

Travel deals

◆ If you visiting London this summer, Travelodge has released 25,000 rooms priced from £55 to £95, available from July 26 to September 9. The biggest hotelier in the capital will have 53 hotels open in time for the Olympics. A family room priced at £55 works out at £13.75pp for two adults and two children and the company is also handing out free London guides. For bookings go to www.travelodge.co.uk



◆ Inghams is offering discounts on holidays to the stunning Austrian mountains in May. For example - a week half-board at the 4* Huber's Boutiquehotelat popular Mayrhofen now costs from £349pp - a saving of £236pp. The price includes flights from Gatwick and transfers. For more on this and other deals go to www.ingham.co.uk or call 0208 780 4454.

◆ Short break specialist Great Escapes has announced special offers to Lille and Leuven with the choice of a self-drive breaks by ferry or Eurotunnel. It has three nights for the price of 2 at the 3* Best Western Grand Hotel Bellevue in Lille from £125pp and three nights at the renovated 4* Martin's Klooster, Leuven from £188pp. For details call 0845 330 2089 or visit www.greatescapes.co.uk

◆ Austravel, the specialist in travel to Australasia has a saving of £485 per couple off a 10-night holiday taking in Hong Kong, Sydney and Cairns - home to the Great Barrier Reef departure dates are in November with prices from £1195pp. There are a number of other special offers to Australia, call 0800 988 4834 or visit www.austravel.com

Local offers

Late holiday offers with flights from Norwich. Telephone Travel Norwich Airport on 01603 428700, email enquiries@travelnorwichairport.co.uk to check availability. Or visit our website www.travelnorwich.com

◆ Lake Garda - May 13, three-star allocated on arrival, seven nights, Bed & Breakfast from £329pp. Up-grade to Half Board from £63pppw.

◆ Turkey - May 24, three-star named in Side, seven nights, All Inclusive from £379pp

◆ Malta - May 29, three-star named in Qawra, seven nights Half Board from £375pp

◆ Corfu - June 22, three-star named in Roda, seven nights Bed & Breakfast from £359pp. Includes a saving of £352 per couple!!

◆ Bulgaria - June 24, three-star named in Sunny Beach Half Board from £339pp.

◆ Madeira - June 25 and July 2, five-star named in Funchal Half Board from £649pp. Includes saving of £340 per couple!!

◆ Prices are correct at time of sending, all subject to availability and based on maximum occupancy.



Mark Nicholls visited the Greek island of Crete and stayed in a superb hotel aimed at the solo traveller.

As the largest of the Greek islands, Crete has so much to offer; excellent beaches lapped by turquoise seas, ancient Minoan history, a wonderful natural landscape and a tasty and healthy cuisine.

It hosts picturesque harbours with shoreline tavernas, small inlets where colourful fishing boats bob on the tide and is populated by a warm and welcoming people.

For many though, what caps a holiday is the accommodation and who you meet. For those who travel alone and independently, that can be more important still.

It is for these reasons that the 33-room Mistral Hotel, tucked away in the village of Maleme just a few miles east of the charismatic harbour city of Chania, is such a Cretan treasure.

It specialises in attracting those who want to go on holiday alone and meet like-minded people to take part in various activities ranging from sightseeing, walking and photography or simply chilling by the pool and lazing on a beach.

Run by Vassilis Gialamarakis and his brother Adonis, the Mistral has perfected the art of singles holidays over the last two decades and taken them on to a new level.

With double-sized balconied rooms for single occupation that are spacious and stylish, the Mistral has created the ambience that makes its repeat guests as well as those visiting for the first time feel relaxed, at home and among friends. Significantly with the Mistral, once they find it, many guests know when they are on to a good thing. How many other hotels have repeat business nudging 65 per cent?

Guests cover a range of ages and backgrounds from nurses, draughtsmen, beauty therapists, a company secretary, TV producers and those who are retired.

The Mistral has two beautiful pools, quiet landscaped gardens, a lively bar area and an attractive restaurant where for dinner you can expect to be served traditional dishes such as beef stifado or souvlaki, stuffed tomatoes and peppers and superb salads, dressed in olive oil produced by the hotel from its own trees and all washed down with good local wine.



