

Family and Child



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Region of Crete
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GREECE





Crete, with its natural beauty, its shallow waters and sandy coves, its accessible beaches, its theme parks, its culture and history, offers endless possibilities and is a perfect place for an unforgettable family holiday. Modern accommodation facilities guarantee safety and comfort to visitors wishing to spend a carefree family holiday.





Good climate

The climate in Crete is one of the best in Europe. The island's good weather throughout the year makes it an ideal destination for children and their families.

Crete falls into two climate zones: the Mediterranean one to the north and the North-African one to the south. The temperature of the sea doesn't go below 15 de-

grees Celsius in winter; especially on the south coast. Winter is moderate, spring and autumn mild and pleasant and the fresh north winds alleviate the summer heat.

Means of transport

Millions of visitors come to Crete every year from all over the world. The three international airports on the island, in Heraklion, Chania and Sitia are linked to hundreds of other international airports. The largest low cost companies have regular flights to Crete and the most important international airlines organize charter flights. Crete is therefore easily accessible to families who wish to choose it as a destination for their holidays.

Ports also play an important role. The three ports of Crete, Heraklion, Rethymnon and Chania, have dozens of luxury ferry boats linking them with Greece's largest port, Piraeus, on a daily basis. Other ship routes include the Cyclades from Heraklion; Rhodes, Karpathos, Kos, Kithira and Milos from the ports of Sitia, Agios Nikolaos and Kissamos. On the south coast maritime routes link Gavdos to Sfakia, Loutro, Agia Roumeli, Paleochora and Sougia.



For those who don't have their own means of transport, there is an efficient and cheap network of luxury buses across the island. The main towns of Heraklion, Rethymnon and Chania also have an efficient network of urban buses. And there is of course always the possibility to rent a car or a camper which will allow you to explore the island on its modern network of roads.





Safety

Another important asset Crete has to offer families who want to spend their holidays here is the overall feeling of safety on the island. Crete has a very low percentage of criminality and guarantees a peaceful holiday to its visitors.

Equally important is the fact that there are no dangerous animals

in Crete. Bears, wolves, and other large mammals, or poisonous snakes that can be harmful to human beings and exist in the rest of Greece, are not to be found on Crete and legend has it that Hercules, out of respect for Zeus who was born here, cleaned the island of all 'harmful and poisonous' animals. A later legend declares that this is the work of the Apostle Paul who, in the two years he spent on Crete, stowed blessings on the island and banished all dangerous animals. This is true too for the sea: swimming in Crete, as everywhere in the Mediterranean, is totally safe.



The feeling of safety is further enhanced by the large number of well-equipped, efficiently run health stations operating all over Crete 24/7. There are hospitals in the main towns, the largest ones in Heraklion, and private clinics who lend their services to all the surrounding islands in southern Greece. Additionally, there are health centres in the main villages and rural dispensaries who attend to issues of basic health care.

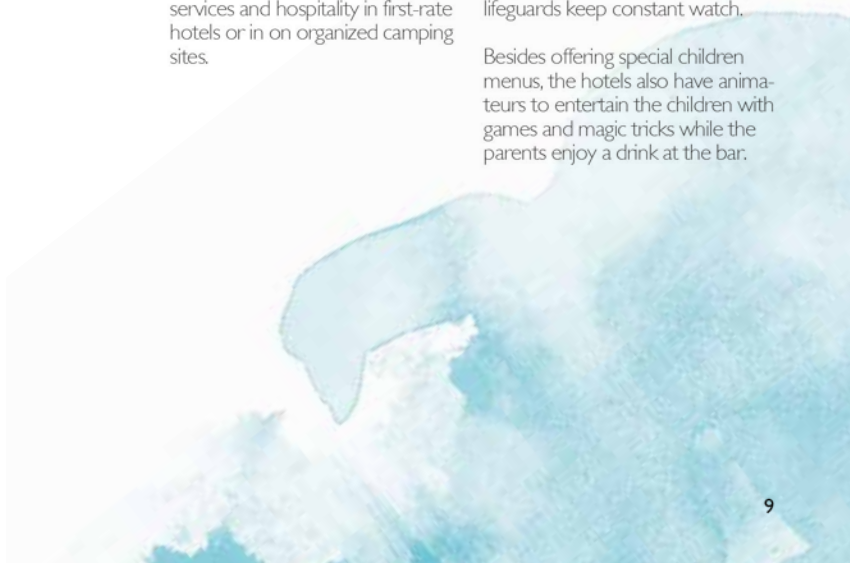
Tip
There are no animals that can harm human beings on Crete. Therefore, sleeping outdoors is perfectly safe.

