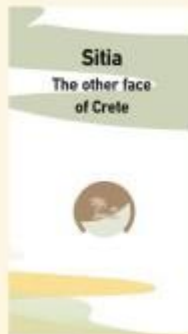
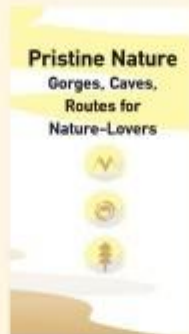


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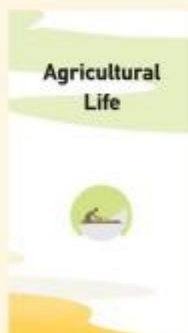
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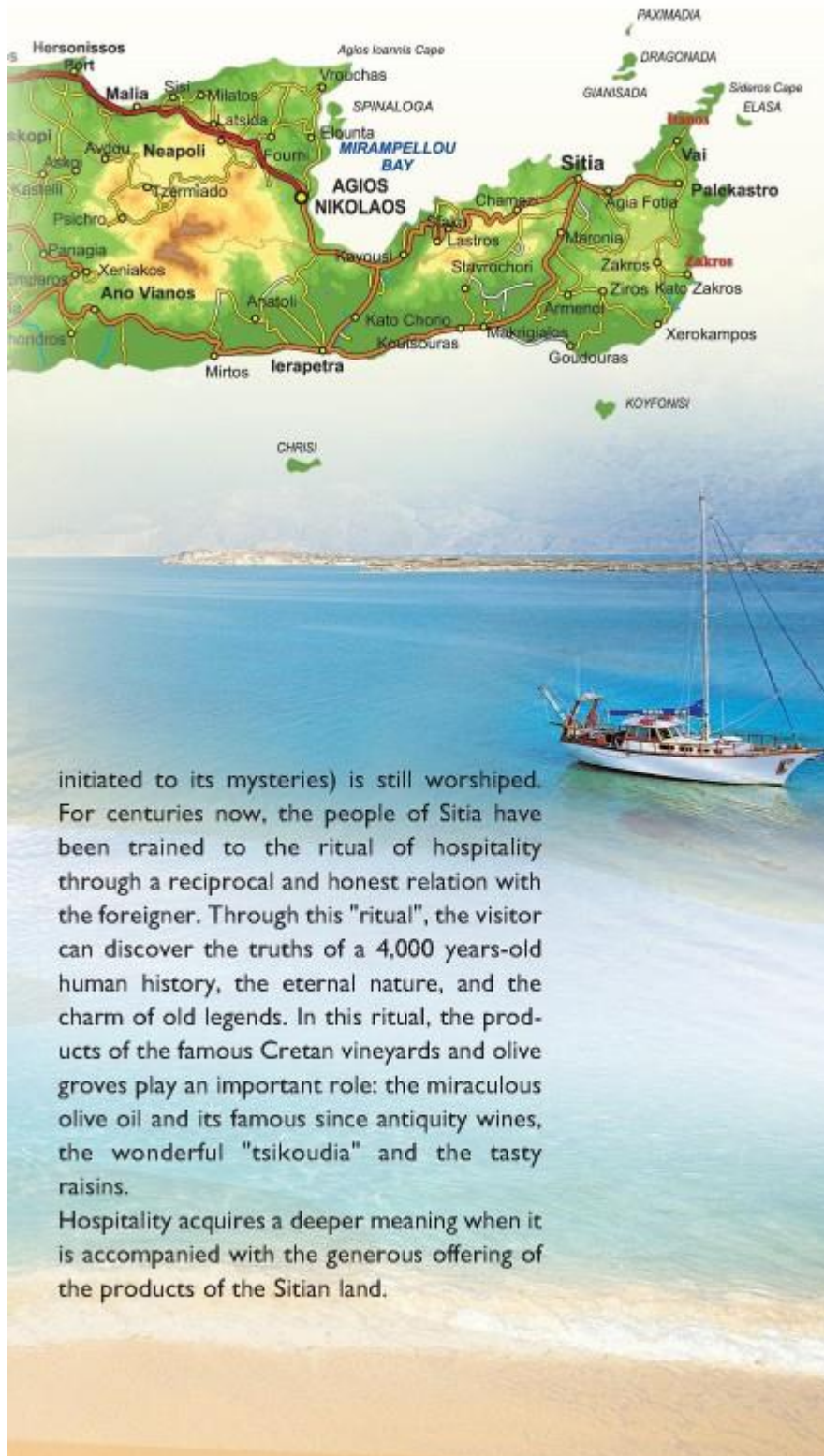
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# *Sitia*

## **The warm embrace..**

They say Crete is the maid of the Mediterranean, the "warm embrace" of Europe, an open gate to both the west and the east. In Sitia, these characteristics acquire a greater importance. Its geographical position on the eastern extremity of Crete, its natural environment and its long historical tradition, make Sitia a place where diversity is synthesized in an extraordinary way. A cross-road of sea routes, a meeting point of many different ancient civilizations. Natural and human creations in complete harmony shape an enchanting vivid present as a continuum of a long mystic and mythic past. It is to this past that Sitia owes its legends and myths, but also its vivid present. This is where Xenios Zeus (who became the patron of all those who dared to admire the beauties Crete and be



initiated to its mysteries) is still worshiped. For centuries now, the people of Sitia have been trained to the ritual of hospitality through a reciprocal and honest relation with the foreigner. Through this "ritual", the visitor can discover the truths of a 4,000 years-old human history, the eternal nature, and the charm of old legends. In this ritual, the products of the famous Cretan vineyards and olive groves play an important role: the miraculous olive oil and its famous since antiquity wines, the wonderful "tsikoudia" and the tasty raisins. Hospitality acquires a deeper meaning when it is accompanied with the generous offering of the products of the Sitian land.



# Sitia

**The other face  
of Crete**





**"The shores were shining and the sea was sleeping, a sweet melody through the trees and through the waters was blowing "**

These verses of Vitsentzos Kornaros describe the sea of Sitia in a masterful way. The poet continues:

" There, where valleys and mountains and forests and meadows stand, flowers, plants and fountains and wells, trees with flowers and fruits and cool gardens, farms with many shepherds".

This is the image of the Sitian countryside, romantic, charming and primeval. Yet, another poet, Kostis Fragkoulis-Antaios places Sitia in a wider framework.

**"How wild is Sfakia, how gentle Sitia is!  
How beautiful and proud all of Crete is!"**

Indeed, Crete is beautiful and proud from one side to the other- "from Gramvousa until the monastery of Toplou", as N. Kazantzakis wrote.

Each place on this island has its own beauty, its own character and identity.

The identity of Sitia is defined as such:

"The gentle face of Crete! The calming, soothing, sweet Crete...the Crete that laughs, sings and relaxes..." and Kostis Fragkoulis continues:





**"The Siteians are known for their kindness, and are famous for their lyra playing, their hospitality and craftwork".**

These are some of the things revealed to the visitors in Sitia, a different and unexplored region of Crete; an exotic place, also in its appearance- with the palm-tree forest of Vai, the banana plantations over the sand dunes and the cedar tree forests, the other kinds of African vegetation, and the blistering sun next to the refreshing shores and seas. Sitia is one more vast cultural heaven. It is the "Ancient Gate of the East", as it was called by archeologists.

The Minoan ports of Zakros, Palekastro, Sitia, Mohos, Psyras, ect., were the ancient meeting points where Minoan Crete interacted with the other great civilizations of the East and that of Egypt. This is where great naval and commercial centers developed, along with powerful cities, imposing palaces, luxurious villas, famous shrines, art centers and more... Archeological excavations have brought to light many important remains that one can visit, while excavations continue and reveal precious treasures every year.

Praissos, the famous capital of the "Eteocretans", the powerful Doric city of Itanos, the Roman Lefki (koufonisi), the Dilos of the Libyan - as it was called due to its 1,000 seat ancient theatre, the luxurious Roman villa of Makry Gialos, the glorious Venetian villa of Etia and Voila -the "little Mustras"- with the imposing fortress of Sitia, the heritage of the Kornaros family, the monastery of Toplou or "the grand monastery" as people call it, and the monasteries of Kapsas, of "Faneromenis" and of "Aghia Sofia" in





Armenoi, the wonderful Byzantine churches, mythical and historical places, picturesque traditional villages and numerous specimens of folk architecture adorn and characterize the whole region of the Sitia province, attracting great interest from the visitors.

The archeological and folkloric museum of the city is one of the greatest in the country. The wonderful museums of icons, heirlooms and engraving works of the Toplou monastery as well as the other interesting folkloric museums of Palekastro, Hamezi, Handras, Pefki, exhibit and "offer" to the public a wide selection of treasures of the region's historical and cultural heritage.

At the same time, the pervasive sweetness and "romantically erotic" atmosphere of the city and the villages subconsciously register, the myth of Erotokritos and Aretousa, the masterpiece of the most erotic poet in International literature -according to Melina Merkouri- Vitsentzos Kornaros, who was



**was "born in Sitia, raised in Sitia, and there he wrote these things to you..."**

Modern Sitia also has its accomplishments. It produces the best and most accoladed olive oil in the world, high-quality vegetables and organic olive oil and wines. It also produces wonderful traditional desserts, dairy products, honey, "tsikoudia", ect, which are often awarded in international competitions.

In Sitia, one can find high quality taverns and restaurants offering the original Cretan cuisine. It also preserves a vivid folk tradition and many traditional feasts, celebrations and cultural events that are organized each summer in the villages.

▶ Sitia also holds the fist place in the world



in per capita utilization of Renewable Energy thanks to its vast aeolic parks; a fact that is highly appreciated by environmentalists.

▶ It has a pristine natural environment "unique in Greece and Europe" and a rich and diverse agricultural landscape, with endless olive groves, vineyards, gardens and fields, which is "often revived by the primeval farmer, with his donkey and his goats".

▶ The proper development of the renewable sources of energy, the excellent organic products, the pristine nature and the primeval agricultural landscape make Sitia the "ecological garden of Europe", as it is rightly called.

Visitors are able to enjoy the beauty of Sitia's nature and the wonders of its cultural heritage by following organized naturalist, scenic and cultural routes. They can enjoy swimming and sea sports in organized or non-organized beaches in the crystal clear sea, or choose to participate in excursions to other parts of Crete and the surrounding islands. And of course, visitors can also find modern forms of entertainment at the local bars and clubs.

The Sitia area forms a unified touristic area and its most visited areas, such as the city of Sitia, Makry Gialos, Koutsouras, Palekastro, Zakros, Xerokambos, and Mohlos offer all kinds of high-quality accommodation, such as hotels and guest houses in good prices.

Sitia invites you to experience the most beautiful and "meaningful" vacation of your life.





# **Pristine Nature**

**Gorges, Caves,**

**Routes for**

**Nature-Lovers**





The nature of Sitia is rich and untouched  
Many "NATURA Regions"

A variety of landscapes with unique natural beauty

- ▶ Rare geological formations and impressive images of geological evolution.
- ▶ More than ten (10) large gorges and geological trenches.
- ▶ Three hundred (300) caves of great importance.
- ▶ Two thousand and a hundred (2100) kinds of agrestal plants, from which the 300 are endemic, numerous are aromatic and pharmaceutical and many are beautiful wild flowers.
- ▶ A large number of rare animals and birds, within which the larger in the world assembly of the "Eleonora" hawk (*Falco de Eleonora*), "Mavropetritis".
- ▶ The richest and most intact sea biotope in the Aegean, north from the island of Psyra where there are fine corals.



Mavropetritis  
(*Falco de Eleonora*)

© Natural History Museum  
of Crete



- ▶ Long prairies where the protected kind of seaweed "Poseidonia-Oceanica" grows.
- ▶ Vai: the only palm tree forest in Europe
- ▶ The beginning of the European waking path E4.
- ▶ Numerous biotopes of mixed Europe-African vegetation (in Vai, the south shores, in Koufonisi, ect).
- ▶ A wide variety of sea shores, from rocky and wild to calm and sandy, crystal clear waters, the most shiny shades of blue and many deserted islands, little heavens for nature lovers and explorers of the sea world.
- ▶ "A rare natural environment unique in Greece and in Europe", as it has been characterized by experts, "it is certainly a natural and beautiful treasure, really rare, really unique".

A journey in Sitia, a land of rare beauty, inexplicable contradictions and magnificent cultural treasures; a land ruled by three seas, opening up to the

endless and brightest horizons of the Mediterranean, a place where nature possesses all these characteristics that human intelligence and sensation seek to experience and art attempts to express, imitate and represent.

Travelers who wish to experience the "real Crete" will find here the roots of a unique human behavior and presence that survived in Sitia thanks to the generosity of a magnificent nature, the creative mixing of great civilizations and the geographical isolation and independence.



## The Tetralogy of the Sitian Nature

The Sitia province, thanks to its climate, its geological formations, and its pristine nature is an ideal place to experience the four elements that form the world in their most ancient form and power: Earth, Water, Air, and Light.

The earth, high in the mountains of the mainland, the water, in the seas of the endless beaches and the small islands surrounding it, the air in the sides and tops of the hills, and the light, the powerful and living sun in the beaches and the open horizons of the East and the South.

### *Earth*

Bare mountain slopes, stone hills, wild gorges and caves, compose a landscape where as the ground is parched by the sun, the rocks are carved by the wind and the rain, wild and ambiguous colors reflect the light and expel a blinding, unprecedented blaze.

Here is where one can feel the irresistible power of the earth.

An earth that created stubborn and sensitive people, who loved her as the Great Goddess, the true Great Mother, the Mother Earth of the Minoans.







## Sea

The warm, summer nights in the beaches of Sitia fill you with unknown scents and strange sounds.

Here one feels that this place is committed to receive the experiences and the breaths of the deep blue of the sea that surrounds it.

A strong power makes one bring to mind the bright Minoan frescos that represent the inhabitants of the Earth, the Sky, and the Water, where the color blue prevails and revives a world that belongs to mythology, revealing the sounds, the light and the scents of a lost Atlantis.





## *Air*

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Following the route that crosses the Sitan mountains, passing through villages built on the top of mountain chains where strong north winds blow, makes you wonder what the secret of the tenacity of this place is. What are the dreams and the unspoken desires that compose the past, the present and the future of these people, who insist on testing their limits everyday.

If you find yourself on these windy mountain villages of Sitia some August night, then you will understand that the experience of this route is a way to feel your own soul reviving, taking pleasure from unprecedented senses.



# *Light*

In the East shores of Crete the dominance of the sun is revealed, a sun too powerful to ignore. A sun whose light enhances the senses of the visitor. The shores of Sitia, Itanos, Vai, Palekastro, Zakros, Xerokambos, Goudouras, Makry Gialos, Koutsouras, Mohlos, Dionusades, Elisas, Leukis, Psuras, and Ag. Nikolaos in Mohlos, all have their own seducing power.

Here is where the fire of the sun rises every morning, offering itself to nature; the most meaningful and worthy act of nature, as ancient as the sea and the sun.





## Vai: the most important palm tree forest in Europe

A beautiful sandy beach surrounded by the palm tree forest, situated in a valley next to the ancient city of Itanos. It is 28 km away from Sitia, 8 km from Palekastro and 6km from the monastery "Toplou".

It covers 200 hectares and it consists of agrestal Phoenix Theophrasti palm trees. It is a unique in size forest, not only in Greece but also in Europe.

Except in the beach of Vai, this type of palm tree is also found in units or clusters in other parts of Crete (Preveli, Aghios Nikitas, ect), in other islands of the north-east Aegean, in Cyprus and Turkey.

There are many legends around the origin of the palm tree forest. It is said that it was created by the Phoenicians who, according to a theory, first inhabited the area of Itanos. According to other legends, the palm tree was created by the seeds of dates consumed by the Epyptian soldiers of Ptolemeos or of the King of Pontus, Mithridatis, who in the framework of alliances had settled in the area, or by Saracen pirates. Whatever the cause of its creation, the sure thing is that the palm tree forest of Vai is preserved by the dry and warm climate, as well as the underground water of the valley. Palm trees existed in Crete since antiquity, according to the testimonies of Theophrastos and Plinius and considering their representation on coins and



vessels. Clusters of palm trees are also found at the beach of Itanos.

Apart from palm trees, other kinds of African vegetation grow in the area, making it a place of unique biodiversity.

The area is also a passage of migrating birds. The landscape is adorned with the pale lines on the horizon, the harmonious interchange of hills and lowlands, the vineyards and the olive plantations, the exotic colors and the dazzling light, while the existence of ancient cities and the "Toplou" monastery assign a unique historical and cultural importance to the region. Due to its unique value and beauty, Vai is protected by the Greek state, the European community and by international conventions.



## Images of natural landscape



### Routes

The north side of the province, the area above "Mohlos" until the city of Sitia is characterized by an agricultural landscape, spreading over the sides of the hills and the mountains, where hidden rubble walls stand and the olive tree prevails. Here visitors can enjoy the distant view of the sea and the southing breeze of the imposing mountains, the picturesque villages and the local communities with their traditions and warm hospitality.

South Sitia, the area over "Achlias", "Koutsouras" and "Makry Gialo" until "Goudoura" is characterized by the magnificence of the high mountains with the deep and wild gorges, the green valleys, the picturesque traditional villages and the view of the endless sea and the coexistence of the olive trees and the greenhouses on the valleys, the warm climate and the long sandy beaches.



The city of Sitia and its wider region is characterized by a plain landscape with green and fertile valleys and beautiful villages, a little heaven with rich history and cultural heritage, numerous archeological sites and Venetian monuments. It is a region that combines the traditional and the modern character of the beautiful and peaceful city of Sitia, the capital of the province.

East Sitia, the regions of Palekastro - Zakros - Xerokambos are characterized by a peaceful landscape, mountainous and plain embraced by the deep blue sea and the dazzling sun, the open horizons and the magnificent colors of the sky and sea that inspire painters. Visitors will be seduced by the beautiful sandy beaches, the African touch on the landscape, the vibes of an ancient world and its mysteries coming from the Minoan palace and the other ancient cities of the area and from the mystical feeling and magnificence of the historical Toplou monastery.



At the center of the province stand the imposing plateau of Handras and the "rocky-garden" of Karydi. An uplifting and liberating feeling and a primeval sense of eternal greatness take over as one enters these magical places.





Above there is only the sky!

The beautiful plateau of "Handras" with its fertile plain ground, the vineyards, and the gardens with the old watermills and wells, assign a sense of wealth and abundance.

The old frescos in the churches and the monastery of "Aghia Sofia", the great monuments, the traditional settlement of Etia with the Venetian villa DEI MEZZO and the medieval settlement of Voila with the church of "Ai Giorgi", the tower of "Zenon", the fountains and the deserted manors, all stand witnesses of the great historical flourishing of the region and invite visitors to a travel in time. Today the plateau of "Handras" struggles for survival and growth, and recent developments indicate a better future.



A completely different picture is projected on the plateau of "Karydi", located on the mountainous area on the southeast of Sitia and west of Zakros. Here is the "Kingdom of Stone", the "rocky-garden" of Nikos Kazantzakis, the imprints of the world's creation. Here visitors experience in the most direct way the mystic genesis of the earth and the traces of the complex geological procedures that shaped the island of Crete. Here is where God spoke with the stones!





