



Crete



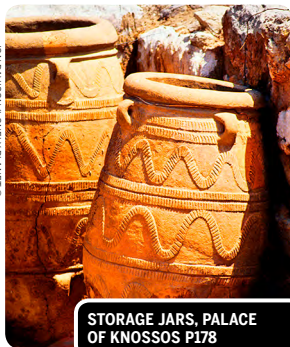
Andrea Schulte-Peevers, Trent Holden, Kate Morgan, Kevin Raub

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Plan Your Trip

Itineraries



2
WEEKS

Essential Crete

Bookended by two of Crete's great cities, this route is a roller-coaster ride through the natural wonders of mountain and sea and the best of the island's historical treasures. You'll also get to soak up Venetian architecture, and feast on both mountain-village and seafront cuisine.

Start in **Iraklio**, checking out the superb museums before heading to the **Palace of Knossos** where the mysterious Minoans ruled about 4000 years ago. Spend a day

enjoying the fruits of the **Iraklio Wine Country**, where 70% of Crete's wine is produced, and which is dotted with wineries. Next, stake out a base near **Matala** to combine trips to **Gortyna**, the former capital of Roman Crete, as well as the Minoan palaces of **Phaestos** and **Agia Triada**. The outstanding Cretan cultural museum at **Vori** and swimming at wide, sandy **Kommos** and **Matala** beaches round out the area's offerings.

Travelling west, lunch in the quaint village of **Spili**, home to several excellent tavernas creating traditional Cretan cuisine.





Loutro (p91)

Then drive to **Moni Preveli**, a working monastery on a hill with sweeping views of the Libyan Sea, and picture-postcard **Preveli Beach**, before steering north to **Rethymno** for a wander around its lovely maze of Venetian lanes. From here, venture into the countryside, folding the pottery village of **Margarites**, **Moni Arkadiou** or the mountain village of **Argyroupoli** into your route.

Zip west to **Hania**, a lively modern city wrapped around a romantic Venetian harbour and atmosphere-laden pedestrianised quarters, and also your next base. When you've had your fill of this historic beauty,

take the early bus to **Samaria Gorge** and trek one of Europe's most famous canyons to the beachfront terminus at the small hamlet of **Agia Roumeli**. Stay over or catch a boat to **Loutro** to overnight in this quaint village accessible only on foot or by boat. Next morning, take the boat to **Hora Sfakion** where you can have a seafood lunch and the local cheese-stuffed-crêpe speciality, and then loop back to Hania.



10
DAYS

Central to West Crete



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This trip presents you with the mother lode of soul-stirring attractions, including the unspoiled southern coast, higgledy-piggledy mountain villages and some of Crete's best beaches, as well as spirit-lifting culture and gastro treats in Crete's two most attractive towns, Rethymno and Hania.

Kick off your trip in **Iraklio**, taking in the Heraklion Archaeological Museum and imposing fortress, and swing out to the **Palace of Knossos**, before steering west to quaint **Anogia**, where ancient traditions and Cretan music thrive at the foot of Mt Psiloritis. Continue west via the pottery village of Margarites to **Moni Arkadiou**, the site of one of the bloodiest moments in Crete's struggle for independence from the Turks. Spend the next day in **Rethymno**, taking your sweet time ambling around its bewitching mix of Turkish and Venetian buildings.

From Rethymno push on to the southern coast, where the lively beach town of **Plakias** makes an ideal base for exploring nearby secluded beaches, including **Preveli Beach**, stunningly located at the mouth of a rugged gorge.

Heading west, stop at the seaside fortress of **Frangokastello** before zipping over to **Hora Sfakion**, where you can hop on a boat to explore the remote villages along this beautiful stretch of coast. Continue north towards the Lefka Ori (White Mountains) and make time for a hike through spectacular **Imbros Gorge**. Continue to the northern coast and linger a night or two in **Hania**, with its beautiful harbour, grand fortress and ambience-packed old town.

