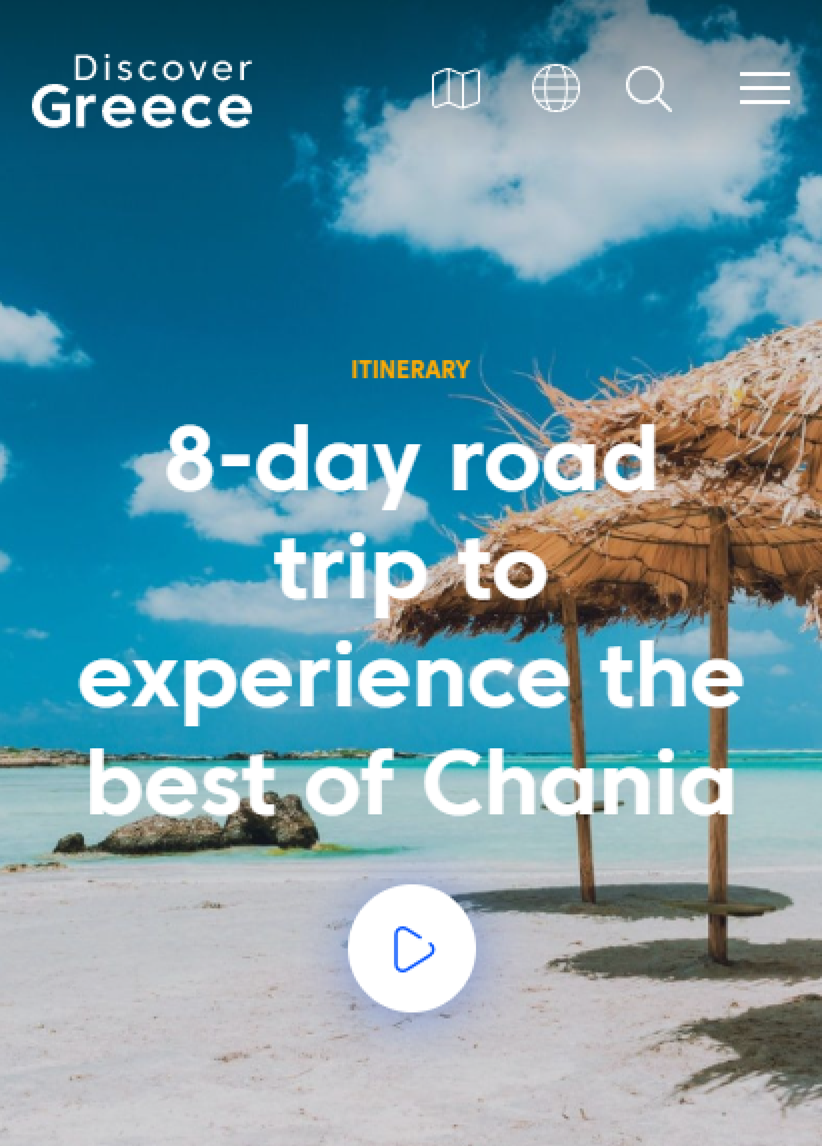
Discover
Greece



ITINERARY

8-day road trip to experience the best of Chania

life, Chania captures the soul of Crete. And once you've experienced it, it never fails to become a part of you.

Using the town of Chania as your base, this extraordinarily diverse region of Crete spreads out before you. An 8-day road trip explores the best of the region's beaches and mountains, including outdoor activities such as SUP-ing and hiking, and taps into the authenticity of the famously welcoming locals and their traditions. It can be enjoyed any time from April to October, with the quieter and cooler months either side of peak summer being even more special. Feel free to lengthen or shorten your trip depending on your time and interests. And note that all distances include daily return trips to Chania town, which you can opt not to do if you find nearby accommodation along the way.