Here is the place where the architecture of the rock and the sculpture of nature meet their perfection, creating masterpieces of divine inspiration. This is also the place where one can admire the power of humanity. Through stone, the human managed to survive and create civilization! The stone-made houses, the stockyards, the shepherd's huts, the dams, the vineyards, and the gardens surrounded by stonewalls, suddenly become works of admiration and symbols of human ability and will to survive, create and develop.

Here is where the popular "mantinada" (Cretan poems/rimes) of Kostis Fragkoulis-Antaios finds its vivid expression:

"Lots of stone, little water, the ground dispersed, this is Sitia, the beautiful, with the nice people!"

Another region is also notable for its unique charm. It is the route from "Piskokefalo" and "Ahladia" to "Chrusopigi" and "Bebonas". The interchange and the variety of the landscape is extraordinary. Green valleys and water streams in the beginning, hills covered with olive trees and vineyards, mountains where bushes and aromatic plants grow, picturesque villages and cultivated fields, mountains from the left and right that resemble more the "far west" rather than an island, farmer houses covered in green, and at the end, the high and imposing mountains and gorges, such as the mountain "Kliros" and "Mesonas". Here is a place where visitors can experience farmer life and old traditional Crete.



## Regions

### NATURA 2000 Sitia

Two areas of the Sitia province are integrated to the "NATURA 2000" network (EU guide 92/43/ EOK), which are of great interest, in terms of natural environment.



#### Kapsa Monastery

(gorge of Kapsas and wider region)

The region is located on the southeast part of Crete, about 35km east from Ierapetra. There is a small gorge -3km long- which has the same name as the monastery (Kapsas), located within the gorge. At the exit of the gorge, towards the sea, there is a small sandy beach with sand dunes. The area has a variety of rock formations and rocky hills. There are also shrubs in very good condition. The sea covers less than 1% of the total area. The kinds of biotope found in the area are: rocky coastlines with Mediterranean vegetation (endemic *limonium* spp.). Streams of the Mediterranean with periodic water flow, *Sacropoterium spinosum* shrubs, scree of the Balkan Peninsula, limestone rocks of the Aegean, inaccessible caves, riparian vegetation-drifts of the warm Mediterranean (Nerio -Tamarketea).

In general, the region is of a great aesthetic value. It also presents an interesting diverse flora (it includes 14 endemic and local endemic species, some of which are rare), due to its geomorphology.

## Mount Thriptis & wider region

This region is located between Ierapetra and Sitia. It includes the coastline of Tholos and the mountain chain of Thripis. The gorge of "Ha" is one of the most impressive gorges in Crete. The humid ponds are characterized by limited vegetation of annual plants, which are common in other places but rare in Crete, while the dry ponds are characterized by thick vegetation. Equally important are the dolomites near the mountain top "Afentis" and the limestone in the wider region. In the south part of the area, there are small prairies with water springs and rivers of constant flow with waterfowl vegetation.

The kinds of biotope in the area are:

Rivers of the Mediterranean with periodic flow, scattered degraded scrublands (garrigues), *Sarcopoterium spinosum* shrubs, Cretan formations (Euphorbieto-Verbascion), sclerophyllous forests used for pasturage (dehesas) with *Quercus ilex*, screes of the Balkan Peninsula, limestone rock formations of the Aegean, primordial meadows on rock surfaces, protected caves, plane tree forests of the East (*Platanus orientalis*), Riparian forests - drifts of the warm Mediterranean (Nerio - Tamarketea), Mediterranean pine forests with endemic species of Mediterranean pine. The area is of great aesthetic value, especially its northern parts. The cave "Theriospilios" is especially important as there are numerous endemic invertebrates and is a relatively large habitat of "myotis myotis" bats. The tops of the mountain chain are very important for the avifauna of Crete. It has one of the richest floras of common and endemic species in the region and in Crete. Its fauna is also rich in endemic invertebrates. The population of mammals in the region is in very good condition.

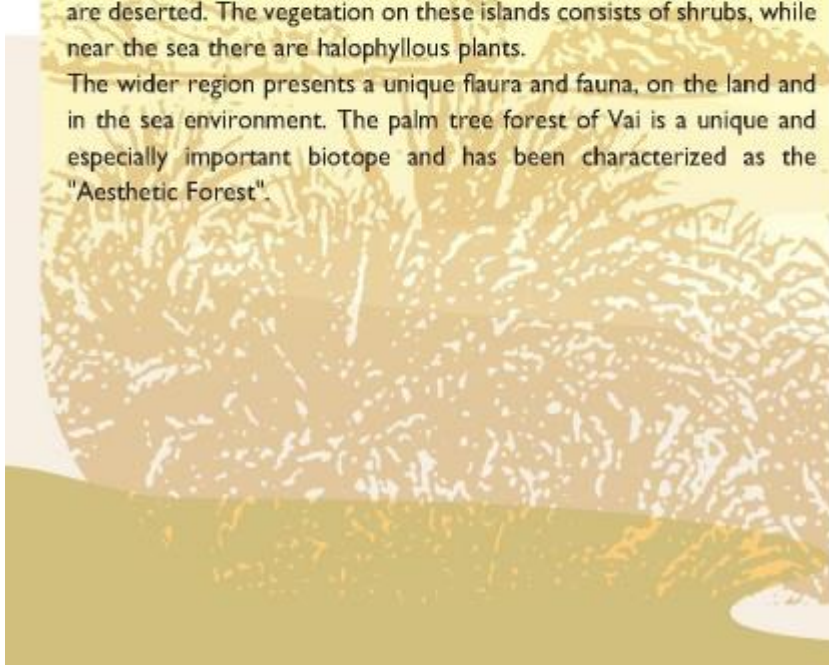
Finally, there is a variety of well-preserved kinds of biotope, which are not easily accessible. The pine forest of the region is one of the most important in Crete, despite the disasters from bush fires.



## North East End of Crete Dionysades, Elasa & the Peninsula of Sidero (Akra Mayrovouni - Vai - Akra Plaka)

This region includes the Northeast side of Crete, the Peninsula of Sidero and the nearby islands, Dionysades and Elasa. The vegetation mainly consists of shrubs, while in the prairies degraded maquis are preserved. The only palm tree forest in Europe with *Phoenix theophrasti* is located in Vai. There are water streams that dry up during the summer, riverain vegetation and many aquatic invertebrates. There are 2-3 villages in the whole area. The areas around the villages are cultivated, while there are greenhouses with banana trees. In the east coast, facing the palm tree forest, there are sand dunes. In the west coast, there are "Posidonia" prairies. In the same area, groups of dolphins (*Tursiops truncatus*) have been spotted. In the end of the Peninsula there is a military base. The islands of Dionysades and Elasa are deserted. The vegetation on these islands consists of shrubs, while near the sea there are halophyllous plants.

The wider region presents a unique flora and fauna, on the land and in the sea environment. The palm tree forest of Vai is a unique and especially important biotope and has been characterized as the "Aesthetic Forest".



## Koufonisi Island

The region includes the island of Koufonisi and the small islands in the north (Stroggli, Makrouli, and Marmaros) and the south (Trahilos). The sea part covers the 60% of the region. Koufonisi is a small island with dry and warm climate. This becomes evident from the north-African desert flora, the steppe vegetation, and the presence of the perennial bunch grass *Lygeum spartum* and *Erodium crassifolium*.

There are sandy and rocky shores. The sea part of the region is representative and well-preserved and includes sea caves, reefs, and "Posidonia" prairies. There are no permanent inhabitants on the island. During the summer, tourists visit the island; however, there is no extended tourist activity.

The importance of this region is related to its geographical location and the good condition of its natural habitats. From a botanical perspective, the flora and the vegetation of the island are of great interest, as they are characterized by the north African element, which is rare in Crete. There are several endemic plants on the north end of their distribution, such as *Zygophyllum alvum*, *Helianthemum stipulatum* and *Astragalus peregrinus* spp. *peregrinus*, the only known habitats in Crete and Greece. The sea habitats are also very important. Finally, the region combines the biological with the archeological interest. There is an ancient theatre and the island is of great archeological value, even though it has not been completely excavated.



## The Endemic Plants of Sitia

The Cretan endemic plants in the region of Siteia usually grow in high altitudes, in gorges and isolated areas. Some of these plants are extremely rare or in danger of extinction. Most of the endemic plants grow in rock cracks and steep cliffs, where humans and animals cannot reach them.

### *Campanula* (*Campanula tubulosa*)

Its shoot is median, fuzzy, with medium and basal oblong-ovate leaves and dichotomous stem. The calyx lobes are twice the size of the ovary, and it has tube-like corolla of blue-violet color.

It blooms in April-May and grows on rocks and gorges in high and low altitudes.



***Kyklamino*** (*Cyclamen creticum*)

It is the only endemic cyclamen species in Crete. It has tuber at its root, and the leaves are long-petioled, more or less cordate at base. Its white (and sometimes rosy) flowers bloom in March-April.

It grows on montane and sub-montane zones, in shady locations.

***Petromarula*** (*Petromarula pinata*)

A biennial plant with a rosette of pinnately-lobed or pinnate leaves, up to 30cm. High and hairless stems, up to 80cm. Flowers blue that bloom from April to May. It grows on rocks and gorges from sea-level to the montane zone.



***Agriogarufalo*** (*Dianthus juniperinus*)

It is a species that has many varieties, all endemic in Crete. A woody perennial shrub, closely packed at the base, with many short non-flowering stems. Flowering

stems up to 20cm high with 2-3 flowers. Pale pink or pink dentate petals 4-8mm and 4-8 epicalyx scales. It grows on rocks in altitudes of 200-1500 meters.

***Matzourana*** (*Origanum mirophyllum*)

It is an endemic plant of Crete and grows on rocky areas, usually in an altitude of 100 to 1800 meters. It has pubescent or hairy leaves, slender quadrangular reddish stems, and purple corolla. It is boiled in water and used as hot medicinal drink. In eastern Crete it is also known by the name "Antonaida".

***The Cretan Ebenus, arhontoksulo*** (*Ebenus cretica*)

Small endemic shrub of Crete that grows all over the island, on dry, rocky slopes of hills and gorges in the montane and lowland zones. It has impressive reddish flowers in dense hairy racemes that bloom in April.

*The photos are taken by G.N Petrakis and come from the archives of the Museum of Natural History of Crete.*





## Gorges



The wider region of Sitia, and especially its southeastern part, is characterized by exceptionally beautiful gorges, where orange and grey-green colours prevail on their rocky cliffs, creating gorgeous scenes of wild nature. The gorges of the region and of Crete in general, were created about 2 millions years ago, when Crete took its final form. Major tectonic changes formed the island to a large degree, and then environmental changes and erosions formed its final form. The geological structure of the Sitia region was perfect for the creation of gorges that, in turn, contribute to the creation of a rich and diverse landscape.

Visitors will feel the presence of this geological wealth in every step and during spring and summer, lovely scents cover the atmosphere in these gorges that are considered the heaven of aromatic and medicinal plants since Minoan times.

There is also a rich diversity of flora and fauna. Populations of important and rare species of the animal kingdom find shelter at the stiff cliffs of the gorges, such as griffon vultures and hawks.

There is a sacred relationship between the people of Sitia and the gorges since antiquity, when nature was worshiped and ancient Cretan deities were closely connected with its reproductive abilities.

The Gorge "ton nekron" ("Faraghi ton nekron", meaning, the gorge of the dead) in Zakros is a place that carries these ancient roots and bonds of humans with nature.

A visit to the gorges of the region is at the

same time a journey in ancient nature, in the civilization and history of Sitia. The natural landscape in this journey constantly changes. The landscape varies from green lands, rich in vegetation to dry, wild and naked areas. In spring, the green cliffs release the scents of pure Cretan nature.

The most important gorges of the region are:

## "Faragi ton nekron" (gorge of the dead) or the gorge of Zakros

The most famous and most visited gorge of eastern Crete. A wonderful route that starts southeast from the village "Ano Zakros", crosses the gorge and ends next to the Minoan palace in the gulf of "Kato Zakros".

It is accessible year-round, spans 2,5 km in length and the altitude difference from the entrance to the exit is about 100 meters.

## The gorge "Pervolakion" or of "Monis Kapsa"

An exceptionally beautiful gorge, easily accessible all through its length. It starts south from the village "Pervolakia" and ends at the beautiful coast of the Kapsa monastery ("Moni Kapsa").

Its full length is about 3,0 km and the altitude difference from the entrance to the exit is about 350 meters.





## The gorge "Hohlakion"

A small, easily accessible gorge, starts from the village "Hohlakies" and ends at the beautiful bay of "Karoumes".

It is 1,5 km long and the altitude difference from the entrance to the exit is about 50 meters.



## The gorge "Pefkon"

One of the most beautiful small gorges of Crete, with impressive rock formations and vegetation. It starts at the south of the "Pefki" village and ends on the north of the "Aspros Potamos" region of "Makrus Gialos". It is about 2,0 km long and the altitude difference from the entrance to the exit is about 300 meters.

A nice path crosses the gorge throughout most of its length.



## The gorge "Rihti"

One of the most beautiful small gorges of eastern Crete with a marked route that follows the river, which has running water year round and forms a lovely waterfall.

It starts a bit further from the village "Exo



Mouliana" and ends at the beach of "Rihti", east from the village "Kalavro".

The total length of the route is about 3,0 km and the altitude difference from the entrance to the exit is about 350 meters.

## The gorge of "Orinos"

This interesting gorge starts from the village "Orinos" and ends at the region of "Koutsouras".

Despite the destruction from bush fires in the forest of "Orinos", it remains one of the most beautiful ecosystems of Sitia. It is relatively easy to cross it. Its total length is about 3,5 km and the altitude difference from the entrance to the exit is 500 meters.





## The gorge of "Xerokambos"

This gorge is located on the route from Zakros to Xerokambos. After the region of "Agrilia", where its many branches meet, an impressive landscape appears. From this point of entry to its exit to the sea the distance is about 1,5 km. At the beach of "Katsounaki", on its beautiful sand dunes grow the famous lilies of the Minoan frescos. The altitude difference is about 100 meters. There is no marked path and its crossing is a bit difficult, but still accessible.

## The gorge Hametoulou"

This impressive small gorge starts from the region of the village "Hametoulo" and ends at the beautiful beach south of Xerokambos. It is relatively easy to cross. It is about 3,0 km long and the altitude difference from the entrance to the exit is about 400 meters.



## The gorge "Agion Panton Faneromenis"

It is a relatively easily accessible gorge starting east from the region "Sfakida" and ending at the bay of "Faneromeni", next to the monastery of "Faneromeni". There are no dangerous passages; however the route is not always visible. It is about 3,5 km long and the altitude difference from the entrance to the exit is about 150 meters.



## The gorge of "Asproolithos"

A small and difficult gorge that ends northwest from the village of "Goudouras". It is about 1,5 km long and the altitude difference from the entrance to the exit is about 120 meters.



## The gorge of "Aghios Antonios"

A small gorge with impressive caves that was named after the small church of "Aghios Antonios" located on its north entrance, which ends at the region of "Goudouras". It is difficult to cross this gorge and professional equipment is necessary. It is 1,3 km long and the altitude difference from the entrance to the exit is about 120 meters.



## The gorge of "Goudouras"

The third small gorge of the region of Goudouras is not easily accessible. It starts from the deserted settlement of "Samakidi" and ends north from Goudouras. In reality, it



is connected with the small gorge that starts from the village "Mesa Apidi" of Ziros. Its crossing requires professional equipment and technical knowledge. It is 1 km long and the altitude difference from the entrance to the exit is about 120 meters.

## The gorge of "Mesa Apidi"

A small gorge, easily accessible that starts from a large headland south from the settlement "Mesa Apidi" and in 2,5 km to the south it connects with the north entrance of the gorge of Goudouras". The altitude difference from the entrance to the exit is about 400 meters.



## The gorge "Ha"

The most impressive gorge of eastern Crete, due to its geological formations, the heaven of Canyoning, especially during spring when there is still water. It is rich in endemic species of flora and bird fauna.



It is 1,6 km long and the altitude difference from the entrance to the exit is about 230 meters.

Professional equipment and technical knowledge are necessary to cross this gorge.



### The gorge of "Hauga"

A small but impressive gorge that ends east from the village "Kavousi".

It is ideal for Canyoning, and its crossing requires special equipment and technical knowledge.

There is an ancient path, parallel to the gorge for walking. It is 1,1 km long and the altitude difference from the entrance to the exit is about 130 meters.



### The gorge of "Mesona"

This gorge connects with the gorge of "Hauga" with direction to the southeast, towards the mount "Thripti". Special equipment and technical knowledge are necessary to cross this gorge. It is accessible for walking on the ancient path that starts in the village "Kavousi" through "Haugas" and continues parallel to "Mesona". It is 2,0 km long and the altitude difference from the entrance to the exit is about 450 meters.



## Speleological Park of Sitia-Itanos

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(Speleological Group of  
Crete)

The mountainous areas of Sitia, in comparison with other mountainous areas of Crete, do not have intense formations. However, due to the limestone composition of its rocks, the rain and river water has created an extended surface carst. In some places, the carst is quite impres-

(\*Note: the information on gorges, caves and the hiking trails E4 of the Sitia region are general. The visitor is responsible in every case to evaluate his/her personal abilities and knowledge in order to choose the appropriate way to enjoy the proposed routes and sights)



sive and has formed hundreds of limestone tips that look like a meteorite rain with uneven shapes.

Even more impressive from the surface carst is the underground carst. There is a small amount of running water on the surface, as most of it is absorbed in the subsoil and moves underground through the multiple channels of the water-soluble limestone. In the mountains of the former Municipality of Itanos only, more than 82 caves, chasms, sinks and underground rivers have been recorded and the total explored routes are more than 6,000 meters and basically provide a bilge system for the province.

From here, the waters flow to the east to finally end up in various springs near the east coastline, like the ones in Zakros and Hohlakia.

In recent years, the former Municipality of Itanos, together with the Speleological





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[Speleological Group of  
Crete]

Association of Crete, has created the right conditions for the establishment of a Speleological Park. Many of the caves of Sitia, and of Crete in general, are connected with religious rituals and traditions dating back to the Minoan period.

For the time being, the caves are not open to the public. However, it is possible to access some of them with the appropriate equipment.

The most important caves of the region that functioned as sites of worship in the past are:



## The cave of Pelekiton

It is also called "tis sukias o Spilios" (meaning, the cave of the fig tree), as there is a fig tree in the entrance. Its official name, however, is connected to the wider region, where there were stone mines. It is located northeast from Kato Zakros, in an altitude of 100 meters and it is about 310 meters long.

Its entrance is impressive with a chamber of downwards inclination.

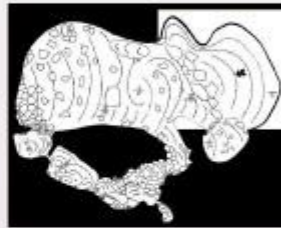




This cave is not only beautiful, as it has a rich adornment, it is also one of the greatest archaeological caves of the region, as signs of human presence are found, dating back to the Neolithic period.

## The cave of Peristeras

Another important cave of the province is the cave of Peristeras. It is located 2km east from the village Karydi, in the area of Platyvolas, in an altitude of 540 meters. It has a rich rock decoration and 170 meters of explored routes. Here too, signs of human presence were discovered, dating back to the Neolithic period.



