


# CRETE





Crete is the largest island in Greece, and the fifth largest one in the Mediterranean Sea. Here, you can admire the remnants of brilliant civilizations, explore glorious beaches, impressive landscapes, fertile valleys and steep gorges, and become part of the island's rich gastronomic culture. Crete is, after all, a small universe teeming with beauties and treasures that you will probably need a lifetime to uncover!

# **GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION**



Crete, the largest island of Greece, is located at the crossroads of three continents, Europe, Asia and North Africa. This position, apart from the huge geopolitical importance, is associated with the formation of the general climate and, consequently, with biodiversity (flora – fauna) the island which is extremely wealthy.

Crete is about 8,000 square kilometers, with a length of 260 km, approximately, while the length of the coastline that surrounds the island is greater than 1,000 km.

In addition, Crete is consisted of four prefectures:

- **Heraklion**
- **Chania**
- **Rethymno**
- **Lasithi**



# HERAKLION

The largest and most densely populated region on the island of Crete is **Heraklion**. Nestling picturesquely among two imposing mountains to the east— Iraklio boasts exceptional archaeological treasures, significant coastal settlements, a series of picturesque villages, vast valleys with olive groves and vineyards as well as the best organised tourist infrastructure in Crete. A unique combination of urban scenery and natural wealth makes the region of Iraklio an appealing all-year-round destination.



# RETHYMNO

Rethymno region: Crete's smallest prefecture located between White Mountains and Mt Psilorítis (also called "Ídi"), is synonymous to gorgeous mountainscapes, marvellous beaches, Cretan lyre melodies, tsikoudiá spirit served with "oftó", legendary caves, historic monasteries and monuments, traditional mountain villages and luxurious holiday resorts. Feel the essence of Incredible Crete in this mountainous, remote and self-sufficient region of the island of Crete.



# LASITHI

**Lasithi** region is a mountainous region of Crete, where the population resides in four semi-urban centers: Áyios Nikólaos, Ierápetra, Sitía and Neápoli. The mythical palm tree forest of Vai the Gulf of Mirabello, the windmills on the Plateau of Lassíthi (the largest in Crete), beaches lapped by crystalline water, beautiful cities and luxurious hotel resorts all make up a rather fascinating world.





# CHANIA

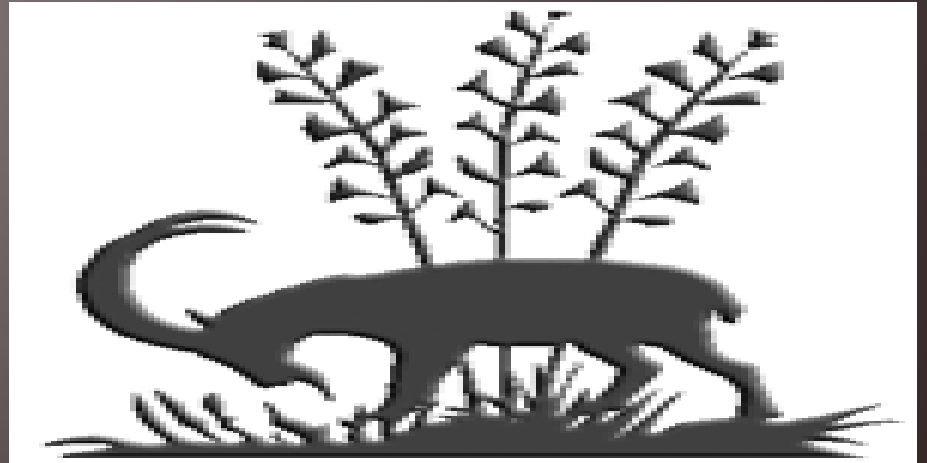
The region of Chania , on the western side of the island, is dominated by the impressive White Mountains and its famous National Park, which occupy the largest part of the region. The Prefecture of Chania provides tourist services and activities of all kinds, satisfying all the choices. The city of Chania maintains unaltered all of its characteristics, from the time of the Venetian Rule up until today.



