

# Tourism Promotion **Guide**

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## ROUTES

IN THE MUNICIPALITY  
OF ARCHANES – ASTEROUSIA

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MUNICIPALITY  
ARCHANES  
ASTEROUSIA

*A place  
for all the senses*



“To stride the earth, to see  
- to see and never be full of -  
new soils and seas  
and people and ideas,  
and see everything as if a first time  
see everything as if a last time...”

**N. Kazantzakis**

# ONE MUNICIPALITY, A PLACE FOR ALL THE SENSES

**1<sup>st</sup> Edition: June 2014**

Municipality of Archanes - Asterousia

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# THE RESPONSIBLE TRAVELLER...

The Municipality of Archanes-Asterousia includes ar-  
eas that are habitats for very sensitive flora and fauna  
species (the Protected Area of the Asterousia Mountain  
Range and Mt. Juktas, wetlands with small birds in the  
Mediterranean zone of the Municipality, gorges and  
rocky coastlines, etc.). The existence of these species is  
an indication of a healthy environment and the least we  
can do is respect it by minimising the signs of our pre-  
sence during our stay and after our departure.

So, we take with us all rubbish or other items that do  
not belong in the landscape, we enjoy the scents and  
view of aromatic and other plants, and only photograph  
them, without removing them. We also avoid fires and  
smoking.

Upon leaving, we leave behind us only footprints and  
take with us only memories.

# CUSTOMS...

The charm of this land lies in, amongst other things,  
in the traditional character of the locals which has re-  
mained unaltered in all the villages you will have the  
opportunity to explore. Please, respect these traditional  
customs by behaving and dressing appropriately; the  
same is true about your contacts with the locals, per-  
haps forgetting for a moment the habits and customs of  
your land and... letting the discovery of the idiosyncrat-  
ic Cretans carry you off down the various extensions of  
their history...

In the framework of your discrete presence the best  
way to keep an excellent relationship with the locals,  
especially in remote villages, is to keep them informed of  
your plans (camping with or without tents, hiking, etc.).  
A coffee, a raki at the village cafés, a word with the reg-  
ulars will reward you with a warm offer of information,  
interest and very often... delicacies!

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Peza, June 2014

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## **WELCOME TO THE MUNICIPALITY OF ARCHANES-ASTEROUSIA.**

A Municipality with an exceptionally versatile landscape, thanks to the two mountain masses, namely, Mt. Juktas and the Asterousia Mountain Range, and the fertile plain of Mesara, the seat of great cultures since antiquity, as well as the hills, torrent beds and gorges that carve through the landscape, forming ideal habitats for rare fauna and flora species.

**The beauty of the nature and fertile land of the Municipality of Archanes-Asterousia have attracted people since ancient times.** Looking at the area from above one can fully understand why the ancestors of current residents chose this land to create significant cultural centres and places of worship. Endless fields for farming, high mountains appropriate for grazing and rich waters have offered a perfect combination for the development of great civilizations throughout all historical periods.

The Municipality of Archanes-Asterousia has adapted to modern times, while keeping the atmosphere of tradition and its unadulterated inland character. **The agricultural orientation of its economy** and social organisation are the safety valve preserving an **authentically agricultural landscape**, interspersed with traditional villages, full of life, endless olive groves, vineyards and pastures, and a total of **55 villages** that, literally, spring out of nowhere.

However, the region of the Municipality has gained most of its recognition from the fact that **this is where some of the most renowned musical tradition, architectural heritage and cultural centres are located.** Some of the best known names are: **Archanes**, one of the most beautiful listed traditional hamlets in all of Crete; **Ethia**, a typical example of a Cretan mountain village and a listed traditional hamlet; **Myrtia**, the family village of Nikos Kazantzakis and the home of the museum dedicated to this great literary figure; **Houdetsi**, home of the globally recognised Labyrinth Musical Workshop; **Astritsi**, home to the renowned Cultural Camping of youth theatre groups.



It is true that it may be difficult for one to imagine how a region so close to the urban centre of Heraklion can offer so many outlets for such a wide range of specialised interests. Adventure lovers will find the ideal playground for a number of outdoor activities, such as **mountain climbing**, **canyoning** in the well known gorges of the Asterousia, **mountain biking**, which has become very popular in recent years, **walking - hiking** on more than 15 trails in the Municipality and **sea canoeing** in the rock caves of the southern shores.

**Gastronomic and wine tourism** are also gaining ground. The climate and landscape have determined production activities and produce throughout the Municipality. At high altitudes and in the mountain ranges with the dry and infertile lands, **animal raising** is favoured, which provides meat and exceptional **dairy produce**. In the plains there are farmlands, the most important products being **grapes** and **olives**. This is where more than **70% of all branded Cretan wine is produced**.

Noteworthy industrial wine maturing and bottling plants take advantage of the unique grape varieties in the region, e.g. **Kotsifali**, **Vilana**, **Mantilari**, and produce and bottle

**some of the best known wines on Crete**. Thus, hundreds of locals and international visitors tour the **wineries** and **oil mills** of the Municipality, to see the wonderful exhibition premises and taste the excellent flavours on offer, as well as to participate in the renowned cultural activities organised every summer in the framework of the '**wine routes**' programme.

All these factors and many more are what make the Municipality of Archanes-Asterousia a frequently visited destination for both local and international visitors. This land may not offer luxurious hotels and services that usually come with mass tourism infrastructure, but it has shaped its very own tourism product, a fact that has made it a top choice for many special interest groups. Nature lovers, hikers, mountain sports lovers, religious and cultural site tourists, families, groups of young people and students, know that they will find nature at its most unspoiled here, an endless source of cultural wealth and genuine hospitality, as expressed through the exuberance of the locals, their gastronomic culture, their customs, traditions and feasts.

# HIKING TRAILS & CYCLING COURSES MAP

## LEGEND

— Borderlines of Prefectures

— Trekking or Climbing Trail  
(partly marked)



⛪ Church

⛪ Monastery

⚡ Gorge

⚡ Beach

🏛️ Antiquities

▲ Mountain Peak (in meters)

🏛️ Museum

🏰 Fortress

🍷 Winery

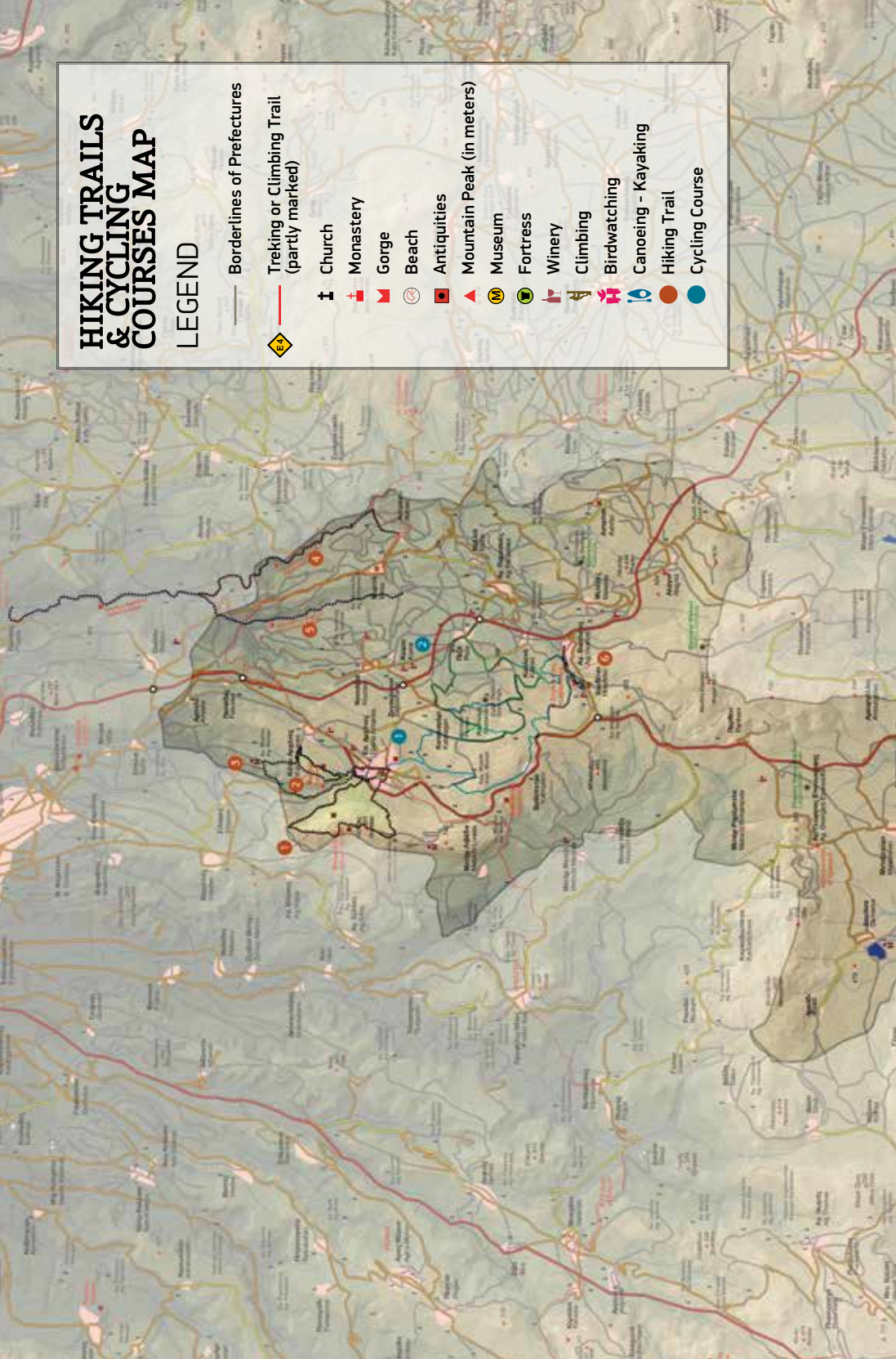
🧗 Climbing

🦋 Birdwatching

🚣 Canoeing - Kayaking

🚶 Hiking Trail

🚴 Cycling Course





# MAP OF WINERIES LEGEND

— Borderlines of Prefectures

Trekking or Climbing Trail  
(partly marked)



i Church

Monastery

Gorge

Beach

Antiquities

Mountain Peak (in meters)

Museum

Fortress

Winery

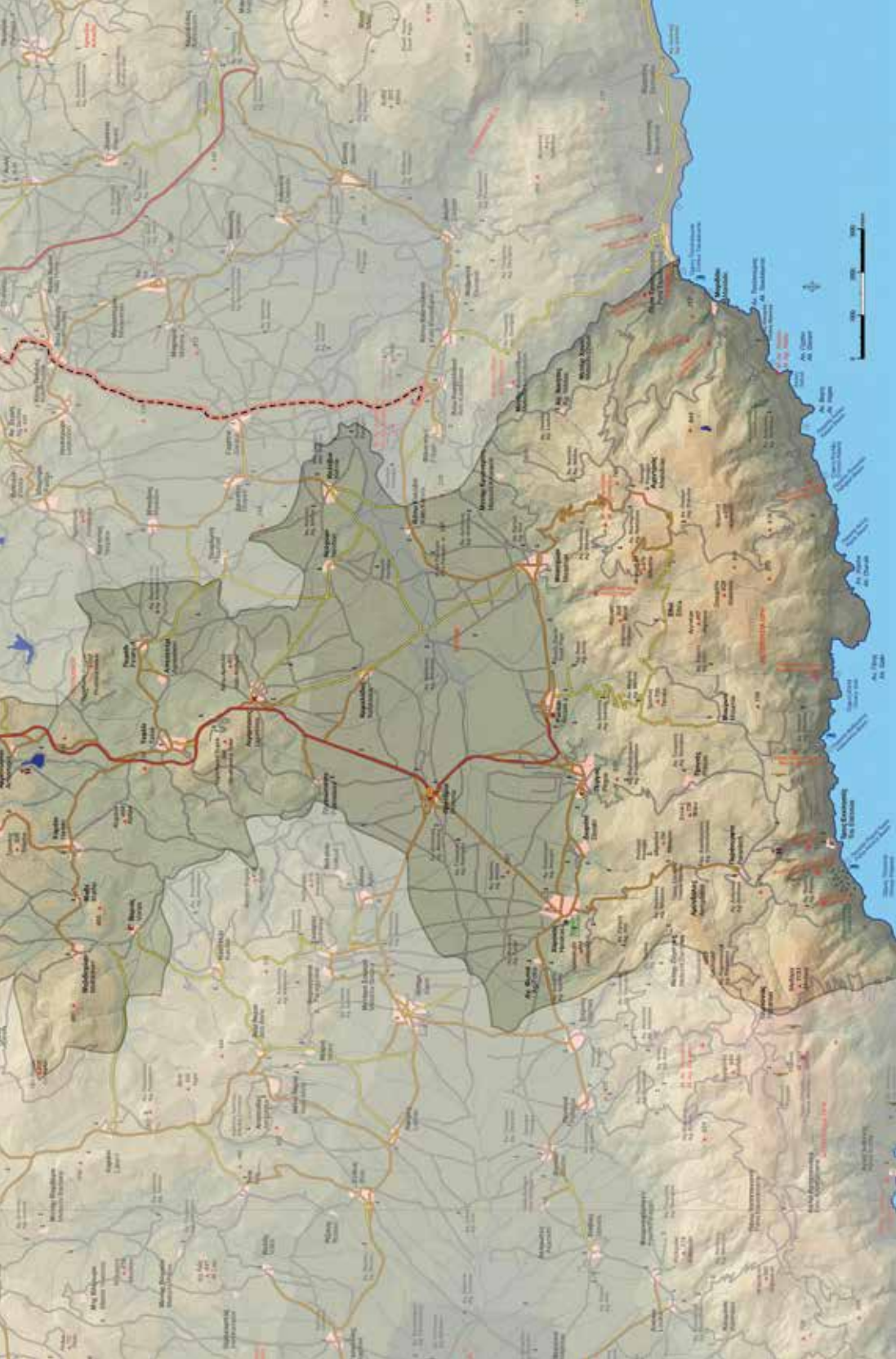
Climbing

Birdwatching

Canoeing - Kayaking

Wine Routes









## MUNICIPALITY HIGHLIGHTS VILLAGES - PEOPLE

**Archanes:** One of the prettiest listed traditional hamlets in the whole of Crete, both regarding its man-made and its natural environment, at the foot of imposing Mt. Juktas. The hamlet has been here for more than 4000 years and is of exceptional architectural and town-planning interest.

**Houdetsi:** An internationally renowned music village and the seat of the 'Labyrinth Musical Workshop'. Sites: Panagia Church, Hatzine Ottoman Fount, listed buildings, etc.

**Astritsi:** Just 12 km from Houdetsi and home to the famous Cultural Camping, a pan-hellenic cultural annual mid-summer festival held at the beautiful gorge of Ai Giannis in Kato Vrysi.

**Myrtia:** The historic village of Varvari (present day Myrtia) is the family homeland of Nikos Kazantzakis and the Museum dedicated to the great writer; it is also a picturesque village known for its wine over the last 7 centuries.

**Pyrgos:** The largest village at the foot of the Asterousia Mountain Range. It probably got its name from the Venetian tower built at the Apano Pyrgos location. Search for 'Karavon' plain, where you will find the ruins of 18 cereal-grinding watermills that used to run on spring water.

**Charakas:** The head village at the foot of Asterousia mountain range. Its famous landmark is Charaki, the Venetian castle that looks over the entire plain of Mesara.

**Achentrias:** A characteristic example of an animal-raising village in the Asterousia Mountain Range. It is the starting point of some of the most beautiful hiking trails of this mountainous region.

**Ethia:** A typical example of a Cretan mountain village, which has been listed as a traditional hamlet. Home to the visitor information centre for the protected region of the Asterousia Mountain Range.

# ARCHAEOLOGICAL TREASURES

If you decide to tour the villages of our Municipality, you must take into account that these lands have been cultivated, built on, and organised over the last 5000 years. So, anywhere you may find yourselves in the Municipality you will feel the aura of the past, starting from the following best-known archaeological treasures:

## **Mt. Juktas Archaeological Park:**

The anthropomorphic mountain has been a place of worship in its every spot; it is a main destination for anyone who wants a tour of Neolithic and, mainly, Minoan Crete. The most important locations are:

### **Iero Koryfis:**

One of the most important peak sanctuaries of Minoan Crete. It consists of four terraced benches, with an altar on the first, and six rooms looking to the east. The finds - votive dedications are of exceptional archaeological value.

### **Anemospilia:**

It is one of four shrines on Mt. Juktas. This rectangular building has three rooms, a corridor at the front and a courtyard. It contained a large number of worship and storage utensils.

### **Archanes and Tourkogitonia:**

Beneath this town in the municipality of Archanes, districts of a Minoan city have been excavated, while in the Tourkogitonia [Old Ottoman] quarter, part of an impressive and luxurious palace complex has been explored.

### **Fourni:**

Here you will find one of the most important prehistoric cemeteries with a large number and wide range of burial monuments dating back to the Proto-Minoan period and Post - Minoan period (2400 - 1200 B.C.)

### **Vathypetro:**

A significant Minoan mansion has been excavated here, with palatial architectural characteristics. They have also found a grape stomping vat, an olive press and a clay workshop with a ceramic kiln.

## **Rotasiani Kefala:**

It is located in Rotasi, at the foot of Asfentilia Hill, and was probably the acropolis of ancient Rytio, an ancient city of central Crete during the Archaic - Hellenistic Period. Apart from the acropolis, the ancient city cemetery has also been found and partly excavated.

### **Charaki:**

The castle of Charaki was probably built in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, when the area was a Venetian fiefdom. Its location was exceptionally defensible and had direct oversight of Mesara valley. The Church of the Transfiguration [Metamorphosis] stands on the west side of the hill.

## **The ancient city of Eltynia:**

The territory of ancient Eltynia is now home to Kounavoi, Peza, Katalagari, Zagouriano and Komes. Eltynia was an independent city with its own laws, strict socio-political structure and an aristocratic governance system. Sporadic important finds reaffirm the position of the ancient city in the region. The geometrical cemetery at Vathiades, parts of which have been excavated, is considered especially noteworthy.

### **Damantri:**

In this location, near Pretoria, a large central Minoan building has been found, surrounded by a settlement and necropolises. This discovery, according to archaeologists, has bridged a large gap, since a Minoan centre had been anticipated in the eastern basin of the great Mesara Valley.

### **Astritsi:**

In the Kefala position to the north of the village, lay the ruins of the walled city of the Archaic Period, which may possibly be identified as the ancient city of Diatonion.

### **Ligortynos:**

At the northern entrance of the village a large carved chamber-shaped tomb from the



Geometric Period was discovered. Unfortunately, it had been plundered.

#### **Inatos and Eileithya Cave:**

The Roman ruins of the settlement and the cemeteries discovered in present day Tsoutsouros position have been identified as the ancient city of Inatos. This is the location of the cave dedicated to the worship of Eileithya, goddess of childbirth.

#### **Koules ton Tholon [Fortress of the Domes]:**

It is situated to the west of Alagni. It may be the central fortress of a network leading from Heraklion to Lasithi. Its use possibly dates back to the end of Venetian rule.

#### **Kastelos and Katalagari stomping vats:**

To the south of Katalagari hamlet, on the hill of Kastelos, stands the Venetian castle of Paliochora or Castello del Corner, property of the Cornaros family. To the west of the castle there is a complex of five rectangular stomping vats with carved receptacles. Nearby there are also two carved compression bases of a worm gear press, which also date back to the Venetian Period.

#### **Kastelos Meleses:**

On Kastelos Hill, near Meleses, stand the ruins of the Venetian fortification, as well as the ruins of the church of Panagia. In Meleses, in the Patitiria or Patitiraki [stomping vats] location, part of a domed stomping vat chamber has been preserved.



## NATURE - PROTECTED AREAS

Mt. Juktas and the Asterousia Mountain Range are two of the most important territories on the island of Crete, as far as biodiversity is concerned; both are part of the E.U. NATURA 2000 Network of Protected Areas.

### **Mt. Juktas:**

This small mountain (811m) is home to more than 360 species of plants, approximately 1/5 of Crete's flora, and 40 species of birds, the most important being the griffon vulture, which uses the mountain as its nesting and mating ground.

### **The Asterousia Mountain Range:**

The treeless Asterousia Mountain Range has a unique charm and even greater ecological value: 55% of the species recorded in Crete can be found in the Asterousia: 23 endemic species and subspecies of plants, more than 90 species of birds, 24 species of reptiles, 8 species of invertebrates, 29 species of diurnal predatory birds and a large number of migratory birds. There are numerous gorges in these mountains.

### **Agios Nikitas Palm Forest:**

The wild Theophrastus palm forest at Agios Nikitas is a small oasis along the treeless shoreline.

### **Treis Ekklisies Carob Tree Forest:**

To the west of the hamlet grows the most extensive natural carob tree forest in Europe.

### **Wetlands:**

The lakes of Armanogia (380m) and Damania are the habitat of dozens of species of small birds; an ideal spot for wild fauna watchers.

### **Knosano, Astrakiano, Kounaviano Gorges:**

Vegetation in these gorges is wild and the waters rich; this is why there are so many mills and aqueducts from various historical periods accompanying hikers along whatever trail they choose.

### **Spiliotissa [Madonna of the Cave] Gorge:**

A small gorge, an oasis of green between Agios Vasilios and Houdetsi. At its Agios Vasilios entrance stands the Monastery of Spiliotissa.

### **Beaches:**

The shorelines of the Municipality, to the south of the Asterousia Mountain Range, host some of the most impressive beaches on Crete, with a large number of sea caves and salt marshes; they are an attraction for both swimmers and canoe paddlers.

### **Abas:**

The torrent running through Abas Gorge, near Paranympoi, creates a 145m waterfall. The gorge's steep cliffs are home to the largest number of predatory birds in Greece.





## MUSEUMS

### **Nikos Kazantzakis Museum:**

A modern and well organised museum at Myrtia that pays homage to the great intellectual figure, exhibiting his manuscripts and notes, books published in various languages, rare photographs and other items.

(Myrtia, Tel: 2810 741689, [www.kazantzaki.gr](http://www.kazantzaki.gr))

### **Archanes Archaeological Collection:**

The archaeological collection of Archanes displays finds from the Minoan era from digs in the area. Contact to arrange a visit

(Archanes, Tel: 2810 752712)

### **Peza Union Exhibits:**

It was founded in 1933 and it is housed in an old bottling plant. The collection includes old olive press equipment from the 19<sup>th</sup> century (grape press, wine pump, distillery kit, etc.). A wine tasting facility and wine retail stall operate at the same venue.

(Kalloni, Tel: 2810 741945 -7)

### **Modal Musical Instrument Museum:**

This is a collection of musical instruments from around the world, used at the Labyrinth Musical Workshop in Houdetsi.

(Tel: 2810 741027, [www.labyrinthmusic.gr](http://www.labyrinthmusic.gr))

### **Folk Museum (Pano Archanes):**

A restored neoclassical building houses the Folk Museum, which presents exhibits from the traditional and daily life of Archanes.

(Visits can be arranged, Tel: 2813 4011000-156)

### **Mt. Juktas Outdoor Museum of Aromatic and Other Plants:**

Along the Anemospilia-Koryfi Mt. Juktas trail, there are a large number of signs informing visitors on the names of aromatic and other plants in Latin, posted by the Archanes Centre for Environmental Education.





## EXTREME SPORTS, NATURE TRAILS, THEME ROUTES

If you are canyoning, rock climbing, trekking, cycling or hiking lovers, you are in the right place!

In the area of the Municipality a network of 10 hiking trails has been established. They follow either ancient paths or goat trails and old footpaths connecting hamlets or locations used by the locals. Most of the paths are well preserved and sign-posted.

At the beginning of each one there is a sign with information on how they should be hiked.

Furthermore, there is a network of 5 mountain biking routes, 4 wine routes with wineries you can visit, 6 impressive gorges secured for technical descents (canyoning) and climbing ranges, which, in total, compose a varied tourist product for those searching for a more substantial acquaintance with this land.

### CUSTOMS

Like all Cretans, the locals of this region are well known for their generous hospitality. Ask them anything you want to know without fear, no matter where you find yourselves and start a conversation with them. You will most definitely enrich your knowledge of the land you find yourself in "every time", especially if you have the luck to meet animal raising farmers in the mountain, who will amaze you with the incredible wealth of place names with which they decorate every inch of land on the mountains they travel.

In the framework of your discrete presence the best way to keep an excellent relationship with the locals, especially in remote villages, is to keep them informed of your plans (camping with or without tents, hiking, etc.). A coffee, a raki at the village cafés, a word with the regulars will reward you with a warm offer of information, interest and very often... delicacies!





## HIKING TRAILS

Download the coordinates of the trails from the Municipality website. For the trails, please look for the printed trail guide of the Municipality of Archanes-Asterousia at the Town Halls in Pyrgos, Archanes and Peza.

- T. 1. Anemospilia - Mt. Juktas - Archanes (circular trail)
- T. 2. Fourni (circular trail)
- T. 3. Knosano Gorge (circular trail)
- T. 4. Astrakiano Gorge
- T. 5. Kounaviano Gorge
- T. 6. Spiliotissa Gorge
- T. 7. Rotasi - Ethia - Rotasi (circular trail)
- T. 8. Paronymfoi - Treis Ekklisies
- T. 9. Ligiofarango and Lichnistis
- T.10. Achentrias - Agios Nikitas



## CYCLING COURSES

- C.C. 1. Tour of Archanes
- C.C. 2. Tour of Peza
- C.C. 3. Tour of Pyrgos - Charakas
- C.C. 4. Achentrias - Pyrgos
- C.C. 5. Tour of Achentria

Regarding all these, look for the printed tour guide of the Archanes-Asterousia Municipality at the municipal departments in Pyrgos, Archanes and Peza.





## TECHNICAL GORGES (CANYONING)

The geomorphology and types of rock formations in the Asterousia Mountains have led to the formation of many deep gorges, which have recently become a pole of attraction for many canyoning groups.

In the narrow strip of land (in relation to the overall mountainous mass of the Asterousia mountain range) that is part of the Municipality of Archanes-Asterousia, there are 7 such gorges, 6 of which exit onto the Libyan Sea (to the south) and only one onto the plain of Mesara (to the north).

The gorges of Agia Paraskevi, Abas, Ethiano (or Vorno), Tsoutsouras, Maridaki, Kakoperato, Mesosfini are deep scars in the steep mountains of the Asterousia range; gorges usually start up high and end on the south coast. These gorges are some of the most beautiful in Crete, with impressive waterfalls and breathtaking descents, attracting canyoning lovers from around the world.

**Beware!** The following gorges are only for those well acquainted with technical descents of gorges.





## CLIMBING

In the region of the western Asterousia Mountains (Agiofarango, Kapetaniana, Kofinas), as well as in the cave of Agios Antonios (the impressive cave formation approximately in the middle of the Paranympfoi or Treis Ekklesies-Koudoumas trail), you will find many courses of varying degrees of difficulty and unique interest, due to the dramatic landscape and amazing images created by the combination of the brown-red vertical slopes that plunge into the deep blue of the sea.

Within the borders of the Municipality of Archanes-Asterousia, the best known courses are in Treis Ekklesies and, specifically, in Abas Gorge and in the beginning of the Kleisoura trail, which runs parallel to Abas Gorge, approached from the beach and from Treis Ekklesies (it is rough going for those who decide to cross it to get to Paranympfoi).

For those interested in experimenting with the creation of new courses, try the rocks easily identified when driving from Paranympfoi to Mournia.

In recent years, courses of various difficulty levels have been opened on the slopes of Mt. Juktas.

For all climbing courses, participants are required to have their own 50m rope, personal set of gear and individual equipment (harness, helmet, footwear, etc.).

Avoid climbing from December to February.

It is the mating season of the few pairs of birds of prey that choose the rocks as their nesting and mating grounds!





## WATCHING BIRDS OF PREY AND SMALL BIRDS

The area of the Municipality of Archanes - Asterousia is ideal for birdwatching.

Its mountainous masses, the hilly ridges in its middle region, the reservoirs-dams of Damania and Armanogeia that have become wetlands, and the seafront, are nesting and mating habitats for small birds, predatory birds and migratory species that one may encounter in large populations.

The species that are the trademark for the entire region are the birds of prey, especially the griffon vulture and the bearded vulture. Their protection has been the main goal in the management framework of the two mountainous masses of Mt. Juktas and the Asterousia Mountain Range, which, to this end, have been incorporated in the European Protected Areas Network (NATURA).

At the Asterousia Protected Area Information Centre in Ethia you can borrow observation equipment (telescopes, binoculars, covers, and specialised books<sup>1</sup>).



## WINE ROUTES OF THE PREFECTURE OF HERAKLION

The Wine Routes of the Prefecture of Heraklion are routes that were created by the Winemaker's Network, and which have been designed in such a way that you have the opportunity to become acquainted with the largest possible number of representative grape-wine producing zones in the region.

Viticulture in Crete has a history of approximately 4,000 years, and it would be no exaggeration to say that we are on the Minoan wine routes, the same routes on which the Minoans cultivated their vineyards and transported their renowned wine in amphora vases throughout the Mediterranean.

They combine travelling through regions with a noteworthy presence of monuments and historical sites associated with wine since antiquity, traditional hamlets, sites and trails of natural beauty, and the most noteworthy wineries where you can try wines and local delicacies.

### WINE ROUTES (WINERIES RECEIVING VISITORS)

- WR.1: Heraklion - Knossos - Skalani - Patsides  
- Kato Archanes
- WR.2: Archanes - Vathypetro - Kounavoi  
- Katalagari - Peza Valley
- WR.3: Peza - Agies Paraskies - Kalloni  
- Agios Vasilios - Houdetsi
- WR. 4: Agies Paraskies - Meleses - Alagni

### Route description

Following Leoforos Knossou (in the city of Heraklion) will lead you to the city exit where the archaeological site of Knossos is located. At a short distance around the palace there are other Minoan monuments scattered, such as the 'Royal Mansion', the 'Small Palace', 'Caravan Sarai', the 'House of the High Priest', the 'Royal Tomb-Sanctuary', and the 'Villa of Dionysus'.

Continue along the beautiful valley south of Knossos and you will come across the first vineyards in no time. A short distance away, at Spilia, you will make out the old aqueduct that used to transfer spring water from the Archanes range to Heraklion. To the south of Spilia you will arrive at the intersection



to the east of the road leading to the village of Sakalani, which is located on the ridge of a hill covered in vineyards. If you continue south, following the road crossing the small valley of Patsides hamlet, you will have the opportunity to admire a wonderful agricultural landscape with vineyards growing on the slopes of the valley all the way to Kato Archanes village. A little further to the south you will reach Archanes, one of the most flourishing farmers' hamlets in Greece, with deep roots in Minoan antiquity and a rich wine producing tradition.

To the south of the hamlet Mt. Juktas towers and antiquities are to be found all around, such as the Minoan cemetery at Fourni, the Sanctuary at Anemospilia and the Peak Sanctuary.

If you take the road leading south from Archanes you will reach the abandoned hamlet of Vathypetro, where the Minoan Mansion with the grape press is located, one of the most important monuments of the Minoan Period.

From Archanes follow the ascending road and cross the peak of the hill to the east to come face to face with the district of Kounavoi, lush with vineyards, which you reach by crossing the village of Katalagari.

Further along, to the south of Kounavoi lies the valley of Peza, the largest wine producing centre of Crete; the slopes of the surrounding hills are dotted with the traditional vineyard villages of the region: Agies Paraskies, Kalloni, Agios Vasileios.

Take the road heading north from Agies Paraskies and you will find Myrtia, home of the Nikos Kazantzakis Museum.

The road leading south from Agies Paraskies journeys through a beautiful hilly landscape in the valley of Meleses village and further south to Alagni, its vineyards creating one of the most beautiful rural landscapes in Crete. From Peza take the road crossing the villages of Kalloni and Agios Vasileios to reach Houdetsi, a hamlet hidden on the hillsides of a gorgeous valley, at the exit of which rolls out a landscape with endless vineyards, opening out onto the south of the prefecture's hinterland.

Following the country road to the south of Houdetsi, after passing Epanosifis Monastery, continue to the villages of Metaxochori, Charaki, Madé, Melidochori, and Vorias, which have been playing a significant role in the wine producing process of the broader region over the last few years.

This is where the wine routes of the Municipality of Archanes-Asterousia end, and the routes that pass through neighbouring Municipalities continue. You can learn more about these routes from the Winemaker's Network ([www.winesofcrete.gr](http://www.winesofcrete.gr)) or from leaflets available at all wineries and the Town Hall.



## WINERIES OF THE ARCHANES-ASTEROUSIA MUNICIPALITY

MUNICIPAL COMMUNITY	AREA	NAME
1 Archanes	Archanes	Archanes Farmer's Cooperative
2 Archanes	Archanes	Synadakis Winery
3 N. Kazantzakis	Peza	Peza Farming Associations' Union
4 N. Kazantzakis	Peza	MINOS Cretan Wines S.A. - Miliariakis Winery
5 N. Kazantzakis	Kounavoi	Creta Olympias, MEDITERRA WINERY
6 N. Kazantzakis	Kounavoi	Stylianou Winery
7 N. Kazantzakis	Kounavoi	Titakis Wines
8 N. Kazantzakis	Metaxochori	Michalakis Estate
9 N. Kazantzakis	Meleses	Paterianakis Domaine
10 N. Kazantzakis	Alagni	Lyrarakis Winery
11 N. Kazantzakis	Houdetsi	'RHOUS' Tamiolakis Winery
12 N. Kazantzakis	Houdetsi	Menexes Estate
13 Asterousia	Vorias	Gavalas Domaine



#### TELEPHONE

+30 2810 753200  
+30 2810 751315  
+30 2810 741945  
+30 2810 741213  
+30 2810 741383  
+30 6936 430368  
+30 2810 743630  
+30 2810 381303  
+30 2810 226674  
+30 2810 741482  
+30 2810 742083  
+30 6947 260251  
+30 28940 51060

#### WEBSITE

[www.archanescoop.gr](http://www.archanescoop.gr)  
[www.cretanwines.gr](http://www.cretanwines.gr)  
[www.pezaunion.gr](http://www.pezaunion.gr)  
[www.minoswines.gr](http://www.minoswines.gr)  
[www.mediterrawines.gr](http://www.mediterrawines.gr)  
[www.stilianouwines.gr](http://www.stilianouwines.gr)  
[www.titakis.gr](http://www.titakis.gr)  
[www.michalakis.gr](http://www.michalakis.gr)  
[www.paterianakis.gr](http://www.paterianakis.gr)  
[www.lyrarakis.gr](http://www.lyrarakis.gr)  
[www.rhouswinery.gr](http://www.rhouswinery.gr)  
[www.menexes.com](http://www.menexes.com)  
[www.nikosgavalas.gr](http://www.nikosgavalas.gr)





# HOW TO USE THIS DOCUMENT

## WHEN TO TRAVEL

## ACTIVITIES

### HIKING @ MOUNTAIN BIKING

**Months recommended:** April, May, June, mid-September to mid-November.

Avoid very hot days.

Hiking the Municipality trails is enjoyable even in winter (unless stated otherwise in the separate description of each trail), as the winter in Crete is mild.

### CANYONING

**Months recommended:**

Throughout the year. Avoid very hot days.

We recommend you avoid waterless months (from mid-June to mid-October) because between descents you will come to stagnant water that you definitely do not want to wade through.

### CLIMBING

**Months recommended:**

Throughout the year. Avoid very hot days.

We recommend you avoid waterless months (from mid-June to mid-October) because between descents you will come to stagnant water that you definitely do not want to wade through.

### SEA CANOEING

**Months recommended:** March to November.

The Municipality's sea activities can be enjoyed even during winter months, as the winter in Crete is mild.

### AGROTOURISM

**Olive harvest:** November - January (throughout the Municipality, mainly in the south, from the plain of Mesara to the northern slopes of the Asterousia Mountains).

**Grape harvest:** Mid-August - September (in the area of the municipal communities of Archanes and N. Kazantzakis, and less so in the plain of Mesara).

### Raki (tsikoudia) distillation:

From mid-October until the end of November (in the area of the municipal communities of Archanes and N. Kazantzakis, and less so in the plain of Mesara).

## CLIMATE

The climate throughout the area is typically temperate Mediterranean, with mild winters and warm summers. During the summer nights there is increased humidity, especially at the foot of Mt. Juktas. On the southern shores of the Asterousia Mountains the low temperatures last a very short time and, as a result, winter is almost unknown. Rainfall is average, with exceptions, and it usually takes place between November and March.

The small amount of rain does not allow for an extensive water supply network. The streams that do exist are small and are torrent-like. This is why if you are travelling here for canyoning you must be especially careful if it rains, as torrents may suddenly appear where you least expect them...

Snow is very limited, even in the mountains. As for winds, the Asterousia Mountain Range is affected by the Libyan Sea and, particularly in the winter period, when there are powerful south-southwestern winds prevailing. Northern and southern winds blow often and they are rather strong. Northern winds, in particular, which blow in the summer (meltemia), pick up speed as they descend from the mountain ranges they encounter further north.

## OVERVIEW

The area is perfect for outdoor activities throughout the year, due to the mild climate and low altitudes. Spring and autumn are ideal periods for walking-hiking and cycling, due to the reasonable temperature range and the rebirth of nature. Snowfall on Municipality mountains is rare, while you should expect very high temperatures during the hot summer days in the treeless mountain paths of Mt. Juktas and the Asterousia Mountain Range..

**Sowing vegetables and local plants** during the seed festival, at the seed bank in Pyrgos:

Early spring

**Crop sowing:** October, November

/ **Crop Harvesting:** Late May (Mesara plain and Asterousia Mountain Range areas).

## FESTIVALS, RELIGIOUS FEASTS & MUSICAL EVENTS

### WINTER

**Translation of St. George's Holy Relics (with the participation of many pilgrims):** on November 3, at the Holy Monastery of Epanosifi.

**Christmas:** In all villages (especially the larger ones) there are events such as concerts, the Storytelling Festival in Charakas and Archanes, Christmas Village in Archanes, etc.

**Agiou Antoniou (St. Anthony's) Feast:**

January 17, "breaking of bread" by locals of villages near the chapel of St. Anthony in the palm forest of Agios Nikitas in the Asterousia Mountain Range.

**Pyrgos Carnival:** February.

### SPRING

**Seed festival:** March-April in Pyrgos (information available at the Town Hall in advance).

**Epanosifis Monastery Festival** with the georgalidika horses: on St. George's Feast, April 23, at Epanosifis Monastery.

Mountain biking races: information available at the Town Hall.

**Koures** (shearing) (animal raising festival -sheep shearing at mitata [animal farmers' stone huts] in the Asterousia Mountain Range): Springtime (to attend such a festival, it is better to have been invited by a local animal farmer).

**Easter:** The greatest celebration of Eastern Orthodox Christianity. Wherever you find yourself during the Holy Week you will enjoy the religious ceremonies and church masses and liturgies in all villages of the Municipality. Do not miss Holy Friday at Epanosifis Monastery. After the Epitaphios Procession around the Monastery, everyone heads to the cemetery. They then go to the sheep-shed where all the sheep pass under the Epitaphios.

### SUMMER

**Cultural camping at Astritsi:** End of July - early August in Kato Vrysi, Astritsi.

**Houdetsi Festival:** Early August ('Labyrinth' Musical Workshop).

'Taxidevontas' (Travelling) Nikos Kazantzakis Festival: July, Nikos Kazantzakis Museum in Myrtia.

**Parathamnia:** Summer festival organised by the Tefeli Cultural Association.

Kakavia (fish soup, type of bouillabaisse)

**Festival:** August, Treis Ekklesies (Treis Ekklesies Cultural Association)

**Archanes Music Academy Seminars:** From June, in Archanes (Archanes Summer Music Academy, info@aasma.gr, Tel: 2810 722160) Modal musical instrument seminars: Summer and autumn at Houdetsi ('Labyrinth' Musical Workshop, info@labyrinthmusic.gr, Tel: 2810 741027).

**Municipality summer festivals/celebrations:** Get detailed information from the event programmes announced by the Municipality and the villages' cultural associations (i.e. Archanes, Pyrgos, Tefeli).

**Christ Festival:** 6 August on Mt. Juktas.

Assumption (August 15): Spiliotissa Convent, Agios Vasileios and in almost all the villages of the Municipality.

### AUTUMN

**St. Nikitas Pilgrimage:** 15 September at Agiou Nikita (St. Nikitas) Monastery in the Asterousia Mountain Range.

**Village Wine-Making Competition:** 2 November at Agies Paraskies (Cultural Association of Agies Paraskies and the Municipality).

**Modal musical instrument seminars:** Summer and autumn in Houdetsi ('Labyrinth' Musical Workshop, info@labyrinthmusic.gr, Tel: 2810 741027).



## TOURIST SERVICES

Throughout the Municipality you will find a variety of cafés, taverns and lodgings ready to cater for you. Information on anything you need can be found at Town Halls and the Citizens' Service Centres [KEPs] in Archanes, Peza and Pyrgos, and at the following websites:

[www.dimos-archanon-asterousion.gr](http://www.dimos-archanon-asterousion.gr)  
and [www.archanes-asterousia.gr](http://www.archanes-asterousia.gr).

Apart from the high standard accommodation that can be found in many Municipality villages, those of you who wish to camp (using your own tents and equipment) have the following options:

### CAMPING SITES

#### **Ethia Camping Centre.**

This is a recently created camping site that will be open until mid 2015 in the schoolyard of the old primary school of Ethia. The camping site belongs to the Municipality, which manages it, and it is housed along with the Information Centre for the Protected Area of the Asterousia Mountain Range, where you can get information and leaflets on the mountain range, its biodiversity and activities that you can participate in, while you can also borrow equipment for activities such as bird watching, cycling, etc.

#### **Kato Vrysi ravine.**

It is located at Astritsi village. Here you can go free camping, as long as you have your own tent. There are showers and toilets and a café-tavern run by the women's co-op of the village. Although you can choose freely where to pitch your tent, information from the tavern management or the village cultural association is always offered to provide you with the best service possible.

#### **Agios Nikitas (St. Nikitas) Monastery.**

After contacting the Monastery caretaker you can either stay in cells there or in your own tents in the olive grove just below the monastery, or even on the beach the monastery steps lead to. The monastery has a fount and stone tables where you can snack.

#### **Primary schools.**

After contacting the cultural associations or the local community president in each village, you can request to stay in the schoolyards of schools that are no longer operating, i.e. in Agios Vasileios, Achenrias, and elsewhere. In most cases the schools have toilets and the villages provide various services, such as cafés, taverns and supermarkets. You can pitch your tent either inside the school or in the schoolyard.

The state-of-the-art building of Ethia parish, in Ethia village (contact the Parish Head or ask in the village).

Local homes in the hamlets of Archanes and Houdetsi (Contact the Town Hall in this case).

Points where information and municipality tourism promotional documents are available: Town Halls and Citizens' Service Centres [KEPs] in Pyrgos Archanes and Peza. Hotels and taverns throughout the municipality.

### ABBREVIATIONS

**M.U.** - Municipal Unit

**M.C.** - Municipal Community

**L.C.** - Local Community

**Municipality A.A.** - Municipality of Archanes-Asterousia

**KEP** - Citizens' Service Centres

**N.H.M.C.** - Natural History Museum of Crete

**P.A.** - Protected Area

# INFORMATION POINTS & CAMPING SITES

INFORMATION POINTS	Information provided	Distribution of printed material	Lodgings
Ethia Information Centre	√***	√	Camping Centre
Archanes Environmental Education Centre	√**	√	
Peza Town Hall (Info Kiosk)	√	√	
Pyrgos Town Hall			
	√	√	
Archanes Town Hall			
	√	√	
Kato Vrysi Ravine/Valley	√	√*	Visitors' own equipment (tents)
Lodgings/Hotels	√	√*	√
Agios Nikitas Monastery		√*	In old monks' cells after making arrangements, using tents and visitors' own equipment
			√
Ethia Parish Welcoming Centre			√*
Charakas Pensioners' Open Care Centre [KAPI]			
Museums throughout the municipality		√	
Labyrinth Musical Workshop		√	

\* Availability cannot be guaranteed

\*\* Mainly on the protected area of Mt.Juktas

\*\*\* Mainly on the protected area of the Asterousia Mountain Range.

## Tourist and other information

Municipality of Archanes-Asterousia	<a href="http://archanes-asterousia.gr">archanes-asterousia.gr</a>
Official documentary on the Municipality	<a href="http://archanes-asterousia.gr">archanes-asterousia.gr</a>
Video about the Municipality of Archanes-Asterousia	<a href="https://youtube.com/watch?v=qgcAOU6HnRI@feature=related">youtube.com/watch?v=qgcAOU6HnRI@feature=related</a>
Video about the Asterousia Mountain Range area	<a href="https://youtube.com/watch?v=Dv8hfZHtEnU">youtube.com/watch?v=Dv8hfZHtEnU</a>
Wine Routes	<a href="http://winesofcrete.gr/cretewines/el/Wineries">winesofcrete.gr/cretewines/el/Wineries</a>
Astrakiano Gorge, Kounaviano Gorge	<a href="http://dimos-nikoskazantzakis.gr/GRE/flash.htm">dimos-nikoskazantzakis.gr/GRE/flash.htm</a>
N. Kazantzakis Museum	<a href="http://kazantzakis-museum.gr">kazantzakis-museum.gr</a>
Labyrinth Musical Workshop	<a href="http://labyrinthmusic.gr/el">labyrinthmusic.gr/el</a>

## INFORMATION

Information for all of the above can be found at the local Town Halls and Citizens' Service Centres [KEPs] in Archanes (Tel: 2810 752960), Peza (Tel: 2810 401141-156) and Pyrgos (Tel: 2893 340128-129).

