

# CRETE

A quick guide to the archaeology and history of this island

## Where Crete is situated



- Crete, Greece's largest island, is known for its varied terrain, which ranges from fine-sand beaches at Elafonisi to the White Mountains.
- Mt. Ida, the tallest of the range, is home to the Ideon Cave, which was the birthplace of Zeus, according to Greek mythology.

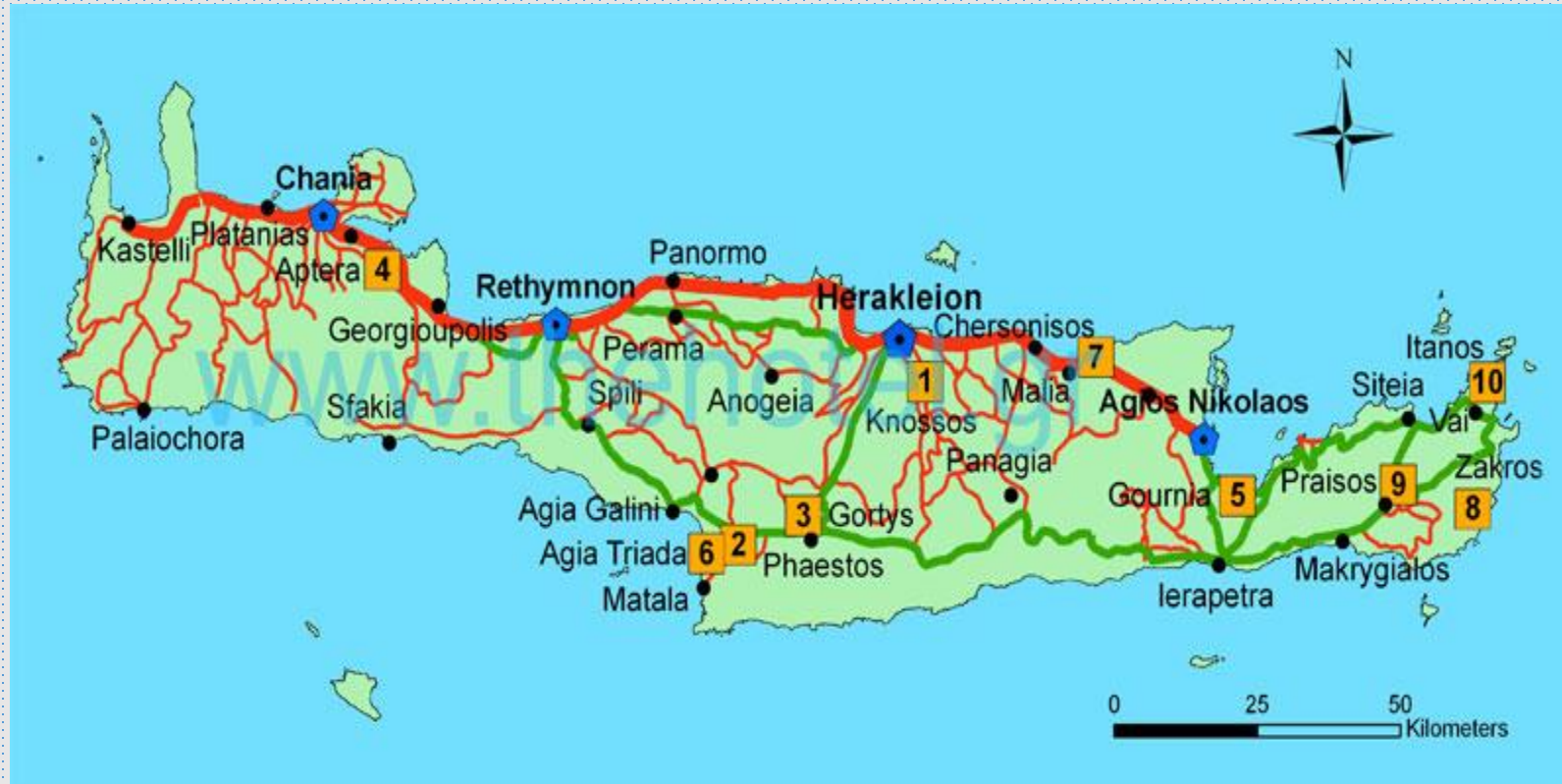


## Map of Crete



- The capital, Heraklion, is home to the renowned Heraklion Archaeological Museum, housing Minoan artefacts, and Knossos, a Bronze Age settlement.