📍 SHOW ROUTE ON MAP

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Start point - End point

Chania Old Town - Apokoronas villages

Distance

Up to 830 km (515 miles)

Means of transport

Boat, Car, Foot, Bike

Duration

8 days

Highlights

The exotic beaches of Balos and Elafonisi, hiking in the Samaria Gorge, the food, the locals

DAY 1 • OVERVIEW

Chania town

22 km

3

Whether you pick up a car at Chania Airport (50min flight from Athens) or arrive by boat from Piraeus (around 8hrs to the Port of

Souda), the first day of your road trip will be spent largely on foot. The town of Chania has everything to get you in the mood – culture, monuments, shops and a wonderful introduction to the food you'll enjoy throughout your stay.

Stop 1

A stroll around the Old Town ⊖

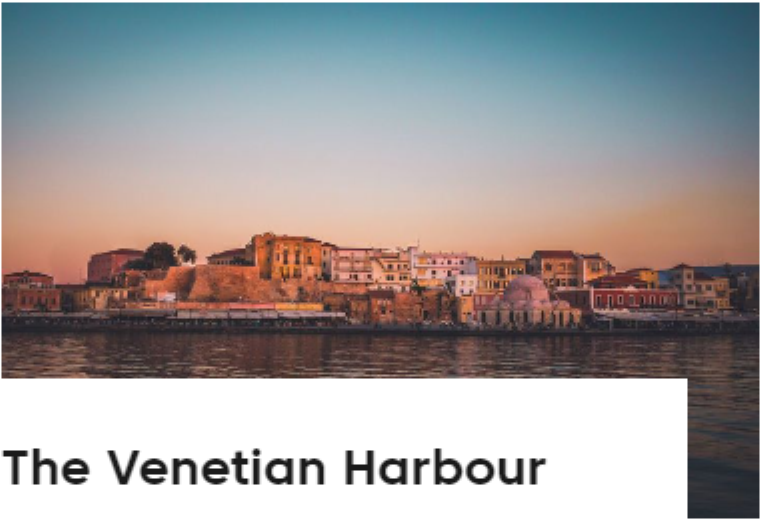
A stroll around the Old

Town

All the history, charm and life of Chania is packed into the Old Town, where you could spend hours exploring the picturesque little alleyways and shops and cafes. There are remnants of Chania's rich history everywhere – the Grand Arsenal by the dockyards, the Giali Tzamisi Mosque and the Venetian Firkas Fortress (from where you'll catch your first glimpse of the harbour and Chania's White Mountains) amongst them.

Stop 2

The Venetian Harbour

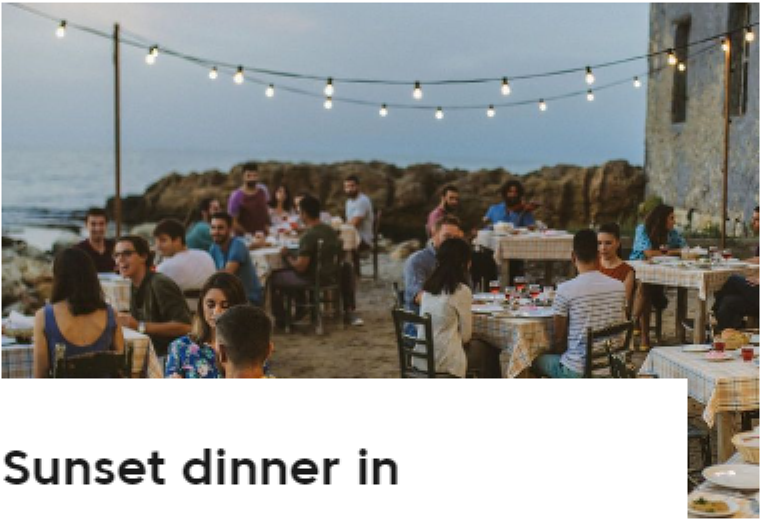


The Venetian Harbour

Without a doubt, the most romantic setting in Chania is the harbour built by the Venetians in the 14th century. It became central to the naval resistance against and the Turks and the town flourishing as a commercial hub. Don't miss the Neoria (narrow, stone buildings once serving as ship repair yards) and the iconic lighthouse, built by the Venetians at the turn of the 17th century and finished by the Egyptians in the 1830s.