## Vreiko

This cave is located 5km away from the village Pefki. The road ends in about 500 meters from the cave's entrance, but it is accessible by walking. Signs of human presence have been discovered, dating back to the Neolithic period.

## The cave of Petsofa

(Itanos)

In an altitude of 80 meters, about 500 meters northwest from the area of Rousolakkos, there is the visible opening of the cave of Petsofa, which was named after the hill. It is a very small cave (about 3x5m) with a large archaeological importance, as here many broken amphoras as well as a number of inscriptions have been found.

## Megalo Katofygi

In the north of the village Tourtoulou or Aghios Georgios, one can find the cave of Megalo Katofygi, one of the most important caves of eastern Crete. It is located in an altitude of 450 meters and its entrance leads us to a chamber complex with an excellent adornment of stalagmites and stalactites.



## The cave Okso Latsidi

The cave Okso Latsidi is located in the area of the village Sitanos and it is part of an extended cave complex that expands for more than 6,000 meters in the subsoil of mountainous Sitia. It is one of the richest karst formations in Crete.

Its entrance is next to the provincial road of Sitia-Karydi, between the villages of Sitanos and Katsidoni in an altitude of 684 meters. The main entrance (there are two) has a diameter of 2 meters and has an intense downwards inclination, which explains its name ("Latsidi" means "hole" in Eastern Crete). Right after the entrance, a large chamber is revealed, again with a downwards inclination. Its ground is covered with stones of many sizes, clay, and other material, such as wood, branches and leaves. After passing this chamber, and for the next 250 meters, there are five large, uneven chambers, which are connected with small passages. After passing the sixth chamber there are small tunnels that periodically become narrow. Water flows in their pavement, which increases during the rain seasons. It is believed that the cave of Okso Latsidi used to be part of an underground river.



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Crete)



## Vasiliki - Thripti Orino - Handras

The E4 route starts from the Pyrenees and crosses the main mountains of Europe to end in Zakros, the eastern part of Crete. E4 offers visitors the opportunity to live wonderful experiences in the small fishing villages and the mountainous villages it crosses. The routes of E4 proposed and described in this guide aim to introduce visitors to the amazing nature and people of Sitia.

### Monastiraki

In this deserted settlement, there are notable buildings of folk architecture and the remains of an old oil-press. On the west part of the settlement there is a basin with running water.

### Short description of the route Vasiliki - Chrysopigi

Total distance: 23,5 km  
Total crossing time: 7 hours  
Proposed season: Year-round  
Difficulty: Almost none  
Road Sign: E4

### Short decription of the route Chrysopigi - Handras

Total distance: 19 km  
Total crossing time: 5 hours  
Proposed season: Year-round  
Difficulty: None  
Road sign: E4

From Vasiliki follow the east road and after passing north from the low hill, where the remains of a pre-Minoan settlement are located, until you reach and drive on the provincial road of Ag.Nikolaos-Ierapetra. Continue to the east through hills of olive groves, until you reach the deserted settlement "Monastiraki" in an altitude of 200 meters. North from the settlement the entrance of the gorge of "Ha" appears, one of the most impressive gorges of Crete. From Monastiraki follow the road that goes up to the slope. To make a shortcut you can go up towards the top of the hill, following the telephone lines of OTE.

The shortcut is a bit difficult and tiresome to cross, however you gain more than 3km. Plus, the view from the top is amazing. Moving away from the hill you turn to the east towards the basin shaped between the tops of Papoura and Afentis of the mount Thriptis. Down at the east coast of a water stream, you will see the remains of an old settlement of coal workers who gave the name "Kaminakia" (meaning, smokestacks) to the area. Continue going up the road, following the pine-tree forest of the hill. To the left, you can see the river that enters the gorge of "Ha", which can only be crossed with professional hiking equipment. After 8.5 km from Monastiraki, in an altitude of 870 meters, you will reach the settlement of Thripti. The houses of the settlement are organized in groups or they are isolated, dispersed on the slope among vineyards.

Continue towards the east until you reach the highest point of the route, in about 1.000 meters, and on the right you will see the dirt road that climbs the to top of "Afentis Christos". The road goes up

#### Thripti

The settlement on the east slope of the mountain plateau of Thriptis, north from the top "Afentis Stavromenos" is used seasonally by the residents of nearby villages for agricultural work, mainly on the vineyards. The region is characterized by a wild beauty and the west view towards the mount Dikti. At the center of the settlement there is a tavern that is open year round and a fountain with running water.

#### Orino

This small traditional settlement is located on the basin with pine-trees on the east slope of "Stavromenos". Its residents engage in agriculture, livestock farming and apiculture. The beautiful natural environment of Orino is one of the best-preserved natural landscapes of Crete. The region is inhabited since antiquity. Traces of human presence have been discovered in the locations of Kastri and Leniko.

In the small gorge south from the village, there is a small frescoed temple of the Byzantine period. Numerous interesting architecture samples are preserved in the area, from different historical periods. On the mountain top west from Orinos, there is the little church of Afentis Stavromenos, celebrated on September 14. On August 15, cultural events are organized in the village's square.

In the village there is a tavern serving traditional food and accommodation in rented rooms. Orino is connected by bus with Ierapetra.

the slope to an altitude of 700 meters, where you meet a small plateau with vineyards before you enter the village "Orino" in an altitude of 600 meters, crossed by a river with platan trees and running water year round.

South from the village there is a small gorge which is the natural exit of the beautiful green valley of Orino. The gorge is crossed by a road that leads to the seaside, at the area of "Mauros Kolumpos". From the east exit of Orino follow the path straightforward and climb the slope facing the top, until you meet the dirt road. Follow the dirt road to the right and then the path on the slope directed towards the northeast, until you see the settlement of Chrusopigi. Cross the small plateau and then start going down the slope towards the water stream. After crossing the water stream, walk towards the east through the olive groves until you reach Chrusopigi, on an altitude of 400 meters.

#### Chrusopigi

The settlement is located on the north side of a small mountain valley and its residents engage exclusively in agriculture.

In the village you will find food markets and a cafeteria, where they might serve food. The village connects by bus with Sitia on a daily basis.





From the east exit of Chrusopigi follow the road and after 1,5 km on a left turn you will see a dirt road, which leads to the right, after passing next to a pine tree. Continue going up the slope for about 2km until you reach the col where the central dirt road continues to the northeast. Follow the central dirt road with a direction to the northeast on the north slope. To your left you can see an asphalt road and to the north the mount of Koprokefalas. Continue until you reach the village of Dafne in an altitude of 600 meters.

Cross the village of Dafne and go down to the east exit and then follow the downhill dirt road that crosses the slope until the water stream with the plane trees. Go across the north bank, and follow the dirt road to the right. Continue parallel to the water stream until you meet a deserted farm building. At this spot, cross the water stream and after about 500 meters cross again to the north bank of the water stream and continue until the end of the earthroad. Go up the small rocky col, which you will see in front of you. To the right, there is a characteristic rocky hill with a large chasm-cave on its south side, where the small church of Aghios Ioannis Theologos is built. At this point, there is the entrance to a small impressive gorge. After crossing the small col, go down the slope towards the east until you find yourself

#### Dafne

This traditional village has a beautiful square next to an old church. The region is inhabited since the Byzantine period. During the Venetian period, the castle Monte Forte is constructed in Apano Kasteli. The remains of the castle are preserved, along with a water tank. On August 29 a traditional feast is organized at the village.

In the village of Dafne there are several food markets, coffee shops and a medical center. There is bus service on a daily basis, from the line Stavrohorisitia.

to a rocky surface, which you must follow with a southeast direction. At the end of this "rocky" road, you will encounter a dirt road. Cross the road and continue straightforward until you reach the water stream in a location with many cypress trees. Cross the river and continue to the left. A bit further you will cross the water stream again to the north bank and follow the dirt road to the east until the village Vori. Go through the village and then go up the dirt road until you reach the provincial road. Follow the provincial road to the left, and after a few meters you will reach the village Papagiannades, in an altitude of 450 meters.

From the village, which is built on the steep slope, go up towards the top, with a direction to the east, after crossing a water tank. Right after, cross the asphalt road and follow the road with a northeast direction, until you see a right by-pass and a large circular water tank. Follow the left uphill direction and continue to the southeast on a plain, naked landscape.

A bit further, the view to the mountain chain of Handras opens. Go downhill, and you will cross a small deserted settlement with a church. Passing by a landscape with windmills and fields to your right, continue until you reach the village of Handras on an altitude of 600 meters.

#### Handras

The village is located on the northwest slope of the mountain chain where a large number of wind mills are installed, similar to those installed on the mountain chain of Lassithi.

Handras is a traditionally built village with many interesting samples of architecture. The bell tower of the church is exceptionally beautiful.

In Handras there are several food markets and coffee shops. There is bus service from the line Sitia-Ziros.

## Short description of the route

**Dafni - Pefki**Total distance: **7,5 km**Total crossing time: **2 hours**Proposed season: **All year round**Difficulty: **None**Road sign: **Non-existent**

We set off at the Dafni village square in a southerly direction. We pass next to the cemetery and take a dirt road that goes left (eastwards), parallel to a steep slope. Approximately 900 m after the village, at the end of the steep slope, we leave the dirt road and take a vague path, in a rather south-easterly direction. After approximately 700 m, we come upon another unsurfaced road, which we follow southwards. We ignore a left-hand turn-off and continue southwards for about 1.000 m; we then leave the dirt road and follow a path which is not clear, in a due southerly direction. We walk for 700 m, to a flat area where the beginning of a small gorge can be seen. We walk along the bed of the gorge for approximately 1.000 m; we then leave it and take the rough footpath, walking on its western side, where a characteristic fig tree can be seen, at the entrance of the Vreiko cave. From the cave and on we walk on a clear path. After approximately 250 m we reach a parking area and an asphalt road, which we follow for about 150 m; we then turn right into a dirt road that leads us to the northern side of a characteristic rocky summit, on top of which there is a pictur-

Vreiko Cave

A cave of a chasm-like nature; it is 30 metres deep, beautifully decorated and easily accessible. Traces of Neolithic habitation have been found in it.

aPefki

One of the most beautiful villages in the area, built amphitheatrically on the side of a hill, with narrow cobbled alleys. It was not mentioned in any Venetian census of the 16th century; it was, though, in a Turkish census conducted in 1671. However, according to written evidence, the village existed before that year. Above Pefki, on the summit of Kastelopoulo, a small building of the Late Minoan period (possibly a look-out post) has been found. Approximately 2,5 km north of the village, the Apoloïstres cave can be accessed by an asphalt road that reaches its entrance. It is of a chasm-like nature and the explored part goes as deep as 20 m. This cave has served in the past as a refuge for residents of the nearby villages, and its archaeological importance is also known. Even though it receives numerous visitors, it has not yet been developed touristically. In the village of Pefki there are shops, restaurants and a Museum of Folk Art.

esque chapel. From the northern side of this rock we follow the easily distinguishable footpath that meanders on its eastern side; after approximately 1.000, we arrive at the village of Pefki.

#### Short description of the route **Pefki - Makry Gialos**

Total distance: **5 km**

Total crossing time: **1 hour, 30 minutes**

Proposed season: **Year round**

Difficulty: **None**

Road sign: **Non-existent**



We walk along the narrow, picturesque alleys of the village of Pefki and follow the asphalt road south-west of the village for approximately 250 m. We then turn left into a rough dirt road which passes through an olive grove and then leads us to a footpath which passes next to an old watermill. The unsurfaced road runs along the edge of the

western wall of the gorge of Pefki for approximately 500 m; next it turns right and descends to the bed of the gorge, which features exceptionally beautiful formations and dense vegetation.

For approximately 1.000 m we follow the rough bed of the gorge and then come upon a dirt road, which we take in a southerly direction for about 1.300 m, to the settlement of Aspros Potamos. After Aspros Potamos we cross the water course; the dirt road continues to run parallel to its eastern bank for approximately another 1.500 m, until it reaches the coastal settlement of Makry Gialos.

#### **Makry Gialos**

A fishing settlement, located 30 km east of Ierapetra, with a long beach which probably gave the village its name (Μακρύς γιάλος - makris gialos - long beach). During the recent years it has turned into a touristic seaside resort and it also is a junction point for visitors setting off for other places of interest and resorts of the area, such as the Kapsa Monastery, Koutsouras, Mavros Kolimpos etc. The location of the settlement is of great archaeological importance; excavations conducted in the area have brought to light a Minoan villa, as well as a Roman villa. In Makry Gialos there are hotels, restaurants, shops, banks.

The bus service to and from Ierapetra and Sitia is quite frequent.

# Handras - Ziros - Zakros - Kato Zakros

Short description of the route

## Handras - Kato Zakros

Total distance: **20,5 km**

Total crossing time: **6 hours**

Proposed season: **Year round**

Difficulty: **None**

Road sign: **E4**

At the south exit of Handras you will encounter the asphalt road that leads to Ziros after 4km in an altitude of 560 meters, through the valley that connects the two mountain chains. From the northeast side of the village take the old path, which follows the left bank of a dry river and crosses the slope until a small plateau, surrounded by a stone fence where the remains of an old shepherd's hut are located on its north side. Continue towards the northeast and pass south from a low rocky hill with many stones and a characteristic almond tree at its root, and after bypassing from its north side you will reach an area with many sharp rocks and with a north view to the region of "Zakanthos", one of the ancient locations of the area, where the

### Ziros

The village is built on the north slope of the Ziros plateau, an area filled with vineyards. Its residents engage in agriculture and livestock farming. The name "Ziros" is of pre-hellenic origin, and numerous ancient settlements have been found in this region that has a long history.

A Minoan settlement has been excavated in the position of Fonias, as well as in the positions of Katsoulianos, Pentalitro, Anemomulia, Pyrgales, Vrysi Hametoulou and Limnia. The region was inhabited during the Roman period, as indicated by the findings in the position Plakospilios. The 14th century frescoes in the church of Aghia Paraskevi indicate that the region was also inhabited during the Byzantine period. During the Venetian period the village was flourishing. During the 1821 revolution a big massacre of the Christian population took place in the position of Fonias. Today, Ziros is a vivid village with a long tradition. In the village lives one of the last bell-makers in Crete.

On August 29, a big traditional feast is organized at the village. There are several food markets, coffee shops serving traditional treats and accommodation options in rented rooms. There is daily bus service from and to Sitia.

#### Ano Zakros

The region is inhabited since antiquity, as indicated by the pre-hellenic settlements excavated in the positions of "Kastellos Lenikon" and "Megalos Kastellos". Furthermore, the discovery of two important mountain shrines of the Minoan period in the positions of "Vigla" and "Traostallo" indicate the importance of the wider region. Today, the village of Ano Zakros is built at the root of the rocky slope and preserves samples of traditional and modern folk architecture. In the small gorge, west from the village, there are numerous water springs, the most important of which is the one of "Mesa Mulou". The waters of these springs were moving the 12 traditional water mills, from which only few are still functioning.

Its residents mainly engage in agriculture and the tourist industry. In the village there are markets, rented rooms, and a medical center. There is daily bus service to and from Sitia.

remains of an old settlement and the little church of Aghios Ioannis are located. Continue your route through the rocks, pass south from an old lime furnace, right after pass right from a small hill to reach a small valley with vineyards on the north slope, where a few farms and a well with running water are located. After 10' of walking, you will reach the small deserted village Skalia on an altitude of 650 meters, north from a small headland where the remains of deserted fields are located. At the root of the rock facing the historical church of the village there is a fountain with running water. The small settlement was deserted forever after its residents were massively slaughtered by the Turkish army in the church of Aghia Paraskevi in Ziros. From Skalia, north from the church, the path leads you to a small dry valley, and after crossing a narrow rocky passage you will reach the small mountain chain crossed by a dirt road. In the east extremity of the mountain chain you will leave the dirt road and turn left to the path that crosses a small col and goes down the north slope of the top. To the left there is a small river, which, a bit further,

becomes a bright green stream with a lot of water.

You will reach a point on the slope where Ano Zakros appears to the east. You will reach the village of Ano Zakros after 5' of walking.

After crossing the old upper neighbourhood of Ano Zakros on an altitude of 250 meters and following the signs, you will reach the central square of the village and right after the yard of the local church. East from the church follow the narrow cement path that goes down through a quiet residential area until you reach the bridge crossing the water stream. Follow the west bank of the stream, until the first left bypass that leads you at the river. In the beginning, walk to the right-south bank of the river and then go to the left bank, until you reach and enter the gorge. Next, follow the direction of the cement pipe that crosses the gorge, which transfers water to Kato Zakros. After 50' of walking in the green gorge filled with oleander and platan trees, you will arrive at the area with the caves that were used as a cemetery during the Minoan period. Moving away from this area, in a few minutes

#### Kato Zakros

The little coast village of Kato Zakros is located in an area of wonderful wild beauty, which in combination with the Minoan palace is considered one of the most interesting landscapes in Crete. On the north slope of the small valley at the exit of the gorge there are the remains of the 4th most significant Minoan palace. At the end of the past century the Italian archeologists Halbherr and Mariani had traced the antiquities that covered the whole region, from Pano to Kato Zakros. The region was probably inhabited from antiquity until the Roman period, and the most important findings were excavated after 1961 by the archeologist Nikolaos Platonas, including the Minoan palace. On the slope of the hill of Aghios Antonios, on the position where the base of a column was found, the archeologist Nikolaos Platonas started his excavation works that led to the revealing of the well-constructed building, with beautiful ceramic works and numerous small objects made by ivory and copper. The building extends to about 8,000 square meters, it had two floors and about 300 rooms. According to the analysis of the ceramics, it is estimated that the palace was used between 1600-1500 BC, when it was destroyed and it was never reconstructed. The most possible reason of its destruction is the grand eruption of the volcano of Santorini is about 1500 BC.

The Minoan settlement of Kato Zakros was of great importance in the region, and the great wealth that probably existed in this settlement differs from inland Crete that was poor in production. ►►

This is probably because the settlement of Kato Zakros developed a strong commercial center that dependent on the import of raw materials and supplies from the East Mediterranean.

All the findings reaffirm the theory that in the region there was an extremely vivid and wealthy Minoan society. In Kato Zakros, apart from the Minoan palace you can enjoy the amazing beauty of the gorge "ton nekron" (faraghi ton nekron, meaning, the gorge of the dead), where the cemeteries of the Minoan period are located. ❧❧

Today, the village has restaurants and rented rooms. It connects with Sitia by bus, from the same line as Ano Zakros.

you will reach the exit of the gorge and from there follow the dirt road to the left. After passing south from the Minoan palace, you will arrive at the modern coast village of Kato Zakros.





Short description of the route  
**Kato Zakros - Karoumes**

Total distance: **5,5 km**

Total crossing time: **2 hours**

Proposed season: **All year round**

Difficulty: **None**

Road sign: **Red marks, until the cave of Pelekita**



From the beach, north of the coastal settlement of Kato Zakros, we follow the path that leads to a rocky plateau, after which we cross a stream. Then, we continue parallel to the coast, in a relatively clear path, which climbs up towards the entrance of the Pelekita cave, with a characteristic fig tree at the entrance.

