

Hania Χανιά



The Hania region offers visitors a wealth of activities and experiences, from mountain climbing, gorge hiking and scuba diving to lazing on the beach and dining on the day's catch in small fishing hamlets along the coast. Despite having one of the island's top tourist attractions – the Samaria Gorge – Hania for the most part maintains an authentic feel. It is renowned for its rugged natural beauty, and for its many stunning gorges and spectacular mountain ranges, such as the Lefka Ori and Mt Gingilos in the rugged interior. Its capital, the port town of Hania, is the island's most romantic and alluring town, with a rich mosaic of Venetian and Ottoman architecture.

The northern coastline is becoming highly developed, especially the string of beach resorts along the Gulf of Hania, but it's possible to find more isolated spots on the Akrotiri Peninsula, which has two interesting monasteries, and to the west around Kissamos and the barely inhabited Rodopou and Gramvousa peninsulas. Hania's rocky southern coast is dotted with laid-back beach communities such as Paleohora and Sougia. The nearly deserted west coast has two of Crete's finest beaches – Falasarna in the north and Elafonisi in the far south.

In the hinterland are traditional mountain villages where you'll still see shepherds tending their flocks and find family tavernas that use their own produce. In the province of Sfakia, road signs riddled with bullet holes remind you that this is the Wild West of Crete. Eastern Hania boasts the island's only natural lake, Lake Kournas, and the stunning Imbros Gorge, the underrated rival to Samaria. Gavdos island, off the southern coast in the Libyan sea, is Greece's southernmost island – the ultimate escape from it all.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Hiking the spectacular **Samaria Gorge** (p93) and **Imbros Gorge** (p95)
- Wandering through the narrow streets of the Venetian and Turkish quarters of **Hania** (p82)
- Relaxing on the remote **southern beaches** (p95)
- Chilling out on the island of **Gavdos** (p106)
- Exploring mountain villages such as **Theriso** (p93) and indulging in the region's excellent cuisine.



HANIA XANIA

pop 55,838

Hania is unreservedly Crete's most evocative city. Remnants of Venetian walls still border a web of atmospheric streets in the old town that tumble onto a picturesque harbour. Restored Venetian townhouses have been converted into restaurants, cafés, boutique hotels and attractive *pensions*. The prominent former mosque on the harbour front and Ottoman-style timber buildings scattered through the old town are remnants of Turkish rule.

Hania's war-torn history has left it with only a few impressive monuments, but the city wears its scars proudly. Along Zambeliou, Theotokopoulou and Angelou streets in the old quarter you will come across roofless Venetian buildings that have been turned into gracious outdoor restaurants. Even during the height of the tourist season when many of the buildings are festooned with tourist merchandise, Hania retains the exoticism of a city caught between East and West.

Hania has some of the island's finest restaurants. The town also has a tradition of artisanship making it a great shopping city, while the cafés along the harbour are ideal for relaxing and watching passers-by promenade.

HISTORY

Hania is the site of the Minoan settlement of Kydonia, which was centred on the hill to the east of the harbour, between Akti Tombazi and Karaoli Dimitriou. Excavation work has been restricted because the ruins lie under the modern city, but the finding of clay tablets with Linear B script (see boxed text, p27) has led archaeologists to believe that Kydonia was both a palace site and an important town. Fifty late-Minoan graves were found in 2004 in the Agios Ioannis area, part of the cemetery of ancient Kydonia, and excavations are continuing.

Kydonia met the same fiery fate as most other Minoan settlements in 1450 BC, but soon re-emerged as a force. It was a flourishing city-state during Hellenistic times and continued to prosper under Roman and Byzantine rule.

The city came under the control of the Venetians around the beginning of the 13th century, and the name was changed to La Canea. The Venetians lost control of the city to the Genoese in 1266, but they finally wrested it back in 1290. The Venetians con-

structed massive fortifications to protect the city from marauding pirates and invading Turks. They did not prove very effective against the latter, who took Hania in 1645 after a two-month siege.

The Turks made Hania the seat of the Turkish Pasha until the end of Turkish rule in 1898. During this time the churches were converted into mosques and the architectural style of the town changed, becoming more Oriental, with wooden walls and latticed windows.

The Great Powers made Hania the island capital in 1898 and it remained so until 1971, when the administration was transferred to Iraklio.

The WWII Battle of Crete largely took place along the coast to the west of Hania. The town itself was heavily bombed during WWII, particularly around Ancient Kydonia, but enough of the old town survives for it to be regarded as Crete's most beautiful city.

ORIENTATION

Hania's bus station is on Kydonias, two blocks southwest of Plateia 1866. From Plateia 1866, the Venetian port is a short walk north up Halidon. Zambeliou, once Hania's main thoroughfare, is lined with craft shops, small hotels and tavernas. The headland near the lighthouse separates the Venetian port from the crowded town beach in the modern Nea Hora Kapi. In the other direction, Koum Kapi, a rejuvenated waterfront precinct is where younger Haniots hang out. Boats to Hania dock at Souda, about 7km southeast of town.

INFORMATION

Bookshops

Mediterraneo Bookstore (☎ 28210 86904; Akti Koundourioti 57) An extensive range of English language novels and books on Crete, as well international press.

Newsstand (☎ 28210 95888; Skalidi 8) A wide range of international press and magazines, books, Crete guides and maps.

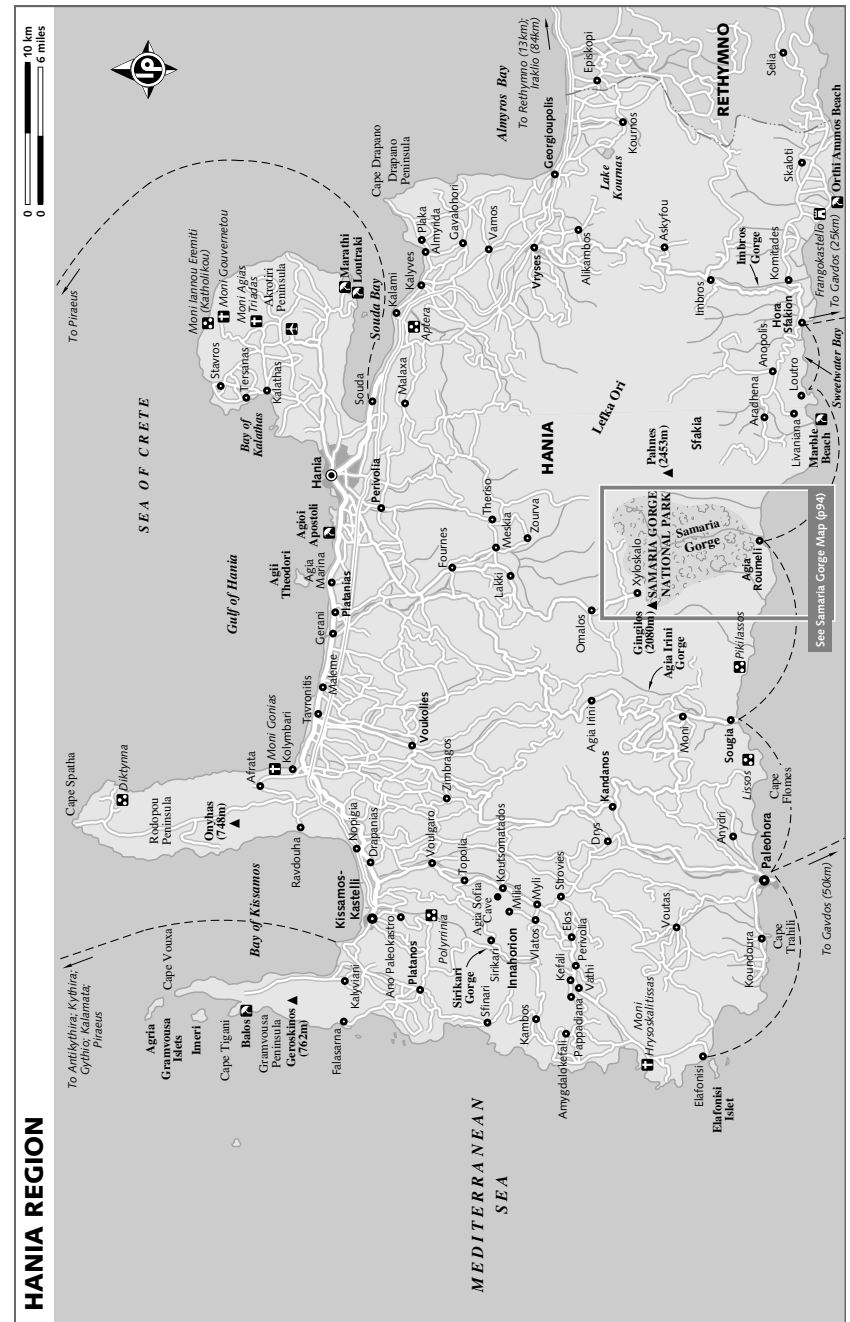
Pelekanakis (☎ 28210 92512; Halidon 98) Has maps, guidebooks and books in 11 languages.

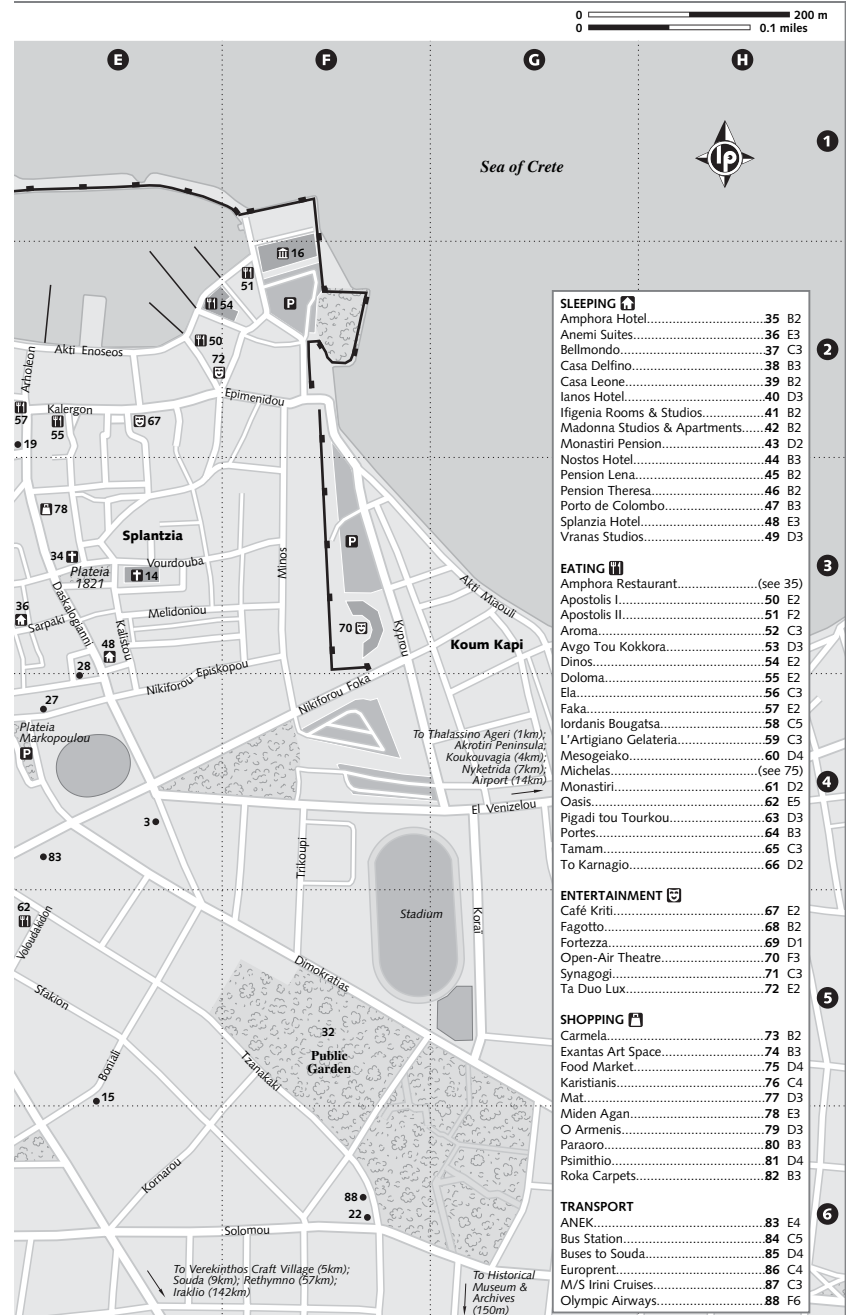
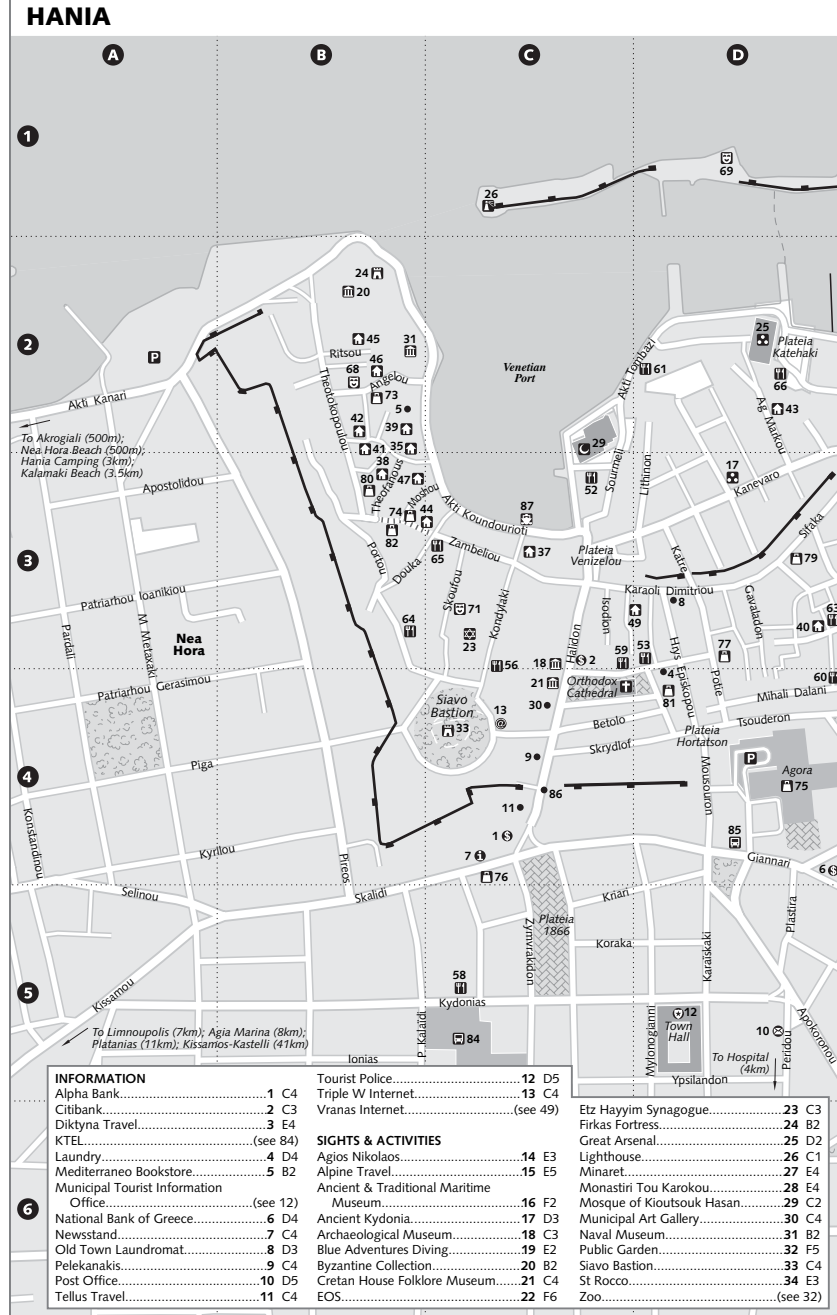
Emergency

Tourist police (☎ 28210 73333; Kydonias 29; ☎ 8am-2.30pm) At the Town Hall.

Internet Access

Triple W (☎ 28210 93478; Valadinou & Halidon; per hr €2; ☎ 24hr) Extensive facilities & high speed access.





Vranas Internet (☎ 28210 58618; Agion Deki 10; per hr €2; ☎ 9.30am-1am) Full set up & air-con.

Internet Resources

www.chania.gr The Municipality of Hania's website is worth a look for information on the city and cultural events.
www.chania-guide.gr Good information on the Hania city and prefecture.

Laundry

Laundry (☎ 28210 57602; Agion Deki 18; wash & dry €6) Self service or drop off available.

Old Town Laundromat (☎ 28210 59414; Karaoli & Dimitriou 38; wash & dry €7; ☎ 9am-2pm & 6-9pm Mon-Sat) Also does dry cleaning.

Left Luggage

KTEL (☎ 28210 93052; Kydonias 73-77; per day €1.50) At the bus station.

Medical Services

Hania Hospital (☎ 28210 22000; Mourmies) Located south of town.

Money

Most banks are in the new city, but there are a few ATMs in the Old Town on Halidon, including **Alpha Bank** (cnr Halidon & Skalidi) and Citi-bank. There are numerous places to change money outside banking hours. **National Bank of Greece** (cnr Tzanakaki & Giannari) has a 24-hour exchange machine.

Post

Post Office (☎ 28210 28445; Peridou 10; ☎ 7.30am-8pm Mon-Fri, 7.30am-2pm Sat)

Tourist Information

Municipal Tourist Information Office (☎ 28210 36155; tourism@chania.gr; Kydonias 29; ☎ 8am-2.30pm) Located at the Town Hall, it provides helpful practical information and maps. The info booth behind the mosque in Old Harbour also tends to be manned between noon and 2pm.

Travel Agencies

Diktyнна Travel (☎ 28210 41458; www.diktyнна-travel.gr; Arhontaki 6) Organises a range of cultural and ecotourism activities, including cooking classes.

Tellus Travel (☎ 28210 91500; Halidon 108; www.tellus-travel.gr; ☎ 8am-11pm) Rents cars, changes money, arranges air and boat tickets, accommodation and excursions.

SIGHTS

The massive fortifications built by the Venetians to protect their city remain impressive.

The best-preserved section is the western wall, running from the **Firkas Fortress** to the **Sivao Bastion**. It was part of a defensive system begun in 1538 by engineer Michele Sanmichele, who also designed Iraklio's defences. Entrance to the fortress is via the gates next to the Naval Museum. From the top of the bastion you can enjoy some fine views of the old town.

The Venetian **lighthouse** at the entrance to the harbour has been restored, though the new lighting along the sea wall could have been more subtle. It's a pleasant 1.5km walk around the sea wall to get there, especially in the early evening (you can cheat by taking the barge from the Fortezza café).

On the eastern side of the inner harbour you will see the prominent **Mosque of Kioutsouk Hasan** (also known as the Mosque of Janissaries), which has been restored and houses regular exhibitions.

Hania's **Archaeological Museum** (☎ 28210 90334; Halidon 30; admission €2; incl Byzantine Collection €3; ☎ 8.30am-3pm Tue-Sun; closes 7.30pm in summer but check) is housed in the superb 16th-century Venetian Church of San Francisco that became a mosque under the Turks, a movie theatre in 1913 and a munitions depot for the Germans during WWII. The museum houses a well-displayed collection of finds from western Crete dating from the Neolithic to the Roman eras. Artefacts from 3400 BC to 1200 BC, to the left as you enter the museum, include tablets with Linear A script (see p47). There is some exquisite pottery from the Geometric era (1200-800 BC) and a case of bull figurines. Among the Hellenistic and Roman exhibits, the statue of Diana is particularly impressive. There is a marble fountain in the pretty courtyard decorated with lions' heads from the Venetian period, while the Turkish fountain is a relic from the building's days as a mosque.

The **Naval Museum** (☎ 28210 91875; Akti Koundourioti; admission €3; ☎ 9am-4pm May-Sep) has an interesting collection of model ships dating from the Bronze Age, and naval instruments, paintings, photographs and memorabilia from the Battle of Crete. It is housed in the Firkas Fortress, once the old Turkish prison. An authentic replica of a Minoan ship, which sailed from Crete to Athens as part of the Athens 2004 Olympics ceremonies, will be the star attraction of the museum's new **Ancient and Traditional Maritime Museum** annexe in the Venetian ship sheds being created at the far end of the harbour.

The **Byzantine and Post Byzantine Collection of Hania** (☎ 28210 96046; Theotokopoulou; admission €2, incl Archaeological Museum €3; ☎ 8.30am-3pm Tue-Sun) is in the impressively restored Church of San Salvatore. It has a small but fascinating collection of artefacts, icons, jewellery and coins, including a fine segment of a mosaic floor for an early Christian basilica and a prized icon of St George slaying the dragon. The building has a mixed bag of interesting architectural features from its various occupiers.

Hania's interesting **Creten House Folklore Museum** (☎ 28210 90816; Halidon 46; admission €2; ☎ 9.30am-3pm & 6-9pm) contains a selection of crafts and implements including weavings with traditional designs.