From here you can easily zip over to the far western reaches of Crete. Take the circular route southwest via Kolymbari and the Innahorion villages to the westernmost tip of the island at **Elafonisi**, which beckons with pink-shimmering sandy beaches. Pushing back north via the coastal road, continue the beach theme at broad **Falasarna** with its rolling waves, or detour to the Gramvousa Peninsula. You'll most likely access the peninsula's spectacular lagoon-like beach at **Balos** by day-boat from Kissamos.

Returning to Iraklio via Hania, consider making a quick detour to the springs of **Argyroupoli**, before taking the coastal road east of Rethymno via peaceful **Panormo** and busy **Bali**.



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Top: Balos (p111)

Bottom: Imbros Gorge (p107)



Around Iraklio

Iraklio is a big, busy city, but it can be a useful base for visiting many of Crete's most famous sights. Since the bus network is decent in this province, it can even be done without your own vehicle. Alternatively, if you do have wheels and your budget allows, stay in more scenic Arhanes in the nearby Iraklio Wine Country, to make these looping day trips.

Crete's largest city, **Iraklio** offers top-notch museums, a Venetian fortress, a colourful street market, lively nightlife and excellent dining. While here, make sure you visit the expertly curated Heraklion Archaeological Museum so that you'll be prepared for Crete's grandest Minoan relic, the **Palace of Knossos**. Drive or hop on a bus for the quick ride to this mesmerising, and partially reconstructed, introduction to Minoan society.

On another day, apply what you've learned in Knossos on a visit to the **Palace of Malia**, another Minoan site, and some people's favourite, with sweeping sea views. You can then explore small mountain villages by zigzagging through tiny Krasí to **Kerá**, which is home to the revered Kerá Kardiotissas Monastery, with its 14th-century frescoes and holy icon. Nearby Sfendile was controversially inundated by the creation of a dam.

If you have your own wheels, designate a driver and spend a day sampling the local vintages of the **Iraklio Wine Country**, home to many wineries and tasting rooms. Plan to stop at the Nikos Kazantzakis Museum in **Myrtia** and the moody Minoan vestiges in **Arhanes**, which also has great traditional tavernas – perfect for a lunch break. Or sample the tipples around Dafnes, the other main hub of wine country.

Take a scenic drive to the rustic mountain village of **Zaros**, at the foot of Mt Psiloritis. Leave time to hike nearby trails, explore Byzantine churches and dine on fresh trout. If you're thirsty for a beach day instead of a hike, continue a bit further along to beautiful sands at **Kommos** or **Matala**. And if you have time to sleep over, the next day you can explore quaint villages such as Sivas, Minoan ruins at **Phaestos**, and Roman ones at **Gortyna**, before looping north again.

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Top: Phaestos (p194)

Bottom: Pithos (storage jar), Palace of Malia (p209)





1
WEEK

Eastern Crete



There's a world of discoveries awaiting in eastern Crete, from the cosmopolitan town of Agios Nikolaos to some of the island's most beautiful churches, moodily historic sights and pristine beaches. Arm yourself with some curiosity and a good map, and the week will fly by with no two days spent the same way.

Make your first base at charismatic **Agios Nikolaos**, where bustling cafes line the waterfront, the harbour and a dark and mysterious lake. Steer north to ritzy Elounda and the ferry ride to **Spinalonga Island**, a former leper colony turned sightseeing magnet thanks to Victoria Hislop's novel, *The Island*, and ensuing TV series.

Another delightful day-trip option from Agios Nikolaos takes you west to the **Lasithi Plateau**, high on the upper decks of the Dikti mountains, where wind power once drove the sails of thousands of windmills. The main attraction here is **Dikteon Cave**, where none other than Zeus himself was born.

South of Agios Nikolaos, **Kritsa** is one of Crete's most bewitching mountain villages, with a cool gorge, the island's oldest church frescoes and the ruins of the ancient city-state of Lato among its attractions. More ruins are in **Gournia**, reached by heading east along the coast, perhaps preceded by a swim at **Voulisma Beach** and followed by a fish lunch in **Mohlos**.

