



# DESTINATION CRETE



## PANORMO

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Imposing mountain ranges, secluded beaches, monasteries and endless fields adorned with wind-mills. Less than an hour drive from Rethymnon and Heraklion (22 km and 55km respectively) lies the picturesque, fishing village of Panormos; a must-see for travellers who want to experience the authenticity of Cretan seaside life and revel in the unspoiled landscapes. Start your day with a refreshing swim: protected from the waves thanks to the area's natural harbour, the calm, clear waters of Panormos two sandy beaches (Limanaki and Limni), are beckoning swimmers of every age. A walk at the village's cobblestone streets afterwards will eventually lead you through the remains of the medieval Genoan fort towards the basilica of Agia Sofia (5th century AD), one of the largest churches of that era in Crete. Take in the history of the place; then let your senses guide you back to one of the village's tavernas for a meal to remember. When it's almost dusk, head to the lighthouse at Hondrocavos cape (about 800 meters from Panormos). It's the perfect backdrop for a sunset - so perfect, no Instagram filters will be needed.



# RETHYMNO

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Rethymno combines an assortment of architectural gems from the Venetian and Ottoman periods with a modern vibe and a smorgasbord of sandy beaches. Less than an hour drive from Rethymnon and Heraklion (22 km and 55km respectively) lies the picturesque, fishing village of Panormos; a must-see for travellers who want to experience the authenticity of Cretan seaside life and revel in the unspoiled landscapes. Start your day with a refreshing swim: protected from the waves thanks to the area's natural harbour, the calm, clear waters of Panormos two sandy beaches (Limanaki and Limni), are beckoning swimmers of every age. A walk at the village's cobblestone streets afterwards will eventually lead you through the remains of the medieval Genoan fort towards the basilica of Agia Sofia (5th century AD), one of the largest churches of that era in Crete. Take in the history of the place; then let your senses guide you back to one of the village's tavernas for a meal to remember. When it's almost dusk, head to the lighthouse at Hondrocavos cape (about 800 meters from Panormos). It's the perfect backdrop for a sunset - so perfect, no Instagram filters will be needed.



# HERAKLION

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Heraklion, Crete's capital and beating heart, has gone through several reincarnations since the Bronze Age. Welcome to the birthplace of Minoan civilization: Heraklion, Crete's capital and beating heart, has gone through several reincarnations since the Bronze Age. Today the uniquely diverse capital beautifully balances its contemporary culture and hip nightlife with its rich Minoan, Venetian and Ottoman past. Hop on a car to the Minoan Palace of Knossos (5km outside Heraklion) to marvel at the colorful frescoes dating back to 1450 BC. Back in the city, learn more about Minoan culture at the Archaeo-logical Museum, before taking a stroll at the Old Town to enter another great historical era: the Venetian period, with the formidable Koules fortress at the harbor as its crown jewel. Walk across the fortified walls to take in sites such as the Venetian Loggia and the stunning church of St Titus, before allowing the city's sirens to lure you into a shopping spree in Daidalou street and some bar hopping around the Lions Square. There's no shortage of great beaches near Heraklion (Kateros and Florida in the south being highly recommended) but for a truly transformative experience, take the 67km trip to Matala. The beach's natural caves have famously been home to the hippy crowd and the free-spirited legends of the '60s, like Janice Joplin.





# CHANIA

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Wonderful destination for dreamers, romantics and bon viveurs alike, Chania will feed your soul with its beauty (and your belly with exquisite Cretan flavors). Apart from looking like something out of a postcard, Chania's medieval Venetian harbor is also an excellent homebase for you to explore the whole town. Pay a visit to the Nautical Museum at the Firkas fortress where you'll find ship models from the bronze age; allow yourself to get goosebumps walking the three aisles of the Greek Orthodox Cathedral at Mitropoleos Square; venture into the old tanners' district where 19th century traditions and techniques are still venerated. But come sunset, make sure to return to the harbor for a stroll at the 14th century Venetian lighthouse, a delicious meal and cocktails with a panoramic view. Beautiful as the city may be, the nature that surrounds Chania is even more astonishing. Dip your toes at the pink sands of Elafonisi lagoon, 67km southwest of the city, or head towards the White Mountains to test your stamina at hiking Samaria, Europe's longest gorge and home to 450 animal and plant species you can't encounter anywhere else.



# LASITHI

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Imposing mountain ranges, secluded beaches, monasteries and endless fields adorned with wind-mills... As you'll soon realize, the natural beauty of the Lassithi area is only surpassed by the kindness and genuineness of its people. The Lassithi plateau is made for road trips. Stop for photos by the white windmills of Tzermiado and the foot of the Gorge of Ha; traverse the Venetian fortress of Kazarma in Sitia and the 15th century monastery of Toplou; enjoy the buzz of Ierapetra town and the serenity of beaches such as Tholos, Zakros, Makrygialos, Myrtilos and Agia Fotia; lose track of time in the exotic palm tree forest at the Vai beach. When you're ready to leave the car behind for a while, take a boat trip to the UNESCO-protected Spinalonga (the secluded island that inspired Victoria Hislop's book) or go on a kayaking excursion near the cosmopolitan coastal town of Elounda. To wind down from your trip, visit Agios Nikolaos: the capital city of Lassithi prefecture with the unique sea lake at its heart, is a great place to enjoy a glass of tsikoudia and a fish meze before it's time to head back.





# NATURE

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Where unyielding mountains give way to lush vineyards – and where sandy beaches meet tropical palm tree forests. It's precisely in that game of sharp contrasts that the incomparable beauty of Cretan nature lies. Here you'll get the chance to rove through mountain ranges that have inspired hundreds of writers and artists across the millennia; hike the longest gorge in Europe (Samaria); delve into the largest palm tree forest in the continent (Vai); swim, dive or kayak in hundreds of sandy beaches, rivers, lakes and lagoons. You'll be in good company as well. Crete is home to some very rare species of flora and fauna, like the Caretta Caretta turtles and a protected species of wild goat (kri-kri), as well as local herbs (diktamo) known for their healing properties.



# HISTORY

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Crete has been inhabited since 7000 BC – and as the island's remarkable array of ruins, fortifications and monuments can attest to, it has been an eventful seven thousand years. The birthplace of the Minoan civilization, Europe's first advanced society, Crete has been making major technological and architectural advances long before the rest of Greece. Although much of the splendor of the Minoan empire was destroyed by natural disasters, the main palaces of Knossos and Faistos are still mostly salvaged to this day. Being a strategic gateway between three continents, the island has been occupied numerous times throughout the ages. Some, like the Venetians, left behind a vibrant culture and architecture. Despite its many hardships though, Crete always manages to emerge more fierce and proud than ever before. Today the island is one of Greece's most popular destinations, attracting travelers from all over the world.



# CULTURE

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At the forefront of cultural contributions since the Bronze Age, Crete has raised iconic artists such as El Greco and authors like Nikos Kazantzakis (of Zorba the Greek fame). Today, the same contrast and diversity encountered in Cretan nature can be found in Cretan culture as well. The buzzing urban life in the metropolitan areas is refreshingly juxtaposed by the traditional villages where time seemingly has stood still; where people still wear the traditional vraka, play lyra, dance pentozali and sing mantinades (the island's distinctive form of poetry). Very often, these two worlds collide – especially during religious holidays, communal celebrations and social events such as weddings. Local dialects and customs are taken very seriously in Crete but don't worry: the most important custom of the island is filoxenia, aka taking very good care of its visitors!