



Lasithi

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Why Go?

Lasithi (Λασιθί) is Crete's wildest area with the richest biodiversity – with its caves, gorges, gas-blue coves and snow-capped mountains, the region seems to have been lavished by the gods. And that's not forgetting its rich ancient history, with Minoan and Mycenaean sites to be explored at every turn.

This is also where you'll find the island's top resorts. Agios Nikolaos' smouldering cosmopolitan cool, while nearby Elounda, the preserve of Tinseltown's finest, glitters with uber-swanky hotels. For adventure and gastro Greco-philis, Lasithi ticks all the boxes. Cyclists head up to misty Lasithi Plateau, trekkers tackle gorges like the dramatic Valley of the Dead, while foodies enjoy some of Crete's finest tavernas and restaurants. Then there are attractions like the historic monastery of Toplou and Vai's beguiling palm-lined beach, while scores of towns and villages maintain a rich undertow of Cretan history and spirit.

Road Distances (km)

Agios Nikolaos	36			
Elounda	45	10		
Sitia	62	73	70	
Kato Zakros	98	106	116	36
Ierapetra				
Agios Nikolaos				
Elounda				
Sitia				

NORTHERN COAST

Agios Nikolaos

Άγιος Νικόλαος

POP 11,421

Tumbling down the hillside to the shores of the glittering bay of Mirabello, Agios Nikolaos (*ah-yee-os nih-ko-laos*), Lasithi's capital, caters to an international cast of visitors and welcomes them with typical *filoxenia* (hospitality). Its streets are a colourful blend of bars, traditional tavernas and upscale clothes shops, counterbalanced with fish markets and earthy *kafeneia* (coffee houses). By night it really comes into its own when the harbour is illuminated by the lights of effervescent bars, and the adjoining bottle-green lagoon of Voulismeni Lake is even more beguiling.

Cosmetically, like many Cretan towns, Agios Nikolaos' architecture may lack the neoclassical grace of the Dodecanese and the sugar cube simplicity of the Cyclades, but it's stylish nonetheless, teeming with chic boutiques hawking jewellery, sea sponges and the usual offering of carved olive wood artefacts and busts of Achilles.

Stroll the harbour front alongside a young crowd of Greek fashionistas, park yourself at a cafe and listen to the buzz of conversation, or head to one of a handful of neighbouring beaches. And for all the glitz there's a surprising amount of affordable accommodation, while tavernas and restaurants offer both great-value Cretan specialities and wider Mediterranean-influenced cuisine. There's also free wi-fi in the harbour area and its surrounds.

The bus station is located just under a kilometre to the northwest of Voulismeni Lake. Most banks, travel agencies and shops are on Koundourou and the parallel pedestrian street 28 Oktovriou.

Sights

Archaeological Museum

MUSEUM

(☎ 28410 24943; Paleologou Konstantinou 74; ☎) Due to the economic crisis at the time of writing, this museum was closed until 2016 for refurbishment and expansion. When open, the extensive collection is the second-most significant Minoan collection in existence, and includes clay coffins, ceramic musical instruments and gold from the island of Mohlos. The highlight is the

odd-looking Goddess of Myrros, a clay jug from 2500 BC.

Folk Museum

MUSEUM

(☎ 28410 25093; Paleologou Konstantinou 4; admission €3; ☎ 10am-2pm Tue-Sun) Next to the tourist office, this museum has a small, well-curated collection of traditional handicrafts and costumes.

Beaches

In town the beaches of sandy **Ammos** and pebbly **KyTROPLATIA** are small and over-crowded. Let your feet take you 1km north and south respectively to **Ammoudi** and **Almyros** beaches, for longer stretches of finer sand to call your own. Almyros is quieter than the other beaches around town, with fine sand and beautiful clear water. All have umbrellas and sun chairs for rent.



Activities

General

BOAT TRIPS

(☎ 28410 24376; www.sailcrete.com; Mirabello Hotel Bungalows; half-/full day incl food & drinks €900/1300; ☎ 9am-6pm) Run by Captain Apostolos, the *General*, a handsome 44ft cat, takes you (and up to five others) to Spinalonga Island and beyond on half- and full-day cruises. Meet him in Agios Nikolaos or arrange to be picked up from Elounda harbour.

Creta Underwater Center

DIVING

(☎ 28410 22406; www.cretaunderwatercenter.com; Mirabello Hotel, Agios Nikolaos; dives from €50) Reef, wreck and night dives to a host of different locations. Four-day PADI open-water courses also available.

Creta Semi-Submarine

BOAT TRIPS

(☎ 28410 24822, 6936051186; www.semi-submarine.gr; adult/child €15/10) The *Nautilus* has a submerged viewing cabin that is popular with youngsters and adults.

Pelagos

DIVING

(☎ 28410 2376; www.divecrete.com; Minos Beach Art Hotel; dives from €50, night dives €70) Offers dives and PADI courses.

Nostos Tours

BOAT TRIPS

(☎ 28410 22819; 30 Rousou Koundourou; trips to Spinalonga without/with barbecue €15/25, fishing trips €50) Runs boat trips to Spinalonga including a swim at Kolokytha. Also offers trips to Spinalonga Island including a barbecue, and fishing trips with food, including anything you catch.