Stop 3

Sunset dinner in Tabakaria



Sunset dinner in Tabakaria

For a hidden gem in which to have your first meal, head to Tabakaria on the eastern outskirts of town. The district was famous for its tanneries in the early 19th century, with many of the buildings once used to process leather hides still standing and some having been renovated. It's a wonderfully atmospheric setting for a seaside meal.

DAY 2 • OVERVIEW

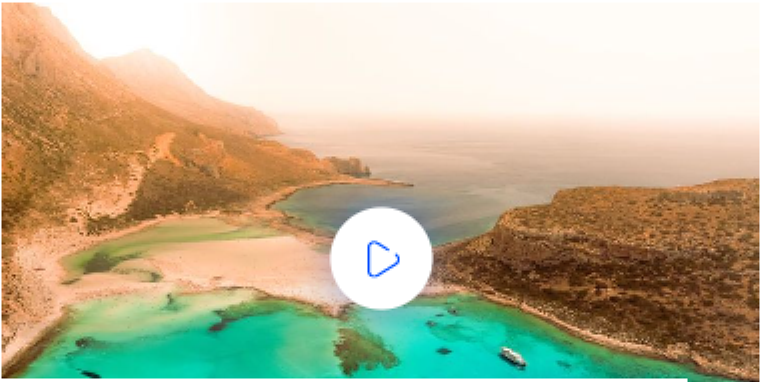
Balos

110 km Car, Foot 3

Images of the impossibly **beautiful lagoon of Balos**, on the north-westernmost peninsula of Crete have travelled the world – and with good reason. It can be visited by boat but driving there and walking down to the beach is the best way to enjoy the Natura 2000-protected region. Prepare to be wowed!

Stop 1

Majestic Balos beach



Majestic Balos beach

The exotic greens and blues and sweeping sandbanks of Balos are what first catch the eye, but it's worth exploring once you're there. The area is home to rich plant and animal life and the snorkelling – especially where the lagoon becomes deeper – is magical.

Experience Balos beach

Stop 2

The magnificent sunset

The magnificent sunset

It's worth spending the day at Balos – not just to enjoy the beach but to leave as the sun is setting. There's a viewpoint on the 1km walk back up to the carpark, from where you can have one last (loooong!) look at the lagoon and appreciate all those colours in the setting sun. Note the shimmering flecks of pink from crushed shells in the sand.

Stop 3

Dining in Kalyviani village ⊖

Dining in Kalyviani village

For a glorious taste of Chania stop at Kalyviani village, a short drive along the road back to town. It's a sleepy village of around 300 residents with some excellent, family-friendly eating places. Look out for the local dishes cooked in the wood-fired oven. They're heavenly.

See also> Crete: Food as a celebration →

DAY 3 • OVERVIEW

Elafonisi

155 km Car, Foot 2

Elofonisi is Chania's other pin-up beach and, as beauty queen beaches go, it takes some beating. This time you drive to the southwestern tip of Chania and your reward is a paradise of fine white sand and shallow turquoise water. Sometimes Elafonisi is an island you can reach by wading through knee-deep water and sometimes it's connected to the mainland. But it's always heart-meltingly beautiful.