To visit archaeological sites, contact the Archaeological Collection of Archanes

**Opening hours:** From 08:00-15:00 daily, but not on Tuesdays; Tel: 2810 752712.

[www.archanes-asterousia.gr](http://www.archanes-asterousia.gr)

[www.dimos-archanon-asterousion.gr](http://www.dimos-archanon-asterousion.gr)

## INFRASTRUCTURAL TABLE OF ARCHANES-ASTEROUSIA MUNICIPALITY



## MUNICIPAL UNIT OF ARCHANES

[illegible]

**"N. KAZANTAKIS" MUNICIPAL UNIT**

Agies Paraskies		●		●			●	●	●		●			●	●		●	●	●	
Agios Vasileios							●	●			●			●	●		●		●	●
Alagni		●			●		●	●		●	●			●						
Astrakoi							●	●	●					●	●		●		●	●
Astritsi				●			●	●	●		●			●	●	●			●	●
Armanogia								●												●
Damania								●												●
Kalloni				●				●		●					●					●
Katalagari				●			●	●			●	●	●		●					
Kounavoi		●		●		●	●	●		●	●	●		●	●	●			●	
Meleses							●	●		●	●	●		●		●				
Metaksochori							●	●		●							●			●
Myrtia		●					●	●	●		●			●		●	●	●	●	
Peza		●	●			●	●	●	●	●	●			●				●		
Houdetsi		●			●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●		●	●	●	●	●

## MUNICIPAL UNIT OF ASTEROUSIA

[illegible]

# SURVIVAL GUIDE

## INSTRUCTIONS FOR TRAILS AND ROUTES

This guide presents a summary of the nature trails you can follow in each area so as to enrich your holidays. It also includes cultural and other thematic trails.

More detailed information is presented in the more specialised guide you can obtain at various distribution points.

In any case, if you choose to proceed with outdoor activities, please take into account the following:

### DO NOT FORGET!

Necessary personal equipment:

Hiking boots/walking shoes, hiking baton, sun screen, hat, sunglasses, wind breaker, small backpack, hand or head torch, bags for rubbish, etc. depending on the type of activity you choose.



### Water

Throughout the trails, there are few springs with drinkable water. Take a moment to estimate your personal needs depending on the duration and difficulty level of each trail. Avoid drinking from rivers, wells or springs that are not appropriately marked.

### Difficulties

Do not underestimate the mountainous character of Municipality mountains. At many points on the trails the terrain may be loose or slippery due to rain, a fact that makes it significantly more hazardous, especially along steep sections.

Take care during fog, especially in the mountainous areas of the Asterousia, where trails are not always easily discernable.

**In case of an accident in a gorge, on a trail, at sea or anywhere where extreme sports are undertaken, please contact:**

The National Emergency Aid Centre	166
Police Immediate Response	100
European Emergency Number	112
Fire Department	199
Heraklion EMAK (Hellenic Rescue Team) 2813 07016	

### Fences

On trails that lead through grazing areas you may encounter closed fences. Make sure you close any gates you walk through. Keep your distance from sheep dogs and avoid behaviour that could be perceived as aggressive.

### Road network

Access to the Municipality is through the urban centre of Heraklion, heading towards Archanes and Peza, either taking the old country road or the new central road network. If you take the new road, access is through the motorway and requires far less time than the country road, which, although paved with asphalt, has many turns and limited visibility at points, which increases risk. Nonetheless, if you take the country road, you will be compensated by the view of the vineyards in the plain, the valley and the view of Knossos Palace, of the Arab aqueduct at Agia Eirini, and the lush vegetation throughout the route, thanks to the Katsambadianos River.

If you want to fully satisfy the explorer in you, wander around the dirt roads that start in the villages and lead to various points in

the countryside; if you are in the Asterousia Mountain Range, prepare yourselves for endless off-road routes that will amaze you with the wildness and beauty of the landscape. A 4x4 vehicle is a 'must' in such cases.

### Sign-posting

Signs are not posted on all trails. Furthermore, some trails are not even clearly set out and follow goat trails. If you estimate that your experience with mountains is adequate you can attempt following them, but we recommend you first visit the Municipality website [www.archanes-asterousia.gr](http://www.archanes-asterousia.gr), where you can download the coordinates of each route onto your GPS, providing you with information per stop, thus making your trek easier and more interesting.

### Changes in trails

The information in this map was accurate at the time it was published and the publisher is not liable for possible future changes. Changes in the trails or in the conditions of the trails may be due to human intervention (farming, animal raising, public works) or weather conditions (local torrential rain causes significant alterations to trails).

### Safety

In general, the trails in the region are manageable, without great difficulties or technical demands. Hikers follow the trails described on their own risk. They are responsible for any accidents that may befall them or any damage they might cause, such as forest fires, pollution, degradation of the environment, etc. Your safety on the mountain depends entirely on your personal judgement, training and experience, as well as the assessment of your own skills.

Use of the information in this document must be combined with the understanding on your part of the dangers hiking in unknown areas entails and with the recognition of your personal responsibility in the choices you make regarding your safety.

### Poisonous animals/insects

There are no poisonous animals on Crete, but you should take the necessary precautions in case you are allergic to certain insect stings (i.e. there are bees everywhere) or other land or sea creatures.

### Difficulty levels:

#### Low (1-2):

Suitable for any interested party, even children that are accustomed to hiking.

#### Medium (3-5):

Suitable for those in relatively good physical condition with elementary mountain hiking knowledge.

#### High (5-6):

Suitable for experienced climbers and hikers.

### Hiking tour durations

The duration quoted for each trail is indicative for the pace and skill of an average hiker. Attention! Breaks and stops are not included in the time indicated. In plains or slightly hilly areas the walking pace is calculated at approximately 4 km/hour. In purely mountainous terrain with high inclines, hiking uphill is calculated based on 300m in altitude difference per hour, while hiking downhill is calculated at 400-500m altitude difference per hour. This data should be adjusted based on the personal pace and physical condition of the hiker, the weather conditions, the weight of the backpack, etc.

#### HERAKLION HOSPITALS

##### PEPAGNI (Regional University Hospital of Heraklion)

Exchange Centre 2813 402111

Information 2810 392835

2810 392549

Citizens' Bureau 2810 392701

##### VENIZELEIO

Call Centre (60 lines) 2813 408000

#### HEALTH CENTRES:

Agia Varvara 28943 40100

Charakas 28933 40000

Moires 28923 40100

Arkalochori 28913 40200

Kastelos 28913 40000

Vianos 28953 40000

#### e-track

Download the trail coordinates from the Municipality website, [www.archanes-asterousia.gr](http://www.archanes-asterousia.gr) and load them on to your GPS.



# GORGE DIRECTIONS CANYONING

The following gorges are only suitable for those well acquainted with technical descents of gorges.

## What this means is:

- Crossing them requires a great amount of experience and good technical skills, as well as a full set of personal equipment.

- All gorges are rigged with anchors, but there is always the possibility of corrosion or wear; therefore, you must always have with you a rigging set for any possible changes that need to be made.

- Check the relay before each descent. Most gorges can be crossed throughout the year. However, it is preferable to do so in spring and winter, because during waterless months you may encounter stagnant water you would not want to wade through.

- Avoid crossing canyons where birds of prey nest from December to February as it is the mating season of these important and endangered species (the gorges you should look out for are listed below). The same goes for mountain climbing.

- Do not forget to check the weather forecast, because sudden showers are not a rarity on Crete and they cause flash floods.

## Necessary equipment

- Helmet with light and backup batteries
- First aid kit (with survival equipment, i.e. space blanket, small candle, etc.)
- Adequate water and food
- Additional safety rope
- Rigging set


















Recommended sites:

[www.emy.gr](http://www.emy.gr)

[poseidon.hcmr.gr/weather\\_forecast.php?area\\_id=gr](http://poseidon.hcmr.gr/weather_forecast.php?area_id=gr)

Make sure you have left a car at the exit point so that you can drive back up to your starting point.

Make sure someone always knows where you are and provide a “safe time” for your return. Have emergency telephone numbers with you.

Symbol memo	
Nearest hamlet	
Entrance coordinates	
Exit coordinates	
Average canyon crossing time - canyoning (calculated for 4 experienced individuals)	
Average hiking time	
Difficulty level (the level of difficulty is calculated on a scale of 1 to 6)	
Longer descent	
Total number of descents	
Duration of hike from the stop point to the entrance of the gorge	
Duration of the hike from the exit point of the gorge to the parking area	
Entrance-exit distance (in km by car)	
Appropriate period	
Recommended period	
Tourist services	
Type of trail	
Kind of trail	
Distance	





## HISTORY

The area you have chosen to travel essentially covers the entire central part and the longest part in the Prefecture of Heraklion.

You will be surprised by the versatile landscape, thanks to its two mountainous masses, Mt. Juktas and the Asterousia Mountain Range, the fertile plain of Mesara, as well as the hilly ridges, torrents and gorges that carve through the landscape, forming ideal habitats for rare flora and fauna species.

The beautiful nature and fertile land could not but have attracted mankind since ancient times. Looking down at it, one can easily comprehend why the ancestors of today's locals chose this land to establish important settlements and places of worship. Expansive plains for crops, high mountains for grazing, and rich waters are an ideal combination for the development of great civilizations.

Lose yourself for a moment in the depths of time and travel to great historic moments throughout the prefecture this region has been a part of for about 8,000 years, in order to understand how the landscape, the buildings and the multifaceted souls of the locals have been shaped.

### CRETE IN THE NEOLITHIC PERIOD (6500-circa 3000 B.C.)

Crete's history goes back 8,000 years. According to archaeological evidence, the island was first inhabited in the Neolithic Period, at around 6500 B.C.

Permanent Neolithic settlements in Heraklion were those of Knossos (on the outskirts of the Municipality), Phaistos, Katsambas, while certain caves were seasonally inhabited, such as Stravomytis Cave on Mt. Juktas, Eileithyia in Gouves, Trapeza in Tylissos.

The first Cretans arrived here, according to the most popular view, from Asia Minor or North Africa and gradually progressed in the next 3,000 years. They lived in caves and used stone tools to cultivate the land and raise animals. What was initially primitive pottery developed with the use of fire and gradually became more technically advanced.

The Neolithic Period lasted until about 3,000 B.C. Religious worship during this period was dedicated to the goddess of fertility of the land. A significant number of corpulent female clay figurines have been found around Crete and in the broader Mediterranean region.

### CRETE IN THE MINOAN PERIOD

The long Neolithic Period was followed by the Minoan Period. The 3000-2000 B.C. period is essentially the first developed phase of civilization on Crete (Pre-Palatial Minoan Period). It is the era during which crafts using clay, stone, and metal and miniature art flourished, while at the same time there were improvements in the building of houses; settlements expanded and vaulted constructs for the burial of the dead were built. Exceptional examples in the Prefecture of Heraklion are the settlements of **Knossos, Phaistos, Malia, and Trypiti** in the south. Great vaulted burial buildings were discovered in ancient Levina (present day Lenta), **Odigitria** and **Archanes** (Fourni cemetery).

The era of the renowned great palaces of Crete begins at approximately 1900 B.C. The most important and largest palaces are found in the Prefecture of Heraklion: **Knossos, Malia, Phaistos, Archanes** and **Monastiraki**. These palaces, along with other smaller ones in other locations, were, for approximately 600 years, the "centres of creation and radiance of the Palatial Minoan Civilization", the phenomenon that left deep marks on Crete's history.

During this period the water supply and sewer network projects were completed, which visitors can admire at the archaeological sites mentioned above, while granaries were also built to keep their crops and stores of food-stuff. The artful Kamares vases also date back to this period and are an excellent example of the ceramic craftsmanship of this era.

This period was also a turning point in the intellectual development of Minoan Crete: the use of the older written language meets the form of engraved drawings and images on seals and vases (Ideograms or Pictographs). The best known monument of this writing is the clay Wheel of Phaistos, in Mesara, which has still not been deciphered.

Excavations at the Minoan palace in Sklavokambos, in Agia Eirini in Krousonas, etc., confirm the importance of mountain regions in shaping the Minoan culture. There are countless Peak Sanctuaries (among which are the ones of Mt. Juktas and Mt. Kofinas (Municipality of Gortyna in the Asterousia Mountain Range), which developed on almost all mountain peaks in Crete, as well as the archaeological finds from almost all caves, which indicate their ritual role and their importance in Minoan religion. Despite the fact that large Minoan cities almost always had close relations with the sea, excavations and scientific research over the last few years has highlighted the vital relationship of major Minoan centres with the island's mountainous hinterland. It has been proven that every Minoan city had a mountainous production centre of major significance in supplying important raw materials, such as wool, honey, etc.

The new palace at Agia Trias, near Phaistos, was established in approximately 1650 B.C. (Neo-Palatial Period). During the same period goldsmithing reached its heyday, as proven by the elaborate jewellery discovered at Knossos, Archanes and Malia.

Throughout this "Golden Era", the radiance of these Minoan centres reached the entire Mediterranean basin. Architecture, painting, pottery and goldsmithing achieved excellence. During the same period the great Minoan fleet dominated the Mediterranean, providing wealth for the island from commerce and protection from invaders.

Preserved murals testify to the psyche of a people that was peace loving, happy and powerful, with close bonds to the sea. No signs of fortification have been found around Minoan cities, a fact indicating there was continuous peace and safety on the island.

**Arthur Evans**, the archaeologist that carried out the excavations at the Palace at Knossos, retroactively named this period "Minoan", from Minos, the mythical King of Knossos.

This period lasted for approximately 1500 years and was the "Golden Age" of Crete. Evans divided the Minoan Period into Protominoan (3000-2000 B.C.), Mesominoan I and II (2000-1600 B.C.), Mesominoan III, Later-Minoan I and II (1700-1400 B.C.) and Later-Minoan III (1400-1100 B.C.).

A great earthquake struck Crete in around 1700 B.C. completely destroying the palaces, most of which were immediately rebuilt, and Minoan civilization continued to flourish, even more enriched and magnificent. A few centuries later, however, around 1450 B.C., a new wave of destruction struck Crete, causing large scale damage to palaces and settlements. This event resulted in the disappearance of this glorious civilization. Palaces crumbled and were burnt and smaller settlements abandoned. The real causes that led to this destruction are still unknown and disputed. One theory supports that a powerful explosion of the volcano on Thera (Santorini) was what caused Crete to be deserted.

## FROM THE SUB-MINOAN TO THE HELLENISTIC PERIOD

Regardless of the cause, the end of the Minoan civilization was sudden. The Minoan fleet was destroyed, settlements were levelled, and the population decreased.

The next wave of invaders, the Dorian Greeks, after destroying Mycenae, in mainland Greece, settled on the island around 1100 B.C. It is not known if there was a mass invasion of the destroyed island or if it was a gradual immigration that lasted some years and was supported by marriages between noble families. Interaction between Minoans and Mycenaeans created an amalgamation in the sectors of culture and the arts, while new cities and palaces began appearing, particularly in Western Crete.

The Dorians established a type of aristocratic government during their rule. Cretan society was divided into three social classes: free citizens, who were subjects to the invaders, landowners, who kept their land and paid excessive taxes, and slaves. The renowned Legal Code of Gortyna illustrates the absolute authority of those governing in all sectors of life.

Minoan civilization continued to flourish in some isolated cities and villages, especially in eastern Crete. Cities such as Karfi, in the mountains of Lasithi, were populated by Minoans who called themselves Eteocretes (True Cretans). Other major cities, such as Praisos in Lasithi, gradually merged Minoan and Hel-

lenic culture. Praisos retained its own dialect (which has not yet been deciphered) and maintained its peak until the 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C.

Around the 7<sup>th</sup> century B.C. Crete became an important centre for Greece, but declined once again when more emphasis for the Hellenic Civilization was placed on centres such as Athens, Sparta, and Macedonia.

Cretan cities such as Lato, Gortyna, Praisos, Itanos, Cydonia, Aptera, and Knossos, came into conflict with one another and there were constant wars between cities throughout the island. However, when external enemies made their appearance, the islanders faced them as one. Nevertheless, the island succumbed to the Romans in 69 B.C..

## THE ROMAN PERIOD (31 B.C.-324 A.D.)

Crete held a strategic location in the eastern Mediterranean and this was a challenge for the Roman Empire. In 74 B.C. Mark Anthony started a campaign against the island, but the Cretans were well prepared and defeated him at sea.

Later, in 69 B.C. Crete fell to the Romans and became a Roman province. Gortyna, which was always a Roman ally, became the island's capital. Other important Roman cities were located in Eleftherna, Polyrrenhia, Limenas Chersonisou and Aptera.

Living conditions gradually improved and the population increased. However, the Cretans never played an active role in the political and cultural activities of the Roman Empire.

## EARLY CHRISTIAN AND FIRST BYZANTINE PERIOD (4<sup>th</sup> century-first quarter of the 9<sup>th</sup> century A.D.)

The first Byzantine period lasted from 324 A.D. to 826 A.D. During this period Crete was part of the Byzantine Empire, the capital of which was Constantinople. The island became a separate province of the Empire and was governed by a Byzantine General. Christianity spread and was established on the island.

An important role in the spread of Christianity was played by Titus, the student of St. Paul, who was the first bishop of Crete.

His activity contributed to the establishment of the new religion. Many churches were built during this period, mainly Basilicas. There are ruins of at least 40 Basilicas from this period.

The most important ones are located in Gortyna, Itanos, Chersonisos, Sougia, Panormo, Elounda and Mitropolis.

## THE ARAB PERIOD (823-961 A.D.)

The period of peace was disrupted during the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> centuries when raids began. In the 9<sup>th</sup> century Crete was attacked by the Arabs, who settled and established the new capital, Chandax (present day Heraklion), to the west of the harbour of Minoan Knossos, which, until then, had been a small insignificant port, clearly less important than Amnisos, which had operated as the port for Knossos during the peak years of the palace. So, suddenly, with the arrival of the Arabs, Chandax acquired an urban character and became the centre of Crete.

Thus began the Arab reign that lasted a century and a half, during which Crete became the base of the Saracen pirates in eastern Mediterranean. Local Christian populations were persecuted but continued to survive, especially in the mountains.

## THE SECOND BYZANTINE PERIOD (961-1204 A.D.)

Byzantine general Nikephoros Phocas liberated Crete from the Arab occupation in 961 A.D. Heraklion fell into Byzantine hands after a four-month siege during which the Arabs suffered approximately 200,000 dead.

Nikephoros Phocas, after liberating Chandax, founded the Temenos fortress on Rokkas hill in 961 A.D., aiming at transferring the city of Heraklion to this location to prevent its citizens from being attacked. During the period of the Byzantine Empire the island began to flourish once more. Its strategic location was established, Heraklion's position as the cap-

ital of the island was strengthened and the arts flourished, mainly through church architecture and icon and mural painting. The murals of this period are especially noteworthy. However, his effort was not completed and the city remained in its original location.

Christianity flourished once more and Heraklion became the seat of the archbishop, while churches and monasteries were built throughout the island. Many of the churches from this period have been preserved throughout the island. Many noble Byzantine families settled on the island during this period, as did many soldiers of Nikephoros Phocas' army, who built new villages.

After the IV Crusade the Byzantine Empire started to fall apart and during the distribution of the territories Crete initially went to the Genoans and soon after that to the Venetians, who settled on the island.

## VENETIAN RULE (1211-1669 A.D.)

In 1204 the Crusaders conquered Constantinople and broke up the Byzantine Empire. Crete was not part of this fragmentation, as it had been traded to Boniface I of Montferrat for his help, who in turn sold it to the Venetians for approximately one thousand silver pieces. For this reason it was not included in the *Partitio terrarum imperii Romaniae*.

The Venetians established themselves on the island gradually from 1210 A.D., turning out the Genoans who had taken advantage of the turmoil. Crete was valuable to the Venetians, because, due to its position, it would contribute to the growth of Venetian trade in the East.

During Venetian rule some of the most important technical and architectural projects on the island were constructed. One of the most characteristic examples of these are the new walls of Heraklion, the largest Venetian fortification work on Crete and in the entire Mediterranean. Despite the modern structure and character of the city, the walls are a jewel that preserves important memories. The enormous defensive work is complemented by the sea fortress *Rocca a Mare* (presently known as *Koules*) at the city port and magnificent, unique buildings such as

Loggia (noblemen's club) and the Fountain of *Frascesco Morozzini*, the crowning jewel in the water supply project that started at the springs of *Mt. Juktas*.

There are countless monasteries and churches spread throughout the Prefecture, such as *Epanosifis Monastery*, *Kera* (our Lady's) Convent, *Paliani Monastery*, *Angarathos Monastery*, *Monastery of the Odigitria* (*Madonna Guide*), *Kalyviani Monastery*, etc.

Apart from architectural masterpieces, however, Venetian rule is also associated with struggles and battles that lasted for years.

The Venetian system of government was oppressive and enforced strict observation of the class system and rules. The Duke of Crete and the supreme administrators and church officials were appointed directly by Venice and took full advantage of Cretans' wealth.

Heavy taxes, low product prices and confiscation of private property caused intense dissatisfaction among locals.

The Cretan people revolted 27 times in total. The revolutions were headed by local lords and the hatred was such that for two centuries there was an enormous gap between local Cretans and Venetian settlers. The revolutionary movements lasted approximately until the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Towards the end of the century the divide became less intense and the two sides (local Cretans - Venetian settlers) began to come closer to one another.

Slowly the Venetians relaxed their reign and allowed for marriages to take place between locals and Venetians, as well as free settlement anywhere on the island.

With these changes the financial and social situation for many Cretans improved.

This is the beginning of the Cretan Renaissance, during which Crete's arts and letters flourished. In the early years of Venetian rule the city of Heraklion created the right conditions for intellectual growth, which was to be strengthened shortly before the fall of Constantinople. Many Byzantine intellectuals saw the danger of being conquered by the Ottomans and fled to Europe, mainly

Italian, cities, as well as to Crete, mainly Heraklion (Candia). This wave of arrivals of Byzantine intellectuals supported the cultural growth of the city in all fields.

The Sinai Monastery of St. Catherine proved to be a major spiritual and educational centre of the city, where great men of letters, such as Meletios Vlastos, Ioannis Mortzinos, Cyril Lukaris, and others taught at the school that operated there.

A large number of young people from the city travelled to Venice and other Italian cities to study, and, thus, Heraklion slowly started to experience the impact of this early renaissance, and an important autonomous intellectual output started to emerge, mainly in painting, poetry and drama.

Especially in the last few years of the Venetian rule (1594-1669) Cretan literature reached its pinnacle of growth, and 'Cretan Drama' is widely recognised in the same way the 'Cretan School' of icon painting (16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> century) is.

#### THE CRETAN SCHOOL OF ICON PAINTING:

Present-day Heraklion, during Venetian rule and after the fall of Constantinople, grew into one of the most important artistic centres of Venetian territories. At around 1600 the city had approximately 20,000 residents and there were 200 painters working in it, whose reputation spread far beyond the island; soon their work was decorating major monastic centres throughout Greece and the Christian Orthodox East. This is the background against which the 'Cretan School' of painting gradually began to take shape. Icons and illustrated manuscripts travelled throughout the Venetian East and significant Orthodox monastic centres.

The 'Cretan School' of painting created important works which are now in museums, monasteries, private and public collections, and makes up a very important and idiosyncratic chapter of the history of art. Unfortunately, after two centuries of excellence (16<sup>th</sup> & 17<sup>th</sup> century), with the occupation of Heraklion (Candia) by the Ottomans, the intellectual flourishing of Crete's renaissance was violently disrupted. Significant representatives of the 'Cretan School' of painting were: Angelos (Akotantos) (15<sup>th</sup> century), Damaskinos Michael (16<sup>th</sup> century) Domenikos Theotokopoulos (16<sup>th</sup> century), Theofanis Kris (16<sup>th</sup> century), Georgios Klotzas (17<sup>th</sup> century), Ioannis Cornaros (18<sup>th</sup> century).

During this period the Cretan School of Painting emerged, its major representatives being Theofanis, Klontzas and Damaskinos.

The letters and literature also flourished with Georgios Chortatzis and Vincenzo Cornaro, who left us renowned works, such as Erotokritos, Erophile, and the Sacrifice of Abraham.

#### DOMENIKOS THEOTOKOPOULOS OR EL GRECO:

El Greco is one of the most important figures in painting world history. He was born in Venetian ruled Heraklion (Candia), where he received his first lessons in painting, until the age of 20, when he left for Italy. He seemed to have already mastered Byzantine art as he was mentioned in archives of the times as an established painter.

In Venice, which was his first stop in Italy, he was taught by Titian (Tiziano) and perfected his mastery of western painting. After a short stop in Rome, he settled in Toledo, Spain, in 1577, where he created his masterpieces. He never forgot his Cretan heritage and in all his works he signed "Domenikos Theotokopoulos of Crete".

With both deep knowledge of Byzantine scholarly tradition and ancient Greek, as well as renaissance thought, he managed to illustrate in his works the secret flame of orthodox art and his own personal visions.

At present in Heraklion, at a specially set up room of the Historical Museum, 'Mt. Sinai', one of El Greco's early works, is exhibited.

#### EROTOKRITOS:

A masterpiece of Cretan Literature: the well-known lyrical poem by Vincenzo Cornaro is one of the most important monuments of Modern Greek letters.

It was written during the 1650-1660 period and was one of the most important educational tools of popular Cretan culture. It depicts the most beautiful aspects of Cretan culture and celebrates all the virtues that form the base of Cretan 'leventia' (gallantry) and is naturally part of the classic works of Modern Greek literature.

Its 10,000 lines talk of the love story between Erotokritos and Aretousa and at the same time describe important aspects of daily life in those days. It was first published in 1713 in Venice and at the time it was the "Bible" of the Cretan people.

In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, and while the threat of an Ottoman invasion loomed, the effort to rebuild the major castles began. Towards the end of the century, 'Megalo Kastro' (Big Castle) was constructed using forced labour; it is the fort of Heraklion that has been preserved to this day. All major cities and ports of Crete were fortified with such castles.

## THE OTTOMAN PERIOD ON CRETE (1669-1898 μ.Χ.)

Crete was under constant threat of Ottoman invasion during its last years of Venetian rule. The invasion started in 1645 with an attack on Chania. Sixty thousand Ottoman soldiers disembarked from 400 ships and soon took over the city.

Rethymno was the next target and fell into Ottoman hands in 1646. By the end of 1648 Ottoman Sultan Ibrahim I had the whole of Crete under his control, apart from Heraklion, the siege of which lasted 21 years. In the end, on 27 September 1669, Heraklion surrendered. The heroic battle cost the life of 117,000 Ottoman soldiers and 30,000 Cretans and Venetians.

Incredible destruction followed the conquest. Churches were looted, while others were turned into mosques. Even roads and houses were destroyed by the destructive rage of the conqueror.

Many of the locals left Crete to escape execution, thousands were imprisoned, while others fled to the mountains. A large number of Ottoman settlers arrived, forcing the constantly shrinking Christian population into further misery. Cretans had to pay much higher taxes than other territories of the Ottoman Empire. Some of the farmers became slaves and private property was confiscated. The conditions of slavery led to constant uprisings against the Ottomans. Strict countermeasures against the Christian population followed most local uprisings.

In 1821, when the Greek Liberation War began, Crete participated in force. The Ottomans asked for the assistance of the Pasha of Egypt and his soldiers broke the island's resistance. In 1832 the Greek State was

founded, but it did not include Crete and the island passed into the hands of the Egyptians, in recognition of their assistance to the Ottomans.

The great Cretan Revolution broke out in 1866, supported by volunteers and reinforced by the whole of liberated Greece. Initially the revolutionaries had a series of victories. But as more and more Ottoman forces disembarked on the island, the countermeasures became harsher and were enforced more often, even on people who did not participate in the revolts. The holocaust of Arkadi Monastery was a tragic symbol of the Cretan struggle for independence. Hundreds of women and children found refuge at the Monastery, refusing to surrender to the Turkish forces and blew up the gunpowder stores, taking hundreds of Ottoman soldiers with them to the grave.

In the end, after years of struggles, the Great Powers (Britain, France, Italy and Russia) decided that the Ottoman Empire could no longer control Crete and they intervened, so the Ottoman forces were expelled in 1898 and the Cretan Republic was declared independent.

## THE INDEPENDENCE OF CRETE AND ITS UNION WITH GREECE

In 1898 the Cretan government was formed, with Prince George, the youngest son of King George of Greece, as the island's supreme governor. However, the goal of most Cretans remained to be unification with Greece. There were reactions every time the supreme ruler imposed limitations on human freedoms or changed administrative methods.

This undying revolutionary spirit led to the 'Revolution of Theriso' in 1905. The revolution was led by Eleftherios Venizelos, who had fought in the latest struggles for independence and had been appointed Minister of Justice by Prince George. The revolution did not last long, as support for Venizelos was so strong that Prince George had to resign.

The Great Powers withdrew their military forces from Crete, the supreme commander left and elections were held which Venizelos won. When the 'Military League' of Athens



came to power, Venizelos was asked to become the Prime Minister of Greece.

The longed-for union of Crete with Greece was realised in 1913, with the Treaty of London in which Sultan Mohammed II resigned his rights on the island. In December the Greek flag was raised at Firkas Castle in Chania, in the presence of Venizelos and King Constantine. Crete was now one with the rest of Greece.

## THE WORLD WAR AND OCCUPATION

The desire of the Cretans for independence and military tradition once again came to the surface in the 1940s. Crete took part in the war to fend off the Italian forces of Mussolini. After Mussolini's humiliating defeat, Crete became a target for Hitler's forces.

In April 1941 the Nazis attacked mainland Greece and quickly defeated Greek forces, conquering the country.

While Crete's military forces were absent from the island, the Nazis began their attack on Crete. Nazi special forces parachuted onto the island on 2 May 1941. Just 30,000 poorly armed British allied troops and 22,000 Greek soldiers stood by the locals in defence of the island.

The Battle for Crete lasted only ten days, but caused immense losses to both sides. Without heavy weaponry, the Allies and local guerrillas fended off the Nazi air attack. But the occupation of Maleme airfield near Chania by the Nazis strengthened their position on the island. On 30 May the battle ended and the allied forces fled through the mountains to boats for Egypt from Chora in Sfakia and other southern villages.

The Nazi occupation lasted approximately four years and was characterised by the heroic resistance of the locals (like the locals of the villages of Kadanos and Koustogerako in western Crete and Arvi location in central Crete). Special allied forces, mainly from England, landed on the island and organised resistance movements. Most of them hid in the mountains, in caves and monasteries, protected by the brave risky Cretans. A sig-

nificant success of the resistance movement was the abduction of Nazi General Commander Kreipe in 1944, which took place at Patsides. This act was unbelievably daring and considered a great success for the relatively inexperienced group that undertook it. The counter-measures to every action of the resistance were immediate and cruel.

## RECENT PAST AND PRESENT

After the end of WWII Crete began the effort of reconstruction, at a time when the rest of Greece was suffering from the Civil War. Due to this period of peace and the incredible climate of Crete, the island soon became one of the richest areas in the country.

Agricultural products became the main source of the island's economy. At present, tourism has marked a new era in economic growth for Crete.

The favourable location of 'Krisa Gi' (Cretan Land), at the crossroads of major ancient Mediterranean civilizations was the main reason for constant attempts to conquer the island by various invaders throughout the centuries.



## ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES - MONUMENTS

All of this rich history has left indelible marks on the land...

• **On Mt. Jukas**, the 'Holy Mountain' of Archanes, people have worshipped gods since prehistoric times. In fact, this is where the tomb of Zeus is rumoured to be according to modern travellers. At 'Psili Korifi' (High Peak) location near a natural crevice that is more than 12m deep, a very important peak sanctuary of the Minoan world has been discovered, while the two caves, Chosto Nero and Spilio tou Stravomyti (Crooked Nose Cave), have also been used as places of worship. Lastly, an important 16<sup>th</sup> century B.C. temple has been discovered inside Anemospilia Cave, a unique monument to Minoan religious architecture to this day.

• **In 'Tourkogeitonia' district in Archanes**, the rich and luxurious building constructed here is the palace centre of a sprawling Minoan settlement, dating back to 1700-1450 B.C.

• **The prehistoric cemetery at Fourni**, rich in finds and in use for more than 1000 years (2400-1200 B.C.), contains almost every kind of burial building and reflects various funereal practices of the Minoan civilization.

• **The Minoan mansion at Vathypetro** dates back to 1600-1425 B.C. and was quite possibly the seat of a local lord. One of the most complete wine stomping vats was discovered here, along with an olive press.

Mt. Juktas and Archanes are an archaeological treasure, a complex of interesting landmarks, where myth and history intertwine, and where anyone can wander visiting archaeological sites or along the hiking routes connecting them.

Still, these are not the only places of such great historical interest. The entire Municipality is strewn with archaeological sites (although some cannot be visited) of prehistoric and historical times. The most important ones are the following:

• **The ancient city of Eltyna**, where part of a Geometric cemetery (11<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> century B.C.) near the village of Kounavoi has been excavated

• **The ancient city of Diatonion or Tritonion**, present-day Astritsi, where the torso of a female daedalic statue from the Archaic period was found.

• **The ancient city of Rhytion**, present day Rotasi, with the Hellenistic acropolis and Geometric vaulted tombs.

• **The ancient city of Inatos** and the cave dedicated to the worship of Eileithyia at Tsoutsouros.

• **The archaeological site of Damantri** near the village of Pretoria, where a Minoan building is surrounded by a settlement and necropolises.

• **Ligortinos**, Late-Minoan finds some of which are on display at the Louvre Museum.

• **The Venetian fortress on Charaki** (Rock), in Charakas.

If you decide to travel the villages of our Municipality you should take into account that these lands have been cultivated, built on, and organised for 6,000 years. For example, the three churches that gave the name to the nearby hamlet (Treis Ekklesies) in the Asterousia Mountain Range was built on the ruins of Basilicas from early Christian years, the village of Rotasi is built on the location of the ruins of ancient Rhytion (mentioned by Homer), Pyrathi is built on the ancient city of Pyranthos and Tsoutsouros is built on ancient Inatos, the port of Priantos. This continuous use of the land enchants all visitors.

A more detailed description of these locations and other archaeological sites and monuments is included in the guide of the Municipality by area, below.

Those who wish to draft their own archaeological tours in the Municipality can consult the tables below.



# FORTIFICATION WORKS, MONUMENTS THROUGH- OUT THE LANDSCAPE

Crete has always been a point of contest for the Mediterranean peoples due to its physical and geopolitical location. All conquerors that passed from this land built major fortifications, such as castles, fortresses, walls, towers, so as to oversee the broader region in order to have time to prepare for any potential threat, and to ensure communication between their territories.

When travelling the villages in the region you will see many ruins of the monuments strewn throughout the landscape and you can be certain that they hold many stories. Stories that it would be a shame to forget. It is helpful to know that they are divided into the following categories:

## **Walls.**

These concern the major cities of the northern shoreline.

**Fortresses or Castelllos**, as the Venetian fortresses are called, can be found throughout the island. In fact, many villages are called Kasteli, obviously due to old fortresses, which may not exist today. The castles, fortresses and castelllos were public buildings erected with public funds and the labour of local populations. Crete is a large island with many locations that can be used to disembark onto the island.

Thus, the various conquerors, mainly the Venetians, made sure to construct dozens of fortresses in key-positions on the island and the islets around it, which they used to monitor the surrounding area and its passages. For the Venetians there was no chance that an area's defensive position not be utilised; they made sure that each fiefdom - no matter how small - had its own castle.

## **Kouledes (plural of 'koules', Forts)**

Fortresses constructed by the Ottomans upon conquering Chandax in 1669 (after a 22-year siege), in an effort to strengthen their presence throughout Crete. The Ottomans maintained their fortifications throughout their presence on the island.

## **Towers.**

Towers were tall buildings with strong foundations used mainly for defensive purposes. Their shape was circular, semi-circular, square or polygonal. Towers were often built on the external sides of castle walls, near the gates and at the corners of fortresses. Erecting a tower was one of the fortification measures undertaken by the various conquerors of Crete (mainly Venetians and Ottomans) to strengthen their dominance on the island and protect themselves from the constant revolutionary movements of Cretans. Towers were also built by the Byzantines during the 961-1204 A.D. period, to protect their province from pirate raids.

Towers were smaller buildings usually built by individuals or feudal families with forced labour or at their own expense. They were private property that was passed down to their descendants. That is why the family crest was placed in a conspicuous place, usually above the central gate, and attested to the tower's identity. The systematic construction of towers was initially undertaken by the Venetians and then the Ottoman Malikian Aghas.

Furthermore, there were also towers that did not have a clear defensive character. They were instead luxurious mansions where village lords resided. They were constructed in such a way as to cover the residential needs of feudal lords, while also serving various administrative and military purposes. They were known as mansions, konakia, and serayia, and they also served the role of a tower. Most towers no longer exist, as they were destroyed by the rage of the Cretans in revolt.



# FORTIFICATIONS IN THE ARCHANES-ASTEROUSIA REGION

The Longobardi Tower in Livadia, Monofatsi. To the east of St. George's Epanosifis Monastery sat the hamlet of Livadia until 1671. The hamlet was a feudal land of the Patriarchy of Constantinople, which rented it to various individuals. In 1332 the tenant was Georgios Dalaportas and in 1450 it was Stephanos Foskarini. During the last centuries of Venetian rule on Crete (16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> century), the area was the fiefdom of the Longobardi, who had helped found Epanosifis Monastery. One of the family members was a monk there.

The Longobardi built a tower in order to strengthen their position in the region, the ruins of which survive to this day on a hill that looked over the hamlet.

## **Charakas Castle - Venetian - 14<sup>th</sup> century, altitude 310m, relative height 35m.**

There is no definite construction date for the castle. There are no written testimonies and the structural data cannot support a safe estimation.

Two construction phases can be discerned in the castle, the first of which is that of the Middle Byzantine Period. The buildings, fortifications and ruins that we see at present mainly originate from a later phase that is definitely Venetian.

The earliest reference to the village as 'San Giovanni' is found in a contract from 1280. From 1373 onwards there are many references to it as a Venetian fiefdom.

Around the fortified rock there lay some sort of Byzantine hamlet that had already become a Venetian fiefdom by the 14<sup>th</sup> century, seeing as, firstly, small and large fiefdoms alike required a respectable castle and, secondly, it was impossible for the Venetians not to take advantage of the rock's exceptional defensive position, which leads one to the conclusion that the Venetian fortification had already been constructed by the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Also contributing to this conclusion is the fact that the fortification was not particularly advanced, unlike later Venetian fortifications.

After the Ottomans conquered the castle it may have also been used by them; however, it was abandoned relatively quickly.

## **Structural, Architectural and Fortification Elements**

The fortification of the second rock on the west comprised of a double wall: a lower one on the slope and a second one on the peak. Traces of fortification walls have survived on the northern and southern sides, while the eastern side remained unfortified as the rock there is vertical and practically impassable. On the upper level, the rock is dominated by a long and narrow building with three consecutive rooms with semi-circular domes.

The layered structure of the eastern wall, and the variations in width and incline are dictated by the shape of the wall to which this is adapted.

The roof of the building had various openings along the sides to collect rainwater.

The floor of all three rooms was carved directly on to the rock and covered with plaster. As the rock is on an incline, in some parts that have not been carved out, the rock protrudes from the floor. In the NW side of the building there rose a rectangular two-storey tower, superstructure traces of which are preserved at the points where the building was supported. To the south of the complex the ruins of another rectangular building are preserved, at the edge of which there was a second tower; this, in combination with the northern tower, provided an overview of the entire valley.

At the highest point of the rock there are traces of another building, which was probably also a tower, a kind of donjon, the last point of defence of the castle. Lower than the rest of the complex, on the western side, is the church of Metamorphosis tou Sotiros (Transfiguration of Christ). To the south of the church there was a lower wall with battlements.

## **Tholon (Vaulted) Fortress (Alagni) - Venetian - 16<sup>th</sup> century, altitude 640m., relative height 80m.**

A dirt road starts from the village of Alagni, leading to the top of the hill where the Tholoi (vaults) are located. At the top of a hill with



a panoramic view to the west of Alagni, there is a small fortress from the last period of Venetian rule, built during the 16<sup>th</sup> century or perhaps in the first half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. It is a complex of three vaulted ground floor apartments, with a fortified courtyard. This is where the name of the fortress comes from (the vaulted chambers). The initial building had two storeys.

At the foot of Tholon Hill stands the two-aisled church of Agioi Apostoloi (St. Apostles), built in the 15<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> century, bearing the coat of arms of the Cornaro family. In the church there are two arcossoliums, one inside and one outside, which bear the date ΑΧΙΔ (1614).

### **Castello of Katalagari - Byzantine - 10<sup>th</sup> century - altitude ≈ 450m.**

It is positioned on a hill 2.5km south of Katalagari. At the southern tip of the village of Katalagari there is a 2.5km dirt road that leads to Castello. Like most isolated and neglected castles, access is free.

Castello of Katalagari or Paliochora fortress or Castello del Corner or Castello of the Cornaros is located on Kastellos Hill, south of Katalagari, in an area full of olive trees and vineyards, at the location of the ancient city of Skilloudia. It is a Byzantine Period fort directly connected to overseeing the crops of the region, like Meleson Castello and Melisses Castello. It is strategically placed, as it looked over the area from Archanes to Castello Pediadas (Castle of the Plain). According to tradition, it was built by Nikephoros Phokas after the liberation of Crete from the Arabs in 961 A.D. During Venetian rule it was the seat of the fiefdom and belonged to the Corner family and oversaw their fortunes.

### **Structural, Architectural, Fortification Elements**

Not much has been preserved to this day, apart from a section of the courtyard and the foundations of the buildings. A few metres to the west there are many stomping vats, carved out of the rock, which are believed to have been used during the Minoan Period. During Venetian rule this area, like the rest of Crete, produced great quantities of Malvasia wine, one of the best-known wines of the

time in Europe. Directly next to the courtyard there is the small Zoodochos Pigi (Life-Giving Spring) church, but none of its murals have been salvaged. It should be noted that a similar fortress with stomping vats, dedicated to Zoodochos Pigi (the Life-giving Spring) is the Melissa Fortress near Agios Thomas.

### **Meleses Castello - Byzantine - altitude 375m.**

On the hill to the east of Meleses village in the Prefecture of Heraklion there are what little ruins are left of a Byzantine castle that was quite possibly used by the Venetians.

This is the location where Castello del Botto is believed to have stood, the castle mentioned in the census by the Castle guard, with 37 residents in 1583.

There is a fortress at Meleses Castello which is mentioned in Basilicata's map. He refers to it by the name Castel del Cornaro. The same map is mentioned by G. Gerola, preserving the name of the fortress. He adds another name for the fort, Castel del Betto, which he found in other lists of Cretan villages. He immediately notes that we do not know the exact location of these two places. In his description he names it medieval (medio-vale). S. Spanakis repeats the information of Stephanus of Byzantium, that half a mile to the east of Meleses (the exact position of the Castello in relation to the village) lay "the ruins of a village, called Kastelos with the ruins of two churches".

