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THE ISLAND INSIDE YOU

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THE ISLAND INSIDE YOU

From the dunes of Lafonissi and Xerokambos to the tropical shores of Kedrodasos and Chrissi, from the hidden beaches in the wild gorges of Sfakia and Asteroussia to the emerald bays of Triopetra and Plakias, from Balos and Elounda lagoons to the palm groves of Preveli and Vai, from piney beaches of Ierapetra to the long organized strands of the northern coasts, Crete offers the ultimate combination of carefree holidays and natural beauty.

Thousands of kilometers of coasts carved by the salt, the sun and the wind. Crystal waters exhausting the color palette of blue and green. Steep mountains which abruptly raise above the sea ... this scenery is met in all areas of Crete.

The coastline of Crete is 1046 km long, with very well organized, and popular beaches, but also isolated, scenic and pristine places.

North or South?
In Crete, visitors can escape to one of the numerous hospitable, organized beaches located mainly in the northern coast that hosts the major tourist resorts. All those beaches offer visitors a wide range of services, amenities, security, cafes, bars, restaurants, water sports, lifeguards, etc. Most of them have been awarded with the Blue Flag for their safety, cleanness and immaculate amenities.

For romantics and adventure lovers, there are pristine beaches of incomparable beauty, especially in the southern coast. Small emerald heavens are reached after driving in serpentine dirt roads on the edge of steep slopes with breathtaking sea views, or after walking on ancient paths and crossing wild gorges.

Summer all year round
The winter in Crete is mild, while the spring and the autumn are soft and pleasant; the summer is warm and bright with cool breaks due to the northern winds (meltemi) of August. Crete straddles two climatic zones, the Mediterranean and the North African zone, mainly falling into the former.

Sea temperature rarely falls below 15 degrees Celsius in winter, especially to the south. Winter swimming with the whitewashed peaks of the Cretan mounts in the background is a unique experience and attracts an increasing number of fans.

The climate of Crete is considered as one of the finest, healthiest and mildest climates in Europe. One factor that plays a key role in the formation of the climate is the sea surrounding the island and alleviating the heat intensity of the summer sun. Ierapetra is considered the warmest Greek city and the coastline of the Libyan Sea and Gavdos are the warmest in Greece. The southern coast, including the plain of Messara and the Asterousia Mountains, falls into the North African climatic zone and thus has many sunny, warm days all year round.

Tip:
The wintertime is so mild that many swallows winter in southern Crete and Gavdos Island.

Sea of colors
Mother nature was very generous in the creation of Crete. The island is adorned with fantastic sceneries and exotic beaches. From Chania to Lassithi, one comes across many beaches with white sand tinted with pinkish hues due to the millions of crushed shells. Turquoise water, aquarium-like seabed, sand dunes and rare coastal ecosystems give visitors the opportunity to discover their paradise in Crete.