Stop 1

Exotic Elafonisi beach

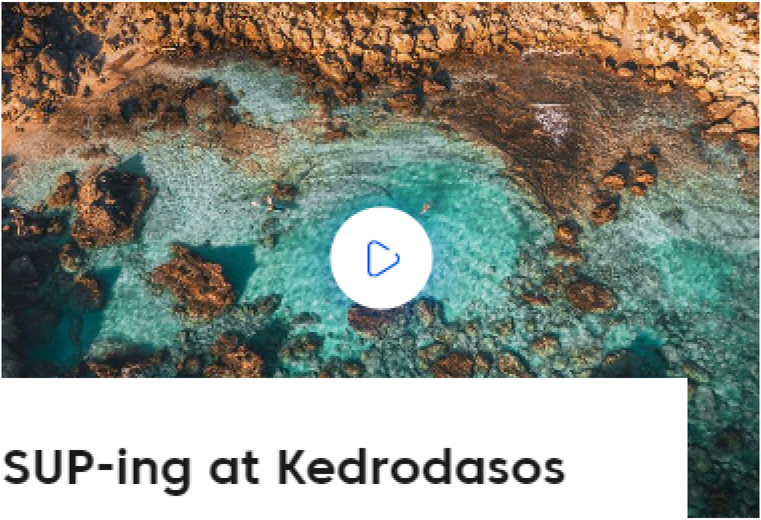
Exotic Elafonisi beach

There's an organised side to the beach on the mainland, on which you can find amenities to stay the whole day, but make sure you explore the entire area, which is Natura 2000-protected. Amongst the sand dunes, you'll find rare plants and there are plenty of coves for privacy.

Experience Elafonissi beach

Stop 2

SUP-ing at Kedrodasos beach ⊖



SUP-ing at Kedrodasos beach

There's another (far less known) swathe of paradise nearby. Kedrodasos means cedar forest – although the trees from which the beach takes its name are actually junipers. To get the most out of this dreamy beach, hire a Stand-Up Paddleboard and explore the cove. The sense of escape is magical. (A tip for those who prefer something even more active than SUP: Falasarna Beach, in northwest Chania, is a surfing hub.)

DAY 4 • OVERVIEW

Loutro boat trip

146 km

Boat, Car

3

No trip to Chania is complete without exploring the coastline, so you're off to Chora Sfakion on the south coast today. It is a 73km (1hr25) drive but once you're there you can sit back and enjoy an all-day boat trip. A tip is to visit the **Douroundous Bakery** in town and stock up on local delicacies before setting off.

Stop 1

Loutro

Loutro

Most boat trips from Chora Sfakion head to Loutro. It's not only one of Chania's most atmospheric settlements but is even more special because it's only accessible by sea. You'll be seduced by the crystal clear water, whitewashed houses and smell from the fish tavernas on the waterfront.

Stop 2

Marmara beach

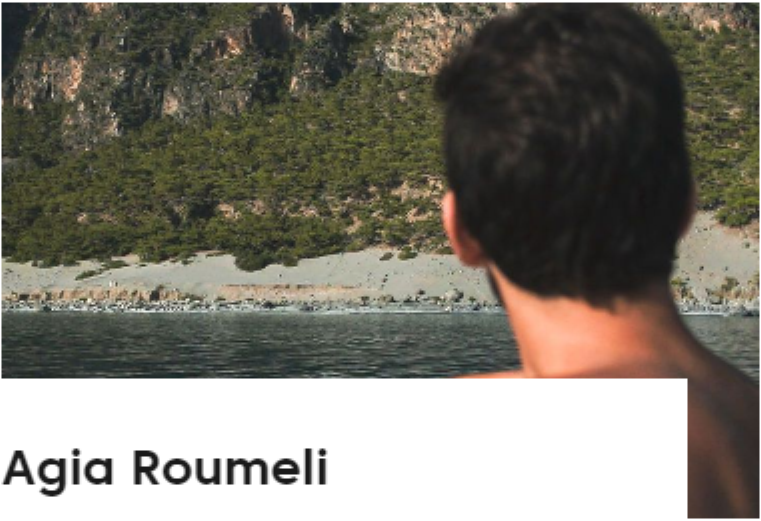
Marmara beach

If you want to swim with an even greater sense of seclusion, pick a boat trip that also takes you to the beach of Marmara, just up the coast. The compact, pebbly beach has fantastically clear water and a view of the Aradena Gorge. (The other way to get there is a 6km hike.) There's a very good taverna just above the beach.

Stop 3

Agia Roumeli

⊖



Agia Roumeli

Agia Roumeli is famous as the end-point of the Samaria Gorge and, other than completing the 16km walk down the gorge, it is only accessible by boat. A boat trip here allows you to enjoy an afternoon swim with a dramatic backdrop of the famous gorge.

DAY 5 • OVERVIEW

The White Mountains

86 km Car, Foot 2

With your first sight of the **Lefka Ori** (as the mountains are known in Greek), you're overtaken by the urge to explore. The entire Cretan landscape lends itself to **outdoor activities** but no setting is more gripping than the island's tallest mountain range (reaching 2,450m), which includes an area known as the mountain desert, containing more than 50 peaks rising above 2km.