# Famous archaeological sites of Crete



## Map of Crete



- Famous archaeological sites in Crete
1. The **Minoan Palace of Knossos**, very close to Heraklion and famous for its legend with the Minotaur
  2. The **Minoan Palace of Phaistos** with its beautiful views - this is where the Phaistos disk was found
  3. The **Minoan Palace of Malia** with the living sections and higher walls to better imagine the site
  4. The **Roman city of Gortyna** - with the impressive Law code carved in rocks
  5. The **island of Spinalonga** - a small fortified islet turned into a leper colony

# Minoan Palace of Knossos

- The Palace of Knossos is located just south of modern-day Heraklion near the north coast of Crete.
- Built by a civilization that we call the Minoans, it covers about 150,000 square feet (14,000 square metres), the size of more than two football fields, and was surrounded by a town in antiquity.
- The site came to prominence in the early 20th century when it was excavated and restored by a team led by British archaeologist Arthur Evans.



The name "Minoans" comes from Arthur Evans, who believed that he had found the palace of "King Minos," a mythical Cretan king who supposedly constructed a great labyrinth on Crete. Today, archaeologists know that King Minos likely did not build this palace.



# The north entrance of the Palace of Knossos



# Part of Knossos palace



One of the Kouloures – round pit



# The reconstructed South Propylaeum- monumental gateway



# The Throne Room



# The first palace

- Although the remains of the "first palace" mostly lie under later palace renovations, archaeologists have been able to put together a rough picture of what it looked like in antiquity.
- The first palace was built around a central court and contained numerous storage areas, including magazines to the west and northeast. On the northwest side of the central court was a room that researchers refer to as the "early keep" and near that another section referred to as the "initiator area."
- The development of the palace coincided with the appearance of the still undeciphered Minoan writing system.
- Also in this early period the different regions of Crete maintained their own distinct style of pottery and material culture, an indication that the island was not unified.
- The "first palace" likely suffered some level of damage, probably from earthquakes, around 1700 B.C. and underwent a series of renovations that produced what some researchers call the "second palace."

# The Minoan palace

- The palace in this period contained four entrances, one from each direction, and a royal road running to the north of the palace.
- the entranceway to the south offered a particularly grand arrival, leading the visitor through a narrow corridor lined with a fresco depicting a procession. Their final destination would have been the central court, which may have been used for religious ceremonies. "
- There is an entranceway not dissimilar to that of a labyrinth, a key idea in Greek literature (found in stories like "Theseus and the Minotaur") and something that was on Arthur Evans' mind when he interpreted the site.
- He thought he had uncovered the palace of the mythical Crete King Minos, who in legend kept a Minotaur in a labyrinth, demanding that the city of Athens feed it young men and women.

# The End of Knossos

- Around 1450 B.C., a cataclysm hit Crete. All the palaces on the island, with the exception of Knossos, were destroyed. What exactly happened is a matter of debate.
- One idea is that a series of natural calamities, such as earthquakes, hit the island.
- Another idea is that Crete was invaded by a people called the Mycenaeans, whom researchers know came to occupy Knossos.
- The Mycenaeans were a Greek-speaking people who apparently moved to Crete from the mainland. They wrote in a language we call "linear B," and thousands of inscribed clay tablets bearing the script, and baked from fire, have been found at Knossos.

# Examples of Linear B script

Linear B is the name for the late Minoan script which was first found on clay tablets and sealings in the second palace at Knossos on Crete.

These early tablets survived because they were baked in the fire which burned down the palace.