From the cave, the path which becomes hard to discern, descends for about 500 m, to the ancient quarry. From the quarry and on, where the indistinct path continues along the coast at a higher level, it passes by the mouth of the Adiavato cave and then climbs up to the top of a steep slope. From this point, we follow the same contour for about 600 m; the entire bay of Karoumes, with the beach at the end of the gorge of Chochlakies, lies before us, to the north. We arrive there, passing by a smaller beach and having bypassed the rocky southern slope of the main beach.

#### Pelekita Cave

It was named after the nearby ancient quarry, where rock used to be mined. It is also called "The fig tree cave", because of the large fig tree at its entrance. The cave is located north-east of the village of Kato Zakros, at an altitude of 100 m. Its length is about 310 m and its entrance is impressive. It is accessed by a chamber which slopes downwards to a great degree. Apart from its great aesthetic value, due to its rich decoration, it is considered an important site of archaeological interest in the region, as traces of habitation from the Neolithic era have been found in it.

#### Karoumes

The bay of Karoumes is the end of the gorge of Chochlakies. It is one of the most beautiful beaches of Crete, with just a few clumps of trees and a great number of fossils located on the limestone cliffs that surround the beach. The lovely natural environment of the bay is complemented by the diverse ecosystems that are created by the wetland, which is formed by the small delta of the Flega stream. This stream flows through the gorge, creating a rare landscape for the dry Sitia region.



### Short description of the route **Karoumes - Hohlakies**

Total distance: **3,5 km**

Total crossing time: **1 hour, 10 minutes**

Proposed season: **All year round**

Difficulty: **None**

Road sign: **Non-existent**

From the beach of Karoumes, we walk along the stream for approximately 500 m, until the entrance to the gorge; this is smaller than the gorge of Zakros, yet it does not lack natural beauty and interesting geological formations.

We walk through the gorge for about 1.500 m, until its western outlet, where we see an information sign,

at the end of a dirt road. We next follow a dirt road, along the northern bank of the stream, and after approximately 600 m we pass onto the southern bank and reach a parking area, where a small chapel can be seen.

From the chapel and on we continue westwards, until the village of Hohlakies; we arrive there after approximately 400 m, right where we come upon the main road that connects Zakros with Palekastro.

#### Hohlakies

A small agricultural village, which was probably named after the large number of stones that are to be found in the area of the Flega stream, which ends up in the gorge. (Χοχλάκι - hohlaki = smooth-surfaced, rounded stones found in river beds.) Close to the village, a notable Minoan rural villa has been unearthed; traces of other Minoan buildings can also be seen nearby.





## Nature and sport



### Climbing

The alternative choice for extreme excursions on your holidays. Climbers will find that the well-secured climbing areas in the gorge of Kato Zakros offer safe, quality climbing. There are also secure routes near the villages of Hohlakies and Katsidoni, and the tourist resort of Dionysos. You will also find climbing routes in the gorge of Pervolakia or Kapsa Monastery.



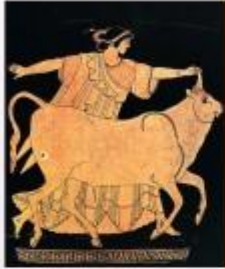
### Mountain Biking

Don't stop! Pedal hard and climb steep hills with endless views of the wild landscape all around, or take small roads and pathways, sitting on your bike or standing on the pedals! Feel that you are flying down the other side of the mountains. Along the way, you'll find villages ready to welcome you with open arms in the timeless traditions of hospitality. Give yourself the chance to refresh yourself with local soft drinks and try local delicacies. Cycle along dirt tracks and paths, through olive groves and vineyards, crossing mountainous landscapes or coasting along the seashore, to discover the unspoilt nature of Sitia.

# Culture



## Visiting the roots of the European civilization



A trip to Sitia is a trip at the roots of the European civilization. The Minoan civilization, as it is commonly accepted, is the first and most ancient great civilization in Europe, and here, in Eastern Crete, in Zakros and Palekastro, in Mohlos and Psyra, the first centers and ports of this great civilization developed. This is the place referred in the charming ancient myths. Zeus, the king of the Gods, who according to myth transformed into a white bull, seduced and abducted the beautiful daughter of the king of Phoenix, Europe, and carried her on his back to bring her in Crete, somewhere here, in a beautiful beach down in Palekastro and Vai. They stayed there to rest, and then they continued their route to Diktaio Antro and Gortyna. This beautiful myth entails some historical implications on the relationship of Crete with the East, explaining why here, in Eastern Crete which is close to Asia Minor, Syria, Palestine, ancient Phoenix and Egypt the first signs of European civilization were born. It is in this place, in the Minoan town of Palekastro, where the famous shrine of Diktaios Zeus was located and where his hymn was found written on a rock, which was chanted by young naked shield-bearers, dancing around his altar, imitating the Kourites who protected the young god at his birth

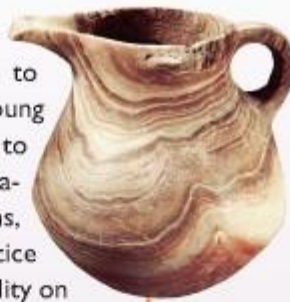


with their weapons and their dances. This is the first hymn to peace and peaceful life. The young men prayed to Zeus to come to earth along with the gods of vegetation to bring happiness to humans, peace and order to the world, justice and protection for the young, fertility on the earth and its fruits, winds to the ships, ect. Furthermore, the shrine of Diktaios Zeus is connected with one of the most ancient environmental provisions in the world: the prohibition of cutting trees from the forests that belonged to the shrine of Zeus, under the threat of harsh



punishment! Here, at the cape Cavo-Sidero, the ancient Samonion, the Argonauts disembarked and built the shrine of Samonia Athena and the god

Dionysos created the islands "Dionysiades", named after him. It seems that nowhere else in this world nature and myth were combined as well as in Crete. And it is remarkable how these traditions of worship and the rituals still survive to our days in different forms and contexts at the villages of Sitia. Its geographical position -the nearest station of the sea route to North Africa and the East- and historical reasons contributed to the flourishing and the creation of this amazing archeological and historical wealth. Sitia was "the gate of the East" of the Minoan world and here are the first and last sites of the Minoan civilization. The same is true for the literary tradition of this place:





- ▶ Myson the Sitan, one of the seven wise men of antiquity, as reported by Stefanos the Byzantine.
- ▶ Vitsentzos Kornaros, "the Great of the Greek nation and the immortal poet", according to Kostis Palamas.
- ▶ Andreas Kornaros, the great literary scholar, the founder of the Stravaganti academy in Megalo Kastro (Heraklion) and the writer of the first history book of Crete.
- ▶ The pantogalloi brothers, great men of the church and literature.
- ▶ Pertzivalis and Kalyvas, distinguished scholars and teachers of the renaissance.
- ▶ The Salamon family, a member of which was our great National poet, Dionysios Solomos.

These are only some examples of the respectable personalities of literature and art. At the same time, the traditional folk culture is one of the richest and most vivid today, expressed by the folk music and popular poetry, which not only continues to survive but also continues to flourish and be reproduced creatively as Melina Merkouri noted and said: "until today, Sitia is the home of pleasure, happiness, and creativity. A place where life finds its meaning. A place that proudly continues a great tradition of offering, in literature, sciences and art".

## Antiquities

Information: 24th Ephorate Of Prehistoric And Classical Antiquities (Mon-Fri) 7:00 -14:30  
Tel: 28410 22462



The extremely rich and bright past of the region is certified by the many extendent archeological excavations and historical researches conducted by Greek and foreign researchers



the last 100 years and on, and this fact is noted by the unforgettable Melina Merkouri. When she was the minister of culture in 1984, she performed the opening of the archeological museum of Sitia. Then, she said:

"Sitia is one of the most privileged places. Not only in terms of natural beauty but also in terms of history and culture. Few other places of the Greek land encompass within their borders so many signs of a bright past. Eighty (80) archeological sites have been excavated in the region and more than a hundred (100) have been traced and wait to be excavated to enrich your wealth and pride".

Indeed, the Sitia province is one of regions of Greece and of the whole world with a large number of antiquities within its borders, with archeological sites such as:

The Minoan palace of Zakros, the Minoan town of Palekastro, the Minoan settlements-naval centers of Mohlos and Psyra, the Minoan cemetery of Aghia Fotia, the Minoan palace and settlement of Petra, the Minoan villas in Sitia, in Zou, in Pano Zakros, Achladia, Aghios Georgios, Makrus Gialos, the residence Hamezi, the eteocretan Praissos, the Doric Itanos, the Hellenistic settlements of Trypiti and Xerocambo, the Roman Lefki (koufonisi) the medieval settlement of Voila, the Kazarma fortresses of Sitia, the Venetian villa in Etia, Liopetro, Monte Forte, ect; the monasteries of Toplou, Kapsa and Faneromeni, Byzantine churches, frescoes and icons, historical sites, folk architecture, traditional fountains, neo-classic houses, watermills, windmills, farms, and many more monuments of the local, national and global cultural heritage.



## The Palace and the Minoan Settlement of Zakros

Opening hours: 8:30 - 3:00 - Tel.: 28430 26897



The first excavation in Kato Zakros was performed by the British D. Hogarth, in 1901. Then, the remains of a Minoan settlement came to the surface, indicating a flourished society. The most important of Hogarth's findings were the about 300 clay stamps on coins, indicating some sort of bureaucratic system of control or a number of commercial affairs. Some of these stamps originate from Knossos, something that indicates the close relationship of Knossos and Zakros, at least during the 15th century BC. In 1962, the Ephore of Cretan Antiquities N. Platon started a new excavation in the valley of Kato Zakros. The Greek archeologist was convinced that this position was "hiding" something more important than a "naval settlement", as it seemed to be the center of a culture, recognized by the ceramic products of the wider region. The excavation results were indeed impressive. The excavations revealed a Minoan palace and a settlement surrounding it, dispersed over the slopes of the two hills of the valley. Important findings came to light during the research of the Minoan tombs, most of which were "sheltered" in natural caves, in the gorge of Zakros -that after the findings was renamed as "the gorge of the dead" ("faraghi ton nekron") - but also in other positions, such



as in "Mavro Aulaki" southeast from the gulf and "Spiliara", on the north slope of the valley. The palace of Zakros - as it is preserved today- was constructed during the 16th century BC. It is possible that it



replaced an older public building, as indicated by the remains found under the east wing of the palace. Only at this spot it was possible to further excavate, since agricultural activity during the 20th century -and before the excavations- had totally destroyed this part of the palace. In terms of architecture, the palace of Zakros has several similarities with the larger palace of Knossos. In Zakros like in Knossos, the west wing (the section of the construction west from the central yard) accommodated the chambers of the shrine: the main shrine, next to a ritual room that A. Evans named "Lustral Basin", the treasury of the ritual objects and the majestic chambers of the rituals and the feasts, which in the case of Zakros were located on the ground floor. The placement of the main spaces of storage of agricultural products, of the palace treasury and of other spaces of processing valuable materials at the west wing, reaffirms the theory that the economic management of the Minoan state was in the hands of a powerful ministry. The east wing, like in Knossos, was probably used as the "accommodation area". The other two wings seem to have been of secondary





importance. Laboratories were probably located at the south wing, as in some of the chambers valuable processed, unprocessed or semi-processed materials have been found (such as marble, crystals, ivory, ect). At the north wing there was another "Lustral Basin" which was probably connected with the entrance of visitors in the palace. The central gate of the palace was also the end of a central road leading to the Minoan port. The close relationship and the similarities between Zakros and Knossos might lead to the conclusion that the latter was the metropolis of the former. Most of the buildings that form the Minoan settlement were probably built at the same time as the palace. Many of the buildings have "copied" architecture styles from the palace. Almost all the buildings had two floors with one or two stairways connecting the chambers of the two floors. The study of the ceramics had led to the conclusion that the settlement and the palace of Zakros were completely destroyed in 1450 BC. The destruction was probably caused by some natural disaster (an earthquake or the eruption of the volcano of Thira), as it was deserted for a long time and the palace was never re-constructed. Parts of the settlement were later re-inhabited for a short period of time (1400 -1300 BC), but since then the area never managed to re-establish its old glory.



## The Minoan town of Palekastro

Opening hours: 8:30 - 3:00

Tel: 6942 407209 Mrs. Veniamaki Anthoula

At the beach of Palekastro, in the position of Russolakos, a great and big town of the Minoan period was excavated. It flourished during the post-Minoan period but some remains date back to the pre-Minoan period and the mid-Minoan period, mainly tombs with numerous bones very well preserved. The anthropologists that studied the bones found important information on the body structure of the Minoans, who reportedly had an average body length of 1.60 for men and 1.50 for women. A central road connects with 4 other roads that divide the town in 9 districts. The houses that face the central road had imposing fronts, while a complete drainage system was functioning in all the districts. In the district B, among others, there was a chamber-manor with 4 lines of columns and a kitchen, a "Lustral Basin", a well, a home shrine, a bath, and an oil storage room, while in other spaces there was an oil press. Many vessels, vases, lamps, ect were also found.





Chamber-manor were also found in other districts, while in one district a wine press was found. In another district, the famous in antiquity shrine of Diktaios Zeus was found. At this shrine, Zeus was worshipped until the

Roman period. The pieces of a plate where the hymn of Zeus Diktaios were also found; it is the first hymn to a deity in the ancient world and it is a hymn to peace and life. In the same space the pieces of an ivory figurine, "the masterpiece" of the Minoan civilization as it



has been characterized, were discovered and are exhibited at the archeological museum of Sitia. Human activity in the Minoan town of Palekastro suddenly seized, as it happened in Zakros and in other towns of Crete in about 1500 BC, after the horrific eruption of the volcano of Thira.



## The first Centre for Archaeoastronomy and Aegean Scripts in Europe is found in Sitia and houses the first computer known to humanity!

Visitors can admire the rock-cut copy of the Minoan stone matrix from Palaikastro, Sitia, which was used in the Minoan era and is thought to be the first analogue computer in human history.

The Archaeoastronomy Centre, operating on a permanent basis with daily tours, is housed by the town marina, in a booth owned by Sitia Municipality. Minas Tsikritsis, a scholar of Aegean scripts, established the centre in collaboration with the Municipality and the Holy Metropolis of Hierapytna and Sitia. Their aim was to create a centre of Minoan civilisation in Sitia, in order to showcase the value and culture of Minoan Crete, the cradle of Europe, and to provide visitors with the opportunity to observe, once again, that Ancient Greek civilisation is inextricably linked with every scientific field. The Palaikastro mechanism, thought to be the first computer in human history, is a rayed disc dating to the 15th century BC, divided into two semicircles with a cross in the centre. The original matrix with relief symbols, discovered at



Imprint of the Palaikastro matrix from the study by Stephanos Xanthoudides.

Operation of the rayed disc as a sundial.





Palaikastro, Sitia, in 1898, is housed in the Heraklion Archaeological Museum. It depicts the cosmological model of the Minoans. The Minoan artefact predates the "Antikythera mechanism" by 1,400 years and is the first analogue computer, with three recognised functions to date:

1. Sundial
2. Geographical latitude calculator
3. Solar and lunar eclipse predictor

Next to the copy of this Minoan computer is a modern interactive computer on which visitors can predict future eclipses by tracking the orbits of the Sun and Moon.

On display in the booth are also copies of "frying-pan" vessels from Hagia Photia, Sitia, dated to 2,700 BC, depicting planetary synodic cycles. They are thought to have been used as calendars and aids to predict the position of the Sun, Moon and planets, in order to plan seasonal activities. We are left speechless by the skills and knowledge of the people who made these accurate calendars, based on solar, lunar and planetary movements and periodicities.

The booth is also a centre of Aegean Scripts, the first writing systems of European civilisation, with examples of the first Cretan scripts: Cretan Hieroglyphic, the Phaistos Disc, Linear A, and the oldest deciphered script in Europe, Linear B. Over 500 word-symbols are presented here, representing months, occupations, deities, place-names, etc.

The booth, in the remotest corner of southern Greece, makes Sitia a unique tourist destination for everyone, particularly schoolchildren. It provides a history lesson to all, highlighting the roots of Cretan and Greek civilisation, and demonstrating the origins of technology: astronomy and mathematics were developed by the first Greek civilisation from the mid-15th century BC onwards.



## Mohlos

The American archeologist R.B. Seager discovered Mohlos in 1907, after following the instructions of a local fisherman. The following year, the excavations began on the little island, which revealed 20 built tombs and about 12 habitations. In 1955, J. Leatham and S. Hood conducted underwater searches and found Roman fish tanks at the coast across the island, supporting the hypothesis that the island of Mohos was a peninsula during the copper age. According to the findings of the excavations, the island of Mohlos developed to one of the most important centers of the Minoan civilization. The valley ashore provided a rich agricultural production and the narrow strait that united the island with the shore in antiquity was forming two natural ports, keeping the ships safe in any weather condition. As an important commercial center, it imported obsidian from the island of Milos and other raw material from the East, which were further supplying other regions of Crete. The discovery of a circular





stamp that comes from north Syria and dates back to the 18th century, proves the significance of this port. In the 'district of the craftsmen' golden jewelry was constructed, along with stamp-stones, and the famous stone vessels of

Mohlos, many of which were found in tombs of the period. After the destruction from the volcano eruption, the town of Mohlos was reconstructed and expanded. The new town had central roads and other smaller roads that divided the town in districts. The houses were built in different levels, adjusted to the inclination of the ground, and had two or three floors. During the last phase of the extended habitation on the island of Mohlos, a 1st century fortification is constructed at its north and east part. The fortification was probably an effort of Ierapytna to establish its presence on the north coast of Crete in this period.



## The Minoan Villa of Pano Zakros

Opening hours: 8:30 - 3:00 Tel: 28430 26897

The Minoan villa of Pano Zakros was studied by N. Platonas, with the aid of his then associates, Giannis and Efi Sakellarakis, in the years of 1965 and 1966.

The chambers of the ground floor include mainly production and storage spaces of agricultural products. One of the chambers accommodated one of the most articulate Minoan wine press, with two press basins and vessels to collect the product. Next to the wine press, a spacious storage room was found, along with six large tubs. One of the tubs bore a Linear A inscription, that started with the ideogram of the wine.



## The Villa of Achladia

In the position "Riza", in 1952, N. Platon attempted to perform a small excavation on a point where an ancient wall was visible. During the excavation the external walls of a habitation were revealed, which were made by large carved stones. In 1959 Platon continued the excavation works and uncovered the whole building, which proved to be an important agricultural villa of the Minoan period. It dates back to 1600-1550 BC, and was used for at least half a century until it was destroyed, probably by an earthquake. The building covers 270 square meters and includes 12 chambers. The main entrance, with a monolithic sill, was in the east, while another entrance was in the west. The reception hall in the left of the tiled pre-chamber



Fig. 10. Villa of Achladia (Riza) - Plan.

had a double entrance and communicated with a smaller chamber with a built bench and had three columns supporting the roof. Another possible reception hall was on the right of the pre-chamber. The villa also had a kitchen, storage rooms and other secondary spaces. In the exterior, the walls shaped a yard that was probably used for animal housing.