# MUNICIPAL COMMUNITY OF ARCHANES

L.C./M.C.	Place name	Short description	Visitability
<b>Places of Archaeological Interest</b>			
ARCHANES (within hamlet)	Tourkogeitonia	Central palace building	Yes
	‘Troulos’ neighbourhood archaeological site		Yes - Limited
ARCHANES (MT. JUKTAS)	Psili Koryfi	Peak Sanctuary	Yes - By car and then hiking from the parking area or hiking from the hamlet of Pano Archanes or from the Anemospilia archaeological site
ARCHANES (MT. JUKTAS)	Anemospilia	Minoan sanctuary	No - The space is fenced off and remains shut, unless you have contacted the Competent Antiquities Authority. In any case it is signposted and this is where the trail to the peak of Mt. Juktas and the Minoan Peak Sanctuary starts.
ARCHANES (MT. JUKTAS)	Chosto Nero	Cave, place of worship	No
ARCHANES (MT. JUKTAS, KARNARI)	Spilios tou Stravomyti (Crooked Nose Cave)	Burial cave, place of worship	No
KATO ARCHANES	Fourni	Minoan cemetery	Yes - Contact the competent Archaeological Authority to arrange a visit, otherwise the site is shut and fenced off.
ARCHANES	Vathypetro	Minoan Mansion	Yes

L.C./M.C.	Place name	Short description	Visitable
<b>Churches</b>			
ARCHANES (within the hamlet)	Church of Panagia (Virgin Mary) with murals		Yes - Operates as an ecclesiastical museum (Feast on 15 August)
	Agios Georgios (St. George)	This is a three-aisled basilica with a raised middle aisle. It was founded in the 13 <sup>th</sup> -14 <sup>th</sup> century and it is the largest church in Ano Archanes decorated with murals.	Yes
	Agios Nikolaos (St. Nicholas)	It is the biggest in size church of Archanes.	Yes
	Agia Triada (Holy Trinity)	It is full of Byzantine frescoes	Yes
ARCHANES (Agia Fotia)	Agia Fotini (St. Photini)	This church has a single chamber, with an arched roof, and two entrances, one on the west and one on the east side. The roof retains its original plastering. The church has been dated based on the morphology of the doorframes, the "ophthalmos" of the western wall and its dimensions and was found to have been built in the early or late 16 <sup>th</sup> century.	Yes
ARCHANES (MT. JUKTAS)	Sotiras (or Afentis) Christos (Christ Saviour or Christ our Lord) church	Church dedicated to three martyrs	Yes (Feast on 6 August)
ARCHANES (ASOMATOS)	Michail Archangelou (Archangel Michael) church	This is a church that with a single chamber, an arched roof and murals dating back to 1315.	Yes
<b>Modern sites</b>			
ARCHANES (within the hamlet)	Pano Mylos	Watermill	Yes
ARCHANES (within the hamlet)	Kato Mylos	Restored watermill	Yes
ARCHANES (MYRISTIS)		Morosini Fount, Aqueduct and Panagia (Virgin Mary) church in Karydaki, all of the Venetian era	Yes (trail: Knossano Gorge)

# MUNICIPAL COMMUNITY N. KAZANTZAKIS

Post Code/Hamlet	Points Of Interest
AG. VASILEIOS	<p>Panagia Spiliotissa Convent, Spiliotissa Fount and two watermills</p> <p>Fount – ‘Fountana’ Water reservoir</p> <p>Fount – ‘Palea Vrysi’ Water reservoir</p>
AGIES PARASKIES	<p>Ali Aziz Efendi Fount</p> <p>Agia Zoni (Holy Belt) Church</p>
ALAGNI	<p>Tholi (Vaulted) Fort</p> <p>Agion Apostolon (St. Apostles) Church</p>
ARKADI	<p>Fount – water reservoir</p> <p>Monument to the Fallen</p>
ASTRITSI	‘Kefalas’ Archaeological Site
DAMANIA	Vaulted tomb from the Late Minoan Period
KATALAGARI	<p>Venetian Castle in Paleochora a.k.a. Castello del Corner</p> <p>Complex of five rectangular stomping vats with carved wine receptacles</p> <p>Zoodochos Pigi (Life Giving Spring) Church</p>
KATO ASTRAKOI	<p>Ruins of the three-aisled church of Agios Georgios (St. George)</p> <p>Ruins of the church of Panagia (Virgin Mary) 1555</p> <p>Watermills in the gorge</p>
KOUNAVOI	<p>The ancient city of Eltyna and the Geometric Period cemetery</p> <p>Christos &amp; Agios Dimitrios &amp; Nikolaos (Christ and the Saints Demetrius and Nicholas) Church. Initially the five-domed cross-dome church was destroyed in 1889 and rebuilt in 1936, in a different architectural style.</p> <p>Carved and arched-roof roof wine stomping vats</p>
MELESES	Venetian fort on Kastelos Hill
METAXOCHORI	Agiou Georgiou (St. George) church at Epanosifis
PEZA	<p>Stone built grape stomping vats at Agios Konstantinos location</p> <p>Tou Skoti to Pigadi (Skotis’ well) in the village centre</p>
HOUDETSI	<p>Hatzine – 1671 Fount</p> <p>Agios Nikolaos (St. Nicholas) Church</p> <p>Building of the heirs of Androulakis</p> <p>Building ruins, property of Pezanakis, Malliotakis – Vranas and heirs of Sifakis</p>

# MUNICIPAL COMMUNITY OF ASTEROUSIA

Post Code/Hamlet	Points Of Interest
AGIA FOTIA	Aqueduct – Fount (Roman period) Agias Fotinis Samareitidas (St. Fotini of Samarea)
DORAKI	Watermill
ETHIA	Traditional hamlet
KALYVIA	Fountain
LIGORTYNOS	Geometric Period carved tomb Ruins of Agia Triada (Holy Trinity) Byzantine church
MARIDAKI	Agios Nikitas (St. Nikitas) Monastery
MESOCHORIO	Windmill and watermill Primary school building
PARANYMFOI	Agios Pavlos (St. Paul) Church
PLAKIOTISSA	Fabrica (factory)
PRETORIA	Damantri archaeological site (Minoan building) – non-visitable Anapodaris Bridge Michail Archangelos (Archangel Michael) Church
PYRGOS	Karavoi flourmills Pyrgos bocage
ROTASI	The ancient city of Rhytiasos or the Homeric Rhytion and Geometric Period cemetery non-visitable
TEFELI	Fount
TREIS EKKLISIES	Treis Ekklesies (Three churches) Agios Georgios (St. George), Metamorfosis Sotira (Transfiguration of Christ) and Panagias (Virgin Mary) Byzantine churches
TSOUTSOUROS	The ancient city of Inatos – cave dedicated to the worship of Eileithya – non-visitable
CHARAKAS	Venetian castle on ‘Charaki’ rock Agia Paraskevi (St. Paraskevi) and Agios Ioannis (St. John) churches Agios Nikolaos (Agios Nikitas) (St. Nikitas) and Metamorfosis tou Sotira (Transfiguration of Christ) churches Windmill Community fount



## MUNICIPALITY OF ARCHANES-ASTEROUSIA

### GEOGRAPHY

**Total Municipality area:** 335.38km.

**Population:** 16,692 (2011 census).

**Seat:** Administrative and financial: Peza (home of the Town Hall, KEP (Citizens' Service Center), and many other services)

**Historical seat:** Archanes (home to a Town Hall branch with a KEP housed at the hamlet's historic school) / Pyrgos is also a histor-

ical seat of the Municipality where there is a KEP and other services.

#### **Municipal units:**

There are three major administrative (and geographical) units in the Municipality: Archanes, N. Kazantzakis, and Asterousia, with 55 villages. Up until 2010 they were separate Municipalities, but since then, as a result of the administrative reforms (Kallikratis Plan), they were unified under one new Municipality.

#### **Natural geography:**

The Municipality of Archanes-Asterousia is basically a semi-mountainous Municipality.

Its morphology is characterised by three zones: the mountainous zone above 400m, the semi-mountainous zone between 200m-400m, and the lowland zone below 200m. The first two zones cover approximately  $\frac{3}{5}$  of the Municipality. The mountains that tower over it are Mt. Juktas and part of the eastern Asterousia range. An important part of the fertile plain of Mesara spreads out below the northern slopes of the Asterousia Mountains and is within the administrative borders of the Municipality.

### **Borders and their relationship with neighbouring regions:**

The Municipality is located at the centre of the Prefecture of Heraklion, covering a long stretch of land that starts in the northern part of the Prefecture, very close to the urban centre of Heraklion and reaches the southern shores, with an exit onto the Libyan Sea.

In the north it borders with Heraklion, the capital of the island. It takes only 30 minutes by car to get to central Heraklion from Peza or Archanes. Especially in the case of Archanes, this extremely short distance has contributed to the gradual urbanisation of the beautiful village, which, over the last few years, has been attracting more and more residents from the city seeking a calmer daily life.

It has also played a decisive role in tourism growth, as dozens of tourist buses arrive here during the summer season, to tour the archaeological sites of exceptional importance, the beautiful alleys and the inviting taverns and cafés in the most cosmopolitan traditional village in Crete.

From a historical point of view, this northern area of the Municipality (the broader Archanes region) has always been functionally dependent and a continuation of the capital of Crete. Knossos itself, during the peak years of the Minoan civilization, utilised the entire region of Mr. Juktas and Archanes, even beyond Vathypetro.

Another example is the south of the Municipality. The part of the Asterousia mountain mass that administratively belongs to the Municipality of Archanes-Asterousia, is approximately one third of the overall mountain mass. This is the western part. The

eastern part belongs to the Municipalities of Gortyna and Phaistos. However, the mountainous mass is a single entity, with common geomorphological characteristics and biodiversity, with the same needs for protection, preservation and promotion, which require joint administrative policy efforts. In this guide we attempt to present alternative touring choices visitors have throughout the mountain mass.

Lastly, in the east the Municipality borders with the Municipalities of Minoas Pediados and Hersonissos, with which it shares the rich ecosystem of the Karteros River and its deep gorges that form tributaries (Astrakiano and Kounaviano Gorges).

### **Living standards**

The high quality of life of the residents has been secured with the construction of major infrastructure projects concerning water supply, irrigation, sewers and cleaning, such as biological treatment plants in most Municipality hamlets, new water supply and sewer networks, reservoirs, and sanitary landfills.

A broad social services network has also been established including Open Care Centres for the Elderly, kindergartens and centres for children's creative occupation.

All of the above, in combination with modern infrastructure for sports (football grounds, calzetto courts, indoor gyms that can support training needs of sports teams and athletes) and culture, make the Municipality an attractive destination, both for a visit and as a permanent home.



## ECONOMY

A drive through the area is sufficient for anyone to understand that the economy of the land is based on olive trees, vineyards and animal raising.

Grazing grounds cover 39.75% of the total area of the Municipality and arable land 57.16%. 1.09% is covered by forests (small clusters of various trees depending on the area) and 1.15% is used for residential purposes.

As expected, the greater part of the employed population (54.14%) works in the primary production sector. Especially in the south of the Municipality, in the area of the Asterousia Mountains, 70.19% of locals work in animal raising and farming (olive groves). Animal farming includes sheep, goats and to a much lesser extent poultry (mainly for consumption, not for sale). In the mountains animal farms very often make cheeses, mainly for family use (you will be very lucky if you find someone making cheese at a mitato (mountain stone hut) somewhere in the Asterousia and even luckier if you have the chance to try mature cheese, made with the artisan skill of the shepherd). At present, most sell their milk to dairies.

The activities of the 'Galathinos' company are noteworthy. A group of active animal farmers trade milk and meat with dynamic prospects for the standardisation of animal farming products.

In the middle zone of the Municipality, the **N. Kazantzakis region**, most locals work in olive groves and vineyards and raise animals.

## Botanical and vegetable garden and the Seed Festival

Since 2011, with the initiative of the PELITI\* farmers, action has been taken for the salvation, preservation and cultivation of local seeds, including cereals, in an effort to resist the control of seeds by multinational corporations and the replacement of local varieties by hybrids and industrialised mass-produced seeds. In the garden, a 2 km<sup>2</sup> field in Pyrgos, provided by the Municipality to local farmers, you can see alternative natural farming and sample the vegetables always splashing this beautiful garden with colours. Ask at the Town Hall, situated very close to the garden, and they will show you the field and put you in contact with the farmers, whom you can also contact directly (Stella: 6974-958711 local PELITI group).

If you find yourself here in the spring find out when the annual Seed Festival is held, during which there are seed exchanges and thousands of local seeds and vegetable and cereal varieties are handed out to farmers and other interested parties who arrive here from the whole Crete to listen, ask and talk about natural cultivation, agricultural development and 'un-development' issues.

## Legumes, dwarf garlic and other vegetables...

This practice, in combination with the Greek economic crisis over the last few years, which has contributed to a gradual turn, even among young people, to cultivating the land and returning to the countryside, many new farmers have appeared throughout Crete and, naturally, in the Municipality of Archanes-Asterousia. These young "land lovers" have adopted self-organising and self-management practices, they plough the fields, plant seeds of every kind of vegetable, legume and cereal, and produce the tastiest fruits of nature, reviving memories and flavours that had almost vanished.

In the region of Silamos, very close to Pano Archanes, they are once again producing Cretan dry dwarf garlic with an impressively strong aroma and rich flavour.

The olive groves provide fruit thanks to the natural fertilisation of the land with nitrogen, which occurs due to the simultaneous cultivation of local lentils, chickpeas, and other legumes under the olive trees.

## \*PELITI ([www.peliti.gr](http://www.peliti.gr))

PELITI is an urban non-profit organisation aiming at collecting, preserving and spreading local varieties. It undertakes activities of seed exchange and distribution, free of charge, to amateur and professional farmers, on the condition that they will cultivate them and pass the seeds on.

Climate and terrain conditions in the area favour olive tree growth, providing olive oil with a wonderful aroma and fruity flavour, and noteworthy organic and therapeutic properties.

Almost all families have their own olive trees and oil production for consumption and sale to the oil mills is the rule for most households (something that happens throughout Crete, mainly in rural areas).

The same is true for the Archanes region. Apart from olive groves, the entire middle and northern side of the Municipality is covered by vineyards. The mild winter combined with the hot and dry summer, and the large amount of sunlight and coolness from the northern winds of the Cretan Sea, create ideal conditions for the vegetation cycle of vines, providing wines of exceptional quality and unique taste. Cretan vineyards are the most traditional in Europe, with old varieties, the roots of which are lost in antiquity and the Minoan civilization.

In this zone of the Municipality, apart from the cultivation of olive trees and vines, locals also work in plants processing and standardizing agricultural products. Almost all of these plants concern olive presses and wineries, including some co-ops which are very important for the agricultural economy of Crete, such as the Agricultural Cooperative of Archanes (with a modern packaging plant for table grapes intended for export to western Europe), and the Union of Agricultural Cooperative of Peza, of a panhellenic range and noteworthy and dynamic interventions, mainly in standardisation and trade of agricultural products.

70% of the wineries on Crete operate in the N. Kazantzakis territory.

In an effort to strengthen the productive web, support growth and promote the tourism and cultural product of the region, the Municipality has set up the institution of the Sunday Market. Local producers gather at each Municipal Community to offer visitors local delicacies, accompanied by cultural and musical events, combining a visit to the Municipality's sights with the right conditions for a Sunday excursion.

## **Cereals**

In the Mesara region you will encounter cereals cultivated by very few families, mainly for private use. In older times, cultivating cereals was very common practice. At present, a renovated old flourmill grinds local cereal grains.

## **Trade - Services - Tourism...**

No small percentage of locals works in the tertiary sector, in retail shops, tourism and other services. Tourism, in particular, due to the Municipal cultural and natural wealth, seems to be playing an increasingly complementary role as regards other productive activities. Efforts have been made over the last 30 years for the development of agrotourism and many locals have invested in this alternative form of tourism, mainly in the Archanes and N. Kazantzakis districts, by transforming their homes into guesthouses, cafés, taverns and forms of services for tourists seeking more authentic versions of the tourism product.

## **The transformation of agricultural products...**

### **Women's cooperatives**

In Archanes (Archanon Geuseis [Flavours of Archanes]), in Charakas (Melistalakti [Honey-dripping]) and in Agios Vasileios (Vasileion Glykasmos [Sweetening of Vasileios]) there are three exceptional women's cooperatives that prepare hundreds of delicacies typical of Cretan cuisine. These are mainly baked goods (biscuits, breads, pies, kaltsounia (savoury pastries with various fillings), breadsticks, rusks) and local preserves (quince, citron, orange, as well as walnut, rose and many other imaginative desserts, usually served with Greek coffee or after a good meal).

At their workshops you can also find desserts and other products made with grapes, carobs, molasses or carob-syrup, as well as liqueurs scented with the essential oils of fruits or aromatic herbs. There are also bunches of well-dried aromatic plants, such as dittany, marjoram, sage, oregano, savory, and others. If you find yourself in these villages, ask where you can find the cooperatives and try one of these delicacies coming from a long tradition and excellent artistry.

# NATURE - PROTECTED AREAS

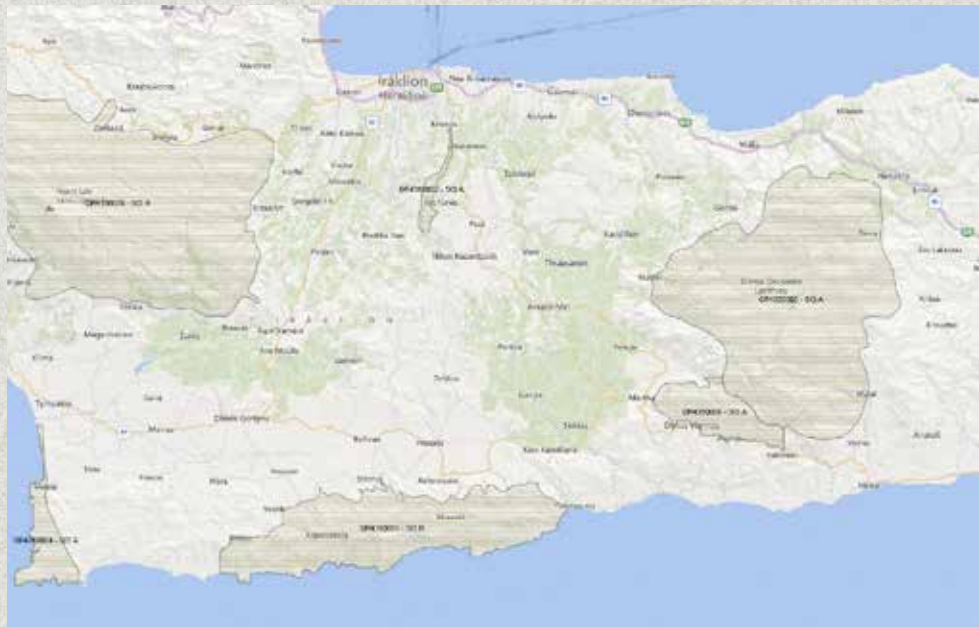
## MUNICIPALITY OF ARCHANES - ASTEROUSIA

### PROTECTED AREAS

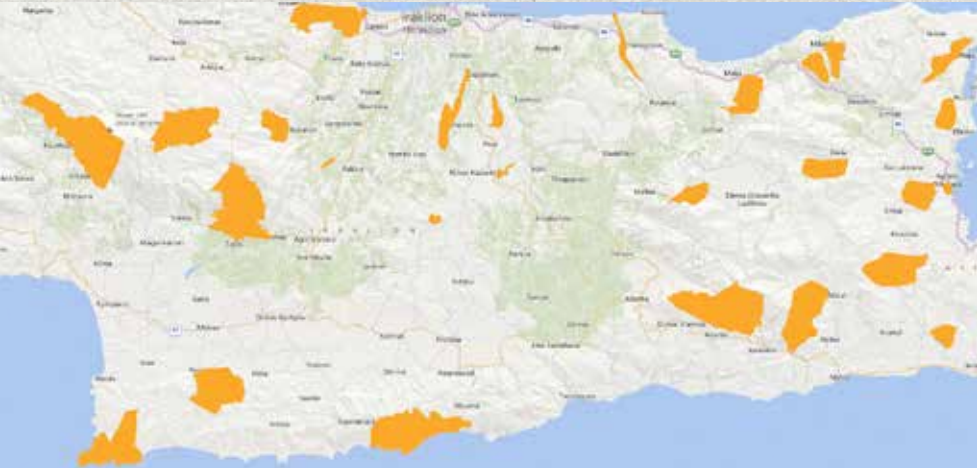
CHARACTERISATION	AREA
Natura Areas (Areas of EU Importance)	The Asterousia Mountains (Kofinas): GR 4310005 Mt. Juktas – Agia Eirini Gorge: GR 4310002
Natura Areas (Special Protection Zones)	The Asterousia Mountains (Kofinas): GR 4310013 Mt. Juktas: GR 4310010
Wildlife Refuge Areas	<b>The Asterousia Range</b> – Official Gazette Issue 753/b/15-06-01 <b>Ophis Marias Charaki – Epanosifis Metaxochori</b> – Official Gazette Issue 245/B/78. <b>Mt. Juktas and Agia Eirini Gorge</b> – Official Gazette Issue 769/B/19-06-01. <b>Kounavoi</b> – Official Gazette Issue 754/B/15-06-01 <b>Meleses</b> – Official Gazette Issue 754/B/15-06-01
Landscapes of Outstanding Natural Beauty	Agia Eirini / the Asterousia Mountains / Mt. Juktas
Habitats	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The cliffs of the mountains that are home to birds of prey are also home to chasmophytes in the rock cracks. The endemic wild carnation, <i>Dianthus juniperitus</i> ssp. <i>Bauhinorum</i>, should be mentioned, as it only grows on Mt. Juktas and in the region of Prinia – Asites in Malevyzi. The rare species of <i>Hipericum jovis</i> also grows here which can be found only on Mt. Juktas, specifically in Kofinas, and on Mt. Psiloritis (Mt. Ida).</li> <li>• Maquis vegetation areas the prevailing species being kermes oak (<i>Quercus coccifera</i>).</li> <li>• Rocky brushwood areas dominated by Jerusalem sage, cistus, and thorny burnet.</li> </ul>

# MUNICIPALITY OF ARCHANES-ASTEROUSIA

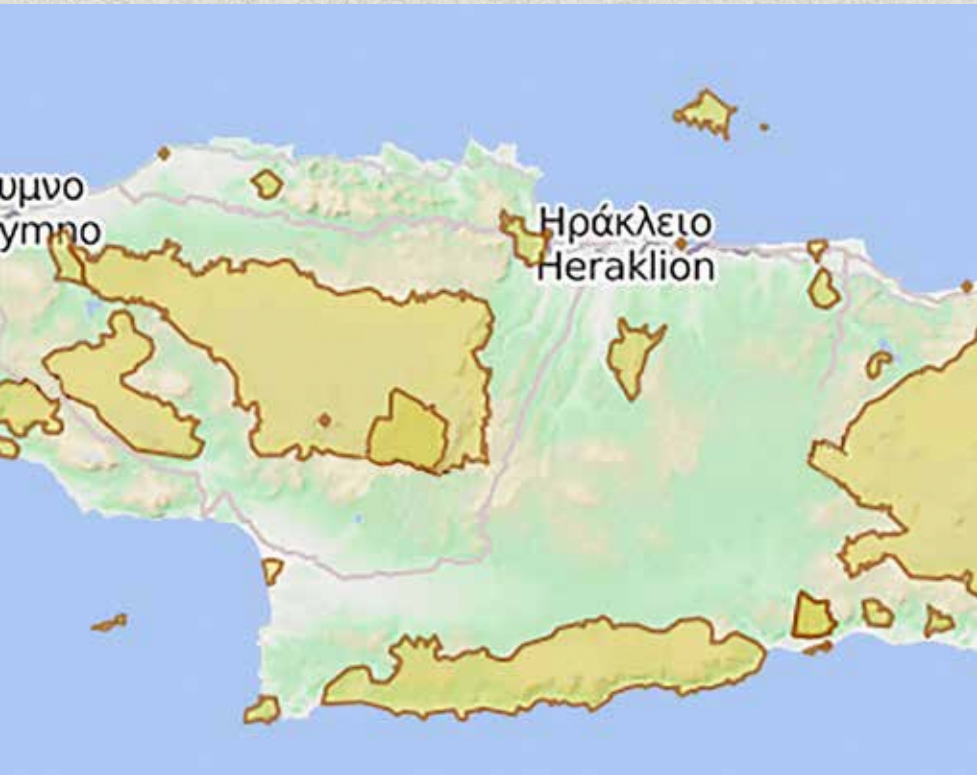
## INCORPORATED IN THE NATURA 2000 NETWORK



WILDLIFE REFUGE AREAS



MUNICIPALITY  
OF ARCHANES-ASTEROUSIA HABITATS





## THE ASTEROUSIA MOUNTAINS (KOFINAS)

The treeless mountains of the Asterousia Mountain Range have a unique charm and even greater environmental value: 55% of the species recorded on Crete can be found here: 23 endemic species and subspecies of plants, more than 90 species of bird, 24 species of reptiles, 8 species of invertebrates, 29 species of diurnal predatory birds and a large number of migratory birds that stop in the area, using it as a rest stop between the reservoirs in Armanogia and Damania, located in the Mediterranean zone of the Municipality. The Asterousia Mountain Range is part of the NATURA Protected Areas Network, the main protected species being the bearded vulture (*Gypaetus barbatus*), which is an endangered species.

The environment of the Asterousia is an ideal habitat for birds of prey. The cliffs offer refuge from the endemic and rare fauna species endangered of becoming extinct. The large number of free grazing goats and sheep provide plenty of food for the vulture, which is a prerequisite for its survival.

Older terraced wheat farms have been abandoned and overrun by brushwood and maquis vegetation. The southern slopes are very steep with cliffs that plunge abruptly into the sea and deep gorges that lead to pebbled beaches with numerous caves. On the southern slopes there are also small clusters of Cretan pines and cypress trees. Acorn bushes, dittany, and petromaroula (rock lettuce) only grow on the cliffs that cannot be reached by the goats that overgraze the entire mountain massif. The sea caves are mating grounds for the Mediterranean seal. The aesthetic and environmental value of the Asterousia Mountain Range is great, as extensive parts of the mountain massif and coastline remain untouched, as there is still no seaside road.

**Protected areas  
of the Asterousia Mountains:**

**The Western Asterousia  
(from Agiofarango to Kokkinos Pyrgos  
- is not under the administration  
of the Municipality)**

The area consists of two main parts, a rocky section with cliffs and gorges and another surrounding a sandy beach (where the Caretta caretta sea turtle lays its eggs) and the mouth of the Geropotamos River. The area extends to Kokkinos Pyrgos, including two thirds of Mesara Gulf's coastline.

The gorges present constant changes to the landscape. There is a wide range of small plant communities. Among them there are clusters of *Nerium oleander*, a small cluster of *Phoenix theophrastii* in the district of Martsalos, a mixed forest with *Juniperus phoenicea*, maquis vegetation with *Oleo-Ceratonion* (matorral) and brushwood.

**The Asterousia Mountains  
(Kofinas - Municipality of Gortyna)**

(With the exception of Kofinas the rest of the mountain range is administrated by the Municipality)

The region includes the eastern part of the mountainous mass of the Asterousia in southern Crete. The sea area covers less than 1% of the region.

The importance of the region comes down to the endemic and protected species of flora, the nesting grounds provided by Mt. Kofinas and the cliffs of Abas Gorge for large birds of prey, to the presence of the Mediterranean seal in the sea caves, the interesting snail species, nine of which are endemic to Crete, while *Albinaria terebra* is endemic only to the Asterousia Mountain Range. The region is of great archaeological importance (there are very interesting caves with prehistoric remains, archaeological finds and iconostases, Byzantine monasteries, etc.), and aesthetic value, due to its morphology.

## BIRDS OF PREY

Crete is home to 13 significant species of diurnal birds of prey, 7 of which are considered important, and the island is a vital refuge for them. Especially for the Bearded Vulture and the Griffon Vulture, Crete is the last safe haven!

### Feeding hierarchy in the birds of prey...

If there are only vultures in the feeding area, Eleonora's Falcon does all the "hard work", which is breaking up the external parts of the animal (skin, sinew, etc.) with its powerful beak. Then follows the Griffon Vulture, which, usually, eats all soft tissue of the animal.

Then it is the turn of the Egyptian Vulture for anything that might have been left over, and last arrives the Bearded Vulture (or Bonetaker) who feeds on the bones of carrion. In areas where there are other predators, such as wolves and jackals, vultures are still the dominant species.

**The predatory birds of Crete:** Populations - reproductive pairs throughout Crete

**Bearded Vulture (*Gypaetus barbatus*):** 20-25 individuals / 4-6 reproducing pairs (the only ones in Greece). Endangered species close to becoming extinct

**Griffon Vulture (*Gyps fulvus*):** 380 individuals / 140 reproducing pairs ( $\approx 70\%$  of the population in Greece and the largest island population in the world)

**Golden Eagle (*Homeyeri*):** 16-18 pairs ( $\approx 10\%$  of the Greek population)

**Bonelli's Eagle (*Hieraetus fasciatus*):** 15 pairs ( $\approx 10\text{-}20\%$  of the population in Greece). Crete is one of the most important refuges of the species. It belongs to the vulnerable species category (those whose population is under constant pressure)

**Lanner Falcon (*Falco biarmicus*):** 6-9 pairs. It belongs to the vulnerable species category

**Peregrine Falcon (*Falco peregrinus*):** 70 pairs

**Eleonora's Falcon (*Falco eleonore*):** 1106 pairs ( $\approx 9\%$  of the population in Greece and  $8\%$  of the population in the world)

**Long-legged buzzard (*Buteo rufinus*):** Listed as a rare species

### BEARDED VULTURE (*Gypaetus barbatus*)

The Bearded Vulture is the rarest type of vulture in the European continent and in the broader Mediterranean region. It is the largest bird of prey on earth ( $>110\text{cm}$ , due to its tail), while its wingspan is wider than  $2.50\text{m}$ . Its weight is quite small in relation to its size, around  $5\text{-}7$  kilos, depending on the sex of the animal. Its characteristics are a short neck, in relation to the buzzard, and its "beard" under its beak, which is where it got its name ("barbatus" in Latin means "bearded"). In general it has a long, thin body, which often seems rounder due to its hunched over stance.

Adults are mainly dark grey in colour, their back tinted blue or black. Their underside is off-white but you will rarely see this as it usually turns rust coloured.

Its average territory, in which it searches for food on a daily basis, is  $350\text{sq.km}$ . Its diet consists mainly of sheep and goats or small hoofed animals, such as wild goats and wild sheep, in their natural mountainous habitats, as well as rodents and migratory birds that it locates dead in the snow. What characterises it, however, is that it shuns flesh and mainly -  $85\text{-}90\%$  - feeds on bones and marrow! In reality, it is the only species of bird that specialises in this specific source of food.

To break the bones of dead animals it usually drops them from high above, thus the name 'kokkalas' (bonetaker) they have given it in Crete.

### BEARDED VULTURE - Threat and protection

The Bearded Vulture is a priority species for the European Union and it is protected by Community Directive 79/409/EEC, because over the last decades its population has decreased dramatically. It has also been listed among species that are endangered of becoming extinct in the European and in the Greek Red Book of Endangered Vertebrates.

The most significant threats are human activity, specifically poaching, the use of poisoned bait, killing for taxidermy purposes, target practice, sparse food (especially in areas where nomadic animal farming is in decline) and the destruction of its habitats, mainly due to the development of mountain tourism and the opening of forest and agricultural roads that increase disturbance to this species, which is especially sensitive to human presence.

For a species with such a slow reproductive pace (every one to two years) and such a long reproductive cycle (8 months), it is impossible to make up for the losses caused by human causes.

Over the last few years some efforts have been made to protect the species by the Natural History Museum of Crete with funding from the EU, aiming at applying special management measures, such as a detailed population census, nesting ground protection, installation of feeding trays (as is the case on Mt. Juktas), etc.

### Griffon Vulture (*Gyps fulvus*)

The Griffon Vulture is a type of vulture encountered in Greece. The top part of adults is generally brown or reddish brown in colour and their bottom half is cream coloured. Their head and long neck is covered in greyish white feathers, cream coloured at the top of the head and the bottom of the neck.

Their fluffy, full "mane" (ruff) is white, but can rarely be made out at a distance. Its sharp, powerful beak is yellowish-greenish in colour and light grey at its base.

#### Body length:

(93-) 100 to 110 (-112) centimetres

#### Wing span:

(234-)236 to 274(-280) centimetres

#### Weight:

(6.2-) 6.5 to 8.2 (-8.5) kilos.

This species forms colonies and is encountered in open expanses with sparse vegetation, while it nests in steep cliffs at low alti-

tudes. The territory in which they search for food has a radius of 30-40km from the colony, but wandering individuals may be spotted searching for food much further away (200-300km). It feeds on medium to large farm animal carrion, such as equine or bovine species. It mainly favours the tender parts of dead animals, with a great preference for entrails. Its sharp vision, flying habits and mainly its "pack" behaviour help it locate carrion before it begins to rot, which is very useful in such hot climates, where dead animals can also be sources of disease.

A group of 60-80 vultures can consume a dead sheep in 5-10 minutes or a larger animal (cow, horse, etc.) in 3-4 hours.

### Locations for the observation of birds of prey in the Asterousia Mountains

**Abas Gorge:** Drive to the village of Paranympoi and keep going towards the village of Mournia. As you drive you will come to a sign that says "Abas". Follow the sign and park where the road ends.

From there follow the trail that leads to the renowned horseshoe formed by the cliffs of Abas Gorge, from where you can enjoy the view of Treis Ekklesies beach, the 140m waterfall (during the rainy season) and the large number of birds of prey that nest there.

**Kofinas Peak:** One of the most impressive views of southern Crete and an exceptional location for the observation of birds of prey, flying in groups of five or ten over the limestone outcrops of the 'Holy Mountain'.

#### Observation point on the way to Koudoumas:

A wooden hut built to be used as an observation point. If it is not open when you visit, the spot is still a good location for bird watching.





## **MT. JUKTAS ECOLOGICAL - ARCHAEOLOGICAL PARK**

Mt. Juktas Ecological-Archaeological Park is comprised by Knosano Gorge (Agia Eirini Gorge), Astrakiano Gorge and Kounaviano Gorge.

Mt. Juktas is a mountain formed exclusively of limestone. Its rocks are older than those of the broader region. It was formed a million years ago, during the Cretaceous period (145-68 million years ago), while around it lay sediments of the more recent Pliocene epoch (5.3-1.6 million years ago).

The Mt. Juktas part is 3km west of Archanes and 18km south of the city of Heraklion. It covers a total area of 4km<sup>2</sup> and has a North-South longitudinal shape. Its highest peak is 811m high. The west slopes are steep with a gradient of up to 100%, while the east slopes are milder with a gradient of up to 50%. So far there are eleven known caves on Mt. Juktas, of which Chosto Nero and Spelios Stravomyti (Buried Water and Crooked Nose Cave) have been explored and partially mapped.

In the north-northeast part of the region there is a torrent bed with relatively rich bank vegetation and a small gorge.

## Endemic Plants of Crete

Crete has the greatest plant biodiversity of all Mediterranean islands, with the exception of Sicily, which, however, is three times as large. Cretan flora comprises of around 1,800 plant species, of which 180 are endemic to Crete, i.e. they are not encountered anywhere else in the world.

The Botany Department of the Natural History Museum of Crete - University of Crete, in the effort to highlight Cretan flora and, in particular, the endemic and endangered plants of Crete, has established the first 'arc' of endemic plants on Mt. Juktas.

Anthropomorphic Mt. Juktas, the sacred Minoan mountain, with its numerous archaeological sites is a natural refuge of rich flora (380 plant species, of which 21 are endemic to Crete), rarely encountered elsewhere in Europe. All of the above makes it apparent that around  $\frac{1}{5}$  of Cretan flora and  $\frac{1}{11}$  of endemic Cretan flora grows on Mt. Juktas. This is why this territory has been included in the European Union list of CORINE BIOTOPES, the important biotopes to be conserved in Europe, while it is also included in the NATURA 2000 Network, under Code No: GR 4310002 "Mt. Juktas-Agia Eirini Gorge".

The region is included in the European Nature Network (Natura) 2000 for "the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora" and it is considered an Important Bird Area (IBA) of the European Union. It is also protected as an 'Archaeological Site' and as a 'Landscape of Exceptional Natural Beauty'.

The Park is surrounded by extensive vineyards and olive groves. The impact of human activity on the natural environment of the area (logging, clearing, cultivation, fire) has drastically changed its profile, although nobody can definitely say what the territory used to be like before human intervention. The sparse oak trees scattered in the Archanes basin might be remnants of the once prevailing vegetation. In general, human intervention is less intense on Mt. Juktas, and vegetation, although different in the quantity and quality of flora composition than in the past, has maintained several of its original features. Around 360 different plant species have been identified, of which 18 are endemic to Crete and/or Greece. Wood stemmed bushes with small leaves that often have thorns prevail (underbrush), such as thymios (thyme), angarathia (Jerusalem sage), astoivida (*Sarcopoterium spinosum*), and chinopodi (type of fleawort). Locally there

are deciduous, flat-leaved species, such as Kermes Oak and the carob tree, which in some places are small trees. Numerous herbs appear after the first rains and turn Mt. Juktas turns green by springtime. Several species grow on steep slopes, such as chasmophytes, which are unique and have not been affected by the human presence. Among them are dittany and the Cretan white ebenus (*Ebenus cretica*).

The fauna of Mt. Juktas has not been studied in depth, although it is truly interesting for various reasons, since there are species that complete their life cycle in this habitat, as well as others that visit the locality temporarily or use it as a nesting site.

The number of invertebrates comes to several hundreds, many of them endemic. Snails, millipedes, spiders, herbivorous, carnivorous and carrion-feeding insects can be found everywhere, even in the depths of caves. Amphibians have been sited mainly at the foot of the mountain and include the yellow bellied toad and the common tree frog. Reptiles are represented by a type of lizard (*Lacerta trilineata*) and two species of harmless snake, the 'spitofido' (house-snake, *Zamenis situla*), which is called 'ochentra' on Crete and it is not related to the adder, whose name is very similar in Greek, as well as 'gatofido' (cat snake, *Telescopus fallax*). There are a total of eight mammal species, three of which are insectivores (a bat, *Hipposideros rhinolophus*, a mole, the Cretan shrew, *Crocicura zimmermanni*, the hedgehog) and three rodents (the house mouse, *Mus domesticus*, the rock mouse, *Apodemus mystacinus* and the rat), a type of hare, three carnivores (the European badger, *Meles-meles arcalus*, the Cretan Beech Marten, *Martes foina-bunites* and the Cretan least weasel (*Mustela nivalis galinthis*).

Bird fauna of the island is particularly significant, as around forty bird species have been spotted and vulture reproduction here is of major importance. There are also other rare and/or endangered species, such as the falcons 'petritis' (*Falco peregrinus*) and 'mavropetritis' (*Falco eleonora*).

## KNOSANO GORGE OR AGIA EIRINI GORGE

Knosano Gorge extends south of Archanes (Agios Mamas), goes through the hamlet of Archanes at Kato Mylos Location, Myristis Location and the aqueduct at Karydaki, up to the aqueduct of Agia Eirini Spilia; the total length of the gorge is around 5.7km; it goes on to the north, through Knossos. The Kairatos or Katsambas stream runs through it, which leads through Agia Eirini and Knossos and flows into the sea at Katsambas location. The gorge area, which is called 'Paradisos' (Paradise), has been listed as a 'Landscape of Exceptional Natural Beauty' and is included in the Natura 2000 Network.

### The Flora of the Gorge

Floral biodiversity in the gorge is limited, due to the shade cast by the prevailing species, i.e. plane trees and blackberry bushes.

In total 120 species have been recorded so far in the gorge, of which 40 are encountered in river beds and the rest on the embankments. Endemic species only grow on the embankments, and there are 11 species, 2 of which are rare and 9 common endemic ones to Crete. The rare ones are: 'kampanula', *Campanula tubulosa*, in West Crete and 'nepeta', *Nepeta melissifolia*, which is endemic to Crete and the island of Melos, is found in small populations. An important feature of the gorge flora is the presence of a significant population of an arctic type of Elm, namely *Ulmus minor* ssp. *Canescens*.

There are a few individuals of this species in the area of Chania, where it is considered an foreign species. The fact that there is a significant population in Knosano Gorge indicates that it is indigenous to Crete, a relic of a past cold period, when there were still glaciers in continental Europe.

### The Fauna of the Gorge

Two migratory bird species are found in the gorge, namely the spotted flycatcher (*Muscicapa Striata*) and the hoopoe (*Upupa epops*). There are also jackdaws (*Corvus monedula*) and some rock-living birds, such as the blue-rock thrush (*Monticola solitarius*), while the rest of the species are typical for bushy vegetation.

Where there are fresh-water wetlands and riparian trees, there is a wide variety of passerines, such as finches and the great tit.

The gorge is also habitat of the Balkan pond turtle (*Mauremys rivulata*) and the amphibians green toad (*Bufo viridis*) and tree frog (*Hyla arborea*).

### The third most important

#### palm forest in crete (*phoenix theophrastis*)

The small palm forest of Saint Antonios is situated next to St. Nikitas Monastery. This oasis stands along a stream which springs from Kefalovrisi, a steady spring of water in the middle of the green belt. The forest is made of palm trees of the Phoenix theophrasti species (Cretan date palm), which can be found in few locations on Crete, and is, therefore, protected by the Forest Service. The forest is enclosed by a fence to prevent goats from grazing there.

The Cretan date palm is a small-sized phoenix tree native to the east Mediterranean, confined to few areas, mainly on Crete and, specifically, Vai (a beach in the Municipality of Lasithi), the Preveli Beach (on the south coast of the Municipality of Rethimno).

The Asterousia Mountain Range, where you are, is the only location in Crete where these palms grow away from the sea.

### Species biology

This palm grows up to 15 meters high, and usually has very thin branches. The leaves are pinnate, 2-3 meters long and feature multiple, unbending greyish-green linear leaflets, 15-50cm long, on either side of the central stalk. The fruit is an oval yellowish-brown stone fruit, 1.5cm long and 1cm in diameter and contains a single large stone. As a palm tree, it mostly resembles *Phoenix dactylifera*, known to us as the date palm that grows in the Sahara and Arabian deserts, but is occasionally similar to *Phoenix canariensis*, with a much more silvery-green leaf colour. This is why there is a hypothesis that *Phoenix theophrasti* is the ancient ancestor of both species, as it is smaller in size (adult trees only reach 10-15 m) and the flesh of its fruit (the 'date') is not worth eating, since it is very thin and fibrous and has an acrid taste; still, the fruit is sometimes eaten by locals.

**Wetlands**

In the last decade, this Municipal area has emerged as a small-bird watching location in the newly created wetlands of Damania (trib-

utary of the Anapodaris River), Armanogeia and in areas outside the Municipality’s jurisdiction (Amourgelles, Ini-Machera, Partira).

The Damania are built on a swell above the lake, seemingly suspended above its water. There is a path and dirt road around the lake for walking tours and flower identification, as well as birdwatching, since many avian species quickly discovered this new wetland area. On the west side of the lake, a very small swell protrudes from the ground by the name of Zaviana, on which antiquities have been found.

The Armanogeia Dam is a 120 square metre area, 380m above sea level. Since its creation, it has attracted dozens of species of avifauna.

**Changes or threats to the landscape?**

It seems that the influence of climate change on the Archanes - Asterousia region, as well as the entire island of Crete, is not what we initially thought.

Groups of biologists, physicists, environmental scientists and environmental engineers have joined forces to sound the alarm for the landscape and topography of the island.

There is very tangible/real danger of environmental degradation, desertification (extreme degradation caused by climate change, fertilizers, forest fire and overgrazing), as well as planned wind farms and photovoltaic installations.

The landscape is being dramatically altered and more importantly, farmland is shrinking, and together with it, the capacity to produce our prized agricultural and livestock products.





## CAVES

Local lithology does not allow for the formation of extensive caverns, like in other regions on Crete, which feature large speleological parks. In the Municipality of Archanes-Asterousia, the only caverns located to date are: 11 caverns on Mt. Juktas, four of which were used as sacred places – one for every point on the horizon. In the Minoan Era (and possibly earlier), they were used as places of sacrifice (even human sacrifice), rituals and food storage. They are:

### **The cavernous chasm of Juktas sanctuary.**

(a long, narrow chasm about 12m deep, which communicates with secondary cavernous cavities at its ends. It is in the 'Tou Zia to Mnima' [Zeus' tomb] location, at the centre of the sacred Minoan peak sanctuary, at an elevation of 720m.

'Chosto Nero', at an elevation of about 720m, on the southernmost peak of the sacred mountain.

This cavern comprises three chambers and many corridors connecting all of them to the first chamber, 7m in length, which has adequate light due to its wide passage. It seems that the calcareous outcrops and anthropomorphic stalactites and stalagmites of this cave also attracted Minoans to worship their gods.

The 'Stravomitis' cave, also called 'Karnari', after the nearby settlement, 'Spiliaridia' because of its many openings on the slope of the mountain, and 'cave of Lykastos', due to the assumption that the ancient city of Lyksastos, mentioned by Homer, used to be nearby. It is the most typical cavern on Mt. Juktas in terms of morphology, featuring a number of forking ducts, chambers and passages on at least two levels, reminiscent of... Swiss cheese. It is believed that its passages are 400m in total length, although the cavern remains unexplored.

Finally, Anemospilia. Although its name implies a cave ['...spilia'], it is an archaeological site.

The remaining (unexplored) caves on Mt. Juktas are 'Kroustallospilios', 'Diportos Spilios', 'Moutoupaka', 'Spiliarotrypa', 'Aneragdospilios', the Sopata Pit (-70m), and the 'Anonimo' [unnamed] pit (-20m).

Their common morphological feature is multiple linked chambers and passages, which resemble Swiss cheese, especially in the case of Stravomitis. It is an impressive and interesting morphology, since it offers insight into their formation: they were probably completely submerged in water, which patiently eroded the mountain's calcareous rocks for millions of years.

To the southwest, in the Astrakiano Gorge, there is the small cave of 'Neraidospilio'. Its entrance is covered in water. This cave's importance lies in its water spring and the multitude of legends surrounding it, about fairies and sprites (from which it gets its name - neraido-: of the fairies), which locals believed inhabited the cave and all aquatic features.

## MUSICAL TRADITION

If, for reasons purely of utility and economy, activity in handmade crafts has dropped over the last few years, there is an art form that is in absolutely no danger of being lost. On the contrary music and dance are flourishing.

Through the small and major festivals that locals participate in, they come into contact with and become the “mystics” of a great musical tradition, comprising of Cretan music and its dances.

Following the thread of the history of the traditional music of various peoples and the history of instruments, you will wander through Africa, Europe, the Mediterranean, the Balkans, Central Asia, all the way to distant and vast China, and you will observe that despite all their differences, the peoples of these lands have so many characteristics in common: their love and pride in creativity, their need to express themselves and communicate between them through the paths of music.

Cretan musical tradition is considered the “most alive” in Greece because it continues to evolve and creatively incorporate modern musical elements, while it also manages to express and comment on modern reality in a lively way. Especially during the many cele-

brations and feasts, musicians do not limit themselves to going through the motions of repeating basic musical melodies. They enrich their performance with improvisations, which are accompanied by corresponding improvisations by the dancers.

The roots of modern cultural events must be searched for in the celebrations and feasts organize throughout rural Crete, drawing mainly on religious holidays or historical anniversaries. Almost all of the villages in the region, with the initiative of the cultural associations or on their own, continue to organize feasts which are a reason for local populations to get together, while they also contribute to the preservation of the land's customs and traditions.

**Lyra, laguto, bulgari, habioli, askomandura...**

The basic instruments used in Cretan music are the lyra (pear shaped standing violin) and the laguto (type of lute). In eastern and western Crete they use of the violin instead of the lyra is quite common. In many cases the bulgari (type of baglama or small bouzouki) complements the lagouto in accompanying the lyra.



The mandolin is also used often, especially in 'kantades' (impromptu musical expressions, often people will wander the village streets and sing love songs - serenades).

An important position in the musical tradition of Crete is held by wind instruments, such as the habioli (Cretan flute) and askomandura (island bagpipes), which is a "grandchild" of the ancient askavlos.

## Dances

The basic Cretan dances are the **Pentozalis** (its roots hold back to the ancient pyrrhichios - pyrrhic dance), **Maleviziotis**, **Sousta**, **Siganos** and **Chaniotis** (syrtos). If you are given the opportunity to attend a feast, do not miss it and have no second thoughts about joining the dance circle, even if the steps look confusing. The most popular dances at feasts are Chaniotis (syrtos), Siganos, and Maleviziotis (pidichtos - jumping dance). Especially in Ethia, a local variation of the pidichtos survives, Ethianos Pidichtos, which, if you are lucky, you might see the older village locals dancing.

## Songs

Cretan traditional music mainly includes dancing tunes. In many cases, however, the music purely accompanies the song, which can be put into two basic categories.