The **Historical Museum and Archives** (☎ 28210 52606; Sfakianaki 20; admission free; ☎ 9am-1pm Mon-Fri), southeast of the old quarter, traces Crete's war-torn history with a series of exhibits focusing on the struggle against the Turks. There are also exhibits relating to the German occupation and a folklore collection.

The stunningly restored **Great Arsenal** (☎ 28210 40101; www.kam-arsenali.gr; Plateia Katehaki) is now home to the Centre for Mediterranean Architecture, which hosts regular events and exhibitions.

The restored **Etz Hayyim Synagogue** (Parodos Kondylaki; ☎ 28210 86286; www.etz-hayyim-hania.org; ☎ 10am-8pm Tue-Fri, 5-8pm Sun, 10am-3pm & 5-8pm Mon) has a moving memorial to the Jews of Hania who were annihilated by the Nazis.

Hania's three-level **Municipal Art Gallery** (☎ 28210 92294; www.pinakothiki-kania.gr; Halidon 98; admission €2, free Wed; ☎ 10am-2pm & 7-10pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat) hosts exhibitions of modern Greek art.

You can escape the crowds of the Venetian quarter by taking a stroll around the Turkish **Splantzia quarter** – a delightful tangle of narrow streets and squares that is being rejuvenated and cut off to traffic. It is attracting new boutique hotels, galleries and artistic or alternative pursuits. Along Daliani, you will see one of Hania's two remaining **minarets** and pass the restored 16th-century **Monastiri Tou Karolou** (☎ 28210 50172; Daliani 22; ☎ 11am-late; closed Sun). Apart from the pleasant courtyard café, which hosts occasional live music and cultural events, the old monastery is now the home, atelier and hairdressing salon of Hania's famous formerly Paris-based celebrity hairdresser-cum-sculptor Karolos Kambelopoulos.

Hania's other remaining minaret is attached to the charmingly schizophrenic **Agios Nikolaos** formerly part of a Dominican priory, which has a belltower on the other side. Nearby you can see the restored Venetian church of **San Rocco**.

You can see excavation works at the site of **Ancient Kydonia**, to the east of the old harbour at the junction of Kanevaro and Kandaloneou.

Hania's magnificent covered **Agora** (Municipal Market; see p85) has some excellent eateries and is a worth a visit even if you don't want to shop. Sadly, the central bastion of the city wall was demolished to make way for this fine 1911 cruciform creation, modelled after the market in Marseilles.

ACTIVITIES

Hiking, Climbing & Biking

Trekking Plan (☎ 28210 60861; www.cycling.gr; Agia Marina) In Agia Marina, 8km southwest of the old town, Trekking Plan offers hikes to the Agia Irini and Imbros gorges, and climbs of Mt Gingilos, as well as canyoning, rappelling, rock-climbing and kayaking and mountain-bike tours.

Alpine Travel (☎ 28210 50939; 6932 252 890; www.alpine.gr; Boniali 11-19) Organises a range of ecotourism, mountaineering and hiking programmes.

EOS (☎ 28210 44647; www.eoshanion.gr; Tzanakaki 90; ☎ 8.30am-10pm) The Hania branch of the Greek Mountaineering Association has information about serious climbing in the Lefka Ori, mountain refuges and the E4 trail, and runs regular weekend excursions.

Hellas Bike Tours (☎ 28210 60858; www.hellasbike.net; Agia Marina) In Agia Marina, this group rents out bikes and leads half and full-day bike tours around the region.

Nature Maniacs (☎ 28250 91017; www.naturmaniacs.com; Platania) Specialises in nature, adventure and cultural travel programmes as well as a sea kayaking on the south coast around Loutro.

Diving

Blue Adventures Diving (☎ 28210 40608; www.blueadventuresdiving.gr; Arholeon 11) This outfit offers a PADI certification course (€370) and daily diving trips around Hania (two dives €75), including beginner dives. There are also snorkelling trips and cruise options if you just want to go along for the ride.

Swimming

The town beach at **Nea Hora** is crowded but generally clean if you need to cool off and get

some rays. For better swimming, keep heading west and you'll come to the beaches (in order) of **Agioi Apostoli**, **Hrysi Akti** and **Kalamaki** (about 3.5km). There are regular local buses heading there and all the way to Platánias and beyond.

HANIA FOR CHILDREN

If your five-year-old has lost interest in Venetian architecture, head to the **public garden** between Tzanakaki and Dimokratias, where there's a playground, a small **zoo** with two resident kri-kri (Cretan goat) and a shady café. Eight kilometres south of town the giant water park **Limnopolis** (☎ 28210 33246; Varypetro; day pass adult/child 6-12 €17/12, afternoon pass €12/9; ☎ 10am-7pm) has enough slides and rides to keep kids amused and cafés and pool bars for adults. Buses leave regularly from the KTEL bus station (€1.60).

TOURS

Boat excursions from the harbour take you to the nearby islands of Agii Theodoroi and Lazaretto and the Gulf of Hania. The **M/S Irini** (☎ 28210 52001; cruises €15; sunset cruises €8, children under 7 free) runs daily cruises on a lovely 1930s cruiser, including free snorkelling gear, and sunset cruises with complimentary fruit and raki.

The **F/B Alexandros** (☎ 28210 71514) runs daily cruises around Souda Gulf that stop at caves and beaches.

Several operators offer really short half-hour or one-hour cruises or rides on murky glass bottomed boats, but they are hardly worth it.

Sheffield-born photographer **Steve Outram** (☎ 28210 32201; www.steveoutram.com) runs photography tours twice a year for both amateur shutterbugs and more seasoned photographers.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

In summer, the municipality hosts cultural events around the city, including the public gardens and the **open-air theatre** (www.chania.gr) on the outskirts of the city walls (on Kyprou), which has regular music and theatrical performances.

Hania commemorates the **Battle of Crete anniversary** with athletics competitions, folk dancing and ceremonial events during the last week of May.

SLEEPING

Hania's Venetian quarter is brimming with chic boutique hotels and family-run atmos-

pheric *pensions* in restored Venetian buildings. Most hotels are open year-round. Keep in mind many of the older and boutique hotels have no lift. The western end of the harbour and along Zambeliou is a good place to look, but it can be noisy at night, especially along the harbour – the price you pay for a view. There are cheaper rooms around the Splantzia quarter, where some reasonably priced boutique hotels have recently opened. Hotel complexes with pools can be found at Nea Hora and along the beach running west to Platánias and beyond.

Budget

Hania Camping (☎ 28210 31138; www.camping-kania.gr; Agii Apostoli; caravan/tent €7/4; 🚰) The nearest camp site is 3km west of town on the beach. The site is shaded and has a restaurant, bar and mini-market and pool. You can also rent a tent (€10). Buses heading west (every 15 minutes) from the southeast corner of Plateia 1866 can let you off at the camp site.

Pension Lena (☎ 28210 86860; lenachania@hotmail.com; Ritsou 5; s/d €35/55; 🚰) Lena's is a friendly, cosy *pension* in an old Turkish building where you can help yourself to a room if the owner is not there. It has an old-world feel and a scattering of antiques, though the front rooms are the most appealing. Originally from Hamburg, Lena makes guests feel welcome.

Ifigenia Rooms & Studios (☎ 28210 94357; www.ifigeniastudios.gr; Gamba 23 & Parodos Agelou; studio €35-140; 🚰) This network of refurbished houses around the Venetian port offers anything from simple rooms to fancy suites with kitchenettes, Jacuzzis and views. Some bathrooms are very basic, the faux old-world décor a little contrived and the renovations not always sympathetic.

ourpick Pension Theresa (☎/fax 28210 92798; Angelou 2; r €40-50; 🚰) This creaky old house with a steep spiral staircase and antique furniture is the most atmospheric *pension* in Hania. It attracts many artists and writers, and is often full. Some rooms have a view, but there's always the stunning vista from the rooftop terrace where you can use the communal kitchen. The rooms are spotless and all have TV, air-con and lofts with an extra bed for small families, though some are on the tight side and the ambience comes at a premium.

Monastiri Pension (☎/fax 28210 41032; Agiou Markou 18 & Kanevarou; d & tr €40-55; 🚰) The stone arched entry and antique family furniture in the communal area give this older-style budget place a certain charm. Bathrooms are basic but rooms have a fridge and some have a TV. The front rooms have balconies with lovely views.

Midrange

Vranas Studios (☎ 28210 58618; www.vranas.gr; Agion Deka 10; studio €40-70; 🚰) This place is on a lively pedestrian street and has spacious, immaculately maintained studios with kitchenettes. All rooms have polished wooden floors, balconies, TVs and telephones. There's a handy internet café attached.

ourpick Madonna Studios & Apartments (☎ 28210 94747; madonnastudios@yahoo.co.uk; Gamba 33; studio €70-110; 🚰) This charming small hotel has five attractive and well-appointed studios around a lovely flower-filled courtyard. They are furnished in traditional style and the front top room has a superb balcony, while the courtyard room has the original stone wash trough.

Nostos Hotel (☎ 28210 94743; www.nostos-hotel.com; Zambeliou 42-46; s/d/tr incl breakfast €60/80/120; 🚰) Mixing Venetian style and modern fixtures, this 600-year-old building has been remodelled into classy split-level accommodation, with kitchen, fridge, phone and TV. It also has a roof garden. Try to get a balcony room with harbour views.

Porto de Colombo (☎ 28210 70945; colompo@otenet.gr; Theofanos & Moshon; d/ste incl breakfast €84/103; 🚰) Once the French embassy and office of Eleftherios Venizelos, this Venetian townhouse is now a charming boutique hotel with 10 lovely, well-appointed rooms; the top suites have fine harbour views.

Bellmondo (☎ 28210 36216; www.belmondohotel.com; Zambeliou 10; d/ste incl breakfast €90/110; 🚰) This classy hotel has harbour views and a formal feel, with iron beds and traditional furnishings. It has Turkish and Venetian features, including part of an old *hammam* (Turkish bath) in one room. Children up to 12 stay free. The nicer rooms have balconies (€99).

Anemi Suites (☎ 28210 53001; www.anemisuites.gr; Sarpaki 41; s/d/tr €70/82/105; 🚰) A restored Venetian-Turkish building in the quiet Splantzia quarter has been turned into four comfortable suites.

Ionas Hotel (☎ 28210 55090; www.ionashotel.gr; Sarpaki & Sorvolou; d €50-80, ste €120; 🚰) This is one of

the new breed of boutique hotels in the quiet Splantzia quarter. The historic building has a contemporary design and fit-out and the nine rooms with all the mod-cons and a small terrace on the roof. The price includes a buffet breakfast.

Splantzia Hotel (☎ 28210 45313; www.splantzia.com; Daskalogianni 20; d €100 incl buffet breakfast 🚰) This smart new designer hotel in an Ottoman building has eight stylish rooms, some decorated with four-poster timber beds and drapery. The back rooms overlook a lovely courtyard.

Top End

ourpick Amphora Hotel (☎ 28210 93224; www.amphora.gr; Parodos Theotokopoulou 20; d with view €120, ste €145; 🚰) This historically evocative hotel is in an immaculately restored and kept Venetian mansion with rooms around a courtyard and in a second connected wing. The rooms are elegantly decorated and the top rooms have air-con and views of the harbour. The front rooms can be noisy in the summer and there are cheaper rooms without a view. Breakfast is €10.

ourpick Casa Leone (☎ 28210 76762; www.casa-leone.com; Parodos Theotokopoulou 18; s & d incl breakfast €120-150; 🚰) This Venetian residence has been converted into a classy and romantic boutique hotel. The rooms are spacious and well appointed, with balconies overlooking the harbour. There are honeymoon suites, the usual mod cons and extras such as hairdryers.

Casa Delfino (☎ 28210 93098; www.casadelfino.com; Theofanos 7; ste & apt incl buffet breakfast €186-316; 🚰) This elegant 17th-century mansion is the most luxurious hotel in the Old Town. There are 22 individually decorated and well-appointed suites, including a palatial, split-level apartment with a Jacuzzi. The apartment sleeps up to four people. Breakfast is in the splendid pebble-mosaic courtyard.

EATING

Hania has some of the finest restaurants in Crete, some housed in roofless Venetian ruins. Unfortunately, most of the prime-position waterfront tavernas are generally mediocre, often overpriced and fronted by annoying touts, so head for the back streets.

Budget

Hania's famous covered **Agora** (Municipal Market; ☎ Mon, Wed & Sat 8.30am-2pm, Tue, Thu & Fri 8.30am-1.30pm

& 6-9pm) is a good-value place for self-caterers to stock up on supplies, as well as stop for lunch.

Michelas (☎ 28210 90026; mains €5-7; 🍷 10am-4pm Mon-Sat) Near the meat section of the food market, this place has been serving great fresh, and cheap traditional cuisine for 75 years.

Iordanis Bougatsa (☎ 28210 900261 Kydonias 96; bougatsa €2.50) Continuing the business started by his great-grandfather in 1924, Iordanis churns out endless trays of delicious creamy *bougatsa* (filo pastry filled with *myzithra* cheese sprinkled with a little icing sugar). It's opposite the bus station.

Doloma (☎ 28210 51196; Kalergon 8; mayirefta €4.50-6; 🍷 Mon-Sat) This unpretentious restaurant tucked behind the harbour is half-hidden amid the vines and foliage surrounding the outdoor terrace. The traditional cooking is faultless. Pick from the various trays of *mayirefta* (casseroles and bakes) cooked daily.

L'Artigiano Gelateria (☎ 28210 53612; Athinagora Plateia) There is almost always a queue for this delightful home-made Italian gelati.

There are plenty of snack food and souvlaki places on Halidon, but locals swear by the undeniably tasty souvlaki at the tiny old-style **Oasis** (Vouloudakidon 2; 🍷 Mon-Sat; shopping hr only; souvlaki €2).

For breakfast, sandwiches and lighter meals you can try the popular **Aroma** (☎ 28210 41812; Akti Tombazi 4) next to the mosque or **Avgo Tou Kokkora** (☎ 28210 55776; Ag 10 & Sarpaki) behind the cathedral.

Midrange

Our pick Portes (☎ 28210 76261; Portou 48; mains €6-8.50) Affable Susanna from Limerick cooks up Cretan treats with a difference at this superb restaurant in a quiet street in the Old Town. Try her divine marinated *gavros* (little fish), stuffed fish baked in paper, tasty meatballs with leek and tomato, or pretty much anything from the specials board.

To Karnagio (☎ 28210 53366; Plateia Katehaki 8; Cretan specials €5-10.50) This is a popular place with outdoor tables near the Great Arsenal. There is a good range of seafood (try the grilled cuttlefish) and classic Cretan dishes, plus a fine wine list.

Tamam (☎ 28210 96080; Zambeliou 49; mains €5.50-8.50) Housed in an old *hammam*, Tamam presents a superb selection of vegetarian specialities – try the spicy avocado dip on potato (€6) – and inspired dishes such as the Tas

kebab veal with spices and yogurt or the Beyendi chicken with creamy aubergine purée.

Our pick Thalassino Ageri (☎ 28210 51136; Vivilaki 35; top fish €55 per kg; 🍷 dinner) It can be tricky to find, but this solitary fish taverna in a tiny port among the ruins of Hania's old tanneries is one of the most delightful eateries in Crete. Apart from the superb setting they have fresh fish and excellent mezedes such as tender octopus in wine vinegar and melt-in-your-mouth calamari as well as a delicious fisherman's salad. Take a taxi or follow Venizelou around the coast turning left at Noel St as soon as you veer away from the coast.

Mesogeiako (☎ 28210 59772; Daliani 36; mezedes €3.20-5.60) This promising newcomer near the minaret in the revitalised Spantzia quarter is a trendy *mezedopoleio* serving an array of classic and more creative dishes. Try the pork meatballs and their excellent raki.

Monastiri (☎ 28210 55527; Akti Tombazi; mains €7.20-13.90) One of the few waterfront restaurants that gets the general thumbs up from discerning local and international diners, Monastiri, on the eastern side of the harbour, dishes up well-executed Cretan fare.

Faka (☎ 28210 42341; Plateia Katehaki; mains €6.20-12.90) This is another of those quiet, unassuming places that doesn't dish up bland fare. The cuisine is solid and genuine. Good local choices include artichokes and broad beans. There's a children's menu and small playpen.

Pigadi tou Tourkou (☎ 28210 54547; Sarpaki 1-3; mains €10-14.50; 🍷 dinner, closed Mon-Tue) Features from this former *hammam*, including the well it's named after (Well of the Turk), are incorporated into the cosy design of this popular restaurant, which has dishes inspired by Crete, Morocco and the Middle East. The service can, however, be indifferent and prices have crept up.

Ela (☎ 28210 74128; Kondylaki 47; mains €6.50-18; 🍷 noon-1am) This 14th-century building was a soap factory, then a school, distillery and cheese-processing plant. Now Ela serves up a decent array of Cretan specialities, such as goat with artichokes, while musicians create a lively ambience. The tacky board outside tells you it's in every guidebook but the accolades are not undeserved.

Also recommended are the excellent Amphora Restaurant, on the port below the hotel and **Dinos** (☎ 28210 41865; Akti Enosis 3), in the cluster of fish tavernas at the far end of the harbour.

Top End

Akrogiali (☎ 28210 71110; Akti Papanikoli 20, Nea Hora; 🍷 dinner only) One of the best seafood restaurants in Hania, Akrogiali is on the beach side of the new town. The fish is fresh and the accompaniments are superb. The airy restaurant opens onto the seafront giving you a great view of the sunset.

Apostolis I & II (☎ 28210 43470; Akti Enoseo; fish per kg up to €55) In the quieter eastern harbour, this is a well-respected place for fresh fish and Cretan dishes in two separate buildings. Apostolis II is the more popular as the owner reigns there, but the other store has the same menu at marginally cheaper prices. A seafood platter for two, including salad, is €30. Service is friendly and efficient, and there's a good wine list and harbour setting.

Nykterida (☎ 28210 64215; Korakies, on airport road) This highly regarded establishment just outside town has been around since 1933 and was converted to the German club during WWII. It has been graced over the years by the likes of Churchill, Melina Mercouri, Andreas Papandreu and Anthony Quinn (who the owner's father taught how to dance for his role in *Zorba the Greek*).

ENTERTAINMENT

The harbour's lively and prominent waterfront bars and clubs around the mosque are mostly patronised by tourists, while the row of clubs along Sourmeli are frequented by American soldiers from the nearby bases. There are some lively bars in the streets of the Old Town.

Synagogi (☎ 28210 96797; Skoufou 15) Housed in a roofless Venetian building that was once a synagogue, this popular lounge bar is the favourite haunt of young locals.

Fagotto (☎ 28210 71877; Angelou 16; 🍷 7pm-2am Jul-May) A Hania institution housed in a restored Venetian building, Fagotto offers the smooth sounds of jazz and light rock and blues. Jazz paraphernalia includes a saxophone beer tap.

Café Kriti (☎ 28210 58661; Kalergon 22; 🍷 8pm-late) Also known as Lyrakia, this rough-and-ready joint, with a decorative scheme that relies on saws, pots, ancient sewing machines and animal heads, is the place to hear live Cretan music.

Fortezza (☎ 28210 46546) This café, bar and restaurant, installed in the old Venetian ramparts across the harbour, is the best place in

town for a sunset drink. A free barge takes you across the water, from the bottom of Sarpidona to the sea wall wrapping around the harbour.

Further along the harbour, the arty café-bar **Ta Duo Lux** (☎ 28210 52519; Sarpidona 8; 🍷 10am-late) remains a perennial favourite hangout for a younger alternative crowds and is popular day and night. Along this strip you will also find Bolero and Hippopotamos.

Serious party animals head to the flashy clubs in Platánias and Agia Marina, 11km west of Hania.

Koukouvagia (☎ 28210 27449; Venizelos Graves) If you have wheels then take a 10-minute drive up the hill to where the great statesman Eleftherios Venizelos is buried. The owl-themed café and bar (with an extraordinary owl décor collection) enjoys panoramic views of Hania. It's a cool place to hang on summer's nights. The pitta creations are excellent, as are the large selection of cakes and desserts.

SHOPPING

Hania offers the best combination of souvenier hunting and shopping for crafts on the island. The best shops are scattered through the back streets of the old town and around Theotokopoulou. Skrydlof is 'leather lane,' known as the 'Stivaniadika' because this was where you would pick up a pair of Cretan boots. You can still find them, but most of the goods on sale are handmade sandals, belts and bags. On Sifaka you will find the 'Machairadika', stores selling traditional Cretan knives.

There's an outdoor *laiki* (street market) Saturday mornings from 7am to 2pm on Minoos and another market on the waterfront west of the Firkas fortress on Thursdays.

Most stores in the old town tend to stay open until at least 11pm, while the new town shopping district keeps regular shop hours (see p210).

Exantas Art Space (☎ 28210 95920; Zambeliou & Moschon; 🍷 10am-2pm & 6pm-11pm) This classy store has great postcards with old photos, lithographs and engravings, handmade gifts, Cretan music as well as a good range of travel, coffee table and art books.

O Armenis (☎ 28210 54434; Sifaka 29) Owner Apostolos Pahtikos has been making traditional Cretan knives since he was 13 and has passed on the trade to his son. You can watch them work as they match the blades to carefully

carved handles at the workshop (Sifaka 14). A kitchen knife costs €15.