## The tomb of Achladia

Numerous excavation works have been performed in two locations in Achaldia, where visitors can see two wonderful sites of the Minoan civilization, the unique domed tomb of Eastern Crete and the remains of a Minoan villa. In the position "Platuskinos", and underground domed tomb with a hall passage has been excavated, the only sample of a domed tomb of the copper age in Eastern Crete and extremely rare in the whole island. It dates back to 1400-1220BC and it was used for more than a century. A built passage 9 meters long leads to the entrance of the tomb. The chamber is circular with a diameter of 4,08 meters and height 4,16 meters. The dome is build with large stones and is cone-shaped. Right across the main entrance of the tomb, there is a second smaller entrance, which was possibly a symbolic opening for the passage of the dead to the "other" world, but it could also be the entrance of a side chamber which was never fully constructed. The lintels and the sills of the two entrances are monolithic. The cavities around the main entrance probably functioned as the support of the wooden gate, which was closing the entrance to the tomb.



Due to its similarity to the Mycenaean domed tombs of Northern Greece, it is often argued by some researchers that the technical construction of the domed tombs of the post-Minoan period was "imported" from Mycenaean technicians of mainland Greece.

## The Minoan Villa of Makry Gialos

In the position "Plakakia", west from the village of Makry Gialos, archeological excavations revealed a villa that dates back to the post-Minoan period. The villa that was revealed is very important for the study of Minoan architecture because it constitutes micrography of a Minoan palace. In the middle of the building there is the big central courtyard, surrounded by the remainder spaces of the villa with slab paved floors and walls covered with mortar, while there is also a western courtyard.

In the central courtyard there is a built altar and next to it a stamp stone was found with a representation of a holy boat, a holy tree and a priestess. The roof was set with canes and clay, which is exceptionally interesting as it connects the Minoan with the later Cretan architecture, since this method was used until recently for the construction of the roofs of rural stone-built houses. The villa was destroyed by a big fire, as it is proved by the imprints of burned wooden joists and the blackened slab paved floors. The architecture style of the villa, the small number of spaces for domestic use, and the importance of certain findings (figurines, stone stamps and a bowl of Holy Communion), all of which are accommodated in the Archaeological Museum of Aghios Nikolaos, indicate that the villa had a religious



character and it is possible that it constituted an important religious centre of the wider region.

In the position "Katovigli", in 1976, systematic excavations began under the direction of N. P.

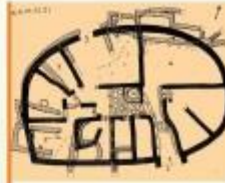
Papadakis that were completed in 1980. The ruins of Roman villa were then revealed, that had a bath complex and an outdoor water reservoir. The design of its spaces is quite complicated. Corridors and courtyards function as central axes surrounded by rooms and auxiliary spaces.



The floors and the walls of the central rooms are covered with marble plates. The entrance of the villa had a mosaic floor with geometric and plant decor. A large chamber with luxurious floor was probably used as a reception hall. In the south-eastern department of the villa the bath complex was located, also known as "valaneio", with a petal-shaped swimming-pool whose floor and stairs were set with marble. A large mosaic with geometric representations was found in the outdoor space next to the swimming-pool. In the villa there was a system of build pipes, which channelled the water from the reservoirs in the "valaneio" and in the remainder spaces. Between the various spaces of the "valaneio", a room was located which probably had some sort of burrial use, where bones but also entire skeleton were found. The villa was inhabited from the 1st century B.C. until the 3rd century A.D. The cause of its destruction is unknown. The few findings of the excavations are accommodated in the Archaeological Museum of Sitia.

## The Elliptical House of Hamezi

In the position of "Souvloto Mouri", in 1903, the excavations under the direction of St. Xanthoudidis brought into light a building of the Minoan period. Its unique elliptic form -uncommon for the period- and its function, puzzled the archaeologists for many years. In 1971, a new research conducted by the Professor Mr. Dabaras revealed new evidence that this building was in fact a residence, of unique style in the Minoan period, dating back to 2200-2000 B.C. while the remains of more ancient residences have been found. During the excavations cupreous objects were found in the exterior of the residence, while in the rooms vessels and some figurines have been found, which are saved in the Museums of Heraklion and Aghios Nikolaos.



## Pressos

The region, located between the two arms, Kalamauki and Panteli, of the current river of Stomios (ancient Didymos), was occupied by the ancient big city of the Eteocretans, Praissos, which was one of the most important regions of Eastern Crete. It was built on three hills and was surrounded by a strong fortification wall, whose remains are saved in some points and in particular on the northeast of the big hill, where the chair of the city's authorities was located. The third hill with the altar-shrine and the holy cave in



the position Skales were located outside the fortification. After the conquest of Crete from the Dorians in the 12th century B.C. the Eteocretans, who were the first inhabitants of Crete and the "native Cretans", withdrew towards the east of the island, where they preserved their genuine Minoan character, their language, religion and the worship of Diktaios Zeus.

Praissos was located at the centre of the Sitia peninsula and had harbours in the Northern sea, the Cretan sea, in Iteia (Sitia), in the Libyan sea, in Styles, as it appears in the resolution of Praisians, during the Macedonian years, concerning fishery and the trade of the red shells and the navy. The Ierapytnians, who were of Dorian origin, after many years of war finally defeated the Eteocretans of Praissos and destroyed their city. The region was probably inhabited since the Neolithic period. In the cave located in Skales, by the river banks of Kalamauki and Panteli, neolithic and caramaic ceramics were found.

In 1884, Federico Halbherr discovered in Praissos the first Eteocretan inscription and found a large number of clay figurines. The excavations of the British Archeological School revealed that in Praissos there was a city of the historical Hellenistic times.

The more ancient Eteocretan city of Praissos, recorded by the ancient Greek historian Stravon, was far from the remains preserved today and after its destruction, the last descendants of the Eteocretans, along with the Dorians, built the new city in the 12th century BC. It is the remains of this new city that are still preserved today. The region of the "state" of Praissos occupied the whole peninsula of Sitia -apart from Itanos- which was then called the Eteocretan peninsula, the



peninsula of Praision.

The regime of the Hellenic-Geometric Praissos was democratic. As an autonomous city, Praissos had its own coins. In most of these coins we find representations of Hercules, Zeus, Apollo, Demeter and the word "PRAISION".

At the hill of Praissos a tomb was excavated in 1935, where a Praisian athlete was buried along with his awards, the most characteristic of which were two painted Athenian amphoras dating back to 560 - 500 BC. It seems that the athlete participated and won the pan-Athenian games. In Praissos there are traces of all past centuries. The traces of the Neolithic, the Mycenaean, the Geometric, the Hellenistic, and the Venetian centuries. Even the Turks left two fountains in Vavelous.

## Itanos

Opening Hours: 8:30 - 3:00

Tel: 6932 356825 Hatzidakis Nikos

Itanos had been one of the most important coastal cities of eastern Crete from the Minoan years until the first Christian era. Nowadays it is known under the name of Erimopolis. Its citizens were dominating throughout the coast of Sitia, from the Samonion cape (today cape Sidero (iron)) to the Erythrean cape (today called Goudoura) and the island of Lefki (Koufonisi). Itanos is also mentioned by Herodotus. When Pythia saw the oracle and told the Thyraeans to make a settlement in Libya, the latter sent emissaries to Crete in order to find guides who would lead them to



Libya. The emissaries on their arrival to Itanos met with laver fisherman who recounted to them how he had once drifted away pushed by the wind to the land of Libya. In turn they convinced him to guide them there where they ended up founding the colony of Cyrene in 630 B.C. Itanos is also mentioned by Stephanos the Byzantine who reckons that the city's name finds its origins in the Itanos Phoenix. According to him, Itanos was a Phoenician colony controlling the laver and glass trade.

It was in this city that the Phoenicians merchants, who traded with Crete, were based. Numerous laboratories for fish and laver processing, glass making and textiles were also found here. Itanos had always been a Syrio-Phoenician station where Phoenician gods such as Phoenix, Amfion and Tagha were worshiped. The city has been a very important port as it was used as a transportation base between the East and Crete.

Thanks the trade of laver, glass and fish, as well as the great income generated by the Diktaion Zeus temple, Itanos became a rich and prosperous city as one can infer by the great number of temples and luxurious marble structures that have been found here. Still, it was its affluence that led to their subjugation by the Dragmians who before rising up used to be controlled by the people of Itanos. Furthermore, when the Ierapytnians destroyed Praesos, Itanos was contained even further.

After the Roman occupation of the whole island, Itanos managed to flourish thanks to seafaring and trade. The city minted its own currency that had the tridents, fish and even Triton (ancient eastern Cretan deity) as was to be expected by a seafaring city. Many of these coins are described by Sboronos.

During the proto-Christian period, several

glorious and gallant temples were erected as indicated by their ruins. Itanos was either destroyed in the 9th century A.D. by the Saracens or by the great earthquake in 795 A.D. The city must have been populated once more but was finally looted and utterly destroyed by pirates sometime during the 15th century. Its residents retreated to safer mountainous settlements.

The regime of Itanos was initially monarchy but later became democratic with its own senate and open parliament ("ekklesia tou demou"). Sometime during the 3rd century B.C. there was an attempt to overthrow the aristocratic democracy. The citizens of Itanos asked for help by Ptolemy the Philadelphian of Egypt who sent the general Patroclus the Patron to their aid.

In Itanos several sepulchral epigrams from the proto-Christian period have been found. On the transom of the Saint-John's temple one can find an epigram from the 3rd century B.C. describing how Itanios competed and equaled in archery the god of light and music, Apollo.

In 1919 an old tomb was found, covered by two plaques that can be found in the Archaeological Museum of Heraklion. These plaques were made of locally extracted blue rock. The first epigraph comes from the 2nd century A.D. and consists of 98 verses badly damaged, that describe the conflict between the Itanians and the Ierapytnians over the Diktaeon sanctuary. The other epigraph contains a resolution from the 3rd century B.C. voted by the Itanians thanking the Macedonian general Patroclus the Patron.

Itanos is also mentioned with the same name (u-ta-no) in the linear B inscriptions found in Knossos. In the area of Cape Sidero, the people sailing to the East worshipped the gods of the winds, that were later substituted by Poseidon.



## Hellenistic city of Xerokampo

Recent surface excavations have proven that the area has been populated since the prehistoric times and is of great archeological interest.



In the site of Katsounakia a large Minoan settlement was found but has not been excavated yet. In the hill of Trachelas a sanctuary was also found but had already been desecrated. Furthermore, in the area of Psile Ammos one can see the ancient stone quarry that was used to build the ancient city. There are also numerous salterns used for sea salt production. They consist of a series of canals and founts that are dug in the rocks of the seashore.

Today they are mostly covered by the sand of the beach. Across from the Kabaloi area one can find a series of islets with installations dating from the post-Minoan era (1500-1300 B.C.). Also in the Farmakokefalo area important excavations started in 1984 by the archeologist N. P. Papadakis.



An important Hellenistic city was found which is speculated to be the ancient city Ampelos, spanning throughout the contiguous hill and

surrounded by high city walls. Only part of the city-walls is still preserved. Many houses, roads and other findings have come to light uncovering an important part of its history. The city was built sometime during the 5th century B.C. and flourished during the 3rd-2nd century B.C. There was trade with other Cretan cities and the Dodecanese; especially with Rhodes and Kalymnos. Characteristic findings include lead pellets used by the slingers of the army.

The excavation findings are kept in the Archaeological Museum of Sitia. Finally, in the centre of the city the small church of Aghios-Nikolaos dating from 1895 can be found.

## Koufonisi

The ancient name of the island was Lefki and it played an important role in the Hellenistic and Roman history of Eastern Crete. Its citizens were mainly fishermen and laver makers. The art of laver processing was known in the area since the prehistoric times as can be seen by the processed laver shells found in Minoan settlements. The laver trade was very lucrative.

In 1975 in the same area, N. P. Papadakis excavated a Hellenistic theater with a capacity of 1000 spectators. The orchestra was



## Trypitos

Just east of Sitia, 2.5 km along the road to Palaikastro, is the small promontory of Trypitos.

A major Hellenistic settlement, perhaps the city of ancient Sitia, was excavated on the east side of the headland from the 1980s onwards. Public buildings, houses and streets came to light, along with many ancient artefacts including jewellery, coins and lead weights.

On the east shore of the promontory, in the lee of the northerlies and northeasterlies that have always been the prevailing winds on Crete, was discovered an ancient shipshed for repairing or sheltering ships. A wall protecting the settlement and the shipshed was also found on the south side.

semicircular and its corridors were vaulted. The second most important edifice found was the public bath house dating from the 1st century A.D. In the ancient Lefki settlement that is located close to the theatre, several houses operating as laver processing laboratories were also found. A mansion with numerous rooms, mosaics and colourful walls was also found. All findings, such as figurines, stone and metal vases are kept in the Archaeological Museum of Sitia.

In the top of a hill, around 2 km from the settlement, the ruins of an ancient temple were also found, along with two remaining pieces from a colossal sitting statue. The water-supply system consisted of three built aqueducts bringing water from a spring on the top of the hill to the centre of the settlement. It seems that the whole area was violently destroyed during the 4th cent. A.D., while the theatre was looted and burnt. Since then the island has not been permanently populated again. Only passing sailors left their traces in the small caves of the western beach, where engraved on the rocks one can find Christian Saints' figures dating back to the 17th century. Today, the whole island is a vast archaeological area.





## Voila settlement

The deserted settlement of Voila occupies the north and west sides of the steep hill located on the eastern side of the Armenochantrades plateau. On the southeast side the settlement is protected by the steep cliff. In the north and western sides of the hill, the houses are built like fortifications, while a short wall is protecting the remaining perimeter towards the valley. The settlement spans below the contemporary road which destroyed many of the archaeological buildings when it was built. Domed warehouses or stables are still preserved in the low external zone while all the houses are built on the slope.

During the Venetian domination over the island, the settlement belonged to the feud of the Salomon family. During their reign they expanded the Aghios-Georgios church which also includes the family tomb of the Salomons. During the Ottoman Empire most of its citizens were ottomans and was also the base of a janizary battalion. The most know commander of the janizary was Jen Ali after whom the tower of the settlement was named. Since the end of the 19th century, the settlement declined and today lies in ruins. The majority of the remaining buildings belongs to the Ottoman Empire era. However, the architecture of the Venetian built edifices is a witness to the affluence of the area during their reign.



## Etia Settlement



Etia probably took its name from the tree *Itea* (willow).

The village seems to have been populated since the Byzantine period as one can see from the remaining churches of Aghios-Ioannis and Aghia-Ekaterini. During the Venetian reign it was one of the largest villages of the area with 563 citizens. The area was a feud of the Venetian aristocrat Dei Mezzo from the great Dei Mezzo family, which is one of the most populous families of Sitia. Dei Mezzo built the villa that bears its name and is one of the most important Venetian monuments of the Cretan country side.



The building had a rectangular shape with an entry hall covered by arches; as was the main dining hall and the corridor. All the auxiliary structures around the mansion were probably built during the Ottoman



reign. Many engravings and the escutcheon of the Dei Mezzo family can also be found.

The villa was built at end of the 15th century, the same time the Toplou monastery was built and it was preserved intact until 1828. The building was surrounded by a big yard and was protected by walls. The main gate was palatial and bore the coat of arms of the Dei Mezzo family. On the eastern side of the yard close to the door, a fountain was found; the water was passed to the basin along the road.

## Archaeological Park of Petra

Petra is a traditional settlement, 1 km east of Sitia. A small tower from the Venetian period can be found there. It bears the name "house of Kornaros" and belonged to the homonym family.

On the hill over the tower, a small palace and a settlement have been brought to light by recent excavations. The rooms of the palace were luxuriously adorned and its walls painted with bright colours. Many pots, vases and epigrams of Linear A and B were found as well. Under the road of the contemporary settlement cyclopean fortifications were found, while in the fringes port installations were also found.

In the adjacent hill "head of Petras" (east of the palace towards the sea) a Neolithic settlement is being excavated. Recently, the settlement of Petras has been transformed into an important archaeological park that is worth visiting during the summer months.

## The hymn to Diktaios Zeus

poetic output: Nick Petrakis

Oh! Great Kouros, I salute you,  
 I salute you son of Cronous, master of the cosmos.  
 You, which came this spring again, here in Dikte  
 surrounded by the gods of vegetation;  
 Come with us, come in delection  
 For our songs and melodies  
 For you we play, with harps and flutes  
 We laud you Zeus, around your adorned altar.  
 Oh! Great Kouros, I salute you,  
 I salute you son of Cronous, master of the cosmos.  
 Come with us, because it was here,  
 When your shield-bearing guards, the Kourites  
 Hided you and saved you  
 Rhythmically beating their feet,  
 When they took you from your mother Rhea.  
 Oh! Great Kouros, I salute you,  
 I salute you son of Cronous, master of the cosmos.  
 Come with us, you, star of the fair dawn  
 Oh! Great Kouros, I salute you,  
 I salute you son of Cronous, master of the cosmos.  
 And those times were fructuous and justice was the reigning  
 amongst the people.  
 And all the creatures of the earth by the prosperous Peace were  
 governed  
 Oh! Great Kouros, I salute you,  
 I salute you son of Cronous, master of the cosmos.



Come again, this spring with us  
 And dance, dance  
 And make the earth fertile  
 So that our jars are full  
 And our herds give wool like silk  
 And our grains are fecund  
 And our beehives bristling with honey  
 Oh! Great Kouros, I salute you,  
 I salute you son of Cronous, master of the cosmos.  
 Dance, dance and leap with joy and come with us, come and  
 enliven the creation  
 Come and guard upon our cities  
 Protect our ocean crossing ships  
 Protect our young men  
 Uphold and protect our just laws



The above poem is a translation from the ancient Kouritic hymn found on epigram. Its many fragments were found dispersed close to the ruins of the Dictaeon sanctuary in Palaecastro of Sitia. The big grey stone plaque bears text in both sides (one of the side contains several mistakes). Nevertheless, it was possible to combine the two texts and reveal the whole poem.

This hymn was sung by naked shield bearing young men that were representing the Kourites, the young men who protected and fostered the divine infant, the young Zeus. It is an epiclesis for the yearly revival of the young god, for a rich harvest and the weal of their live-stock. The hymn was part of initiation ceremonies during the transition of boys from adolescence to adulthood in order for them to enter to the class of "perfect" citizens.

## The Monastery of Toplou

One of the greatest monasteries of Crete. It is located 10 km east from Sitia, in the center of an open plateau at the base of the Cavo-Sidero peninsula and 6km away from Palekastro. Its building



complex is imposing, as it looks like a fortress. Its official name is "Panagia Akrotiriani". The name toplou means "the one that has a cannon" (top means cannon in Turkish), probably because the monastery had a cannon to protect itself from the pirates during the Turkish period. The monastery was most likely founded in the 16th century around the little temple of Panagia (Virgin Mary) that existed there since the 14th century. The monastery acquired a lot of property in a short period of time; it

founded more churches all over Crete, while other monasteries were embedded to its property. The monastery was looted several times by pirates, the knights of Malta and the Turks, because of its wealth and because it supported national revolutions. The monastery was probably destroyed during the invasions at the end of the 15th century and its reconstruction was related to the Venetian-Cretan noble families of Kornaros and Dei Mezzo. As indicated by a number of religious icons of the 14th and 15th century, the fortress-monastery flourished during this period. The icons follow the doctrines of the Constantinople painting style,



which gradually became popular in Crete after the fall of Constantinople. The high art value of the icons is representative of the high education level of the monastery community, which played a crucial cultural role in renaissance Crete. The 1612 earthquake caused a lot of damages in the monastery. The monastery was once again recovered by the abbot Gabriel Pantogallos and the generous donations of the Venetian Senate. At the same time, the monastery was renovated and its southern aisle of Aghios Ioannis was added. The front of the building and the imposing bell tower are of renaissance style. All operational spaces are organized around the internal courtyard in three floors with bastions. In total, the building complex of the monastery of Toplou combines elements of Byzantine and Western architectural topology.