**ENVIROMENT**

# FAUNA

The rich fauna of Crete, like its flora, is a result of the island's geographic position, its long isolation from surrounding land masses, the patchiness of its ecosystems, the bold relief of its topography and its long history of human activity. On the main migration route from Africa to central and northern Europe, the island is exceptionally rich in birds of prey. Both Greece's only 2 native mammal species are found only on Crete: the Cretan Shrew (*Crocidura zimmermanni*) and the Cretan Spiny Mouse (*Acomys minous*). A very rich fauna of invertebrates includes many endemic species; in some groups, such as land snails or darkling beetles, over 40% of the species are unique to Crete.



# FLORA

Crete has around 2000 species of plants. A large percentage of these are endemic, with 10% growing only on Crete and nowhere else in the world. 100 species of Crete's endemic plants grow only in a specific area of Crete, the Lefka Ori mountain range (White Mountains) in the Chania area. An additional 38 species are confined to only 2 places in the world - Crete and the Karpathos.

The Red Data Book of Rare and Threatened Plants of Greece includes 67 plants which grow on Crete, of these, 30 grow in the Lefka Ori. Some plants in Chania are very highly endangered - two of these species are recorded in the catalogue of 50 most threatened Mediterranean island plants.



**CLIMATE**



The island of Crete enjoys a temperate Mediterranean climate with a very little variation. During summer months the average high climbs to mid thirties while in winter it becomes much enjoyable and chilly. Snowfall is not uncommon in Crete during the winter season. The island receives a great level of sunshine all year round.

# HISTORY

**Mythology** has it that it was in a cave of Crete where the goddess Rhea hid the newborn Zeus. In that cave, Zeus was brought up by the nymphs while the demonical Kouretes would strike their shields loudly so that Cronus may not hear the crying of the baby Zeus and eat it. It was also to Crete that **Zeus**, disguised as a bull, took **Europa** so that they may enjoy their love together. Their union produced a son, **Minos**, who ruled Crete and turned it into a mighty island empire of the seas. In Minoan times, even Attica would pay a tribute tax to Crete, until **Theseus**, the Athenian prince, killed the **Minotaur**. The truth behind the myth is the existence of a mighty and wealthy kingdom and of a **civilisation** that is considered the most ancient one on the European continent.





In 1450 BC and again in 1400 BC the **Minoan Civilization** was successively devastated possibly due to the eruption of the **volcano of Thera** and was eventually led to its decline. In the wake of the devastation the Dorians arrived to settle on the island. They were later followed by the Romans. After the Roman rule, Crete becomes a province of Byzantium until the arrival of the Arabs who occupied the island for an entire century (824-961 BC). During the Arab domination, Crete became the lair of pirates who were based out of Chandakas, present day **Heraklion**.



Next, Crete fell under Byzantine rule again until the arrival of the Venetians who occupied the island for approximately 5 centuries leaving their stamp on the island's culture . The Cretan State was created with the son of the King of Greece as the island's High Commissioner. In 1913, Crete was finally joined officially with Greece.



Copyright Yannis Samatas - [www.explorecrete.com](http://www.explorecrete.com)

**CULTURE**

# LANGUAGE

The long occupation of the Venetians and the Turks have left their mark on the language. While in general the population of Crete utilizes the standard modern Greek language, there are distinct differences in the way certain consonants sound in the Cretan dialect., and certain Greek words are different. Besides the vocabulary differences, spoken Greek in Crete is also distinguished by its distinct accent.

The development of the Cretan dialect is due to the relative isolation of the island, and it shares characteristics with the Greek spoken in Cyprus and other southern Aegean islands. Sounds like the 'k', 'h' for example have a different sound in Crete than in modern Greek, as they acquire a listing softness and sound like 'ch' and 'sh' .

respectively.

# MUSIC

The music of Crete is as distinct as its people, and it permeates society as it is ever present in all social events. Cretan traditional music exhibits a unique sound emanating from a unique instrument, the "lyra".

Lyra is held vertically, resting on the thighs of the player, and is played with a bow like a violin. Another instrument which contributes to the unique sound is the "lute" which is played like a guitar and provides the vigorous rhythm of the songs.

“Mantinades” are one category of songs that utilize improvisation and speak of age old concerns of love and death.