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# The Linear B Tablets interpreted-

- From archaeological context, Linear B was known to be the writing of the Mycenaeans. But before 1952 no-one knew who the Mycenaeans were.
- Archaeology had revealed a rich Late Bronze Age culture of c.1600-1100 BC, but the language and ethnicity of its creators remained uncertain. Many scholars still doubted the Mycenaeans were Greek, and viewed Homer's Iliad and Odyssey as wholly mythological.
- The decipherment of Linear B settled this argument forever, proving the Mycenaeans were Greek, and rooting Homer's epics in an ancient folk tradition that recalled real events centuries before.
- It was a brilliant young scholar, architect (and former wartime bomber navigator) called Michael Ventris who cracked the code

# Archaeological Museum at Heraklion

- The Herakleion Archaeological Museum is one of the largest and most important museums in Greece, and among the most important museums in Europe.
- It houses representative artefacts from all the periods of Cretan prehistory and history, covering a chronological span of over 5,500 years from the Neolithic period to Roman times.
- The singularly important Minoan collection contains unique examples of Minoan art, many of them true masterpieces.
- The Heraklion Museum is rightly considered as the museum of Minoan culture par excellence worldwide.



# Minoan Palace of Phaistos

- Phaistos was one of the most important centres of Minoan civilization and the most important city in wealth and power of southern Crete. It is mentioned in the texts of ancient writers such as Homer.
- It belongs to the three important cities founded in Crete by Minos. According to mythology, the dynasty of Radamanthis, son of Zeus and brother of Minos, reigned in Phaistos.
- Homer mentions its participation in the Trojan War and describes it as a "well-inhabited" city.
- The heyday of Phaistos begins with the entry of Crete into the Bronze Age in the middle of the 3rd millennium BC, where the foundations for the Minoan civilization are laid.

# Phaistos.....

- From an archaeological point of view, Phaistos is the second most important Minoan city after Knossos.
- The first to recognize and identify the position of Phaistos was the English captain Thomas Spratt.
- Archaeological excavations began in 1884 by Federico Halbherr in Phaistos
- Some areas, mainly the old palace and the royal rooms of the new palace were covered with plastic canopies, while others, such as the warehouses of the new palace, were covered with concrete slabs.

# The west façade of the old palace



The Phaistos Disc was found in this part of the Old Palace



The theatral area, with the West Court and raised walkway



Part of the old palace east of the New Palace



# The Magnificent Staircase



The Magazines where olive oil, wine and wheat were stored



The "king's Megaron" - the central hall of a large Mycenaean house.