Stop 1

Hiking in the Samaria Gorge

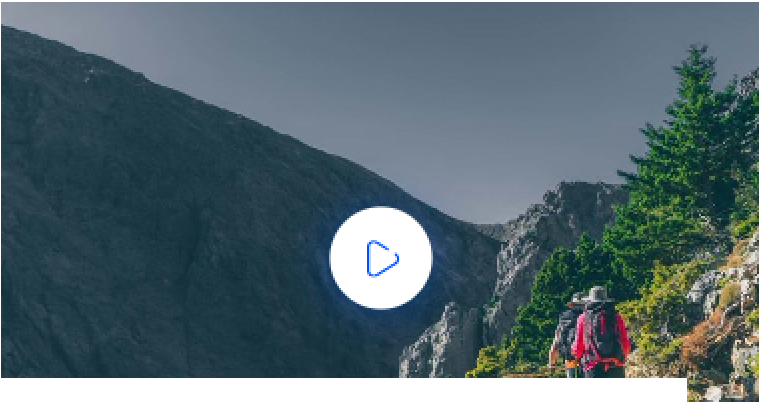
Hiking in the Samaria Gorge

Covering the full length of the Samaria Gorge is one of the great hiking experiences of Europe. But you don’t need to walk the full distance to feel its majesty. Arriving at Xyloskalo, the starting point of the trek down gorge, you can head through the pine forest in the first part of the gorge to the chapel of Agios Nikolaos (4km) and back and fully enjoy the UNESCO-protected Biosphere Reserve.

Experience Samaria Gorge

Stop 2

Exploring the Gigilos trail



Exploring the Gigilos trail

If you're looking for a lesser known but equally epic way to enjoy the White Mountains, the Gigilos trail is a great recommendation. Using the Kallergis refuge (northeast of Xyloskalo) as your base, the trail offers big, big views and a feeling of total isolation. You could hike or even bring hired mountain bikes from Chania.

DAY 6 • OVERVIEW

A culinary tour

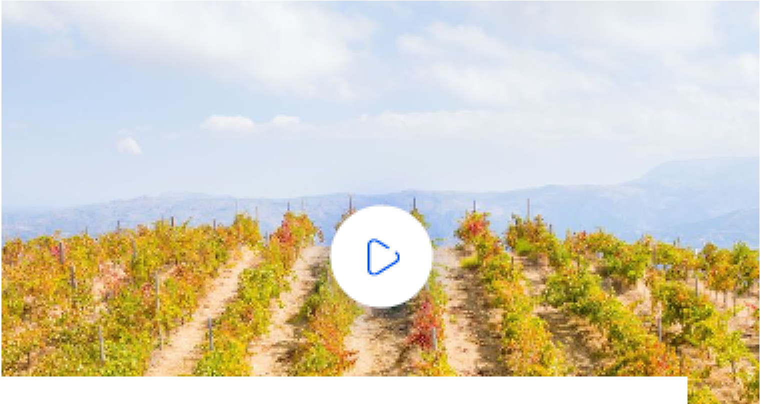
166 km Car, Foot 3

Dedicating a day to the gastronomic

experiences of Chania is a must. For Cretans, food is a way of life, with an emphasis on simplicity, sustainability, fresh local produce, respect for tradition and (most importantly) warm hospitality. Three stops are outlined here, with the total distance being for all three but you can choose one or two and build your day around that.

Stop 1

A wine tour



A wine tour

Wine-making in Crete goes back thousands of years and vineyards (often cultivating indigenous varieties of grape) can be found in the foothills of the White Mountains and the outskirts of villages of Chania. A wine tasting and a vineyard tour are the only way to learn about the rich history and delicious flavours of the region's reds and whites. In the village of Vatolakkos there's Manousakis Winery, which is dedicated to organic production. If you're feeling adventurous, take the off-road vineyard tour. You'll love it.