In 1646, the monastery was looted by the Turkish army. The abbot Parthenios Kafouros renovated the monastery and invited great painters, like Ioannis Kornaros and Stamatios, to paint numerous wonderful icons. The monastery paid in blood its participation in the revolution of 1821 and in the National Resistance in 1940-44, as many monks were slaughtered. There is a marvelous recent sculpture monument of Manolis Tzompanakis. In the past few years, a big restoration work began and still continues. Two appreciable museums were created; the one exhibits icons and heirlooms and the other engravings. The monastery also accomodates organic olive groves and vineyards, while nearby an aeolic park was established.





# Agricultural Life





The nature of Sitia is rich and enchanting, providing the perfect conditions for a healthy and vivid agricultural life. The earth of the Sitia province, the plains, the valleys and the hills are cultivated, while the remainder wild lands are covered with "aspalathous", "faskomilo", "thymari" (thyme), "rigani" (oregano) and many other aromatic plants and nourish thousands of free range sheep and goats. Near the shrub and wildflower biotopes there are beehives, which are known as "bee gardens".

Most of the population of Sitia is engaged in agriculture:



Olive growers, viticulturists, cultivators of vegetables in greenhouses or in open gardens, cattle-breeders or apiarists, while in the coastal villages and the city of Sitia traditional fishermen still exist. In all parts of the province, visitors will see beautiful images of rural life, which are sometimes primeval and touching, with old men still practicing old methods of agricultural work, such as the tradition of shearing the sheep called "koures", using donkeys for transportation, milking of sheeps and goats with the hands, and so many other traditional methods that



are more and more threatened by the modernisation and mechanization of agricultural production.

Visitors will also see modern farmers using modern machinery and cars as well as modern agricultural installations, processing and packing methods, which is a normal phenomenon in our days where mass production and the standardisation of agricultural products prevail. In Sitia the traditional and the modern, not only in agriculture but also in other sectors, often coexist in a harmonious and often impressive way. A characteristic example is the harmonious coexistence of old windmills and modern wind generators on the plateau of Handras. The agricultural landscape of the Sitia province is characterized by the dominance of the olive tree. Furthermore, as the experts argue, Sitia is famous for its olive production since antiquity, since the earth and the climate conditions are ideal for the flourishing of olive groves. The holy tree of Athena with its silver-green leaves playing with the wind accepts the warm rays of the sun and transforms its juices into oil, the miraculous elixir of life and health. Plains, hills, valleys and mountain slopes are covered with this blessed tree, while vineyards, gardens and fruit trees add their own joyful colors on the painting of the Sitian landscape. It is not however only the beauty of landscape.





For many years villagers believed that olive oil and wine - in small quantities the second - benefit health and lengthen life. Both of these beliefs are now confirmed by scientific research in the most festive way! The olive and the vine do not only give us their blessed fruits, but they are also connected to the history and culture, the tradition, the art and the everyday life of Crete and the entire Mediterranean and Europe. It is really worth following their particularly interesting and beautiful routes, as well as the routes of the unexplored Sitia, full of beautiful images, experiences and emotions and beneficial knowledge and messages of life. For this reason there are many beautiful agro-touristic lodgings, rented rooms, apartments and family hotels or villas everywhere in the province, in which you can stay and enjoy the routes in nature, rural life and tradition. Of course, those who live in luxurious resorts or come from other areas of Crete can also follow and enjoy these routes.



## Agricultural Products and Cretan Food

Long term researches conducted in Universities and in other scientific institutions have proved that olive oil protects the human immune system from heart diseases and various kinds of cancer as well as from other diseases and it also prolongs youth and life expectancy. The red wine also helps in the prevention of cancer, osteoporosis and other diseases. According to researches, the Cretan diet, which is based on olive oil, legumes, vegetables and fruits, meats low in fat, dairy products, fish and a bit of wine, is the cause of good health and the longevity of Cretans and this is the reason why it is recommended by the special scientists and dieticians. The Sitian wines are famous since antiquity. Furthermore, according to Latin writers and traditions, Lucullus was sending ships to bring him the Sitian wines to Rome, to enjoy them in his famous Lucullian banquets! He did the same with the fish. Cretan wine was exported since Minoan times. Many ancient wine presses have been revealed, as well as thousands of vessels that were used for storing and transporting wine, some of which are real masterpieces. The chamber of symposiums has a predominant place in the Minoan palace of Zakros. It is not a coincidence that the god of wine, Dionysos, created entire islands which he named after him (Dyonisades) about 9 miles from the city of Sitia. And today the wines of Sitia are distinguished for their excellent quality and are





very popular in the Greek market, but also abroad, while the olive oil of Sitia is considered the best in the world. It is extra virgin olive oil, it bears the Name of Origin of Superior Quality, and it is checked according to HACCP and ISO 9002 principles. For years the Sitian olive oil has the first position in international competitions, such as the first World Reward which it received twice, as well as in the extra virgin olive oil competitions of International Council of Olive oil (a UN institution). The past few years in the province Sitia, in the monastery of Toplou and elsewhere, organic olive groves and vineyards have been developed by new farmers with the subscription of European programs, producing excellent quality olive oil, wine, tsikoudia (raki), olives, olive pastry, soap and vinegar. Visitors can buy the unique products of the Sitian land in low prices from stores and specialized centers all over the province, as well as from the producers themselves.

The names, details and opening hours of these stores and centers are listed in the annex of this book. The excellent quality of the olive oil, wines and the other products of the Sitian land is owed to the components of the territory and the dry climate of the region, but also to the agricultural methods and the love of the Sitian farmers towards the earth that nourishes them from the Neolithic times up to today, since in this place agriculture always constituted the main occupation of its residents, and the most



profitable part of the local economy. With the same love the famous for the nobility and art Sitian housewives prepare and cook their food and pastries, while the foundation and operation of the Department of Nutrition and Diet in the Technological Educational Institute of Crete in the city of Sitia confirms and enriches the traditional practices of the local cuisine. The numerous certified Sitian restaurants specializing in Cretan cuisine, as well as the awarded olive oils, wines, local honeys and traditional desserts, make the people of Sitia proud, as their efforts to maintain and promote a high quality and healthy life are officially recognized.

## Wines

From the Minoan period already, Sitia develops in one of the most important wine-producing regions with wines of excellent quality from famous varieties of wine grapes. The thousands of years old tradition of wine production is proved by the discoveries in the palace of Zakros and in other archaeological sites, in regions that continue to produce some the most famous Cretan wines today.



## The Sitian Vineyard

At the long mainland of the Sitia province, which extends from the west to the East, a backbone of high mountains serves as a natural shield from the hot south winds. Thus, the traditional Sitian vineyard (the most traditional vineyard of Europe) is protected at the northern side, facing the Cretan sea, covering





an area that begins on an altitude of 600 metres, and unfolds downhill, reaching the sea. It dominates on the slopes of the hills and develops in the diverse landscape of Sitia, following the continuous alternation of hills and valleys that surprises and charms the visitor. In a primeval, harmonious coexistence with this natural environment, the local grape varieties enrich the region with a priceless wealth of biodiversity. The mild and without extremities Cretan winter, in combination with a hot and dry summer, the

continuous sunlight and the breeze from the northern winds of the Cretan Sea, provide the ideal weather conditions for the growth of the vine. Therefore, it is not surprising that Sitia bears a 4,000 year-old wine tradition, proved by the findings at the palace of Zakros, where the oldest cultivated vineyard was found. The wine of Sitia went through many periods of commercial flourishing. The most important stations in its long historical route was the Roman period, a time when the Sitan wine, stored in amphoras, travelled in the entire Mediterranean and the Venetian period (12th -16th century) when the Cretan wine reached the peak of its fame.

The wine was an important component of the Cretan diet, and its positive effects on health were later recognized.

Recent researches revealed the abundance of components in the wine that serve as

antioxydants for the human organism.

The ideal climate and earth conditions and the systematic cultivations in the region, developed the exceptional varieties of grapes that produce the famous Sitan wines. The most common varieties are "Liatiko", "Romaiko", "Mantilari", "Kotsifali", "Vilana", "Athiri", "Thrapsathiri", and many others, which in their varieties create the Sitan wines. Wines that satisfy all gastronomic desires with distinguished flavours.

## Olive Oil

The olive oil, besides its rich nutritious value, is one from the best natural antioxydants that protect the human organism from various diseases. Its benefits were known since antiquity when great doctors such as Hippocrates and Galinos believed in its beneficial effect in the human body. Today the Cretan olive oil is considered as one of the most beneficial olive oils the world, due to the climate conditions that prevail in the island, which are considered as the most ideal for the growth of olive tree. It is not accidental that the cultivation of the olive tree originates in Crete from antiquity and from there it was distributed in the Europe and the Mediterranean region. The juice of the olive has a splendid scent and a fruit flavour and, most importantly, valuable nutritious, preventive and therapeutic attributes that benefit and protect the human organism. The olive oil is the most beneficial to human health compared to the all other greasy substances consumed by people. This is in accordance with the results of long laboratorial and clinical





research and the conclusions of many epidemiologic researches in the world, but also with centuries of experience of the people of Crete whose diet is based on olive oil, all of which prove that the olive oil:

- ▶ It cures gastroenteritis and hepatic diseases
- ▶ It helps individuals suffering from diabetes
- ▶ It protects the skin from the solar radiation
- ▶ It is beneficial for the growth of the human skeleton
- ▶ It prolongs youth
- ▶ It plays a crucial role in the prevention of heart diseases and various kinds of cancer.

For these reasons, more and more people in the developed world choose olive oil for cooking and include it in their everyday diet. Some ways to enjoy olive oil: you can use fresh olive oil in salads, or you can use it for cooking your food. Olive oil can be used in anything you want to cook and it is always better than other oils and fat. It is especially good for frying, as because it is very resistant in high temperatures, it does not "soak" the food, keeping it light and healthy. In the average daily energy needs



of the human organism that are about 2500 calories, the consumption of 25-35 grams of olive oil daily covers the needs in fatty acids and vitamin E.





## Sitia, the ecological garden of Europe

### Aeolic Parks

Strong winds have always been an inextricable characteristic of Crete. Crete was called "Anemoessa" and "Aerii" ("the windy one") since antiquity. The ancient myth of Ikaros, the son of Daidalos from Knossos who was the first who managed to fly is known all over the world. The long sea routes of the Minoan period heavily dependent on the currents of the winds. In the eminent anthem of Kritagenous Zeus, that was found in Palekastro, the young men pray to the king of the gods to send them winds to travel with their boats. Many and characteristic toponymies still testify the powerful presence of the winds ("Anemoi") in the island: "Anemokroti", "anemospilios", "Anemomylia", "Anemas", "Polus Aeras" etc. The Cretans sometimes face difficulties because of the strong winds; however, they always find the appropriate way to use them, such as the construction of windmills and for navigation purposes.

The past few years, however, concerning the exploitation of wind, a peaceful revolution took place in the Sitia province. With the collaboration of local authorities, scientific institutions and Renewable Sources of Energy companies, a series of Aeolian Parks (wind generators installations), that convert the force of wind in electricity was created. Sitia has innovated and created new possibilities in the field of Renewable Sources of Energy, since it became the first center of aeolic park



development in the country and the first region in the world in exploitation of Renewable Sources of Energy.

Aeolian Parks cover the 10% of electric consumption in Crete and save the environment from the emission of millions of tones of carbon dioxide and other polluting emissions, while the profits for the local development are many. The region has attracted the interest of the European media, and the aeolic parks of Sitia became known internationally and became an attraction of ecological and educational tourism. Following the example of the Aeolian Parks, the installation of photovoltaic systems is designed that produce electricity from the sun. Considering the widespread development of organic cultivations and the preservation of the Sitian natural environment and ecosystems, Sitia rightly holds the title of "the green, ecological garden of Europe".





# Sitian Sea



The warm summer nights at the beaches of Sitia are filled with splendid scents and strange sounds. It feels like this place was created to accept the experiences of the endless blue sea that surrounds it. Experiences that bring to mind the luminous Minoan frescoes that portray the residents of the Earth, Sky, and Water. A blue so deep and imposing, that carries you away into the world of myth, into the light and the sounds and scents of a lost Atlantis.

## Beaches

The Sitia province has numerous beaches of exceptional beauty, with crystal clear waters. Some of these beaches are quiet, ideal for solitary, peaceful moments; while some others are loud and crowded, for those who prefer to socialize. And there are beaches that are quiet but are also surrounded by small picturesque fish taverns, where you can enjoy a nice meal with your drink, or have a nice Greek coffee. The most notable of these beaches are:

### Mohlos 🇬🇷 🇵🇹

A picturesque fishing village where you can swim and visit the local archeological sites.

### Papadiokambos 🇵🇹

Small beach north of the town of Sitia.

### The beach of Sitia 🇬🇷 🇵🇹 🇵🇹 🇵🇹

A large organized sandy beach near the city. Here you can enjoy water sports (Jet ski - Surfing - water ski) Pets are allowed to swim at the eastern end of the beach in the Petras area.



### Itanos 🇵🇹

A sandy, quiet beach where the remains of an important archeological site are located, 11km away from Vai. Pets are allowed to swim at the newer, solitary beach in the Itanos area.



### Vai 🇬🇷 🇵🇹 🇵🇹

A beach of exceptional natural beauty. The only palm tree





forest (phoenix Theofrasti) in Europe. It is an organized beach, where you may also enjoy water sports (jet ski - surfing - water ski).

### Maridati 🍷 🏖️

Small, picturesque beach between Vai and Kouremenos.

### Kouremenos 🍷 🏖️ 🌊

A long sandy beach. Ideal for surfing.



### Hiona 🍷 🏖️

A sandy beach 2km away from Palekastro. Here there are fish taverns serving the local specialty, the fish "kakavia".

### Kato Zakros 🍷 🏖️

A picturesque beach next to the Mincan palace of Zakros. There are also some fish taverns.



### Xerokambos 🍷 🏖️ 🌊 🐾

Xerokambos is an untouched area of beautiful beaches, ideal for those in search of peace, calm and a relaxing holiday. Its shallow, crystal-clear blue waters make this the perfect destination for families with children. The wild beauty of the mountains and gorges combines with olive groves, fantastic deserted beaches and turquoise coves to form a fairytale landscape. In Xerokambos there is a small village with rent rooms and tavernas. Quiet beaches of exceptional beauty. There is also small village with rented rooms. Pets are allowed to swim. Pets are allowed to swim at the eastern end of the beach in the Katsounaki area.



### Makry Gialos 🍷 🏖️ 🌊 🐾

An organized sandy beach in a touristic area. Here you can enjoy water sports. Pets are allowed to swim at Lagada beach, east of Makry Gialos beach.



- 🍷 Food
- 🏖️ Organised beach
- 🌊 Beach unorganized
- 🌊 Watersports
- 🐾 Pets allowed



## Goudouras 📍 🇬🇷

A quiet sandy beach.



## Koutsouras and M. Kolympos 📍 🇬🇷

Small picturesque sandy beaches.

**The small islands across the shores of the Sitia province are both of great interest.**

## Koufonisi 🇬🇷

Across from the monastery of Kapsa and the bay of Goudouras, to the south, there is Koufonisi and the small rocky islets Makroulo, Stroggulo, Trahila and Marmara. It is a beautiful landscape with an African touch, sandy beaches, clean sea, and many fish.





## Islands

### Koufonisi

In antiquity it used to be an important spot for fishing, collecting sponges and "porfura", a kind of sea shell used to make red color.

It flourished during antiquity, and excavations have revealed great findings, including a Roman theatre of 1,000 seats, public baths, a villa, temples, ect. It has been rightly called "the little Dilos" by the archeologist Nikos Papadakis.



### Dyonisades Islands

The complex of the deserted islands, Dragonada, Giannisada, Paksimada and Paksimadaki, north from the gulf of Sitia, are an interesting destination for a day-trip with boat from the port of Sitia. In the islet Paksimada and Paksimadaki you may encounter the protected hawk species, Falco Eleonora.



### Psyra

In the small deserted island of Mohlos there are the valuable remains of important pre-Minoan settlements. The findings indicate that there was an important naval center in the area. A Minoan settlement has been excavated, built amphitheatrically on the slope of the peninsula, which protected the port from the strong winds. The ceramics and the vessels discovered in Psyra are considered as some of the best of the Minoan period.





## Watersports

Crete, with 1,000 km of coastline, boasts a wide variety of landscapes and coasts. The Sitia area is particularly blessed, with three different seas on three sides: the Sea of Crete to the north, the Sea of Karpathos to the east and the Libyan Sea to the south. Alongside swimming and snorkelling, feel free to enjoy the many organised watersports on offer, such as windsurfing, sailing, kayaking, fishing and scuba diving.

## Windsurfing

Experience unique moments of freedom, speed and relaxation, as you raise your sail to catch the strong northeasterlies that blow steadily on Kouremenos Beach, justly one of the most famous windsurfing beaches in Europe. There are organised clubs offering state-of-the-art equipment to suit even the most demanding, as well as lessons for those who want to taste the magic of this impressive sport for the first time.



## Sailing

Freedom! The fresh Aegean breeze cool on your skin, the gentle droplets of spray flung up by each wave passing under your bows, and the vast blue of the Cretan sky stretching as far as you can see! Come and experience the feeling of freedom with your family and friends, sailing the seas of East Crete. In Sitia you can rent a boat for open sea sailing. Sitia is also the home of the Sitia Yacht Club, which offers sailing lessons for children aged 6 to 18 and windsurfing lessons for children and adults.



## Kayaking

Visit Sitia and discover the coastline of East Crete, using the power of your arms alone. Enjoy the sense of adventure, coasting where only a kayak can take you: beautiful sandy beaches, secluded coves, sheer cliffs, sea caves, known or awaiting discovery, to gain what Crete truly has to offer: the mystery of the sea.



## Fishing

For the people who live here, fishing is an everyday activity and a must for those who enjoy the beauty of the sea in other ways than swimming.

You can rent a motorboat (by arrangement) for yourself and your family or friends, to enjoy a daily cruise, combining fishing using modern equipment with swimming or snorkelling. And, of course, the local tavernas will be happy to cook your catch for you!



## Scuba Diving

The underwater world of East Crete and Sitia is exceptionally rich in fish, molluscs and marine mammals, due to the combination of the rocky bottom and *Posidonia oceanica* seagrass meadows.

You can dive in selected areas and wonder at the varied flora and fauna and the local wrecks.





# Modern Sitia





The pristine and calm natural landscape that constantly changes and pleasantly surprises the visitor, the images of

rural life, often primeval and picturesque, the beautiful wild flowers of the fall, winter and spring and the sand lilies of the summer, the numerous aromatic plants; the old stone-built farms, the birds, the free range herds, the endless olive groves and vineyards, the meadows and the gardens around the villages, the view of the high mountains, the deep blue and the open horizons of the sea, all comprise a magical scenery, a pleasure for the eyes and the soul and a journey to a dream world. The religious rituals and the feasts at the village churches provide the perfect opportunity to experience local traditions as well as the local way to have fun with marvelous music, traditional dances- some of which are easy to learn!