# FOOD

The Cretan diet is not just a variety of dishes laid on the table. It comprises a whole philosophy of life and represents the lifestyle of the Cretan people. The Cretans traditionally accompany their meals or dinners with wine. Wine is a part of the people's culture. Tsikoudia is a local Cretan distilled alcoholic drink, a clear and fragrant liquor which visitors are offered as a welcoming gesture, or at the end of a meal. Also the consumption of cheese in Crete is the highest in the world! Maybe the Cretans are right. They don't regard food as a medicine, they know how to enjoy its taste. One of the basic differences between the Cretan diet and the diets of other Mediterranean areas is the huge consumption of fruit!



# TRADITION

The Greek dances and music first appeared in Crete. Some of the most popular dances are “haniotis”, “pentozali”, “malebioziotis”, “sigano”. The Cretans dance these dances with a lot of passion and they enjoy doing that each time of the day.

Many hand crafts remain alive on the island, while they have been abandoned in other places of Greece. Potters who mold the clay just like the Minoans did thousand years ago, carpenters who turn the wood of mulberry to lyre and lute, cobblers who create the Cretan buskins, daggers that convert steel to Cretan knives, women in the villages who still weave on the loom...





# TOURISM



The sources of Crete's economy come especially from agriculture and tourism .

Because of the fact that Crete is the largest of the Greek islands, it offers developed tourist areas with large resort hotels, small intimate hotels, quiet coves, hidden beaches, invigorating mountain villages and plateaus that reward the discerning traveler.

A decorative graphic consisting of several parallel white lines of varying lengths, slanted diagonally from the bottom right towards the top right, set against a blue gradient background.

- 
- **Chania Town**, considered as one of the loveliest towns of Greece, has managed to keep its local and authentic colors, despite the growing numbers of visitors. Most popular is the beautiful Venetian castle and harbour with its waterfront taverns, fine restaurants and unique accommodation in restored buildings.
  - **Rethymno Town** is divided into the Old and the New, both delightful in their own way. An endless sandy beach spans the Rethymno coast with many modern and luxurious "resort" hotels. The old part of Rethymno is particularly charming, full of old buildings, stone paved alleys and a huge Venetian fortress that overlooks the city. There are a number of elements that participate to the charm of Rethymno town such as the many arched doorways, stone staircases, 16th century buildings, Byzantine, Hellenic and Roman remains, the superb municipal gardens, waterside fish restaurants, cafes, bars and a few clubs. Like Chania, the Venetian and Turkish influences abound with minarets and domed mosques making Rethymno both popular and photogenic.

- **Heraklion Town** is the capital of the prefecture and all Crete, an administrative, commercial, industrial and agricultural centre of the island with a population of about 125.000. Because of the extensive development experienced in recent decades, Both cosmopolitan and traditional, giving shelter to luxury yachts and the boats of local fishermen bringing in the catch of the day. The picturesque port is ideal for romantic and relaxing walks and the waterfront is boarded by traditional cafes, modern cafeterias and all sorts of small shops welcoming visitors and locals alike.

- A little to the north of **Agios Nikolaos** is the well developed beach resort of Elounda, to the east is the famous palm-tree forest and splendid beach at Vai. while a visit to the nearby island of Spinalonga will remind you of it's historical past when it was once a Venetian fortress. A more abstract division of Crete is the North/South divide. The main towns of the prefectures are all on the north coast of Crete and this north coast is considerably more developed in terms of commercial tourism. In the north of Crete you will find a very diverse selection of hotels including large resort hotels, some of the finest to be found anywhere in Greece.

# THE MAIN SIGHTS IN CRETE



## FORTRESS

Built between 1573 and 1580, Rethymno's fortress cuts an imposing presence on a rocky headland above the historic quarter. Inside the battlements, the most interesting feature is a meticulously restored square mosque, converted by the Turks from a Venetian cathedral. Its architecture is lovely, especially the dome, held up by eight arches, and the ornate mihrab (a niche that points in the direction of Mecca). The pint-sized church near the east gate is of more recent vintage (1899). Also within the compound is the Erofili Theatre, a modern amphitheatre surrounded by pine trees; it gets busiest during the Renaissance Festival.