Carmela (☎ 28210 90487; Angelou 7) This exquisite store has a tempting array of original jewellery designs with stones collected on their travels, as well as Carmela's unique ceramics using ancient techniques. They also have jewellery and ceramics by leading Greek artists.

Mat (☎ 28210 42217; Potie 51) A hobby that turned into an obsession for the late national chess champion Athanasios Diamantopoulos has put this tiny shop on the world map for chess enthusiasts. His wife continues to sell a large range of his original chess piece designs (from €60 to €1000), including the popular 'Athenians'.

Miden Agan (☎ 28210 27068; www.midenaganshop.gr; Daskalogianni 70; ☎ 10am-3.30 Mon & Wed, 10am-2.15 & 6.15-10pm Tue & Thu-Sat) Foodies and wine lovers will be delighted with the range at this excellent shop, which stocks over 800 Greek wines, as well as its own wine and liquors. There's a variety of beautifully packaged local traditional gourmet deli foods, including oil and honey and their own line of spoon sweets (try the white pumpkin).

Paraoro (☎ 28210 88990; Theotokopoulou 16) Stamatias Fasoularis' distinctive series of metal boats are functional as well as decorative, such as his nifty steamship oil burner. The workshop also has unique ceramics by artist Yiorgos Vavatsis, including his trademark skewed drink ware. Their bigger gallery pieces are exhibited upstairs.

Roka Carpets (☎ 28210 74736; Zambeliou 61) This is one of the few places in Crete where you can buy genuine, hand-woven goods. You can watch the charming Mihalis Manousakis and his wife weave his wondrous rugs on a 400-year-old loom, using methods that have remained essentially unchanged since Minoan times.

Psimithio (☎ 28210 54606; Theotokopoulou 50) This small jewellery workshop just behind the cathedral has some interesting original designs in silver.

Karistianis (☎ 28210 93573; Skalidi 9-11) For outdoor clothing and hiking shoes to tackle gorges you could try this place or their hard core army supply store across the road for camping and climbing gear.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

Hania's airport (CHQ; ☎ 28210 83800) is 14km east of town on the Akrotiri Peninsula.

Aegean Airlines (☎ 28210 63366; www.aegeanair.com) Four daily flights to Athens (€76-123) and one to Thessaloniki (€125-135).

Olympic Airlines (☎ 28210 58005; www.olympicairlines.com; Tzanakaki 88) Five daily flights to/from Athens (€76-106). Also four flights per week to/from Thessaloniki (€126-136).

Sky Express (☎ 28210 223 500; www.skyexpress.gr) Daily flights from Hania to Rhodes on 18-seater planes (from €104, one hour).

Boat

Hania's main port is at Souda, about 7km southeast of town. There are frequent buses to Hania (€1.15), as well as taxis (€7). The **Port Police** (☎ 28210 89240) can provide ferry information.

ANEK (☎ 28210 27500; www.anek.gr; Plateia Sofokli Venizelou) Has a daily boat at 9pm from Piraeus to Hania (€30, nine hours) and at 8pm from Hania to Piraeus. In July and August there is also a morning ferry from Piraeus (€30).

Hellenic Seaways (☎ 28210 75444; www.hellenic-seaways.gr; Plateia 1866 14) Has a high-speed catamaran service from Piraeus that take only 4½ hours (€53). It's a better option for getting to Hania as it arrives at 8.30pm, but the flight from Hania gets you to Athens rather inconveniently at 2am.

Bus

In summer, buses depart from Hania's **bus station** (☎ 28210 93052) during the week for the following destinations:

Destination	Duration	Fare (€)	Frequency
Elafonisi	2½hr	9.60	1 daily
Falasarua	1½hr	6.50	3 daily
Hora Sfakion	1hr 40min	6.50	3 daily
Iraklio	2¾hr	10.70	half-hourly
Kissamos-Kastelli	1hr	4	13 daily
Kolymbari	45min	2.80	half-hourly
Lakki	1¾hr	2.60	2 daily
Moni Agias Triadas	30min	2	2 daily
Omalos (for Samaria Gorge)	1hr	5.90	3 daily
Paleohora	1hr 50min	6.50	4 daily
Rethymno	1hr	6	half-hourly
Sougia	1hr 50min	6.10	2 daily
Stavros	30min	1.80	3 daily

Check with the bus station for off-peak services.

GETTING AROUND To/From the Airport

There are three buses per day to the airport (€2, 20 mins) from the bus station. A taxi to the airport will cost about €18.

Bus

Local **blue buses** (☎ 28210 27044) meet the ferries at the port of Souda, just near the dock. In Hania, the bus to Souda (€1.15) leaves from outside the food market. Buses for the western beaches leave from the main bus station on Plateia 1866 and go as far as Panormo (€2).

Car, Motorcycle & Bicycle

Most motorcycle-hire outlets are on Halidon, but the companies at Agia Marina are competitive and can bring cars to Hania. Most of the old town is pedestrian only. The best place to park is in the free parking area near the Firkas fortress (turn right off Skalidi at the sign to the big supermarket car park on Pireos and follow the road down to the waterfront). Some of the new town streets have paid street parking so check for signs.

Eurorent (☎ 28210 27810; Halidon 87)

Tellus Travel (☎ 28210 91500; www.tellustravel.gr; Halidon 108)

AKROTIRI PENINSULA & SOUDA BAY

AKROTIRI PENINSULA ΧΕΡΣΟΝΗΣΟΣ ΑΚΡΩΤΗΡΙ

The Akrotiri (ak-roh-tee-ree) Peninsula, to the northeast of Hania, is a barren, hilly stretch of rock covered with scrub. It has a few coastal resorts, Hania's airport, a massive NATO naval base on Souda Bay and a two interesting monasteries. There are few buses and the poorly signposted roads can make it a difficult region to explore, but if you have a car it makes an interesting day trip where you can combine a swim and lunch with a visit to the monasteries. If you want to stay at the beach instead of Hania town, Kalathas and Stavros are a much quieter alternative to the resort strip west of town. The beach settlement of **Kalathas**, 10km north of Hania, has two sandy beaches lined by pine trees. It is the preferred weekend haunt of Haniots, many of whom own summer and weekend houses nearby.

Three kilometres north of Kalathas is the small beach settlement of **Tersanas**, signposted off the main Kalathas-Stavros road.

The village of **Stavros**, 6km north of Kalathas, is little more than a scattering of

houses and a few restaurants and hotels. The main cove is a narrow strip of sandy beach dominated by a mammoth rock shelf that served as the dramatic backdrop for the final dancing scene in the classic movie *Zorba the Greek*. It can get crowded, but the sheltered cove is your best bet on a windy day. The area around Stavros is ripe with new villa development and is also home to the fancy **Perle Resort & Health Spa** (☎ 28210 39400; www.perlespa.com).

The impressive 17th-century **Moni Agias Triadas** (☎ 28210 63310; admission €2; ☎ 8am-7pm) is a visitor-friendly monastery. It was founded by the Venetian monks Jeremiah and Laurentio Giancarolo, who were converts to the Orthodox faith. There was a religious school here in the 19th century and it is still an active monastery with an excellent library. The church is worth visiting for its altarpiece as well as its Venetian-influenced dome façade. There is a small museum and a store selling the monastery's fine wine, oil and raki.

The 16th-century **Moni Gouvernetou** (Our Lady of the Angels; ☎ 28210 63319; ☎ 9am-noon & 5-7pm Mon, Tue & Thu, Sat & Sun 5am-11am & 5-8pm), 4km north of Moni Agias Triadas, may date as far back as the 11th century from a time when an inland sanctuary was an attractive refuge from coastal pirates. The building itself is disappointingly plain, but the church inside has an ornate sculptured Venetian façade. The monastery was attacked and burnt down during the war of independence but the monks were warned and managed to save the treasures (though not themselves) and had them shipped off to Mount Athos. The monastery is now run by four monks from the holy mountain who keep a strict regime and have banned tour buses. Visitors must park in the car park before the monastery and be dressed respectfully while on the grounds (they do not provide long pants or skirts) or will be asked to leave. Swimming is not permitted in the cove below.

From Moni Gouvernetou, it's a 20-minute walk (about 30 minutes on the uphill walk back) to the path leading down to the coast to the ruins of **Moni Ioannou Erimiti** (also known as Moni Katholikou). In disuse for many centuries, the monastery is dedicated to St John the Hermit who lived in the cave behind the ruins, at the bottom of a rock staircase. Near the entrance to the cave, there's a small pond of water believed to be holy. When

St John died in the cave, his 98 disciples are said to have died with him. His skull is kept in the monastery and brought out for a special service the first Sunday of every month.

On the eastern side of the peninsula is the pleasant beach of **Marathi**, a lovely spot past the military base with two sandy coves and turquoise waters on either side of a small pier. The ruins of **Ancient Minoa** are next to the car park. Marathi gets crowded with local families at weekends and has a couple of tavernas. Further south along this coastline is another pleasant swimming and snorkelling spot at **Loutraki**.

Sleeping & Eating

Esplanade Apartments (Kalathas; ☎ 28210 69810; www.esplanadehotel.gr; studio & apt €40-85; 🚻 📺 📺) This two-storey hotel has roomy, light and breezy studios with phone, TV and well-stocked kitchenette.

Georgi's Blue Apartments (Kalathas; ☎ 28210 64080; www.blueapts.gr; studio & apt €85-130; 🚻 📺) Georgi's is a tasteful, rather upmarket complex of well furnished studios and apartments with phone, satellite TV, fridge and kitchenette. There's a pleasant communal lounge area near the pool and a private little cove where you can swim off the rocks.

Paradisio Apartments (Stavros; ☎ 28210 39737; www.paradisiohotel.com; apt €85; 🚻 📺) This is friendly family-run affair with apartments that can sleep up to five people. There's a swimming pool with a separate area for kids and the family provide guests with their own organic fruit, olive oil and honey.

Blue Beach (☎ 28210 39404; www.bluebeach-villas.com; d €50; 🚻 📺) Right on the pretty spot on the beach, Blue Beach is a low-key resort hotel that welcomes independent travellers. The rooms are comfortable and self-contained with fridge, kitchenette, TV and there is a pool. Air-con is an extra €7.

Sun Set Beach Bar (☎ 28210 39780) Right on the western beach at Stavros, this attractive bar evokes a tropical paradise, tucked under a huge tree with a shady timber deck and thatched umbrellas. It's a great spot for a drink and they also serve a range of local an international-style snacks.

Patrelantonis (☎ 28210 63337; Marathi; fish per kg €34-50) This well-regarded fish taverna by the beach under the shady tamarisk trees puts on a decent seafood spread, best en-

joyed with *horta* (wild greens) and their hand-cut potatoes.

Getting There & Away

There are six buses daily to Stavros beach (€1.80) that stop at Kalathas.

There are two buses Monday to Friday, at 6.30am and 2.15pm, to Moni Agias Triadas (€2, 40 minutes).

If you're coming by car from Hania follow signs to the airport and branch off at the turnoffs from there.

SOUDA ΣΟΥΔΑ

pop 5330

The harbour of Souda is one of Crete's largest, and is the port of entry if you come to Hania by ferry. The Venetians built a castle at the entrance of Souda Bay, which they held until 1715, even though the Turks had already seized the rest of the island. Souda is now the site of the Greek navy's main refitting station, which sees a sizeable military presence in the area.

The town of Souda, about 2km from the port, sprang up 130 years ago under Turkish rule, but little remains from that period. Today most of the activity and services – including travel agencies, banks and shops – are all clustered in the port close to the main plateia (square) near the ferry quay. Accommodation and dining opportunities are limited and you are much better off in Hania.

Gelakakis Travel (☎ 28210 89065; 🕒 8am-10.30pm), on the main plateia; changes money, handles air and boat tickets, and rents out cars.

Sleeping & Eating

Hotel Parthenon (☎ 28210 89245; El Venizelou 29; d €35; 🚻) Right across from the main plateia above a taverna, the rooms at this small hotel have a fridge and TV, if you need to spend a night in the port.

Vlachakis Brothers (☎ 28210 89219; 16 Ellis St) Over in Souda town, this simple fish taverna is widely known for its excellent seafood and its house specialty, the prawn omelette, washes down nicely with barrel wine.

Paloma (☎ 28210 89081; fish dishes €6-10) Further along from Souda on the coastal road leading to the airport, this fish taverna with classic blue chairs and chequered tablecloths is right by the sea overlooking the port. It's a pleasant walk past the cemetery.

Getting There & Away

Souda is about 9km east of Hania. There are frequent buses to Hania (€1.15) that meet the ferries. Taxis to Hania cost about €7.

GULF OF HANIA

The coastline west of Hania between the Akrotiri and Rodopou Peninsulas, which forms the Gulf of Hania, is an almost endless 13km strip of hotels, domatia, souvenir shops, travel agencies, mini-markets and restaurants. The former villages along this coast have become little more than entertainment strip malls. It's not the place to come if you're looking for a quiet, relaxing holiday, but the nightlife is good and it has all the services to cater to your needs.

The first tourist town is **Agia Marina**, 9km from Hania. While it caters primarily to package tourists, you will find a clutch of undistinguished domatia along the main road. The beach tends to be packed with lines of identical lounges and umbrellas, and the water is rather murky and uninspiring. Agia Marina is the first port of call for Hania nightclubbers.

Next along is **Platanias**, 12km from Hania and almost indistinguishable from Agia Marina. This community of midrange accommodation, fast-food grills, bars, clubs and shops along busy main strip is teeming with Scandinavians. The streets of the old town, which sprawls over a steep hill on the south side of the road, are picturesque but touristy, though

RESTING PLACE

About 1km west of Souda, is the immaculately maintained **Souda Bay War Cemetery**, where about 1500 British, Australian and New Zealand soldiers who lost their lives in the Battle of Crete are buried. Beautifully situated at the water's edge, the rows of white headstones make a moving tribute to the Commonwealth's heroic defenders of Crete. More than half of the graves are unidentified as the bodies were relocated from German burial grounds in Hania, Rethymno, Iraklio and Galatas. Buses to Souda port that depart from outside the Hania food market on Giannari can drop you off at the cemetery.

there are great views from the top. The beach, as at Agia Marina, is crowded and mediocre.

Marginally better is **Gerani** at the far end of the strip, which is generally far less crowded. Further along, **Maleme** is a quiet, relatively undeveloped coastal resort. There are a few hotels and apartments near the fine pebble beach. Up on the hill, there is a moving, well-tended **German military cemetery** overlooking the airfield where more than 3000 German paratroopers killed in the Battle of Crete are buried.

SLEEPING

Many hotels lining the beach road have been given over to tour operators or function as private clubs.

Tassos Cottages (☎ 28210 61352; tassosgerani@hotmail.com; Gerani; apt €40-50) These well-equipped one and two-bedroom apartments surrounded by pleasant gardens are halfway between the beach and the main drag. They have a TV and fans. Call in at Tasso's taverna on the main street.

Ilianthos Village Apartments (☎ 28210 60667; www.ilianthosvillage.gr; Agia Marina; d incl breakfast from €172; 🚻 📺) This large resort on a wide stretch of beach is one of the more upmarket options in Agia Marina. It has children's facilities, and is accessible to people in wheelchairs and all the mod cons.

Indigo Mare (☎ 28210 68156; www.indigomare.gr; Platanias; studio/apt incl breakfast from €90/104; 🚻 📺) This upmarket apartment complex has well-fitted-out studios and apartments sleeping up to four people, and a lovely pool overlooking the beach.

EATING

Maria's (☎ 28210 68888; Kato Stalos; mains €5-9) For a good feed try the popular Maria's, on the eastern edge of Agia Marina, which serves Cretan and Mediterranean food on a plant-filled terrace. Try the local meat pie.

our pick **Drakiana** (☎ 28210 61677; mains €6-13) It is worth the lovely hike through 3km of olive and orange groves to get to this superbly located taverna under huge plane trees on a river bank. Look for a signposted turnoff from Platanias at the Mylos tou Kerata corner (see p92). Manolis Mavromatis serves excellent Cretan cuisine including a fennel pitta, meatballs in tomato sauce and special meat dishes such as suckling pig on the spit. There are also a picnic area, barbecues and a children's playground nearby.

Aidonisos (☎ 28210 83560; Gerani; mains €10.50-13.70; dinner only) This well-regarded newcomer offers contemporary Greek-style cuisine and some excellent desserts.

Mylos tou Kerata (☎ 28210 68578; Platania; grills €8-15; ☎ dinner from 6pm) One of the best restaurants in the area, it's located in an old water mill. The ambience is pleasant, the menu and wine list extensive and there's a huge range of grilled chicken, lamb and beef fillets.

ENTERTAINMENT

Platanias and Agia Marina are lined with summer clubs whose popularity, names and décor change year to year. In Platanias, the popular clubs were **Destil**, **Utopia** and **Milos**, with top-name DJs also leading big dance events at **Oceanos** in Agia Marina.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Buses running between Hania and Kissamos-Kastelli stop in Platanias, Gerani and Agia Marina.

SFAKIA & LEFKA ORI

This region has some of the island's most spectacular sights, including the Samaria (sa-ma-ria) Gorge, the Lefka Ori Mountains and Mt Gingilos in the rugged interior. The province of Sfakia extends from the Omalos Plateau down to the southern coast and is Crete's most mountainous region.

Sfakia was the centre of resistance during the island's long centuries of domination by foreign powers, its steep ravines and hills making effective hideaways for Cretan revolutionaries. The Sfakian people are renowned for their proud fighting spirit, which even in the recent past has turned family against family in the form of murderous vendettas that have depopulated many of the region's villages (see the boxed text, p97).

Check out the website www.sfakia-crete.com for information on the region.

HANIA TO OMALOS

The road from Hania to the beginning of the Samaria Gorge is one of the most spectacular routes in Crete. After heading through orange groves to the village of **Fournes**, a left fork leads to **Mesklia**, twisting and turning along a gorge offering beautiful views. Although the bottom part of the town is not particularly attractive

with boarded-up buildings, the road becomes more scenic as it winds uphill to the modern, multicoloured **Church of the Panagia**. Next to it is a 14th-century chapel built on the foundations of a 6th-century basilica that might have been built on an even earlier Temple of Aphrodite. At the entrance to the town a sign directs you to the **Chapel of Metamorfofis Sotiros** (Transfiguration of the Saviour) that contains 14th-century frescoes. The fresco of the Transfiguration on the south wall is particularly impressive.

The main road continues to the unspoilt village of **Lakki** (*la-kee*), 24km from Hania, which affords stunning views wherever you look. The village was a centre of resistance during both the uprising against the Turks and in WWII.

Rooms for Rent Nikolas (☎ 28210 67232; Lakki; d €35) has comfortable, simple rooms above a taverna, with magnificent views over the valley.

OMALOS ΟΜΑΛΟΣ

pop 30

Most tourists only hurry through Omalos, 36km south of Hania, on their way to the Samaria Gorge, but this plateau settlement deserves more of your time. During summer, the air is bracingly cool here compared with the steamy coast and there are some great mountain walks in the area. After the morning Samaria rush, there's hardly anyone on the plateau except goats and shepherds.

Omalos is little more than a few hotels on either side of the main road cutting through the plateau. The village is practically deserted in the winter. The town is about 4km before the entrance to the Samaria Gorge.

Sleeping & Eating

Generally, Omalos hotels are open when the Samaria Gorge is open, although winter tourism is evolving. Most hotels have restaurants that do a bustling trade serving breakfast to hikers and are open at meal times the rest of the day. Most will drive you to the start of the gorge.

Hotel Neos Omalos (☎ 28210 67269; www.neos-omaos.gr; s/d €20/30) has comfortable, modern, nicely decorated rooms which include phone, bath, with shower curtain and satellite TV. There's a pleasant lounge in the reception area.

Elliniko (☎ 28210 67169; s/d/tr €20/25/35) This is the nearest to the Samaria Gorge and has

DETOUR: THERISO

For a day trip or an alternative route to Omalos, you can take the scenic road to Theriso, 14km from Hania, via the village of Perivolia. This spectacular drive follows a running stream through a green oasis and the 6km Theriso Gorge. At the foot of the Lefka Ori Mountains, at 500m above sea level, the village was the site of historical battles against the Turks. These days it is popular for its fine tavernas that host marathon Sunday lunches.

Two tavernas vie for top billing. **O Leventis** (☎ 28210 77102) has a lovely courtyard under a giant canopy of plane trees and makes a delicious and sizeable *kreatotourta* (local meat pie), while **O Antartis** (☎ 28210 78943) also has excellent mezedes and Cretan food.

Just past the village on your right, there is a small **Museum of National Resistance** with an eerie monument outside paying tribute to a female resistance fighter. The old millstone was used by Turkish occupiers in 1821 to crush Chrysi Tripiti to death in the local olive press.

A steep and winding road takes you through rugged mountain terrain and around an ever-changing landscape of plane trees, olive, orange, eucalypt and pine through the villages of **Zourva** and **Mesklia** to **Lakki**, where you can continue to Omalos or head back to Hania.

simple double rooms with TV, although they are a little cramped. There is also an attached restaurant that is often busy with tour buses during lunch.

Hotel Exari (☎ 28210 67180; www.exari.gr; s/d €20/30) This big stone-built hotel has pleasant, well-furnished rooms with TV, bathtub and balconies. The owner Yiorgos can deliver luggage to Sougia for groups. There is an attached taverna.