Apart from the traditional ways of entertainment, there are also events and clubs with modern music and dances that last all night long.

In all the villages there are traditional coffee shops and taverns, where visitors can enjoy a greek coffee, herbal teas, or the famous tsikoudia (raki) and taste the local foods and specialties, that often differ from village to village!

The food is always cooked with olive oil - which is the best in the world- while the salads and the fruits served are often produced by the family that owns the tavern.



A walk in the villages will give visitors the opportunity to see buildings of traditional architecture, picturesque streets, fountains, and other works of folk architecture and beautiful old and new churches, symbols of the vivid religious tradition of rural Crete. Visitors will also take a glimpse at the villager's everyday life and experience their warm hospitality.



## Entertainment

The rich cultural heritage of Sitia coexists with a particularly interesting present in the all forms of modern artistic expression and entertainment. In the city of Sitia, in the tourist regions of Makrus Gialos, Palekastros and Mohlos, but also in the villages of province, interesting events are organized, such as art exhibitions, theatrical performances, concerts and dancing events from local and foreign artists and teams. Throughout the year, there are many opportunities to participate and enjoy some of the numerous traditional feasts and festivals and to dance in the rhythm of ancient beats that revive in the modern folk and popular tradition of the region. For those who wish to party all night long, there are many choices for clubbing and numerous bars in the regions of Makrus Gialos, Palekastros and Mohlos.





## The Sitia Nature Park

The area of Sitia has been fortunate enough to avoid the ravages of mass tourism and to preserve the basic elements of its cultural and natural environment unchanged. The easternmost end of Crete has also preserved untouched the particular features of the mountain and coastal landscape on which Cretan tourist development relies, alongside its ancient traditions and culture.

All these elements are harmoniously combined through a holistic plan for the preservation of the natural and cultural environment and sustainable local development: the Sitia Nature Park. The Park covers an area extending from the Mouliana area to Cape Sidero, and from Krya to Xerokambos. The beautiful coastal landscapes alternate with the picturesque wilderness of the craggy mountains and the works of human hand in Sitia through the ages.

In the hope of making the Sitia Nature Park a European and international Geopark, a range of visitor information, awareness and welcome facilities have been created with the aid of EU funding. Alongside the other tourist infrastructure in the area, visitors can also enjoy a network of 17 hiking trails and other geo-routes, discover the riches of the caves at the Karydi Speleological Centre, and visit the local Natural History Museum in Epano





Zakros. Information and route signs inform visitors of the sights and trails in the Park, while a wide range of information leaflets is available from local information centres. The Sitia Nature Park management and information bureau is on the seafront of Sitia town, by the marina.

A basic information gateway to the Sitia Nature Park is the [www.sitia-geopark.gr](http://www.sitia-geopark.gr) website, providing a wealth of detailed information, all the Park publications and news, and interactive maps of the geosites and geo-routes available.





Many years of archaeological and historical research in the province Sitia has revealed valuable findings from the many cultures and civilizations that flourished on the island, from the Neolithic and the Minoan period until the more recent years. All the great civilizations have flourished in Sitia, leaving us magnificent samples of their material and spiritual wealth, exhibited in the museums and collections of the province.



## The archeological museum of Sitia

Visiting hours: 8:30 - 3:00 Monday closed  
Tel: 28430 23917

The archeological museum of Sitia is one of the most important provincial museums of the country. Its collection includes valuable findings dating back to the Minoan civilization and to other ancient civilizations of Crete. Unique exhibits coming from the excavations in Zakros, Palekastro, Psyra, Petra, Itanos, Aghia Fotia and from other archeological sites of Eastern Crete, offer an exceptional experience to the visitors. Many of the exhibits are related to agricultural activities, to the olive tree, olive oil, vine, fishing, apiculture, and in other ancient rural life activities.



## Folklore Museums and Collections

Important Folklore Museums are located in the city of Sitia, in Hamezi and in Palekastro; and you can find folklore collections in Handras and in Pefki. In special organized spaces the exhibitions are divided by subject. The exhibits represent elements of the Cretan folk culture and of the agricultural, rural life.





## Zakros Museum of Water

The Zakros Museum of Water is housed in the restored watermills. It is a theme museum whose aim is to collect objects and other materials associated with water use in bygone times, as well as to highlight the importance of water today.

## The Museums of the Toplou Monastery

The monasteries of the province serve as museums of very important heirlooms, witnesses of the centuries-old monastic tradition of the region. Within the building complex of the Toplou monastery, there are two very important museums. A museum of icons and books, religious heirlooms and ecclesiastical objects; and a museum of engraving and historical heirlooms. But also the monastery alone is a brilliant and exceptionally interesting monument that has been recently restored.



# **Tradition & Contemporary Culture**



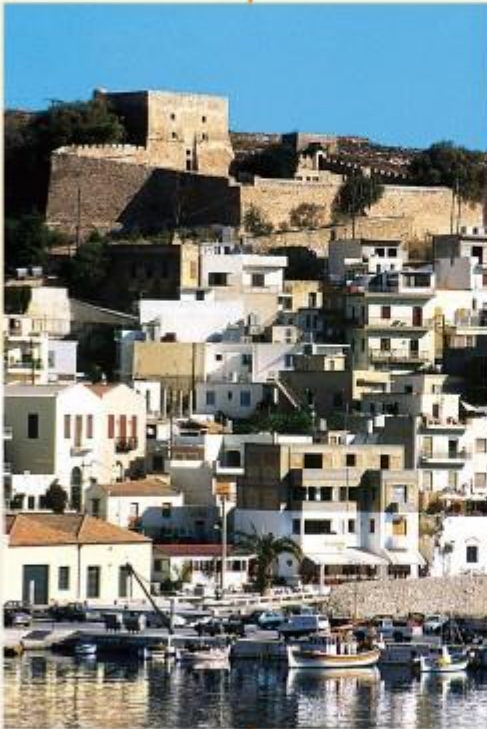
The city of Sitia and its developed tourist regions follow the rhythms of a modern cosmopolitan life. However, all the creative elements that determine the cultural character of the Cretan folk tradition are successfully embedded to this modern everyday reality. The elements and "ingredients" of this culture, the traditions and customs, the ancient

habits and lifestyles, are still preserved and adjusted to the unique modern popular culture of Sitia.

Some of the expressions of this mix of traditional and modern popular culture are the numerous feasts and festivals, where new variations of ancient rituals and habits still survive; and the wealth of the Cretan music and the folk literary tradition. If visitors happen to pass by a folk festival or feast, they will live unprecedented experiences by watching or

participating in the dances, listening the live traditional music - the famous Sitian "kontulies" (lyra playing skills) and the old Cretan "mantinades" (Cretan poems or rimes).

Simple and accidental meetings of locals and foreigners often develop in feasts. In autumn, the ancient process of raki (tsikoudia)



production, the most popular drink in Crete which the past few years is slowly introduced in Europe, always ends up to a modern edition of Dionysian feasts. The rich artistic production in traditional sectors, such as wood and metal carving, weaving and embroidery, are some other examples of the old traditional practices, dating back to the Minoan period, that still survive today.

The unprecedented technical mastery in pottery originates from the ceramic tradition of the Minoans. The exceptional beauties of the Byzantine icons continue the old tradition of the Cretan School as well as the ancient musical instruments that are manufactured with the same love up to today. All the products and works of these old traditions are exhibited in the folklore museums of province, and many are sold in specialized stores and in the laboratories where they are manufactured.

Traditional products and practices also survive in the sectors of local cuisine and domestic pastry and can be enjoyed in local raki taverns (rakadika), in coffee shops, pastry shops, and local markets. It is also important to notice that the simple daily pleasures and habits still maintain the characteristics and the rhythms of life experienced and recorded by the fortunate travellers that visited Crete many years -and centuries- ago. The traditions and customs, the artistic events, the popular folk art in all its expressions, the dances and the music and so much more still constitute important elements of the local modern popular culture.

## Traditional Cuisine



It would not be an exaggeration to say that the Sitian cuisine is the most representative sample of the traditional Cretan cuisine and it is considered today as one of the healthiest cuisines in the world. The wealth and the quality of the products of the blessed Sitian land have contributed to the creation of a cuisine with unique flavour, freshness and imagination. The variety of the necessary products along with the human experience for the creation of unique dishes, always vary according to season and the natural environment of each region.

The dairy products, honey, aromatic plants, herbs and so many other products are the base of the local cuisine. The local cuisine - and the Cretan cuisine in general- is today recognized by the international scientific as the most representative and qualitative example of the so-called Mediterranean Nutrition, which is based on vegetables, fruits, legumes and grains, which in combination with olive oil contribute to the prolonging of life and youth. The secret of the local cuisine lies on the rich variety of products produced by the Sitian land, and in the marvellous Sitian olive oil, which is considered as

one of the best olive oils in the world, and is used in almost all dishes.





## Customs and traditions

The long history of Sitia, the religion, the climate, the social constitution etc. have all influenced the unique morals, the traditions and the customs of the residents of Sitia that still survive despite the fact that in the past few years they present a recession in relation to a few decades ago. Apart from the social relations customs, such as the traditional marriage, many customs are connected to the deep religious sentiment of the locals and are expressed and coincide with various religious feasts and festivals.

## Domestic Handicraft

The cultural heritage of the region is also expressed through the domestic handicraft activities of its residents that developed in times when the isolation and the social - historical needs demanded this work for survival. Bearing a long tradition and various cultural influences, the residents of Sitia continue to pass on the cultural heritage of domestic handicraft. It is not difficult to discover the traditional products of local craft work that bear elements from antiquity. The centuries-old tradition finds today its continuity in different art forms. The art of ceramics, weaving, micro-sculpture, are some of these activities that the visitors can witness and appreciate.



## Music Tradition



Sitia is proud for its numerous traditional musicians that continue the region's long music tradition. The rich Cretan music tradition has its roots in Greek antiquity and is greatly influenced by Byzantine music, but simultaneously it has been enriched by the music traditions of the wider Eastern Mediterranean. The Cretan music tradition begins with the birth of the greatest of the Gods, Zeus.

The Cretan music tradition is considered as one of the most vivid music traditions in Greece because, not only it continues to develop and to incorporate new creative musical elements, but also because it accomplished to express and comment on contemporary realities. Improvisation is one of the basic characteristics of Cretan music. Specifically, during the various feasts and festivals, the musicians do not limit themselves to the strict repetition of basic musical melodies, but they also enrich their music with improvisations that accompany the dancers in corresponding dancing improvisations.



### Musical Instruments

The basic musical instruments of the traditional Cretan music are the lyra and the lute ("Laouto"). However, in the province of Sitia, as in western Crete, the use of violin instead of lyra is more common. In a lot of cases, a mandolin accompanies the lute and the lyra. The mandolin is also often used to sing serenades, the traditional love songs.

Wind instruments, such as the "hampioli" (Cretan flute) and "askomantoura" (the ancient "askaulos") have an important place in the Cretan music tradition.

## Dances

The basic Cretan dances are "Pentozalis" (which has its origins in the ancient dance "Pyrrhios"), "kastrinos pidixtos", "sousta", "siganos surtos" and "haniotikos surtos". These dances also have their local variations and alterations. Even in our days, traditional Cretan dances are very popular and all Cretans know how to dance them. Most of these dances still maintain their ancient circular typology. The dancers form a circle and the first dancer (usually a man) has the opportunity to show his skills with impressive improvisations.

## The songs

The Cretan traditional music includes primarily dancing rhythms. In a lot of cases, the music simply accompanies the songs, which are often rhythmic recitations of the Cretan poems-rimes "mantinades", or serenades, that are often played in traditional feasts and festivals. The easiness with which the Cretan musicians compose the appropriate serenades for each circumstance is proverbial. In Sitia, the Sitian "Kontylies" (lyra or violin playing skills) dominate and express in an exceptional manner the unique psychosynthesis of the Sitian people.

## The Cretan Village: Traditional Architecture



A characteristic element of the Cretan landscape is the Cretan village. The small, elegant, picturesque settlements are always well adjusted to the natural environment surrounding them. They are usually built at the slopes or tops of mountains and hills and are surrounded by a rich agricultural landscape with gardens, olive groves, orchards and vineyards.

At the Sitian villages, visitors will see excellent samples of folk architecture and walk through the narrow streets of picturesque neighborhoods.

The structure and organization of these villages resemble the structure and organization of the Minoan settlements of Palekastro, Petra, Mohlos and Gournes.

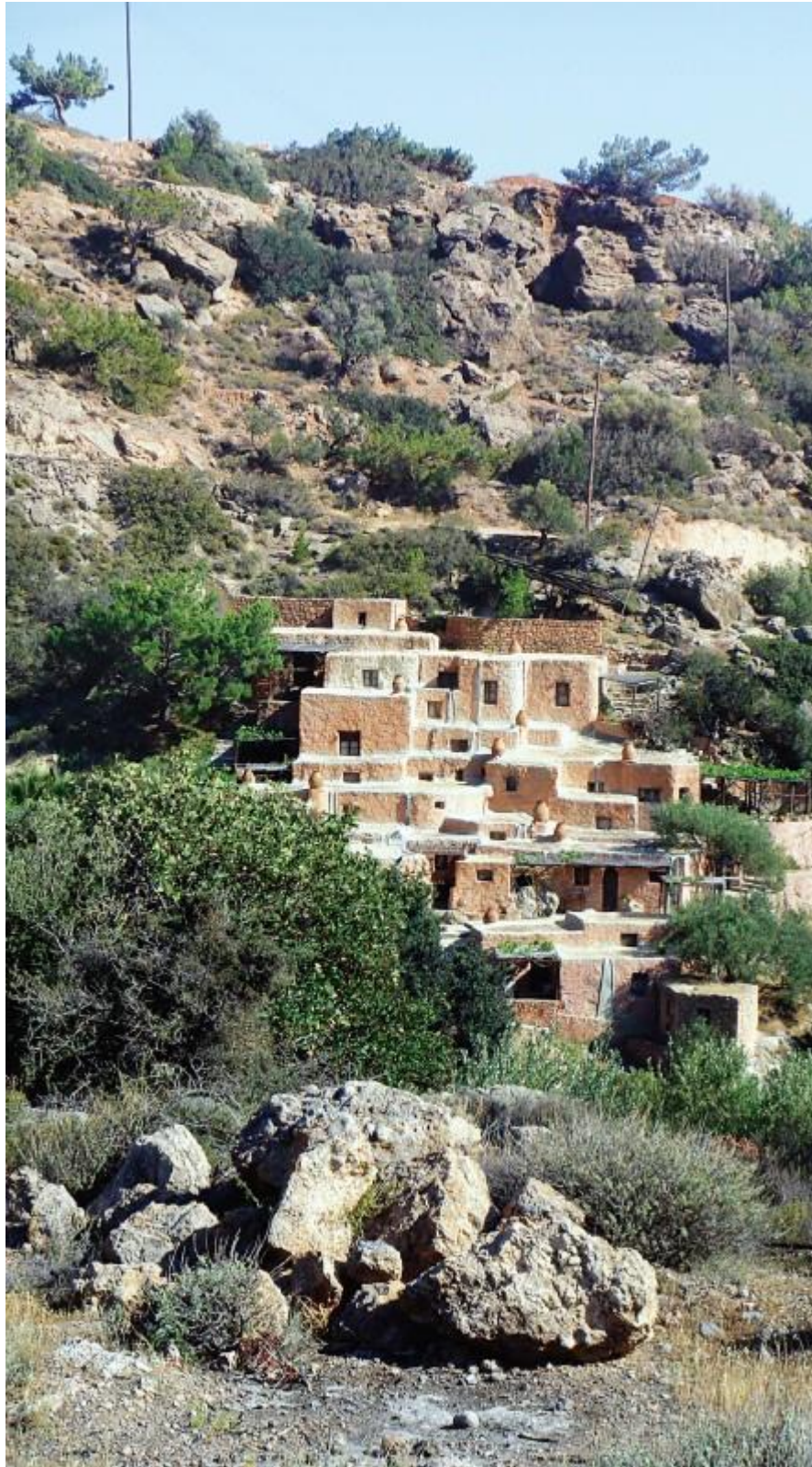
The most important place of the village is usually the Church, while the main square is also the marketplace and the center of social life. In the villages of Sitia visitors can also see all the development phases of the Cretan house, from its most simple and traditional form (often a single space with a



wooden roof) to its most complex and noble traditional form (usually two-story stone-built houses) and the modern houses that were built after the 2nd world war, with all the modern equipment and architecture style.

It is interesting to notice the harmonious co-existence of these different types of Cretan houses in the Sitian villages.





# Settlements



## The city of Sitia



The city of Sitia offers simple daily pleasures in its many corners, where the modern Sitian culture is expressed. At the beach and the squares around it, in the stores and taverns, visitors will discover that Sitia is a vivid city with many things to offer. The intense night life of the city is combined with high quality cultural events during the whole year, and especially during the summer when many music, theatre and dance performances are organized and presented to the public. A city that preserves its past but is also open to the future.

Those who choose to visit or stay in the city must not miss the Archeological and the Folklore Museum of the city. The Archeological Museum of Sitia is one of the most significant provincial museums of the country. It includes exhibits from all over the province, covering a time span of 4,000 years, from the Neolithic period (3.500 B.C) to the Byzantine period (500 A.D). The exhibits include findings of great value, such as the unique ivory figurine of the Minoan period that was found in Palekastro. Do not forget to enjoy the view of the gulf of Sitia from the Venetian fortress of Kazarma, especially during the summer evenings when many art events are organized at the fortress, in the framework of the "Kornareion" festival that honors the memory of Vitsentzos Kornaros, the great poet and writer of the masterpiece "Erotokritos". Vitsentzos Kornaros was from Sitia and at the end of his poem he introduces himself in these words:



"Vitsentzos is the name of the poet, from the family of Kornaros;  
may he be without sin when death finds him;  
born in Sitia, raised in Sitia, and there he wrote these things to you..."

- Go shopping at the city's stores and buy souvenirs and works of folk art.
- Taste the fresh fruit of the open market that sells only Sitian products.
- Taste the wonderful local desserts, such as the famous "kallitsounia" and "xerotighana".
- Feel the sea breeze while enjoying your meal or your drink at the picturesque taverns of the portside.
- Discover the traditional tastes at the restaurants on the rooftops of old noble houses, or hidden in some small neighborhood of the city.
- Collect your own images of Sitia by walking around the city and talking to the locals.



## Aghia Fotia



A small settlement, near the sea, where the important post-Minoan cemetery was excavated with 300 tombs filled with about 1800 objects and vessels, many of which are

exhibited at the archeological museum of Sitia.

## Aghios Georgios

(or Tourtouloi)

A green village with a fountain near a beautiful water stream. It is a place of great archeological interest, as a Minoan and Geometric cemetery have been excavated, as well as a large Minoan villa. Among the findings there is a wheel, several stone tools and other objects. Here, the caves "Megalo Katofugi" and "Mikro Katofugi" are located, both of which were inhabited in antiquity. The region of Aghios Georgios also includes the picturesque settlement of Pano Piskopi. Right after the village of Aghios Georgios, on the right, there are the small villages of Sukia and Sklavous and down the road there is the settlement of Vori and Lithines.