The most popular is that of the fifteen-syllable couplet mantinades, mainly dedicated to love, which are often sung at traditional feasts and kantades. The ease with which Cretans compose mantinades for all occasions, is widely known.

The second important category are the tavla songs, which are sung mainly in the villages at the foot of the Lefka Ori mountains in Chania, and that is why they are called rizitika (riza - root, from the root of the mountain). Depending on the theme of the lyrics they are divided into frontier songs, heroic songs, historical songs and love songs.

There is also an idiosyncratic profile in the music and art of the Asterousia region, where established musicians, poets and dancers have left us an authentic musical tradition of the highest quality, as well as the authentic identity of all the events related to it (good company, kantades, feasts).

## Cretan mantinades

Mantinades are iambic fifteen-syllable rhyming couplets that first appeared as a poetic form in the late 14<sup>th</sup> century, and since then have been cultivated in many regions of Greece, especially on the islands. In Crete mantinades have flourished and have been established as one of the most basic means of emotional expression. The basic mantinades "vehicles" are the lyra players and the rhymers, but also regular everyday people. Mantinades are a steady form of poetry that is completed within one couplet. This type of poetry is obviously very difficult, because thoughts and feelings must be expressed fully within a stifling word limit. Pauses and repetitions of words in the same mantinada should be avoided. This is why there are few good mantinades. To characterize a couplet as a mantinada it must be written in the Cretan dialect, it must make sense, it must have poetic elements, such as originality, inventiveness, imagination, allegory and it must create images. Mantinades are the folk poetry of Crete. They do not live in books but in the people and nature, they are effortless, as they come from the person's life, express his character, his spiritual growth and his morals, with a verbal power that springs forth from the crystal clear spring of his tongue, without any falseness or unnecessary elaboration. Mantinadologoi or rimadoroi (mantinada singers or rhymers) were very sought after in companies of friends. When two or more would meet at the same feast, there were incredible "battles", the so-called drakarismata (crashes) or kontrarismata (challenges). In the drakarismata each mantinada comes to deflect or ridicule the one just spoken by the opponent. An exchange between the guests and the hosts, for example, could be:

- 'Chilia kalos to vrikame tou filou mas to spiti  
apou 'chi ton averino ke ton aposperiti  
[-We're a thousand times glad to have found our  
friend's home  
which has the morning and the evening star on the  
sky's dome]

- Kai esis kalos orisate, chilia kai dio chiliades  
O kampos me ta loulouda ke tis prasinades  
[I welcome you a thousand times and green and  
in this plain of flowers and green plants too]

- Chilia kalos orisane oi filoi oi g'edikoi mas  
K a de choroun sto spiti mas, pano stin kefali mas.  
[A thousand times welcome to our friends  
if our house won't fit them, let them sit on our heads.]

- Stin kefali de vgenome giati tha gremistume,  
Mono 'rthame sto spiti sas mian tsikoudia na pioume.  
[We'll skip the head because we'll fall  
We've only come to have a tsikoudia with you all]



## THE LABYRINTH PHENOMENON

We're not referring to the Minoan Labyrinth, but the 'Labyrinth' Music Workshop, which has been operating for 15 years in Houdetsi and has literally changed the musical landscape of the area, if not the entire island. Founded by Irish, now Cretan, or rather citizen of the world Ross Daly, 'Labyrinth' has managed to be a point of reference for the entire area, attracting hundreds of young people and creating a new generation of musicians who bring tradition back to life in creative ways.

The workshop's purpose is to initiate its participants in a creative approach of musical traditions from pretty much all over

### \*Modal music

Labyrinth is perhaps more a musical way of life than merely a group of musicians. It started on Crete in 1982 simply as a group of friends dedicated to the exploration of the various modal traditions from around the world and the possibilities for creative interaction within and between them.

At various times, Labyrinth has included musicians from a very wide range of different ethnic backgrounds, each of whom brings to it the world from which he has come, through the medium of his own personal creativity. The members of Labyrinth do not necessarily share a common ideology or philosophy, rather they are united in a common spirit and, of course, love for music.

The term "modal music" usually refers to a specific music genre which is quite clearly defined by equally specific technical characteristics, and which is frequently identified geographically with the Middle East and the Orient.

True though this may be, for us it is something much more. Inherent in all of the great modal traditions of the world (both of the East and the West) is a primordial, transcendental spirituality, which is totally independent of religious dogmas or any other specific patterns of thought and feeling of a descriptive or prescriptive nature. It is this aspect of modal music which irresistibly draws us towards it, and which enables us to surrender to a transpersonal and trans-temporal world which it opens for each and every one of us according to his or her individual nature.

<http://www.labyrinthmusic.gr/>

the world. Not limited to that, it holds specialised seminars for modal instruments year-round, concerts, festivals, recordings and other events promoting research in folk music. Besides the promotion and development of music and culture, the case, or rather the phenomenon of the 'Labyrinth' workshop constitutes an excellent example of successful local development for the Municipality, since it strengthens community ties through the creation of approaches and values that promote and blend culture and nature in a creative way.

The Labyrinth Music Workshop is housed in a beautiful traditional building in the centre of Houdetsi.

Passing by the place at any time of the year, you will feel the aura of artistic creation permeating it. In the summer, you will see musicians about the big green yard, composing and interacting, spreading their melodies to the entire village. In the wintertime, you will hear sound escaping the workshop's wooden floor, coming from seminars for lyra, bouzouki, sazi, violin, afghan rabab, arab oud, bendir, boulgari, tobak, guitar and a vast array of other modal\* music instruments.

Labyrinth houses a permanent exhibition of traditional music instruments from all over the world. Part of the personal collection of Ross Dally, the exhibits are evidence of social, historical and cultural expression in their areas of origin. It is the only museum of its kind in Greece and contains a rich selection that sheds light on the most repre-

sentative types of folk music from antiquity to now. There is also an instrument workshop where you can create or repair music instruments.



#### **The Houdetsi Festival**

<http://www.houdetsifestival.com/>

The Houdetsi Festival is a celebration of music, produce and folk art, which has been organised annually in Houdetsi since 2010.

The first two years (2010, 2011) it attracted more than 5,000 visitors. From 2012 and onwards, more than 15,000 people from all over the world attended the festival.

Taking part in the Houdetsi Festival is in itself a reason to plan a trip to this corner of the earth...

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OEV7f4DdTrc>  
(a visual story presented by the 'Labyrinth' Musical Workshop, on antique vendor Anesti's inner struggle with the truth in music).



## VILLAGES, SETTLEMENTS & ARCHITECTURE

You will find 55 small and large villages scattered in this area.

They are the soul of the region, the ark of a land of a thousand buried treasures, which merely requires an adventurous spirit and ... a big stomach to fill with the meze and raki from the 'kafeneia' cafés, where you will

experience the renowned hospitality of the residents.

Touring the area, you soon realise that these small and large villages situated on plains, small vales and mountain slopes are the most important cultural product of Crete. In terms of town organisation and architectural structure, these villages radiate the most timeless elements of the entire island's civilisation. Consider that a large number of the mountain villages are built on ancient locations and contain traces of every historical

phase of their lives. Around each settlement are scattered important architectural monuments, such as 'mitato' [a stone hut for herdsmen], spring fountains, small bridges, individual houses.

### Architecture...

Traditional folk architecture until the 20<sup>th</sup> century has its formative and morphological roots in the beginnings of the island's history. The structure of the Cretan mountain village is essentially almost identical to the ruins of the Minoan settlements of Palekastro in Siteia and of Gournia, the oldest settlement completely excavated in Europe.

You will notice that most villages are built on mountain slopes or hilltops so as to maintain a defensive advantage over invaders of older eras.

These settlements are densely built with narrow streets and attached houses, in a way that makes it very easy for houses to communicate through their terraces.

The village centre was usually a church, around which the social life of the settlement developed.

In terms of typology, the simplest form of dwelling one can find in such villages is the 'monochoro' single-spaced ground-floor house, where all daily activity took place in a single unified space. In the 'monochoro', the 'parastia' -the ancient hearth- also functions as a kitchen. There was usually a raised wooden level serving as a loft, where inhabitants used to sleep. Under it was a storage space.

Stone benches along the walls served as a sitting room, often as beds due to lack of furniture, while small alcoves on the walls served as cupboards. The outer part of the walls was usually unpainted. Interior floors were made of pressed earth and flat roofs stood on mostly cypress wood panels, on which smaller branches were used to create thick arrangements, so as to support the final coating made of waterproof clay soil.

In areas that lacked the lumber used to create small openings, the form of the single-spaced 'kamarospito' was developed. In this case, one or more stone arches were

used to cover the necessary opening to support the room. In this form, the stone arches created corners used in various ways, depending on the needs of each individual family.

The 'monochoro' was expanded using a new floor, accessible via an internal staircase. In this case, the ground floor was used as storage space and to keep animals, and the top floor satisfied the family's daily needs.

Gradually, by annexing additional spaces, a more complex type of house was created, which is the most widespread type on Crete. That was the C-type two-story house, often including additional auxiliary spaces around its yard. Moreover, we often meet elegant openings made out of limestone/tufa, which sometimes included a carved lintel with sculpted ornamentations. Specifically in areas of Venetian influence, we find impressive doorframes featuring beautiful ornamentations.

After the Second World War, the use of modern construction materials started to change the traditional character of Cretan villages, as additions were made to cover new needs. At the same time, that reconstruction period saw traditional Cretan folk houses change towards a more colourful, more outgoing paradigm. Therefore, they might have move away from the traditional forms of the past, but they also started gaining architectural elements that the fear of conquerors had led to disuse. Elements of 'translucence', colour and openness, were important in Minoan architecture.

Today, settlements where restoration and rebuilding programs were carried out, offer interesting examples of the coexistence of such diverse architectural elements.



## **LISTED TRADITIONAL HAMLETS ...THE WONDROUS ARCHANES**

In the Municipality of Archanes-Asterousia, the hamlets that have been listed by the relevant ministry (Ministry of the Environment, Physical Planning and Public Works) are Pano Archanes and Ethia. The latter is a beautiful small village in the Asterousia where you can see all the aforementioned traditional elements, especially after the buildings' restoration by their residents.

However, it is the village of Pano Archanes that is considered representative of traditional architectural heritage. Featuring 200 listed buildings and after an extensive renovation program spanning a number of years, it is considered exemplary on a national and global level. Since the 1990s and for about 10-15 years a series of renovation programs were completed in the village, resulting in Archanes gaining second place in the Euro-

pean awards for the renovation of hamlets. The traditional Archanes house combines the nobleness of the neoclassical building and the simplicity of the farmhouse, and a stroll along its alleys will definitely impress you.

### **Neoclassicism, Archanes and their journey through time...**

Neoclassicism was first adapted in Crete in large public buildings built by the Ottoman government and in the timid, sporadic and remarkable infiltration of certain typical elements of neoclassical form (small wooden columns with ornamental corners) in the various urban Ottoman mansions and villas.

The 19<sup>th</sup> century was a period of significant changes for the country. It was a time of reforms in the Ottoman Empire and the founding of the Greek state. Both developments embraced a European orientation, which influenced city planning as well as architecture. The Bavaria-born kings of Greece believed that folk and traditional architecture could not express their new country adequately, and selected neoclassicism as its official formalistic approach.

Neoclassicism revolutionised interior layouts to cover the needs of the new buildings. It replaced old materials with new to correspond to new construction specifications. In terms of style, it was greatly influenced by German classicism while it also incorporated romanticist elements, affected by a movement to revive the Ancient Greek magnificence.

### Archanes school (old elementary school)

Entering Pano Archanes you are bound to notice a commanding, elegant building along the main road. Built between 1901 and 1911, it is a two-story stone building with cellar, mostly covered with a wooden, tiled roof.

The ground and cellar plan is designed in a Π shape, while the second floor only covers its middle part, highlighting the vertical axis and adding an air of elaboration to the architectural composition. The central part of the

façade, where the main entrance is located, extends outward, featuring a balcony with remarkable twisting ironwork, leading to a pediment. In the west side of the building, a big yard opens up, which functions as a parking space. The school's interior is simple, with bright comfortable teaching rooms and an interesting wooden staircase leading to the top floor.

## REMARKABLE VILLAGES

Other settlements remarkable for their monuments and historical value, as explained above, are:

- The entire uninhabited Kato Astrakoi village. That is where the "Astrakoi Gorge" path begins
- The settlement of Kounavoi, in its connected part, where the "Kounavoi Gorge" path starts.
- The village of Myrtia, in its connected part (home of the Nikos Kazantzakis Museum)
- The Agios Vasileios settlement, combined with the nearby archaeological site and monuments, where the "Spiliotissa Gorge" path starts
- Part of the Alagni settlement
- The Epanosifis Monastery

#### Earth and straw houses?

The last few years, a group of people in Archanes have been promoting a new method of construction, based on the cob method. Although you might be sceptical of how stable or waterproof a house made of earth, animal faeces and straw could be, visiting and talking with them might convince you of the advantages of this alternative method of natural construction. Some of its significant advantages are bioclimatic architecture, savings in money and energy and stable living conditions. Employed construction materials require little processing and transportation and have low financial and environmental costs. Some of these materials are renewable (like lumber and straw), and some others (like rock and earth) exist in such abundance that makes them practically inexhaustible.

An additional advantage of building with local materials is that it creates structures in absolute visual harmony with its surroundings.

"Unlike eco-materials, natural construction materials undergo little or no processing. Their use does not add to the destruction of forests, the squandering of mineral resources or pollution, nor does it depend on industrial materials and heavy machinery. Earth is non-toxic and completely recyclable. In this era of environmental degradation, lack of natural resources and of the thousands of hidden toxins in our houses, it's common sense for us to return to more innocent, cheap and healthy construction materials"

<http://www.cob.gr/> @ The Archanes Project  
<http://www.thearchanesproject.com/el/>

## MOUNTAIN ARCHITECTURE

For those not familiar with the term mitato, the region of the Asterousia Mountain Range offers an excellent opportunity to discover its meaning first-hand.

Alongside the region's country highways and unpaved rural roads, which seem to suddenly appear around every corner and lead to mesmerising natural locations and villages, small stone-built structures can be seen tucked away between rocks or perched atop minor peaks and ridges along the length of the mountain range.

They are the famed mitata: huts that provided shelter to shepherds and their flocks and were also used as pastoral cheese-dairies. Here, in the Asterousia Mountains, they don't always exhibit the typical domed shape that can be seen across most of the island; there are square ones and rectangular ones, as well as others with abstract shapes that follow the land's natural contours. Wherever there were pastures, there was usually a mitato. They were often built at sites with natural caves, and, if the length of the cave allowed it, its furthest recess was then used as a natural refrigerator to let cheeses ripen. Outside the mitato there was a rudimentary yard and, next to it, the fold, which confined animals during milking.

Despite not having been studied as extensively as those in Anogeia and the broader region of Mylopotamos, the mitata on the Asterousia Mountains, with their impressive range of shapes and their distinct character and charm, merit particular attention.

Particularly in the district of Achentrias, which is the liveliest livestock village in the eastern Asterousia mountains, with any mitata still functioning. Cheeses fermented here are amongst the most renowned of this mountain region.

Do not hesitate to approach the hospitable shepherds, particularly if you happen upon them on the mountain slopes or at their mitata. Yet, beware of sheepdogs that are usually around working mitata.



## Necessity

Mitata are usually found in clusters of family clans, at considerable distance from each other. Often, they form complexes affording additional auxiliary spaces.

In this particular natural environment, with limited material and financial resources, inhabitants naturally came to this building method. This is clear, considering that mitata are built using limestone sourced from the actual building site. Another advantage of this type of structure is that it can withstand storms and snow and its upkeep is simple, since the building material is readily available. Whilst no one can conclusively determine the origins and spread of such structures on Crete, be they vaulted tombs or mitata, it stands to reason that they are historically native to the land, for the reasons discussed above.

## Origins

The similarities, in both morphology and typology, between mitata and Minoan tholos (dome) tombs (e.g. the tomb at Furni) leave little room for doubt as to their origins.

Etymologically, the word for these primitive dry-stone structures with the characteristic beehive (or corbelled) domes comes from the Latin term *metatum*, meaning 'military lodging'. Throughout the Byzantine period the term referred to temporary shelters and it is still used on Crete to this day with the very same meaning. Whilst it is rather difficult to date mitata, their construction - or reconstruction - date is estimated based on the engravings on the lintel stones, jambs, and other parts of their masonry. In all likelihood, mitata existed even earlier, but their building materials were recycled to construct new ones on the same locations.

Round, domed structures proliferated on Crete in early antiquity. The theory that these were introduced by or the result of cultural influence of peoples Crete traded with does not seem to stand. This is because during the same period (late-3<sup>rd</sup> and early-2<sup>nd</sup> millennium B.C.) that the beehive/corbelled-domed structure appears in various cultures around the Mediterranean, its already sophisticated construction style on Crete attests to pre-existing technical know-how gained through practical experience.

After all, whilst other civilizations were using these primitive domed structures as residences, the Minoans, having made huge qualitative advances in the conception of their residences, used the earlier structures as tombs and built palaces and mansions to live in.

## Architecture

Domed mitata are dry-stone structures with a dome and are shaped like truncated cones. The domes are constructed using the corbelling method, so that every layer of stone projects slightly more towards the centre of the dome than the one below it. At their top, their crown is a short, slightly protruding cone that barely juts out from the main structure.

Mitata either stand alone, with a small yard within which necessary tasks are carried out, or constitute part of a complex that includes another mitato, known as the *kleidospito* ('keyhouse') or *tyrokeli* ('cheese cell'), used for storing and maturing cheeses. Next to every mitato there is a *mantra*, or fold, for keeping sheep. Other auxiliary spaces include a type of small cellar known as *koumos* and an outdoors sitting area that is also used for dining.

Within the mitato proper, there is always a hearth, which is normally centrally situated, and some benches for sitting and sleeping on. The top of the dome features a small hole, the *aniforas* (lit. *acclivity*), which measures approximately 20-30 cm across and serves to let the light in and let the smoke out.

As regards the entrance, it is identical to those of Minoan vaulted tombs-made using monoliths. Mitata are usually built on solid, flat ground in rocky areas, in order to facilitate the quarrying and transportation of raw materials. Construction begins after the site has been levelled and cleared.



## CHRISTIANITY - MONASTERIES

One of the most characteristic features of Cretan culture and human geography is religion's dominance over the landscape through the presence of hundreds of (mostly) small churches that can be found in every niche and corner of the island.

In-keeping with a practice that goes back thousands of years, inhabitants of the area would choose as their place of worship locations that they believed exuded a distinct energy, which were usually associated with the elements: hilltops and mountain peaks, springs, steep gorges, and river estuaries. In many cases, Christian chapels were erected on the sites of earlier, ancient places of worship, continuing humankind's efforts to commune with the divine.

There is an astounding number of churches to be seen whilst touring the region of Archanes-Asterousia, even in the most remote and inaccessible locations. Many of these were once hermitages, used by monks who practised asceticism.

Multiple churches can also be found in each village, whatever its size. All of them are considered important, and one is usually dedicated to the patron/matron saint and protector of the village. Outside the limits of the hamlets and villages, little picturesque chapels dot the landscape, some restored and others weathered by the elements and the passing of time.

### The Asterousia Range: The Holy Mountain of Crete

The Asterousia Range is one of the most important cradles of Christianity and monasticism on Crete. It is the densest area in cloisters and places of worship, a fact that vindicates its title as the Holy Mountain of Crete.

Due to the morphology of the terrain, its relative distance from cities and villages, the multitude of caves, ravines, remote areas and climate conditions, this area was ideal for monks and especially hermits.

During the early-Christian and early Byzantine eras (324-826), this area was a very important Orthodox centre. In the Arab rule (826-961) period, a time when the entirety of Crete was tested by Saracen pirates slaugh-



tering and plundering, the Asterousia region and monasticism naturally fell into decline. The isolated gulfs and ports of this entire south coastline were the target and hideout of pirates, who slaughtered the monks and plundered the monasteries and villages.

After the liberation of Crete by the Byzantine general Nikephoros Phokas the Elder (Second Byzantine Period 961-1204), a new period of social, economic and spiritual renaissance began on Crete, and the Asterousia played an important role. During Venetian rule (1211-1669), the area flourished and prospered. Monasteries and cloisters became cores of resistance against the Venetians' attempt to Latinise Crete. Many scholarly monks of the area worked to strengthen Cretans' religious and ethnic identity. Very close to Agiou Pavlou Monastery, on the mount top Kofina at 'Lousoudi' location (Municipality of Gortyna), priest-monk Iosif Filagris founded the Treion Ierarchon Monastery in 1361-1362, where a school and manuscript copying center operated. That time saw a revival of monasticism, as monasteries and old hermitage grounds were founded or restored and brought back to operation. They developed into centres for the letters and arts, particularly icon painting. It was a period when the Asterousia monasteries and chapels were decorated with great

murals and icons by great painters of the Cretan School. Due of the large number of monks and hermits that used to live in the Asterousia in that era, the area used to be referred to as 'Erimoupolis' - literally, a place of the hermits.

During the Ottoman rule (1669-1898), the Asterousia monasteries were very active. They became revolutionaries' refuge and bases, since monks provided them with material and spiritual support. They used to house 'secret schools' where children learned to read and write.

In the first few years after the liberation of Crete from the Ottomans, two very important monks were active in the area: Hosios Parthenios and Hosios Evmenios. These two Fathers founded Koudoumas Monastery, the biggest monastic centre that thrived in the east Asterousia. After the death of the two Fathers, since 1920, began the period of decline for monasticism in the Asterousia region, which continues to date. Local monasteries are only housing a few monks and Agiou Pavlou, Maridaki and Treis Ekklesias Monasteries have been abandoned.



## MONASTERIES

### PANAGIA KARDIOTISSA CONVENT

The church of Panagia Kardiotissa (Our Lady of Karydaki) is situated 3km from Pano Archanes (Upper Archanes), on the slopes of the River Kairatos valley flowing towards Heraklion.

It was probably built before 1200 A.D. As the church of Our Lady of Karydaki is referred to as 'old' in ledgers, 1000 A.D. seems to be an acceptable estimate of the year it was constructed in. When visiting in 1415 A.D. (records refer to 'Panagia Convent in Karydaki'), Italian monk Cristoforo Buondelmonti found a thriving convent.

In 1908, Italian historian Giuseppe Gerola presented a floor plan drawing of the church at 'Karydaki', with the description: "An unnamed church in the district known as Karydaki, in Temenos, close to the aqueduct. It has three aisles, but only two of them are in front of the narthex".

The church is a three-aisled basilica with a floor area of 60m<sup>2</sup>. There is a domed narthex, in front of the middle and southern aisles, similar in both layout and masonry style to Paliani Convent in Venerato and to the churches of Panagia Kritharida (Our Lady of Kritharida) and of Agiou Ioanni (Saint John) in Liliano in the Pediada region. The convent fell out of use as a result of restrictions imposed as part of a plan executed by the brilliant Francesco Morosini to supply water to Heraklion. The Venetian indeed succeeded in supplying Candia (as Heraklion was then known) with water from Mt. Juktas.

The springs from which Morosini's water project supplied the city of Heraklion as early as 1627 can be found in the same gorge the river flows through.

The area's geophysical particularities necessitated the construction of aqueducts at Syllamos, Fortetsa, and Treis Kamares (Three Arches), as well as a number of other engineering works.

The water was conveyed over the purpose-built aqueduct and into the main conduit where it continued its course, through the aqueducts of Syllamos and then Fortetsa until it finally reached Candia.

Today, the church of Panagia Kardiotissa lies in ruins, close to the renowned Karydaki Aqueduct.

### 'TON KALOGRADON TA KELIA' (THE MONKS' CELLS) (MT. JUKTAS)

There is an old, abandoned convent perched on the steep, western slopes of Mt. Juktas, known as Ton Kalogradon Ta Kelia-literally, The Monks' Cells. The view from the chapel, which is built atop Mt. Juktas' cliffs, is spectacular, affording a panoramic view. The building itself has three storeys and stands on a site that is both difficult to access and hidden from sight. Many believe that this was the location of Saint Paul's hermitage.

The convent was one of many places of monasticism on and around Mt. Juktas, which flourished during the period of Venetian rule and then declined during the period of Ottoman rule, due to extensive pillaging.

Two structures still survive in moderately good condition: One comprises of a defensive wall with an inner courtyard and a chamber cut out of the rock-face, and the other is located a few metres to the south and was likely used to collect the water that flowed from a rather large opening in the rock face; the spring, however, has now run dry.

Access to the site is difficult, if not dangerous. It can be reached either from the mountain peak, just before the Afenti Christou (Lord Christ) chapel, or from the foot of Mt. Juktas, heading towards the Timiou Stavrou (Holy Cross) chapel. Extra care needs to be taken on both routes.

### SPILIOTISSA MONASTERY

At the beginning of the Spiliotissa Gorge (on the side of Agios Vasileios) you will find the Sinai convent of Panagia Spiliotissa. The convent initially operated as a monastery and,



today, it is one of the smallest active convents on Crete. The chapel of the monastery is built on a rock, on which, according to tradition, an icon of the Virgin Mary was found. What remains of the murals on the rock in Panagia cave dates back to the 15<sup>th</sup> century. It seems that the monastery flourished at around 1600. It came under the jurisdiction of Sinai Monastery during the 1649-1669 period. The first primary school in the region was founded here. The school also served neighbouring hamlets in those years. Visits to the convent can be arranged (Tel: 2810 741370).

## HOLY MONASTERY OF ST. NIKITAS

Many consider this monastery miraculous. This holy site used to be a hermitage and cloister for the spiritual work of monks, mainly from Koudoumas Monastery. The church was built in a cave and, as indicated by its scantily preserved two-layer murals, the Monastery was probably built in the 14<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> centuries, when anachoreticism was widely spread in the Asterousia Mountain Range. To the left of the holy bema (sanctuary), a smaller cavern used by deacons, is said to have stalactites that drip holy water. At present, it is administered by the newly established Arkalohori, Kastelli and Viannos diocese. The monastery is rife with olives and other fruit-bearing trees, and features a cluster of cells where visitors can spend the night following arrangements with the caretaker, who lives on the premises.

## HOLY MONASTERY OF AGIOS PAVLOS, PARANYMFOI

The Agios Pavlos Monastery [St. Paul] dates back to the Venetian rule period. It used to operate as a hermitage site until about the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. This location was not chosen at random; it is on the road from Paranymfoi to Koudoumas Monastery, above the imposing cliffs and rocky caves of the Asterousia, which is ideal for hermits.

The Monastery flourished when scholar Iosif Filagris ran the neighbouring Treion Ierarchon Monastery, at Lousoudi ton Kapetanionon. Agios Pavlos Monastery operated throughout the Venetian era. During the Ot-

toman rule, it was stripped of its belongings and when, during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, attempts were made to re-establish it, the residents of Paranymfoi and Platanas eagerly offered their money. The rapid growth of Koudoumas Monastery had a negative impact on the Monastery, which was gradually abandoned.

Right below the chapel, which is built on a natural balcony, starts a precipitous ravine and the cliffs of the south Asterousia, one of the most imposing locations on Crete.

This area is ideal for settlement, and had likely attracted numerous residents during antiquity, judging by the archaeological findings interspersed in the entire area.

Architecturally, this Monastery is a single-nave basilica with a narthex, while the pointed door-frame is carved in limestone, a typical practice in the Venetian era. In the church interior, parts of the beautiful original murals that used to adorn it are still visible and have been roughly repaired. In the Monastery yard there are ruins of monk cells, annexed to the church, as well as a few graves.

## HOLY MONASTERY OF ST. GEORGE EPANOSIFIS

The Monastery of Agios Georgios [St. George] Epanosifis or 'Epanosifis' is one of the more populous and famous monasteries on Crete.

It was established at the end of Venetian rule and soon gained a lot of fame. As a result, it became one of the biggest pilgrimage sites on Crete.

The monastery was founded at 1600 by Brother Paisios, a monk travelling from the Apezana Monastery to Agarathos Monastery. He spent the night at the property of Venetian Lagouvardos, near Kako Horio (present-day Metaksohori), and built Epanosifis Monastery after a visitation by Saint George himself in a dream. Over the years, the inhabitants of the surrounding villages contributed to the efforts. Later, monks arrived from nearby monasteries and each built their cell using their own financial means.

The name Epanosifis was given by Lagouvardos, who used to be the ruler of the area and employed two shepherds both named Sifis. To tell them apart, he called them Epanosifis

(upper Sifis) and Katosifis (lower Sifis). That was how the name Saint George of Epanosifis came to be.

During the Ottoman occupation (1645-1669), the Epanosifis Monastery started to develop and gained its first significant possessions. By the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Monastery was flourishing. Most travellers who visited Crete also stopped at Epanosifis Monastery and many of them recorded information on the monastic society, the Monks' customs, the monastery's spiritual achievements as well as the structure of the building complex.

The Monastery's spiritual and social contribution during the Ottoman rule was invaluable. The Monks helped both travellers and struggling Cretans. The Monastery housed a school and a rich library. At the same time, scholarly Monks living at the monastery copied books, wrote hymns and preached.

The Monastery's spiritual achievements and its economic development continued until the years preceding the Greek Liberation War of 1821, which was a decisive point in the Monastery's life. A lot of monks were slaughtered by the enemy, while heirlooms were sold to buy arms.

The holy fathers of the Monastery together with Abbot Sofronios played an active part in the revolution of 1866. Most monks joined revolutionary groups such as the one led by Michael Korakas. Elder monks, along with heirlooms and holy vessels were temporarily moved to the Apezana Monastery. During that time, the Christian Church committed to supporting the schools of the island with the monasteries' income. The high income of Epanosifis Monastery was used to pay teachers who had undertaken the children's education during a very trying time for Crete.

In 1941, the Epanosifis Monks participated in the Battle of Crete. The Abbot's room was turned into a hospital for the wounded and more than 100 urban families took refuge at the Monastery. The Monastery offered great assistance to fighting Greeks, despite the fact that it had been looted by Nazis a number of times.

As evident from the Archives of the Elders' Council (local Greek council managing com-

munity affairs under the Ottoman occupation) located in Heraklion, the Monastery held a lot of property, not only in the Municipality of Heraklion but also in Ierapetra, Meramvelo, Viannos and Lasithi Plateau. Dependencies and property owned by Epanosifis Monastery can be found throughout Crete. Its contribution to the local people is also great (Construction of an orphanage and the Heraklion home for the aged, contribution to the construction of the Church of St. Minas and the Archdiocese of Heraklion etc.).

The katholikon (the church) stands in the centre of the monastery courtyard. It is a two-aisled basilica. The right aisle is dedicated to Saint George and the left to the Transfiguration of the Saviour. The foundations were laid on 5 March 1861 and construction was completed on 22 April 1863. The wooden iconostasis is intricately carved with depictions of rare scenes.

The miraculous icon of Saint George, largely covered in valuable votive offerings and oblations, can be found on the left side of the katholikon.

Through the centuries, the monastery nurtured individuals of great spiritual stature who, through their life and actions, succeeded in rising to high-ranking ecclesiastical positions.

A specially constructed two-storey wing houses the religious museum and library. The museum, equipped with state-of-the-art technology, features old icons, Gospels, heirlooms and vessels as well as other artefacts. The Monastery also houses a number of holy relics of saints. In the Monastery yard is the Fountain of Holy Water, discovered when Miliaras, a devout Christian, was visited by Saint



George in a dream. Epanosifis Monastery holds celebrations twice a year, and scores of churchgoers participate: one on 23 April, the feast honouring Saint George's martyrdom, and another on 3 November, the date of the translation of Saint George's holy relics.

The monastery can be contacted by telephone on: ++31 28940 51231 and ++31 28940 51183.

## DON'T MISS...

Anyone who has the opportunity to visit the monastery at Easter should aim to be there on Holy Friday and Easter Monday. On Holy Friday (the day of the Epitaphios Lamentations), following the procession of the Epitaphios-a liturgical icon or embroidered cloth depicting Christ prepared for burial-around the monastery grounds, everyone heads to the cemetery and then to the monastery's sheepfold; there, the Epitaphios is held high and all the sheep walk under it. On Easter Monday, the feast day of Saint George, many people visit the monastery to venerate the saint. Often, on that day, the monastery is visited by an equestrian club, and 'georgalidika' or Mesara horses -a rare Cretan breed- parade ahead of the procession of Saint George's icon around the monastery grounds. Visitors are drawn to the races held a short distance from the monastery. These races are connected with Saint George, as he was a military saint who is often depicted on horseback.

### WALKING AND DRIVING ROUTES FEATURING EPANOSIFIS MONASTERY

#### WALKING ROUTES

Epanosifis small forest

Damania and Armanogeia Wetlands

'Labyrinth' Musical Laboratory at Houdetsi

## AGIOS DIMITRIOS MONASTERY, MESOCHORIO

The dilapidated monastery is located in the northern part of the Asterousia Mountains, on the road that leads to Achenrias. According to surviving accounts, the monastery dates to the period of Venetian rule, and, in an 1848 source, it is referred to as 'erimomonastirio'- 'deserted monastery'. It was small, and its few monks were engaged in livestock farming. The ruins that still survive around

its church are now barely discernible, but older inhabitants of the area recall an entire building complex.

Oral tradition talks of constant pillaging by the Ottomans, and this appears to be one of the reasons why the monastery was abandoned and completely destroyed. According to historians, "its location, in an area particularly well-suited for providing shelter to rebels and its proximity to the Tourkochoria (Turks' villages) of the fertile plain of Mesara support the theory that the monastery was completely destroyed during the Greek Liberation War of 1821".

## PANAGIA AT TSOUTSOURAS

Amongst the various modern tourist accommodation properties, keen-eyed visitors to Tsoutsouras will notice the ruins of an old monastery's cells, close to the beach and at some distance from the church of the Panagia. The truth is that, today, as a result of extensive development in the area, there is nothing left around the church reminiscent of a monastery or hermitage. Judging by the area over which the ruins are spread, it is believed that at least 3-4 monks once lived here.

## TREIS EKKLISIES

Local tradition has it that the bay of Treis Ekklesies ('Three Churches') was once a place of asceticism. After 1900, it was annexed to Koudoumas Monastery. The churches-dedicated to the Virgin Mary, Christ, and Saint George-all feature murals.

## MARIDAKI

In the vicinity of the restored church of Theotokos ('Mother of God'), in the small seaside hamlet of Maridaki, there are three buildings that were once used by monks and hermits (and which, more recently, served as the offices of the hamlet's cultural centre). It is not known if and when this was first used as a monastery. However, according to sources, this was the location of a small monastery with at least three monks in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

## Suggested Religious Itineraries

For those who wish to explore the municipality whilst focusing on religious monuments and events, we recommend that trips be planned either around a specific time of year, to coincide with the great feasts of Christianity, or around specific locations.

For trips planned around a specific time of year, we recommend:

### Easter:

The greatest of Eastern Orthodox Christianity feasts. During Holy Week, religious rituals and church ceremonies can be enjoyed at all villages throughout the municipality.

Epanosifis Monastery is a good choice for Holy Friday. After the procession of the Epitaphios, everyone heads first to the cemetery and then to the sheepfold, and the Epitaphios is held high to allow the sheep to pass under it. Also in the area and very much worth experiencing are the celebrations on Saint George's day, held either on Easter Monday or on 23 April, if it is after Easter. These are also held at Epanosifis Monastery and feature 'georgalidika' or Mesara horses-a rare Cretan breed.

### Dekapentavgoustos

(lit. 15 August, the Dormition of the Virgin):

This is an important day of celebration commemorating the Dormition of the Theotokos (Mother of God). Virgin Mary is honoured across scores of chapels and churches of all sizes, in villages and across the countryside. Artoklasies (lit. Breaking of the Bread, a service during which priests bless and break five loaves of bread), liturgies, special masses, festivities, and numerous events are held throughout the entire region and, since it is in the summer, they can be combined with swimming in the sea and exploring the mountains. In the municipality's central region, just outside the hamlet of Agios Vasileios, the celebrations at Spiliotissa Convent-one of the rare occasions that the devout convent opens its doors to the public-should not be missed. The convent's location, nestled in the verdant Spiliotissa Gorge, offers a breeze of cool air in the summer heat, as well as surroundings of splendid natural beauty.

For trips planned around specific places, we recommend:

### A) Theme: 'The Holy Mountain of Crete'

Tours of the Asterousia Mountain Range, with its monastic communities and scores of chapels that seem to just sprout out of the landscape, following the faithful in their rites on various days of the year.

#### Route A1 (driving):

Charakas > Paranympoi > Agiou Pavlou (St. Paul) Monastery > Treis Ierarches (Three Hierarchs) Monastery in Lousoudi > Koudoumas Monastery > Agia Moni

#### Route A2 (driving & hiking):

Charakas > Paranympoi > Agiou Pavlou (St. Paul) Monastery > (3-4 hours hiking) > Koudoumas Monastery

#### Route A3 (driving):

Pyrgos > Treis Ekklesies (Three Churches Monastery)

#### Route A4 (driving):

Pyrgos > Mesochorio (Monastery) > Achenrias > Agiou Nikita (St. Nikitas) Monastery and the palm forest.

#### Route A5 (driving & hiking)

Pyrgos, Mesochorio (Agiou Dimitriou [St. Demetrius] Monastery) > Achenrias > Agiou Nikita (St. Nikitas) Monastery and the palm forest > Maridaki (Monastery) > (30-60' hiking) > Tsoutsouras (Panagia Monastery)

### B) Theme: the Mediterranean region of the Municipality of Archanes - Asterousia

#### Route B1 (driving & hiking):

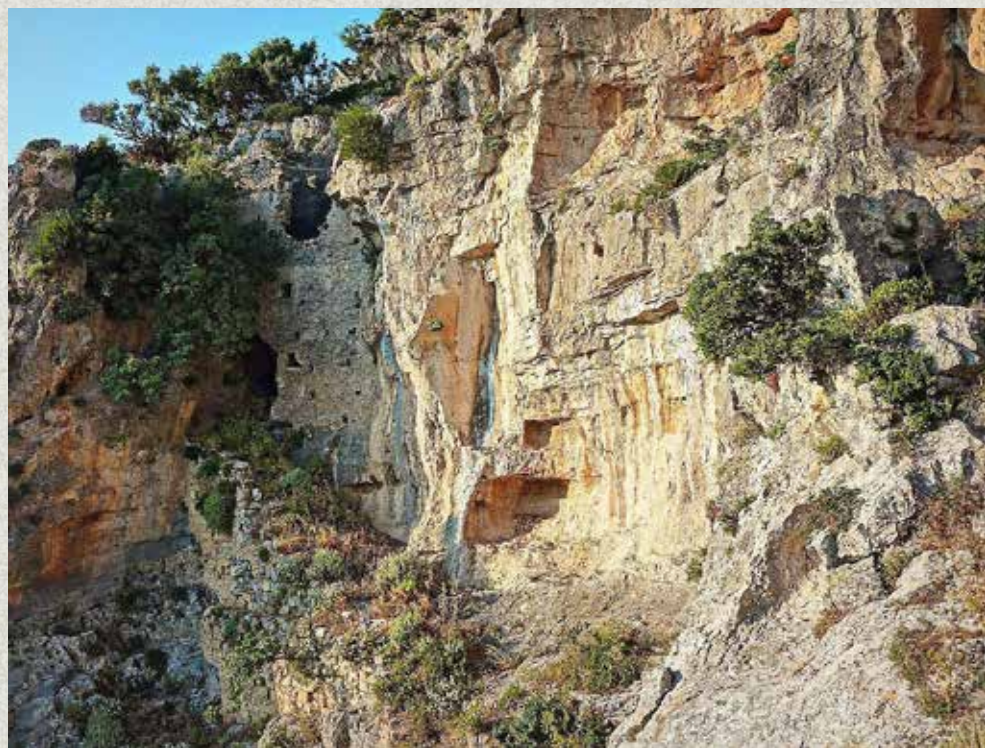
Heraklion > Kato Archanes > Fourni > hike to Panagia Karydakiani (Virgin Mary of Karydaki) and then back to the car > (continue by road to) Pano Archanes > western foot of Mt. Juktas, just below 'Kelia ton Kalogradon' (Monks' Cells) (care must be taken as the path that leads there is hard to discern) > (by road to) Mt. Juktas' peak - the Sotiras Christos (Christ the Saviour) Monastery.

#### Route B2 (driving):

Heraklion > Peza > Agios Vasileios > Spiliotissa Convent > Houdetsi > Epanosifis Monastery.

#### Route B3 (driving & hiking):

Heraklion > Peza > Agios Vasileios > Houdetsi (from here, hike half an hour through Spiliotissa Gorge to reach the Spiliotissa Convent and then head back to the car).



## FLAVOURS

Sampling local flavours is a must for all visitors. Sampling local dishes, wines, various products; dishes with locally produced ingredients prepared in a housewife's 'tsikali' (cooking pot) and products of distillation or the stomping vat that please the human palate. You should not miss out on the opportunity to taste Archanes wines and Nikos Kazantzakis territory wines, from vines that have been cultivated since Minoan times; today they are bottled at the best modern wineries of Crete. Nor should you miss the raki produced mainly in the Nikos Kazantzakis territory, boasting the largest number of raki-vats in the Prefecture!

## NATURE AND LANDSCAPE ...ON A PLATE

The culinary arts follow specific rules, which, however, allow a wide margin for tens of variations and dishes. Food is usually prepared simply, grilled/roasted, boiled or simmered. The combinations are simple but inventive. Ingredients are always local and seasonal and taken full advantage of so as to highlight their particular flavours.

The rural population has always known how to use natural ingredients, the basis of the famous Cretan traditional cuisine, to their best effect. In difficult times, in periods of economic recession and subjugation, such as during Venetian or Ottoman rule, fish, game and snails were ingredients that helped locals survive; they were cooked in many different ways, creating culinary masterpieces.

The rich, edible Cretan flora is widely used, since it always offers Cretan households the possibility of affordable food. Nothing is wasted: housewives cook pumpkin flowers, the young shoots of various vegetables, the leaves of wild mallow, the shoots of blackberry bushes, even stinging nettles, which enjoy pride of place in Cretan cuisine and can be used to prepare sfougato (a kind of spongy egg-pie), yahni (pot casserole) or various other dishes.

Olive oil is a unique fatty substance that has been used since Minoan times. The olive tree, as confirmed by various archaeological finds,

has been found throughout Crete since as early as the Middle and Late Mesolithic periods (2000 B.C.) It has been calculated that olive oil production in those times must have been around 11000 tons, not including the huge quantities of edible fruit that was consumed much more back then than it is today. It should be noted that there are olives that ripen on the tree (stafidolies, literally raisin-olives), which are still eaten without any further processing.

**Wild greens** are usually eaten raw or boiled. Most months, every family lunch or dinner includes a salad with at least eight different wild green species. Intensely aromatic greens are used to make small pies.

**Vegetables** are eaten raw, boiled or yahni (pot-cooked) in a light tomato sauce. The use of tomatoes is not frequent in sauces, since most sauces are transparent and watery, like avgolemono (egg and lemon sauce), or based on lemon and oil or vinegar and oil.

**Legumes** are mainly consumed during the long fasting periods - when food based on animal products is forbidden - which are strictly observed at various times of the year. Legumes are also encountered in original combinations with fish or meat, preserving their Byzantine names and called mageiremata or mageiries.

**Meat** usually comes from goats, sheep, rabbits, poultry and, in winter time, pigs. Even to this day goat kids graze freely, eating wild greens, aromatic herbs and young tree shoots; this is why their meat has a pleasantly crispy texture and hardly any fatty flavour. Snails have a special place in Cretan gastronomy, probably more than in any other cuisine in the world - even compared to French cuisine - since there are more than 25 dishes with snails as the main ingredient.

**Fish and crustaceans**, salted or fresh, are consumed, at least in the hinterland, in smaller quantities than meat, either boiled, grilled or preserved in olive oil, vinegar and aromatic herbs. On the contrary, along the coastline, achinosalata (sea urchin salad), soup made with fish living in the rocks (kaka-via, a type of Bouillabaisse), chtapodopilafio and garidopilafio (pilaf made with octopus or shrimps), even crabs, just like all kinds

## Gastronomic tradition

The cultural influence of the various peoples that have passed through this land over the centuries have left their mark on all sectors of human activity, naturally including gastronomy. The most important influence on Cretan cuisine goes back to Minoan times. To this day, products on the Cretan table are more or less the same: olive oil, cereal grains, legumes, honey, wild greens and herbs. In Byzantine times the Cretans preserved their customs and urban middle class families enjoyed complex dishes of excellent flavours.

During Venetian rule, meat was expensive and not often consumed. The most important shift in the Cretan diet came when products from the New World became known and began spreading throughout the island; tomatoes and potatoes as well as other products were gradually incorporated into local cuisine in the most creative manner.

There is a strong gastronomic tradition and a wide range of dishes, using every ingredient in the most imaginative way; it is extraordinary! Courgettes are eaten raw, boiled and sprinkled with olive oil, fried, cooked in the oven, stuffed, or in pies and patties. And this is only one ingredient!

All fruits and vegetables are disguised and put forth either as the main character in culinary creations or play second fiddle to meat, fish, pasta or legumes. This inventiveness of housewives who combine ingredients with different flavours - fruit with meat, sour with sweet, legumes with vegetables - while maintaining the authentic taste of each one, is the main success of Cretan cuisine, which lets "nothing go to waste".

The tough conditions under which rural populations generally live, but also the special conditions of exclusion and poverty they have often experienced, forced them, at times, to adapt to very austere solutions for their daily diet; this, however, did not adulterate the basis of their cooking nor made dishes less tasty and enjoyable.