Stop 2

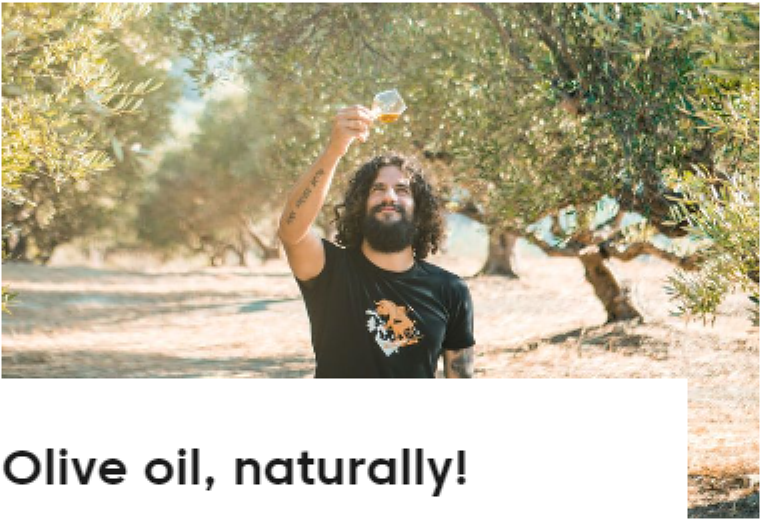
A cookery class ⊖

A cookery class

Local artisan cheeses, honey, meats sourced from nearby farmers and a whole load of other seasonal produce come to life as you learn the secrets behind local combinations and cooking techniques – accompanied, of course, a glass of *tsikoudia* (firewater) made in a seasonal distillery. There are plenty of cookery classes to choose from, with The Olive Farm, in the village of **Litsarda**, being a great option.

Stop 3

Olive oil, naturally!



Olive oil, naturally!

No kitchen in Chania is complete without **a bottle of local olive oil**. There's something primal about olive oil in Chania. You feel it in olive groves found all around the countryside and taste it a traditional stone-milled and cold-pressed exquisite extra-virgin olive. Head to Biolea, in **Kolympari**, and discover why olive oil production in Chania is an art form.

DAY 7 • OVERVIEW

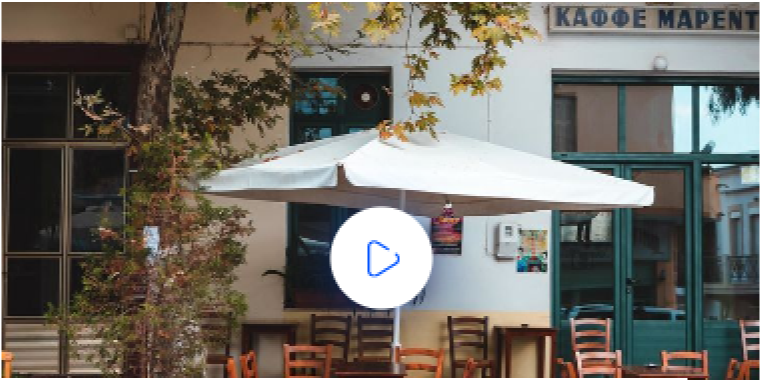
The Apokoronas villages

68 km   Car, Foot   3

If you want to feel Chania at its authentic best, head to the villages. Some are mountainous and others coastal, but all capture the essence of Chania: the traditions, customs, contact with nature and the gloriously slow living of locals who greet you like an old friend. Taking your time to explore some of the 34 Apokoronas villages will reward you over and over.

