

Breakaway

HOLIDAYS AND WEEKENDS

You'll feel at home among friends here

Mark Nicholls visits Crete and stays in a delightful hotel aimed at the solo traveller

DOMINATED by craggy mountains dotted with millions of olive trees which reach down to shorelines with some truly lovely beaches, Crete remains an idyllic holiday destination.

Politically and economically, the Greek landscape has changed considerably as the financial woes linked with the euro crisis and national debt deepen.

But while lying on a beach, eating wonderful seafood in a coastal taverna, driving through isolated mountain villages or cruising off the coast; it seems little has changed for the visitor.

The buildings are still white-washed and tinged with rich blue borders, the cuisine is traditional and healthy, the climate is beautifully Mediterranean and there is history that stretches back across the millennia to the ancient Minoan civilization.

As the largest of the Greek islands, Crete remains warm and welcoming and has much to offer.

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 west 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, watercolour painting, Cretan wine tasting and cookery classes, photography or simply chilling by the pool or lazing on a beach.

Run by Vassilis Gialamarakis and his brother Adonis, the Mistral offers stylish double-sized balconied rooms and has created the ambience that helps its regular guests as well as those visiting for the first time feel relaxed, at home and among friends.

Significantly, once they find the Mistral, many guests know when they are onto a good thing. How many other hotels have repeat business nudging 65 per cent?

The Mistral has two 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 tasty Greek salads, dressed in



MISTRAL HOTEL: Tucked away in the village of Maleme a few miles west of the harbour city of Chania.

FACT FILE



MEMORABLE: Samaria Gorge.

olive oil produced by the hotel from its own trees and all washed down with good local wine.

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

Accommodation: The Mistral opens from April 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 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, see Lonely Planet Greek Islands (£14.99).

some wonderful excursions.

A popular trip is to the 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.

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.

I'd recommend walking the gorge, but pack 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 where the atmosphere of the harbour and narrow backstreets is Cretan to the core.

As you enjoy the ambience of the harbour-front lined with tavernas, it can seem the only major decision of the day is to decide which one to have lunch in.

LATE DEALS

ZANTE: 11 nights from £393 per person staying at the three-star Vasilikos Beach Hotel in Vasilikos on bed and breakfast, flying from Birmingham, May 6.

CRETE: Seven nights in Crete from £230 per person. Staying at the three-star Koni Village Studios in Stalis on self-catering, Birmingham, May 4.

TURKEY: Seven nights in Turkey from £319 per person. Staying at the four-star Yelken Hotel & Spa near Turgutreis on all-inclusive, Birmingham, March 30.

LANZAROTE: Seven nights from £499 per person. Staying at the four-star Luabay Lanzarote Beach Hotel in Costa Teguiuse on all-inclusive, Birmingham, March 25.

EGYPT: Seven nights from £518 per person. Staying at the four-star Sunrise Garden Beach Hotel in Hurghada on all-inclusive, from Birmingham, April 13.

TURKEY: Seven nights in Turkey from £466 per person. Staying at the four-star Sentido Sultan Beldibi Hotel in Kemer on all-inclusive, from Birmingham, April 1.

● For all the above holidays, call Thomas Cook in Worcester on 08443 089662 or visit airtours.co.uk.

TO ADVERTISE ON THIS PAGE, CALL CAROLINE WESTON ON 01905 742362.

Cornwall Porthleven Fishermans Cottages
Log fires, Pets welcome
2 minutes walk harbour side, restaurants, pubs and coastal foot path.
Kernow agis dynargh (Cornwall welcomes you)
01209 860410

BARMOUTH Top Quality Lodges & Caravans
For hire / Sale on our small award winning family park.
Also Luxury Cottage.
Rowen Holiday Park
Talybont, LL43 2AD
01341 242 626
www.rowenpark.com



Brownhill Holiday Park
Luxury Holiday Homes for Sale
Fantastic Site with outdoor heated pool, Bar, Club & Entertainment, Laundrette, Childrens Play area.
3 miles from Beach.
Beautiful Coastal walks.
Dogs welcome
From £12,500

01545 560288 • www.brownhillcaravanpark.co.uk

STATIC CARAVANS

Clarach Bay Club House with fantastic entertainment, indoor swimming pool, kids fun fair park.
Spring Deals
Call now for a

For Sale From
£8995
on the Mid Wales Coast.

FREE BROCHURE 01970 828277

HOTEL VIRGINIA

Luxury Coach Holidays
WORCESTER · TORQUAY RETURN
WINTER WARMERS

Departs March 26th (5 Days, 4 Nights)
ONLY £95

Inclusive of
• Return Travel • En-suite Rooms • Licensed Bar and Happy Hour
• Choice of Breakfast and 3 Course Evening Meal • No Single Room Supplement
• Dancing and Bingo • 400 yards from Beach and Town Centre
• Live Entertainment

For free brochure telephone
Falkland Road, Torquay, TQ2 5JH
Tel: (01803) 294967