You could also try the friendly **Hotel Gingilos** (☎ 28210 67181; s/d/tr €20/25/35).

Located in the hills between Omalos and the Samaria Gorge, **Kallergi Hut** (☎ 28210 33199; dm without bathroom members/nonmembers €10/13) is maintained by the Hania EOS and makes a good base for exploring Mt Gingilos and surrounding peaks, though it is a hike to get there.

Getting There & Away

There are three daily buses to Omalos from Hania (one hour, €5.90). If want to hike the gorge and return to your room (and luggage) in Omalos, you can take the afternoon boat from Agia Roumeli to Sougia and get a taxi back to Omalos for about €35.

SAMARIA GORGE ΦΑΡΑΓΓΙ ΤΗΣ ΣΑΜΑΡΙΑΣ

Hiking through the **Samaria Gorge** (☎ 28210 67179; admission €5; ☎ 6am-3pm 1 May-mid-Oct) is one of the 'must-dos' of Crete and attracts both serious hikers and people for whom it is clearly a one-off experience. Despite the crowds – more than 170,000 people walk the gorge each year – a hike through this

stupendous gorge is still an experience to remember.

At 16km, the Samaria (sah-mah-rih-ah) Gorge is supposedly the longest in Europe. It begins just below the Omalos Plateau, carved out by the river that flows between the peaks of Mts Avlimaniko (1858m) and Volakias (2115m). Its width varies from 150m to 3m and its vertical walls reach 500m at their highest points. The gorge has an incredible number of wild flowers, which are at their best in April and May.

It is also home to a large number of endangered species, including the Cretan wild goat, the kri-kri. The gorge was made a national park in 1962 to save the kri-kri from extinction. You are unlikely to see too many of these shy animals, which show a marked aversion to hikers.

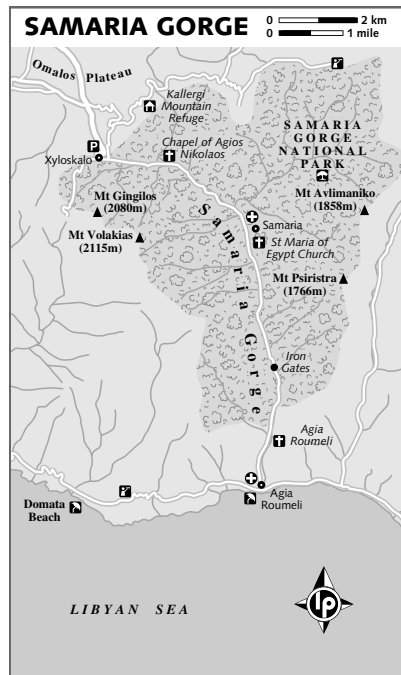
An early start (before 8am) helps to avoid the worst of the crowds, but during July and August even the early bus from Hania to the top of the gorge can be packed. There's no spending the night in the gorge so you are going to have to complete the hike in the time allocated. If you are not sure if you are fit enough, you could try the shorter (it's about half the length) but nonetheless picturesque Imbros gorge (p95).

The hike from Xyloskalo (the name of the steep stone pathway with wooden rails that gives access to the gorge), to Agia Roumeli (p95) on the coast takes from about four hours for the sprinters to six hours for the strollers. Early in the season it's sometimes necessary to wade through the stream. Later, as the flow drops, it's possible to use rocks as stepping stones.

The gorge is wide and open for the first 6km, until you reach the abandoned settlement of **Samaria**. The inhabitants were relocated when the gorge became a national park. Just south of the village is a small church dedicated to **Saint Maria of Egypt**, after whom the gorge is named.

The gorge then narrows and becomes more dramatic until, at the 11km mark, the walls are only 3.5m apart – the famous **Iron Gates** (Sidiroportes). Here, a rickety wooden pathway leads hikers the 20m or so over the water and through to the other side.

The gorge ends at the 12.5km mark just north of the almost abandoned village of Old Agia Roumeli. From here it's a further uninteresting 2km hike to the welcoming seaside resort of Agia Roumeli, with its much appreciated fine pebble beach and sparkling sea, where most hikers can be seen between afternoon taking a refreshing dip or at least bathing sore and aching feet. Be warned, falling rocks can be a hazard and people have been injured, including two fatal incidents in 2006. On extremely hot days the gorge is closed for safety reasons.



There are excursions to the Samaria Gorge from every sizable town and resort on Crete, but you can get there easily enough from Hania by bus (see Omalos), then catch a ferry from Agia Roumeli (see p96) back to Hora Sfakion or other south coast towns. Most travel agents have two excursions: 'Samaria Gorge Long Way' and 'Samaria Gorge Easy Way'. The first comprises the regular hike from Omalos; the second starts at Agia Roumeli and takes you up as far as the Iron Gates.

ASKYFOU ΑΣΚΥΦΟΥ

pop 444

The road to Hora Sfakion takes you across the war-torn plain of Askyfou, which was the scene of one of the most furious battles of the Cretan revolt of 1821. The Sfakiot forces triumphed over the Turks in a bloody battle here, which is still recounted in local songs. More than a century later the plain was the scene of more strife as Allied troops retreated towards their evacuation point in Hora Sfakion. The central town of the region is Askyfou, which stretches out on either side of a hill. The post office is at the top of the hill with a mini-market and several tavernas with fairly cheap rooms to rent.

As you enter Askyfou from Hania, signs direct you to the **military museum** (☎ 28250 95289; admission free; ☎ 8am-7pm Mon-Sat), which displays the gun and military odds-and-ends collection of Georgios Hatzidakis, who is eager to show you around.

For a glimpse of traditional Sfakian village life, it is worth veering right off the main road to arrive at a small square flanked by four *kafeneia* and statues of local resistance heroes. Just above the small square you'll probably see local black-clad gents under the mulberry tree of the old-style *kafeneio* (☎ 28250 95228), where apart from the local *myzithropita* (cheese pie) with honey you can normally get a basic meal such as local sausage, or at weekends traditional wild goat or lamb *tsigariasto* (sautéed) or *vrasro* (boiled), charged by the kilo. And lots of raki.

On the way to Imbros, the upscale **Lefkoritis Resort** (☎ 28250 95455; www.lefkoritis.com; apt summer €45-95) is a sizeable stone-built retreat popular with hunters that operates year-round and has a taverna. It has tasteful furnished rooms and apartments sleeping up to six and enjoys sweeping views of the surrounding mountains.

A SHORT SURVIVAL GUIDE TO THE GORGE

The Samaria Gorge hike is not a Sunday stroll; it is long and, at times, hard. Do not attempt it if you are not used to walking. If you find that the going is too tough within the first hour, there are park wardens with donkeys who will take you back to the beginning. They will be on the look out for stragglers.

Rugged footwear is essential for walking on the uneven ground, which is covered by sharp stones. Don't attempt the walk in unsuitable footwear – you will regret it. The track from Xyloskalo to Agia Roumeli is downhill all the way and the ground makes for generally uneven walking. Take a hat and sunscreen, plus a small bottle of water that can be refilled along the way in the many springs spurting cool water (it's inadvisable to drink water from the main stream). There is nowhere to buy food, so bring energy food to snack on.

IMBROS GORGE ΦΑΡΑΓΓΙ ΙΜΒΡΟΥ

The **Imbros Gorge** (admission €2; ☎ year-round), 57km southeast of Hania, is less hiked than its illustrious sister at Samaria but is just as beautiful. Cypresses, holm oaks, fig and almond trees gradually thin to just cypresses and Jerusalem sage deep within the gorge. The walls of rock reach 300m high, while the narrowest point of the ravine is only 2m wide. At only 8km the Imbros walk is also much easier on the feet. Most people begin the walk in the mountain village of **Imbros** but you can also do it from the southern village of **Komitades**. Both places are used by gorge hikers and have plenty of mini-markets and tavernas to fuel up at. There's nowhere to stay in Imbros village.

You'll find the well-marked entrance to the gorge next to Porofarango taverna on the road to Hora Sfakion. The track is easy to follow as it traces the stream bed past rockslides and caves. The gorge path ends at Komitades, from where you can walk 5km or take a taxi to Hora Sfakion (€17 to €20).

At the start of the gorge, the friendly family taverna **Porofarango** (☎ 28250 95450; mains

€6-8) has a big balcony with great panoramic views of the gorge and serves good-value Cretan cuisine and generous raki. The meat is usually its own and it often has wild goat. Try the special *tsigariasto* pork.

There are three daily buses from Hania to Hora Sfakion (€6.50, 1¼ hours), which stop at Imbros. Buses from Hora Sfakion to Hania stop at Komitades.

The Happy Walker (p126), in Rethymno, organises hikes through Imbros.

SOUTHERN COAST

The rocky southern coast is dotted with laid-back beach communities such as Paleohora, Sougia, Frangokastello and Loutro. These are some of the best places in Crete to relax. Many of the beaches are inaccessible by road because of the mountains and gorges that slice through this part of the island, which spill out to the beaches. The Samaria Gorge ends at the village of Agia Roumeli. This region has some stunning walks and is the only place in Crete where you can boat-hop along the coast to isolated beaches.

AGIA ROUMELI ΑΓΙΑ ΠΟΥΜΕΛΗ

pop 123

These days most hikers emerging from the Samaria Gorge stop for a swim and lunch at the tiny beach settlement of Agia Roumeli before catching a boat, which is the only way out. Agia Roumeli is a pleasant enough stopover, although the surrounding mountains can make it very hot and stifling. The pebble beach gets exceptionally hot and thus impossible to sit on for long unless you hire a beach umbrella and sun lounge (€4).

If you're in no hurry to leave, there are quite a few places to stay and decent places to eat. There are no tourist facilities or banks, and not much to see, other than to walk up to the well-preserved ruins of a **Venetian castle** above the village (about 30 mins), or check out the **Panagia church** in the village, which has some surviving remnants of a Roman mosaic floor.

On Easter Saturday, the tavernas of Agia Roumeli put on a **post-resurrection feast**, which anyone in the village is free to join.

Sleeping & Eating

Gigilos Taverna & Rooms (☎ 28250 91383; gigilos@mycosmos.gr; mains €4-7; s/d/tr €25/35/40; 🍷) Right on the beach at the western end of the village, the best rooms are at the front the beach road. They are clean and nicely furnished with decent new bathrooms and a communal fridge in the hall. The taverna has a pleasant huge shady deck on the beach.

Oasis (☎ 28250 91391; s/d/tr €25/30/35; 🍷) The family who run these rooms live downstairs, giving this place a friendly and homy feel. The simply furnished rooms have dated but functional bathrooms, fridge and balconies.

Farangi Restaurant & Rooms (☎ 28250 91225; mains €4.50-8.50; d/tr €30/35; 🍷) On the beach road, Farangi has a range of Cretan specials and taverna standards as well as friendly service and beer on tap. There are some tidy well-equipped rooms above the restaurant with a fridge, kettle and TV, some with sea views.

Getting There & Away

The boat **ticket office** (☎ 28250 91251) is a small concrete structure near the beach.

There are two afternoon boats daily (3.45pm & 6pm) from Agia Roumeli to Hora Sfakion (€7.50, one hour) via Loutro (€5, 45 minutes) that connect with the bus back to Hania, as well as the morning boat from Paleohora to Hora Sfakion. You can also head west catching a boat from Agia Roumeli to Paleohora (€11, 1.5 hours) at 4.45pm, calling in at Sougia (€6.30, 45 minutes).

HORA SFAKION ΧΟΡΑ ΣΦΑΚΙΩΝ

pop 302

Hora Sfakion (*ho-ra sfa-ki-on*) is the small coastal port where the hordes of walkers from the Samaria Gorge spill off the boat and onto the bus back to Hania. Most people pause only long enough to catch the next bus out, but the settlement can be a relax-

ing stay for a few days and there are several beaches accessible by boat or road, including the isolated **Sweetwater** and **Ilingas beach** to the west. It's also a convenient spot for heading westwards to other resorts or taking a ferry to Gavdos.

Under Venetian and Turkish rule Hora Sfakion was an important maritime centre and, as capital of the Sfakia region, the nucleus of the Cretan struggle for independence. The Turks inflicted severe reprisals on the town's inhabitants for their rebelliousness in the 19th century, after which the town fell into an economic slump that lasted until the arrival of tourism a couple of decades ago. Hora Sfakion played a prominent role during WWII when thousands of Allied troops were evacuated by sea from the town after the Battle of Crete.

Orientation & Information

The ferry quay is at the eastern side of the harbour. Buses leave from the square up the hill on the northeastern side. There is one ATM. The post office is on the square, opposite the police station.

Sfakia Tours (☎ 28250 91130), next to the post office, rent cars and can help with accommodation. There is parking near the bus stop and the ferry terminal. Check email at **Kenzo Club** (📧 8am-late; €3 per hr).

Notos Mare Diving Centre (☎ 28250 91333; www.notosmare.com; from €42) offers a range of experiences for beginners and experienced divers, as well as snorkelling and boat excursions along the south coast.

You can also go **bungee jumping** off the Aradena (Aradhena) bridge (see p74).

Sleeping & Eating

Samaria & Lyvikon (☎ 28250 91261, 28250 91211; fax 28250 91161; s/d €20/30; 🍷) These prominent neighbouring establishments have a range of decent, though dated, budget rooms. The Lyvikon has brighter rooms with bathtubs, fridge and TV and sea view balconies. They are virtually under the same management and the tavernas share a kitchen.

Rooms Stavris (☎ 28250 91220; stavris@sفakia-crete.com; s/d €21/24; 🍷) Up the steps at the western end of the port, it has clean, basic rooms – some with kitchenettes and fridges. There were plans to refurbish them.

Lefka Ori (☎ 28250 9109; www.chorasفakion.com; s/d €23/27; 🍷) This taverna at the western end of

the port does some solid trade and has budget rooms behind the restaurant.

Xenia (☎ 28250 91490; fax 28250 91491; d €33-38; 🍷) The best value rooms in town are the spacious seafront rooms in the modern wing of this refurbished hotel well-positioned at the western edge of town. The rooms in the main building are more cramped.

There are no standout dining options, though **Delfini** (☎ 28250 91002) is the pick of the bunch.

You can enjoy a lovely sunset and stunning views as far as Loutro from the Thalassa Café, about 1.5km along the road out of town.

Getting There & Away

BOAT

Boat tickets are sold in the **ticket booth** (☎ 28250 91221) in the car park. From June through August there is a daily boat from Hora Sfakion to Paleohora (€11, three hours) via Loutro, Agia Roumeli and Sougia. The boat leaves at Hora Sfakion at 1pm and stops for two hours at Agia Roumeli to catch the gorge walkers heading west. There are four additional boats between Hora Sfakion and Agia Roumeli (€7.50, one hour) via Loutro (€4, 15 minutes). From 1 June there are boats (€12, 1½ hours) to Gavdos island (see p106) on Friday, Saturday and Sunday.

BUS

There are four buses per day from Hora Sfakion to Hania (€6.50, two hours) – the afternoon buses at 5.30pm and 7pm wait for the boats from Agia Roumeli. In summer there are three daily buses to Rethymno via Vryses

(€6.50, 1 hour). There are two buses daily to Frangokastello (€1.50, 25 minutes).

AROUND HORA SFAKION

A scenic, hair-raisingly steep, 12km winding road west from Hora Sfakion takes you to **Anopoli** (Ανώπολη), a quiet village in a fertile plateau at the base of the Lefka Ori, with a memorial to resistance fighters in the main plateia (square). It was one of the few areas that did not fall to the Turks, which you can appreciate when you see its location.

The **Orfanoudakis bakery** (☎ 28250 91189) has some exceptional semi-sweet biscuits, rusks and sweet treats including mega-size Sfakianes pites. They also rent attractive and spacious new studios and apartments nearby (€35).

You can also reach Anopoli from an extremely steep path leading up from Loutro.

The virtually abandoned stone hamlet of **Aradena**, about 2km west of Anopoli, is famous for the **Vardinogiannis bridge** that crosses over the Aradena gorge. At the kantina next to the bridge you can get directions for a remote refuge at nearby Agios Ioannis.

At weekends you will see people launching themselves off the bridge 138m into the gorge – this is the highest **bungee jumping** (☎ 6937 615191; www.bungy.gr) bridge in Greece. For a less adrenalin-pumped experience, you can reach the gorge entrance by rambling through the ruins of the village. It takes two and a half hours to walk to **Marmara beach**, and the excellent **Dialeskari taverna** (☎ 6942 201456) perched above this idyllic (except at weekends and August) pebble cove. There are three basic rooms without power for rent.

CRETAN VENDETTAS

Cretans might be famously welcoming to strangers, but they are notorious throughout Greece for murderous family vendettas that have lasted for generations and caused hundreds of Cretans to flee the island.

Particularly prevalent among the harsh mountain people of Sfakia, where whole villages have been decimated due to vendettas, the disputes can start over the theft of sheep, an errant bullet at a wedding or anything deemed an insult to family honour. The insult is avenged with a murder, which must be avenged with another murder ... and so the blood feud continues. Modernity has somewhat stemmed the carnage but there are still occasional mysterious cases where police can find no witnesses or people willing to come forward with information about a killing, including an incident in 2007 where an army conscript was shot in a barracks in Rethymno in front of his family and other witnesses but no one would identify the assailant. Avengers have also been known to pursue their targets across Greece and occasionally across the globe (as portrayed in the movie *Beware of Greeks Bearing Guns*).

FRANGOKASTELLO ΦΡΑΝΚΟΚΑΣΤΕΛΛΟ

pop 154

Frangokastello is a striking 14th-century fortress on a fine stretch of beach along the south coast, 15km east of Hora Sfakion. It is popular with day-trippers, but the scattered beach settlement around the castle is a peaceful retreat. The wide, white-sand beach beneath the fortress slopes gradually into shallow warm water, making it ideal for kids. Development has been kept to a minimum with most accommodation set back from the shore leaving the natural beauty largely untouched.

Frangokastello has an eventful history. The sand-coloured fortress was built by the Venetians as a defence against pirates and rebellious Sfakiots. The legendary Ioannis Daskalogiannis, who led a disastrous rebellion against the Turks in 1770, was persuaded to surrender at the Frangokastello Fortress but he was flayed alive. On May 17 1828, 385 Cretan rebels made a heroic last stand at the fortress in one of the bloodiest battles of the Cretan struggle for independence. About 800 Turks were killed along with the rebels.

Legend has it that at dawn each anniversary their ghosts, the *drosoulites*, can be seen marching along the beach. Others theorise that the 'ghosts' are an optical illusion created by peculiar atmospheric conditions and that the figures may be a reflection of camels or soldiers in the Libyan Desert. The name comes from the Greek word *drosia* meaning 'moisture', which in itself could refer to the dawn moisture that is around when the ghosts are said to appear.

There's no actual village centre in Frangokastello, just a series of scattered domatia, tavernas and residences that stretch either side of the main road from Hora Sfakion to the fortress, as well as a couple of mini-markets. The bus stops at several spots along the main road.

To the east of the castle is the stunning **Orthi Ammos** beach, with a long stretch of steep sand dunes (not pleasant on a windy day).

Sleeping & Eating

Accommodation is reasonably good value and mostly designed for longer stays. Those after value for money would be wise to avoid the over-the-top Kriti taverna, across from the castle.

Stavris Studios (☎ 28250 92250; stavris@sfakia-crete.com; studio €35-38; 📶) This quiet, well-maintained place is on the right as you enter the town from Hora Sfakion. The rooms have kitchenettes and balconies and sea views and adjoining rooms for families.

Mylos (☎ 28250 92161; www.milos-sfakia.com; studio €35-50; 📶) This old stone windmill in a pretty spot on the beach has been turned into an apartment and the four stone cottages under the tamarisk trees are now pleasant studios. There are also modern well-equipped studios nearby.

Fata Morgana & Paradisos (☎ 28250 92077; www.fatamorgana-kreta.com; studio €40-50; 📶) Set among an olive grove above Orthi Ammos beach, this lovely complex has a range of attractive, spacious, fully-equipped studios and larger apartments for families, as well as two cosy mock castles (€55). There's a playground and a chook/bird pen to amuse the kids.

The best place to eat is the **Oasis Taverna** (☎ /fax 28250 92136; www.oasisrooms.com; mains €4.50-8), part of an excellent family-run studio and apartment complex at the western end of the beach. The taverna's well-executed Cretan specials include a delicious *kreatopita* (meat and cheese pie). The spacious rooms have full sized kitchens, are set among a lovely garden and you can walk to a quiet stretch of beach.

Taverna Babis & Popi (☎ 28250 92091; www.frangokastello.de; specials €3-5.50) This taverna serves decent, good-value meals under a shady vine canopy tucked behind the family's rooms and minimarket.

Flisvos Taverna (☎ 28250 92069; mains €5.5-9) Enjoys a lovely setting right on the water under some tamarisk trees, and serves reasonable food. There are some rather cramped rooms above the taverna (€35) but they also have bigger apartments by the beach, as well as two restored houses in a nearby village.

Getting There & Away

In summer, two daily buses from Hora Sfakion to Plakias stop at Frangokastello (€1.50, 25 minutes). From Hania there's a daily afternoon bus (€7.20, 2½ hours). From Rethymno, you need to change at Vryses.