# The Phaistos Disc



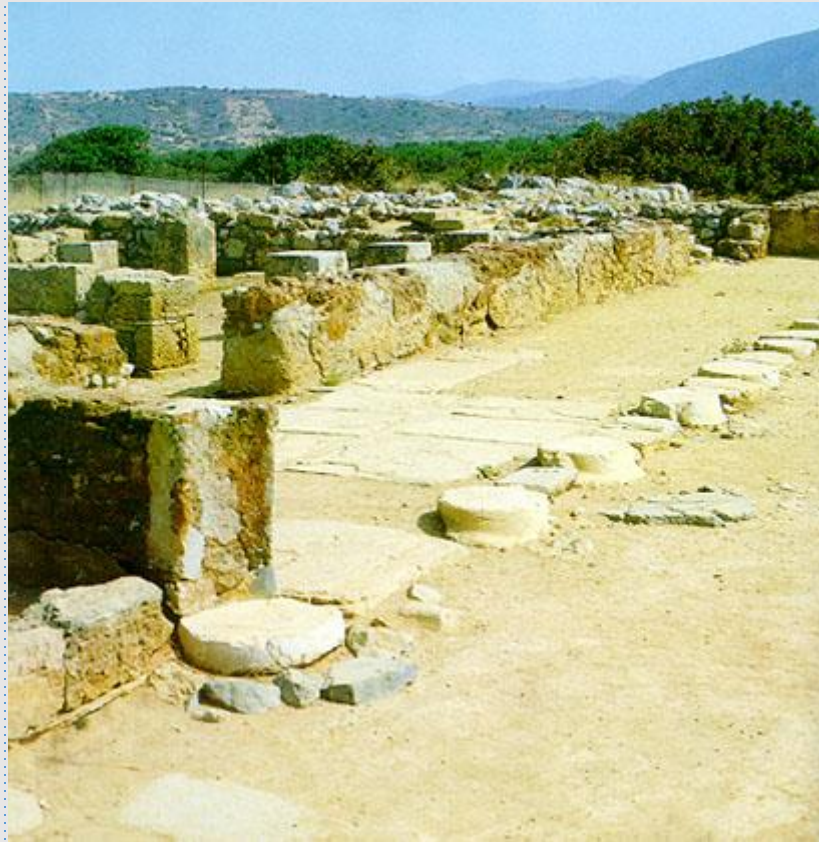
# Minoan Palace of Malia

- The palace was built in the Middle Minoan period (around 1900 BC).
- Two main construction phases have been identified, which determine its history. The first had a lifespan of two centuries. Around 1700 BC. its destruction occurred.
- Fifty years later a new palace was built (around 1650 BC), on the ruins of the old one, which seems to have generally followed its design and the ruins of which are preserved today. Its final destruction occurred around 1450 BC. and was made by fire.
- Whether the causes of disaster are related to war or natural disasters is still a matter of debate in the scientific community. The palace was the centre of the entire urban area. The various districts of the Minoan city extend a short distance from it. The city, whose name is not known, was enclosed by a wall.
- The city cemeteries are located in the north. There are indications of the existence of a coastal Roman settlement and a Byzantine basilica.