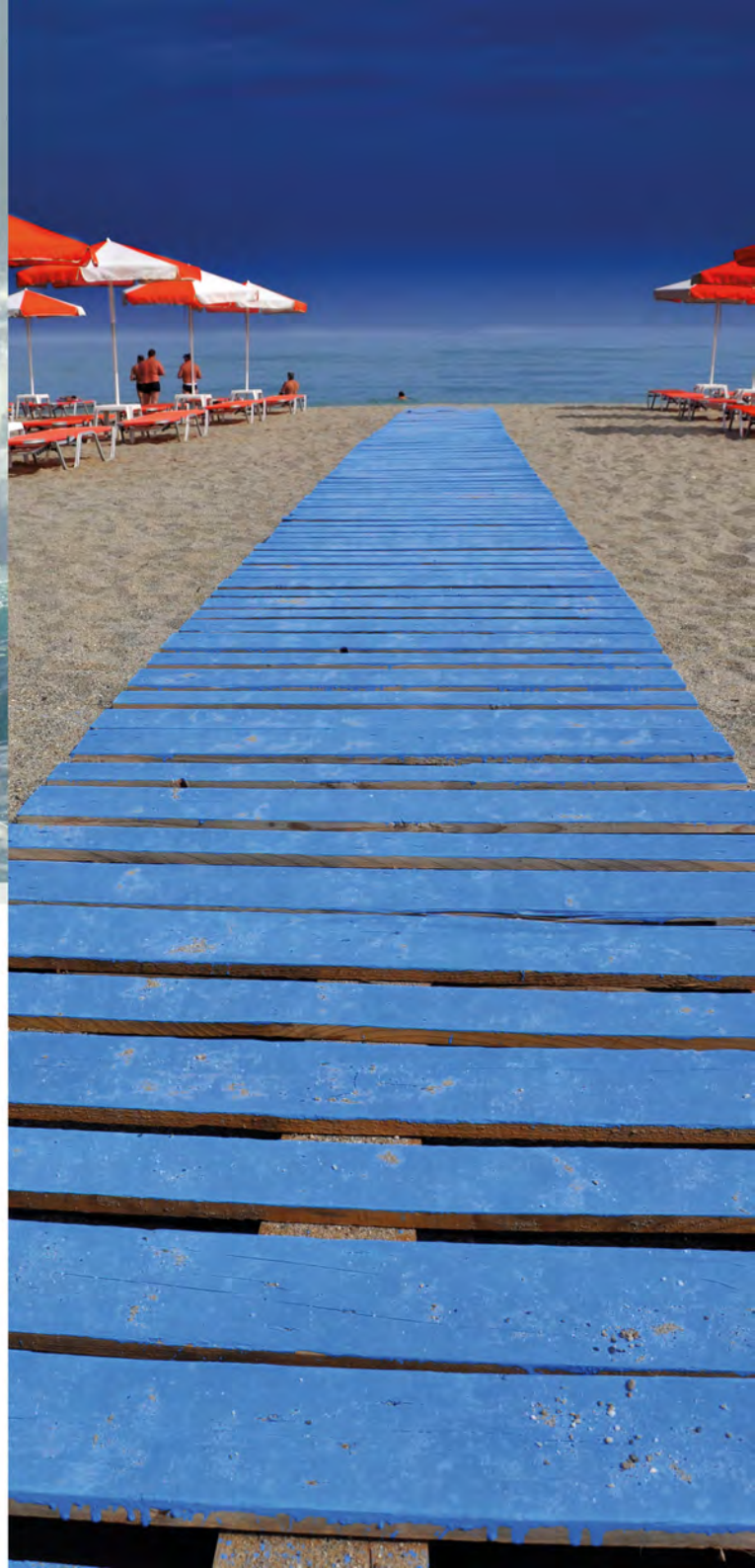
Chania
The most famous and most photographed beaches on the island, known for their exotic water and majestic natural environment, are the heavenly lagoons of Balos at Gramvousa peninsula and Elafonissi, which lie in the southwestern edge of the island. Between them, lies the virgin beaches of ancient Falassama. For those looking for seclusion, there is the hidden paradise of Kedrodasos and White Lake near Elafonissi and the African seascapes of Agiannis and Lavrakas on Gavdos island.

Rethymnon
The southern coast of Rethymnon hosts some of the most beautiful, untouched exotic beaches of Crete. At Agios Pavlos, huge sandhills descend steeply and vanish into the sea, forming a beach, where one may sense the most positive vibrations of the island. On the adjacent beaches of Ligres and Pahia Ammos by Kerames the scenery remains mysterious. However, the most brilliant turquoise waters in Rethymnon are found on the beaches of Skinaria, Ammoudi and Damnoni, all located near Plakias.

Heraklion
Driving on dusty dirt roads across rocky pastures and hiking in the canyons usually end up in a refreshing swim at a splendid secluded beach. The hues of the sea play their color game with the stones and the sun. Some of the most popular beaches are Agiofarago, while there are still impressive beaches at Vathy, Trafoulas by Lendas, Aspes and Agios Nikitas. Those preferring to stay close to "civilization" can swim below the legendary caves of Listis by Keratokambos and the dunes of Komos by Matala. On the north coast, in the coves of Sarandaris at Hersonisos, Potamos by Malia, as well as on Dia island one comes across heavenly beaches, where the water is azure blue.

Lassithi
The eastern part of the island hides some of the nicest surprises. The exotic beaches of the islands Chrissi and Lefki can be explored by taking a sea trip on excursion boats from Ierapetra and Makrigialos. The protected palm forest at Vai and Itanos strongly reminds of an African landscape, while the secluded beaches of Karoumes and Xerokambos are a must-see for nature lovers. The dry rocky landscape changes dramatically a few miles to the west, on the serene strands formed below the slopes of Thripti mountain. The capital of Lassithi, Agios Nikolaos, hosts the lovely beaches of Gargadoros, Istron and Ammoudara.

Tip:
Loggerhead sea turtles lay their eggs on the beaches of Crete from May to September. This period coincides with the tourism season and protection of nests is a major concern for local authorities.



Facilities
Lovers of crowded places, water sports, cocktails and parties on the beach have unlimited options due to the wide array of well-organized beaches in Crete. All beaches located near the major cities of the island generally offer all kinds of amenities such as sun beds, beach bars, showers, toilets, changing rooms, water sports and lifeguards. Most of them have been awarded the Blue Flag by the homonymous program that certifies beach cleanness, safety, accessibility for disabled people and infrastructure.