LOUTRO ΛΟΥΤΡΟ

pop 89

The small but densely built up fishing village of Loutro (*loo-tro*) lies between Agia Roumeli and Hora Sfakion. The town is little more than

WALKS AROUND LOUTRO *Graham Williams*

Loutro to Marble Beach via Livaniana

Distance: 6.5km**Duration: 3½ hours**

Take the path beside the Hotel Daskalogiannis and follow the yellow/black E4 markers over the headland to Phoenix. As you descend there is a sign to Phoenix: take the right-hand path that goes around the houses. Cross the dirt road and head directly up the hill towards Livaniana in the distance. At the top of the hill take the path signposted to Livaniana and follow the blue-paint markers. Cross the road again and follow the obvious path that traverses up to the road on the outskirts of the village; 200m on is a taverna that sells cold drinks.

Walk on up the hill aiming for the church. Past the church, follow the blue markers to a sign pointing to Marble Beach. The markers take you around the field and along the edge of the old olive terrace. After 100m you come to a gap in a fence, where you look down into the Aradena Gorge. Look out for Bonelli's eagles riding the thermals. Turn left and follow the blue-paint markers, which lead you down towards the floor of the gorge. At the bottom turn left towards the sea and Marble Beach. The route is not always obvious with the faded red paint being the most reliable waymarking. Marble Beach has a taverna that serves simple meals.

To return to Loutro, follow the E4 path that starts behind the beach and the yellow/black paint spots. After half an hour you reach the hamlet of Likkos. Walk through the tavernas then follow the path (blue paint), which leads over the headland where you meet the path to Livaniana.

Loutro to Anopoli & the Aradena Gorge

Distance: 7km (9km if walking back to Loutro on the E4)**Duration: 5-6 hours**

This is a strenuous, full-day's walk, which takes in an authentic country village, and spectacular gorge with a beach at the end of it.

Make an early start as all the hard effort is at the beginning – a 680m climb from the sea up to the plain of Anopoli. The path starts behind the Kri Kri taverna: go through the new metal gate, turn left and follow the path up the hillside. After an hour you reach a dirt road, cross it and keep going until you meet it again. Turn right and walk 100m until you reach a cistern on your left where you pick up the path again. After 200m the path forks: turn left and continue up the hill. You are aiming for the point below the walled compound you can see above you. At the top, enjoy the view, then follow the tarmac road to the town square where there are a couple of tavernas.

Follow the road sign to Aradena and follow it for 1.5km. Just as the ruins of Aradena come into view look for a small cairn and path on the right side of the road marked with faded blue spots. Walk along it pointing directly at Aradena, before descending into the gorge. At the bottom turn left. After 20 minutes you reach a staircase cut into the side of the gorge, follow it with care for 300m. In the past the Aradena Gorge was a tough proposition as getting around this section meant scrambling using fixed ropes and ladders.

Follow the cairns and faded red-paint spots until you reach the junction with the Livaniana path and continue as for the Loutro to Marble Beach via Livaniana walk above.

Hora Sfakion to Sweetwater Bay & Loutro

Distance: 5.5km**Duration: 2 hours**

Follow the road west from Sfakion, signposted to Omalos. After 20 minutes you cross a culvert then ascend to the first switchback where there is an E4 sign to Sweetwater Bay. Follow the path marked with yellow/black paint marks and poles, which passes through a rock fall where the progress is slower, and arrives at Sweetwater after one hour. Across the bay the trail continues up beside the taverna to the top of the headland. Loutro is one hour further on, an easy if shadeless path.

A booklet called *Walks Around Loutro* is also available from shops in Loutro priced €5.

Graham Williams has been walking in Crete annually since 1988.

a crescent of white-and-blue domatia around a narrow beach. It's a pleasant, lazy resort that is never overwhelmed with visitors, although it can get busy and rather claustrophobic in July and August. It is a popular base for walkers (see p99).

Loutro is the only natural harbour on the south coast of Crete and is only accessible by boat or on foot. The absence of cars and bikes make it quiet and peaceful.

Its advantageous geographical position was appreciated in ancient times when it was the port for Phoenix and Anopoli. St Paul is said to have been heading to Phoenix from here when he encountered a storm that blew him off course past Gavdos Island and to eventually be shipwrecked in Malta.

Loutro is a good base for boat excursions along the southern coast. You can rent **canoes** (per hr/day €2/7) and a small ferry goes to nearby Sweetwater beach (€3.50, 15 mins).

Orientation & Information

There's no bank or post office, but there are places to change money at the western end of the beach. Boats dock in front of the Sifis Hotel. The ticket stall opens an hour before departures. There is **internet access** (per hr €4) at the Daskalogiannis Hotel.

Sleeping & Eating

Loutro has good budget accommodation options, with most places overlooking the harbour.

The Blue House (☎ 28250 91127; bluehouseloutro@chania-ci.gr; d €40-45 ☹) has a mix of spacious, well-appointed rooms with big verandas overlooking the port. The nicer rooms are in the refurbished top floor section. The taverna downstairs serves excellent *mayirefta* (€5 to €7), including delicious garlicky spinach and a great *bourekki* (small pastry pie) baked with zucchini, potato and goat's cheese.

Hotel Porto Loutro I & II (☎ 28250 91433; www.hotelportoloutro.com; s/d/tr €45/55/65 with breakfast; ☹) is the classiest hotel in Loutro, spread across two buildings. Rooms are simply decorated in understated island style, with quality linen and extra pillows, fridge and phone and small balconies overlooking the beach. They don't accept children under seven.

Apartments Niki (☎/fax 28250 91259; www.loutro-accommodation.com; studio & apt €40-55; ☹) These beautifully furnished two- to four-person studios with beamed ceilings and stone floors

are just above the village. They have great views, ceiling fans and air-con, kitchenettes and balconies.

Faros (☎/fax 28250 91334; d/tr €35/40; ☹) These spacious and airy rooms with beamed ceilings are a stone's throw from the beach, and have fridges and balconies. Air-con is €5 extra.

Rooms Sofia (☎ 28250 91354; d/tr €20/25) Above the Sofia mini-market, one street back from the beach, these are probably the cheapest rooms in town. They're plain and clean and a little cramped but most have a fridge and air-con.

You could also try **Keramos** (☎ 28250 91356; €35), which has simple budget rooms all brightly painted with Minoan murals. The top floor has air-con for €5 extra.

Given the captive market, the tavernas that line the waterfront in Loutro are surprisingly good. Most prominently display a wide range of *mayirefta* and you can't miss the dazzling range of cakes and sweets. Recommended are **Notos** (☎ 28250 91501) for excellent mezedes (€2.50-7), **Pavlos** (☎ 28250 91366; grills €6-8) for grills and **Ilios** (☎ 28250 91460) for fish.

Getting There & Away

Loutro is on the main Paleohora-Hora Sfakion boat route. From April to October there are four boats per day from Hora Sfakion (€4, 15 minutes), four from Agia Roumeli (€5, 45 minutes), and one boat per day from Paleohora (€13, 2½ hours). Taxi boats go to Sweetwater Beach and Hora Sfakion.

SOUGIA ΣΟΥΓΙΑ

pop 97

Sougia is one of the most laid back and refreshingly undeveloped beach resorts along the south coast, with a lovely wide curve of sand-and-pebble beach and a few tavernas and rooms along a shady tree-lined coastal road. It was once a popular remote hippy hangout and many nostalgic ex-hippies return religiously each year. It retains its chill-out atmosphere and there is little to do other than relax and recharge depleted batteries for a few days.

Sougia's tranquillity has been preserved largely because of archaeological remains at eastern end of the beach that prohibit development. It lies at the foot of a narrow, twisting road that also deters most tour buses and passing traffic. There are a few small

complexes of rooms, a few tavernas, a couple of lazy beach bars, two open-air clubs and a small settlement of campers and nudists at the eastern end of the beach. It is also great hiking territory, close to the Samaria and Agia Irini Gorges.

The ancient town was on the western side of the existing village. It flourished under the Romans and Byzantines when it was the port for Elyros, an important inland city (now disappeared). A 6th-century basilica that stood at the western end of the village contained a fine mosaic floor that is now in the Hania Archaeological Museum (p82).

There is one road into Sougia and the bus drops you on the coastal road in front of the Santa Irene hotel, where there is a ticket booth. There is an ATM next to Taverna Galini. Check out www.sougia.info for information about the town.

Roxana's snack store (☎ 28230 51668; ☹ 5am-late) sells boat tickets to Elafonisos. **Internet Lotos** (☎ 28230 51191; per hr €3; ☹ 7am-late) can get you online.

Sleeping

Aretousa (☎ 28230 51178; fax 28230 51178; s/d/studio €35/40/42; ☹) This lovely *pension* on the road to Hania has bright and comfortable refurbished rooms with new beds and linen, flat screen TVs, as well as studios with kitchenettes.

Captain George (☎ 28230 51133; g-gentek@otenet.gr; s/d/studio €35/40/48; ☹) Attractive, good value rooms and studios among a lovely garden with a resident kri-kri. The captain also runs taxi boat trips to nearby Lissos, Domata and other beaches.

Rooms Ririka (☎ 28230 51167; s/d €35/40; ☹) Small but homy rooms right on the eastern side of the beach over a lovely garden courtyard.

Santa Irene Hotel (☎ 28230 51342; www.sougia.info/hotels/santairene; s/d/apt €35/45/55; ☹) The rooms at this smart hotel on the beach have marble floors, TV and kitchenettes, while there are also two family rooms with baby cots available. Prices drop dramatically off season.

Arhontiko (☎ 28230 51200; r €40-50; ☹) Tucked behind the supermarket, Arhontiko has spacious, attractive new studios and apartments comfortable for longer stays.

Also recommended is **Pension Galini** (☎/fax 28230 51488; s/d/tr €35/40/45; ☹) which has well-appointed rooms and barbecue facilities.

Eating

Polyfimos (☎ 28230 51343; mains €5.20-7.80; ☹ dinner) Tucked away off the Hania road behind the police station, ex-hippy Yianni makes his own oil, wine and raki and even makes *dolmades* (vine leaves stuffed with rice) from the vines that cover the shady courtyard. The food is excellent and service from the affable Savvas delightful.

Kyma (☎ 28230 51670; meat dishes €5.50-7) On the waterfront as you enter town, with the fish tank in the front, Kyma has a good selection of *mayirefta*, its own meat and fresh local fish supplied by the owner's brother. Try the *tsigariasto* (goat in wine) or the rabbit. If you are up for a splurge, try the langoustine spaghetti (€70 per kg).

Taverna Rembetiko (☎ 28230 51510; mezedes €2.30-3.80) On the road to Hania, this popular taverna has an extensive menu of Cretan dishes such as *bourekki* and stuffed zucchini flowers. It has a great atmosphere and is known for its good Greek music.

Also recommended is the international-style cuisine of French-run Omikron, and Livykon taverna at the western end of the beach.

Entertainment

Sougia has two open-air clubs that can get surprisingly lively for such a small resort. Alabama on the eastern side of the beach is the perennial favourite, while Fortuna, on your left before the entrance to the town, has had an impressive makeover and is a great place for a late night drink. Both kick off after midnight.

Getting There & Away

There's a daily bus travelling from Hania to Sougia (€6.10, 1hr 50 mins). Sougia is also on the Paleohora-Hora Sfakion boat route. Boats leave in the morning for Agia Roumeli (€6.30, 13/4 hours), Loutro (€10, 1½ hours) and Hora Sfakion (€11, 13/4 hours). For Paleohora (€7, one hour) to the west there is a departure at 5.15pm.

AROUND SOUGIA

Twelve kilometres north of Sougia is the mouth of the pretty **Agia Irini Gorge**, which may not be as fashionable as Samaria Gorge (p93) but is less crowded and gruelling. The 7km gorge is carpeted with oleander and chestnut trees and is fragrant with rosemary, sage and thyme. You'll see the entrance to the gorge on the right if you're travelling from Sougia.

You'll cross a stream bed before coming to olive groves (where many trees were destroyed in a fire in 1994). From there, the path follows a dried-out river bed bordered by caves carved into the rock. There are a number of rest stops along the way and many tranquil places to stop and admire the scenery.

Paleohora travel agents (opposite) offer **guided walks** through the gorge but it's easy enough to organise independently – just catch the Omalos bus from Paleohora or the Hania bus from Sougia, and get off at Agia Irini.

Lissos Λισσος

The ruins of ancient Lissos are 1½ hours walk from Sougia on the coastal path to Paleohora (see the boxed text, p106), which starts at the far end of Sougia's small port.

Lissos arose under the Dorians, flourished under the Byzantines and was destroyed by the Saracens in the 9th century. It was part of a league of city-states, led by ancient Gortyna, which minted its own gold coins inscribed with the word 'Lission'. At one time there was a reservoir, a theatre and hot springs, but these have not yet been excavated. Most of what you see dates from the 1st through 3rd centuries BC when Lissos was known for its curative springs. The 3rd-century-BC **Temple of Asklepiion** was built next to one of the springs and named after the Greek god of healing, Asklepios.

Excavations here uncovered a headless statue of **Asclepius** along with 20 other statue fragments now in the Hania Archaeological Museum (p82). You can still see the marble altar base that supported the statue next to the pit in which sacrifices were placed. The other notable feature is the mosaic floor of multicoloured stones intricately arranged in beautiful geometric shapes and images of birds. On the way down to the sea there are traces of Roman ruins, and on the western slopes of the valley are unusual barrel-vaulted tombs.

Nearby are the ruins of two early Christian basilicas – **Agios Kirkos** and the **Panagia** – dating from the 13th century.

Lissos has a lovely beach to cool off after the walk, and if you come on July 15 you will stumble on the annual **festival**, held in honour of Agios Kirkos.

PALEOHORA ΠΑΛΑΙΟΧΩΡΑ

pop 2205

Paleohora (pal-ee-o-hor-a) was discovered by hippies back in the '60s and from then

on its days as a tranquil fishing village were numbered. Despite the mid-sized hotels and package tourists, the place is still appealing and retains a laid-back feel. The number of backpackers is dwindling but it attracts many walkers in spring and autumn and people who come back year after year. The tourist profile has gone up an age bracket and it has become more of a family destination, though it gets much livelier in the peak of summer. It is also the only beach resort on Crete that does not go into total hibernation in winter.

The town lies on a narrow peninsula with a long, curving tamarisk-shaded sandy beach exposed to the wind on one side and a sheltered pebbly beach on the other. The most picturesque part of Paleohora is the maze of narrow streets around the castle.

On summer evenings the main street and beach road is closed to traffic and the tavernas move onto the road, giving the place a lively summer ambience.

Orientation & Information

Paleohora has an attractive seafront promenade, along with the main road (Venizelou) which is cut off to traffic – they are the centres of activity in the early evening. Boats leave from the old harbour at the southern end of the pebble beach. There are ATMs on the main drag.

Erato Internet (☎ 28230 8301; Eleftheriou Venizelou; per hr €3)

Municipal tourist office (☎ 28230 41507; ☎ 10am-1pm & 6-9pm Wed-Mon May-Oct) On the beach road near the harbour.

Notos Internet (☎ 28230 42110; Eleftheriou Venizelou 53; per hr €2; ☎ 8am-10pm)

Post office At the northern end of Pahia Ammos beach.

Wash & Go Laundry (wash €4; dry €4) Next to Notos, keeps the same hours.

Sights & Activities

It's worth clambering up the ruins of the 13th-century **Venetian castle** for the splendid view of the sea and mountains. The castle was built so the Venetians could keep an eye on the southwestern coast from this commanding position on the hill-top. There's not much left of the fortress, however, as it was destroyed by the Venetians, the Turks, the pirate Barbarossa in the 16th century, and the Germans during WWII.

There are several great beaches and walking trails nearby. From Paleohora, a six-hour walk

along a scenic **coastal path** leads to Sougia, passing ancient Lissos (see opposite). You can also do an easier walk around Anydri (p105).

Aqua Creta Diving & Adventures (☎ 28230 41393; www.aquacreta.gr; Kondakaki 4) runs a range of diving courses from beginner dives (€50) to seven- to 10-day master courses (€580). They also run one-day beach-hopping and snorkelling excursions to remote beaches along the southern coast and as far as Gavdos (€50-60).

Museum of the Acritans of Europe (☎ 28230 42265; Next to the Panagia Church; admission free; ☎ 10am-1pm & 6.30-9pm Wed-Sun) This obscure museum is dedicated to the border fighters and heroes of Europe's medieval and Byzantine times. It has a well-displayed historical exhibition along with musical instruments, weapons and other items from the period. The Paleohora connection remains a mystery.

Tours

You can hike the Samaria and Agia Irini Gorge from Paleohora, either through organised tours or the local KTEL bus service, returning by ferry.

In summer, you can take a day trip to **Elafonisos** by ferry (see p105). **Dolphin-watching trips** (€18; three hrs) leave at 5pm. They reckon you have a 50-50 chance of spotting one when it's not windy.

Tsiskakis Travel (☎ 28230 42110; www.notoscar.com; Eleftheriou Venizelou 53)

Selino Travel (☎ 28230 42272; selino2@otenet.gr)

Sleeping

Camping Grammeno (☎/fax 28230 42125; per person/tent €4.27/3) This new camp site is at Grammeno Beach, about 5km west along the road to Koundoura.

Camping Paleohora (☎ 28230 41120; sites per person/tent €5/3) This large camp site is 1.5km

northeast of the town, about 50m from Pebble Beach. There is a taverna but no mini-market and facilities are a bit primitive, though the new management say they will improve things. You can rent tents (small/large €6/10).

Homestay Anonymous (☎ 28230 41509; www.anonymouhomestay.com; s/d/tr €17/24/28) This excellent small *penion* has great value rooms with private bathrooms and shared cooking facilities in the courtyard garden. The rooms are clean and tastefully furnished and the old stone walls have been exposed, adding to its character. The amiable owner, Manolis, is full of useful information for travellers and his mother next door looks after the place. Rooms can connect to accommodate families.

Oriental Bay Rooms (☎ 28230 41076; s/d/tr €30/35/38; ☎) These immaculate rooms are in the large modern building at the northern end of Pebble Beach. Rooms have balconies with sea or mountain views and come with kettle and fridge.

Villa Anna (☎ 2810 346 428; anna@her.forthnet.gr; apt €42-80; ☎) Set among a lovely shady garden bordered by tall poplars, these well-appointed, family-friendly apartments can sleep up to five people. There are cots, and swings and a sandpit in the garden and the grounds are secured.

Haris Studios (☎ 28230 42438; www.paleochoraholi.days.com; d/apt €45/50; ☎) Right on the dramatic rocky seafront around from the port, these friendly well-fitted studios are open all winter. The top rooms are nicer and have great views. The bathrooms are basic but functional. Scottish Flora cooks up a feast for guests once a week, often the day's catch from keen fisherman partner Haris.

Aris Hotel (☎ 28230 41502; www.aris-hotel.gr; s/d €40/50 with breakfast) This friendly good-value

LETTING IT ALL HANG OUT

In most places in Crete topless sunbathing is allowed, though it is wise in family areas to take heed of others around you or any signs asking you to keep your gear on.

Although naturism is not officially allowed, the remote south coast beaches have a more relaxed attitude and you'll find a sprinkling of naturists on the far ends of most remote beaches or in secluded coves. Many Greek naturists, free campers (though rarely locals) and old hippies frequent these beaches too, which despite the flesh factor can have a laid-back, even family ambience. Beaches that are currently popular with naturists include Kommos near Matala, Sweetwater Beach, the south end of the sandy beach in Paleohora and the east end of Sougia. Sweetwater, close to Loutro is an old standby as is Orthi Ammos, east of Frangokastello and Ditikos, west of Lendas.

hotel at the far end of the road skirting around the headland from the port welcomes independent travellers. There are bright garden and sea view rooms with some adjoining rooms and balconies for families, and you can get great rates off season.

Also recommended is the larger **Villa Marise** (☎ 28230 41162; www.villamarise.com; 🏠) complex, it's on the beach and has a great beach bar.

Eating

Paleohora has decent and generally good-value eateries.

Dionysos Taverna (☎ 28230 41243; mains €4.40-6.80) One of the oldest tavernas in town, the popular Dionysos is known for top-grade food, particularly its excellent *mayirefta*. There is a

good range of vegetarian dishes and grills. It has a roomy interior and tables spread across the main street.

Ourpick Third Eye (☎ 28230 41234; mains €5) It's not just vegetarians who flock to the Third Eye, just inland from Pahia Ammos. Crete's only vegetarian restaurant has an eclectic menu of curries, salads, pastas and Greek and Asian dishes, much of it made from the family farm's organic produce. There is often live music on Saturdays. They also have good budget rooms and apartments (€20-40) upstairs with air-con, fridge and balconies.

Kyma (☎ 28230 41110; top fish €42 per kg) One of the better places for fresh, local fish, Kyma is run by a fisherman: the offerings are normally from his own catch. It has a pleasant setting

right on the quiet end of the beach, with a few tables outside under the trees.

To Kiparaki (☎ 28230 42281; mains €8-9) This Dutch-run little place serves Asian-style food using only fresh produce for its daily changing menu. There are only eight tables in the little garden out the back.