A pleasant stay

Those who travel with children in Crete benefit from high quality services and hospitality in first-rate hotels or in on organized camping sites.

Swimming pools in hotels include smaller ones especially designed for young children and trained lifeguards keep constant watch.

Besides offering special children menus, the hotels also have animators to entertain the children with games and magic tricks while the parents enjoy a drink at the bar.





Qualified teachers in swimming lessons and sea sports, as well as basketball and football pitches and tennis courts are regular features in most luxury hotels in Crete. Babysitting is also available and most hotels baby proof the rooms if required by the parents to ensure a safe stay to the entire family.

Agritourism

Families visiting Crete have the opportunity to bring their children in to contact with a traditional way of life. There is a wide variety of choice for agrotourism accommodation and camping sites in the island's hinterland.

The 'return to nature' that agritourism accommodation has to offer is a unique experience in alternative tourism, regardless of one's age. In most of those locations children are offered riding lessons and excursions on horseback.





Additionally, children and their parents can go for walks on the well-kept trails of the agritourism accommodation facilities or they can cycle on well-mapped routes. Also, there are farms that children can go visit to see the animals. Another possibility is to participate in farming activities such as growing natural produce in vegetable gardens. In the nearby villages, families

can go to theatre plays, concerts and to local parties where they can watch Cretan dancing.

Some agritourism facilities offer cooking lessons to which children are welcome. Children can also learn about wine, watch documentaries on how it is produced, listen to legends and myths related to wine.





Beaches

The sea is a main attraction for children who can play, run and roll about in the sand to their heart's content. They make friends and feel the healthy power of nature. Crete has a wide variety of beaches that are safe and ideal for families with children: well-kept, well-equipped, peaceful, sandy beaches with lifeguards next to tourist facilities.

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

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



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

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



Sea tours

The possibilities for families to explore the coastal regions of Crete are many. Every day small boats take visitors to the most famous remote beaches of the island, among them Balos, Preveli and the beaches around Sfakia.

Most of these excursions take place on board bottom glass boats and put place emphasis on the discovery of marine life. These are memories that children will cherish all their lives. The tours are always a lively experience, with music, various on-board activities and food is often provided.

On the well-equipped beaches it is possible to rent pedalo and paddle boats to explore, the beauties of the nearby coast or to have fun fishing, together with your children.





Hiking

Accompanied by adults, children can discover some of the most beautiful places on Crete and enjoy walking in natural surroundings. Many children of Cretan families take walks with their parents to places that are easily accessible.

Instance of this is the famous the Astrakiano gorge and its twin branch, the Kounaviano gorge, near Heraklion. In pleasant surroundings with pools, trees and resting places, children are given the opportunity to discover the magic of nature. Other ideal gorges for family outings are the following: the Imbros gorge in Sfakia, the Borianio gorge and the Kydoni one gorge in Karanou, the Sinkariano, the Margaritsano, the gorge of Patsos, the Agiofarago, the Spiliotissa in Houdetsi, the Richtis and Kato Zakros gorges.

It is worth noting that speleology clubs and other private and qualified organizations run schools where children can learn the technical aspects of mountaineering and gorge trekking, as well as the theory and practice of speleology, a great favourite for children who find caves very exciting.



Environment and ecology

Environment and ecology are seriously taken into account in Crete and every year a number of clubs, associations and other entities organize educational activities for small children and their families.

In Rethymnon, Chania and Messara various programmes awaken public awareness on the protection of sea turtles who lay their eggs on the sandy beaches during the summer months. Associations for the protection of the environment, such as the Archelon sea turtle protection association take children to see turtle nests and newly-hatched eggs and often let them be present to witness how turtles, who had previously been ill or injured, return to their natural habitat.

On the other hand, other entities such as the Museum of Natural History often organize educational activities linked to the island's wetlands. Cleaning beaches is yet another activity that these organizations take on, on a volunteer basis. Children can also observe birds who are set free, an exciting moment. Those activities allow children to come to direct contact with nature.



City games

All Cretan towns have adequate parks where children can play, get to know each other, and run up and down in safety while their parents have a coffee under the trees.

The largest park where children can play in Heraklion is the Georgiadis Park. With its playground, the park provides lots of fun for the small ones; there are many benches and a small picturesque café in the park. In recent years new playgrounds for children have been constructed along the coastal avenue of Heraklion right by the seashore. There are cafés, playgrounds, as well as special tracks for bicycles, skateboards and action bikes.