Sitia is a handy base in these eastern reaches for trips to **Moni Toplou**, a brooding fortified monastery, and the palm-lined beach at **Vai**. More beaches await near Palekastro, including **Kouremenos Beach**, Crete's windsurfing mecca.

The mountains get bigger and more rugged as you head south to Zakros, the launch pad for the trek through **Zakros Gorge** down to the beach community of Kato Zakros with its Minoan palace ruins. For splendid solitude, brave the serpentine roads leading south to ultra-remote **Xerokambos**, with its gorgeous sandy beaches.

From here steer west, perhaps stopping in bustling **Ierapetra** or, better yet, in pretty nearby **Myrtos** where you can soak up bohemian beach living. The route north back to Agios Nikolaos is wonderful, taking you past bare mountains crowned with cockcombs of rock rising from woods.

Top: Ierapetra (p249)

Bottom: Fresco, Church of Panagia Kera in Kritsa (p234)

Behind the Scenes

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THIS BOOK

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- Buddhist
- Castle/Palace
- Christian
- Confucian
- Hindu
- Islamic
- Jain
- Jewish
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- Ruin
- Shinto
- Sikh
- Taoist
- Winery/Vineyard
- Zoo/Wildlife Sanctuary
- Other Sight

Activities, Courses & Tours

- Bodysurfing
- Diving
- Canoeing/Kayaking
- Course/Tour
- Sento Hot Baths/Onsen
- Skiing
- Snorkelling
- Surfing
- Swimming/Pool
- Walking
- Windsurfing
- Other Activity

Sleeping

- Sleeping
- Camping
- Hut/Shelter

Eating

- Eating

Drinking & Nightlife

- Drinking & Nightlife
- Cafe

Entertainment

- Entertainment

Shopping

- Shopping

Information

- Bank
- Embassy/Consulate
- Hospital/Medical
- Internet
- Police
- Post Office
- Telephone
- Toilet
- Tourist Information
- Other Information

Geographic

- Beach
- Gate
- Hut/Shelter
- Lighthouse
- Lookout
- Mountain/Volcano
- Oasis
- Park
- Pass
- Picnic Area
- Waterfall

Population

- Capital (National)
- Capital (State/Province)
- City/Large Town
- Town/Village

Transport

- Airport
- Border crossing
- Bus
- Cable car/Funicular
- Cycling
- Ferry
- Metro station
- Monorail
- Parking
- Petrol station
- S-Bahn/Subway station
- Taxi
- T-bane/Tunnelbana station
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- U-Bahn/Underground station
- Other Transport

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- Freeway
- Primary
- Secondary
- Tertiary
- Lane
- Unsealed road
- Road under construction
- Plaza/Mall
- Steps
- Tunnel
- Pedestrian overpass
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- Walking Tour detour
- Path/Walking Trail

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- International
- State/Province
- Disputed
- Regional/Suburb
- Marine Park
- Cliff
- Wall

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- River, Creek
- Intermittent River
- Canal
- Water
- Dry/Salt/Intermittent Lake
- Reef

Areas

- Airport/Runway
- Beach/Desert
- Cemetery (Christian)
- Cemetery (Other)
- Glacier
- Mudflat
- Park/Forest
- Sight (Building)
- Sportsground
- Swamp/Mangrove

Note: Not all symbols displayed above appear on the maps in this book



OUR STORY

A beat-up old car, a few dollars in the pocket and a sense of adventure. In 1972 that's all Tony and Maureen Wheeler needed for the trip of a lifetime – across Europe and Asia overland to Australia. It took several months, and at the end – broke but inspired – they sat at their kitchen table writing and stapling together their first travel guide, *Across Asia on the Cheap*. Within a week they'd sold 1500 copies. Lonely Planet was born.

Today, Lonely Planet has offices in Franklin, London, Melbourne, Oakland, Dublin, Beijing and Delhi, with more than 600 staff and writers. We share Tony's belief that 'a great guidebook should do three things: inform, educate and amuse'.

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