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to Greece's most storied isle f share



Mountains, museums and the Minotaur's lair

By Heidi Fuller-Love, DESTINATION EXPERT

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Beautiful coastline, ancient treasures and tasty cuisine make Crete an alluring island destination

CREDIT: CHRISTOPHE FAUGERE

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Variety is the spice of life on the largest Greek island. Crete, home of the Minotaur legend and birthplace of Europe's first evolved society, is a vivid and sensual mosaic of contrasts: from lofty mountains and

pink-sand beaches, to buzzing nightlife and traditional kafeneions

(coffeehouses). Standing at the crossroads of three continents, the atoll described by Homer in his Odyssey as 'a fair land ... in the midst of the wine-dark sea' has been invaded countless times over the

centuries. The traces of successive invasions can be found in Turkish bathhouses, Venetian fortresses, and Byzantine architecture. However, Cretans refuse to dwell on the past: any and every occasion is an excuse for a glendi (party), usually revolving round food: home-grown vegetables, locally produced olive oil, fat snails gleaned in the mountains, or raki brewed in the local still. And (as any Greek will proudly tell you) Crete is the country's most hospitable island, so you can expect plenty of invitations to join in the fun.

Hot right now... Heidi Fuller-Love, our resident expert, offers her top tips on the hottest things to do and places to eat and stay this season. Stay One of a recent flurry of luxury hotel openings, beachside Nana Princess (Old National Road; 00 30 28970 26900) offers stone-built suites and villas clustered around a spectacular underground spa-

which is possibly the most lavish in Crete.

Eat

Nana Princess, on a sea-view slope just outside Hersonissos, is a luxurious idyll

The island's hottest dish right now is saligaria souvlaki, a recent

vinaigrette. Order them in any of the kafeneions near the town of

It's a winding drive to Psiloritis' northwest slopes, but worth it to

artefacts from the seventh century BC necropolis of Orthi Petra.

Eleutherna (Milopotamos; 00 30 2834 092 501). Highlights include

creation: snails grilled on a skewer and eaten with a tangy

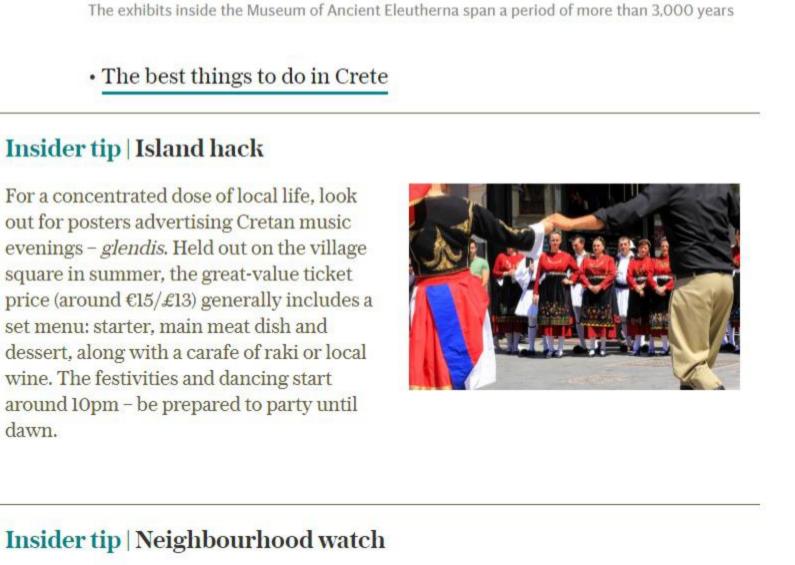
Do

visit the superbly designed Museum of Ancient

Moires, where the dish was first invented.

· The best restaurants in Crete

· Where to stay in Crete



the flower-strewn Maxaradika street.

Luxury Living

Where to stay ...

Clustered around 1821 Square, Chania's

Splantzia district is a concentrated slice of

14th-century church of Agios Nikolaos, with

the city's Turkish occupied past. Visit the

its bell tower and lofty minaret; tuck

into meze dishes; and browse the book

stores and knife-making workshops along

repose, and lighting is used to create ambiance: a forest of light bulbs dangles above comfortable sofas in reception, and the main bar glows with coloured lights. Double rooms from €233 (£206). Themistokleous Avenue; 00 30 2897 022850

Traditional stivania boots can be made to measure at Nikos

Terezakis's Chania store, Gilotes-Stivania (potie 17; 00 30 28210

carved headboards from India and driftwood sculptures

What to bring home . . .

50300).

Rooms at Abaton Island Resort & Spa are gleaming white, with decorative touches such as huge

No expense has been spared in creating Abaton Island Resort &

Hersonissos. Rocking chairs scattered around the property invite

Spa, a sleek and classy Cycladic-style resort close to



coach-tour crowds, visit around noon when tourists will generally be having their lunch. For sights that are open in the evening, plan to visit around 5pm when most day trips

but in late spring and early autumn the beaches and attractions are generally far less crowded - especially in the east of the island. **Essential information**

The basics

Currency: Euro (€)

Telephone code: 00 30

Tourist police: 171

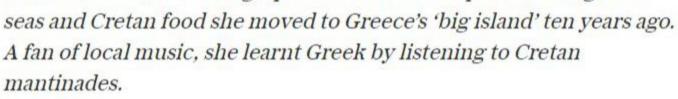
Ambulance: 166

Fire: 199

Time difference: +2 hour Languages: Kritikoi (Cretan patois), Greek

Local laws and etiquette

religious places - and you are expected to remove headgear when entering. Nude sunbathing near Cretan families is considered extremely rude, and is only acceptable on designated beaches. **Author bio**





have ended.

day, or at least until 3pm. To avoid the

When to go... Temperatures are balmy all year round along Crete's extensive coastline - although it will often rain from January to March, and sometimes there will be a few days of snow. Weather up in the

degrees cooler - are ideal for escaping the heat.

mountains is colder: expect chilly weather from late December to

early April. Conversely, in summer when temperatures along the

coast climb to 30-35C, the mountain villages - which are often five

Sea temperatures start to rise in late April and May, and you can

often still swim in November. The island is crowded during July and

August when Cretans from overseas come 'home' for the summer,

Know before you go ... British Consulate: Heraklion: 00 30 28102 24012; gov.uk

Tourism Office: 00 30 28102 28225; Xanthoudidou 1, Heraklion

Flight time: Around four hours

Cretans are relaxed about sartorial style, but they appreciate modest clothing (no shorts or crop tops) when visiting churches and other

Heidi Fuller-Love is Telegraph Travel's Crete expert. Seeking clean

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