## Achladia

A beautiful village, where some old noble houses are preserved.

In the site of Platoskinos a post-Minoan tomb has been excavated, with a corridor and a

large circular chamber, while in the site of Riza a large and complex agricultural villa of the Minoan period has been found, with 12 rooms and a "Cretan Megaron" (a large characteristic chamber, a kind of living room). In the community of "Achlada" the deserted old settlement of Kumourgiotis is located, next to a green stream. After Achlada you will reach the small settlements of Paraspori and Skordilos, where a beautiful Turkish fountain is located.

## Episkopi Epano

It is first recorded as part of the Sitia province in 1577 by Fr. Barozzi. The Venetian church of Panagia (Virgin Mary) is located there. In the site of Trupitos, a guard tower of the Hellenistic period was found in 1978. A 2 meters high stone wall is still preserved.

## Episkopi Kato

It is first recorded as part of the Sitia province in 1577 by Fr. Barozzi. Minoan tombs have been excavated in the region.

## Zou

A small traditional settlement built around a green stream in a region where a significant Minoan residence has been found, along with numerous valuable findings that are exhibited at the Archeological Museum of Heraklion. The fountain of Zou is famous for its excellent quality drinking water. In the same region, there are the small settlements of Arniko, Pano and Kato Drus, Zaharino, Muloi, Sfakakia and Stavromenos.



## Katsidoni

A traditional mountainous settlement, where the top Prinias with a Minoan shrine is located. The excavations around the shrine revealed valuable findings. The community of Katsidoni also included the small settlement of Santali.

## Krya

Krya consists of two small settlements, Pano and Kato Krya. A cemetery of the pre-Minoan and Geometric period has been found in the area. At the top of the hill of Aghios Georgios there are the ruins of the Venetian castle Monte Forte or Apo Kastelli, built during the 13th -14th century. After Krya, to the left of the road, there is the small settlement Dafne with a small picturesque square, a large platan tree and a water fountain.

## Lastros

A settlement bearing a pre-Hellenic name, where important Minoan remains and findings have been discovered. It is a very beautiful village that still preserves a lot of traditional elements. In the village there are the Byzantine churches of Aghios Georgios and Christos (Jesus Christ).



## Maronia

A small village near the green stream of the river Panteli, where Minoan tombs and antiquities have been found. The old olive press of the village has been turned into a folklore-agricultural museum.

## Mouliana Ekso

A settlement where the significant 15th century church of Aghios Georgios is located, with part of its frescoes still preserved.



## Mouliana Mesa

A settlement where important antiquities and findings have been revealed, including a bell-shaped proto-geometric crater with the representation of a hunter and a man on a horse and a golden mask.



The small settlement of Kalavros is also in the region, located on an impressive landscape over the steep coast of the Cretan sea. Furthermore, the famous since antiquity wine from "liatiko" grape is produced here.

## Mohlos

A picturesque fishing village with a small islet in the north (Aghios Nikolaos). In antiquity, the islet was united with the mainland through a channel that formed two natural harbours. It was an important naval center of the Minoans, and the excavations have revealed many of its secrets. The architecture and the Minoan findings, such as the vessels of Mohlos, are considered as some of the most impor-



tant findings of this period. Northwest from Mohlos there is another larger island, Psyra.

## Myrsini

A traditional village with a magical view of the Cretan sea, where ancient installations have revealed important findings, mainly from the post-Minoan period. In the site "Ghalana Harakia" the first Minoan domed tomb of Eastern Crete was found, with 60 burials and a large number of vessels and other objects. North from the village, next to the small church of Aghios Antonios, the ruins of a Venetian tower are preserved.

## Praissos

A village that took its name from the famous ancient city of Praissos, the capital of the Eteocretans. The ancient city was built over three hills- acropolis, next to the river Stomio and was

inhabited since the Neolithic times. Near the ancient city of Praissos the new city of Praissos was built, the small village Vaveloi that in 1995 was renamed as Nea Praissos. In the position Skales or Helidonies, there is a cave where vessels and tools dating back to the Minoan period were found. In the position "ravdia tou Digeni" and "Kiona" an ancient quarry was found. A bit further, the settlement of Aghios Spuridonas is located, and a bit lower there is a green stream with a watermill (tou Fugeto o Mylos).

## Roussa Ekklesia

An asphalt road that starts 5km east from Sitia leads to Roussa Ekklesia. It is a picturesque green village with many waters and a marvellous view of the gulf of Sitia.

At the main square of the village with the large platan tree and the old church of Aghios Nikolaos, there is a beautiful fountain built by the Eparch of Sitia K. Axelos in 1877. At the site of "Anoiksi" a shrine with many archaic findings was excavated and at the site of "Kastri" the ruins of a fortified city with towers have been found.

The district of Roussa Ekklesia includes the deserted small settlements of Kruoneri, Xerolimni, Mitato, Vrusidi, Magkhasas and Honos, with excellent samples of old traditional Cretan architecture.

## Sandali

A small village in Katsidoni Community, Municipality of Sitia. The village, 13 km from Sitia, lies at an altitude of 350m. It is called Sandali from the Turkish word for "seat". Visitors today can enjoy the shade of the ancient plane trees that form a magical landscape, and relax with a refreshing draught of cold water from the spring at the end of the village.



## Sitanos

A small settlement located in a beautiful landscape, where the cave Okso Latsidi is located. Near Sitanos there is the deserted settlement Zakanthos. East from Sitanos, on a fortified position with a complex of impressive rocks, the deserted settlement of Skalia is located. Skalia has a glorified history. It was the "unconquered Castle" of Eastern Crete during the Turkish occupation. At the end, Skalia were also conquered by the Turkish army, after long battles and sieges. The church of Aghios Georgios is preserved, along with a small water fountain. The rocky landscape is quite imposing.

## Skopi

One of the larger settlements of the Sitia province, with historical traces from the proto-Minoan-geometric period (a domed tomb in the site of Droggara).

Around the region of the settlement, near the sea, there is the deserted monastery of Panagia tis Faneromenis, built in the 15th century. Another important monument of the region is the fortress of Liopetro, dating back to the Genoan period.

Parts of the wall with the towers and several domed tanks are preserved. North from Skopi, in





interesting coastal areas, the small settlements of Papadiokampos and Platani are located.

## Sfaka

A settlement with an old church of Aghia Triada. In the region "Keratidi" a Minoan tomb has been excavated.

## Tourloti

A traditional settlement built on a hill with a marvelous view to the sea. In the site of "Kastri" the ruins of a Minoan settlement has been found, along with valuable findings.

## Hamezi

A settlement with a valuable folklore museum. In the region of Hamezi there is one of the most important archeological remains of the Minoan civilization, the elliptical Minoan residence. The typology of the building, located on the top of the hill Souvloto Mouri, became the subject of an interesting scientific dialogue around the origins of the residence type and its function.







## Koutsouras

A new coastal settlement founded by the residents of Stavrochori during the past few years, when the massive tourist development plans started. The route to Stavrochori is very interesting, as it crosses a small valley called "The path of the Pirates". At the valley, you will encounter the deserted village Tsikalaria and a complex of watermills.

### Aghios Stefanos

On a hill over the village, there are the ruins of the Venetian fortress (Kastella or Fortezza) that was probably built over the ruins of a geometric acropolis. In Aghios Stefanos the popular tourist destination of "Makry Gialos" is located.

### Analipsi - Makry Gialos

A modern coastal settlement and a popular tourist destination. There are Minoan and Roman antiquities in the region. North from the settlement, at the small valley with the olive groves, there is the small renovated settlement of Aspros Potamos. East from Makry Gialos an asphalt road parallel to the coastline crosses the small settlement of Goudouras with its sandy beach. During the summer season, a small boat organizes excursions to the small picturesque island of Koufonisi.



## Thripti

A settlement in the east side of the valley of the mount Thriptis, north from the top Afentis Stavromenos. The settlement is used seasonally by the residents of nearby villages for agricultural activities, mainly at the vineyards. The region is known for its wild beauty and the west view of the mount Dikti.



## Lapithos

It is located south from the village Roukaka. The settlement is first recorded in a 1368 document of the Duke archive of Handakas (Heraklion). Its name is pre-Hellenic and refers to the battle between the Lapithes and the centaurs that resulted in a peaceful resolution (Odyssey φ 295). According to mythology, Lapithes was a tribe of the same origin as the centaurs that were described by ancient Greek poets as great and brave warriors and were distinguished from the centaurs as they had a human form.

## Lithines

The settlement was founded during the 2nd Byzantine period by the the family of Litinon. The tower was constructed during the Venetian period and was later destroyed during the 1897 revolution. In the important 15th century churches of Aghios Athanasios and Panagia there are marvelous icons and "tamata" (oblations).

## Mayros Kolympos - Achlia

A tourist area with beautiful beaches and crystal clear sea. The exit of the gorge Orinos is also located in the region.

Over the coastal-tourist zone, in a distance of 5-6 km, the old traditional villages of Sitia are located, with a beautiful view of the Libyan sea.

## The Kapsa Monastery



The Kapsa monastery, dedicated to Aghios Ioannis Prodromos, is located at the east exit of the gorge Perivolakia and is built on a steep rocky hill. It was probably founded in the 15th century, it was later destroyed during the Turkish occupation and was renovated in 1861. The view of the Libyan sea from the monastery is amazing.

## Orino

A beautiful mountainous village in a landscape with pine trees, rocks, and a wonderful gorge. There is a mountain shelter for hikers and nature-lovers. There are also old churches in the area, including the church of Aghios Dimitrios with beautiful frescoes.



## Pefki

The caves Apaloustres and Vreiko are located in the region. Archeological findings indicate that the cave of Vreiko was inhabited during the Neolithic period. The exit of the gorge of Peukon is also located in the same area, which became accessible to visitors when discrete paths, stone-made fountains and shelters were constructed in the framework of the LEADER programme. At the village of Aspros Potamos located near the sea, there have been several renovations of traditional habitations. In the community of Pefki there is the tourist settlement of "Analipsi".



## Skinokapsala

A settlement with a beautiful view of the Libyan sea, where the coastal area of Achlia is also located.

## Stavrochori

It is located over the tourist settlement of Koutsouras. There are old watermills and spring waters in the area. The "path of the pirates" crosses the deserted settlement of Tsikalaria and it is a beautiful route for walking. There is also an old interesting church of Panagia in the site of "Lughia". The old settlement of Lapithos is also located in the area, with a beautiful traditional fountain.



## Palekastro

Palekastro is one of the "richest" archeological regions of Crete with beautiful beaches that was inhabited since the Minoan period. The archeological findings in the area are of great significance: the burial cave of the Copper Era and the Mycenaean bank of offerings in the site of "Modi", the mountain top shrine in the site of "Petsofas", the sarcophagus that were found at the community of Aghia Triada, and -most importantly- the Minoan town in the site of "Roussolakkos", which presents an excellent urban structure and architecture and where valuable findings were excavated.

The golden-ivory figurine of a deity was also found in this area, which is considered a masterpiece and is exhibited in the Archeological Museum of Sitia. At the same region the shrine of Diktaios Zeus flourished, where an important inscription bearing the hymn of Kourites or of Zeus was found and is exhibited in the Archeological Museum of Heraklion.







## Adravastoi

It is located 35,5km away from Sitia, on the way to Zakros. It is recorded for the first time on the 1834 Egyptian census. The name probably originates from the Byzantine surname Ardavastos, or from Artavasdos from the soldiers of Nikiforos Fokas. However, it is not recorded on Venetian census and that indicates that the settlement was built after the Venetian period. At this village, the tower of the Turkish ruler Ibrahim Afentakis or Afentakakis was located. Ibrahim Afentakis was known for its cruelty and when the 1821 revolution started he arrested and slaughtered the Christians living in the nearby villages.

## Azokeramos

A settlement on the 31km of the road from Sitia to Zakros. It was first recorded on the 1834 Egyptian census Azokeramo. It is not recorded in older census; therefore it is also a newer settlement. Southeast from the village of Azokeramos there is the hill of Traostalos, about 515 meters high, where a shrine was located.

## Magkassas

N. Platon has argued that the name Magkassas is pre-Hellenic. According to St. Xanthoudidis the name refers to the first settler of the region called Magkassas, which is a Byzantine surname, who probably arrived there after the army of Nikiforos Fokas settled in Crete. Thus, the name of the settlement is directly connected with the period of its establishment.

## Zakros

The Minoan vine press exhibited in the Archeological Museum of Sitia was found in the settlement of Ano Zakros. North from the settlement, the river of the small valley springs and leads to the Gorge of the Dead ("Faraghi ton Nekron"), a gorge of exceptional beauty and great archeological importance, which ends at the most remarkable archaeological site of Eastern Crete, the Minoan Palace of Kato Zakros. The palace, located near a lovely beach, was probably built in about 1600 B.C. and was destroyed at the same period as the rest of the Minoan palaces, probably due to the eruption of the volcano of Thira in about 1450. Its structure and organization of spaces is similar to the rest of



the Minoan palaces in Crete. It covers an area of 8.00 square meters, and around the central courtyard visitors can see the unique chamber of symposiums, baths, laboratories, storage rooms, a treasury and other spaces where a large number of important findings were revealed, designating the significance of the palace and its vital role in the commercial exchanges of Minoan Crete with other cultures of the Eastern Mediterranean.

## Karydi

In the region of this settlement important archeological findings have been excavated and are exhibited in the Archeological Museum of Heraklion. In the same region, one of the largest and most significant caves in Crete is located, the cave of "Peristeras".



## Toplou

This fortress type of monastery is one of the most notable in Crete. It was built in the 15th century over the ruins of an older monastery. It is dedicated to Aghios Ioannis Theologos and to Panagia Akrotiriani (Virgin Mary), as the monastery is built at the cape (akrotiri) of Cavo-Sidero. The interior of the temple is decorated with outstanding 14th century frescoes and Byzantine icons. The most noteworthy icons are the ones of "Meghas ei Kyrie" (Great is the Lord) painted in 1770 by Ioannis Kornaros and "Rhodon to Amaranton" (Immortal Rose) painted in 1771 by Stamatios. There are two important museums at the monastery. The one exhibits wonderful icons, heirlooms, ecclesiastical objects, ect. The other muse-



ums exhibits the works of Greek engravers of the 17th-19th century.

## Hohlakies

The village is first recorded in 1842 and was probably built after the Turkish period, as it is not recorded in Turkish census. The name "Hohlakies" originates from the words "hohlaki"- "hohladi"- "Hohlakias" or "Hohlakia", all of which refer to the small round stones that exist in the area, which make the ground infertile. In this isolated village of Sitia there was a massacre in June 29, 1821, when the janissary Houssein Lagoudoglous, executing the orders of the local ruler Ibrahim Afentakis, arrested 50 men from Zakros and 20 men from Azokeramo and Klisidi, and slaughtered them in Hohlakies.



## Ziros

This village is located in the north-eastern side of the plateau of Ziros, in an altitude of 590 m. Its pre-hellenic name serves as a testimony of its long history, along with the antiquities found in the area from different historical periods. Minoan remains have been located in five sites. The lovely Byzantine frescoes in the churches of Aghia Paraskevi, Aghia Eirini, Aghios Georgios and -most importantly- in Aghios Nikolaos, date back to the 14th - 15th century. In the church of Aghia Paraskevi the bones of the brave fighters from Skalia are sheltered. South from Ziros the small village of Aghia Triada (or Tso) is located, with a beautiful view of the Libyan Sea. In site of "Stalos" (an old little village) a Minoan settlement was excavated and in the site of "Leivari" there is the cave of Aligaras, which was inhabited during the Minoan period. After Ziros there is the village of Apidia, divided in small districts with a beautiful view of the Libyan sea. In the devastated settlement there are excellent architectural elements from the Byzantine, the Venetian and the Turkish period.



## Armenoi

The village is located after Handras and before Etia. It is surrounded by gardens and fields, while the watermills that are preserved and function create a beautiful scenery. At the valley of Armenoi there is the church of Aghia Sofia, which used to belong to the notable monastery that flourished in older times, bearing the same name. The cave of the "Aghio Pneuma" (Holy Spirit) is also located in the area.

## Voila

A deserted medieval settlement, one of the most notable of the period, 1 km north from the village of Handras. One of the most important monuments of the settlement is the church of Aghios Georgios and the ruined Venetian tower. Voila is the birth place of the Greek national poet, D. Solomos. There are also two wonderful fountains with spring water.



## Etia

A small deserted settlement, west from the village of Armenoi. It was founded during the Byzantine period but flourished during the Venetian period when it was the feudal property of the family Dei Mezzo, who built the famous three-story villa. Today only the ground floor is preserved in a very good condition. The villa Dei Mezzo is considered the greatest





private habitation of rural Crete and one of the most important buildings of its kind in south Europe.

## Katelionas

Katelionas was one of the most populated villages of Sitia during the Venetian period. It is located on a plateau. Most of the houses are deserted today, including a well-built Venetian house, constructed during the first years of the 1820-1826 war. The archaeologist N.P Papadakis relates the settlement with ancient Castello. As he argued, the ancient epitaph inscriptions and other findings indicate the existence of an ancient settlement in the area. Its name probably originates from the last name of its habitants, Katelos, an extended family from Nauplio that settled in Crete during the Venetian period, after the fall of Peloponnisos in 1479, mainly at the mountain chain of Lassithi.

## Xerokambos

This important coastal settlement, south from Zakros, is located in a region inhabited since the Minoan period, according to archeological findings. At the coastal hill of Kefala a shrine was found, while in the site of



Farmakokefalo parts of an important town are being excavated, which probably flourished during the Hellenistic period. The significant findings from the excavations are exhibited in the Archeological Museum of Sitia and prove that the town had commercial relations with the islands of Karpathos, Rhodes and Kalymnos. The beaches of Xerokambo are considered as some of the most beautiful and pristine beaches of Eastern Crete.



## Papagiannades

The settlement is first recorded in the 1834 Egyptian census Papa - Jannadho. At the hill of Ai Lias (Aghios Elias), 440 meters high, there was a shrine and in the site of Monastirakia the remains of a Minoan settlement were found. The name of the settlement is probably related to the surname of its first settlers. There is also a 14th century church of Panagia Eleousa with well-preserved frescoes.

## Sykia

It is located 16,7 km away from Sitia, on the road from Papagiannades to Lithines. It is recorded in 1577 as part of the Sitia province

by Fr. Barozzi. In 1954, Nikolaos Platon excavated 17 tombs in the area between Sykia and Adramulon, dating back to the pre-Geometric, Geometric and Hellenistic periods. A large number of vessels, jewelry, iron weapons, stone stamps and other important findings were found in the area. During the 1897 revolution, the Turkish residents of the village were trapped in the local mosque and were burned alive by the rebels.

## Handras

It is a central village on the fertile plateau of Handras. Old noble habitations and an interesting fountain are preserved in the village. Handras is constituted by the communities of Voila, Aghios Panteleimonas and Panteli, where the old frescoed church of



"Metamorfofi tou Sotiros" is located. West from Handras there is the deserted settlement of Katelionas, which is full of ancient remains and ruins of old houses and churches. The cave "Panagia Gounta" is also located in the area.