Oriental Bay (☎ 28230 41322; mains €5-8) This beachside villa is one of the best options on this side of the village. In addition to a range of cheap vegetarian choices, such as green beans and potatoes, there are dishes such as 'rooster's kiss' (chicken fillet with bacon) and 'drunk cutlet' (pork chop in red wine).

Also recommended are the excellent sweets and homemade ice cream at **Sartzetakis Zaharoplasteion** (☎ 28230 41231) and the **Bakakis Bakery** (☎ 28230 41069) for snacks.

For excellent traditional Cretan food it is worth the trip to **Grammeno** (☎ 28230 41505; Cretan specials €4.50-9) just past the beach, about 5km west of Paleohora. The menu includes specialties such as braised rooster, various wild greens, lamb in vine leaves and tender roast goat.

Right on Krios Beach – at the eastern end of Koundoura about 9km from Paleohora – there is a kantina that serves excellent and cheap Cretan food; try the *kalitsounia* (pastries filled with cheese or wild greens) or *Sfakianes pites* (pancakes) with honey.

Entertainment

La Jettee, behind the Villa Marise hotel, is right on the beach and has a lovely garden, while Skala by the port is an old-time classic bar.

Most visitors to Paleohora spend at least one evening at the outdoor **Cinema Attikon** (tickets €7; 🎬 screenings start 10pm).

Nostos Club (☎ 28230 42145; 🎵 6pm-2am) has an outdoor terrace bar and a small indoor club playing Greek and Western music. **Paleohora Club** (☎ 28230 42230; 🎵 11pm-late), next to the camp site, used to be popular for all-night, full-moon parties but is now a less-appealing swanky indoor club. There's a shuttle bus from the port.

Getting There & Away

BOAT

Boat schedules change year to year so check with travel agents. In summer there is a daily morning ferry from Paleohora to Hora Sfakion (€14, three hours), via Sougia (€7, 50 minutes), Agia Roumeli (€11, 1½ hours) and Loutro (€13, 2½ hours). The same boat also

continues three times per week in summer to Gavdos (€15, 2½ hours).

From mid-April M/B *Elafonisos* ferries people to the west-coast beach of Elafonisi (€7, one hour). The service increases from three times per week to daily in mid-May through September. It departs at 10am and returns at 4pm.

Tickets can be bought at **Selino Travel** (☎ 28230 42272; selino2@otenet.gr).

BUS

In summer there are four to six buses per day from the **bus station** (☎ 28230 41914) to Hania (€6.50, two hours). There is also one daily service, departing 6.15am, to Omalos (€5.50, 2 hours), for the Samaria Gorge, which also stops at the entrance to the Agia Irini Gorge (€4.50).

Getting Around

Notos Rentals (☎ 28230 42110; notosgr@yahoo.gr; Eleftheriou Venizelou) rents cars, motorcycles and mountain bikes.

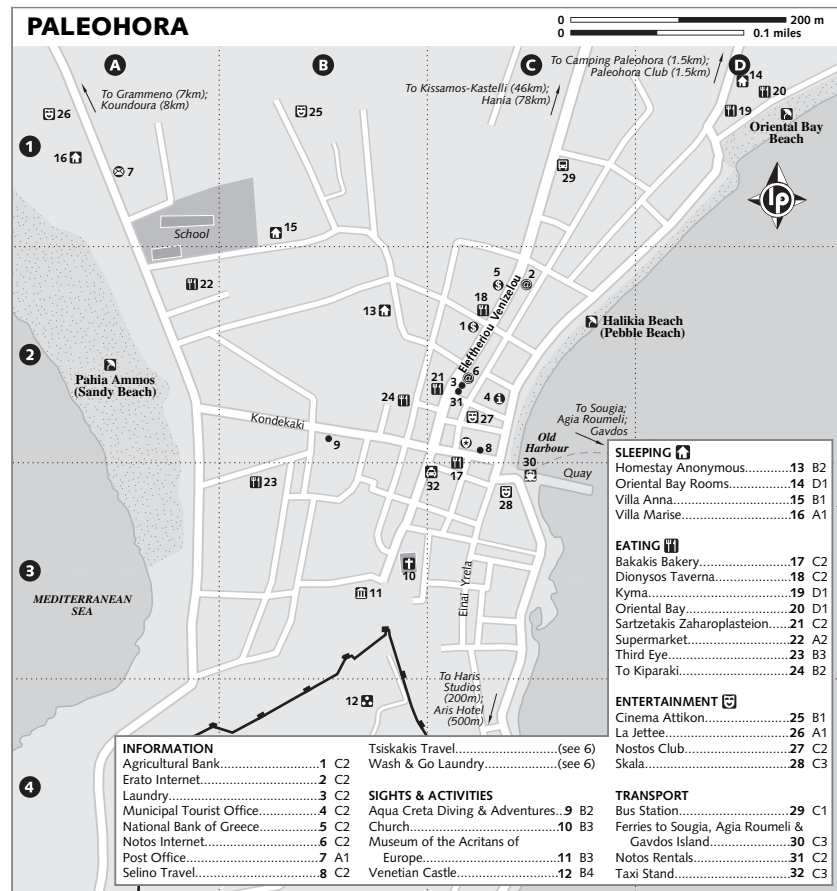
The **taxi stand** (☎ 28230 41128; 6972 726 149) is near the port. Sample fares are Kissamos (€40), Hania (€60; airport €70) and Elafonisi (€60).

AROUND PALEOHORA

The village of **Anydri**, 5km northeast of Paleohora is a popular destination for walkers and is reached via a picturesque drive through a gorge. The founding fathers of the village were two brothers from Hora Sfakion fleeing a murderous vendetta, which is why most villagers have the same surname.

Many people walk a circuit route from Paleohora to Anydri via the gorge to return along the coast. Take the road that goes past the camp sites ground and follow the paved road that forks off to the left, which is bordered by steep rocks. As you enter the village you'll see a sign directing you to the **Anydri Gorge**. After a few hundred metres on a footpath you'll see an overgrown path on the left. Red markers direct you to the gorge. Alternatively, you can have a break in the village at the excellent **Kafeneio To Scholio** (☎ 28230 83001), a converted school, and take another path from there past the **Church of Agios Georgios** which has 14th-century frescoes.

After walking along the dried-out riverbed, signs direct you to wide **Gialiskari Beach** at the end of the gorge. The nicest stretch is the sandy beach with coarse sand at the eastern



PALEOHORA-SOUGIA COASTAL WALK

From the town centre of Paleohora, follow signs to the camp sites to the northeast. Turn right at the intersection with the road to Anydri and soon you'll be following the coastal path marked as the E4 European Footpath. After a couple of kilometres, the path climbs steeply for a beautiful view back to Paleohora. You'll pass **Anydri Beach** and several inviting **coves** where people may be getting an all-over tan. Take a dip because the path soon turns inland to pass over **Cape Flomes**. You'll walk along a plateau carpeted with brush that leads towards the coast and some breathtaking views over the Libyan Sea. Soon you'll reach the Minoan site of **Lissos** (see p102). After Lissos the path takes you through a pine forest. The road ends at Sougia Harbour. The 14.5km walk (allow about six hours) is nearly shadeless so take several litres of water and sunscreen. From June through August, it's best to start at sunrise in order to get to Sougia before the heat of the day.

end, left of the *kantina*. You can take a different path back to Paleohora following the E4 markers, which will take you along the coastal cliffs. The beach is accessible by a driveable dirt road, where it is signposted to the right well before the gorge.

GAVDOS ΓΑΥΔΟΣ

pop 81

Gavdos (*gav-dos*) is as much a state of mind as it is an island. If you want to get away from it all, there is no better place for peace and isolation. Gavdos attracts a loyal following of campers, nudists and free spirits seeking natural beaches, long walks and laid-back holidays. This is the place for chilling out, letting your beard grow, rolling cigarettes and spending the nights looking at the starry skies.

Located under Crete in the Libyan sea, 65km from Paleohora, it is the most southerly place in Europe. Geographically it's more akin to Africa than Europe and enjoys a very mild climate. You can swim as early as February. Gavdos is surprisingly green, with almost 65% of the island covered in low-lying pine and cedar trees and vegetation, although it has a rugged natural landscape. There are several stunning beaches, some of which are accessible only by foot or boat. Most of the beaches are on the northeastern coast, as the southern coastline is all cliffs.

Gavdos has three main 'villages', which are virtually abandoned and full of ruins, and one beach settlement that gets relatively lively in July and August. At its tourist peak, the island's permanent population of about 55 residents may swell to 1000.

Archaeological excavations indicate the island was inhabited as far back as the Neolithic period. In the Greco-Roman era Gavdos,

then known as *Clauda*, belonged to the city of Gortyna. There was a Roman settlement on the northwestern corner. Under the Byzantines, Gavdos was the seat of a bishopric, but when the Arabs conquered Crete in the 9th century the island became a pirates' nest.

Until the late 1960s Gavdos had little water and no electricity or phones, and most residents emigrated to Paleohora or other parts of Crete or Athens. While water is now plentiful, there can still be electricity shortages and blackouts (particularly in summer) as only part of the island has grid power – the rest use generators which are often turned off at night and in the middle of the day. It is wise to take a torch. Strong winds can leave visitors stranded for days on end, but you won't find too many people complaining.

Orientation & Information

The island's port is Karabe on the east side of the island, while the capital Kastro is in the centre. There is no bank but you can send mail in Sarakiniko. There are a couple of mini-markets for basic supplies and a medical clinic at Kastro. Mobile coverage is patchy but card phones are available. Gavdos has a short season, as most tavernas and rooms shut by early September when schools start.

Gavdos has a new port and a **police station** (☎ 228230 41109) at Karabe.

Sights & Activities

The biggest beach community is at **Sarakinikos**, in the northeast, which has a wide swathe of sand and several tavernas, as well as an **amphitheatre** for occasional performances. The stunning **Agios Ioannis** beach, on the northern tip, has a scraggly summer settlement of nudists and campers, though numbers swell in

summer. There are some wonderful beaches on the northern coast such as **Potamos** and **Pyrgos**, which you can reach by foot (about an hour) from Kastro if you follow the footpath leading north to Ambelos and beyond. Three giant arches carved into the rocky headland at **Triptiti** – the southernmost tip of Europe – are the island's best-known natural feature. The beach is reached by boat or on foot (a 1¼-hour walk from Vatsiana).

The restored 1880 **lighthouse** on the road to the village of Ambelos has a museum and café. Before it was bombed by the Germans in 1941 it was the world's second-brightest lighthouse after Tierra del Fuego.

In **Vatsiana**, the island's priest has created a small private **museum** (☎ 28230 42167; ☎ 10am-6pm Jul-Aug, knock next door at other times) in an old stone house with items collected from the island, including agricultural and domestic tools, a loom and weavings. There is a small working traditional wood oven next door and the priest's wife, Maria, runs the quaint attached *kafeneio*, where you can try her ouzo and cake.

Despite the meagre population, there are 16 small churches dotted around the island. Most boat owners offer full- and half-day **cruises**, including trips to the remote, uninhabited island of Gavdopoula, although there are no good beaches there. Ask at the tavernas.

Sleeping & Eating

It used to be considered upmarket if you had power in Gavdos but a swathe of new accommodation options has since sprung up, including some flashier places. Free camping is popular. The tavernas all offer fairly good value.

Nychterida Taverna & Rooms (☎ 28230 42120; d €20-50) has basic but comfortable rooms on Sarakinikos beach.

Akrogiali Taverna & Rooms (☎ 28230 42384; d/tr €35/40), on Korfos beach, offers fresh local fish and its own goat meat for hearty Cretan cooking. The simple rooms have a fridge and a fan and overlook the beach.

Sarakiniko Studios (☎ 28230 42182; www.gavdosstudios.gr; d/tr studio incl breakfast €50/60), above Sarakiniko beach, has comfortable studios and new villas sleeping up to five (€80 to €100). You can be picked up at the port or it is a 20-minute walk north. A camp site was set to begin operating nearby in 2008.

Taverna Sarakiniko (☎ /fax 28230 41103; gavdos@cha.forthnet.gr; r/studio €60/85; ☎), run by Manolis the

fisherman and his wife Gerti, serves Manolis' fresh catch daily. It has rooms with sea views, fridge and air-con (24-hour power) and stone studios nearby with pine furniture and basic kitchen facilities that sleep four. It also rents cars and bikes.

Theophilos taverna (☎ 28230 41311), above Agios Ioannis beach, has excellent trays of *mayirefta* catering to the campers coming up from the beach.

Getting There & Around

Services to Gavdos vary throughout the year and can take between 2½ to five hours depending on the boat and other stops, so it can be confusing. The most direct route to Gavdos is from Hora Sfakion, which has services to Gavdos on Friday, Saturday and Sunday (€15, 1½ hours). There are also two boats per week from Paleohora, increasing to three from mid-July to August, though they go via the southern ports and Hora Sfakion, making it a long five-hour trip. There is also a Tuesday morning post boat from Paleohora (via Sougia).

Only some ferries takes cars so check if you plan on taking one across.

You can rent a bike or car at the port or in Sarakiniko, though be wary that they may not have insurance.

WESTERN HANIA

Western Crete is less affected by tourism than the rest of Hania. The northern coast is defined by the virtually uninhabited Gramvousa and Rodopou Peninsulas. Kolymbari, at the foot of the Rodopou Peninsula, is the most developed tourist town.

The Kissamos province is a rugged region of scattered villages and towns that attracts few tourists. Its capital, Kissamos-Kastelli, is the port for boats from the Peloponnese. The west coast has two of Crete's finest beaches, both of which are surprisingly underdeveloped: Falasarna in the northern corner and Elafonisi in the southern corner. The Selino Province includes the Innahorion region of small mountain villages.

RODOPOU PENINSULA

The barren, rocky Rodopou Peninsula has a few small villages clustered at its base but the rest is uninhabited. A paved road goes as

far as Afrata, but then becomes a dirt track that meanders through the peninsula. If you are travelling by foot, jeep or motorcycle you can reach the Diktyнна sanctuary at the end of the peninsula, but make sure you have planned your journey and are well supplied since there is not a drop of petrol or water, nor a morsel of food, beyond Afrata. From Afrata a road winds down to the small, gravelly pebbly **Afrata Beach**, which also supports a small seasonal snack bar.

Kolymbari Κολυμπάρι

pop 919

Kolymbari, 23km west of Hania, is at the base of the Rodopou Peninsula, and appeals to those seeking a quiet, relaxing holiday. Development of the fishing hamlet is in its embryonic stage, but that is changing fast as hotels and domatia arise to take advantage of the long pebbly beach. Kolymbari is a good base for a walk to Moni Gonias (right) and an excellent place to sample local fish at one of the well-regarded fish tavernas.

The bus from Hania drops you off on the main road, from which it is a 500m walk down to the settlement. There is an ATM on the main street and a post office in the centre of the village.

SLEEPING & EATING

Rooms Lefka (☎ 28240 22211; fax 28240 22211; s/d/tr €25/35/45; 🍴) On the way into town from the bus stop you will see this decent budget place on the right. Rooms are older-style but comfortable, with a fridge and rather wacky showers nozzles in the basin. They are well set up for families, and the taverna downstairs serves up good, honest Cretan food and a hearty breakfast (€6).

Aeolos Apartments (☎ 28240 22203; studio/apt €45/60; 🍴) Signposted to the left off the main road, this dated but well-maintained complex on the hill has big balconies with sea views and flower beds. Breezy studios and two-room apartments are spacious and comfortable, with carved timber beds, TV and kitchenettes with bar stools.

Argentina (☎ 28240 22243; fish per kg €30-48) Considered one of the best fish tavernas in the area, the classic Argentina has tables on the main road and across the street overlooking the sea. It serves seafood dishes such as octopus with olives, quality fish and there is a select wine list.

Diktina (☎ 28240 22611; top fish per kg €47) This place has had an upmarket facelift and looks more like a city restaurant than a fish taverna but it has sea views and a range of reliable fish dishes.

Milos tou Tzerani (☎ 28240 22210) This café/bar in a restored mill on the sea is a great place for a coffee or an evening drink and also has light snacks and mezedes.

Also recommended is **Palio Arhondiko** (☎ 28240 22124) on the beach.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Buses from Hania to Kissamos-Kastelli stop at Kolymbari (€2.80, 40 minutes, half-hourly).

Moni Gonias Μονή Γονιάς

Founded in 1618, **Moni Gonias** (☎ 28240 22313; Kolymbari; admission free, museum €2; 🕒 8am-12.30pm & 4-8pm Mon-Fri, 4-8pm Sat, 7am-noon & 4-8pm Sun) was damaged by the Turks in 1645, but rebuilt in 1662 and extended in the 19th century. The monastery houses a unique collection of icons dating from the 17th and 18th centuries. Some are in the church while others are in the monastery's two-room museum. The most valuable icon is that of *Agios Nikolaos*, painted in 1637 by Palaiokapas (in the museum on your left). It perfectly exemplifies the Cretan school of icon painting that flourished in the 17th century. The monastery, which also incorporates Crete's Theological College, is easy to reach from Kolymbari. Take the beach road north from the town centre for about 500m.

Diktyнна ΔΙΚΤΥΝΝΑ

On the tip of the Rodopou Peninsula are the remains of a temple to the Cretan goddess Diktyнна, which was the most important religious sanctuary in the region under the Romans. Diktyнна was the goddess of hunting and she was worshipped fervently in western Crete.

Legend has it that her name derives from the word *diktyon*, which means 'net'. It was a fisherman's net that saved her when she leapt into the sea to avoid the amorous desires of King Minos. The temple dates from the 2nd century AD but it was probably built on the site of an earlier temple.

After the collapse of the Roman Empire the temple was desecrated but you can see the temple's foundations and a sacrificial altar as well as Roman cisterns. If you are 'templed out' you can relax on a lovely sandy beach.

Diktyнна is only accessible by dirt road from Kolymbari, but travel agencies in Hania (p84) offer boat excursions.

KISSAMOS-KASTELLI ΚΙΣΣΑΜΟΣ-ΚΑΣΤΕΛΛΙ

pop 3969

The largest town and capital of the Kissamos province is Kissamos-Kastelli, usually referred to simply as Kissamos. The north coast port town is where the ferries arrive from the Peloponnese or Kythira. It's a quiet town of mostly elderly residents that neither expects nor attracts much tourism, but is worth more than a passing glance. Many small family hotels have sprouted in recent years and tourism seems to be on the rise. The huge Bay of Kissamos has some fine pebble and sand beaches and the almost bucolic feel to the region is a welcome antidote to the bustling Crete further east. There's a string of waterfront tavernas and bars lining the seafront promenade but the place only ever gets busy in August. Kissamos is good base for walking and touring the area, with the Gramvousa Peninsula to the west and the Rodopou Peninsula to the east. Cruises to the Gramvousa Peninsula leave from Kissamos port.

History

In antiquity, Kissamos was the main town of the province of the same name. When the Venetians came along and built a castle here it became known as Kastelli. The name persisted until 1966 when authorities decided that too many people were confusing it with Crete's other Kastelli, near Iraklio. The official name reverted to Kissamos, though it is still often called Kastelli or Kissamos-Kastelli.

Ancient Kissamos was a harbour for the important city-state of Polyrrinia, 7km in-

land. Vestiges of Roman buildings have been unearthed, but most of the ancient city lies beneath the modern town of Kissamos and cannot be excavated. Kissamos gained independence in the third century AD and then became a bishopric under the Byzantines. It was occupied by the Saracens in the 9th century and flourished under the Venetians. Parts of the castle wall survive to the west of Tzanakaki square.

Orientation & Information

The port is 3km west of town. In summer a bus meets the boats, otherwise a taxi costs around €5. The bus station is on the main square, Plateia Tzanakaki, and the main commercial street, Skalidi, runs east from Plateia Tzanakaki. The post office is on the main through road, near Plateia Venizelou. There are a number of banks with ATMs along the highway and Skalidi. It's a 200m walk to reach the foreshore promenade.

Kissamos has a reasonably informative website, www.kissamos.net. **Horeftakis Tours** (☎ 28220 23250; www.horeftakistours.com; Skalidi) is a good source of information. You can buy foreign press and books at **Fountoulakis Bookshop** (☎ 28220 22361) on Skalidi. **Gamers Internet Cafe** (☎ 28220 22112; Skalidi 17; 🕒 10am-late; €1.70 per hr) has the full service.

Sights & Activities

The new **Archaeological Museum of Kissamos** (☎ 28220 83308; Plateia Tzanakaki; 🕒 8.30am-3pm; free admission), in an imposing two-level Venetian-Turkish building on the main square, has a well displayed collection of artefacts unearthed during archaeological digs in the area, including statues, jewellery, coins and a large mosaic floor from a Kissamos villa. There are exhibits from Falasarna and Polyrrinia and

DETOUR: RAVDOUHA

The unassuming fishing hamlet of **Ravdouha Beach**, on the western side of the rugged Rodopou Peninsula, is one of the area's hidden gastronomic treats. Follow the signs to Ravdoucha until you reach a fork in the road. To the left, a rough dirt road leads 700m to the **Waves on the Rock** (☎ 28240 23133) run by fisherman Theodoris Falelakis, who serves excellent fresh fish. If you really feel like getting away from it all there are also five **rooms** (€25-30) upstairs with kitchenette and air-con.