Bread became rusk to keep longer. The root systems of numerous plants became a delicacy at times of fasting; okra was dried, fresh fish was preserved in salt and meat was cured into smoked sausage to keep longer. Any fruit that was not or could not be eaten raw was cooked and turned into jams or preserves. Everything from yesterday to the present has been used to its full extent, consumed in dozens of different ways. A wonderful environmentally friendly practice, emerging from the harmonious coexistence of humans with nature, rooted in ancient practices of times when advanced civilization could not but have an impact on cuisine. Ancient Greek Customs have been preserved to this day and have hardly changed! "Krasopsychia" (literally: wine boost), i.e. starting one's day with a breakfast of a mug of wine and rusk has been an almost pan-hellenic custom since antiquity, while ancient Greek "polykarpia" (literally: miscellaneous fruits) (a dish made with boiled fruit and nuts, cereals and legumes accompanied by aromatic

herbs and wild greens) have always given handy and tasty solutions to most, mainly rural, communities of the region.

of shellfish, are considered to be wonderful ingredients.

The breads accompanying daily meals are made with at least two types of flour, wheat and barley (in the past carob flour was used too), while the sweeteners, as recently as 50 years ago, were petimezi (grape must syrup), the famous thyme honey and carob syrup.

## There were four main types of sweets:

- Small and larger pies made with different types of dough and filled with soft cheeses, drizzled with honey;
- "Spoon sweets" (fruit preserves), using all edible fruit growing on the island;
- Sweets containing various nuts, such as walnuts and almonds (patouda [purse shaped biscuits filled with nuts], walnut cake and marzipan sweets); and
- Breads and celebratory breads prepared with white wheat flour and lots of aromatic herbs, the dough usually kneaded with olive oil.
- One of the outstanding products of the Cretan land is honey, which for many years was the only sweetener used; today it is also used for the preparation of various dishes. A typical example is meat in honey as cooked in Western Crete, while the commonest dessert in animal raising regions is myzithra or graviera cheese and various pies drizzled with honey.

Dairy produce is very popular in the Cretan diet, being more important than meat or fish. This includes the famous Cretan xinohondros, which is a wonderful blend of bulgur wheat and buttermilk.

Byzantines considered Cretan cheeses the best in the Mediterranean, while great cheese quantities were also consumed by the Venetians, who had forbidden cheese exports from the island. The most famous cheeses are anthotyros (fresh cheese with milk and whey from sheep and goat), graviera



(ripened cheese made with sheep's milk) and kefalotyri (hard, salty, yellow cheese made with goat's and/or sheep's milk).

Finally, local cuisine uses dozens of wild greens and aromatic herbs that grow everywhere, particularly in mountainous areas, and are used either to flavour various products (e.g. edible olives and olive oil), to add flavour and nutrients to various dishes or to prepare wonderful herbal teas. Whether medicinal or not, these plant species are probably the most representative elements of the natural profile of this land: small and 'humble', without impressive colours or shapes, yet coming in a vast range of intoxicating scents, offer a deeply satisfying palatal experience.

## THE WINES

Crete in general, and Heraklion more than any other prefecture, has been known as one of the most important wine producing territories since as early as the Minoan Period, with high quality wines and famous wine-making grape varieties. The centuries old viticulture is confirmed by finds from Archanes and Vathypetro, territories which still produce some of the most famous Cretan wines.

The Cretan vineyard, the most traditional in Europe, starts at an altitude of about 600 metres and stretches all the way down to the shores, following the versatile terrain, over an incessant alteration of hills and valleys that surprise and enchant visitors.

The mild, moderate winter and the dry hot summer of Crete, with its generous sunshine and the cool sea winds ensure a comfortable vegetation cycle without surprises or any particular problems.

For this reason, it is no surprise that Crete has a 4000-year-old winemaking tradition. This is confirmed by the stomping vat, the oldest known in the world, discovered at Vathypetro, as well as the one found at Castello, Katalagari. Indeed, local winemaking has known periods of major trade flourish. Important turning points in its long, magnificent history, were the period between the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> centuries A.D., when Cretan wines sealed in artistic vases travelled around the Mediterranean and the period of Venetian rule (12<sup>th</sup> - 16<sup>th</sup>

### Wineries welcoming guests (Wine Routes):

Lovers of good wine, you have arrived at the right place, the Mediterranean zone of the Municipality of Archanes-Asterousia, one of the major wine-producing territories of Crete, with numerous wineries open to visitors, offering guided tours and tastings. At the wineries or the Town Hall you can find printed material on Cretan 'Wine Routes', which will guide you on a circular tour of the hinterland, covering the entire wine-making zone of the prefecture and giving visitors the opportunity to get to know many representative viticulture-winemaking zones of the territory.

[www.winesofcrete.gr](http://www.winesofcrete.gr)

century) when Cretan wine, namely Malvasia, reached the peak of its fame. Today, the fact that the Cretan diet is considered ideal for health has contributed to the recognition of the positive effect that Cretan wine also has on health, when consumed in moderation.

## CELEBRATING TASTE...

Major religious festivals and life events are associated with specific and, usually, complicated, dishes.

At Christmas, after the long fasting period, meat, pork in particular, is a major player on the festive table. Housewives also prepare Christmas breads, called Christopsoma or Stavropsoma (Christ's breads of Cross breads) famous for their elaborate decoration and the special motifs used, different for each locality. For New Year's Day they prepare kourambiedes (a type of shortbread covered in icing sugar), melomakarona (small biscuit-like sweets sprinkled with walnuts and diluted honey) and the vasilopita (a special cake or pie containing the 'lucky coin'). In different places different sweets are prepared, such as methysmena koulourakia (literally: drunk cookies, made with wine) in Merabello, xerotigana (honey-dipped spiral pastries) in Ierapetra, etc. On the eve of Epiphany the dish of the day is palikaria (a dish made with various legumes and cereal grains, such as lentils, chick peas, beans, broad beans and wheat); during Carnival they make agnophites (literally: purity pies, a type of cheese pie) and tzoulamas (pie filled with chicken livers, raisins and nuts), at Easter they cook lamb, mageiritsa (a soup made with lamb offal) and avgokouloures or lambrokouloures (sweet round bread loaves, literally: egg-loops or

Easter loops) as well as kalitsounia (small pies filled with cheese or herbs). At social events, such as weddings

or christenings, as well as at religious feasts, the main dish is pilaf, while special bread loaves are also prepared, decorated with exceptional skill and artistry, the famous gamokouloura or xobliasta psomia (literally: wedding bread loaves or 'embroidered' bread loaves). Furthermore, xerotigana (honey-dipped spiral pastries) as well as amygdalota (marzipan sweets) are offered at weddings and at other important social events. The drink offered at weddings is soumada (a drink made with almond 'milk') along with plenty of local varieties of wine.

Kazanemata (kazani is the distillation vat) In the autumn, raki distillation is a non-stop feast from one end of Crete to the other; it is known as 'kazanemata'. Raki is a special drink, full and exuberant, born from the remnants of grapes. This drink has two to three times the alcohol content of wine (20-30%). The strongest raki is that produced the first 10-15 minutes of each 'kazania' (vatful) and it is called protoraki (first/top raki).

If you visit Crete in November, when kazanemata starts, go to Agies Paraskies, Komes, Houdetsi and elsewhere, to taste the tsikoudia (another name for raki); the drink flows freely at distillation plants during local feasts, accompanied by music and delicacies. Raki production is not just a process, particularly for this Municipality. It is a feast, an opportunity for socialising, for singing and dancing, which starts early in the evening and ends the following morning.

### The Watermelon Festival

At Charakas, Heraklion, they hold the Watermelon Festival every summer; it is accompanied by Cretan music & dance troupe performances.

### Koures (Sheep shearing)

This is one of the most impressive feasts and takes place at the end of spring at the mitata (plural of mitato, stone huts on mountain peaks) of the Asterousia mountain range; every animal farmer invites friends and relatives to help with the shearing, which is followed by feasting with food and drink, music and dancing.

### What has world research shown on dietary patterns?

The Cretan dietary pattern holds top position the world over today, as specialists admit, even in the 'gourmet' land of France, and this is indicated by valid scientific surveys.

The 7-country study undertaken by the World Health Organisation, the Serge Renaud study, the recent survey undertaken by the medical schools of the Universities of Athens and Harvard and many more reveal the longevity of Mediterranean peoples compared to the rest of Europe, and, particularly, that of the Cretan population; they associate this with Cretan dietary patterns.

To be specific, in the beginning of the 1960s the World Health Organisation started a study of the dietary customs of people from 7 different countries (Greece, Italy, Yugoslavia, the Netherlands, Finland, the USA and Japan). The study lasted 30 years and participants included about 12-13,000 individuals aged 40-59 years; it examined the relationship between the dietary customs of these regions with medical conditions like cancer and cardiovascular disease. The results surprised the international scientific community as they indicated that people who lived in the Mediterranean countries presented lower rates of mortality from cancer and coronary disease and had the highest average life-expectancy (particularly on Crete), when compared to the inhabitants of other countries. In their efforts to reveal their secret, scientists were led to the conclusion that their particular and natural life style (working outdoors, increased physical activity) as well as their simple and austere diet, which became known around the world as the 'Mediterranean Diet' were responsible for this phenomenon.

Then followed the «Lyon Heart» study, by renowned French Professor Serge Renaud, who wanted to find out to what extent the factors above, combined with reduced stress levels, were responsible for the good health of Cretans. This survey, which lasted 5 years, included 605 patients, (who had already suffered a cardiac episode and were at risk of a second one) and took place in Lyon. Patients were divided into two groups: the first one was given a diet complying with what the World Health Organisation proposed and the second one was given the food ratios used by Cretans. The results of the second group were much better than those of the first group, so that even Serge Renaud himself had to admit:

**"Don't look for a pill to replace the Cretan diet. There is no such thing" (1998).**

### Worth looking for:

Pergamonto (bergamot orange) preserve • Psomi zymoto migadero (hand-made bread using a mixture of wheat, barley and oat flour, before it is baked again to be turned into rusk) • Gardoumakia me kolokythia (courgettes stuffed with finely chopped sheep offal) • Lamb with artichokes in an egg and lemon sauce • Chickpeas cooked with veal or beef (revithato) • Tomatoes stuffed with rice and fennel • Pies filled with wild greens • Chochlioi with chondro (Snails cooked in a bulgur and buttermilk mixture)

## **Kakavia**

### **(fish soup, a type of Bouillabaisse) Feast**

In the summer, around August, ask about the famous feast held at Treis Ekklesies (Literally: Three Churches), accompanied by music and dancing.

## **YOU MUST TRY IT**

### **Antikristo:**

This is probably the most 'primitive' and also most delicious way of roasting meat. Big meat cuts, usually of lamb or goat kid, are supported on thin sticks or branches around a big fire. The meat is cooked slowly for 4-5 hours in the heat of the flames.

### **Apaki:**

Smoked truly tender pork fillet eaten raw as a meze or used as an omelette filling along with wild greens.

### **Eptazyma:**

Rusks made with a kind of sour dough based on powdered chickpea.

### **Kalitsounia:**

Small pies filled with sweet myzithra (sweet fresh cheese made with sheep's/goat's milk and whey) or mixed with sour myzithra, as well. Sometimes they are sweet, sometimes slightly sour. Their shape may be like an ancient oil lamp, called lyhnarakia or triangular (called anevata), similar in shape to a folder scarf.

### **Kefalotyri:**

A hard cheese, made exclusively with sheep's milk, with an excellent savoury taste. If it has matured in the mitata (plural of mitato, stone huts on mountain peaks), on the mountains, then it is called 'tyri tis trypas' (literally: cheese from the hole).

### **Dakos:**

Round barley rusk, soaked in water and served with olive oil, grated tomato, oregano, and a dash of feta or xinomyzithra cheese.

### **Myzithra or anthotyro:**

This is a soft, sweet, quite fatty, really white cheese. It is made from sheep's or goat's milk whey or a mixture of milk and whey. It is served as a table cheese or as a dessert with honey and nuts. When it is salted and left to mature in the air, it hardens and acquires a

fuller, peppery flavour and it is called anthotyro. When it is dry and hard, it can be grated over spaghetti boiled in meat stock.

### **Xinomyzithra:**

This is a soft, rather sour cheese with creamy or granular texture, mainly used as filling for sarikopita (type of cheese pie served with honey) and kalitsounia (small pies filled with cheese or herbs).

### **Xerotigana:**

Thin strips of dough that curl into a spiral as they are deep-fried in olive oil, served sprinkled with honey and sesame.

### **Ofto:**

Meat from a year old lamb (zygouri) or goat kid, which, after being well salted, is cooked in sealed ovens over burning wood.

### **Sarikopites:**

Spiral fried pies filled with xinomyzithra and served with honey. They are named after the characteristic Cretan headscarf called sarik. Skaros, a Cretan Sea fish (Mediterranean parrotfish, *Sparisoma cretense*)

It is served having been grilled whole with its guts, provided it was caught earlier on the same day or pot cooked in tomato sauce.

Tsakistes (literally: 'smashed') (olives): medium-size, green, unripe olives, the flesh of which is 'smashed' using a stone or a metal object.

### **Tsiladia:**

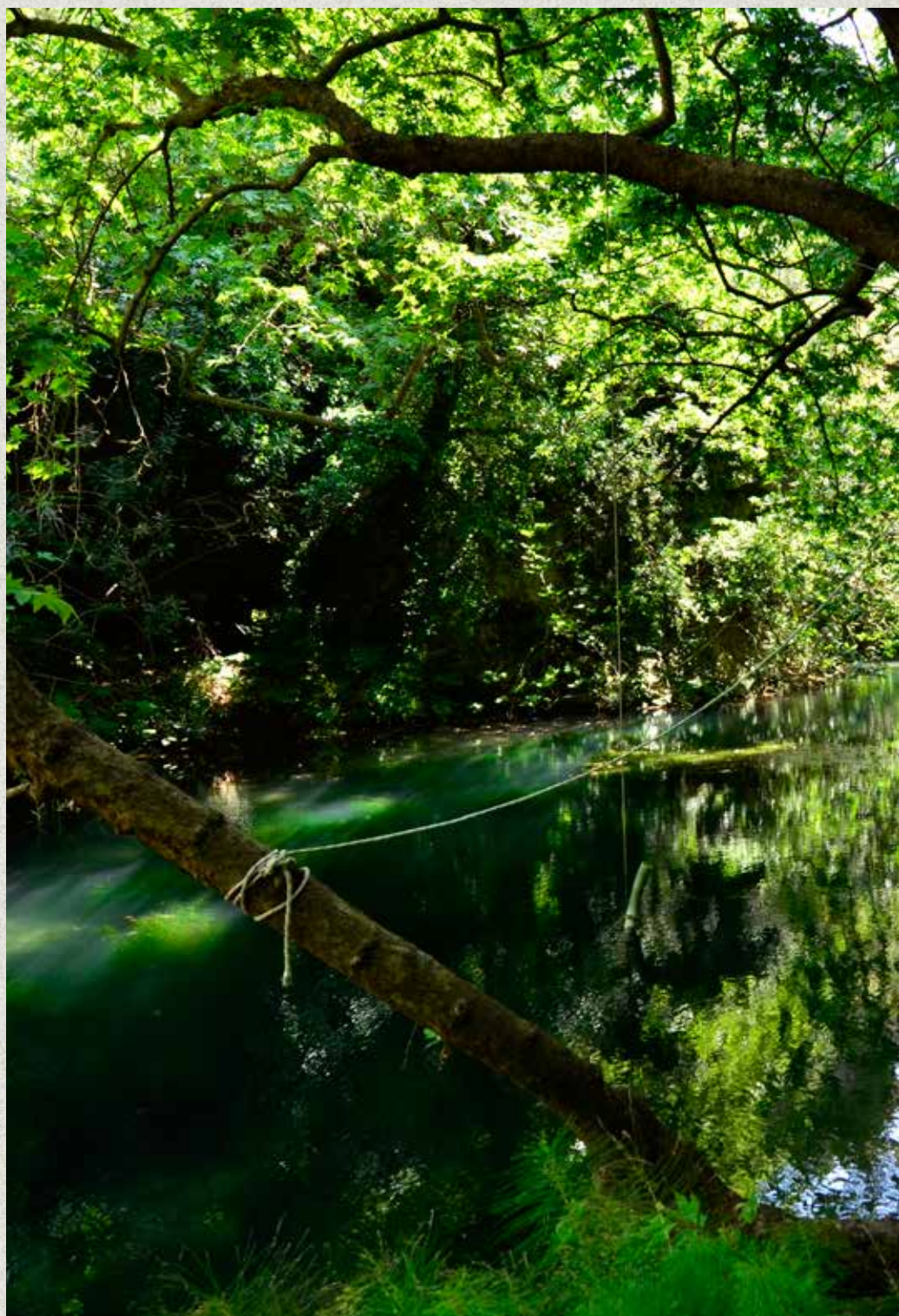
Elsewhere it is known as 'pihti' (meat jelly) Pieces of pork meat (head and trotters) are boiled slowly; they give out a thick, gelatin-like broth. This is seasoned with cumin, the juice of Seville oranges, and bay leaves and served mainly as a Christmas delicacy.

### **Tyrozouli:**

This is a cheese usually produced at home from goat's milk. It is semi-hard and has excellent taste.

































## M.U. OF ARCHANES

Population of the M.U. of Archanes:

5.409 residents

Area: 31.855 km<sup>2</sup>

The most popular site on Crete is, without doubt Knossos; its famous palace is visited by thousands of people from around the world. What is not known, however, to visitors who arrive at the famous palace is the geography of Knossos or the district the rich ancient palace lived off, which is no other than the valley of the Karteros and the Katsabadianos Rivers with the anthropomorphic Mt. Juktas and the rising hills, which have always created a particular microclimate favourable for vineyards and olive groves.

This region, the “Cretan Tuscany” (along with the middle municipal zone) is the broader region of Archanes, the northern part of the Municipality of Archanes-Asterousia.

Archanes is built at an altitude of 380 metres, looming over a fertile and systematically cultivated valley, teeming with vines, olive trees and cypresses; the landscape must be quite similar to what it looked like in Minoan times. To the west rises the landmark of Archanes, Mt. Juktas (altitude 811m and 3.5 km long), which has an exceptionally beautiful natural landscape and archaeological significance, and is a mountain with an excellent variety flora and fauna species. It is an arc of aromatic herbs and rare wild orchid species and hosts a significant vulture colony (about 28 pairs). Mt. Juktas meets Mt. Psiloritis on the west, the Lasithiotica mountain range to the east and the Asterousia range to the south. From its peak at 811m, the 3600 view is riveting, as there is no other such vantage point in the Prefecture of Heraklion.

Characteristic landmarks of the Archanes zone, besides the hamlet itself, which is indisputably one of the most cosmopolitan traditional hamlets on Crete, are ....remains of the past! Archanes archaeological sites and regions surrounding the hamlet are definitely an extensive archaeological park, which, if you set your mind to it, would take you more than a week to tour!

## PANO ARCHANES

### THE SEAT OF THE M.U. OF ARCHANES

**Distance from Heraklion:** 15.7 km.

You are in Archanes, the most charming hamlet of Crete. Observing it from above, one can fully recognise why this land has been inhabited since late Neolithic times. To the west looms sacred Mt. Juktas, surrounded by hills with numerous water springs.

Rich water springs fed the Kairatos River (present-day Katsampadianos), which irrigated the fertile valley that connected Archanes with the famous Knossos Palace and ended at the north coast of Heraklion.

The lush Cretan landscape we see today embracing the hamlet, teeming with vineyards, olive groves and cypresses, must be quite similar to that in Minoan times. When the Ottomans, after 22 years' siege, managed to conquer the Venetian Chandax (Heraklion) in 1669, they gave the city as a gift to A. Barocci, the person who had betrayed it. Archanes became the stronghold of the rebels/guerrilla fighters. In the times of the Cretan State, the city flourished: wine, raisins and olive oil were exported and brought wealth to the city. The well-to-do Archanians, wanting to express their love and desire to unite with Greece, built houses in the neoclassical style. Their mansion facades adopted an architectural trend imported from liberated Greece. This is how a unique hamlet of architectural interest was created, which has been preserved in its entirety. Extensive pedestrianisation, picturesque cobblestone lanes, lamp posts and beautifully restored mansions give visitors to Archanes the opportunity to travel back in time. Christian churches decorated with murals coexist with fountains and wonderful buildings from the Ottoman era, the best one among them being Mustafa Naili Pasha's residence, with fountains and gardens. On the north side of the valley is the quaint gorge named Paradeisi (small Paradise), which the Ottomans called Akarsular Dag (Mountain of the Running Waters). Within the same gorge, at Pelekita location, there is a water spring; in 1628, Francesco Morosini channelled its waters to supply Heraklion. The spring is dry today because of water drilling projects in the area.

#### 'Acharna'<sup>2</sup>

The main hamlet is today called Epano Acharnes and stands separate from the quarter of Kato Archanes, which is one km to the north. Archanes has preserved its ancient Greek name, which can be found on a 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C. inscription. It is an alliance treaty between Knossos and Tylissos, and one of the provisions mentioned, "Archos will have the sanctuary in Acharna". Archos was a local hero worshipped in Archanes. Archaeological testimony confirms the village's inhabitation in prehistoric times and throughout history.

#### Present-day Archanes

Where the old vineyards that made Archanes famous for the rozaki and sultana grapes used to be in the past, there stretch today extensive vineyards producing excellent table grapes that are mainly consumed in European markets. Other important products of Archanes include raisins, wine and olive oil.

The hamlet itself is a particularly lively community. Pretty hostels and quaint taverns and cafés serving traditional dishes are poles of attraction for visitors. Discover the small shops still operating in the 'old market' (palia agora) lanes; you will find plenty of hand-crafted items and local products sold by local entrepreneurs.

#### In ancient times...<sup>3</sup>

The palace complex of Archanes was first built in the beginning of the second millennium B.C. along with the first palaces of Knossos, Phaistos and Malia. S. Xanthoudakis was the first to point out the importance of Archanes in 1912. It was A. Evans, however, who discerned the palatial character of the ruins. In 1922 he started excavations that brought to light part of the palace. Based on the Victorian understanding of his times, Evans put forth the theory of the summer palace of the royals of Knossos at Archanes.

In 1964 archaeologists Giannis and Effie Sakellarakis excavated Tourkogeitonia and brought to light part of the palace structure. Quite possibly three stories high, it was luxurious and magnificent. The floors were covered with marble or slate and the walls with impressive murals.

### Archanes Archaeological Sites<sup>4</sup>

The Minoan city of Archanes and its palace complex was discovered in a small, closed valley, 15km from Knossos. Evidence supporting the oldest human presence in the region comes from the stone tools and a burial dating to the Late and Final Neolithic Periods (5<sup>th</sup> - 4<sup>th</sup> millennium B.C.).

In the Pre-Palatial period (3000-1900 B.C.), according to architectural relics found near the late Minoan palace complex and ceramic finds, there used to be a proto-Minoan settlement. The most important evidence, however, comes from the burial monuments of the necropolis discovered at Fourni. The various precious artefacts, such as ceramics, seals, Cycladic statuettes, golden jewellery, Egyptian scarabs, reflect the wealth of residents and an organised social life in contact with the outside world.

Life continued in Archanes in the Old-Palatial period (1900-1700 B.C.) and the hamlet developed into a significant Minoan community with a palace complex. Architectural relics lay beneath the palace building constructed at a later date; wonderful samples of Kamares ceramic ware have been found in Tourkogeitonia, while in nearby sites other town sectors have come to light, such as the theatre area, the underground water tank, the archives and the sanctuaries.

At Troula archaeological site a cochliarion (stone vessel used in rituals) has been found along with Mid-Minoan ceramics. Important information on the worship of the inhabitants is found at the sanctuaries of Archanes region. A peak sanctuary was established on the Psili Korfi (High Peak) of Mt. Juktas. Another very important sanctuary is the independent temple in Anemospilia, on the west side of the mountain.

The settlement flourished during the New Palatial Period (1700-1450 B.C.).

The excavated part of the brilliant palace centre at Archanes belongs to this period. Significant isolated residences or mansions were built in the surrounding area (Vitsila, Karnari, Chomatolakos, Xeri Kara, and Vathypetro). Around 1450 B.C. yet another major earthquake caused a lot of destruction throughout the island including Archanes.

Life in this location went on, nevertheless. The appearance of Mycenaeans on Crete did not lead to stagnation. On the contrary, a wealth of Mycenaean finds, both in the palace centre and the necropolis of Fourni, reflect continuous growth.

In historical times, various finds from Archanes and its broader region confirm its continued inhabitation during Geometric and Archaic years, while Mt. Juktas remained a place of worship. The first reference to the name 'Archanes' dates back to the Classical period. In 67 B.C. Crete became a Roman province, following its conquest by Metellus. Archanes then belonged to the Knossos territory. Architectural relics of residences and tombs confirm the presence of a settlement. There are few relics in Archanes from the Byzantine period. Rokkas Castle was built in the broader region (10th century A.D.). Some monuments from the Venetian period have been preserved in Archanes, such as the Morosini Fountain. The next conquest of Crete was by the Ottoman Turks (1669-1898), who also left their traces in Archanes, as the hamlet became one of the seats of Ottoman officials.

Excavations began the exploration of the Archanes region in the beginning of the 20th century, when St. Xanthoudidis indicated the presence of antiquities. Still, the person who started digging was A. Evans, who recognised the palace character of the Minoan complex. Evans' research at the palace complex was continued by G. Sakellarakis in 1964. In 1965 the necropolis at Fourni was discovered and this further encouraged the search, while in 1966 the Archanes excavation was included in digs undertaken by the Archaeological Society.

## MODERN HISTORY

### CRETAN REVOLUTIONS<sup>5</sup>

The town of Archanes was an important revolutionary centre of Eastern Crete during the 1897 Revolution. It was here that, as of February 1897, the Defense Committee of Archanes undertook the responsibility of co-ordinating military action in the broader region and Eastern Crete in general and faced major attacks by pro-Ottoman Cretans and the regular Ottoman army with remarkable bravery. In essence, the military part of the Cretan Question was decided in the region of Heraklion, centred round the town of Archanes, since the local geology makes it a natural fort, ideal, as proven later, to become the base of guerrilla fighters.

Indeed, the celebration of the 15<sup>th</sup> of March in 1897 (Commemorating the onset of the Greek Liberation War against the Ottomans) was grand, in this, first, and only, liberated part of Crete, i.e. Archanes, with no presence of Ottoman Occupation troops.

### WORLD WAR II

The location of Archanes and the bravery and spirit of its inhabitants were the main factors for the active participation of the village in war events of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

During the Battle of Crete (May 1941 - WWII) the Command Centre of the Greek Forces was established in Archanes, where a rudimentary military hospital was also established. In the first year of the Nazi Occupation, the first Intelligence task force on Crete was organised in Archanes, offering great services to the Resistance. The presence of the Occupation Forces was particularly strong in Archanes, since it was the seat of the Nazi Military Division.

### THE OLD PRIMARY SCHOOL OF ARCHANES<sup>6</sup>

The school of Pano Archanes is a noteworthy building from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The first study was undertaken by architect Saliveros in 1899. Saliveros was part of the staff of the Commissioner of Crete, Prince George. The land selected for the school construction was at 'Patitiria' (stomping vats) location in the north-eastern entrance to the hamlet, where, during the great Cretan Revolution of 1897, there used to be the camp of the 'Select Cretan Battalion' commanded by Ioannis Dafotis. The building plans were drafted according to recommendations given by schoolteacher Simantiras, in order to meet the needs of the town. The size and significance of the building testify to the importance given to covering the building needs for the education of a rich and important hamlet. Its plans were completed in 1901 and construction started immediately; works were completed with donations from rich Archanians living in the USA. The building operated as a school until the Second World War. They then had to transfer the patients from the Pananeion Municipal Hospital of Heraklion and the wounded from the Battle of Crete here. During the Nazi Occupation, the Nazi Division under Müller was housed in the building; Müller was replaced by General Kreipe. From this commanding centre, Müller coordinated the operations of the famous battle at Viannos. It was also from this building that in April 1943, General Kreipe departed after a reception on the occasion of a Nazi anniversary, to return to his overnight accommodation in Knossos; along the way he was kidnapped at Patsides by resistance groups and then transported to Egypt.

After the liberation, the school building housed the resistance organisations of Eastern Crete for a short while and after 1954 it started operating as a school again.

It is a stone building with a wooden roof covered with ceramic tiles. The floor plans of the basement and ground floors are Π-shaped, while the top floor is constructed only over the middle part; this gives the architectural composition a monumental character. It is a very interesting example of a special purpose building, constructed following the standards of neoclassical urban architecture, as applied in a wealthy provincial centre, an invaluable specimen for the study of architectural history; the school is an integral part of the history of the place and the memories of its people.



Today, the listed historic building has been renovated so that it can serve in the most effective manner the structures it houses, namely the Greek Open University, the Superior School of Paedagogy & Technology Education (A.S.PAI. TE), the Centre for Life-long Learning of the Municipality and the Town Hall services.

## LOCAL SIGHTS TO VISIT:

- **Panagia Faneromeni** (Virgin Mary Revealed) Church, which was initially built in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, is associated with numerous legends and traditions. It is a three-aisled church with an arched roof, built during three different time periods, located near the Heroes' Monument (Heroon) and the Old Primary School. Within the church there is an Ecclesiastical Museum, where icons from various Archanes churches are on display (the oldest ones date to the 16<sup>th</sup> century and the most recent ones are from the 20<sup>th</sup> century) along with church heirlooms (Father Paul's Phelonion [similar to the Western church chasuble], which was embroidered by the priest's wife and founder of the church, Maria Archogaropoulou), gospels, silver chalices, silver-plated trays, etc), as well as mementos from the 1897 revolution, the most impressive of which is Napoleon's telescope. It was given as a gift by Napoleon to the owner of the house, Chlapoutis, who put the French leader up for a night at Ierapetra, when the latter stopped over on his way to Egypt. In 1897 the telescope was handed over to the Revolutionary Committee of Archanes to serve the purposes of the struggle and ended up in the museum of Panagia Faneromeni.

In the churchyard, which was used as the cemetery of Archanes until 1902, there is the chapel of Agios Antonios (St. Anthony), the impressive bell tower of Faneromeni with decorative reliefs - built in 1857- and the clock, which was made in 1930 and was presented as a gift by the Archanian Women of New York and Boston.

- **The Folk Museum**, which is housed in a restored mansion and offers a taste of a traditional Archanian home and daily life in it.

Visits can be arranged by contacting the Town Hall.

- **The centre of the traditional hamlet**, with its stone-paved lanes and neoclassical buildings as well as its lively square, which is always active (this is where most catering establishments and banks are to be found).

- The premises serving the activities of the **Agricultural Cooperative of Archanes** in the sector of processing and standardising basic local farming produce.

- **The Weaving Workshop** with its traditional looms, where you can try the traditional products of the Women's Cooperative (Tel.: 2810 751968)

- **The workshop of famous sculptor Manolis Tzobanakis**, where his works made with wood and reinforced concrete are on display; it is located within the hamlet of Archanes at #6 Georgiou Eleftheraki Street.

- **The Xotaris Private Engraving Museum and "Eleni" Fabrica**, a restored old factory reviving the traditional way of producing olive oil.

- **The mansions** belonging to M. Psaltaki and the heirs of Annika Lydaki, opposite the Old Primary School.

- **A short distance outside Kato Archanes (Lower Archanes), on the road to Heraklion**, there is the Cretan Historical and Folklore Museum, where Michalis Psaltakis has put on display typical objects of Cretan history and tradition from the 9th century to date, which he managed to gather from various Cretan villages. Items exhibited in the halls of the Museum include military objects from WWII (jeeps, tanks, Nazi automobiles, etc.), as well as old looms, wine stomping vats, machinery for the production of olive oil, etc.

Visits can be arranged after contacting the Town Hall.  
Town Hall Tel.: 2813 401100-156, 2810 751853

- **The stone theatre at Kato Archanes (Lower Archanes)**, near the archaeological site of Fourni. The theatre was built in 2008 and hosts numerous cultural events. In the adjacent wood there is a recreational area that completes one's visit to this location.

- **Other infrastructure**

At Archanes there is a municipal open-air cinema operating in the summer; it is called

'Paradeisos' and it is part of a network of open-air summer cinemas of the Ministry of Culture. It is housed on a premises that blends in with the aesthetic character of the hamlet and the Greek tradition of open-air summer cinemas.

The Centre for Environmental Education of Archanes (K.P.E.), which was founded to raise awareness and inform pupils, teachers and other social groups on local and global environmental issues. It has been in operation in Archanes since 2003 at a newly built complex and includes an organic olive grove, a vineyard and a botanical garden open to the public.

Archanes is also the seat of Anaptyxiaki Irakleiou A.A.E. O.T.A. (Heraklion Developmental Company, Local Authorities Organisation), the main aim of which is to support local authorities in their developmental role and developmental planning in the broader region.

At Archanes there is a wide network of sports facilities, such as indoor gyms, stadiums and 5x5 football grounds, where the famous Juktas club is active with various sports academies.

## **MINOAN PALACE - TOURKOGEITONIA**

The building complex excavated in the Tourkogeitonia district of Archanes has all the features of the palaces of Knossos and Phaistos, the dimensions, orientation, architecture and rich construction materials, and it is a monument serving both administrative and residential purposes.

Like all other Minoan palaces, the palace complex at Archanes was built around 1900 B.C. (Old-Palatial Period), following the same architectural plan. Excavations have indicated that following initial construction small changes were made at later phases. The relics of this building and the Kamares ceramics found here indicate significant wealth.

Around 1700 B.C. the first destruction of the Archanes palace occurred, probably due to an earthquake. The palace was rebuilt immediately, but its life lasted only one hundred years, until an earthquake destroyed it again. Crete was experiencing its peak in growth and economic wealth in the "Pax Minoica" period; the Minoans ruled the Aegean Sea and had trade relations with Egypt and the Middle East. The Archanes palace was reconstructed and it is the ruins of this palace that visitors see today. The last flourishing period lasted a little more than two centuries and arts, at their prime, produced significant works. The final fall of Minoan Crete and the palace came in 1450 B.C. However, life went on and the palace experienced a new period of prosperity, this time under Mycenaean rule.

The palace complex at Archanes is an important document of Minoan architecture, but its construction is puzzling, when at a distance of 15 km there stood the most important Minoan palace of Knossos. They are like 'twin palaces', like those of Phaistos and Agia Trias. The view A. Evans supported, i.e. that it was the summer residence of the kings of Knossos and Phaistos, should be considered rather out of date.

It is possible that at such neighbouring palaces resided members of the royal family with various duties and specific powers. At Archanes the royal ruler must have controlled the hinterland of the region, rich in waters and raw materials, while also being the religious leader of the people; this involved significant worshipping locations, such as the temple at Anemospilia and the Peak Sanctuary of Mt. Juktas.

At present, the New-Palatial Period is also preserved at Archanes. The central core of the complex came to light in the so-called Tourkogeitonia of the present-day town, while close by other sectors have been revealed, such as the theatre location, the archives and the sanctuaries. Some of the walls still stand to a height exceeding 2 metres and they are quite thick (more than 1m), supporting the hypothesis that there were additional storeys. The palace was constructed using different types of stone (tuff, conglomerate rocks, gypsum, soft local limestone, slate and marble in various colours).





The interior side of the walls was often decorated with murals and several floors were made using coloured mortars.

The central palace yard was discovered in the southeast side of the excavated part, where there is a central monumental entrance and a platform with an altar. In the north part there are various rooms, a small staircase and a skylight shaft. Probably one of these rooms (Room 10, to the west of the entrance) was a sacred space, since the sacred utensils (vessels, sacrificial table) that were originally on the upper storey but found here are evidence pointing to this explanation.

The upper storey of the western sector probably did not contain cottage industry premises, but residential apartments, according to the finds, while ground floor premises used the walls of the old palace complex.

At this site relics from the Mycenaean Era were also found. Palace workshops were probably at the westernmost part of the west sector (pottery wheels). To the north of the central core of the palace Evans revealed an underground tank, which must have supplied the palace with water.

In the southeast part of the excavated area, a theatre location was discovered. It was paved and 'sidewalks' crossed it; there was an altar and sacred horns as well. In the southeast part of the central core, a space came to light that contained ceramics and signs bearing Linear A writing. This is where the archives of the palace were kept, and were destroyed by Mycenaean and later strata.

In the same space, unprocessed pieces of rock crystal, obsidian and soapstone have been found, confirming that some kind of workshop operated here.

# 1) ANEMOSPILIA - MT. JUKTAS - ARCHANES

TRAIL  
(circular route)

Epano Archanes > Anemospilia > Peak Sanctuary > Alo-naki > Mt. Juktas Peak > Epano Archanes

Turn right from the Archanes ring road at the sign for 'Vasilies'. Be careful on the narrow uphill road with its many sudden turns, leading to the archaeological site of 'Anemospilia', where there is a small parking area

You cannot enter the fenced Anemospilia archaeological site unless you have made arrangements with the relevant archaeological service (Tel: 2810 752712, Archaeological Collection of Archanes).

The trail starting here will lead you to the peak of Mt. Juktas. The trail follows the western slope of the anthropomorphic mountain. Shortly before the peak (approximately at the height of the telecoms antenna) you can make out the ruins of the Minoan Peak Sanctuary. Continue to the chapel of Afentis Christos [Master Christ] from where you can enjoy the panoramic view of the entire region of Heraklion. This is the starting point of the second trail, downhill all the way, following the eastern side of Mt. Juktas, which ends at the Archanes ring road (at the 'Afentis Christos' sign). Please note that you must have taken care of leaving a car at the finishing point, as the starting and finishing points are some distance from each other, and will take you more than an hour's hike on asphalt to get from one to the other.



- 🏠 Epano and Kato Archanes
- 📏 7.7 Km 🕒 3 hours
- 📍 35° 15.341'N / 25° 8.672'E (Anemospilia)
- 📍 35° 14.195'N / 25° 9.239'E (Epano Archanes - ring road)
- 🏠 Well-trodden trail with markers
- 👣 Moderate
- 🌿 Year-round
- 📍 In Epano Archanes

# 1) ARCHANES CIRCULAR TOUR

## CYCLING ROUTE

Epano Archanes > Katalagari > Houdetsi > Spiliotissa Gorge > Vathypetro > Epano Archanes

There are numerous incline changes along this tour and a wide range of terrain and landscapes.

A 3.7km uphill route starts at the village of Archanes, initially through the village's narrow streets and then on to dirt roads.

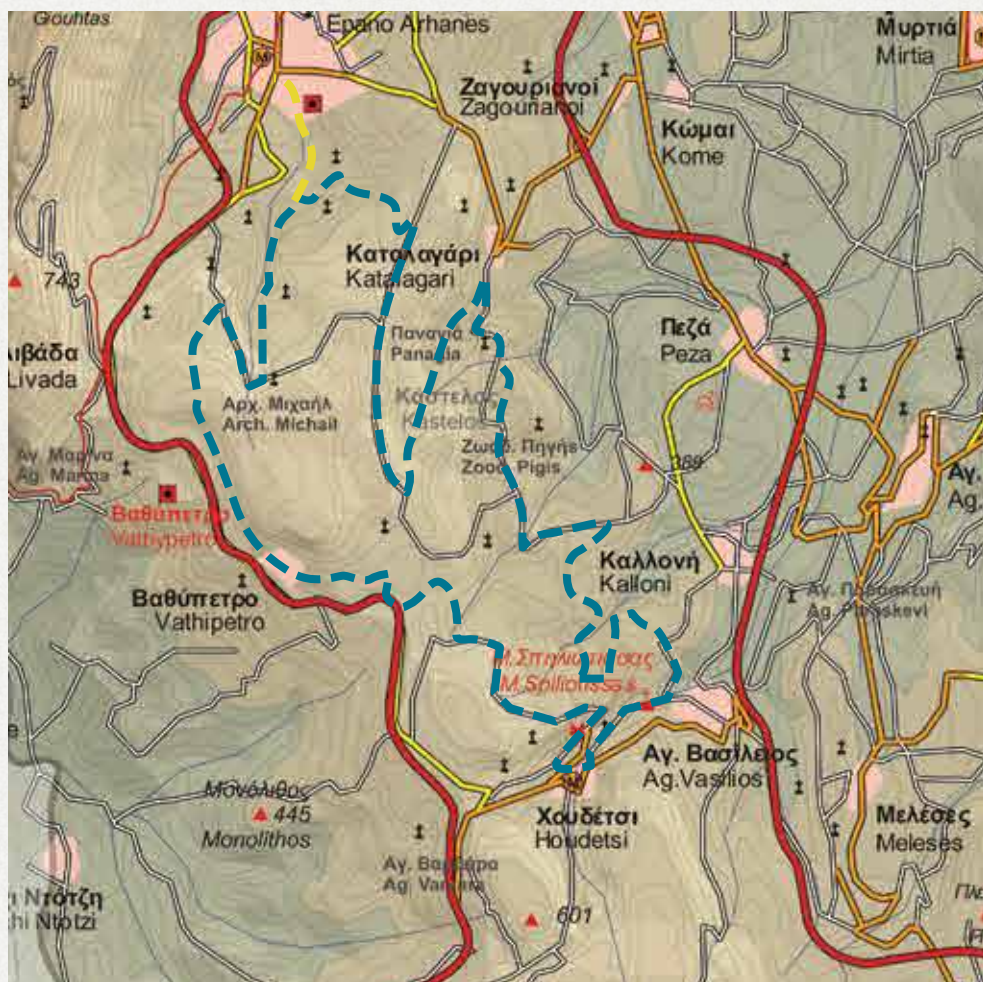
5 km of cycling takes you through the cobble streets of Katalagari village, while at the 7<sup>th</sup> km point you will pass the Vigla location. Immediately after that the route reach-

es the village of Houdetsi, passing through its cobbled streets and the lush vegetation of Panagia Spiliotissa Gorge. Shortly after the gorge you cross an olive grove that leads to the Tamiolakis Winery and its vineyards.

At the 14<sup>th</sup> km the route heads off the trail and passes the Venetian grape stomping vats and from there it leads to the last 3.8km uphill stretch with a 4.2% incline.

The tour ends at the old Ottoman Road (Mesara - Heraklion), its large rocks marking the beginning of the downhill stretch that ends at Archanes.

21,7 Km    Difficult  
 35° 14.018'N / 25° 9.523'E (Epano Archanes)  
 In Epano Archanes, where the Town Hall is also located



### 3) KNOSANO GORGE

TRAIL  
circular route

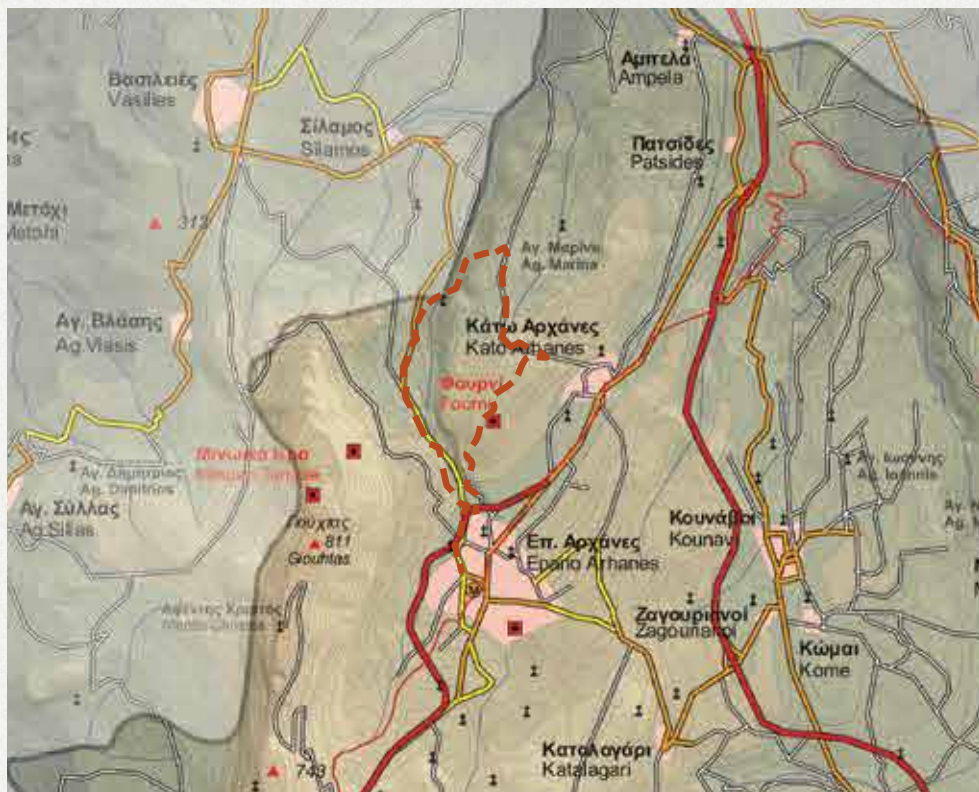
Epáno Archanes > Ai Yannis Manganitis > Ai Yannis Myristis > Karydaki Bridge > Kardiotissa Convent > Wildlife observatory > Fourni Theatre > Minoan Cemetery at Fourni > Epáno Archanes

This is one of the most interesting trails in the Archanes area. It starts at Epáno Archanes and follows the asphalt road that runs parallel to Knosano Gorge; shortly after the chapel of Ai Giannis Myristis [St. John of the Myrrh] and the biological treatment plant you will come to a downhill dirt road going right and leading you to the bed of the small gorge. Cross the small bridge and follow the trail to Karydaki Bridge, the Venetian aqueduct bridge that used to bring water from the springs of Archanes to Heraklion.

Leave the bridge on your left and follow the easily discernable path that makes its way uphill, comes to a wooden pavilion-observation point, and ends at a dirt track leading

south, taking you slightly uphill until Kefala Forest. Follow the dirt road south to Fourni, and after passing the archaeological site with the prehistoric cemetery, you will be back in Epáno Archanes.