Chania
The beaches of Agia Marina, Stalos and Platanias are the most organized and popular ones and they are located near the city of Chania. Locals prefer the quieter, yet but equally organized beaches of at Kalathas, Marathi, Loutraki and Agii Apostoli. Quiet beaches offering all basic amenities are also met in other towns, villages and tourist resorts of Chania, such as Paleohora, Sougia, Kolymbari, Kissamos, Georgioupolis, Sfakia and Fragokastelo. In August, Falassama beach dances to the rhythm of the most famous beach party in Crete.

Rethymnon
Other organized beaches of Rethymnon are located along the 8km long coast starting from the port of Rethymnon and ending at Skaleta. Similarly, small towns such as Panormo and Bali, offer excellent services and facilities. To the south, the cosmopolitan beaches of Agia Galini, Plakias and Rodakino are fairly organized.

Heraklion
Heraklion is the most developed tourist area in Crete, with Hersonissos and Malia hosting the largest numbers of tourists. Indeed, all coasts from Heraklion to Malia are fully organized and big resorts are built on the beach. Gyms, massage services, extreme water sports are just some of the services offered on the beach.

Lassithi
Lassithi beaches are quiet, but still organized. Apart from the beaches of the popular lagoon of Elounda that host prominent personalities from the fields of politics, media, sports and arts, all the beaches of the towns of Agios Nikolaos, Sitia, Makrigialos and Ierapetra are very well organized. Other options for relaxation offering basic amenities are the picturesque villages Mohlos and Myrtos, and the beaches of Kouremenos, Chiona and Kato Zakros.

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Breaking the waves
Windsurfing and kitesurfing are the two most popular wave sports in Crete. In recent years fans of a new form of sport, stand up paddle (SUP), have increased. During the winter days, the most adventurous are engaged in surfing.

Kouremenos bay, next to Palekastro, is definitely the king of windsurfing sites in Crete and one of the most famous areas in Greece. Here, lovers of surfing and kite-surf will find all they need; strong winds and equipment to rent.

A little further, at the base of Cape Sidero, you will meet the most talented athletes of the sport at the secluded beach of Tenta. Other windsurfing sites in Crete are Falassama, Elafonissi, Kedrodasos, Stavros, Elounda, Amoudara in Heraklion and Hersonissos.

Tip
One of the most important sites for wave sailing in Greece is the rocky bay Papadiokambos, also known as Faneromeni, a few miles west of Sitia.

Diving

Crete's rugged terrain below sea surface, forms imposing abysses, caves and reefs. Furthermore, numerous shipwrecks and airplane carcasses are dispersed around Crete, as a reminder of its history.

Guests of Crete have the opportunity to escape to the magical underwater world by choosing among a large number of companies that deal with diving. Besides diving, visitors can explore coasts through snorkeling or participate in fishing trips or bottom-glass boat excursions.

Chania

Souda Bay and the rocky coastline from Kalyves to Georgioupolis are home to spectacular diving sites with many caves and rocky abysses. Among those, the underwater cave of Elephants, which took its name after the petrified bones of elephants that still lie at the bottom, stands out. Other famous diving sites are the shores around Spatha Cape and Gramvousa Peninsula.

Rethymnon
Almost all diving schools offer diving excursions on Skinaria beach by Plakias. Indeed, the seabed at Skinaria is one of the most impressive on the island, with thriving sea life and horizontal visibility exceeding 40 meters. Additionally, the rocky coast between Skaleta and Geropotamos at North Rethymnon is full of caves and it is ideal for underwater exploration.

Heraklion
In Heraklion, the sites preferred by diving schools are located in the area of Ahlada, west of Heraklion. Diving centers are based on the beaches of Ligaria and Mononaftis. Several diving schools also operate in Hersonissos and Malia, usually offering diving excursions on the island of Dia.

Lassithi
Diving spots of Lassithi include the town of Agios Nikolaos, the island of Agii Pantes and Voulisma beach. In the wild shores of Cape Sidero, visitors can admire possibly the richest seabed of Crete, while trips are organized to Dionysades islets from Sitia. Around Ierapetra, scuba diving schools frequently visit the rock of Agia Fotia.

Tip
Snorkeling above ancient submerged towns and settlements is one of the most exciting activities in Crete. There are several places such as the Roman settlement of Koufonisi, ancient towns of Itanos, Olous and the sanctuary of Viena at Krios Cape.

Islets
Crete is surrounded by more than 80 large and small islands.