Stop 1

Vamos



Vamos

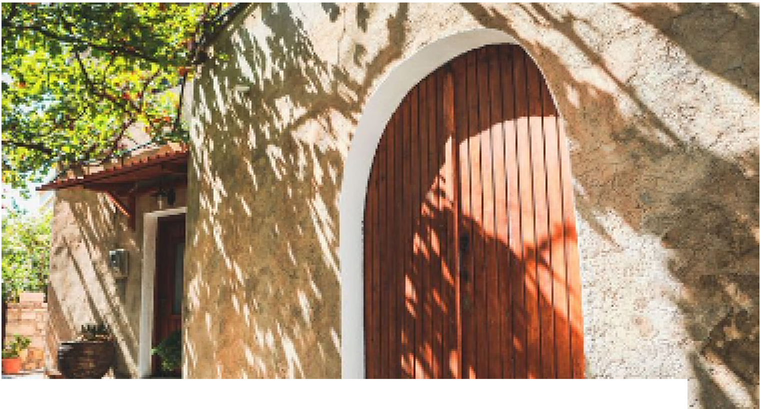
A natural starting point to your village-hopping tour, Vamos is the biggest village of the Apokoronas. That, though, doesn't stop it retaining a wonderful mountain village feel, with plenty of shops with local products to browse through and alleyways to explore. There's also an excellent cheese factory and a 13th-century chapel to visit and, each July, Vamos hosts **one of Crete's largest jazz festivals**.

Village hop through Chania

Stop 2

Douliana

⊖

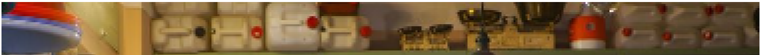


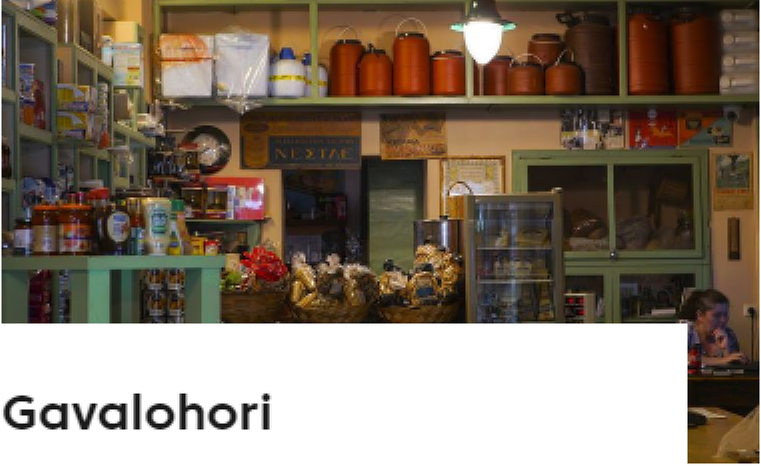
Douliana

With around 200 residents, there's a wonderfully cosy village feel to Douliana, with traditional stone houses and a tiny church. You'll love the views of the Bay of Souda and the White Mountains and there is a handful of short walking paths that set out from the village, including one to Gavalohori.

Stop 3

Gavalohori





Gavalohori

Whether you arrive by foot or car, you'll be greeted by authentic stone houses, cobblestone streets and quaint coffee shops. Order yourself a traditional coffee and make a point of speaking with the locals. There's a very good Folk Museum in Gavalohori with a collection of local costumes, old coins and items of everyday village life from days gone by.

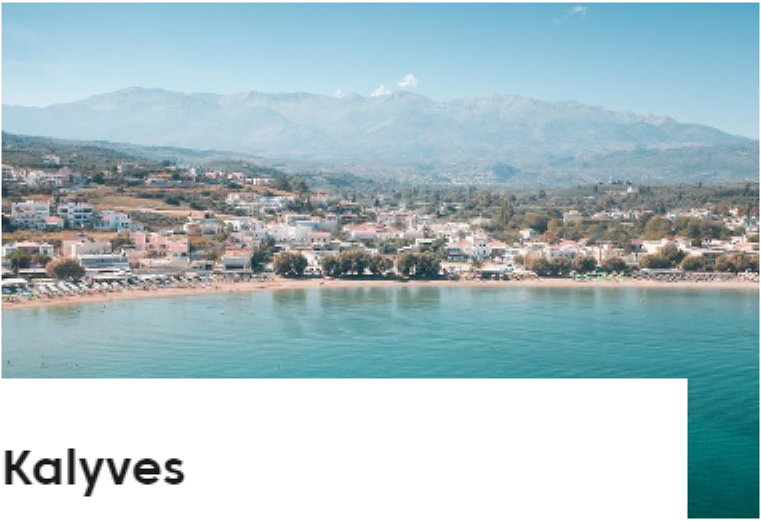
Village hopping (part II)

77 km Car, Foot 3

You'll quickly understand why spending just one day in the Apokoronas villages isn't enough. So after returning to Chania town for the night (or better still, overnighting in one of the villages), it's worth spending a second day village hopping. You'll appreciate the architecture, watermills, churches, handmade local products and energising locals all the more – as well as the surrounding nature, which has more than a hint of the Tuscan countryside about it.