Cretan treasure a

Four-course evening meals are usually taken together in a lively and chatty atmosphere, while breakfast is light and relaxed with hams, cheeses, eggs, cereals, juice and coffee - perfect for the Mediterranean climate.

The Mistral also prides itself on showing Crete as it is through its food, wine and hospitality with some wonderful excursions.

A popular trip is to the perfect beach of Falasarna with its expanse of fine sand and clear waters, followed by a banquet at a family restaurant at another quiet cove at Sfinari with freshly-caught fish, a range of seafood, local wine, and the irresistible Kakavia (fish soup) on the menu.

Other excursions include trips to Elafonissi beach or a boat trip out to Gramvousa island for snorkelling, swimming and exploring Venetian ruins.

For the more adventurous, tackling the 17km of the Samaria Gorge is a truly memorable and rewarding experience. Not for the faint-hearted, it is an early morning start and a steep descent into the gorge, which becomes ever narrower before it brings you out to the beach at Aghia Rhoumeli and a cooling dip in the sea. The only way out is by boat to Chora Skafion.

Right, Trek challenge: The Samaria Gorge is not for the faint-hearted - and make sure you pack your walking boots.

I'd recommend walking the gorge, but pack walking boots or firm footwear and perhaps indulge in a massage at the Mistral's spa area the next day to ease those aching limbs.

In addition to the excursions, many visitors hire a Jeep and go off and explore the island on their own or in small groups. The Mistral is only a few miles away from Chania and a ride into the Venetian harbour city is a must to absorb the ambience of one of Crete's magical gems with harbourside restaurants, narrow backstreets and a relaxed atmosphere that is Cretan to the core.

The Mistral also has some interesting hotel-based activities such as a photography course that helps you get the best out of your camera and improves your holiday snaps; a water-colour painting course; and a wine tasting lunch and cookery class to learn more about Cretan food and drink.

Vassilis, a graduate of the Scottish Hotel School at Strathclyde University in Glasgow, said: "We offer exclusive excursions and while our guests may have gone away on holiday alone, they are not alone. It is a holiday for independent travellers...and it seems that our guests do like what we do."

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Factfile

◆ **Accommodation:** The Mistral opens in April, initially with themed weeks such as walking, photography and painting, and runs through to October. Guests book the hotel independently and arrange their own flights, though the Mistral arranges transfers. A typical week's stay, half-board, starts from about £525 per person. For bookings and further information, visit www.singlesincrete.com, email info@singlesincrete.com or call 0871 990 2070.

◆ **Flights:** Mark Nicholls flew from East Midlands to Heraklion with leisure airline Jet2.com which offers low fares and a 22kg baggage allowance. Flights start from £71.99 one way including taxes. For more information, visit www.jet2.com

◆ **Guidebook:** To discover more about Crete and other Greek Islands, Lonely Planet Greek Islands offers a comprehensive overview of what to see, where to stay, transport, cuisine and other tips, £14.99.



Cretan treasure: Far left and main picture, views of the Mistral; above, the beach at Falasarna.

real delight



From the small and intimate to the large and luxurious, **Mark Nicholls** also stayed at the five star Out of the Blue Capsis Elite Resort near the island's capital Heraklion during his visit to Crete.

Sitting high on the peninsular overlooking the Aegean and nestling against the attractive fishing village of Aghia Pelaghia is the stunning Out of the Blue Capsis Elite Resort.

Stylish and exclusive, the quality of accommodation, food and location blends to make this one of Crete's top destinations.

With a range of restaurants, bars, numerous pools and private beaches, the resort is also a green oasis with much of the 167,000 square metres of the peninsular site hosting a lush array of trees, flowers, greenery, palms and herb gardens.

As part of the Great Hotels of the World grouping, the Capsis Elite Resort offers differing styles of accommodation ranging from small apartments to large luxury villas which suit varied tastes and budgets.

Many of the properties have their own private pools and gardens, while others have sea view balconies that draw in panoramic views across coves and inlets.

The Eternal Oasis Neighbourhood, for example, is bungalow suites mainly for families and is the biggest section of the hotel, while the classic boutique Ruby Red Regal Hotel has rooms and suites aimed at couples.

