



The church of St. Michael in Chania is typical of the region

## 1 Chania equals paradise

Chania is on the western end of the long northern coast of Crete and easy to get to (easyJet flies from Gatwick). This corner of Crete is generally reckoned to be the most beautiful part of the island, with long sandy beaches, olive and orange groves, wild mountainous landscapes and a stunning coast.

## 2 Long, hot summers

Crete is the most southerly island in Greece, and Chania is as close to north Africa as it is to Athens. Not surprisingly, the weather is pretty good. Summer can start in April and stretch into October. When I visited in September, the daytime temperatures were still well in the 30°s.



Friendly and funky: the Mistral Hotel

## 3 Make friends at the Mistral

The Mistral Hotel is in the village of Maleme, run by the Gialamarakis family. Mama does the cooking, son Vassilis runs the hotel, while brother Adonis mans the turntables for nights

dancing under the stars. Friendships — and more — flourish under a big yellow moon. This all means the Mistral's mission is working, as it specialises in singles. There are two pools, a spa, cookery demonstrations, plus a bottle of their own olive oil to take home when you leave.

## 4 Great for families

There are little villages all over this coastline, with small hotels right on the beach, ideal for children. You can take a boat to Gramvousa — otherwise known as Pirates' Island — and spend the day visiting the Venetian castle and swimming in the safe, clear waters of Balos lagoon. Cretans love kids and families are welcomed in restaurants and tavernas all over the island. If you want a real back-to-nature adventure, try walking with donkeys in the hills — visit [www.walkwithdonkeys.com](http://www.walkwithdonkeys.com)

## 5 Idyllic beaches

There are long, soft sandy ones, ones covered in coloured pebbles, deserted coves, beautiful bays — all with clean, crystalline waters. Platanias is a long, sandy beach in a picturesque resort close to Chania. If you want something remote, head for Finikas on the south coast, accessible only on foot from



Crete's beaches are breathtaking

Loutro. Golden Beach is the opposite — the closest to Chania and very popular.

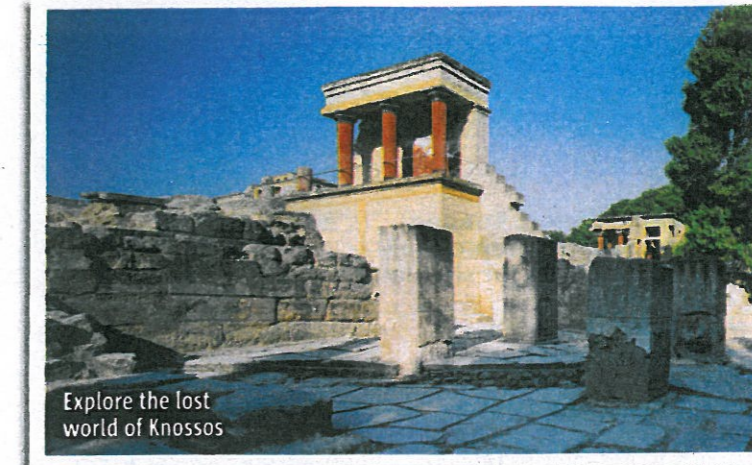
Maleme Beach is a few minutes' walk if you stay at the Mistral. Falasarna has loungers for hire on a long pretty beach, a small taverna and the ruins of a city dating from 300BC. Most astonishingly, the world's first computer, the Antikythera mechanism, was found here in a wrecked ship. It had bronze gears and was housed in a wooden box.



The tranquil beauty of Sfinari

Searching for the real Greece? Head for the unspoilt villages and beautiful beaches around Chania in Crete...

Ten reasons to go to...  
**Crete**



Explore the lost world of Knossos

## 6 The palace of perfection

If you're expecting the Pyramids or the Parthenon, Knossos will surprise you. It's on a much smaller, more human scale — and this could be down to the fact that women played a hugely important role here and probably in how it looked.

The wall paintings show high priestesses with curled hair and bare breasts, the Queen's apartments have a frieze of blue dolphins leaping, and there are endless pictures of dancing and musicians, bluebirds and sea creatures.

There are no signs of any armies or weapons — Knossos dominated the Mediterranean with trade — and there was no slavery. So perhaps it really was the perfect society.

## 7 Adventure!

There's a five-star PADI scuba diving centre at Platanias and lots of other watersports available on the bigger beaches.

You can walk in the Cretan hills or go for a serious hike in the Samaritan Gorge — at 17km, the longest gorge in Europe. A World Biosphere Reserve, you can see *kri-kri* (unique wild goats), lots of flowers and birds, ruins of ancient villages and soaring cliffs.

## 8 Fantastic stories

Crete has a history so long it's tangled up with mythology. This is where Theseus fought the Minotaur, where Zeus was born and it's also one of the contenders for the lost island of Atlantis — the civilisation of which was swept away by a terrifying tidal wave.

## 9 How's the food?

In a word, sensational. The fish leaps from sea to plate and the vegetables tend to have been picked that morning.

In Sfinari, I found myself at the Sunset Tavern, run by the Baladakis family. They showed me the catch before they cooked it and the choice was stupendous. There was grouper, bass, bream, parrotfish, octopus, cuttlefish and a fish soup so rich guests are recommended only a very small bowlful.

Homemade herb bread, aubergines, peppers and salads straight from the garden were brought out in abundance. Here you eat like a Greek — you feast, you talk, you chill.



Stunning views await at the Samaritan Gorge

## 10 Discover the real Greece

Crete is a world away from Athens and it hasn't been spoiled by overdevelopment. On the road, you get accustomed to being held up by flocks of sheep or goats. There are many fishing villages with tavernas on the beach where you're more likely to find Greeks than tourists.

The pace of life is slow, the locals welcoming and sun guaranteed. For a touch of Greece at its most idyllic, look no further.

Anna Selby

## Here we go!

For tourist information on Crete visit [www.crete.gr](http://www.crete.gr) With thanks to [www.youphorivillascrete.com](http://www.youphorivillascrete.com) Prices at the Mistral Hotel from £525pp half-board, including airport transfers from Chania Airport. Themed holidays available include Greek Easter, walking, or painting — prices from £675 for a week. For bookings, call 0871 990 2070, visit [www.singlesincrete.com](http://www.singlesincrete.com) or email [info@singlesincrete.com](mailto:info@singlesincrete.com) EasyJet flies to Crete (Chania) from London Gatwick. Prices from £54.99 one way, including taxes. Visit [www.easyjet.com](http://www.easyjet.com)

**WIN!** A HOLIDAY IN CRETE. PAGE 56