- 🏠 Epáno and Kato Archanes
- 📏 7,1 Km ⌚ 2,5 hours
- 📍 35° 14.176'N / 25° 9.456'E  
Epáno Archanes (Ai Yannis Manganitis)
- 🚶 Well-trodden trail with markers
- ⚡ Moderate
- 🕒 Year-round
- 📍 In Epáno Archanes



### **Mt. Juktas's water to Chandax**

Heraklion had always had a water shortage problem and that's why, in 1627, the Venetian Francesco Morosini decided on a public project that would resolve the issue once and for all. He had an aqueduct constructed, where the waters from three springs, of Archanes: Pelekita, Agiou Georgiou and Karydaki, were collected (during the Ottoman occupation period, waters from more springs were channelled into the aqueduct). The stone pipe was 15km long and led the water, through Syllamos and Fortetsa, to the central square of Chandax (present-day Heraklion), to the Four Lions Fountain. At Karydaki location in Archanes Gorge, there is an aqueduct standing in good condition; it is around 65m long, with one large arch and two smaller ones. On the bridge there is a sign in Latin, indicating the year 1627. The aqueduct of Morosini was inaugurated in 1628, on the day of St. Mark's feast, the patron saint of Venice, at the Lions Square.

In fact, Morosini had a commemorative medallion cut: on one side there was Zeus and on the other an eagle, pouring water from Mt. Juktas. Around the perimeter of the medallion there was the inscription "Quadet feumine non fulmine", which means "Happy with the water not the thunder".

In order to ensure its safe operation, the Venetian ruler ordered that anyone who damaged the aqueduct should be severely punished (imprisonment, forced labour, exile, confiscation of property); furthermore, it was forbidden to plant trees within a radius of 10 steps on either side of the pipe. He also ordered that Panagia Kardiotissa Convent should be vacated, because he was afraid of sabotage.

### **The chapel of Panagia (Virgin Mary) is still preserved to date near the canal-carrying aqueduct**

Morosini's aqueduct is probably one of the best and most beautiful water supply projects from the era of Venetian rule and relieved residents of Venetian Chandax from long water shortage periods. The aqueduct is around 15km long, starting from the northern foot of Mt. Juktas and ending at the eight-lobe fountain of Morosini, popularly known as 'the Lions' (in the city of Heraklion, Venetian Chandax). The aqueduct was standing almost in its entirety, along with later modifications and additions, until the Second World War. Heraklion received its water supply from Morosini's aquaduct until 1927!

### **The route**

If you are coming from Heraklion, continue on the way to Syllamos and then towards Karydaki and Archanes. After you come to the riverbed at Syllamos, the road goes uphill to Karydaki district (there is no village); in a chasm with steep banks, on the right, there is the second part of the Venetian aqueduct.

The impressive bridge is not visible from the road, but you can see it on the left, from the side of the road. There is a footpath going downhill, backtracking for about 50m, after the road bend (at the next bend there is a small stretch where you can park).





## **MT. JUKTAS ARCHAEOLOGICAL PARK**

Mt. Juktas is a significant destination for visitors to the region of Archanes, since it was a special place of worship for Minoans. Four Minoan sanctuaries have been revealed to date, while the place is still sacred, as the church of Afentis Christos (Lord Christ) stands here.

This is one of the most important peak sanctuaries<sup>7</sup> of Minoan Crete. Situated at 'Psili Koryfi' (High Peak) location, it has four step-like terraces with retaining walls; there is an altar at the first one and a series of six rooms facing east. The findings - votive offerings are of significant archaeological importance.

Mt. Juktas sacred caves<sup>8</sup>. In the sacred anthropomorphic Mt. Juktas, which ancient writers considered Zeus' tomb ('tou Zia to mnima') there are two worship caves and a crevice. The common morphologic feature of the two caves is that there are numerous, varied and inter-connecting halls and corri-

dors. The morphology is both impressive and interesting, since it indicates how they were formed: probably entirely under water, which patiently eroded the lime rocks of the mountain for millions of years.

### **CHOSTO NERO (BURIED WATER)**

At an altitude of about 720m, on the southernmost peak of the sacred mountain, the cave contains a maze of corridors; access to most of them is challenging. In all compartments there are stalactites and some contain pits with water. The oldest evidence of worship within the cave dates back to the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium B.C, but it was continuously used for centuries through historical times.

### **STRAVOMYTIS' CAVE (CROOKED-NOSE CAVE)**

It is located on the southwest slope of Mt. Juktas, close to the hamlet of Karnari. It is characterised by a complex system of two-storey galleries and there are five entrance points and rich stalactite decoration.



In one of the galleries there is a small water lake. The wealth of findings in this cave document that it was used during all Minoan periods, even in the Neolithic one, since the fragments of a child's skull were found inside a Neolithic vase discovered here.

## THE CHASM CAVE OF MT. JUKTAS SANCTUARY

This is situated on the southwest slope of Mt. Juktas, above the hamlet of Karnari. It is characterised by a complex system of two-storey galleries and there are five entrance points and rich stalactite decoration.

## THE TEMPLE IN ANEMOSPILIA<sup>9</sup>

The Anemospilia was an important landmark in the history of Archanes. There, on the north slope of Mt. Juktas, with views towards Dikti, Idi, and every other major or minor centre on the north coast, was where Yannis and Efi Sakellarakis, in 1979, found a

unique -to date- temple from the Minoan Period. The Anemospilia building stood for only half a century. It was unexpectedly ruined by an earthquake in the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century BC. Entry to the enclosed archaeological area is not permitted without prior arrangement with the competent archaeological service.

## THE BUILDING

On the site, archaeologists have excavated a four-room building, which might have featured additional auxiliary spaces. It is a solid structure, with thick walls covered in partially preserved white or red masonry. Cut tuff stone was used for the thresholds and frames.

The rectangular building comprises three closed rooms of equal size along the south and a long corridor in the north that covers the length of all three rooms. The building is surrounded by an enclosure, believed to have been a temple, the statue of the deity residing in the main chamber.



This type of building is known from works of art depicting tripartite temples, such as the gold flattened strips from Mycenae and Volos, the stone rhyton (liquid containing) vase from Zakros and the Archanes ring.

These representations depict freestanding temples on mountain slopes, the types of which were later transferred to residential complexes, such as those of Vathypetro and Knossos palace.

According to researchers, the antechamber was where the preparations for acts or worship were made. The discovery of 150 vessels of various shapes, including an important chalice, as well as jars, pestles and pots has provided further evidence. The jars, some of which are carved with writing, were used at temples to store fabric but also the necessary liquid and solid foods for rituals. Both pestles and pots were used during preparations. The antechamber's benches did not only function as seating but were also used to store vessels. In front of the double wooden door at the entrance to the central chamber stands a stone structure, possibly used for libations or cleansing rituals.

The central chamber was packed with the largest vessels in the temple. Besides the jars stored along the walls, the entire room was full of vessels with the exception of the north and northwest parts. This chamber was where an important discovery was made: a pair of unnaturally large ceramic feet with a finished hole on their upper surface. Around the feet a thick layer of wood ash was found, which hints at the object being a remnant of a large wooden acrolithic statue - a statue whose extremities were made of different material than its main body. This acrolithic technique was known in the Aegean since the Neolithic Period and on Crete since the Middle Minoan Period. According to the archaeologists, the statue would have been placed in the central chamber of the Archanes temple, next to the non-sculpted rock intentionally placed in the same room, representing 'the sacred earth'. The vessels found all around are indicative of the offerings to the deity of worship following both bloody and bloodless rituals performed in separate areas. Charred nuts have been found in a vessel, typical of such practices. Perhaps the last offerings were made on the non-sculpted rock.

According to the evidence, bloodless rituals were carried out in the spacious eastern room, featuring a graded structure sculpted on the rock that probably served as an altar. Baskets, prochous (beaked) vases of various shapes and three calyx-shaped cups are some of the objects found in this room. The cause of the building's destruction, a powerful earthquake that took place in the first half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century BC, offers a possible explanation for the findings in the western chamber of the temple.

Here, the skeletal remains of two humans were found, whose cause of death is related to the falling stones and wood panels from the room and the resulting fire. Moreover, the skeletal remains of a third person were found on a table like structure shaped like a pedestal rising from the plastered floor. This person's death was from a wound inflicted using a sharp-edged weapon. This, according to archaeologists, was the result of human sacrifice - a rare but actual practice in Minoan Crete. Finally, a third body has been discovered, crushed while the person was trying to leave the building.

# ARCHANES ARCHAEOLOGICAL COLLECTION<sup>10</sup>

**Postal Address: Archanes, P.C. 70100**

Open daily (not on Tuesday);

opening hours: 08:30am-14:30pm;

admission is free. Tel.: 2810 752712

The Archaeological Collection is housed in a neoclassical building of the previous century in the district of Tzami; in the yard there is a bust of the archaeologist Yannis Sakellarakis, erected by local residents to pay homage to his work.

Until 1993, when the Archanes Museum was inaugurated, findings from this region were at Heraklion Archaeological Museum. Even today, for security purposes, the Archanes Archaeological Collection includes mainly ceramic and stone vases and exact copies of the most significant finds of this area.

Still, the way the finds are displayed in the elegant glass cases and the explanatory signs accompanying them help visitors form an overall picture of life in Minoan Crete and the importance of the Archanes finds in shaping our picture of the Minoan civilisation.

The neoclassical building of the museum was built in the 19<sup>th</sup> century to house the first school of the town. The display is presented in a single hall, in glass cases along the walls and in the centre of the hall.

Entering the hall, visitors move from left to right. The first six glass cases (1-6) contain finds from the Minoan cemetery at Furni Hill in Kato Archanes (Lower Archanes). The cemetery was used for more than a thousand years, from about 2400 until 1200 B.C. The excavation was important because of the information it provided on the funereal customs and the organisation of cemeteries during that period; it contains hundreds of burials and artefacts from Minoan vaulted tombs to Mycenaean pit-like tombs, sacrifices, funereal dinners and auxiliary constructs of the cemetery.

Glass Case 1 contains reproductions of Cycladic statuettes from tombs at Fourni, which confirm the relationship the island of Crete had as early as the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium B.C. with

the Proto-Cycladic Civilisation flourishing at the time.

Glass Case 2, containing artefacts from the Old-Palatial period, displays, among other things, jewellery made of ivory, a pair of silver earrings and tiny clay animal statuettes. In the corner of the hall, in a suitably laid out area, the burials are on display, as they were found at Fourni cemetery. You can see three clay sarcophagi with their lids, which contain the burial of a man and a woman and three funereal jars, which were usually used for children's burials. The dead were buried in a contracted position, i.e. with their knees folded against their chest, as the skeletons on display show.

Glass Cases 4 and 5 present the ceramic art of Fourni from the pre-Palatial and early Old-Palatial periods. These are hand-made ceramic objects of various shapes, with simple linear drawn decoration. In Glass Case 4 notice the reproduction of the ceramic sistrum (rattle-like instrument) found at Fourni. It is a musical instrument known to us from the scene on the 'Harvesters' Vase' on display at Heraklion Archaeological Museum.

A detail of the scene that depicts musicians, one of whom is holding a sistrum and singing, is displayed next to the sistrum. Glass Case 6 contains sarcophagi with children's burials and various funereal vases, including a pot (chytra).

Wall mount VII, Glass Case 7 and the three giant jars to its right are related to sanctuary and worship practices. The most important findings here are from the sanctuary excavated in Anemospilia. The sanctuary dates back to the beginning of the Neo-Palatial period and was destroyed by an earthquake around 1700 B.C. Within this sanctuary archaeologists discovered the skeletons of three humans who met their death from the falling roof and walls during the earthquake. They also found the skeleton of a human tied on an altar. They assumed that there was a human sacrifice in progress here during the earthquake, in an effort to exorcise evil. In Glass Case 7 there is a reproduction of the clay feet from the wooden statue of the goddess standing in one of the sanctuary rooms, a reproduction of the copper sword used for the sacrifice and a cast of the seal on the dead person's wrist, who is



believed to have been the priest. The three giant jars were found in the same room as the statue of the goddess. Glass Case 9 contains a concise representation of daily life activities during Early-Palatial times. The warp weights (agnythes) from the looms of the time have been preserved, as well as cone-shaped cups containing traces of dyes used to colour the textiles; there are also ceramic pots (chytres) with food remains, informing us about the Minoan diet. The storage jar on display right after Glass Case 9 was found in a Minoan rural residence in the area of Archanes and it is decorated with plastic motifs of excellent craftsmanship.

The rows of handles were used for ropes to be passed through so it would be possible to transport it. In order to form a more complete picture of daily life in Minoan Crete, backtrack across the hall, opposite Glass Case 7.

The centrally positioned glass cases display a clay grape stomping vat (lenos). This object was found at Fourni, but similar ones have been found in many Minoan sites, since winemaking was one of the main trade activities of the island.

The sign next to the stomping vat presents a picture of land and marine transport means of the time. Going back to Glass Case 11, you can see ceramic items from the Neo-Palatial Period. The vases on display here were found in the Palace building being excavated in the heart of the village, in Tourkogeitonia district. Glass Case 12 is dedicated to stone works. There are stone vases made of various ores as well as stone tools and spindle components. Glass Case 13 contains a number of fragments from clay vessels (ostraka) from various periods, found in Archanes. It is worth taking a moment at this case to see how ceramic styles developed and differed with time.

The time sequences of ceramic styles are used by archaeologists to date the various phases of an excavation site.

Glass Case 13 concludes your tour of the series of wall-mounted cases. You can now proceed to the group of glass cases in the middle of the hall. Start with Table I, opposite the entrance, which depicts the excavation of the palace at Tourkogeitonia. Moving to the left, this is what you will see in turn: a stone throne found in the palace (Exhibit 14), a libation vase in the shape of a bull from Fourni (Exhibit 15) and fragments of murals found in the palace building (Exhibit 16). Sign X and Glass Case 18 present items made of ivory and found in Archanes. In Glass Case 18 you can admire an ivory comb found in the Mycenaean cemetery grounds at Fourni, which is decorated on both sides with pairs of lizards in relief. Above this case you can see the double bull-horns made of tuff. We are not in a position to know the exact symbolism of the 'horns of consecration', as scholars call them, but they are definitely a sacred symbol of the Minoans, which appears in palaces and sanctuaries, as well as on all ritual utensils. Glass Case 19 presents a tripod-altar, which is also associated with worship. To the left of this there is a tall lamp, like those used to light the rooms and corridors of Minoan buildings. The last two exhibits are Archanes findings from the historical period. There is an altar from the 1st century A.D. (Exhibit 22) and the marble head of a young girl from the 3rd century A.D. (Exhibit 23), which indicate the importance of the years following the destruction of the Minoan civilisation and the continued inhabitation of the region until our times.



## PATSIDES

Leaving behind the antiquities of Knossos and the aqueduct of Agia Eirini (St. Irene) at Spilia, the first organised hamlet one comes across is Patsides. At an altitude of 250m, the hamlet, which has been regenerated, is of special interest for visitors and primes them for the full development and high aesthetics characterising the entire Municipal Unit of Archanes. Patsides is the northernmost residential part of Kato Archanes (Lower Archanes) Postal Code district. The geomorphology of the location is exceptional and Patsides is at a comfortable distance from the hustle and bustle of Heraklion. Recently, small taverns serving excellent food have opened here and they are a pleasant option for the recreation of Heraklion residents.

## KATO ARCHANES

The village lies at the entrance of the fertile basin to the west of Mt. Juktas.

Village residences are built amphitheatrically, looking over the fertile valley of Archanes, which is covered in vineyards. These are two-storey stone houses, with spacious

### Minoan Cemetery at Fourni<sup>11</sup>

On Fourni Hill, between Pano and Kato Archanes, near the Minoan settlement of Archanes, within an olive grove and vineyards, a rich cemetery was discovered; this is one of the most important archaeological sites on Crete. Fourni Hill is the border of the small plain of Archanes to the north-west, but it is not part of Mt. Juktas; the western slope of the hill is steep and its peak barren.

Tombs were in use for a very long time (2400-1200 B.C.) and a wealth of artefacts have been unearthed, making it one of the most significant cemeteries in the Aegean territory. The oldest burials date back to the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium B.C., while some tombs were used for an extremely long period (2000 B.C. -1350 B.C.). Of the constructs revealed to date, most are funereal, but there some were for secular or worshipping purposes.

Fourni necropolis is characterised by a multitude and variety of burial constructs, built in a wide range of architectural styles; among them are those of eminent royal persons judging from the wealth of votive offerings. Furthermore, important evidence concerning the funereal customs and worship of Minoans has been collected. Light has been shed on the manner in which a major cemetery in the Mid and Late Minoan periods was organised and managed, with the construction of auxiliary buildings, paved roads and systems to drain rainwater. Many of the votive offerings and artefacts are imported and reflect the contact between the residents of Archanes and the Cyclades, Egypt and the East. Access to the necropolis was from the south; there is a wide path, still paved at some points, which leads from Kato Archanes to Fourni. There is a similarly constructed ascending path within the cemetery as well. It is possible that the path was constructed in Minoan times, to help the residents of Archanes carry their dead, the sarcophagi and various other objects. Until 1964 Fourni necropolis was not known. It was in that year that the first exploratory excavation by G. Sakellarakis, revealed a vaulted tomb at the east foot of the hill. The following year some more vaulted tombs were also located and since then there have been incessant excavation works exploring the area. Works to support all funereal constructs have also been carried out.

### Kreipe Monument

At the crossroads of the old Heraklion-Archanes road with the new National Road, opposite the Chapel of Agiou Sozontos (St. Sozon), there is a monument marking where Nazi General Kreipe was abducted.

It is a work by sculptor Manolis Tzobanakis constructed with wire. At exactly this point, on the night of April 26, 1944, a group of British soldiers and Cretan resistance fighters set up an ambush for the automobile carrying the Commander of Eastern Crete, General Heinrich Kreipe, whom they abducted and transported to Egypt as a prisoner.

yards and stomping vats for winemaking, ceramic tile roofs, paved lanes, jasmine and lilies, all elements of the serenity and beauty of yesteryears.

Residents are mainly farmers, producing grapes, raisins and olive oil.

In recent years, taverns serving excellent food have started operating here, offering a pleasant recreational option for Heraklion residents.

## WORTH SEEING

Kato Archanes is built at the foot of the historic hill of Tze, a hilly extension of Mt. Juktas, and on Kefala Hill, a reforested stretch, which is the only recreational park with trees in the area, attracting visitors even from the urban centre of Heraklion. At Kefala Hill, the Municipality has recently built a theatre, where excellent performances and various cultural events are held; if you happen to be there for such an event, don't miss it!

What is definitely unique, and is right next to the theatre and above Kefala Hill, is Furni, with the famous Minoan necropolis discovered by archaeologists G. and E. Sakellarakis. From this important archaeological site there is a footpath (the old Minoan one) that leads to Pano Archanes, while a hiking trail, recently created by the Municipality, goes around the hill creating an interesting circular route. Visitors can go up Kefala Hill following the Fourni sign in Kato Archanes square.



## 2) FOURNI

TRAIL  
circular route

Kato Archanes > Fourni Theatre > St. Eirini Gorge > Minoan Cemetery at Fourni > Fourni Theatre

From Kato Archanes, approximately at the centre of the hamlet, turn onto the uphill asphalt road following the sign to 'Fourni' along the path to the next sign, which will lead you to the parking area of the Municipal Contemporary Theatre.

This is where the trail begins. Despite it being a short trail in duration and length, it presents very interesting features. In an hour and a half hikers get a very good feeling of the geomorphology of the Mt. Juktas Ecological Park, since this circular trail starts from the small artificial forest on 'Kefalas' Hill and goes around the northern slope of the hill, revealing the panoramic view of the gorge of Agia Eirini below, with porous limestone rocks sculpted by time and the elements and lush vegetation.

The trail follows the gorge from the very top and approximately half way along it you can make out the hamlet of Epano Archanes.

Shortly after that the trail changes course and heads north, to bring you to the ancient Minoan trail that leads to the Minoan Cemetery in Fourni, where the view is riveting. Make arrangements with the relevant archaeological service (Tel: 2810 752712, Archaeological Collection of Archanes) to gain entry to the archaeological site (especially if you are a group). From there you continue to the theatre parking area where this route ends.

- 🏠 Epano and Kato Archanes
- 📏 3,1 Km 🕒 1,5 hour
- 📍 35° 15.080'N / 25° 9.767'E (Fourni Theatre)
- 🐐 Goat trail without markers
- 👣 Easy
- 🌤 Year-round
- 📍 In Kato and Epano Archanes



## VATHYPETRO<sup>12</sup>

Built on the west foot of Mt. Juktas, the small settlement of Vathypetro affords some of the best views in the Municipality of Heraklion: over the Mesara plain, the Kofinas Peak Sancturay in the Asterousia Mountain Range and the sloping of Heraklion plain to the north of the island. Surrounding the settlement, fertile plains, orchard hills, olive groves and vineyards, offer some of the most distinguished products on Crete. This authentic rural landscape has not changed much since ancient times, as evident from significant archaeological findings on the Pera Livada site.

## KARNARI

Very close to Kato Archanes, at the south-west foot of Mt. Juktas, there is the dependency of Karnari, as the locals call it. In recent years, due to the panoramic view over the fertile vineyards of the territory, the location has been attracting an increasing number of

residents. Very close to the hamlet there is the Stravomytis (Crooked Nose) Cave.

## KERA ELEOUSA (LADY OF MERCY)

Stretched along the ravine of Agia Eirini, there is the traditional hamlet of Eleousa, enjoying the beauties of the natural landscape (protected by the 'Natura 2000' Programme), with its plane trees, willows, chaste trees (*Vitex agnus-castus*) and poplars, generously offering their shade to daring hikers. Eleousa looks more like a large neighbourhood and less like an autonomous hamlet, since it has almost joined the main hamlet of Kato Archanes, following the intense residential growth of recent years.

Its name comes from the largest church of Archanes, dedicated to Mother Mary of Mercy, (Panagia Eleousa), while in the past the location was known as the Arab-Agas dependency.



## TRAILS AND ROUTES STARTING - ENDING AT ANO & KATO ARCHANES

### HIKING TRAILS

- T. 1. Anemospilia - Mt. Juktas - Archanes (circular trail)
- T. 2. Fourni (circular trail)
- T. 3. Knosano Gorge (circular trail)

### CYCLING COURSES

- C.C. 1. Tour of Archanes

### WINE ROUTES (WINERIES RECEIVING VISITORS)

- WR. 1: Heraklion - Knossos - Skalani - Patsides - Kato Archanes
- WR. 2: Archanes - Vathypetro - Kounavoi - Katalagari - Peza Valley

### OTHER SIGHTS

- The Archaeological Collection of Archanes: is open daily (except on Tuesdays) from 08:30 to 14:30 and entrance is free. (Tel: 2810 752712).
- Outdoor endemic flora museum of Crete (at the Anemospilia, Iero Korifis and Plakostroto locations).
- Birds of prey observation point at Mt. Juktas, where there is also a feeder

### The Minoan Mansion<sup>13</sup>

In addition to the renowned palaces, a number of mansions were also built in Minoan Crete. A prominent example is the Vathypetro mansion, at Piso Livadia site, 4km north of Archanes, on the south-east slope of Mt. Juktas.

An archaeological excavation has brought to light a large Minoan building dating back to the first half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century B.C. It very possibly housed a local lord and features typical elements of palatial architecture of the time.

According to recent research, it comprised two structures constituting a single unit, since the eastern part was added later. The initial, west building (Later Minoan Period I/ 1600-1480 B.C.) featured an impressive western façade and possibly a second floor. Entrance chambers with skylights, water tanks, a crypt on pillars, a tripartite temple with a recess, storage spaces as well as a pottery workshop have been identified. During the second phase (Later Minoan Period II/ 1480-1425 BC), the second building was added and a number of changes were made to the first one - olive presses, storage rooms, pottery rooms, wine production rooms and textile mills. Vathypetro is important because of its architectural detail as well as its obvious contribution regarding the economic activity of that period.

### The excavation<sup>14</sup>

The mansion was brought to light by Spiros Marinatos, during an excavation he carried out between 1949 and 1956. Stabilisation and restoration works were concurrent and continued until 1973. One of the restored rooms houses a small exhibition space featuring pottery from the Vathypetro mansion.

## "N. KAZANTAKIS" M.U.

Population of the "N. KAZANTAKIS" M.U.  
7.171 residents  
Area:  
102.201 km<sup>2</sup>

The N. Kazantzakis Unit is the middle zone of the Municipality and stretches over a hilly terrain of multiple geologic folds, with rivers and valleys creating idyllic landscapes of lush vegetation; there are numerous hiking trails and ideal niches for viticulture and olive groves. The 'Tuscany of Crete' (as this Unit and Archanes is called) has produced famous wines since antiquity; this is why there are numerous scattered locations of ancient stomping vat grounds, as well as a multitude of wineries. This zone produces 70% of all labelled wine on the island. There are significant industrial plants for the maturing and bottling of wine, capitalising on unique local grape varieties, namely Kotsifali, Vilana and Mantilari.

The strongest feature of this Unit's identity, though, is its culture. For at least 20 years, local authority agencies have systematically worked to enhance artistic creation and culture production. This has resulted in numerous villages within N. Kazantzakis Unit having operational cultural infrastructure

renowned around the world; the benefits are visible in the cohesion and mobilization of local society. Such infrastructure includes: Nikos Kazantzakis' Museum, seated in Myrtia, the village where the author's father was born; the Cretan Literature Centre; 'Labyrinth' Musical Workshop in Houdetsi hamlet, a hive of musical creativity; drama workshops, music schools and the Cultural Camping Site in Astritsi, are all attraction points for hundreds of young performance art lovers from around Greece.

Of course, archaeological sites and historical and religious monuments from all eras could not be missing from N. Kazantzakis zone. There are fortresses, hamlets, rural chapels, aqueducts, monasteries and numerous other finds confirming that this versatile terrain with its fertile land and ample waters could not but have been used in various ways since antiquity. An absolute indication of the value of this location is that fact that, contrary to most rural areas, which are deserted due to urbanisation, with a catastrophic impact on the cohesion of the social web, villages of this area attract young people from the urban centre of Heraklion, who settle and work here permanently.



# PEZA

**Distance from Heraklion:** 17,7 Km

**Amenities:**

Town Hall, Citizens' Service Centre (KEP), small taverns and retail shops, groceries, pharmacy, banks and regional medicinal centre.

Peza is the seat of the Municipality of Archanes-Asterousia and it is located in the most important wine producing area in the Prefecture of Heraklion. The locals traditionally work in viticulture and olive tree cultivation, producing top quality olive oil with a designation of origin, as well as branded superior quality wine with a designation of origin. One of the most interesting points in the village is the establishment of the 'Peza Union', which has standardised the olive oil and the wine produced by the region's farmers since 1933. In the exhibition premises one can see the equipment of the old 19<sup>th</sup> century olive mill, grape presses, wine pumps, distillation equipment, etc.

## WHAT TO SEE...

At the Agios Konstantinos location stomping vats constructed in the Venetian period (15<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> century) have been found. It is a complex of four wine-presses in a row. The village Cathedral [Metropolis] is dedicated to St. Nicholas and holds its feast on December 6.

The Churches are dedicated St. Constantine (Byzantine church), St. Demetrius, St. George (of the cemetery), and the Saints Cosmas and Damian. A great festival is celebrated on 21 November in the old church of Panagia ton Eisodion [Madonna of the Presentation] (who is the village's matron saint).

## 2) PEZA CIRCULAR TOUR

### CYCLING ROUTE

Peza > Katalagari > Peza

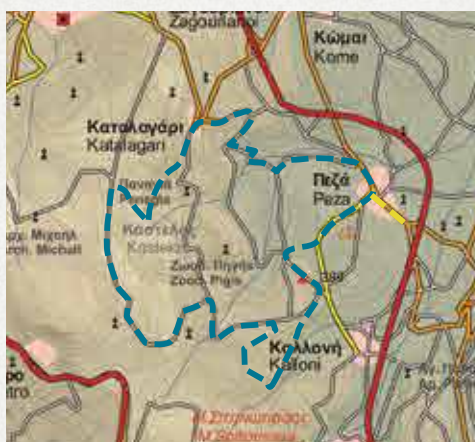
The route starts in the village of Peza. It is uphill for 1.6 km with an average incline of 3.5%, quick clean dirt and an asphalt stretch. After a slightly downhill kilometre there is a short uphill stretch, with an average incline of 4.2%, which, however, includes a difficult 25m section with loose dirt and a 20% incline.

Then there is a quick, slightly downhill kilometre, that leads to the last, and demanding, uphill stretch of an average incline between 5.5% and 8%, at the end of which the route comes to a narrower, technically challenging, straight path with large rocks and eroded tracks.

Then, a short asphalt stretch leads to the beginning of the descent, initially with powdery soil and "S" turns and then a fast, well-trodden track that once again takes you to the entrance of Peza, through the alleys of Katalagari village.

During your tour the terrain often changes from loose and well-trodden with gravel, to clearer patches with grooves and sharp edges, as well as eroded patches with rocks and low olive tree branches.

12,8 km    Moderate  
 35° 12.932'N / 25° 11.743'E Peza  
 In Epano Archanes, where the Town Hall is also located



### TRAILS AND ROUTES STARTING AT PEZA

**HIKING TRAILS**

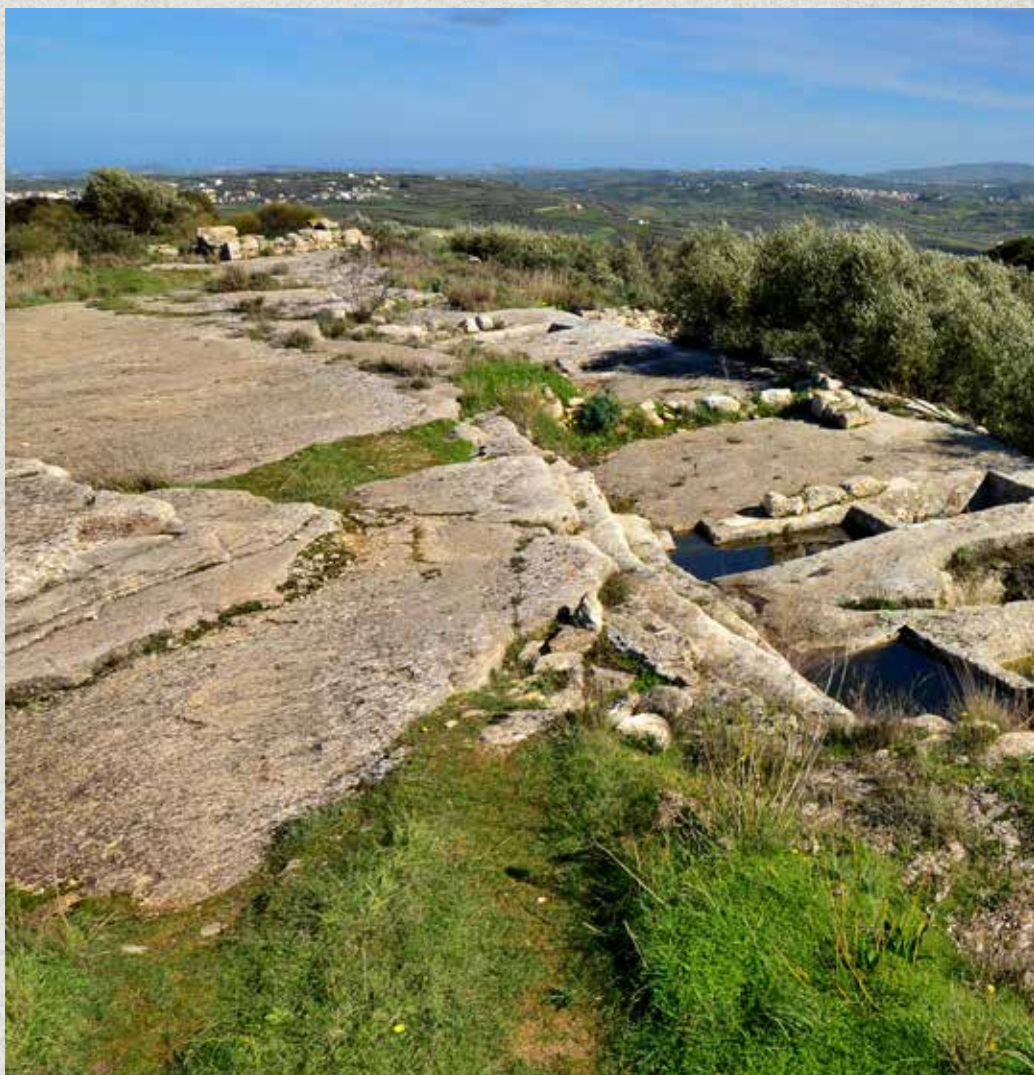
- T.5. Kounaviano Gorge
- T.6. Spiliotissa Gorge

**CYCLING COURSES**

- C.C.2. Peza Circular Tour

**WINE ROUTES (WINERIES RECEIVING VISITORS)**

- W.r. 3: Peza - Agies Paraskies - Kalloni
- Agios Vasileios - Houdetsi



## KATALAGARI

Perched on the east foot of Kefala Hill, with a panoramic view over the vineyards and olive groves of the plain. Residents are mainly farmers who have preserved the secrets of making good wine and raki over the years. Excellent table grapes are produced here.

The name of the village comes from the word 'logara', which means 'clear liquid that has settled'; 'logara' was also a term used for a slope affording a good, clear view. The name is a combination of the words 'kato' (lower) and 'lagara'.

Although in Greek it is rare for an 'o' to be turned into an 'a', this happens in spoken language, and so Kato Logari turned into Katalagari. It might also be related to the word 'logari' meaning 'treasure'. In the past it must have been named Kato Logari

### TRAILS AND ROUTES STARTING - ENDING AT KOUNAVOI

#### CYCLING COURSES

- C.C.1. Archanes Circular Tour
- C.C.2. Peza Circular Tour

#### WINE ROUTES (WINERIES RECEIVING VISITORS)

- W.R.2: Archanes - Vathypetro - Kounavoi
- Katalagari - Peza Valley



(although it was built higher than its present-day position) and later on, when these two words were combined the name Katalagari emerged. Another legend has it that the name of the village comes from the verb 'katalagiazō', which means to settle, to precipitate, because they carried the grape must from the stomping vats to Katalagari to let it settle and turn into wine.

During the Nazi occupation the place was a base for Nazi forces; despite this fact, a lively nucleus of National Resistance was organised here.

There is a pretty little theatre in the village that hosts several cultural events.

**Carved stomping vats at katalagari and 'castello venetian fortress'<sup>15</sup>**

To the south of Katalagari, in an area covered by olive groves and vineyards, stand the ruins of Castello del Corner. Tradition has it that it was built by Nikephoros Phokas after Crete was liberated from the Arabs in 961 A.D. The fortress belonged to the Cornaro family who ruled the land and controlled its crops. A few metres to the west there are numerous stomping vats carved out of the rock, which are believed to have been in use since Minoan times. During the Venetian rule, great amounts of Malvasia wine were produced here, as well as in the rest of Crete; Malvasia used to be one of the best known wines in Europe.

## KOUNAVOI (THE ANCIENT GREEK CITY OF ELTYNIA<sup>16</sup>)

Kounavi is built in a valley on the northern side of the Municipality and it is one of the hamlets with the largest populations in the region.

The ancient city of Eltynia or Eltyna or Eltynaia covered the area where the villages of Kounavi, Katalagari, Peza and the hamlets of Zagouriani and Komes are located today. Eltynia was a city-state with its own laws, strict socio-political organisation and an aristocratic system of governance. The noteworthy finds sporadically discovered confirm the ancient city's position; they include inscriptions, a beautiful epitaph stele depicting a young woman, and architectural remains from the Archaic Period (7<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> century B.C.) at the Ellinika location. The Geometric cemetery (11<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> century B.C.) is of particular importance, and part of it has been excavated at Vathiades, while in the same area Roman tombs (2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D.) have also come to light. Votive relief tiles from the Hellenistic Period (4<sup>th</sup>-1<sup>st</sup> century B.C.) have also been unearthed at Skenteri. On the same site there are also the foundations of some buildings as well as a ceramic kiln. Roman buildings have

### TRAILS AND ROUTES STARTING - ENDING AT KOUNAVI

#### HIKING TRAILS

- T.5. Kounaviano Gorge

#### CYCLING COURSES

- C.C.2. Peza Circular Tour

#### WINE ROUTES (WINERIES RECEIVING VISITORS)

- W.R.2: Archanes - Vathypetro - Kounavoi  
- Katalagari - Peza Valley

been excavated near the Zagouriana hamlet in the Ellinika location.

Viticulture in the Kounavi area dates back to the 13<sup>th</sup> century. The wine-presses and stomping vats preserved in Kounavi, judging from their architectural form and ceramic finds must have been constructed in the 15<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> century. They provide their own testimony to the history of wine in the region. They can be seen at Agios Nikolaos, where a church to St. Constantine stands, and at the Skepasta patitiria, Korakia and Symianou Lakos locations, where domed wine-presses are preserved. Just 300m from the main hamlet, hidden in the vineyards, stands the church of Agios Panteleimon [St. Panteleimon], whose feast is celebrated at a great festival on 27 July.

Make sure you discover the Venetian-Ottoman quarters known as 'Soulahi Camara' (the Arch of Soulahis)



## 5) KOUNAVIANO GORGE

### TRAIL

Peza > Kounaviano Gorge > Intersection with Astrakiano Gorge > Mesa Karteros

Kounaviano Gorge is the second main branch of the Karteros River. At its end it meets the second tributary branch (Astrakiano Gorge) and together they end up at the sea, 5 kilometres later.

The trail begins at the biological treatment plant in Peza and follows the banks of the river/gorge along a lush green path; there are wooden bridges with railings at its hardest points.

Along this route there are traces of springs, small bridges, water mills and building ruins from times passed.

At the end of the route, at the northern exit of the gorge, near Karteros Beach, stands one of the most interesting watermill complexes in the region.



🏠 Kounavoi, Peza, Myrtia, Astrakoi

📏 10,9 Km 🕒 3 hour

📍 35° 13.674'N / 25° 12.219'E  
(Peza - biological treatment plant)

📍 35° 18.745'N / 25° 12.075'E  
(Mesa Karteros - water mills)

👤 Well-trodden trail with basic markers.  
Be careful when locating the entrance,  
as it is not clearly marked

⚡ Moderate

🌧 Spring, summer, autumn. Be very careful  
in winter, because of rainfall. At least your feet  
and legs must be covered.

📍 Taverns, cafés and accommodation at Kounavoi  
and neighbouring Peza  
(Central Authority of the area).





## MYRTIA

Myrtia is the home village of the world renowned intellectual Nikos Kazantzakis, who may be the most translated author in the world. The village used to be called Varvaroi.

According to tradition the name came about when Byzantine Emperor Nikephoros Phokas liberated Crete from the Saracen pirates in 961 A.D. and some of his troops settled in the village. They were barbarians (varvaroi), not Greek. Others say that the village was the base of barbarian pirates who robbed passing travellers and they named the area Varvaroi. According to Venetian information, however, the village owes its name to its first resident, who was Venetian Feudal Lord Barbaro. Finally, there is Kazantzakis' own opinion in his work, 'Report to Greco', which tells us that the name Varvaroi comes from those who remained after the slaughter by the soldiers of Nikephoros Phokas (Arabs, Saracens), who settled in some of the region's villages, one of which was Varvaroi.

There are no Venetian building ruins in the village; however, according to the locals the Venetians used the labour of the villagers of Varvaroi in Heraklion for the construction of the Venetian walls. During Ottoman rule the locals suffered greatly, mainly because they were raided by the Ottoman residents of the next village, Astrakoi.

The village square is dominated by Nikos Kazantzakis Museum, founded by Giorgos Anemogiannis, the set and costume designer of Greek theatre. The museum is a modern well-organised cultural venue, paying tribute to the great intellectual, exhibiting his manuscripts and notes, publications of his works in various languages, rare photographs, mementos from his travels, personal objects, scale models, costumes and material from theatrical performances of his works, as well as many heirlooms that keep his memory alive and promote his work, life and personality. The author's archives have been fully digitised and the large number of educational applications are constantly growing. The Museum is a global intellectual pilgrimage and it is no exaggeration to claim that it is reason enough for anyone to visit the region.

Myrtia is also the seat of the Cretan Literature Centre, the mission of which is to study and promote the work of Cretan authors, from the folk Byzantine tradition and Venetian Renaissance period to date. Activities organised by the Centre include numerous conferences on special topics and other events.

In the village there are many churches. There is Metamorphosis tou Sotira [Transfiguration of the Saviour], which is approximately 100 years old, Panagia (Evangelismos-Annunciation), which, tradition has it, was built in just 40 days due to pressure by the Ottomans, Agios Antonios (St. Anthony), Genethlia tis Theotokou (Nativity of the Virgin), who is the matron saint of the village.

### TRAILS AND ROUTES STARTING - ENDING AT MYRTIA

#### HIKING TRAILS

- T.4. Astrakiano Gorge
- T.5. Kounaviano Gorge

#### OTHER ACTIVITIES

- Nikos Kazantzakis Museum

### 'Taxidevontas' (Travelling) Annual Festival

In order to ensure he could travel, Kazantzakis used to work as a correspondent for Athenian newspapers. The texts of his correspondence are contained in five volumes under the general title 'Taxidevontas' (Travelling), and they are considered an excellent example of travelling literature.

Based on these travels of the great author, as recorded in the 'Taxidevontas' (Travelling) series, Nikos Kazantzakis' Museum (MNK) is starting in 2015 to 'build' a festival that will help people get to know countries and cultures that moved the author and inspired his works. The aim is to establish an annual art festival at Myrtia, where the audience will have the opportunity to 'trace' the travels of the great Cretan author and thinker through music, dance, drama and literature.

Those of you travelling in the region in July 2015 make sure to participate in the festival that is definitely going to reward you; the honoured country will be Spain.



# NIKOS KAZANTZAKIS MUSEUM

Myrtia, Heraklion; P.C. 70100

## Opening hours/Inquiries:

March-October, daily from 09:00am to 17:00pm;

November-February,

every Sunday from 10:00am to 15:00pm.

Tel.: 2810 741689, FAX: 2810 742232

info@kazantzakis-museum.gr

www.kazantzakis.gr

"My Father's Clan", writes Nikos Kazantzakis in 'Report to Greco', "draws from a village they call Varvaroi [lit. Barbarians]". In this village, present-day Myrtia, 15km from Heraklion, where the wine routes meet the author's words and the serene Cretan landscape, Nikos Kazantzakis' Museum has been operating since 1983. It was one of the first personal museums of a literary personality in Greece.

The visionary and founder was set designer Yorgos Anemoyiannis; his efforts secured the premises and the creation of the collections started with the help of Eleni Kazantzaki and numerous private individuals. Visitors have the opportunity to get to know the personality of the author through his manuscripts and notes, specimens of his correspondence with great thinkers, politicians and literary figures of his time, first editions of his works in Greek and other languages, rare photographs, mementos from his travels, personal items, scale models, costumes and material from performances of the author's dramatic works - in Greece and abroad - portraits and sculpted works representing his likeness, dozens of his translated works, bringing his memory back to life and shedding light on Kazantzakis' work and personality.

The Museum keeps enriching its collections, preserves and uses all kinds of "kazantzakian" material. It also organises actions, such as the scientific documentation and digitisation of the author's archives, the creation and implementation of educational programmes, and the production of printed and digital publications, while it always tries to improve its services. The next goal for the Museum is to reinforce and encourage scientific research on Kazantzakis' work and to promote its cognitive and educational role through appropriate actions.

Within the museum there is a café-reading room, providing excellent quality meals and snacks, as well as a shop selling N.Kazantzakis' works translated into many languages, as well as a range of other books.

## NIKOS KAZANTZAKIS: A GREAT CRETAN

The great author Nikos Kazantzakis was born in 1883 and was raised in Heraklion. His childhood in his birthplace was filled with indelible experiences, which seem to have played a decisive role in the way the young man developed. At the tender age of 7 years he experienced the Revolution of 1889 and at 17 he saw his homeland liberated from the Ottoman yoke. He greedily breathed in the reviving air of such heroic moments for Crete and this had a great impact on him, as reflected by numerous relevant references in his works. In 1908, having completed his legal studies at the age of 25, Kazantzakis took his first steps on the Modern Greek literary scene with his works 'The Sickness of the Century', 'Serpent and Lilly' and the play 'It's Dawn'. These early works heralded the significant literary course he was to follow in later years.

Kazantzakis was influenced by Friedrich Nietzsche, whose work 'Thus Spoke Zarathustra' he translated; he also fought in the Balkan Wars in 1912-13. In the interwar period he travelled incessantly and wrote his most important travelling works, while he translated the *Odyssey* into Modern Greek. After World War II, Kazantzakis authored his most important works, such as 'Christ Recrucified', 'Captain Michalis', 'The Last Temptation', 'Zorba the Greek' and completed his own 'Odyssey', which he spelt with one 's' to distinguish it from Homer's, telling the story of Odysseus after he returned to Ithaca.

His work 'Report to Greco' records in an autobiographical manner his world theory and basic views on life and intellectual creation. In almost all his works Kazantzakis reflects his love and admiration for Crete and its people, talking about the 'Cretan View, the manner in which Cretans experience life and express themselves through daily activities and spiritual quests.

Kazantzakis lived the final years of his life in Nice, France and died in Freiburg in 1957. He was buried in his beloved Cretan land. From his grave, at the Martignano Bastion on the Venetian Walls of Heraklion, he looks out onto eternity.





## ASTRAKOI

On the left bank of the valley of the River Karteros, there is the traditional hamlet of Astrakoi. In the past there used to be two parts, Pano and Kato (Upper and Lower) Astrakoi, but today only the Upper part is inhabited. The location has an unusual energy, enhanced by the presence of the old deserted Muslim quarters in Kato Astrakoi. If you follow the dirt road from the hamlet, leading here, you can see ruined traditional houses, the architectural features of which have remained the same since they were deserted by their inhabitants.

The oldest reference to the hamlet is found in a 1271 contract prepared by Chandax notary public Pietro Scardon.

All Muslim inhabitants of Astrakoi left with the exchange of populations in 1924 and families from Asia Minor settled at the village.