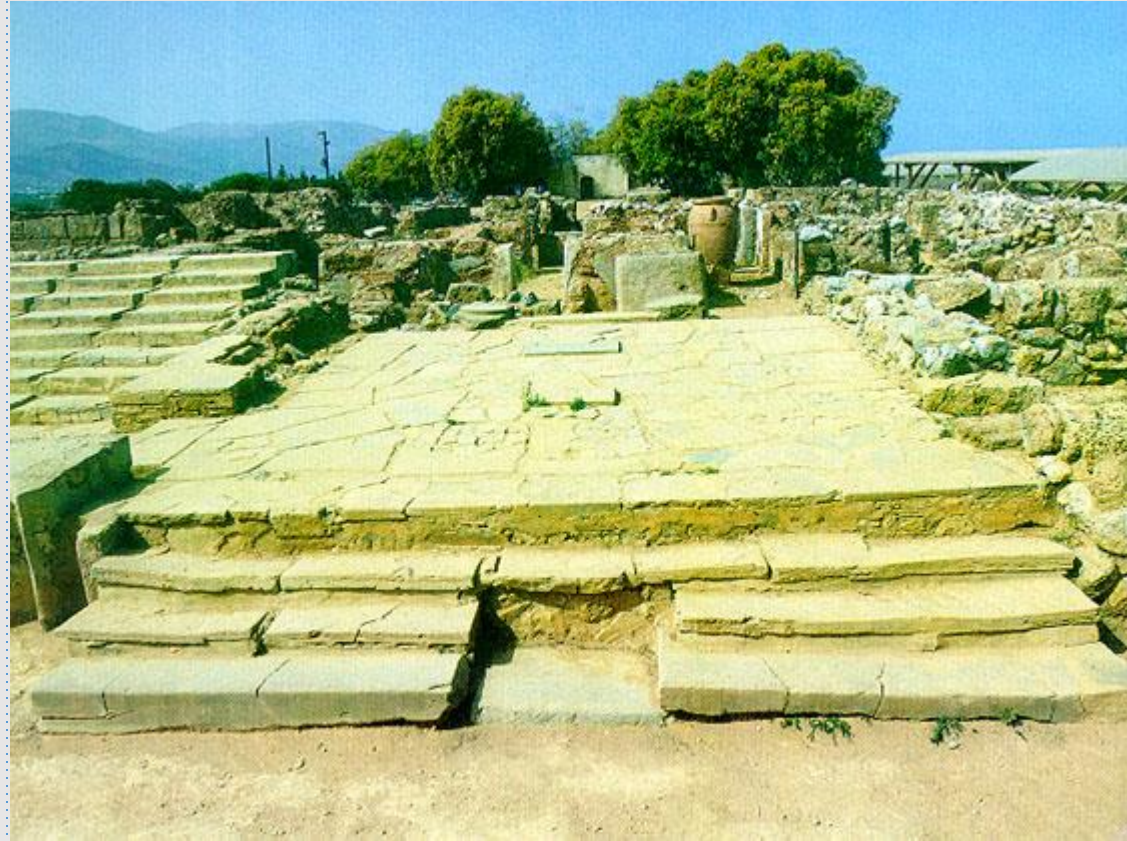
# Minoan Palace of Malia

- The Minoan Palace and the archaeological site of Malia are located 3 km East of the town of Malia. From the architectural point of view the Palace of Malia, is the third- largest of the Minoan Palaces and is considered the most "provincial" of them. It covered an area of 7,500 sq.m. and according to tradition the third son of Zeus and Europa, Sarpedon, brother of the legendary king Minos, ruled here.
- The site was inhabited in the Neolithic and early Minoan period (6000- 2000 BC), but very little trace remain. The first Palace was built in 1900 BC and destroyed in 1700 BC when a new Palace was built. Following the fate of the other palaces in Crete it was also destroyed in 1450 BC. and the present ruins are mainly those of the new palace.

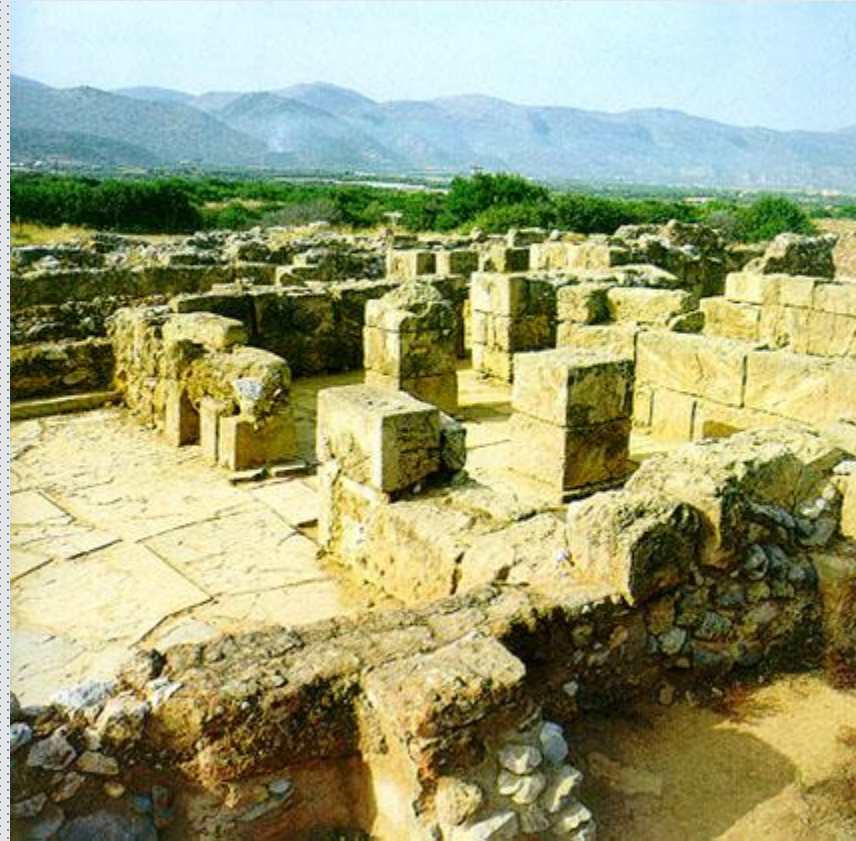
# View of the central courtyard of the palace of Malia



View of the majestic Loggia, a room elevated and open to the courtyard, on the west wing of the palace of Malia



View of the "crypt of the pillars" in the west wing of the palace of Malia



Large area that may have served as a theatrical space in the southwest of the central courtyard of the palace of Malia



# The most important monuments of the site are:

- At the south west part of the central court is located a round table, with little cavities around the edge and a bigger at the centre, standing on a base. This table is believed to be a kind of kernos of the classic Greece. In the cavities the Minoans put the seeds, offering to the god, so they wished to have a fruitful crop.
- This explanation seems more probable as this custom still exists in Crete.