Turning right at the fork will lead you to a small pebbly beach with a pier and couple of tavernas, including an incongruous Italian restaurant **Don Rosario** (☎ 28240 23781; mains €9.50-22.50) run by a retired Italian chef, who dishes up scrumptious pans of seafood spaghetti and sophisticated Mediterranean cuisine on his shady terrace.

most of the collections spans the Hellenistic-Roman eras, though there are displays from Minoan excavations and Nopigia.

Run by Stelios Milonakis and his British wife Angela, **Strata Walking Tours** (☎ 28220 24336; www.strata-tours.com) offers a range of walking tours for small groups, from leisurely day trips including taverna lunch in the surrounding countryside (€40) to full-on 15-day round trips (€895) reaching as far as the south coast. They also run jeep safaris to interesting off-road destinations (€40).

Sleeping

Camping Mithymna (☎ 28220 31444; www.campingmithymna.gr; Paralia Drapania; per person/tent €6/4) About 6km east of town, Camping Mithymna is an excellent shady site near the best stretch of beach with a restaurant, bar and shop. Take a bus to the village of Drapanias, from where it's a pleasant 15-minute walk through olive groves to the camp sites (or walk 4km along the beach).

Bikakis Family (☎ 28220 22105; www.familybikakis.gr; Iroón Polemiston 1941; s/d €20/25, studio €30; 🍷 📺 📺) This would have to be the best budget option in Kissamos town. The rooms and studios sparkle and most have garden and sea views, kitchenettes and extras such as TV, hairdryers and free internet. It maintains a family environment and owner Giannis makes guests feel very welcome. He is also an expert on herbal teas and the local environs. There are bigger studios and adjoining rooms for families and breakfast is available.

Thalassa (☎ 28220 31231; www.thalassa-apts.gr; Paralia Drapanias; studios €35-55; 🍷 📺 📺) The isolated Thalassa complex is an ideal spot to retreat to with a stack of books. The immaculate studios are airy and well-fitted out with irons, hair-dryers and ADSL/wi-fi connections. There's a barbecue on the lawn and a small playground and it's just across from the beach, 100m east of Camping Mithymna.

Galini Beach (☎ 28220 23288; r €38-48) At the eastern end of the beach next to the soccer ground, this well-maintained, friendly, family-run hotel has spacious rooms decorated in cool tones, some with kitchenette, as well as adjoining family rooms.

Christina Beach Hotel (☎ 28220 83333; studio €60-80; 📺 📺 📺) This smart studio complex on the west side of Kissamos represents the upper end of accommodation in town. Right on the foreshore, the modern studios are large and airy and all have ISDN internet connection.

Eating

Kellari (☎ 28220 23883; Cretan specials €3-7.50) This well-regarded taverna on the eastern end of the beach strip has an extensive range of Cretan dishes, grills and fresh fish as well as a Greek-tasting menu for two (€16). Owned by the same family that runs Strata Walking Tours (p109), they use their own meat, wine, oil and other produce.

Papadakis (☎ 28220 22340; mains €5-8) One of the oldest tavernas in town, this place is well patronised by local diners. The taverna has a very relaxing setting overlooking the beach and serves well-prepared fish dishes such as oven-baked fish (€6) or fish soup.

O Stimadoris (☎ 28220 22057; fish per kg €30-45) This well-respected fish taverna is about 2km west of town, just before the small fishing harbour. The owners are fishermen and therefore the fish is always fresh. Try an unusual salad made of seaweed in vinegar, *salata tou yialou*. The small taverna is like a mini-museum while the room with sea views regularly hosts weddings.

Also recommended for fine home cooking and excellent value is **Violaki** (☎ 28220 23068) on the main through road and **Akroyiali**, well signposted before Kissamos, for excellent fresh fish on the beach.

Getting There & Away

BOAT

ANEN Ferries operates the F/B *Myrtidiotissa* at weekends on a route that takes in Antikythira (€9.40, two hours), Kythira (€16.40, four hours), and Gythio (€22.10, five hours). Sunday's service does serve Piraeus eventually but it's far quicker to go from Hania. You can buy tickets from **Horeftakis Tours** (☎ 28220 23250) and the **ANEN Office** (☎ 28220 22009; Skalidi).

BUS

From Kissamos' **bus station** (☎ 28220 22035), there are 14 buses per day to Hania (€4, 40 minutes), where you can change for Rethymno and Iraklio; two buses per day for Falasarna (€3, 20 minutes), one bus per day to Paleohora (€6.50, 1¼ hours) and one to Elafonisi (€5.90, 1¼ hours).

Getting Around

Moto Fun (☎ 28220 23440; www.motofun.info; Plateia Izanakaki) Rents cars, bikes & mountain bikes.

AROUND KISSAMOS-KASTELLI

Polyrrinia Πολυρρηνία

The ancient city ruins of Polyrrinia (pol-ee-ren-ee-a) lie about 7km south of Kissamos-Kastelli, above the village of Ano Paleokastro (also called Polyrrinia). It's a steep climb to the ruins, but the sea and mountain views are stunning and the region is blanketed with wild flowers in spring. The city was founded by the Dorians in the 6th century BC and was constantly at war with the Kydonians from Hania. Coins from the period depict the warrior-goddess Athena, who was evidently revered by the warlike Polyrrinians.

Unlike their rivals the Kydonians, the Polyrrinians did not resist the Roman invasion and thus the city was spared destruction. It was the best-fortified town in Crete and the administrative centre of western Crete from the Roman through to the Byzantine period. The Venetians used it as a fortress. Many of the structures, including an **aqueduct** built by Hadrian, date from the Roman period.

The most impressive feature of the site is the **acropolis** built by the Byzantines and Venetians. There's also a church built on the foundations of a **Hellenistic temple** from the 4th century BC. Near the aqueduct is a **cave** dedicated to the nymphs; it still contains the niches for nymph statuettes.

It's a scenic two-hour walk from Kissamos-Kastelli to Polyrrinia. To reach the Polyrrinia road, walk east along the Kissamos-Kastelli main road and turn right after the OTE (public phone company) office. You can reach the site through the village on foot, passing by the interesting olive wood **workshop** (☎ 28220 24168) of Giorgos Tschlakakis.

If you are driving, take the perimeter road at the turn off for the **Acropolis Taverna** (☎ 28220 23678) which has lovely views. Behind the taverna there is a path to the left about 100m before the Agios Pateras church which leads to the acropolis. You can do a full circuit around the hill to take in the views but the path can be overgrown.

There are no buses to the site.

Sirikari Σηρικαρί

From Polyrrinia, many intrepid walkers continue the hike to the **Sirikari Gorge**, one of the area's most scenic and popular walks. The walk takes about two hours (and as much

again to reach Kissamos if you are doing it the other way around). From the tiny hamlet of Sirikari, the entrance to the gorge is near the Agios Apostoli church.

An appealing new accommodation option if you are after somewhere remote, is the **Kastania Traditional Guest House** (☎ 28220 51449; Sirikari; d €40-60 with breakfast). The owner, a retired air traffic controller, has restored the family home into four cosy traditional-style studios and makes a hearty breakfast (and can also provide good value home cooked meals). From here there are great walks through a verdant chestnut forest leading to Kambos.

GRAMVOUSA PENINSULA ΧΕΡΣΟΝΗΣΟΣ ΓΡΑΜΒΟΥΣΑ

Northwest of Kissamos is the beautifully wild and remote Gramvousa Peninsula, whose main attraction is the stunning lagoon-like sandy beach of **Balos**, on Cape Tigani on the west side of the peninsula's narrow tip. The idyllic beach with turquoise waters is overlooked by the two islets of **Agria** (wild) and **Imeri** (tame), but day trippers can detract from its appeal.

The very rough but drivable dirt road (best in a four-wheel drive) to Balos begins at the end of the main street of **Kalyviani village** and follows the eastern slope of Mt Geroskinos. From here, the views over the shoreline and the Rodopou Peninsula are spectacular.

The road ends at a car park (with a kantina) from where the path to the beach is a 30-minute walk down the sandy cliffs (45 minutes on the way back up).

West-bound buses from Kissamos will let you off at the turn-off for Kalyviani, from where it is a 2km walk to the beginning of the path at the far end of the main street. The shadeless walk to Balos is around 3km – wear a hat and take plenty of water.

An easier way to get there are the three daily **cruises** (☎ 28220 24344; www.gramvousa.com; adult/concession cost €22/12; 55 mins). The morning boats stop at Imeri Gramvousa, which is crowned with a **Venetian castle** from which there are stunning views of the peninsula. It's a steep 20-minute walk to the top and there is a small beach below with a shipwreck. The beach gets crowded if the boats are full, as does Balos. Tickets can be bought on the day at Kissamos port. Departures are at 10am, 10.15am and 1pm and returns at 5.45pm and 8pm. The trip can be rough if it's windy.

History

The offshore island of Imeri Gramvousa was an important vantage point for the Venetians, who built a fortress here to protect ships on their way to and from Venice. It was considered an impregnable fort and had a large cache of armaments. The Turks did not conquer Imeri Gramvousa along with the rest of Crete in 1645; the fort remained in Venetian hands. Eventually the Venetians left and the fort fell into disuse until it was taken over in 1821 by Cretan revolutionaries. It later became a notorious base for piracy before the Turks took it and used it to blockade the coast during the War of Independence. Local legend has it that the pirates amassed a fabulous fortune that they hid in caves around the island.

The **Kalyviani shipwreck**, rusting on the west side of Kalyviani beach, is a Lebanese-registered ship that struck trouble on its way from Libya to Crete in 1981.

Sleeping & Eating

A good base for touring this region is the village of Kalyviani, 7km west of Kissamos.

Kaliviani (☎ /fax 28220 23204; www.kaliviani.com; d & tr €40-55; 🍴) An attractive stone-built guesthouse with comfortable, tastefully furnished rooms with fridge and balcony. The excellent restaurant (mains €4.80-8.50) serves up the genuine article, whenever possible using organic produce. Recommended is the *gramvousiano yiahni* – a tasty local goat stew (€7).

Olive Tree Apartments (☎ 28220 24336; www.olive-tree.gr; apt €40-70; 🍴) This attractive complex in an olive grove at the entrance to the village has spacious, comfortable and well-presented apartments suitable for families and longer stays, as well as an inviting pool.

Gramvousa (☎ 28220 22707; wood oven specials €5.50-8.70) In the centre of the village, Gramvousa serves fine traditional Cretan cuisine in an attractively decorated stone building set in a superb garden. Try the wood oven specials such as the suckling pig or lamb with honey.

FALASARNA ΦΑΛΑΣΑΡΝΑ

pop 21

Falasarna, 16km west of Kissamos, was a Cretan city-state in the 4th century BC but there's not much of the ancient city left to see. It attracts a mixed bunch of travellers due to its long, wide stretch of sandy beach, which is considered one of the best in Crete. It is split up into several coves by rocky spits

and is known for its stunning sunsets and the pink hues reflecting from the fine coral in the sand.

If you like solitude, Falasarna is your kind of place – apart from the rush of activity from mid-July to mid-August. There is no village nor facilities, just a scattering of widely spaced rooms and tavernas among the greenhouses that somewhat mar the approach to the beach. There is no organised 'beach scene', although there is a beach bar in the centre and the omnipresent beach umbrellas and lounges at different locations. The big beach to the south is the livelier spot, with the middle rocky cove frequented by nudists, and there's a quieter smaller beach to the north.

History

Falasarna has been occupied at least since the 6th century BC, but reached the height of its power in the 4th century BC. Although it was built next to the sea, the town's ruins are about 400m away from the water because the western coast of Crete has risen over the centuries. The town owed its wealth to the agricultural produce from the fertile valley to the south. It was the west-coast harbour for Polyrrinia but later became Polyrrinia's chief rival for dominance over western Crete. By the time of the Roman invasion of Crete in 67 BC, Falasarna had become a haven for pirates. Stone blocks excavated around the entrance to the old harbour indicate that the Romans may have tried to block off the harbour to prevent it from being used by pirates.

Sights

The **ruins** of the ancient city of Falasarna are the area's main attraction, although not much is visible. Signs direct you to the ancient city from the main road, following a dirt road at the end of the asphalt.

First you'll come to a large stone throne, the purpose of which is unknown. Further on there are the remains of the wall that once fortified the town and a small harbour. Notice the holes carved into the wall, which were used to tie up boats. At the top of the hill there are the remains of the acropolis wall and a temple as well as four clay baths.

Sleeping & Eating

Most accommodation is aimed at the independent traveller. The places on the beach are unfortunately the least attractive. There are

numerous places for free camping, although like elsewhere it is officially frowned upon.

Rooms Anastasia-Stathis (☎ 28220 41480; fax 28220 41069; d/apt €40/50; 🍴) The airy, attractively furnished rooms with fridges and large balconies are perfect for stress relief, as the friendly owner Anastasia puts it. Her enormous breakfasts (€6) are open to all comers and guests can pick vegies from the garden.

Doma (☎ 28220 41726; www.domaapts.gr; studio €44, apt €50-70) This attractive complex in a garden setting has tastefully furnished studios and one- or two-room apartments that are well equipped for longer stays. There are big balconies and extras such as hairdryers and TV, while some have full-size kitchens.

Kavousi Resorts (☎ 28220 41251; www.kavousi-resorts.com; studio & apt €45-70 🍴) High above on the approach to Falasarna with sweeping views and spacious, comfortable new studios and apartments, though it's only feasible if you have a car.

Rooms for Rent Panorama (☎ 28220 41336; www.falasarna.gr; d/tr €48/55 🍴) One of the first places you will come across, signposted to the left along a gravel track, these refurbished studios are spotless and comfortable, and have a fridge or kitchenette. The well-run and friendly restaurant with a great view of the beach serves up good Cretan cooking.

Galasia Thea (☎ 28220 41421; mayirefta €4.50-6) On the cliff overlooking the great expanse of beach, this café has spectacular views from its huge terrace. There's a big range of baked dishes and *mayirefta* such as the Sfakiano lemon lamb.

Also recommended is **Sun Set** (☎ 28220 41204), a taverna for fish and classic Cretan food.

Getting There & Away

From June through August there are three buses daily from Kissamos to Falasarna (€2.60) as well as three buses from Hania (€6).

INNAHORION INNAXOPION

Innahorion is the highly scenic mountainous region south of Kissamos-Kastelli, which is renowned for its chestnut trees. It is often referred to as 'Ennia Horia', meaning nine villages, but there are actually more than nine villages dotting the region.

If you have your own transport you can drive through the region en route to Moni Hrysoskaltissas and Elafonisi or, with a little backtracking, to Paleohora. Alternatively, you

can take a circular route, returning via the coast road. Heading south from Kissamos you'll pass through some of the lushest and most fertile parts of the island.

You'll first come to the village of **Voulgaro**, which has two Byzantine churches. Three kilometres further south is the lovely village of **Topolia** with a cluster of whitewashed houses overhung with plants and vines.

After Topolia the road skirts the edge of the **Koutsomatados Ravine**, bending and twisting and affording dramatic views. Just before a narrow road tunnel there is a **snack bar** on the left, which is a good place to stop and take a photo of the ravine. Shortly, you will come to the **Agia Sofia cave**, which contains evidence of settlement from as far back as the Neolithic era. The cave is often used for baptisms and celebrates the patron saint's day on 13 April. A third of the way up the 250 rock-cut steps to the cave, the taverna **Romantzta** has great views over the ravine and is run by the colourful Manolis, who wears traditional Cretan dress. It's a lovely drive to tiny **Koutsomatados**, followed by the village of **Vlatos**. Just south of Milia (see the boxed text, p115) and back on the main highway there is a turn-off for Paleohora via **Strovolas** and **Drys**. While most maps suggest it is not a good road, it is actually paved and affords much quicker access to Paleohora than the more obvious route via Tavronitis.

Elos, the largest town and centre of the chestnut trade, stages a **chestnut festival** on the third Sunday of October. The plane, eucalyptus and chestnut trees around the main square make Elos a cool and relaxing place to stop. Behind the taverna on the main square you'll see the remains of the aqueduct that once brought water down from the mountains to power the mill.

Continuing south, you'll pass the atmospheric village of **Perivolia** and then come to **Kefali**, with its 14th-century frescoes church. Kefali has a handful of tavernas taking advantage of the lovely setting and view. From Kefali you can take either the road to Elafonisi or make a right turn and start the loop back along the picturesque west coast to your starting point. The coastal road from Kefali winds around cliffs with magnificent coastal views unfolding after every bend in the road. This is one of the most scenic drives in Crete.

Driving along the gorge you will first pass the little hamlet of **Pappadiana** then you'll

start climbing through the mountains before coming to **Amygdalokefali**, which has beautiful sweeping sea views from a bluff outside town. About 50 minutes from Kefali you'll come to **Kambos** a tiny village on the edge of a gorge. It makes a good overnight stop since you can hike down the gorge to the beach, or alternatively take a hike back to Kissamos via a rough dirt track from Kambos. The trail, touted as an alternative to the better-known **E4 trail**, is known as the **F1 trail**.

Continuing northwards from Kambos, the road now circles around the other side of the gorge, eventually winding down to **Sfinari** after a further 9km. The languid, laid-back agricultural village stretches down to a sizeable beach, which is backed by a phalanx of greenhouses at the northern end but has a small gravelly cove, a basic camp site and a few fine fish tavernas on the beach.

After Sfinari you'll get more coastal views before the road drops down to **Platanos**, a quiet, tree-lined and rather scattered village of whitewashed houses. From here you can detour left to **Falasarma** or keep to the right for the downhill run back to Kissamos.

Sleeping & Eating

Accommodation throughout the region consists of rather scattered and largely under-utilised domatia. There are no large tourist hotel complexes.

Panorama Taverna and Rooms (☎ 28220 51163; Katsomadatos; d €25) With a balcony overlooking the gorge, these simple, clean rooms make a great base for walks. There's no air-con but they are cool at night. Run by Manolis and his Dutch wife Antonia, the taverna has a range of *mayirefta* and can make meals to order for guest on longer stays.

Arhontas Taverna and Rooms (☎ 28220 51531; Katsomadatos; d €30) These are just below the main road is a shady spot virtually in the gorge, surrounded by the owner's fruit trees. The rooms are basic but functional and two have bathrooms added on to the balconies.

Kokolakis Rooms (☎ 28220 61258; Elos; d €30) The only accommodation in Elos is above the *Kastanofolia* taverna, right on the main road by the stream that runs through the village. The rooms are very basic and overpriced, given that the bathrooms are shared.

For a meal in Elos, try the friendly **Kamares Taverna** (☎ 28220 61332; main €5.50-7) for excellent *mayirefta*.

In Vlatos you can visit the organic olive oil farm **To Metohi Tou Monahogiou** (☎ 28220 51655) which has tastings and attractive though pricey accommodation (doubles, including breakfast €90) in a restored stone farm house in a lovely forest setting.

Polakis Rooms (☎ 28220 61260; Kefali; r €30) Simple accommodation with great views and ceiling fans.

For dining in Kefali, try **Elafos** (☎ 28220 96614) or the shady terrace of **Panorama** (☎ 28220 61208).

In Kambos, **Sunset Rooms** (☎ 28220 41128; s/d €15/25) has great views over the valley in otherwise basic but pleasant-enough rooms. The attached **Sunset Taverna** (dishes €2 to €5) serves up grills and large salads.

Hartzoulakis Rent Rooms (☎ 28220 41445; manolis_hartzoulakis@yahoo.gr; Kambos; s/d €20/25) Small and basic but very clean, with large verandas. They make a good base for walkers. The taverna on the terrace serves up good Cretan fare and excellent raki.

our pick **Clara's** (☎ 28220 61537; Amigdalokefali; www.cafedara.com; d €25-50) Danish accountant Lena Troelso has created a delightful home and hideaway just below the coastal road with breathtaking views. There's a lovely stone cottage with ensuite bathroom and two rustic rooms that share an outside bathroom, including a shower in a former grape press. She bakes bread every day and can provide meals. Ask at the kantina on the main road or call her for directions.

Captain Fidas (☎ 23220 41107; Sfinari Beach) One of three fish tavernas on Sfinari beach, this place is run by the amiable Fidas and his four strapping fishermen sons. When they run out they have been known to go home and get the fish destined for their dinner out of the fridge.

Andonis Theodorakis (☎ 28220 41125; Sfinari; *mayirefta* €4-7) Up on the main road to Platanos is Andonis' taverna and adjacent rooms. Food is all home-cooked, village style, and they serve local fresh fish. The chicken with okra is recommended. The simple homy rooms (s/d €15/24) have lovely sea views.

0 Zaharias (☎ 28220 41285; Platanos; *mayirefta* €4-6) This pleasant and well-respected eatery just off the main highway on the road to Falasarma has traditional dishes such as *avgokolytho* – an egg dish made with zucchini, tomato and olive oil. The large Obelix and Asterix-inspired mural was painted by the owner.