Along the road leading to the village of Astrakoi in the deserted hamlet of Kato Astrakoi, there are the ruins of a three-aisled Byzantine church dedicated to St. George. At a distance of about 100 metres from it there is a ruined church of Panagia (Virgin Mary) with relics of icon paintings and a crown with four roses in relief, a depiction of a Byzantine double-headed eagle above its front door and the date 1555. Quite possibly, this crown was the coat of arms of the Kallergoi House, descendants of the grand Byzantine Phokas family.

If you find yourself in the village, visit the church of Michail Archangelou (Archangel Michael) and look for the icon of St. Francis. Very close to the hamlet, archaeologists brought to life part of a Minoan cemetery of

the Mid-Palatial period (1380-1100 B.C.) with carved tombs, which contained clay box-like sarcophagi, ceramic vases and a stone lamp. Furthermore, in the same hamlet, at Kastri-nakis location in Kaki Rahi, there has been partial excavation of the Early Geometric period (1100-900 B.C.) cemetery with burials in pits containing clay vases and objects made of iron.

Furthermore, below the village, at 'Astrakiano Gorge', north of the Astrakoi Bridge, there is the cave called Neraidospilios.

According to archaeologist Paul Faure, this was the sanctuary of Tritogeneia Athena. This adjective is due to the ancient Greek name of the River Karteros, i.e. 'Triton', who was born in the sanctuary of the goddess. In the cave there is one of the springs of the Astrakoi aqueduct, which supplied part of the water necessary for the city of Heraklion in the beginning of the 20th century. Legend has it that this cave, deeply set in the gorge with its numerous springs, clear running waters and lush vegetation, had been chosen by the Fairies (neraides, ancient Greek mythology Nereids) as their home! One night, a young lyre-player, heard their song and his curiosity led him to the cave. He saw the fairies there, dancing and singing bathed in light and dressed in transparent veils! Enchanted by the sweet melody in the air and their dance, he picked his lyre and accompanied their dance.

## KELIA

The traditional hamlet of Kelia lies in the plain of Peza. After the 1923 exchange of populations the village was inhabited by refugees from Asia Minor.

The traditions, history and daily life from then on followed the course of Greek history, as written by the Greeks of Asia Minor: traditions, customs and their way of life were influenced by the new residents they were soon to build strong bonds with.

Viticulture was enriched with the new methods brought from Asia Minor and since then toiling the land has been the main source of income for residents.

## 4) ASTRAKIANO GORGE

### TRAIL

Astrakoi > Abandoned village of Kato Astrakoi > Neraidospilios > Astrakiano Gorge > Intersection with Kounaviano Gorge

The section of Astrakiano gorge that we recommend in this trail starts at Kato Astraki. After Agios Georgios church there are stone steps leading to 'Neraidospilio' [Fairy-cave]. This is where the trail starts, running alongside the creek, with some basic crossing infrastructure at the difficult points along the way. The old Ottoman aqueduct is visible along the trail.

Pay close attention during the first kilometre after Neraidospilio, as the river and wild vegetation have destroyed some crossings. You also need to observe markings on the rocks so as not to miss a detour in the trail due to the crossing ahead having been completely destroyed. The trail runs parallel to the riverbed until half way along the route.

After that point it runs high along the eastern slope of the gorge.

The trail ends where the path meets the country road to Aitania, but you can continue to Karteros if you so wish.



🏠 Astrakoi, Myrtia

📏 7,1 km 🕒 3 hours

📍 35° 14.128'N / 25° 13.230'E (Kato Astrakoi)

📍 35° 16.412'N / 25° 12.251'E  
(Intersection with Kounaviano Gorge)

📸 Partially destroyed well-trodden trail. Markers on signs and rocks, some of which have faded

⚠️ Moderate. Special care should be taken at specific points, and clothing must cover at least feet and legs.

🌦 Spring, summer, autumn. Be very careful in winter, because of rainfall.

🏠 Taverns, cafés and accommodation at Astrakoi and Myrtia, which also houses Nikos Kazantzakis Museum

The village is referred to for the first time in 1577 by Fr. Barozzi in the Province of the Plain (Pediada) as Calia.

## AGIES PARASKIES

This is the 'Wine Competition Village'; Agies Paraskies is built amphitheatrically on a hill, looking on to the Peza viticulture territory. The fertile land covered with vineyards and olive groves, provides it with renowned products such as olive oil and olives, table grapes, wine and raisins, and justifies the hamlet's wine producing character ('manganes', i.e. olive presses of the Minoan era, have been found around the village).

Furthermore, its proximity to Heraklion and strategic location explain its continuous growth through time. The people that wanted to conquer the island left their marks on the area, creating rich popular tradition. Mythical treasures, the discovery of which promised the salvation of Crete, fairies and dark creatures star in the area's myths.

Construction of the hamlet began after the 11<sup>th</sup> century, while it has appeared in written references since the early 13<sup>th</sup> century.

In 1630 Basilicata mentions two villages, Agies Paraschies Apano and Agies Paraschies Cato. That means that there were two separate hamlets, each with their own church of Agia Paraskevi (St. Paraskevi), thus justifying the plural name of Agies Paraskies (colloquial plural of Agia Paraskevi).

### Churches and religious traditions

The name of the village comes from the 5 churches dedicated to St. Paraskevi, of which only ruins remain. Even the three-aisled church dedicated to the patron saint of the village, Agios Georgios (St. George), which can be seen at the rising of the village centre, is dedicated (one aisle) to St. Paraskevi (the other aisle is dedicated to the Agioi Deka - Ten Sainted Martyrs). You can find more chapels in the hamlet, such as Agios Antonios (St. Anthony), Prophitis Ilias (the Prophet Elijah) near the bridge of Kolomodi and other churches that lay in ruins. The church of Agia Zoni (Holy Belt) is especially important in the village, dating back to the beginning of the Venetian rule. It is full of murals, but, unfortunately, parts of them are covered with layers of plaster.



### Back in time<sup>17</sup>...

At Kambos location a domed-honeycomb shaped tomb was discovered, dating back to the late Geometric - Orientalising Period (810-600 B.C.). The tomb belongs to the same settlement complex as ancient Eltyna.

### Folk crafts made from soil

Cretan ceramics have one of the oldest traditions, the roots of which are lost in the first Minoan Period. Minoan craftsmen achieved excellence and created vases of exceptional beauty and technique, depicting the flora and fauna of the island with great artistic mastery and vividness.

Within this very same environment and following the traces of this great ceramic tradition, modern Cretan potters create their own masterpieces. In Agies Paraskies, on the main road after entering the village, there are workshops of local pottery artists welcoming visitors.



An important find from the region is the treasure made up of 82 hyperpyra (gold coins) of the co-reigning emperors Basil II and Constantine VIII (976-1025) as well as 8 similar coins of Nikephoros Phokas (963-969). The coins are kept at the Historical Museum of Crete.

North of the hamlet there is a location called 'Pitsouni' (Squab). This name is encountered in a bridal contract of 1462 and all evidence points to the fact that this must have been the first residential core of the village. Ruins of various tombs have been found, possibly from Archaic times, of the 5<sup>th</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C., and the ruins of three churches. There used to be spring waters here and legend has it that fairies appeared there and whoever drank the water lost their mind.

To the east of the village, there is the small hamlet of 'Kolomodis (kalo+modion: a unit of measurement), where there were inns for travellers in the Ottoman era.

At the Founaroi dependency, near Angarathos Monastery, lived Greeks who had been persecuted by the Ottomans before settling at Agies Paraskies.

The village's contact with Angarathos Monastery had a positive impact on locals' education. Indeed, the Metropolitane of Crete, Meletios Nikolettakis, who was born in the village, while serving as the Father Superior of the Angarathos Monastery, in 1815, organised the Secret School at the Byzantine church of Agia Zoni (Holy Belt). The first school was built after the liberation from Ottoman occupation and it has been renovated and preserved to date housing the Municipal Fine Art Workshop.

#### TRAILS AND ROUTES STARTING - ENDING AT AGIES PARASKIES

##### WINE ROUTES (WINERIES RECEIVING VISITORS)

- W.R.3: Peza - Agies Paraskies - Kalloni
- Agios Vasileios - Houdetsi
- W.R.4: Agies Paraskies - Meleses - Alagni

##### OTHER ACTIVITIES

##### AND POINTS OF INTEREST

- The village wine competition on 02 November
- The Castelos Fortress between Agies Paraskies and Meleses

The Municipality of Agies Paraskies was established on 26 September 1897; it consisted of the following villages: Pano and Kato Astrakoi, Varvaroi, Kelia, Filisia, Astritsi, Houdetsi, Meleses, Agios Vasileios, Skyloi, Peza, Katalagari, Kounavoi, Komes, Zagouriano (Dependency), Galatas, Voni, Mourtzanos (Dependency of Tekes), Spiliotissa (Mt. Sinai Convent), Patsides. Given the fertile land of the area, this Municipality has been one of the wealthiest on the island and exceptionally active.

A group of village residents participated in Theriso Revolt of 1905, in the context of the Cretan Revolution seeking to unite Crete with the rest of Greece.

During the Nazi occupation, Nazi forces set up base in the village and had ammunition stock kept around the area; they organised air defence forces around the village. Residents tried to fight conquerors in every manner possible. They organised resistance groups with the participation of soldiers who had returned from the Albanian front and other young men. Some of them had organised themselves in the surrounding mountains and were involved in the Resistance.

Painter Stephanos Nikolaidis (1814-1907) was born in the village; he is famous for his historical notes and icon painting. Icons painted by Stefanos Nikolaidis are found in the old church of Agios Minas, as well as at Agios Titos (St. Titus) and Agia Zoni (Holy Belt) in Agies Paraskies.

#### Search for...

- Agiou Georgiou (St. George's) square in the upper village, where the statue by sculptor Parmakeles stands, and enjoy its picturesque little cafés.

- To the west of the village, on the main road and next to the chapel of Agios Nektarios (St. Nectarios), is the Fountain of Ali Efendi, built in 1728. Take a moment to observe the inscription in Arabic that says: "Ali Efendi donates this with all his heart, so that passers-by may drink to the memory of Hanum Luhuna". The fountain has been restored and is a jewel for the region.

- The old cobblestone road (at Tzagari Kalami location), at the foot of the village hill..

## Village Wine-Making Contest

The local wine-making contest is an independent yet integral part of the 'Wine Routes', established in recent years as a participatory event; it revives the custom that wants all local wine producers opening their barrels and contesting; the judges are professional oenologists. This contest is held in November at Agies Paraskies and numerous producers participate with their wines, while crowds of guests from the entire island arrive to taste the wines and the local dishes prepared by the Cultural Association, village women and the Municipal authorities.

The view of oenologists-judges reflects the impact of the event: the quality of local winemaking has soared in recent years and part of the success is due to the contest. Furthermore, the event is not limited to a wine-tasting evening, but it includes speeches by eminent connoisseurs on vinification and viticulture (e.g. a two-day meeting dedicated to wine and vineyards) as well as parallel cultural events (concerts, theatrical performances, film and documentary screenings, fine art works, local product exhibitions, etc.).

## KALLONI

The name Kalloni (Beauty) appeared after 1928. Till then the village was known as Skilloi, an ancient name after the plant *skilla maritima* or *skillokrommyda* (*Drimia maritima*, sea onion) that thrived in the territory. This region must have been inhabited since Minoan times, as ruins of a Minoan settlement have been found along with ceramic fragments (ostraka) and archaic figurines at Fanari location. At the same location there is a Byzantine rural chapel dedicated to St. Fanourios, probably an old monastery; residents have renovated it and they hold a major feast there on 27 August.

In the centre of the village there is an old fountain bearing the Byzantine double-headed eagle, and an Ottoman inscription mentioning the name of the man who renovated it. At Ammoudara location, there is the old Agia Fotini church, rumoured to have been built by Nikephoros Phokas when he liberated Crete, where there is an important Byzantine mural. This must have housed a convent deserted before 1600 A.D.

The patron saints of the village are St. Nicholas and St. Ambrose to whom a two-martyr church is dedicated. There is also the church of the Annunciation (Evangelismos) and Agiou Antoniou (St. Anthony) church, as well as the renovated church of Kera-Kardiotissa (Lady of Karydaki), which is the cemetery church.

Kalloni was the birthplace of Gerasimos II, Palladas, the Patriarch of Alexandria, famous for his wisdom and piety.

## AGIOS VASILEIOS

The hamlet of Agios Vasileios is built at the foot of Kefalas Hill at 360m and is one of the largest and most beautiful villages in the Municipality, positioned right at its centre. Its houses are built amphitheatrically affording a panoramic view of one of the most authentic Cretan landscapes of vineyards and olive trees.

### The village of many churches

Old village locals say that a plague afflicted surrounding villages but never affected Agios Vasileios, because the surrounding churches protected it. Indeed, for religious tourists, Agios Vasileios is the destination, as here they will find many churches with a number of legends and stories accompanying them. At the centre of the village stands the church of Agios Vasileios (St. Vasileios), from which the village got its name. The church is decorated with murals that date back to the 15<sup>th</sup> century. There are also Agia Paraskevi (St. Paraskevi), Agia Kyriaki (St. Kyriaki), Agios Constantinos (St. Constantine), Agios Athanasios and Kyrillos (Saints Athanasios and Cyril). Noteworthy churches are those of Agios Antonios (St. Anthony) and Agia Pelagia (St. Pelagia), which have their own mural decorations, as well as the church of Agios Ioannis Prodromos (St. John the Baptist). The dedicatory inscription of the church of Agios Ioannis Prodromos displays the date 1291-1391.

### TRAILS AND ROUTES STARTING - ENDING AT AGIOS VASILEIOS

#### HIKING TRAILS

- T.6. Spiliotissa Gorge

#### CYCLING COURSES

- C.C.1. Archanes Circular Tour

#### WINE ROUTES (WINERIES RECEIVING VISITORS)

- W.R.3: Peza - Agies Paraskies - Kalloni  
- Agios Vasileios - Houdetsi

## 6) SPILIOTISSA GORGE TRAIL

Agios Vasileios > Spiliotissa Convent > Spiliotissa Gorge  
> Houdetsi > Agios Vasileios

The slopes and beds of gorges have always been connecting routes leading to hamlets or destinations when there were no road networks. Spiliotissa Gorge is a classic example of an access route from Agios Vasilios to Houdetsi and back. Not so much from the bed of the gorge, which is difficult to access due to the wild vegetation, but along an old path that had been carved approximately along the middle of the western slope of the gorge, ending at Spiliotissa [Madonna of the Cave] Convent. At present, the trail that has been opened runs parallel to the bed, thanks to the wooden posts and steps created to assist visitors to this beautiful little gorge.

If you find yourselves at Houdetsi, follow the signs and head down the wooden steps into the lush green gorge. Towards the trail's exit, near the village of Agios Vasilios, you will find the Sinai Convent of Panagia Spiliotissa, which lends its name to the gorge (Visits can be arranged; Tel: 2810 741370).

- 🏠 Agios Vasileios, Houdetsi
- 📏 2.4km (including the way back) ⏱ 50 minutes
- 📍 35° 11.810'N / 25° 11.281'E (Agios Vasileios)
- 📍 35° 11.662'N / 25° 10.861'E (Houdetsi)
- 📸 Well-trodden trail with markers and partially facilitated access

👣 Easy

- 🕒 Year-round (be careful on rainy days)
- 📍 Taverns, cafés and accommodation can be found at Agios Vasileios, Houdetsi and Peza. Travellers can camp in the Old Primary School building of Agios Vasileios, following arrangement with the Cultural Association / In Agios Vasileios; excellent quality home-made local products are on sale at the Women's Cooperative.



At the beginning of the Spiliotissa Gorge (on the side of Agios Vasileios) you will find the Sinai convent of Panagia Spiliotissa.

The chapel of the monastery is built on a rock, on which, according to tradition, an icon of the Virgin Mary was found. What remains of the murals on the rock in Panagia cave dates back to the 15th century. It seems that the monastery flourished at around 1600. It came under the jurisdiction of Sinai Monastery during the 1649-1669 period. Visits to the convent can be arranged (Tel: 2810 741370).

Apart from the churches, you can also admire the village itself, walking through its lanes and beautiful neighbourhoods, such as: Livadi, Plakoura, Kolonaki, Kara, Tourkogeitonia, Katrades and Geraki, as well as the fountains-reservoirs 'Palaia Vrysi', 'Fountana', Krini and the Spiliotissa watermills.

## HOUDETSI

Houdetsi is a large village, renowned for its table grapes. It is built at the foot of Spiliotissa Gorge, to the southwest, a fact that justifies the rich vegetation and picturesque landscape created by the impressive rocks of the gorge cliffs.

Houdetsi has a long musical tradition, with renowned rhyme improvisers and noteworthy instrument makers. This musical tradition bears the stamp of musician Ross Daly who cooperated with the Municipality to create the 'Labyrinth' Musical Workshop, a lively hub of musical tradition and culture. 'Labyrinth' has made the village a reference point by organising events and seminars on modal musical instruments, attended by students from around the world. In the old mansion where 'Labyrinth' is housed there is an operating museum with more than 200 modal instruments of traditional music from Crete, the eastern Mediterranean, India, the Caucasus region, the Middle East and Central Asia, which represent the musical traditions of centuries, and await visitors to tell their story and acquaint them with their culture.

Houdetsi Festival is organised annually at the village jointly organised by 'Labyrinth' and the local community, presenting a wealth of musical events, fine art activities and traditional produce exhibitions.

### Worth seeing...

The village fountain is of noteworthy archaeological interest. It dates back to 1671; it is named Hatzine, which means 'water tank' in Turkish. This fountain was the 'heart' of the village and there used to be basins and laundry washing spots around it, which were demolished in the 1980s.

#### TRAILS AND ROUTES

##### STARTING - ENDING AT HOUDETSI

##### HIKING TRAILS

- T.6. Spiliotissa Gorge

##### CYCLING COURSES

- C.C.1. Archanes Circular Tour

##### WINE ROUTES (WINERIES RECEIVING VISITORS)

- WR.3: Peza - Agies Paraskies - Kalloni
- Agios Vasileios - Houdetsi

##### OTHER ACTIVITIES

- Houdetsi Festival every August

At Flambouriaris location<sup>18</sup> a small, clay-head of goddess Athena wearing an Archaic (650-500 B.C.) helmet has been found. On the same spot there are ruins of the installations and pipes of an aqueduct from the Hellenistic era. In 1992 a vaulted tomb dating to the 13<sup>th</sup> century B.C. was discovered in the yard of the old Primary school.

At the centre of the village there is a building owned by the heirs of Androulakis, which is considered to be a Venetian mansion; despite later intervention, the building maintains its morphological and stylistic features. On its east side a coat of arms has been preserved, while a second one is embedded in a later adjacent building, which probably belongs to the same property.

The oldest church in Houdetsi is Agios Nikolaos (St. Nicholas), which was built before 1300, was then destroyed by the Ottomans and rebuilt in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The murals decorating the church were covered with plaster. Parts of the decoration have been revealed. It is located at the entrance of the village, just before the old stone primary school, which was built in 1907 and it is a noteworthy special function building, significant in the history of the architecture of school buildings on Crete in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Other churches are Agia Paraskevi (St. Paraskevi), Agios Antonios (St. Anthony), Timios Stavros (Holy Cross), Agios Panteleimon (St. Panteleimon, Agios Paisios (St. Paisios), Michail Archangelos (Archangel Michael), Panagia Zoodochos Pigi (Madonna, the Life-giving Spring}.

Walk along the lush green Spiliotissa Gorge to find, almost at the very end (near Agios Vasileios) the Panagia tis Spiliotissas (Madonna of the Cave) Sinai convent. (Visits can be arranged, Tel: 2810 741370)

The village festivals are organised on September 25 and 26 (Ai-Giannis Festival) and 15 August on (Panagia Church).

### Castello of Meleses

To the east of Meleses village in the Prefecture of Heraklion, there are the relics of a Byzantine fortress, which was probably used by the Venetians. Quite a lot of the fortification is still in place, while constructs, possibly a tower, are standing on the north side. Within the fortress there are tanks and a ruined church of the Virgin Mary, walls belonging to residences, and a water fountain bearing the date 1594.

Gerola believes that it is the site of Castello di Beto. It is rare to see two grand medieval fortresses at such short distance from each other (Castello of Meleses - Castello of Katalagari). In the broader region of Meleses residential and cemetery remnants of the Late Minoan era have also been located.

## MELESES

The landscape around the hamlet gives away the occupation of its residents: Extensive olive groves and vineyards, have been cultivated with care and the toil of local people for decades, producing top quality olive oil and wine. The most important churches of Meleses are Evangelismos tis Theotokou (Annunciation of the Virgin) (matron saint), Agiou Goergiou (St. George), Agias Paraskevis (St. Paraskevi), as well as the older churches of Agias Pelagias (St. Pelagia) and St. Anthony. The name of the village indicates bee keeping (meleses means bees); indeed, during the 2nd Byzantine period Crete was one of the major honey producing parts of the empire and bee keeping one of the farmers' main occupations. The history of the hamlet is centuries old. The oldest reference to the village name is in a document of 1271, by Chandax notary public Pietro Scardon, who refers to it as Mellixe. In the broader region of Meleses funereal relics have been discovered, dating mainly to the Late Minoan Period.

An important role in the education of local youth is played by the Secondary School Complex (Gymnasium [Junior High School] and Lyceum [Senior High School] of Meleses, named Malioteion Educational Institute.

This was founded in 1967 by Greek expatriate Konstantinos Maliotis, who came from this village.

## FILISIA

Following the 1924 exchange of populations, Christian refugees from Axos and the community of Axenoi at Iconium (present-day Konya), Cappadocia, settled in what used to be the Muslim hamlet of Filisia. Even today, bonds with Cappadocia and memories of the old place remain strong. The Matron of the village is St. Marina, whose church is the only one on Crete.

## ALAGNI

The fertile land of this village has always been and still is the source of income of its residents, who grow vines and olive trees and produce great quantities of olive oil and wine; this is reflected in the numerous olive presses and wineries in the broader region.

It is believed that the name of the village comes from Alagonia, a nymph, daughter of Zeus and Europe; her temple used to stand on the Tholoi (Vaults) rise, where, according to evidence, its ruins are still discernible.

To the east of the village there is Rouma location ('rouma' is the current of a river in the Cretan dialect), which used to be full of oak trees and pines; it was deserted due to the plague, but its residents were saved and settled at Alagni. At the old location there is a church dedicated to the Madonna of the Rouma (Panagia tou Roumatos). However, according to the census of 1630 a separate village named Rouma used to exist. During the church restoration, various old holy utensils were found.

At the top of the hill west of Alagni, affording a panoramic view, stands a small fortress of the late Venetian Period; this is the Fortress of the Vaults (Fourion Tholon), built around the 16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> century.

At the foot of the Vaults Hill (Lofos ton Tholon), there is the two-aisled church of Agion Apostolon (St. Apostles), built in the 15<sup>th</sup> - 16<sup>th</sup> century, bearing the coat of arms of the Venetian Cornaro family. At the church there are two 'arcosolia' (arched tombs), one within and one outside, bearing the date ΑΧΙΔ (1614). The patron saint of the village is St. Blaise (Agios Vlasios), whose church has noteworthy murals. Besides this, there are

also other churches with murals worth visiting, namely the church of the Soter (Saviour) and that of Agiou Georgiou (St. George).

Very close to the hamlet, ruins of a Minoan farmhouse have been located; in the Koursamos, Petras and Karaoula districts, ancient stomping vat complexes have been found and explored, dating from the 14<sup>th</sup> to the 17<sup>th</sup> centuries and indicating how significant the area was for wine production.

## ASTRITSI

Astritsi is built on a hill, 410 meters above sea level. On its foot lay stretches of vineyards, olive groves, citrus tree orchards, grain fields and vegetable gardens, all of which largely determine the local economy.

### Archaeology<sup>19</sup>

The first written references to the village are in the Venetian census of 1577 and 1583. Paul Faure, a French antiquary and philhellene was the first to study the area.

North of the village, in 'Kefalas' lie the ruins of an ancient settlement. This is where the Diatonion or Tritonion are placed, which are ancient cities, possibly part of the Knossos state. Many of the findings date back from the 7<sup>th</sup> to the 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries B.C. In 'Eminani Plai', a limestone torso of a gigantic ancient statue in the daedalic style, while a second torso of a female form dating to the 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C. was located at the ancient city's acropolis. These statues indicate the important role Crete played in the development of sculpture in antiquity. Regarding later findings, there are medieval buildings at 'Rematia Kipon' location, among which an aqueduct and dilapidated churches from the Venetian rule period. The small church of St. Marina is cruciform with a cupola. The church of St. George, patron saint of Astritsi, stands out in the settlement. Other churches situated here are those of St. John the Baptist and of the Transfiguration of Christ. At 'Kato Vrisi' site, an early 20<sup>th</sup> century construct utilises the steady flow of the spring. In front of the spring there is an event venue with a capacity for 1,500 guests.

## Cultural Camp

(<http://politistiko-camping.blogspot.gr/>)

Astritsi hosts the renowned Cultural Camp, an annual cultural festival of national acclaim, which takes place in mid-summer, at Ai Giannis Gorge of Kato Vrasi. The cultural camp features more than 300 student theatre groups and music bands every year, while the cultural activities are enriched every year and include drama and music performances, fine arts, photography and others. Contributors are not only given the chance to share their work, but, more importantly -and as a prerequisite for participation- they stay within the camping area, watch other groups perform and participate in various activities.

The festival is organised by the informal, self-governing team 'Epi Skinis' (literally: on stage) in collaboration with the Municipality of Archanes-Asterousia. Its members are local youth, who share the notion that culture is not a commodity but a means of free expression that stimulates thought on a range of other issues - at a social, political, cultural, personal etc. level.

"Every festival needs three groups of people: artists, audience and workers.

This distinction inevitably leads to a distortion of what we perceive as culture. Breaking down the lines between these groups is one of our main aspirations at the Camping. This is why anyone participating in it should play all three roles: present their artistic work, be the audience of others' works and offer their labour for the operation of the camping site."

**The Team Organising  
the 'Epi Skinis' (On stage) Festival.**

## Daedalic Art

Daedalic art, in large size sculpture, started around 660-650 B.C.; so far very few daedalic 'kores' (maidens) have been found. The best known one is the famous 'Nikandra from Naxos' (Naxiotissa Nikandra), a votive offering at Delos. Then there is the goddess from Astritsi of Crete, and the famous 'Lady of Auxerre' at the Louvre. Now the 'Kore from Thera' is added to them, one of the most significant findings in recent years; it was found by chance at the cemetery of ancient Thera and a short announcement of the find was quickly broadcast around the world.

## DAMANIA

Very close to the Holy Monastery of Epanosifis, on the northeast slopes of Ophis (Serpent) Rise, stands the village of Damania. The name of the village, according to archaeologist N. Platonas, comes from the pre-Hellenic word formation Da Ma, which means Mother Earth. The oldest written reference to the village is made in a contract of 1302 prepared by Chandax notary public Brixano, where it is called Demanie. Residents are mainly farmers and animal raisers. Most inhabitants come from the village of Çiftlik in the region of Seleuceia in Asia Minor. It was hard work for them to make a living and establish themselves on mountains that had never been cultivated before they arrived.

Near the village, at Kourinas location, in 1915, archaeologist Xanthoudidis found a vaulted tomb of the Late Minoan Period. It is built in the Mycenaean style: there is a 10m long and 1m wide road and a paved 4x2.80m burial chamber, which is 4m high. Xanthoudidis excavated the site and found three box-shaped clay lamakes and various artefacts. It dates back to the 13<sup>th</sup> century B.C.

Within and around the hamlet, there are also several churches, such as the Cathedral of the Holy Cross (Timios Stavros), renovated in 1996 and Agioi Pantes (All Saints) at the cemetery. To the north of the lake at Kefalas Hill there are ruins of the old Damania Village, which used to be a major town in Ottoman times; the view over the reservoir lake is breathtaking and on the south shores of the lake stands the impressive old chapel of Zoothohos Pigi (Life-Giving Spring).

Below the village, the artificial lake created in 2003 with the waters of the Anapodaris tributary, has become a significant wetland for small bird species of the broader region. The lake is one of the prettiest on the island in this serene landscape and a wonderful destination for a short escape not too far from Heraklion. There is a path and a dirt road around the lake to stroll along and admire the flora and bird fauna. For bird watching lovers, we recommend they combine a visit to both Damania and Armanogeia Lakes.

## METAXOCHORI (SILK VILLAGE)

Initially it was called Kako Chorio (Bad Village). Its present-day name reflects its silk making past (silk worm farming), which still survives. The matron saint of the village is the Virgin Mary, whose feast is celebrated on 15 August.

There is also the new church dedicated to St. Nicholas, the cathedral of the village, built on the ruins of a Byzantine church, as well as the church of Agiou Rafail (St. Raphael). The hamlet stands out in Greece, as this is the only place with a church dedicated to St. Onesimus, the patron saint of the imprisoned. Agiou Onisimou church is located outside the

hamlet, to the east. At a short distance there are the ruins of the initial hamlet from the Ottoman occupation period.

## PARTHENI

A small hamlet that belongs to the Local Community of Metaxochori with a wonderful view over the west. The eye can reach as far as Prophet Elijah (Profitis Elias). Within the hamlet there is a tavern and traditional café, where one can enjoy local produce and meze. This is where the road to the famous Monastery of Epanosifis starts, which literally towers over the region, with its manmade pine forest and the vast olive groves and vineyards surrounding it.

The earliest reference to the hamlet of Partheni is found in documents of the Chandax Duke's Archives from 1369. Another document from the same archives, dated 1383, mentions that it was part of the fiefdom of Leonardo Gradonicus of the grand family who organised St. Titus Rebellion and established the Commune of Crete in Chandax in 1363.





## ARMANOGEIA

Er(i)ma Anogeia ('Desolate Highlands') (Armanogeia), according to S. Alexiou's etymology, lies in the middle zone of the Municipality. It is known for its rich musical tradition, since numerous lyre players and rhyme poets-mantinades makers, who are excellent users of the Cretan patois, have been born here.

Locals love music and have a special aptitude for mantinades (local improvised two-line rhyming verses), lyre-playing and dancing.

The plains of the broader region are fertile and locals produce wine, raisins and olive oil as well as animal products. An important project for Armanogeia and the broader region, is the construction of the dam for the irrigation of crops. The dam has already become a wonderful wetland appealing to migratory and small birds that arrive here in their hundreds.

If you are a bird watcher, you can combine your visit here with a visit to Damania Lake.

Very close to the dam region there are discernible ruins from the Roman and Byzantine Periods.

## ARKADI

Arkadi is built on the rise of Monodendri. According to archaeologist Xanthoudidis, the name of the village is Byzantine. Immediately after the liberation of Crete, the village received residents from various regions.

After the abduction of General Kreipe, during the Nazi Occupation period, the Nazis executed 28 young men from the village. This is why an impressive monument has been erected at the village and the Municipality pays tribute to the heroes at the annual event organised



to commemorate the Battle of Crete; this is honoured by the presence of all local agencies, school pupils and numerous guests; at the end of the event local residents offer participants their warm hospitality.

During the Nazi Occupation, radio communications were installed in a cave, along with a rebels' court that tried traitors and threw them into the nearby ravine.

## MELIDOCHORI

This is one more animal-raising village hidden within lowlands, hills and cultivated fields. As in other villages, this is where animal farmers from Anogeia (the Highlands) settled after the liberation of Crete; they were all from the clan of the Karatzides, all raising animals and toiling the land. Various archaeological sites have been identified nearby, such as at the rise of Kastriotis at an altitude of 681m and Trochalos Hill, towards Damania, where construction relics and ceramics, probably from the Geometric Period, have been found.



## M.U. OF ASTEROUSIA

Population of the M.U. of Asterousia:

6.496 residents

Area:

203.420 km<sup>2</sup>



The southernmost mountainous mass of Europe is the third largest municipal unit of the Municipality of Archanes-Asterousia.

It includes the Asterousia Mountain Range, part of the plain of Mesara (to the north) and an exit to the Libyan Sea (to the south), with a lace-like shoreline and deserted beaches.

When looking at the region on the map, it is not easy to even suspect the versatility of the terrain, the charm and beauty hidden in the wild gorges, the dry stream beds and surface creeks, the small, closed valleys and the tiny villages popping up everywhere, the animal raising mitata at the peaks and the dry stone-walls that try to retain the meagre soil of the mountain slopes. This special ecosystem that combines cliffs and fertile plains, unpolluted environment and rich biodiversity is an ideal habitat for vultures and, particularly, the Bearded Vulture, which is an endangered species. In order to protect this special bird, which is a marker of healthy environment, the entire mountainous mass has been declared a Protected Area. At the traditional village of Ethia (as of mid 2015), a Visitor Information Centre will be in operation to serve this unique natural park.

Nature is only one of the features of the local area. The Asterousia is called by many the 'Holy Mountain' of Crete, due to the numerous monasteries and hermitages that operated here in older times. This is an ideal place for adventure and extreme sport lovers: Climbing, canyoning, hard-terrain mountain bike, mountaineering and hiking/trekking, sea canoeing, and diving find their niche here.

## TEFELI

Travelling along the central road coming from the north and connecting Heraklion with the south, as they approach Tefeli, visitors will start to make out Mesara plain, the largest and most fertile plain on the island. The view is truly breathtaking with its vast shimmering olive groves and the high massive 'wall' of the Asterousia Range, standing as a natural border against the sea. Behind the mountains Crete ends and the sea stretches out.

**Mesara** (from 'mesi', meaning the middle of something, as it is located in the middle of the island)

The Plain of Mesara stretches east to west in the south part of the Prefecture of Heraklion; it is 50km long and hardly 7km wide. To the south, the plain is protected by the wild Asterousia Mountain Range, while along the west there is an extensive coastline with sandy beaches. Its north border is Mt. Psiloritis. The Geropotamos River (Old River) crosses the plain and flows into the Gulf of Mesara. Two of its tributaries are the Koutsoulitis and the Mageras.

Mesara is truly fertile and has always been the breadbasket of Crete. The warm climate combined with the fertile land favour early vegetable production as well as the cultivation of olive and citrus trees. However, in recent years, the major problem of the entire area has been water scarcity, as there has been very little rain. This is why the major dam of Faneromeni has been constructed, which has also become a significant wetland.

Turn east and head towards Tefeli, a beautiful and lively village of the Asterousia zone.

The locals make their living from olive groves. Sights worth seeing include the spring of Agia Paraskevi, a small wood called Papouri, as well as the so-called old village, offering a lovely walk around its quaint lanes.

The village patron saint is St. John, whose feast is celebrated on 29 August.

The active Cultural Association of the village organises cultural events every August, during the Parathamneia Festival.



## APOSELEMI

An old, small hamlet referred to in all Venetian censuses. Its name and origin, along with the namesake river, are assumed to be Arabic.

## PYRATHI

It is situated in the location of the ancient city of Pyranthos (Fire Flower) and that is probably how it got its name.

## LIGORTYNOS

Ligortynos is the first small village you come across as you descend towards the Asterousia, before Tefeli. It is on the northwest slope of the hill with a nice view over Mesara plain. The name Ligortynos is pre-Hellenic. Indeed, there are findings from the Late Minoan Period at the Louvre attesting to that. Present day inhabitants originate from Anogeia, Mylopotamos (as well as Plakiotissa) and from Asia Minor (Caesarea [present-day Kayseri], the Black Sea shores, and Iconium [present-day Konya]), the latter arriving in 1923. The new settlers soon adapted to the language and cultural life of this land and were assimilated by the native population.

People here cultivate vines and olive trees, cereals and tobacco. In the village there is also a cheese-making cottage industry. In the past there used to be pottery works.

To the south of the hamlet there are ruins of a decorated church (Holy Trinity - Agia Trias) dating to Byzantine times. The central church is dedicated to St. Charalambos. The local Cultural Association is active and has maintained village traditions with events, appropriate aesthetic interventions (paved lanes) and highlighted monuments, such as the old aqueduct.

### Archaeological findings

At the north entrance to the village of Ligortynos, a major, looted, chamber-like tomb of the Geometric Period was found.

The chamber was circular; only the threshold and two monolithic pilasters (1m high), as well as the lintel above them remain of the entrance. Numerous ash containers have been found with their lids, as well as vases,

among which there was a crater (drinking cup) from the Geometric era bearing a 'daedalic' figure. Particularly interesting is a series of 32 tiny clay shields, most of which bear white decorations on a black background.



## PLAKIOTISSA

After Ligortynos, on the way to Pyrgos, you come across the small hamlet of Plakiotissa. This is very old and there are references to it in all Venetian censuses. Most residents of the village come from Anogeia, Mylopotamos. There is a lot of water in the village and the locals are mainly farmers or animal-breeders, tilling the land or keeping bees.

The main landmark is under construction (while this guide is being prepared); it is the dam of Plakiotissa, which will significantly help irrigate the territory.

Churches in the hamlet are the village parish church of Agiou Georgiou (St. George), and the church of Agias Anastasias tis Romeas (St. Anastasia the Roman), who is the matron saint of the village.

The village has more churches, such as the two-aisled church of Agiou Panteleimon (St. Panteleimon) and Agias Ekaterinis (St. Catherine), the Church of Lord Christ (Afentis Christos), the church of the Annunciation, right on the road just before entering the village, etc.

## PRETORIA

After Plakiotissa, and having left behind numerous other smaller villages, such as Kefalados, Neochori, and Kalyvia, you reach Pretoria, right in the heart of Mesara plain, on the right bank of the Anapodaris [Reverse Flow] River.

Pretoria or Protoria is a typical Cretan village with stone paved lanes and traditional yards with flowers. Residents grow vines and olive trees and produce olive oil, wine, and sultanas.

Its name is the Byzantine word from the Gospel, the praetorium, i.e. the official residence of the praetor, a kind of magistrate in Ancient

### **Damantri, a Minoan centre in eastern Mesara<sup>20</sup>**

"Locating a major central Minoan building surrounded by a settlement and necropolises at Damantri location has come to bridge the gap, since a Minoan centre had been suspected to have existed in the eastern basin of the extensive plain of Mesara in southern Crete.

The location is at a low land rise, northeast of the present day village. The carved façade and the numerous streets with 'tectonic points' in the excavated area testify to the significance of this building.

So far the search has followed its course over an area of about three square kilometres, while the entire site seems to be larger, since it stretches to adjacent properties. Surface indications point to settlements throughout the hill, while the necropolises were located on its western slope. After the conclusion of cultivation activities, the burial surroundings were excavated and small elliptical larnakes and jars were found. Finds indicate that the settlement dates to the Middle Minoan Period, while evidence collected so far from the central building indicates that it was destroyed by fire in the Late Minoan Period.

Traces from a major fire are visible everywhere (at numerous points stones have become calcified). The time of the destruction is believed to have been after the cereal harvest, since amphorae filled with charred grain were found, and before olives and grapes were harvested, since the jars awaiting to receive them were found washed clean and ready, placed in order upside down, on the long sides of the storage room. It seems that the place was never inhabited again after it had been destroyed; at least the search so far has not revealed any later remnants."

Rome. For a period of time the name of the village changed to Protoria.

At present-day Pretoria, at Damantri location, a grand central Minoan building was discovered, surrounded by a settlement and necropolises. According to archaeologists, this find has bridged a gap, as it had been suspected that a Minoan centre would be found in the eastern basin of the extensive plain of Mesara.

Visitors should not miss the Anapodaris River Bridge, an integral part of local history and the memories of residents.

Another important point for the village is the Holy church of Archangelou Michail (Archangel Michael) dating back to the 13th century.

## CHARAKAS

Charakas is one of the three main villages at the root of the Asterousia, on their north side. Its Venetian name was San Giovanni (St. John), but it changed to Charakas, because in the west of the village there is an imposing rock, 35m high and 60m wide. On Crete and other islands, the word 'Charaki' means rock. This is a monolithic mass, accessible only from the southwest, through the cobblestone lane that leads to the quaint Byzantine church of Afentis Christos (Lord Christ).

The west side of the rock is sharp and steep. Its fortified position, affording a panoramic view and surveillance of the entire plain of Mesara, led the Venetians to build a castle here. Today only some of its relics survive.

The village has an active Cultural Association that organises various celebratory events throughout the year to mark religious feasts (Christmas, Easter) and other occasions, such as the feast of St. Panteleimon (27 July), the anniversary of the Battle of Crete (20 May), etc. Especially on the occasion of the last event, Charakas becomes the central point of the feast, due to the anniversary of its bombardment by the Nazis. They say, however, that this attack was a mistake made by the enemy, as they were targeting the village of Charaki, but ...mixed it up with Charakas.

In recent years, in cooperation with the Municipal Centre for the Open Care of the Elderly (KAPI), the operation of the old looms has been revived; older housewives teach young girls how to weave. Ask at the local KAPI, in the village square, under the Charaki, to be shown the looms and their wonderful woven items.

Also seek out the Women's cooperative with their dozens of sweet and savoury products. The churches of the village are: Agiou Panteleimon (St. Panteleimon), the patron saint with the largest church and a four-storey bell tower, the church of Koimisi tis Theotokou (the Dormition of the Virgin Mary) (in the old village), Agiou Nektariou (St. Nectarius) (in the lower district), Agiou Ioanni (St. John) (in the cemetery), Agias Paraskevis (St. Paraskevi) (on the edge of the village), the church of the Holy Spirit (Agiou Pnevmatos) (on the Asterousia heading to Paranympoi), Agiou Georgiou (St. George) and Agiou Nikolaou or Agiou Nikita (St. Nicholas or St. Nikitas) (on the plain) and Afentis Christos (Lord Christ) (on Charaki rock).

Also worth seeing are the windmill and the water fountains.

## AGIA FOTIA (HOLY FIRE) - DORAKI (LITTLE GIFT)

Both hamlets belong to the district of Charakas and lay about 1.5km west of it. They are old hamlets referred to in Venetian censuses. It is worth visiting the Byzantine church of Archangelou Michail (Archangel Michael) and Panagias (Virgin Mary) at Doraki, as well as the church of Agia Fotini of Samareia and the fountain at Agia Fotia.

## AMYGDALOS

Leaving Charakas behind and heading to the mountainous region, the first village you come across is Amygdalos, a small but quaint village of the Asterousia Mountains, built on the lower slopes of Maroulis Peak.



## PARANYMFOI

This small village with its few residents and the three hospitable coffee houses is a landmark point for many routes and activities in the east zone of the Asterousia. Near here is the famous Abas location. It is a wonderful vantage point looking out onto the southern coastline offering a truly breathtaking view. Heading from Paranymfoi to Mournia, after about 800 meters, you come across a small sign pointing to Abas. Follow the narrow lane and park your car where the road ends. The old watermill is a characteristic feature: it ran on the water from the stream flowing into the gorge right below you. Throughout the year, but not in the summer, you can see this active stream. Any daredevils among you should not follow this route, because you will soon find yourselves needing ropes and equipment to continue your descent by canyoning. Follow the path going in the opposite direction and reaching the 'horseshoe' shaped Abas cliff, where you can discern the hamlet of Treis Ekklesies (Three Churches) in the distance.

It is on these cliffs where the bearded vulture and the griffon vulture nest and you are bound to come across them during your tour. Avoid wearing bright colours, because they frighten the large, yet sensitive, birds of prey. If you are interested in bird watching, you can be supplied with all necessary visual equipment from the Information Centre of nearby Ethia (following prior arrangement with the competent Town Hall personnel).

From Paranymfoi you can also head to Kofinas, along an old footpath that is not easily discernible; however, if you feel like exploring, get ready to discover the rich biodiversity of this land with the wide range of ecosystems. Another landmark is the small gorge connecting Paranymfoi with the next village of Platania. Ask the way at the village.

If on the other hand you are interested in finding out why the Asterousia range is called 'the Holy Mountain of Crete', follow the dirt road leading away from Paranymfoi to the southwest that takes you to the church (old monastery) of Agiou Pavlou (St. Paul).

A well-maintained and clearly signposted trail starts there and takes you above the only carob tree forest on Crete; the path forks out at that point (there are signs) and you

### St. Paul's Monastery

St. Paul's Monastery dates to the time of the Venetian rule and it operated as a hermitage until about the middle of the 20th century. Its location was carefully chosen, on the road connecting Paranymfoi with Koudoumas Monastery, over the imposing cliffs and rocky caves of the Asterousia, which are ideal for asceticism, particularly to the east of the Kofinas Peak Sanctuary (an Asterousia Peak that belongs to the Municipality of Gortyna). At the foot of this very slope there used to be a water spring, that is still active today (there is a beautifully hewn stone basin at the site).

have to choose whether you will go to Treis Ekklesies or to Koudoumas Monastery. Either choice will offer you unforgettable moments.

## ROUTES AND ACTIVITIES NEAR TO PARANYMFOI

### AG. PARASKEVI GORGE (VOUKOLIAS) CANYONING


It is nearby, west of the large gorge and waterfall of Abas.

It is quite open gorge and it ends on a beach west of Treis Ekklesies village.

Its longer descents are near the entrance and shorter ones can be found further inside, after a long walk.

#### Amenities:

Ethia Information Centre and Camping centre. Cafés in the villages of Paranymfoi, Ethia, Achentrias, Treis Ekklesies.

 Paranymfoi  
 034° 57.916' N / 025° 07.365' E / 524 alt.  
 034° 57.168' N / 025° 07.818' E / 8 alt.  
 3h  4 < 60 m  
 2min  2min  11 km  
 Year-round  Winter, Spring

# ABAS (OR MOUSOULIS) GORGE

CANYONING

The most well known gorge in the Municipality due to its impressive 140m waterfall, the biggest recorded waterfall in Crete, which essentially receives the waters of the Amygdalos and Paranympoi village basins.

Its name, "Abas", comes from the Latin Abas (priest), after one of the numerous hermits who found refuge in the Asterousia in the past.

Abas is a large, beautiful and technically demanding gorge which begins at the small plateau south of the Timios Stavros peak (710m), stretches out between the Monopori (561m) and Kefala (610m) peaks and exits onto the Treis Ekklisies beach.