# The Golden bee pendant

- The famous gold jewel with the bees. Consists of two bees holding a piece of honeycomb between their heads, a filigree `cage` containing a gold bead balanced on their heads and little disks hanging down from their wing and sting. An exquisite example of Minoan goldwork, it combines hammering, filigree and granulation.

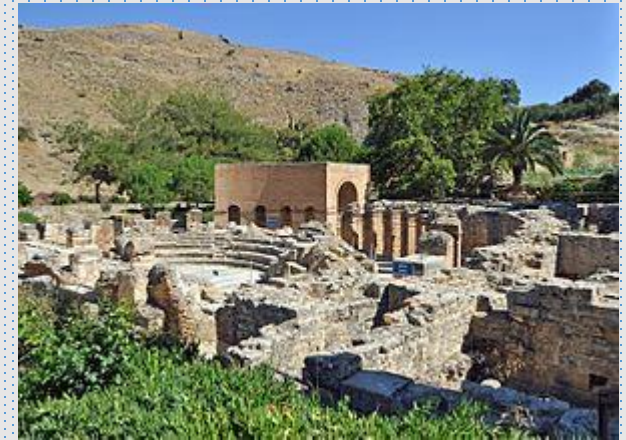


# Roman city of Gortyna

Excavations of Gortyn were begun in 1884 by the Italian School of Archaeology at Athens. The excavations showed that Gortyn was inhabited from the Neolithic age.

Ruins of a settlement on the citadel of Gortyn, were discovered and dated back to 1050 BC, their collapse dating to the seventh century BC.

Classical Greek mythology has it that Gortyn was the site of one of Zeus' many affairs. This myth features the princess Europa, whose name has been applied to the continent, Europe. Disguised as a bull, Zeus abducted Europa from Lebanon and they had an affair under a plane tree. Following this affair three children were born, including Minos and they became the kings of the three Minoan Palaces in Crete.



# The island of Spinalonga



During the early 19th century, there was a world of misconception surrounding Leprosy. At first, it was believed to be hereditary. However, it was soon proved to be infectious, and patients were immediately sent to isolation. In Greece, the isolation centre was the island of Spinalonga.



# Spinalonga....

- the arid, rocky islet once served as a military stronghold during Venetian (and later Ottoman) rule; a medieval citadel stands testament to that chapter in the island's history.
- In 1904, after the Cretans evicted the Turks from Spinalonga, the islet was transformed into a leper colony, where, by 1913, after Crete became part of Greece, anyone afflicted with the disease was sent. At its peak, the colony comprised nearly 400 inhabitants.

# The History of Spinalonga

- Once diagnosed, these victims had their property and financial assets seized, their citizenship rights revoked and their identity wiped clean. They were then deported to Spinalonga, where they never received treatment for their disease.
- The sole doctor assigned to the island only made the trip from Plaka if someone was struck by another illness. What's more, even though treatment for leprosy was found as early as the 1940s, the Greek state kept the colony operational until 1957.
- Only after a British expert visited the island and compiled a damning report denouncing the island doctor and the state for failing to provide proper medical treatment and housing did the government officially close Spinalonga.

What became of this island?

For decades after the 1957 closure of the leper colony, little was known about the island. The government, anxious to erase any trace of the colony's existence, burned all its files. And the surviving lepers refused to speak of their experiences. For years it was as if Spinalonga had never existed.



But in 2005....

Victoria Hislop's 2005 novel (the Island) changed all that. Suddenly, people were talking; everyone was an expert.

The government, thrilled at the author's rose-tinted portrayal of the colony, let them talk, and a romanticised, erroneous story of life in the leper colony was born.

- A small cemetery houses the remains of leprosy victims



Today, Spinalonga, the once “grave of the living”, is the second most visited archaeological site of Crete after Knossos, with people from all over the world arriving in Crete only to explore its grounds.



# One of the avenues in Spinalonga



“It has the sublime beauty of ruins in a place of natural magnificence, with the added shiver of a feeling of whispering ghosts among the palm fronds” – advertised as this