The Crystal Energy Hotel is a modern art suite-hotel while the Divine Thalassa VIP neighbourhood comprises luxurious suites, maisonettes and pool villas and includes the Emerald Villa, which is the premier apartment with its own pool and garden. The Oh! All-Suite Hotel is the most exclusive section of the resort with suites, maisonettes and villas with private pools and spectacular views across Aghia Pelaghia.

The jewel in the crown is the Black Pearl villa, one of the most expensive villas in Greece (if not Europe), costing some 25,000 euros per night with its own gym, indoor and outdoor pools, and private deck access to the sea from its spot at the tip of the peninsula.

"The idea of the hotel is that there is something for everyone and all budgets

and tastes," explained Guest Relations Manager Manolis Tzagarakis. "There are modern styles and traditional styles with the accommodation."

The Capsis family, which owns the resort, maintain a very hands-on approach paying close attention to the fine detail and ensuring their guests' every need is catered for.

The resort also has excellent restaurants from the Italian cuisine of the Safran, the H2o Indonesian and Japanese with wonderful sushi, the Poseidon fish tavern and Red Pepper and Precieux gourmet restaurants as well as the Raki Cretan Restaurant.

Another appeal of the Out of the Blue Resort is the exceptional quality of its Euphoria Rejuvenating Spa complex where the range of treatments available is extensive from a basic facial and a relaxing full body massage to specific treatments such as reflexology and hot stones.

The surroundings are discreet and luxurious with a hydrotherapy heated pool, sauna, hammam and massage and shower rooms. The spa also offers massages and treatments

outside, either close to the beach or in the manicured gardens.

The resort, which also offers water sports, has a fitness area, tennis courts, a mini zoo and a themed Minoan Amusement Park area for children, overlooks a wonderful Cretan landscape and blends perfectly with the traditional fishing village of Aghia Pelaghi and its harbour lined with tavernas. When it comes to finding somewhere to relax in the Mediterranean sunshine, few locations can match the ambience, style and quality of the Out of the Blue Capsis Elite Resort.

■ **Out of the Blue Capsis Elite Resort is a member of Great Hotels of the World Luxury Collection. Double rooms start from £145 a night. For more information or to book, visit www.ghotw.com/capsis-beach or call 020 7380 3658.**

Travel clinic

Destinations manager **Gary Wright** reckons Greece is the place for last-minute bargains.



Greece is most definitely is the word, if you are in the market for last minute summer holiday bargains this year.

Currently, the first thing you think of when someone mentions Greece is not the usual image of beautiful ancient ruins, sparkling blue water and white sandy beaches, but protests, unrest and unemployment. It is precisely because of these images that visitor numbers to the usually popular holiday destination have been falling. This has resulted in holiday companies being forced in to slashing their prices, in an effort to entice people back.

Even better news for consumers is that the British pound is performing pretty well against the euro at the moment, so you'll get more for your spending money too.

While there are currently no travel restrictions in place for Brits travelling to the economically-troubled country, the Foreign Office does warn of the possibility of regular strikes which are often called at short notice and can be violent. Their advice is to avoid large crowds and demonstrations, and keep an eye on local media, as transport links are often closed at short notice due to protests. Whilet this may all sound a bit scary and off-putting, most of the civil unrest tends to be focused in and around Athens.

Therefore if you are travelling to more rural areas of the country, or to the islands, then you shouldn't encounter any problems. Should you still decide to visit the larger cities such as Athens, then you will likely find yourself rewarded not only with great value accommodation, but with bargains at restaurants and souvenir shops as well.

Back in February the already ailing tourist trade suffered a further blow when Foreign Secretary William Hague made an announcement that Britain had plans to evacuate British nationals, in the event of major civil unrest.

Angry travel companies were forced to further cut prices as holiday bookings slumped.

This Greek tragedy does represent a very good opportunity for finding some pretty astonishing deals, to destinations all over Greece.

For example I have been looking at offers travelling out in the next few weeks, and have managed to find a week self-catering on the beautiful Island of Skiathos for just £120 per person. I have also found a 4 Star all-inclusive property on the Island of Rhodes for just £290 per person, "which equates to just over £40 a day". These holidays would be inclusive of flights from Gatwick and return transfers.

The golden rule for anyone looking to bag a last-minute bargain to Greece this summer is to be prepared to be flexible. This applies to the destination, departure date – even the airport you travel from. If you can keep an open mind about where you go and when, then you will surely unearth some real treasures.