Traversing the gorge is difficult in terms of necessary technical skills, as it requires four aerial changes. 21 additional descents and a trekking part towards the end follow. Please avoid canyoning here from December to February, as it is the reproductive period for the birds of prey that use its precipitous rocks to nest and reproduce.

## Amenities:

Ethia Information Centre and camping centre. Cafes in the villages of Paranympoi, Ethia, Achentrias, Treis Ekklisies.



📍 Paranympoi

📍 034° 57.925'N / 025° 07.933'E / 460 alt.

📍 034° 57.270'N / 025° 08.161'E / 0 alt.

🕒 7 h 🏔️ 5 ⚡ 45 m \ 22

🚶 5min ➡️ 0min 🚶 8,7 km

📅 Year-round

🌤️ Winter, Spring



## 8) PARANYMFOI - TREIS EKKLISIES

### TRAIL

Paranymfoi > Agios Pavlos Church > Carob Tree Forest  
> Treis Ekklesies

The trail affords an exceptional view of the Libyan Sea and the coastlines of Asterousia mountain range, which suddenly plunges into the sea, creating coves and sea caves that are unique in Crete.

From the exit to Paranymfoi head on for approximately 1 km on an easy-to-drive dirt road until the byzantine church of St. Paul, where you can park and start your hike on the well-maintained trail that leads down to the coastline.

About halfway down there is a sign pointing towards Treis Ekklesies and Koudouma Monastery.

Follow the first sign and further along you will encounter the largest natural carob tree forest in Europe. The trail continues along the sea until Treis Ekklesies, built at the exit of Abas gorge.

To return, you have two options: (a) you can have arranged to have a car waiting at Treis Ekklesies so as to head up to Paranymfoi, (b) to hike another three hours uphill along the 'Klisoura' trail towards Paranymfoi. The ascent follows a fairly visible trail, which, however, is rather rough going.



🏠 Paranymfoi, Treis Ekklesies

📏 6,7 km

🕒 2,5 hours (downhill all the way)

📍 34° 57.608'N / 25° 7.170'E (Agios Pavlos Church)

📍 34° 57.199'N / 25° 8.128'E (Treis Ekklesies)

👣 Well-trodden trail with markers

⬆️ Moderate

👉 Year-round (be careful on rainy days)

🏠 There are cafés at Paranymfoi and, in the summer, taverns, cafés and accommodation at Treis Ekklesies

## PLATANIAS

Platanias is the westernmost settlement in the Archanes-Asterousia Municipality (right on the boundary with the Gortyna Municipality). It is a small, picturesque, almost uninhabited village with many abandoned homes where, despite their disrepair, you can witness the typical architecture of Heraklion's mountain houses.

Downhill from the village you can find a great picnic spot, next to a stream watering great walnut, almond and fig trees. This location, called 'karies' [walnut trees], is ideal for connecting with this beautiful landscape, while birds of prey circle above you as they follow the thermal currents. Notice that this stream, like dozens of others, heads toward the cliffs near Abas, sculpting distinctive crevices in the ground, which in time develop into gorges.

In spring, you'll find yourself traversing a green carpet of vegetation. In autumn, you'll be able to taste tender walnuts from the elderly yet still productive walnut trees - please be careful of the aggressive rooster, belonging to hospitable Mrs. Maria, who, along with her husband, are the last remaining residents of this beautiful village.

# PYRGOS

**Distance from Heraklion:** 49.5km

**Amenities:** Town hall, KEP [Citizens' Service Centres], KAPI [Centres for the Open Care of the Elderly], police station, fire station, regional clinic, banks, post office, traditional taverns and cafés, shops, municipal canteen, lodgings, farmers' market.

Pyrgos is the largest village at the foot of the Asterousia Mountain Range. It is the head village, where most citizen services for the residents of the southern part of the Municipality are to be found.

Its particularly favourable location played a definitive role in its growth and development into a central hamlet of the southern part of the Municipality, as well as of the broader region of Mesara. Built at the foot of the imposing Asterousia Mountain Range, in between and on top of hills that offered a good view of the entire valley, it secured its protection against intruders in times passed. The name itself (meaning Tower) indicates its fortifiable position, while, according to one account, it is connected to the Venetian Tower that was built at the peak of 'Apano Pyrgou', a rocky and barren hill to the east of the village.

## Looms and the art of weaving

Pyrgos is one of the few pockets in the Municipality, if not in the whole of Crete, where you can be informed on the art of weaving on the island; you can see looms at the village Open Care Centre for the Elderly' (KAPI) and authentic textiles at the village central square.

Traditional folk weaving and embroidery has a long history on Crete and maintains a rich modern production. The intricately designed and decorated textiles of Crete are created with the use of wool, linen, cotton and silk yarn on traditional looms that most homes of mountain villages still possess. The decorative motifs use various geometric shapes and also display scenes from nature or human activities. Woollen kilim rugs, patania blankets, multi-coloured shoulder bags (called "vourgies"), cotton or linen sheets, towels and silk dresses and other clothing items, are some of the most popular products of the Cretan weaving art. Crete's embroidered items are known for their colourful tableaux and themes from nature and daily life, using motifs borrowed from the Minoan and Byzantine traditions of the island. Embroidered and woven items are often complemented by hand-made lace in wonderful designs and motifs.

Pyrgos is surrounded by 3 creeks with seasonal torrents that collect the rainwater on this side of the Asterousia, meeting the water supply needs of residents and the irrigation needs of their fields in Mesara, the most fertile valley on Crete, that spreads out at the feet of the village. The locals mainly work in farming, producing oil, table grapes and a cornucopia of vegetables.

Pyrgos is also a centre of cultural and other events for the villages of the southern part of the Prefecture of Heraklion, many of which are held at the man-made bocage to be found to the east of the village. Over the last few years the Pyrgos carnival has become an institution.

In Pyrgos there is also a children's library, an interesting spot for children and young people to enjoy various activities.

## WHAT TO SEE...

**The hill of 'Kakoplagos':** This is one of the hills on which Pyrgos is built and the point at which the old ill-preserved trail that used to connect Pyrgos to the village of Mournia starts.

**The hill of 'Kefalas':** Another hill in Pyrgos at the peak of which stands the chapel of Agios Pantaleimon (St. Pantaleimon). This is the starting point of the old and ill-preserved trail leading to the village of Prinia.

**The valley of Karava:** Between the hills of Kakoplagos and Kefalas there is a small valley, the valley of Karava, also known as Kavousi, with spring waters; it is rich in vegetation, mainly plane and walnut trees. The waters of Agios Mamas (St. Mammes) spring were channelled through pipelines and to run the flourmills that used to stand on the western side of Kakoplagos. From there, the waters travelled along an arched hanging pipeline to the torrent on the opposite side and, continuing through another pipeline in the form of a chain, moved other flourmills. Rumour has it that there used to be 18 such flourmills. As they are horizontal mills, they are classified as Byzantine flourmills; while their architecture indicates that some were built during the Venetian rule, and others during the Ottoman rule, they always used the same construction style and architecture.

**‘Ta Archontika’ (The Mansions) Hill** with its off-white granite rock is where the local Venetian lord had his residence and where the area got its name from. Alongside and to the north of this mansion there was a spring that had been crafted into an intricate fountain for the water supply of the lord, which survived under the name ‘Archontissa’ (Lady). Few ruins of the residence and the fountain have survived, echoing the grandeur and aura of that age.

**Churches:** The chapel of Agia Eirini (St. Irene) / the two-aisled chapel of Agios Georgios (St. George) and Agios Constantinos (St. Constantine) are decorated with noteworthy murals, while the dedicatory inscription displays the date 1314-1315. The church of Metamorphosis tou Sotiros (Transfiguration of the Saviour) and patron saint of the village (where, according to tradition, there used to be a convent)/ the chapel of Agios Raphail (St. Raphael) / the chapel of Agia Paraskevi (St. Paraskevi) and Profitis Ilias (Prophet Elijah).

**The Pyrgos Festival** is held on 5-6 August.

#### TRAILS AND ROUTES

##### STARTING - ENDING AT PYRGOS

#### HIKING TRAILS

- A trail around Karavoi (it is not part of the official Municipal hiking trail network, but you can easily locate it and hiking it is not demanding).

#### CYCLING COURSES

- C.C.3 Pyrgos - Charakas Circular Tour
- C.C.4 Achenrias - Pyrgos

## 3) PYRGOS - CHARAKAS CIRCULAR TOUR

### CYCLING ROUTE

Pyrgos > Charakas > Agia Fotia > Sternes > Agios Nikolaos > Platanias > Paranymfoi > Prinias > Pyrgos

Set off from the village of Pyrgos. The first 7km are fast and straight through narrow paths and olive groves, the terrain mainly powdery with scattered grooves.

Half way along this stretch, while crossing the village of Charakas, the route crosses an asphalt patch and after a short uphill section it returns to harsh cement and narrow dirt tracks, until the village of Sternes.

This is the starting point of the route's main uphill stretch; this is quite hard, as it is a 9km steadily uphill section of an average incline of 7.6% and a maximum incline of 12%.

The soil is powdery with some gravel, small stones and ruts at points. After reaching the top and crossing a small flat area that follows, an equally long and fast descent begins. It is long with intense slopes that start off at -12% and gradually level out 5 km passed Platanias, before arriving at Paranymfoi. Similar to the uphill part, there are turns along the road that have been ruined by the rains. At the 27<sup>th</sup> km point starts the second and final uphill stretch, which is 2.75 km long and 4.5% steep and passes through the village of Prinias; this is followed by another very fast descent to the finish line at Pyrgos.

33,6 km 🏔️🏔️🏔️ Difficult

🏠 35° 0.405'N / 25° 9.152'E (Pyrgos)  
35° 0.736'N / 25° 7.194'E (Charakas)

📍 Tavernas, cafes and accommodation at Pyrgos, where the Town Hall is also located





## PRINIAS

If you are traveling on a 4x4 vehicle or on a mountain bike, have enough experience and stamina and you are interested in enjoying one of the most exciting mountain routes in the Asterousia, head from Pyrgos towards the small village of Prinias which pops up in the midst of these barren mountains. Continue from there through the rough twists and turns of the road towards Treis Ekklisies.

If you are traveling on a bicycle please avoid riding downhill when the wind is strong.

## TREIS EKKLISIES

This Asterousia village is famous for the Abas Gorge and waterfall which, when active (from the end of autumn to the end of spring) creates a 140m waterfall, the last carob tree forest on Crete and the astonishing beaches and coastline which stretch to the east and west of Treis Ekklisies.

Don't be deterred by the number of buildings in this seasonal holiday settlement, as in addition to the astounding scenery and tours, you can enjoy meze dishes and raki in the small taverns. If you find yourself here during the annual August 'kakavia' [bouillabaisse] festival, you'll certainly enjoy the local music and folklore dances. This settlement owes its name to its three churches ['treis ekklisies'],

Metamorfosi Sotira [the Transfiguration of the Saviour], Agios Georgios [St. George] and Panagia [the Virgin Mary].

### Carob tree forest

The Treis Ekklisies carob tree forest is situated in one of the most isolated areas in Europe. It is very hard to reach, since it is accessible through a rough 10km dirt road starting in Paranympoi, crossing the Asterousia Mountains and leading to the beach. After reaching Treis Ekklisies, you should continue west after the village hill, up until the Psili Ammos (or Ornio) beach.

The mountain slopes along the road to the beach are green with tall carob trees. The carob forest of Treis Ekklisies is the largest natural carob tree forest in Europe, although it remains largely unknown. These hardy carob trees thrive in dry, rocky areas and grow at a distance from each other.

Their tough, sweet fruit resembles a hard bean. In older times, Cretans used to eat it as a dessert, while it remains a healthy alternative to chocolate. It was also used to manufacture film reels. In the past, the driest areas of Crete were ideal for carob tree cultivation to create animal fodder, but their cultivation has now declined dramatically.





## Beaches

In the west of the Asterousia, the coastline features some of the most impressive beaches on Crete, with many sea caverns and salt marshes, which travellers find very appealing. These beaches are not only beautiful but also mostly isolated, since they are difficult to reach. In order to go there, you have to drive many kilometres of sometimes rough dirt roads (4x4 vehicles are recommended), and often have to hike from the parking location. The local terrain favours the creation of multiple marine caves and caverns of high diversity, which feature many surprises for diving and sea canoeing lovers.

From the east, the first beach in the Municipality is Tsoutsouras. Halfway along, it is gently interrupted by the 'Mintris' Gorge, a natural border between the Municipalities of Archanes-Asterousia (where Pera Tsoutsouras is located) and Minoa Pediados (to which Tsoutsouras belongs). The entire Tsoutsouras beach is one of the most well developed for tourists, with sunshades and many taverns, lodgings and mini markets, which only operate during the summer season (end of spring to October). In Tsoutsouras you will find canoe and water bike rentals and even small caique boats, which will take you to otherwise inaccessible nearby beaches.

Heading west, the first beach you will meet after Tsoutsouras is Maridaki (and the seasonal settlement of the same name). This wonderful pebble beach is basically the point of exit of two gorges beginning in Achentrias, meeting in Lichnistis and emptying into the sea through a common bed. In the summer there are taverns and a few rooms to let in Maridaki, which is accessible via water canoe, walking a path which starts from Tsoutsouras, or by car from Achentrias (through a rough dirt road).

Continuing west, if you're lucky enough to cross these south beaches on a water canoe, you'll be surprised to see a green belt of palm trees interrupting the reddish brown, rocky and barren terrain of the mountain. This important palm forest marks your arrival at the wonderful Agios Nikitas beach, below the monastery of the same name. The monastery is green with olives and other fruit-bearing trees and includes a cluster of cells where travellers can stay after contacting the monastery caretaker, who lives there permanently.

A small path of 230 steps starts at the monastery and leads to the beach, which is one of the most beautiful beaches of the south coastline of Crete, featuring pebbles and visible markings of tectonic movement on a chasm that dives sharply into the sea. On Agios Nikitas beach in the springtime, stock-raisers lead their sheep to the sea, to clean and sanitise them.

If you walk a few meters west of the main beach, you'll come across a solitary palm tree, an emblem of St. Nikitas. The easiest path to reach it (if you are not already on a canoe) is to drive through the most exciting route of the Municipality (a rough dirt road) that starts from Achenrias and leads to the Monastery of Agios Nikitas after 15km.

From the palm forest, a little to the west of Agios Nikitas' beach, there is a series of breathtaking secluded beaches (like Kalami) with peculiar rocks, holes and basins, where the water gets trapped and gradually evaporates thus forming salt-marshes, from which locals collect sea salt to trade. If you do not have a canoe, try to walk the coastline west as far as you can. You'll discover impressive geological and terrestrial formations and well-hidden twisting bays and sea caverns.

At the point where the precipitous rocks and cliffs prevent you from walking further begins the most beautiful part of the Municipality's coastline. Along it are many small and large caves suitable for underwater exploration. Petrigiari, a tiny pebble beach surrounded by tall boulders, is formed at the exit of the narrow Kakoperato Gorge in the Skiadaki area, which starts 10km south of the village of Achenrias.

Next is the fairytale-like Aspes beach (from the Greek word for landslides). It can only be reached by boat or sea canoe. The nearest small ports are in Treis Ekklesies and Tsoutsouras, where you can hop on a boat to Aspes daily.

Right next to it is a narrow gorge leading to the tiny Prikovlychada beach, with the gorge's perpendicular rocks protecting it from the sun. Alykevra in Sfakidia, with its clear blue waters and an impressive sea cave of an inverted triangle shape is situated further west.

It is protected by the Alykapounta cape on the east. This location is considered very important for herds-men, as east of this cap there used to be a freshwater spring, where they watered their sheep.

Continue towards Kaminaki beach formed at the exit of Pervola Gorge, which starts in the area of the same name Southwest of Ethia. This beach is only accessible by water, since the area and gorge are both extremely rough; 400m to the west, in the Agio Pnevma area, there is a second pebble beach, although not as beautiful as Kaminaki.

Right next to it, a small, gorgeous beach with thick sand has been formed - Plysimo - which is the end of yet another of the dozens of precipitous gorges in the Municipal area of the Asterousia. Unless you have a boat it is not easy to reach, but that does not mean it is impossible. This is also one of the beaches where stock-raisers washed their sheep, hence the name, which means 'washing' in Greek.

100m to its west is Voidomatis, or Voudomatos, where the technical, albeit beautiful gorge of Mesosfini ends, with its tall walls and wild rocks. There are two large boulders in the sea and a large cavern on the east, which, according to local tradition, is the eye of the ox, 'voidomatis' in Greek.

You can reach this location via a rough dirt road, which starts at Treis Ekklesies and heads east.

Right next to it is the beautiful and popular Kolovrechti beach, after the many twists and turns downhill from Paranympoi. Most visitors staying at the village of Treis Ekklesies prefer this beach, which is located at the exit of the Abas Gorge. The cliffs of this uncharted gorge house the largest vulture colony in Greece, as well as in southern Europe, and it is also the only habitat of Bearded Vultures (*Gypaetus barbatus*) in the area, which in danger of extinction and the rarest bird of prey in Europe.

Further west, a sandy beach forms at the exit of the Agia Paraskevi Gorge. Pachia Ammos is surrounded by the biggest carob tree forest in Europe. It is accessible via a short dirt road from the settlement. This is where the endangered *Caretta caretta* turtle nests.

West of this beach and downhill from the carob tree forest, the Ornios area features a number of underwater caves, like Glykys Kolympos (near there is a freshwater spring). Between Ornio and Glykys Kolympos is a large marine cave with a very small opening on the surface level and a very impressive clearance once entered. This cave can also be reached through the water, from an underwater hole leading to the same spot.

# MOURNIA

Lost in the greys and browns of the rocky Asterousia landscape, the small picturesque village of Mournia is almost uninhabited. You will come across it while driving between Paranymfoi and Ethia. It was established as early as 1853, when it was first mentioned in a Venetian administrative census. Mournia is the reference point for those who choose to go canyoning in the technical gorge of ‘Mesosfini’.

## MESOSFINI GORGE

### CANYONING


Mesosfini is located between the villages of Mournia and Prinia. It starts one kilometre outside Mournia and although it is initially narrow, it opens and forms long descents.


It is one of the few known gorges in Crete that feature two long consecutive descents (70m and 80m).


It is a beautiful gorge with very interesting formations, like smooth rocks sculpted by the water, stalagmites in the big waterfalls and huge boulders on its bed. Mesosfini collects water from the Kato Kampos plateau, which lies between the Sachos (709m), Aggelomandra (689m) and Skylies (725m) peaks. It exits into the Voidomatos beach.



### Amenities:




Ethia Information Centre and camping centre. Cafés in the villages of Paranymfoi, Ethia, Achentrias, Treis Ekklisies.



 Mournia

 034° 58.087'N / 025° 09.514'E / 465 alt.

 034° 57.386'N / 025° 09.565'E / 5 alt.

 4 h  3  80 m \ 12

 3min  0min  6,8 km

 Year-round  Winter, Spring

# ROTASI<sup>21</sup>

Rotasi (ancient Rhytion) is located on the northern slopes of the Asterousia Mountain Range, at the foot of the Asfentylia rising.

It was one of the ancient cities of Central Crete in the Archaic - Hellenistic Period and one of the cities mentioned by Homer in the Iliad, as having participated in the Trojan War. In Rotasani Kefala there are now the ruins of the ancient city of Rhytion. Ancient tombs of various types dating from the Geometric art period (10<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> centuries B.C.) to the Roman era have been found around the hill and lower in the valley.

The Geometric domed tomb excavated by N. Platon was a great discovery, as it had received more than 40 burials, and yielded at large number of vessels, as well as a sarcophagus and many iron weapons, pins, brooches, silver hairpins and one gold hairpin, and golden rings and foils of gold used to decorate the clothes of the dead. Part of the finds is exhibited at the Archaeological Museum of Heraklion. There are also noteworthy finds from Minoan times, such as the bronze tool and weapon hoard, found at Asprolivada location, in an area where a Minoan hamlet was discovered, as well as a number of impressive stone vessels made from serpentine at Liva-deitis location. Part of a Roman settlement has been excavated at the ‘Kserokampos’ location. A Geometric cemetery has been discovered at ‘Ampasos’ and ‘Farmakara’.

Three churches from Venetian times (1211-1669) are located on Kefalas Hill, the church of Agios Evmenios (St. Eumenios) at the peak of which has been restored, the church of Agios Ioannis (St. John) on the eastern slope which is in ruins and the church of Agios Georgios (St. George) on the northern slope inside the village.

A lovely trail starts from the village, which has always connected it with the hamlet of Ethia. Signs and information can be found at the starting point of the trail.

## 7) ROTASI - ETHIA - ROTASI

TRAIL  
circular route

Rotasi > Ethia > Chavgas Gorge (Vorno) > Rotasi

The trail can be easily discerned and starts at Rotasi village. It follows an uphill route and passes through geological formations such as 'Tafkos tou Peristera', an impressive doline that is 15-20m deep, created by the collapse of a cave roof. Continuing onwards, you will pass 'Rouso Egremo', a complex of limestone ridges that climax at the 'Langadi stis Trypes' location. There is also a spring there. Further along, the path intersects with the road, which you leave behind and continue towards Ethia, where the first part of the trail ends. At Ethia drop in at the visitor information centre, where you can find information on the Asterousia Mountain Range protected area, watch a documentary, pick up pamphlets, while you can also camp out if you wish to do so.

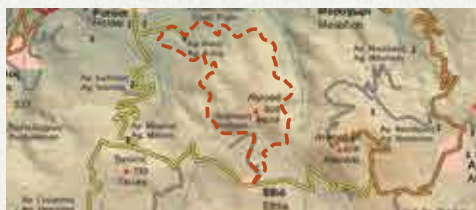
Those of you with the necessary stamina can continue onto Ethia gorge, also known as Chavga gorge or Vorno gorge. This is an old goat trail, suitable for mountain climbers or experienced hikers, as there are some rather hazardous stretches along the way and the path is not easily discernible (you can find the trail's coordinates for GPS at the Municipality website: [www.archanes-asterousia.gr](http://www.archanes-asterousia.gr)). To get to the Vorno trail follow the road from the Information Centre, turn right into the alley immediately after the café and head straight on until you reach the Ethia-Achentria country road, which you cross and continue through the fields, heading to the gorge.

As the path is an old goat trail, it is easy to miss, so ask local farmers about locations and place names, such as 'sto galano charaki', 'st' Apatsanou to ryaki' (water spring), 'o Stavros' plateau, 'o Gero-trochalos' (an outdoor stone-built dairy farm), 'sto Souvloto Mouri',

'stis Kato Porous' with the picturesque chapel, 'ston Apano Poro' with its limestone ridges, 'platoma tou Kastelou', where you have to be careful as the trail starts getting dangerous due to the gravel covered slope, which becomes even more dangerous before the next water-eroded patch [nerofagoma]. 'Spiliara', a large rock shelter that can be made out from far away, marks the exit from the gorge.

The trail ends at the bed of the gorge, where you have to start heading west in order to reach Rotasi. Be careful of wire fences encountered throughout the route, the gates of which you must close behind you... it is an unwritten law of the mountains throughout Crete.

- 🏠 Rotasi, Ethia, Mesohorio, Pyrgos
- 📏 9,7 km Rotasi - Ethia: 4,4 km  
Vorno Gorge: 5,3 km
- 🕒 6 hours Rotasi - Ethia: 2 hours  
Vorno Gorge: 4 hours
- 📍 35° 0.542'N / 25° 10.731'E (Rotasi)
- 📍 34° 59.325'N / 25° 11.563'E (Ethia)
- 🗺 Rotasi - Ethia: Carved trail  
Vorno Gorge: Goat path without markers
- ⚠ Rotasi - Ethia: Moderate  
Vorno Gorge: Difficult  
- some stretches are along cliffs
- ☀ Spring, summer, autumn (avoid high temperatures, because you will be constantly exposed to the sun)
- 🍷 Tavern and café in Ethia. The Ethia Parish Guesthouse offers accommodation at low prices, following arrangement with the Parish (ask at the village). A camping site is available to the public at the Information Centre of Ethia (in the Ethia old school yard - Inquiries at the Town Hall). Cafés, grocery stores and taverns at Rotasi and Mesohorio



## ETHIA

Ethia has been listed a traditional hamlet. It is a typical example of a mountain village of Crete, on the Asterousia Mountain Range at an altitude of 740m, surrounded by five mountain peaks. It is a very impressive land and very well-preserved, thanks to the efforts of the locals, who have been working tirelessly for years on the restoration of its buildings, laying down cobbles in the narrow streets, and, mainly, keeping their village alive, despite the difficulties due to its distant location.

The name Ethia (Itea - Itia, meaning "willow") originates from a plant, as do the names of other villages in the area (Amygdalos, Mour-nia). Legend speaks of a large tree with enormous branches that provided shade for the locals and passers by - and feasts and celebrations were held under its leafy branches. There are no traces of this legendary tree any more, but, if you start up the road that climbs the bare stone mountain over Rotasi, your eyes will immediately be drawn to the young green pine trees, that suddenly alter the landscape as soon as you reach the village entrance. It is a bocage planted by the locals, which has become an oasis of green on the treeless ridge of the Asterousia.

The locals are mainly farmers raising animals and tilling the land. The main products include goat and sheep produce (meat, milk and dairy goods), olive oil and raisins, as well as plants used to feed animals.

Ethia is also known for its Ethianos Pidihtos Choros (local lively dance), an interesting variation on a Cretan pidihtos (jumping dance), that is danced nowhere else on Crete.

A documentary on Ethia has been filmed by Vasilis Panagiotakopoulos, titled 'The Little Palace of Aoria'.

### Churches and religious traditions

The village churches are Panagia (Virgin Mary) built in 1909 and Profitis Ilias (Prophet Elijah). Profitis Ilias with its age-old wooden iconostasis, is built on a rising with a panoramic view. According to one tradition, it was built in 1874 in just one day, as the ruling Ottoman Pasha had only allowed from sunrise to sun-

set for it to be built. A great festival is held here every year for Prophet Elijah's feast.

In 2007 to honour Mt. Athos monk Evmenios, who was from Ethia, a guesthouse was built in the centre of the village, where travellers are welcomed and many events are held.

Until recently (1965) a quite interesting traditional ritual was kept in Ethia, 'zosimo tou choriou' [the binding/circling of the village]. In order to drive back some evil that threatened the village, each woman would take some cotton to the church for the priest to bless. From there, women began to spin it into thread and wrapping it around the village. The thread was left surrounding the village for forty days and then it was collected and used to make candles.

### Information Centre for the Protected Area of the Asterousia and Ethia Camping Centre.

Arriving in the village from Rotasi, you'll meet the old - now defunct - elementary school, restored by locals themselves (Ethia Regeneration Society). Ask the villagers at the cafés to unlock the school so you can travel in time through old photographic material, traditional Cretan attire and other heirlooms gathered by residents and exhibited in this building, which villagers treat as their home.

In 2011, the Municipality of Archanes-Asterousia attempted to revive the memories and the village itself by organising events such as children's camping and, now, an information centre for the protected area. Set to start operating in 2015, it is located in the schoolyard and will provide information on the surrounding mountains, their biodiversity and activities available in the entire Municipality. Furthermore, inside the school, visitors will be able to watch documentaries and films on the Municipality and the protected area. You will also be able to borrow special equipment for activities such as bird watching, cycling, etc.

Apart from the information centre, the yard also houses a fully equipped, contemporary camping site where you can put up tents of your own or borrow some from the centre. The camping area includes tent shades, toilets, outdoor showers, water taps, a small kitchen, tables and benches.

### Don't miss...

If travelling on a 4x4 vehicle, don't miss the opportunity to take the trip south of Ethia, crossing impressive spots in terms of terrain and scenery along a number of dirt roads. Typical points of reference on this route are Kouroupas pit, a deep pit created by water, which clearly shows how gorges are geologically formed, 'pervola', with the beautiful limestone ridge and colourful garden right below it, Agia Eirini chapel and the 'potistres', a series of stone-carved watering troughs for cattle.

### Basket Weaving

One of the oldest handicraft applications on Crete is basket weaving, which has recently declined. Using flexible branches from bushes or reeds, the locals once created many of the everyday objects used in the agricultural and herding lifestyle.

Today, basket weaving still flourishes in the villages of Ethia and Rotasi. You can find samples of this art on the village squares.

A recently published book, "Ethia: Pos na se ksech-aso" [Ethia: How can I forget you?] (Itanos publications), discusses the habits, customs, traditions and lifestyle of the residents of Ethia and the Asterousia in great, colourful detail.

## CHAVGA - VORNO GORGE CANYONING

After stopping at the Ethia Visitors' Information Centre where you will learn about the Protected Area of Asterousia, continue towards the Vorno (or Ethia, or Chavga) Gorge, the largest gorge on the northern side of Asterousia. The typical limestone rocks, some of which are crumbling, are clearly visible above, so you need to be very careful of landslides. From the entrance to the gorge the rising of Asfentilia is visible, where scientists from the Natural History Museum of Crete have located rare fossils, which will be studied to contribute significant new data on the paleontological history of the island. Water only crosses this gorge after heavy storms.

It is generally open and features a long hiking path at its exit, meeting the Anapodaris River, which waters the large valley of Mesara. The gorge can be also crossed on foot.

### Amenities:

Ethia Information Centre and Camping Centre. Cafes and taverns in Ethia.

🏠 Ethia  
📍 034° 59.512'N / 025° 11.834'E / 670 alt.  
📍 035° 00.559'N / 025° 11.839'E / 282 alt.  
🕒 3,5 h 🧑 3 👤 37 m  
🚗 5min 🚶 0min 🚶 10,8 km  
🕒 Year-round 🕒 Winter, Spring





## MESOCHORIO

This is the third largest village on the northern slope of the east Asterousia, located in the eastern exit of Vorno Gorge, which connects it to the mountain mass of Achentrias. According to tradition, Mesochorio [middle village] was created when residents of nearby settlements decided to live together in a spot near the middle of the road from each of their villages. It is an active, inhabited village, the local economy of which is based on olive oil, grapes and vegetable production. You should definitely visit the church of Panagia [Virgin Mary] which dates to 1570, Ag. Vlasios, the chapel of Archangel Michael in Pentamis, and the listed historical building of the elementary school.

## CHARAKI

It gets its name from a large crack running along the centre of the village.

## MADES - VORIAS - KALYVIA

These are small picturesque villages on the easternmost boundary of the Municipality.

## ACHENTRIAS

Achentrias or Ochentrias (the village with the many Ochentres, a non-venomous viper species found on Crete) is one of the most typical examples of a lively animal raising village in the Asterousia. It is located on a small, cultivated plateau to the west of Asfentylia and to the north of the cliffs and gorges that lead to the southern coastline. The aesthetic value of the plateau of Achentrias is matched by its ecological importance in preserving the biodiversity of the Protected Area of the Asterousia.

Most of the villagers are animal farmers and, to a lesser extent, work the land. The main products come from goats and sheep (meat, milk and various cheeses) and the excellent



flavour and quality of the cheese produced here, at the uniquely built mitata (plural of mitato, stone huts on mountain peaks) of the area, is well known.

The village is downhill from Mount Asfentylas, an ideal juncture for the entire south of Crete, as there are but few obstacles. This is why a television broadcasting antenna was installed in 1970 on its 970.43m peak, which unquestionably affects the otherwise spectacular view towards the entire Mesara Valley, the Sea of Crete and the island of Dia. On this mountain, an ongoing survey by the Natural History Museum of Crete is after a very rare animal fossil, argued to have lived here, but has not been matched to any known animals until now.

Some of the most beautiful hiking trails of this mountainous zone start at Achentrias. Signs with maps and descriptions that will help you approach them safely are located at the starting points of the trails. The most beautiful trail is the one that has always con-

nected Achentrias with the Holy Monastery of St. Nikitas, with the renowned palm forest and water spring, Kefalovrysi. Animal farmers continue to wash their sheep in the sea on St. Nikitas beach to this day, usually in late spring, in order to clean them.

Two more wonderful trails connect Achentrias with the seaside hamlet of Maridaki, through two gorges. One is Ligiofarango and the other Lichnistis.

## CHURCHES, CELEBRATIONS

The village churches are those of Agios Dimitrios (St. Demetrius), Kimisis tis Theotokou (Dormition of Mary), Agios Charalambos (St. Charalambos) and Agios Ioannis Theologos (St. John the Theologian). On August 6 Achentrias celebrates the Transfiguration of Christ with a festival.



## 4) ACHENTRIAS - PYRGOS CYCLING ROUTE

Achentrias > Ethia > Mournia > (alternatively) Treis Ekklesies > Prinias > Pyrgos

The route starts at Achentrias. It starts off uphill for 2.5 km with continuous, quick changes in incline, which reaches 9% at certain points. Then there is a continuous, mainly flat stretch of well-trodden dirt, with quick turns that lead to an impressive opening at the 4th km affording a view of the Libyan Sea. After 6.3 km the route goes down a hill, passing through the cobbled alleys of Ethia, before entering a speedy descent on asphalt, and then re-entering the dirt, leaving a small gorge behind on the left and passing through the village of Mournia.

The descent continues until the 15<sup>th</sup> km where you can choose to turn left for a technically demanding descent towards Treis Ekklesies, down a 6.4km stretch of an average incline of 7.2%, and a maximum incline of 11%. You can also choose to continue straight on until the right turn to Prinia, where the last uphill stretch of the route, 3.1km at a 4.8% incline, starts, before the fast descent to the finish line at Pyrgos.

—	Achentrias - Pyrgos	22,8 km
—	Achentrias - Treis Ekklesies - Pyrgos	37,4 km
▲▲▲	Achentrias - Pyrgos: Moderate	
▲▲▲	Achentrias - Treis Ekklesies - Pyrgos: Difficult	
📍	34° 59.454'N / 25° 13.420'E (Achentrias)	
📍	35° 0.405'N / 25° 9.152'E (Pyrgos)	
🍷	Cafés at Achentrias. Taverns, cafés and accommodation at Pyrgos, where the Town Hall is also located	



## 5) ACHENTRIAS CIRCULAR TOUR CYCLING ROUTE

This route starts inside Achentrias. After 350m on the village asphalt, the route moves to a wide, well-trodden dirt road with gravel, which is mainly flat for the next 2.5 km. There, against the backdrop of the imposing Asterousia Mountain Range and the enchanting Tsoutsouras and Maridaki beaches, starts the first half of the circular stretch, approximately 3.5km downhill, with quick turns and increasingly technically demanding patches, as the incline gradually becomes steeper and the route enters narrower downhill paths with large rocks and eroded terrain. Then comes the second half of the tour with a demanding 6km uphill stretch at an average incline of 5.1% and a maximum of 9%. The last 2.5 km are slightly uphill until you arrive back in Achentrias.

— 12,9 km ▲▲▲ Moderate  
📍 34° 59.422'N / 25° 13.509'E (Achentrias)  
🍷 Cafés at Achentrias



## 9) LIGIOFARANGO GORGE AND LICHNISTIS

### TRAIL

Achentrias > Ligiofarango > Lichnistis > Maridaki > Pera Tsoutsouras

Two gorges start in Achentrias: 'Ligiofarango', which is dry and can be hiked across, and 'Lichnistis', which is suitable only for canyoning lovers.

Ligiofarango can be hiked but there are difficult descents and ascents along the bed. The trail starts just outside Achentrias.

Hike through the fields and dry stones, following the goat trail and you will gradually enter the bed of the gorge, which you follow until the exit at Maridaki.

Towards the end the two gorges converge and end along a joint bed leading to the

beach. Shortly before the end of the second gorge, there is a series of five waterfalls. The last one, Lichnistis, is 60m high.

Within Maridaki there is a spring that preserves the rich vegetation consisting of century-old plane trees and other water-loving plants. There are steps heading up from the spring to Tsoutsouras.

🏠 Achentrias, Maridaki, Pera Tsoutsouras

📏 7,2 km 🕒 3 hours

📍 34° 59.422'N / 25° 13.509'E (Achentrias)

📍 34° 59.051'N / 25° 16.842'E  
(Pera Tsoutsouras)

🐐 Goat path and gorge bed.  
No markings (GPS tracker is a must)

⚠️ Difficult

🌞 Spring, Summer, Autumn  
(beware of rainfall and high temperatures)

🍷 Cafés at Achentrias, tavernas and seasonal accommodation at Maridaki and Tsoutsouras



# 10) ACHENTRIAS - AGIOS NIKITAS MONASTERY

## TRAIL

Achentrias > Tourkou Lakkos > Agios Nikitas Palm Forest > Agios Nikitas Monastery

This is one of the most interesting trails in the Asterousia Mountain Range, which has always connected Achentrias with Agios Nikitas Monastery. Follow the southernmost dirt road leading out of the village and park at 'Steiromantra', where the road ends. This is where the hike starts, heading SE, up the rise through 'Stenos Poros'; at the top you can make out the small seasonal lake, 'Tourkou Lakkos'.

After the lake, continue heading SE trying to locate the traces of the old trail. Until the point where the steep slope begins, look for markings on the rocks that will make things easier for you. From then on, there are fewer markings; looking down you can make out the green strip of the palm forest that is your destination. It is where you can find 'Kefalovrysi' [a water spring] and Agios Antonios Chapel. The trail ends at the dirt road that you must follow to reach Agios Nikitas Monastery, where you can spend the night, as you can also do on the deserted beach, which the steps immediately beneath the monastery lead to.

🏠 Achentrias, Maridaki 📏 8 km 🕒 3 hours

📍 34° 58.938'N / 25° 14.127'E  
(Achentrias - Steiromantra)

📍 34° 57.956'N / 25° 15.345'E  
(Agios Nikitas Monastery)

🐐 Goat path without markers

⚠️ Moderate. Experience in trekking is required, as the path is not clearly visible

🌦 Spring, summer, autumn  
(beware of rainfall and high temperatures)

🏠 Cafés at Achentrias 'Kefalovrysi' spring, monk cells available for tourists at Agios Nikitas Monastery (following arrangements with the caretaker, the only permanent resident at the monastery)



# MARIDAKI

In terms of geophysics, Maridaki is quite impressive. It is essentially the estuary of two surface streams crossing two of the most beautiful gorges in the Asterousia, both of which start at Achenrias. These streams meet about 100m from the beach and form a small delta, with pebbles, levelling smoothly into the sea, forming a beach with blue waters, ideal for swimming. From the point where the two streams join and all along the estuary, there is rich vegetation of tall planes and other aquatic plants due to year-round water circulation. You can thus sit under the shade cast by the leaves and enjoy food and drinks in the small taverns which operate here in the summer. Besides the gorges that end up here, two seaside paths start at the settlement, one towards Tsoutsouras and one towards Agios Nikitas. They are both exceptionally beautiful and very accessible, even to inexperienced hikers.

## PERA TSOUTSOURAS<sup>22</sup>

Tsoutsouras or Tsoutsouro (from the Venetian Zuzzuro) is located at the exit of the imposing Mintri Gorge. It is built at the location where the ancient city of Inatos, a port for Priansos, used to stand. This is also the location of the cave known as Fylakes, where Eileithya, the goddess of childbirth, was worshipped. In the cave many votive offerings by those faithful to the goddess have been found, such as copper and clay idols of men, pregnant women and erotic complexes, jewels and copper double axes, clay model ships, as well as Egyptian faience (type of quartz) statuettes.


Throughout Tsoutsouro parts of the Roman and Paleochristian city of Inatos have been excavated. The findings that have come to light include public and private buildings, workshops, baths, an aqueduct, a bridge by the River Mintris that used to connect the two parts of the city, architectural ruins of a theatre, as well as a Paleochristian basilica. Also, cemeteries have been identified at various sites, the most important being the one discovered in the western part of the present-day hamlet, with constructed box-shaped graves from the post-Roman era.


# MARIDAKI GORGE (LICHNISTIS) CANYONING


Lichnistis Gorge starts in Achenrias valley, at the 'Faraggouli' location and gets its name from the impressive waterfall located towards its exit. The gorge is generally rather open with the occasional narrower spot. It is long and features alternating rock types, like 'Plakoura', a remarkable rock formation of limestone. Before the gorge reaches the sea, it forms a series of five waterfalls, the last of which is the impressive 'Lichnistis', 65m tall.




### Amenities:




Cafés and taverns in Maridaki (seasonal) and lodgings in the nearby settlement of Tsoutsouras (seasonal).



 Maridaki

 034° 59.786'N / 025° 14.573'E / 460 alt.

 034° 58.584'N / 025° 16.294'E / 0 alt.

 3 h  2+  65 m

 5min  5min  10 km

 Year-round  Winter, Spring



On the eastern edge, specifically at Aliori location, part of a Minoan settlement has been excavated. In Pera Tsoutsouras the coast is full of beautiful caves and unique karst formations. To the west of Tsoutsouras two parallel mountain peaks can be seen, which the locals call Zeus and Hera, as they remind them of two reclining bodies. This is the starting point of the Asterousia Mountain Range, which embraces the fertile southern valley of Mesara.

## GORGES

For canyoning lovers there are two gorges here: Tsoutsouras and Troulla. Both have torrents that flood during the winter and spring and are dry in the summer and autumn. Tsoutsouras Gorge is approximately 1.5km long; it is located in Tsoutsouras and is one of the many rough gorges of the area. The trail starts at Sfakias location and its exit is near the village, at Larinaki location, where the rock formations are very impressive.

A few metres to the west of Tsoutsouras Gorge the smaller Tsoutsouraki Gorge extends forward like a narrow cut into the hard rocks. Its entrance is a short distance to the west of the impressive Troulla of Tsoutsouras, at Meli Lakos location (the area, literally 'honey pit', produces a fair amount of honey) and its exit is in the Staoussa district, just outside the village.

## MINTRIS GORGE

Mintris Gorge starts near the village of Filipoi in Mesara, and ends at the port of Tsoutsouras, essentially acting as a border for the administrative division of Pera Tsoutsouras and Tsoutsouras, since it covers a 6 km distance. It is a very open gorge, without vertical walls, dry in the summer and very easy to hike. Along the river lie the ruins of the ancient city.

Hiking can start in the middle of the gorge, from the trail leading to Tsoutsouras. The trail passes through and next to the Mintris riverbed, where there are mostly carob trees. Halfway along the trail, at Perdikonero, there is a spring with drinkable water.

## TSOUTSOURAS GORGE

CANYONING

This is the shortest gorge in the Asterousia (approximate length 1.5km).

In its first part, it is open and features a hiking path. After the middle it becomes precipitous and narrow, with longer descents and beautiful rock formations up until its exit. It is crossed by water from December to the end of spring and is easily traversed year-round. Right before its end (before the hamlet's exit to Keratokampos), you can choose the left path to avoid a part with rich vegetation and small descents.

### Amenities:

Cafés, taverns and lodgings in Tsoutsouras.

📍 Tsoutsouras  
 📍 034° 59.884'N / 025° 17.584'E / 263 alt.  
 📍 034° 59.395'N / 025° 17.709'E / 7 alt.  
 ⌚ 2 h 🏔️ 2 ⚡ 32 m \ 13  
 🚶 20min 🚗 10min 🚚 6,6 km  
 🌧️ Year-round 🌧️ Winter, Spring

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MUNICIPALITY	REGION	NAME
N. KAZANTAKIS	MELESES	DOMAINE PATERIANAKIS
N. KAZANTAKIS	HOUDETSI	VILLA SELENA
N. KAZANTAKIS	HOUDETSI	PETRONIKOLIS
N. KAZANTAKIS	KATALAGARI	KATALAGARI COUNTRY SUITES
ASTEROUSIA	PERA TSOUTSOURAS	KAINOURGIAKIS ARISTEIDIS
ASTEROUSIA	PERA TSOUTSOURAS	LIMNIDIS APOSTOLOS
ASTEROUSIA	MARIDAKI	KAPELAKIS GEORGIOS
ASTEROUSIA	PYRGOS	SARIDAKIS NIKOLAOS
ASTEROUSIA	PYRGOS	ARCHONTIKO
ARCHANES	ARCHANES	VILLA ORESTIS
ARCHANES	ARCHANES	KOURINA
ARCHANES	ARCHANES	NERAIDOSPILIOS
ARCHANES	ARCHANES	KALIMERA ARXANES VILLAGE
ARCHANES	ARCHANES	TROULOS
ARCHANES	ARCHANES	ELIATHOS RESIDENCE HOUSES
ARCHANES	ARCHANES	ARCHONTIKO
ARCHANES	ARCHANES	VILLA ARCHANES
ARCHANES	ARCHANES	MANILI VILLAS
ARCHANES	ARCHANES	KRITAMON
ARCHANES	ARCHANES	TZIVAERI

LODGING TYPE	TELEPHONE	WEBSITE
FURNISHED HOUSES	2810 226674	paterianakis.gr
TRADITIONAL GUESTHOUSE	2810 343505	selenahome.gr
TRADITIONAL ACCOMODATION	2810 743203	petronikolis.info
HOTEL	2810 753350, 6949 444592	katalagarisuites.com
ROOMS TO LET	28910 92451, 6978 554052	
ROOMS TO LET	6944 144725	
ROOMS TO LET		
ROOMS TO LET	28930 22861, 28930 22238	
FURNISHED HOUSES	28930 23118, 6945 190736	arxontiko-hotel.gr
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**Theatrical Workshop of the Municipality of Archanes-Asterousia**

**Charakas Cultural Association**

**Nikolaos Kadianakis,**

Associate Professor of Mathematics, National Technical University of Athens, Charakas.

**Guillaume Coquin**

[canyonisme.net/2014/07/07/canyoning-nice-verdon-antibes/Guillaume Coquin](https://canyonisme.net/2014/07/07/canyoning-nice-verdon-antibes/Guillaume%20Coquin)

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The travel guide you are reading was written from the point of view of a visitor looking to discover the beauty of the most central part of Crete: the Municipality of Archanes-Asterousia. A traveler ready to dive into the depths of history, to wander in the contemporary soul of its inhabitants, to explore every nook and cranny of its landscape. A traveler wishing to see, touch, smell and hear the soul of this rather unexplored place.

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2007-2013.



Με την συγχρηματοδότηση της Ελλάδας και της Ευρωπαϊκής Ένωσης