MONI HRYSOSKALITISSAS ΜΟΝΗ ΧΡΥΣΟΣΚΑΛΙΤΙΣΣΑΣ

Five kilometres north of Elafonisi, is this beautiful **monastery** (☎ 28220 61261; admission €2; ☞ 7am-7pm) perched on a rock high above the sea. Hrysoskalitissa (hris-os-ka-lee-tiss-as) means 'golden staircase'. Some accounts suggest the top step of the 98 steps leading to the monastery was made of gold, but could only be seen by the faithful. Another version says one of the steps was hollow and used to hide the church's treasury. In any case, during the Turkish occupation the gold, along with much of the monastery's estate, was used to pay hefty taxes imposed by the Ottoman rulers.

The church is recent but the monastery is allegedly a thousand years old and may have been built on the site of a Minoan temple.

The monastery has created two small rudimentary **museums** on site, a folk museum with a selection of weavings and objects from rural life and an ecclesiastical museum with mostly icons and manuscripts. Buses to Elafonisi drop passengers here.

There are a handful of tavernas and accommodation options nearby, which is an alternative base for Elafonisi. **Glykeria** (☎ 28220 61292; www.glykeria.com; d €50 with breakfast; ☞ ☞) is a small and friendly family-run hotel with neat and simple rooms with fridges and balconies overlooking the sea, as well as an inviting pool and a taverna across the road. It's on the main road before the monastery.

ELAFONISI ΕΛΑΦΟΝΗΣΙ

pop 12

As one of the loveliest sand beaches in Crete, it's easy to understand why people enthuse

so much about it. At the southern extremity of Crete's west coast, the beach is long, wide and is separated from the Elafonisi Islet by about 50m of knee-deep water. The clear, shallow turquoise water and fine white sand create a tropical paradise. There are a few snack bars on the beach and stalls to rent umbrellas and lounge chairs. The islet is marked by low dunes and a string of semi-secluded coves that attract a sprinkling of naturists. Unfortunately this idyllic scene can be spoilt by the busloads of day-trippers who descend in summer. There is some accommodation nearby for those who want to luxuriate in the quiet that descends in late afternoon, and several more options around Hrysoskalitissa.

Sleeping & Eating

Rooms Panorama (☎ 28220 61548; s/d studio €20/25) This place has a taverna overlooking the sea from its commanding position on a bluff. Rooms have a kitchenette and fridge, but many are rented by the month to itinerant workers.

Rooms Elafonisi (☎ 28250 61274, fax 28250 97907; s/d €30/35; ☞) The 21 spacious rooms here have fridges, and there are nicely furnished bigger rooms out the back among the olive groves, as well as apartments with kitchens. The outdoor patio has views and there's an attached restaurant.

Innahorion (☎ 28250 61111; d/tr €30/35; ☞) About 2.5km before the coast at Elafonisi, this restaurant is the best in the area, serving good Cretan food on the terrace. The accommodation is perhaps the least attractive of the three options, however. The 15 rooms each

MILIA VILLAGE

One of Crete's ecotourism trailblazers is the isolated mountain settlement of **Milia** (☎ 28220 51569; www.milia.gr; cottages incl breakfast €50-65-70). Inspired by a back to nature philosophy, sixteen abandoned stone farmhouses were restored into eco-cottages with only solar energy for basic needs (leave the laptop and hairdryer at home). The cottages have antique beds and rustic furnishing.

Milia is one of the most atmospheric and peaceful places to stay on the island, but it is also worth a visit just to dine at the superb taverna, which uses organic produce from its farm, including their own oil, wine, milk, cheese and free-range chickens, goats and sheep. Try the *bourekki*, the stuffed rabbit with *myzithra* or yogurt, or pork with lemon leaves baked slowly overnight. We loved the winter favourite – potatoes, chestnuts and baby onions in red wine sauce. There is no Coke or anything processed.

There is a signposted turn-off on the right after the village of Vlatos. The rather narrow access road becomes a drivable 3km dirt road.

have a fridge and kitchenette, but are set back a fair way from the beach.

Getting There & Away

There is one boat daily from Paleohora to Elafonisi (€4.50, one hour) from mid-June through September, which leaves at 10am and returns at 4pm. There are also two buses daily from Hania (€8, 2¼ hours) and Kissamos (€3.40, 1½ hours), which return in the afternoon.

EASTERN HANIA

The northeastern corner of Hania prefecture contains some interesting sights, including the island's only natural freshwater lake, Lake Kournas, and beach resorts such as Kalyves, Almyrida and Georgiopolis, which retain more of a village feel than the resorts spread along the coast west of Hania. There are also the restored village of Vamos and the ancient site of Aptera, as well as traditional villages such as Gavalohori. Increased package tourism is changing the nature of the Apokoronas peninsula, as is the real estate construction frenzy for holiday homes for foreigners.

GEORGIOPOLIS ΓΕΩΓΙΟΥΠΟΛΗ pop 489

No longer the quiet getaway that it once was, Georgiopolis has been swamped by coastal hotel development. Popular with families and nature lovers, it still retains some of the ambience of a languid seaside tourist town. The town's most distinctive features are the eucalyptus trees lining the streets that fan out from the main square and the picturesque small chapel of Agios Nikolaos, jutting from a narrow rocky jetty in the sea.

Located at the junction of the Almyros River and the sea, Georgiopolis is a nesting area for the endangered loggerhead sea turtle. The **marshes** surrounding the riverbed are known for their bird life, especially the egrets and kingfishers that migrate into the area in April, as well as the hordes of mosquitoes in summer. The river spills its icy water near the smaller beach to the north of the port, where another small church, Agios Kyriakos, stands at the far end of the cove.

The long narrow stretch of hard-packed sand east of town, spliced by another river leading into the sea, becomes a long sandy

beach that continues for about 10km towards Rethymno.

Georgiopolis was named after Prince George, High Commissioner of Crete from 1898 to 1906, who had a hunting lodge there. During classical times it was known as Amphimalla and was the port of ancient Lappa.

It is a handy base from which to explore Hania and Rethymno.

Orientation & Information

The main street from the highway leads to the town centre, where there are a number of travel agencies, tavernas and ATMs. **Ballos Travel** (☎ 28250 83088; www.ballos.gr) can organise boat tickets, excursions and accommodation, and also changes money, rents out cars and arranges money transfers. It also sell stamps – the town post box is outside. **Planet Internet Cafe** (☎ 28250 61732; www.alchemist.gr; per hr €3; ☹ 9am-late) is near the square. There is accommodation and other information on www.georgiopolis.net.

Sights & Activities

Yellowboat (per person per hr €6) rents pedalboats and canoes to go up the river.

If you don't have wheels, a **tourist train** (€6) runs trips to nearby Kournas Lake and Argiroupoli. **Zoraida's Horseriding** (☎ 28250 61745; www.zoraidas-horseriding.com) runs various trail rides around the area, including beach rides (€30) and special rides for children. **Adventure Bikes** (☎ 28250 61830; www.adventurebikes.org) rents bikes and runs bike tours around the region (€35-56).

Sleeping

Most of the big hotels on the beach are aimed at package tourists.

Andy's Rooms (☎ 28250 61394; d €29.50; studio €25-63; ☹) To the right of the main road opposite the church are these good-value large rooms with marble floor, mosquito screens, kitchenette, TV, ceiling fan and a big balcony. There are also larger apartments for families.

Porto Kalyvaki (☎/fax 28250 61316; d €30-35; ☹) Located behind a taverna on the more isolated northern beach, Kalyvaki has a mix of rather plain studios spread across two buildings, and some quirky reconstructions of the Acropolis and other monuments scattered around the grounds.

Egeon (☎ 28250 61161; fax 28250 61171; studio €40; ☹) Near the bridge, these pleasant rooms

are run by friendly Greek-American Polly and her fisherman husband, whose nets you may see laid out in the foyer. They've upgraded the furniture and installed screens on the windows, while some have kitchenettes, shower curtains and TV.

Nicolas Hotel (☎ 28250 61375; nicolashotel@yahoo.gr; d incl breakfast €55; ☹) On the main road entering the village, this place has doubles attractively furnished in pine with a safe and home-cooked breakfast.

Apartments Sofia (☎ 28250 61325; www.river-side.gr; studios d/q €50/60; ☹) This salmon-coloured building has balconies overlooking the sea and well-equipped rooms with kitchenette, CD player and hairdryer.

Eating

Poseidon Taverna (☎ 28250 61026; fish per kg €30-50) Signposted down a narrow alley to the left as you come into the village, this well-regarded place is run by a fishing family. You can choose from the fish and seafood laid out on the counter and enjoy an excellent meal under the mulberry trees in the lovely courtyard.

Arolithos (☎ 28250 61406; Greek specials €5.50-7.70) Near Andy's Rooms, Arolithos has an extensive selection of appetisers, traditional Greek dishes such as *spetsofai* (sausage and pepper stew), and some creative offerings such as the grilled chicken with orange sauce.

A good choice for fish is **Fanis** (☎ 28250 61374; €35-58; seafood dishes €5.50-8.50), on the riverbank, which also serves reasonable Cretan cuisine and meat dishes.

For traditional home-style cooking you could also try Zorba's and Konaki, while the unassuming Plateia does some decent grills.

Entertainment

There's not much of a bar scene in Georgiopolis, though the new Tropicana Club, a massive two-level beach hut, was hoping to liven things up. Titos is the liveliest bar on the main square.

The sprawling Edem park complex on the beach has a large pool open to the public. It presents live Cretan music occasionally in the summer, as do some of the hotels and tavernas in town.

Getting There & Away

Buses between Hania and Rethymno stop on the highway outside Georgiopolis.

LAKE KOURNAS ΛΙΜΝΗ ΚΟΥΡΝΑΣ

Lake Kournas, 4km inland from Georgiopolis, is a lovely, restful place to have lunch or to pass an afternoon. The island's only natural lake, it is about 1.5km in diameter, 45m deep and is fed by underground springs. There's a narrow sandy strip around the lake and you can walk two-thirds of the way around. The crystal-clear water is great for swimming and changes colour according to the season and time of day. You can rent **pedalboats** and **canoes** (per hr €4) and view the turtles, crabs, fish and snakes that make the lake their home, although tourist buses can crowd the lake in the peak of summer.

There are a number of tavernas around the lake, but few of the older rent rooms above the tavernas were operating. The shady **To Mati tis Limnis** (☎ 28250 61695; mains €5.50-7) on the quieter end of the lake makes good traditional dishes such as rabbit *stifado* (braised with onions) or filling *mizythropites* (cheese pies).

You could also try **Omorfi Limni** (☎ 28250 61665) which dominates the other end of the restaurant strip, or stop for a drink and enjoy the stunning views of the lake and sea from up high at the oddly American Indian-themed **Empire Cafe** (☎ 28250 83008).

The lake is below **Kournas Village**, a steep 5km up a hill. Kournas is a traditional village of white-washed houses, a few stone homes and a couple of *kafeneia*. You can get a delicious meal at the **Kali Kardia Taverna** (☎ 28250 96278; grills €5) on the main street. Owner Kostas Agapinakis is known for his award-winning sausages, excellent *apaki* (smoked pork) and meats cooked on the grill outside the taverna. If you are lucky you might get to try his delicious *galaktoboureko* (custard pastry) while it is still warm.

As you enter the village there is an excellent **ceramics shop** (☎ 28250 96434; ☹ 9am-8.30pm) run by friendly Kostas Tsakalakis, who uses local clay and special lead-free glazes. There is a huge range and the prices are very reasonable.

A tourist mini-train runs from Georgiopolis to Lake Kournas in the summer, but no public transport.

KALYVES ΚΑΛΥΒΕΣ

pop 1408

Located 18km east of Hania on Souda Bay, Kalyves was once predominantly a farming village, but has now become a built up resort –

the biggest on the Apokoronas peninsula. It has morphed into a largely British and foreign enclave, thanks to the holiday home real estate boom in the area. The town boasts a long sandy beach and retains a fairly low-key village ambience.

Kalyves has a post office and an ATM on the main road. You can rent cars and bikes from **Flisvos** (☎ 28250 31337; www.flisvos.com; ☎ 8.30am-1.30pm & 5.30-10pm). **Floppy Cafe** (☎ 8am-10pm; per hr €3) has high speed access, webcam and ice-cream.

Sleeping & Eating

Most of the private domatia are clustered at the western end of the village.

Thamiris (☎ 28250 31637; www.thamiris.georgioupoli.net; studio/apt €25-60; ☎) This friendly place just before the bridge has a range of well-maintained comfortable rooms and fully equipped studios in two complexes, as well as two attractive and more secluded studios right on the beach next to Piperia taverna. There's a daily cleaning service.

Maria (☎ 28250 31748; r €35; ☎) Maria has small rooms with kitchenette and sea views. Look out for the giant swan opposite the supermarket as you head into town.

Piperia (☎ 28250 31245; mains €6.50-7) Right on the beach just before town, this is one of the best restaurants in Kalyves, with a great selection of Cretan specials and seafood. The menu includes dishes made from organic produce and oil, including an exceptional organic Greek salad.

You could also try the well-regarded Provlita on the waterfront and Gialos at the other end of the beach. In the centre of Kalyves visit the Old Bakery for scrumptious cakes and homemade breads and biscuits.

Getting There & Away

There are seven buses daily (€2.10, 20 mins) to Kalyves from Hania.

ALMYRIDA ΑΛΜΥΡΙΔΑ

pop 119

The former fishing village of Almyrida, 14km east of Kalyves, is considerably less developed than its neighbour, although it's getting more so. Still, it's a reasonable spot to hang out for a few days and is probably a better option for independent travellers than Kalyves. Almyrida is popular for windsurfing because of its long, exposed beach. History buffs can check out

the remains of an early **Christian basilica** at the western end of the village.

One road through the village runs along the beach. There's an ATM and you can check mail at **Internet Services** (☎ 11am-9pm). **Flisvos Tours** (☎ /fax 28250 31100; ☎ 8am-1.30pm & 5-9.30pm), just off the main road, rents out cars, scooters and mountain bikes. The French-run **UCPA Sports** (☎ 28250 31443; www.ucpa.com), runs windsurfing (€8 per hour) and rents catamarans & kayaks. **Dream Adventure Trips** (☎ 6944 357 383) offers speedboat swimming and snorkelling trips to nearby caves, coves and Marathi beach (€15).

Sleeping & Eating

Almyrida Beach Hotel (☎ 28250 32284; www.almyrida.beach.com; s & d incl breakfast €90-130; ☎) This hotel has two main hotel complexes across from the beach with a pool, including an incongruous white and grey modern wing with a range of rooms and suites (from €120).

Rooms Marilena (☎ 28250 32202; d €25) This place seems to be more popular with itinerant workers than the windsurfing fraternity these days, but has some smallish but decent budget rooms with ceiling fan, fridge and cooking ring upon request. It's behind the windsurf station.

Psaros (☎ 28250 31401; mains €6-10) Well located right on the far end of the beach, with classic blue and white chequered island décor, Psaros has fresh fish and friendly staff. Also recommended are **Lagos** (☎ 28250 31654) at the entrance to the town for good value traditional cooking in a lovely shaded terrace, and **Dimitris**' (☎ 28250 31303) family tavern for friendly service and produce from their farm.

PLAKA ΠΛΑΚΑ

pop 279

The village of Plaka, a pretty drive up from Almyrida, is unfortunately being swamped by a frenzy of development and look-alike holiday houses. Still, off the coast and around the main square (shaded by eucalyptus trees), the winding lanes and low-rise white buildings seem a world away from the tourist bustle. The town also has a few tavernas with lovely views down to the sea.

Eva Papadomanolakis, the owner of **Studios Koukourou** (☎ 28250 31145; fax 28250 31879; studio €35; ☎), has gone to a lot of trouble to create a homy Cretan atmosphere for her guests and has decorated her place with tropical plants

and flowers. There's also a roof garden with panoramic views over the coast. The rooms are very clean and have kitchenettes. It's well signposted as you enter town.

APTERA ΑΙΤΤΕΡΑ

The ruins of the ancient city of **Aptera** (☎ 8am-3pm Tue-Sun), about 3km west of Kalyves, are spread out over two hills that loom over Souda Bay. Founded in the 7th century BC, Aptera was one of the most important city-states of western Crete and was continuously inhabited until an earthquake destroyed it in the 7th century AD.

It came back to life with the Byzantine reconquest of Crete in the 10th century, and became a bishopric. In the 12th century, the monastery of St John the Theologian was established; the reconstructed monastery is the centre of the site.

The site is still being excavated. Diggers recently exposed the remains of a fortified tower, a city gate and a massive wall that surrounded the city. You can also see Roman cisterns and a 2nd century BC Greek temple. At the western end there's a Turkish fortress, which was built in 1872 and enjoys a panoramic view of Souda Bay. The fortress was built as part of a large Turkish fortress-building programme during a period when the Cretans were in an almost constant state of insurrection. Notice the 'Wall of the Inscriptions' – this was probably part of an important public building and was excavated in 1862 by French archaeologists. The Greek Ministry of Culture is continuing to restore the site, installing signs and paths.

There's no public transport to Aptera.

VAMOS ΒΑΜΟΣ

pop 643

The 12th-century village of Vamos, 26km southeast of Hania, was the capital of the Sfakia province from 1867 to 1913 and was the scene of a revolt against Turkish rule in 1896. It is now the capital of the Apokoronas province. In 1995 a group of villagers banded together to preserve the traditional way of life of Vamos. They persuaded the EU to fund a project to showcase the crafts and products of the region and develop a new kind of tourism for Crete. They restored the old stone buildings of the village using traditional materials and crafts and turned them into guesthouses, and they opened shops and cafés where visi-

DETOUR: KOUMOS

One of the more quirky attractions of the Apokoronas area is **Koumos** (☎ 28250 32256; ☎ 10am-late) the huge stone fantasy of local builder Yiorgos Havaledakis. He has spent years collecting a hotchpotch of stones, pebbles and rocks of every shape colour and size from the surrounding mountains to create this bizarre sprawling open-air taverna and *kafeneio*. The grounds include a stone church, bridges, arches, sculptures, light poles – even the toilet block shows off his unique rock art.

tors could taste regional products. This operation has expanded and now dominates the village, which is nonetheless a pleasant stop or base for exploring the region. While the authentic village theme is a overrated, it is one of the better examples of this style of alternative tourism.

In late March or early April, Vamos celebrates **Hohlivradia** (Snail Night) with a festival of cooked snails, washed down with wine and raki.

The **Vamos Tourist office** (☎ /fax 28250 23251; www.vamosa.gr; ☎ 9am-9pm in summer) rents cars, books excursions and runs regular Cretan cooking lessons in a restored olive press. It arranges accommodation in a range of **Traditional Guesthouses** (cottage €75-120). The lovely restored stone cottages have kitchens, fireplaces and TVs and are decorated in traditional style. Most accommodate up to four people, but there are larger cottages including some with a pool.

The old stone taverna **I Sterna tou Bloumosifi** (☎ 28250 22932; mains €5-9.80) has a pleasant courtyard garden and is widely known for its excellent Cretan cuisine. For starters try the *gavro* (mild anchovy) wrapped in vine leaves, or the garlic and herb mushrooms, and then move on to the *hilopita* (tagliatelle) with rooster.

The other place to hang out is the understated **Liakoto** (☎ 28250 23251) café-bar-cum-art-gallery which has a lovely terrace overlooking the mountains and sea. Next door, you can buy local raki, herbs, organic oil and other Cretan products at the **Myrovolo Wine Store & General Store** (☎ 28250 22996).

There are six daily buses to Vamos from Hania (€2.80, 45 minutes).

AROUND VAMOS

The village of **Gavalohori**, 25km southeast of Hania, makes a pleasant stop. The main attraction is the **Folklore Museum** (☎ 28250 23222; admission €2; 🕒 9am-8pm Mon-Sat, 11am-6pm Sun), which is located in a renovated building that was constructed during Venetian rule and then extended by the Turks. The exhibits are well labelled in English and include examples of pottery, weaving, woodcarving, stonemasonry and other Cretan crafts, including the fine *kapaneli* – intricately worked silk lace. A historical section documents Cretan struggles for independence.

Signs direct you to the **Byzantine wells, Venetian arches** and **Roman tombs** about 1.5km above the village.

The **Women's Cooperative** (☎ /fax 28250 22038; 🕒 10am-10pm Apr-Oct), on the main square, sells a few rare pieces of *kapaneli* (lacework) made by local women. You can normally see women hard at work on this painstakingly long process. Prices for quality lacework range from €15 to €1500, depending on the size.

VRYSES ΒΡΥΣΕΣ

pop 848

Most travellers just pass through Vryses, 30km southeast of Hania, on their way to or from the south coast, but this pleasant and sizeable village makes a good lunch-time interlude. The rivers Voutakas and Vrysanos run through the centre of the village watering the giant plane trees along the banks, where you can cool off in one of the shady tavernas. Vryses is a market centre for the region's agricultural products. Many locals stop here for yogurt and honey, a speciality of the town. The village centre is marked by a monument commemorating Cretan independence.

You will be tempted by the lamb or other tasty meat grilling on the spit outside **Taverna Progoulis** (☎ 28250 51086; grills €4.50-6), which has tables under the trees.

Near the crossroads in the town centre the modest **Vryses Way** (☎ 28250 51705) serves excellent gyros, *Sfakianes pites* (traditional pancakes) and yogurt with honey.

Buses from Hania to Hora Sfakion stop at Vryses (€3.50, 30 minutes).