# SPINALONGA

The island of Spinalonga officially known as Kalydon , is located in the Gulf of Elounda in north-eastern Crete, in **Lasithi**, next to the town of Elounda. The island is further assigned to the area of Kalydon. It is near the Spinalonga peninsula– which often causes confusion as the same name is used for both. The official Greek name of the island today is Kalydon.

Originally, Spinalonga was not an island, it was part of the island of Crete. During Venetian occupation the island was carved out of the coast for defense purposes and a fort was built there.

During Venetian rule, salt was harvested from salt pans around the island . The island has also been used as a leper colony. Spinalonga has appeared in novels, television series, and a short film.



# KOULE

The Venetian fortress of Koule dominates the entrance to the Venetian harbour of Heraklion. The Venetians called it the "Sea Fortress", but today it is known by its Turkish name, Koule, a corruption of Su Kulesi (Water Tower). It is one of the most familiar and beloved monuments of the city, and the symbol of Heraklion. Today the fortress of Koules gazes proudly out across the Sea of Crete, reminding us of the glory of Venetian Chandax. It is haunted by legends that Cretan rebels were horribly tortured in its damp, dark rooms.



# PALACE OF KNOSSOS

Evans' reconstruction brings to life the palace's most significant parts, including the reconstructed columns; painted deep brown-red with gold-trimmed black capitals, they taper gracefully at the bottom. Vibrant recreations of frescoes add another dramatic dimension to the palace ruins. The Minoans' highly sophisticated society is further revealed by details like the advanced drainage system and the clever placement of rooms to passages, light wells, porches and verandahs that kept rooms cool in summer and warm in winter.

The first section of the palace you come across is the West Court, which may have been a marketplace or the site of public gatherings. On your left is a trio of circular pits, called "kouloures", that were used for grain storage.





# PHAISTOS

Phaistos, or more correctly the Minoan Palace of Phaistos, situated in South-Central Crete, in the plain of Mesara, 55 km south of **Heraklion** and within walking distance from the archaeological site in Trinity, the archaeological site of Gortys and Matala. Phaistos is one of the most important archaeological sites in Crete, and receives several thousand visitors every year . The Minoan Palace of Phaistos corresponds to a thriving city which, not incidentally, arose in the fertile mesara plain during prehistoric times, i.e. from 6000 b. c. to the 1st century BC, as confirmed by archaeological findings.



# GORGE OF SAMARIA



White Mountains' National Park is the only national park in Crete. It centres around the Samaria gorge, at an altitude of 1,200m and continues down to Agia Roumeli, on the shores of the Mediterranean Sea. Along with the surrounding slopes and a number of smaller gorges branching off from it, Samaria Gorge forms the whole of the area designated as a national park, a status that offers protection to over 450 species of plant and animal, 70 of which are endemic to Crete. In the prefecture of Chania, the Samaria gorge is the longest in Europe (total length 16km), and one of the most impressive gorges in Greece. It starts from Xyloskalo, at an altitude of 1,230m. The width of the gorge is 150m at its widest point and 3m at its narrowest.

# HARBOUR OF FIRKA

The **Venetian harbour** of **Chania** was built by the Venetians between 1320 and 1356. The harbour was used for commerce and also to control the Sea of Crete against pirates.

The Venetian harbour had room for 40 galleys, but it constantly silted up and was never very deep, so it kept having to be dredged, a difficult job with the equipment of the time.

On its north side the harbour is protected by a breakwater. Near the middle of this is a small bulwark like a gun emplacement and the tiny chapel of St Nicholas . The Firkas Fortress at the harbour entrance and the St Nicholas bastion in the middle of the breakwater defended the harbour from raiders.

Today, the Venetian harbour offers moorage for fishing boats and other small craft, while the commercial and passenger port of Chania is seven kilometres to the east, in Souda Bay.

The lighthouse is a distinctive feature of the harbour. It was built at the harbour entrance by the Venetians and restored in its present form by the Egyptians (1830-1840).



WELCOME TO CRETE!

IT WILL BE OUR PLEASURE  
IF YOU COME HERE!!!

**THIS ASSIGNMENT WAS DONE BY THE  
FOLLOWING STUDENTS:**

VAMVOUKAKI EMMANOUELA

VERGETAKI GEORGIA

VERGETAKI PELINA

VERERAKI TONIA

FASOULAKI MARIA