In Chania families can enjoy lovely green surroundings in peace and quiet at the Municipal Garden where there is a summer open-air cinema and a cosy café. The garden was designed in 1870 and still provides great enjoyment to the little ones who can play, feed the ducks and watch the animals.

The Mikrasiaton square in Rethymnon is where children gather to roller-skate, play football or simply to cycle. The square has no shade and it is advisable during the midday hours to go and relax in the lush green municipal garden where children can safely play and observe the animals in the park.



Places children can visit

The island has a number of museums and places that offer guided tours to young visitors on a regular schedule. However, there are other scientific activities that are open to children on specific days, such as a visit to the Skinakas observatory where children can use the telescope to contemplate the stars.

A must for children is a visit to the Natural History Museum where they can observe the mysteries of nature in an original and instructive way. Among the exhibits there are animals and plants from the Eastern Mediterranean, and in particular a copy of a type of dinosaur once found on the island. In the 'Discovery' section children are shown fossils found in the sand and they can play at 'camping' and 'rowing a fisherman's boat'; in this playful way, they are introduced to the Mediterranean ecosystems. Another feature of the museum is the earthquake platform which can make one feel the power of the strongest earthquakes that have shaken our planet through-

out history. The museum also has a series of exhibitions on a variety of topics, such as dinosaurs or the mysterious play of light.

One of the largest state-of-the-art aquariums is the Cretaquarium Thalassocosmos in Goumes. Children can visit the aquarium and watch the hundreds of species –they will love the sharks– that live in the Mediterranean sea, in sixty large basins designed to represent the Cretan bottom of the sea. They will be able to actually touch some of the animals in special open basins and use the equipment provided (stereoscopes and microscopes) to better understand sea life and its ecosystems. Next to the aquarium, there is a private exhibition of dinosaurs.

In Chania families can visit the Botanical Park which hosts hundreds of fruit trees, herbs, aromatic plants, therapeutic plants and plants used in beauty products. The paths take you by a lake with aquatic animals and the entire visit lasts about two hours. There are many ostrich farms in Crete and in Kourounes, in the Mirambello area, there is an unusual park with parrots from all over the world.



History and Culture

Families should visit the most important archaeological sites in Crete. The Archaeological Museum in Heraklion exhibits the findings from the large Minoan palaces. A visit to the palace of Knossos should follow the visit to the museum. In the palace the children will be deeply impressed by the Throne Hall and thrilled to see where the mythical Minotaur was born and then slayed by Theseus.

The best place for children to discover the history of Crete in all its complexity from the first centuries of Christianity up to modern times is the Historical Museum of Heraklion. Besides a treasure hunt which helps children to learn through play, there are various representations of battles as well as visual and audio documents recording the bombings during WWII.





In Chania the exhibits at the Nautical Museum show the seafaring history of Greece. The ship *Minoa*, which is kept in an annex building in the so-called Sand Gate, is one of the museum's great attractions. It is a faithful copy of a Minoan ship built according to information obtained from Minoan vases and inscriptions. This ship followed the Olympic Flame on its trip to Piraeus during the 2004 Olympic Games.

From Elounda, families can take a small boat to the fortress island of Spinalonga where a guide can explain the history of the islet, once as a fortress and later as a leper colony. The boat trip often includes a swim in one of the beautiful beaches close by and fun activities are organized on board.





Many museums offer a series of activities for young children and pupils. The most outstanding ones are the Nikos Kazantzakis Museum in Myrtia, the Folklore Museum Lychnostatis in Chersonissos, the Musical Workshop Labyrinth in Houdetsi, the Cretan House in Chania, and Arolithos near Tilissos. Those places also organize special events during the summer such as concerts, parties, and moonlight evenings.



Fun

Children can have great fun in one of the four water parks on the island. These parks provide activities that range from a peaceful tour on the 'lazy rivers' to the spectacular slides and 'black holes'. Children can play as much as they want and get the thrill of their lives with trained lifeguards in constant watch.

The island also offers a large number of venues where children can enjoy themselves, such as paintball, kart and fun parks.

In tourist areas some private companies offer special activity programmes to families with children. There are pirate ships sailing forth every day from the ports of Rethymnon and Chersonissos to conquer the coastal areas of the island. The staff, dressed up as pirates, organize games and competitions aboard the ship.



Other amusing activities across the island include fun trains, double-decker open buses, labyrinths and places where ancient Minoans welcome children; there one can sample Minoan food and watch a show that brings Minoan customs back to life; there are studios where one can have photos taken in ancient Greek costumes in an authentic Greek landscape.