Gavdos is the only inhabited island around Crete. Secluded at the southern tip of Europe, Gavdos is home to emerald shores adorned with pine trees and junipers.

Chrissi Island is located opposite Ierapetra and hosts many beaches, with the most famous being Belegrina. This beach enchants anyone with its crystal clear turquoise sea water and sparkling white sand.

The island of Lefki (or Koufonisi), which counts 36 beaches, is a vast archaeological site below and above sea level. Visitors can swim over the underwater Roman settlement next to the ancient theater, explore the isolated beaches of Chiliaderfia and admire the stripe-like geological formations on the beach of Asprougas.

Once a base for pirates and rebels, Imeri Gramvousa islet today accepts excursion boats that stop here before continuing their journey to the lagoon of Balos. Hundreds of visitors ascend to the fort that still dominates the beach with the shipwreck of 1968. The view to the lagoon of Balos, Gramvousa Peninsula and the islet Agria Gramvousa is fantastic.

Once a major port of the Minoans, nowadays Dia hosts most yachts of Heraklion. To the south, small coves are formed. The western bay of Saint George with the whitewashed church of the Ascension is the only harbor on the island with crystal clear waters and rich seabed.

The two islets of Paximadia in the bay of Messara are also known as Dionysi Islands. As the legend goes, the goddess Artemis used to hunt there. Paximadia host one of the most beautiful beaches of Crete.

Tip
Islets around Crete serve as shelters for the endangered endemic subspecies of the Cretan ibex. Today, the islets of Thodorou, Dia and Agii Pantes are an animal habitat.

Coastal Nature

Travelers to Crete should explore the very important coastal nature. Development of tourism while respecting natural environment is a challenge for the authorities of the island.

The protected palm grove of Vai, the largest palm forest in Europe, is an attraction of utmost ecological value. Beaches with Cretan date palms are met in more places of the island. Those include the famous beach of Preveli, Aspri Limni (White Lake) by Lafonissi, Souda by Plakias, Itanos by Vai and Finikidia by Agios Pavlos.

Moreover, the protection of junipers is of outstanding ecological value. Those trees grow very slowly and breaking a small branch actually means the destruction of some centuries of development. Reserves of junipers are primarily found in Lafonissi, Gavdos, Chrissi and Falassama.

Tip:
In the fall, sand dunes are smothered with white lilies (sea daffodils). Lilies were a favorite pattern in the Minoan frescoes.

Conquering deep blue
The options for exploring the coasts of the island are endless. There are daily boat services to many of the most famous remote beaches, such as Balos, Preveli and Agia Roumeli. Visitors can also join trips to the islands of Chrissi, Gavdos, Dia and Koufonisi.

Those looking for more options or seclusion could rent a motor or sailing vessel from the marinas of Agios Nikolaos, Heraklion, Rethymnon and Chania and in almost all smaller harbors of the island. Indeed, there are many people combining vacation in Crete with a trip to the magical island of Santorini.

In recent years, the number of visitors who prefer exploring the rugged coastline and the beautiful beaches that offers canoe kayak amenities has increased. Several companies offer equipment and kayak lessons.

Tip
In many places of Crete, rugged coasts consist of imposing cliffs that penetrate deeply into the sea. Exploring them while kayaking is a shocking experience one will never forget.

Ideal destination for families
The sea is a main attraction for children who can play, run and roll about in the sand to their heart's content. They make friends and feel the healthy power of nature. Crete has a wide variety of beaches that are safe and ideal for families with children.

To the south of Chania our small friends can have the time of their lives on the shallow sandy beaches of Frangokastello, Paleochora, Elafonissi and Falassama. To the north, well out of the north wind, there is a choice of beautiful beaches: Marathi, Chrisi Akti and Kalivaki in Georgioupolis.

In the prefecture of Rethymnon children can bathe and play at the wonderful beaches of Plakias and Damnoni on the south coast. The wind protected beaches of Bali and Panormo on the north coast are also ideal.

Moreover, around Heraklion there are many beaches that are greatly appreciated by local families, Keratokambos and Tsoutsouras being two of the most popular ones on the south coast. The well-equipped beaches of Agia Pelagia, Gouves, Chersonissos and Stalida on the north coast also ensure an enjoyable swim and much fun for our little friends.

In Lassithi prefecture, near Agios Nikolaos in Mirambello bay, there are a number of hidden beaches that are perfect for children, though the longer wider beaches of Makrigialos, Kouremenos and Chiona have their own charm.

Tip

Well-kept, well-equipped, peaceful, sandy beaches with lifeguards that are located next to tourist facilities are considered ideal for children.