Stop 1

Kalyves ⊖



Kalyves

The beauty of Kalyves is that it's by the sea, meaning that your day village hopping can begin or end with a cheeky swim. There's a new and old section, but that doesn't stop the entire village retaining a traditional feel, whilst at the same time having all the facilities for you to stock up with provisions. The seafront tavernas are a great option for a seafood meal.

Stop 2

Fres

Fres

You're off into the foothills of the White Mountains next, passing by olive groves and vineyards and rising 220m to the village of Fres. Life centres around the village square in Fres, with shops, cafes and tavernas, but you should also visit the church of Panagia of Two Rocks just outside the village (built, as the name suggests, on a rock) in which there is a collection of beautiful frescoes

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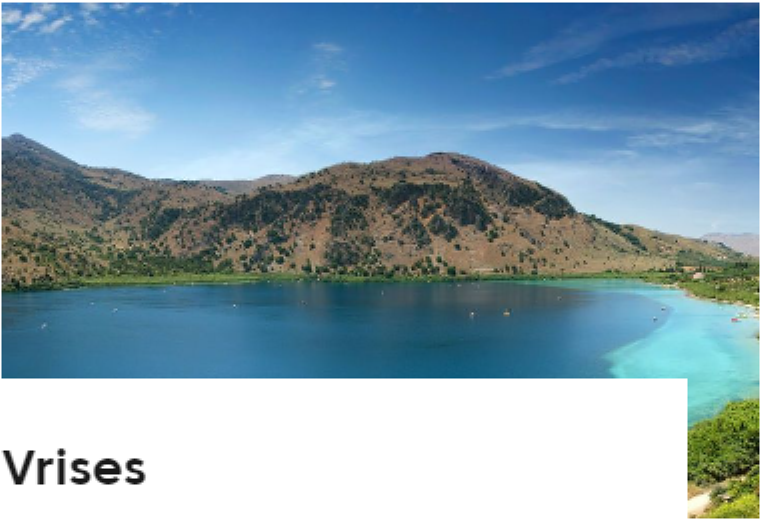
Stop 3

Vrises ⊖

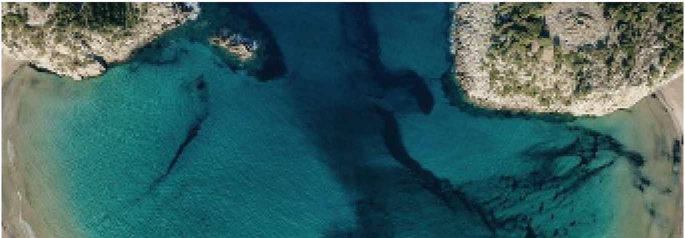


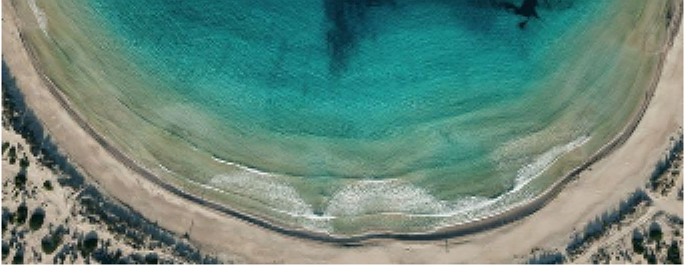
Vrises

Your final village takes you further into nature as you head to Vrises, situated in a green valley surrounded by running water (its name means 'sources'). Take your time to enjoy the countryside, with the nearby **Lake Kourna** being Crete's only natural lake, before settling down for a meal to remember in a waterfront taverna in the village.

More itineraries

If you're looking for other routes to explore





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