

Agios Nikolaos, the heartbeat of Crete

The Place...

Agios Nikolaos, with 9.500 inhabitants, is the capital of the Lassithi province of Crete. It is built around a picturesque lake at the north-western side of the Mirabello bay, the biggest bay in Crete. The beauty here is endless with the seasons succeeding one another. The climate is unique: Dry, without humidity. The area is inhabited since antiquity.



Agios Nikolaos Today...

Major administrative, cultural and communications center, Agios Nikolaos is one of the most developed tourist areas, not only in Crete but in Greece in general. Having a valuable 30 year experience of organized tourism, its infrastructure matches that of any other European resort, for ideal and interesting vacation together with the traditional Cretan hospitality and the excellent climate. Thanks to the beautiful coasts, the great sights and the cosmopolitan life, this lively city hosts every year thousands of visitors without losing one bit of its tranquillity and traditional hospitality. The modern city of Agios Nikolaos became internationally known during the 60's, "discovered" by famous cinema directors (Jules Dassin, Walt Disney etc.), BBC producers and many others. It was then, that the rapid tourist development of the area started. Today, Agios Nikolaos is an international, cosmopolitan tourist resort, able to accommodate, effectively and efficiently, thousands of visitors each year.



A walk around the shopping area of Agios Nikolaos is always a pleasure. You can find everything! There are many tourist shops, full of excellent articles of traditional Cretan art, Minoan copies and copies from the

Popular Art museum, etc. One can also visit fine art galleries and woven handicrafts, jewellery shops, international bookstores, kiosks with Greek and foreign press, cafeterias as well as traditional coffee shops, taverns and restaurants with an inexhaustible assortment of snacks and specialities of Greek and Cretan cooking, accompanied with all sorts of wines or the local strong "raki". At night, there are countless chances for fun at the numerous nightclubs and discos, or at selected clubs with traditional Cretan dances, songs and mandinades or the latest hits of the Greek and international charts.

Agios Nikolaos is the ideal place for rest and fun, all year round and for all ages, combining the traditional hospitality with the authenticity of the genuine Cretan way of life. The visitor will feel secure and, if necessary, will enjoy a full range of medical assistance. At the Municipal play grounds, located at various points of the city, the children can enjoy themselves playing for hours. The Municipality has also a Polycenter, at the renovated traditional REX building with a movie theater and with a fully equipped Convention Center, suitable for 300 people.



Agios Nikolaos, history

The city of Agios Nikolaos is built on the location of the ancient "Lato pros Kamara - port of Lato Etera". Both towns formed one administrative unit, which flourished during the 3rd century. Both worshipped goddess Elithyeia (goddess of childbirth) and they had the same coins - with Elithyeia or Artemis (Diana) on one side and Hermes Lation on the other - as well as their own economy. The Latians, contrary to other towns, which were almost constantly in war with other cities, were in good terms with their adjoining cities of Elounda, Driros, Milatos and Minoa. There is not enough reference about the Byzantine period. During the Venetian occupation (1204-1669) Genoan pirates built a castle on top of the Kefali hill (prefecture hill), which was renamed by the Venetians to Mirabello and gave its name to the whole region. The castle has been destroyed by the earthquakes and burnt during the pirate raids. The city of Agios Nikolaos has been thrust aside during the years of the Turkish occupation and was reinhabited in the 1860's by fugitives from Sfakia, from Kritsa

and other Cretans. In 1881 it was a small picturesque village of few people and in 1900 had 500 inhabitants. However, in 1905, it became the capital of the province.



Agios Nikolaos was named after the small Byzantine church of Saint Nicholas, which is located next to the "Minos Palace" hotel. The church is carefully preserved.

The Archaeological Museum. The museum is situated on K.Paleologou St., almost 400m away from the bridge and houses real treasures of the Minoan and the other periods of the

history of eastern Crete.

The Popular Art Museum. Located next to the bridge at the beginning of K. Paleologou St., houses marvellous objects of the popular artcraft of the area.

Agios Nikolaos, interesting sites

The Lake... The Lake is obviously the most beautiful ornament of the city of Agios Nikolaos! It is linked to the sea by a narrow canal, which greatly adds to the beauty of the lake, while its natural surroundings (red rocks within green plants) turn it into a site of great satisfaction to the foreign visitors, as they can enjoy the view, while sitting comfortably at any of the coffee shops, next to the multicoloured fishing boats. According to the legend, Athena and Artemis Vritomartis were washing their hair at the deep blue waters of the lake. The natives, not able to see the bottom, called the lake bottomless or "sunk", meaning that it has been created by a landslide, until the Christian commissioner Costas Adossidis Passas connected the lake to the sea in 1867 and its stagnant waters became clear. The English naval traveller Spratt, who was mapping the island, found its depth being 210 feet (64 meters) and said that this might be the opening of an underground river.



The Port... The small, especially well-attended port of Agios Nikolaos has its own charm, as picturesque tile-roofed houses surround it and it is illuminated in

the evenings by the lights of the shops and those of the kaikis and the boats moored at the big dock. This is the starting point of the kaikis doing day-trips to Elounda, Spinalonga and the picturesque Mirabello bay. There is a scheduled ferry-boat from Piraeus to Agios Nikolaos 5 times a week while the ferry - boat to Sitia, Karpathos and Rhodes, stops at Agios Nikolaos twice a week.

The Bay...

At the extension of the coast road within a naturally "gifted" landscape, a calm ancient anchorage still exists.

The Marina...

At the heart of the city, one of the best marinas in the Aegean Sea has been inaugurated in 1994.

The Big and the Small Island...

Two lovely islands, at the entrance of the port, complement the beautiful landscape. The little one plays host to the city lighthouse, while the big island's main attractions are the Anion Pandon (all Saints) chapel and the famous kri-kri wild goats, a protected species, for which the island serves as refuge.



The Small Church of Saint Nicolas...

The city of Agios Nikolaos was named after the charming Byzantine chapel, built on the spot called "Nissi" during the 7th century A.D. The chapel has interesting old frescoes and rewards the visitor with a breathtaking view of the city bay.

Agios Nikolaos, beaches

The Municipal Tourist Company has its own organized beaches (Municipal beach, Almyros beach, Havania), where the swimmers can comfortably enjoy their swimming. The exemplary beaches of Agios Nikolaos are always among the candidates for the prize of purity and cleanliness by the respective European Committee, earning more and more "BLUE FLAGS" each year!

Ammos beach..." Next to the coach station, practically within the city center, this marvellous beach, offers easy swimming near the city and various water sports.



Municipal beach..." Within Ammos beach, surrounded by plants, right after the National swimming pool, one can find the well organized Municipal beach, offering a children's swimming pool, play grounds, snack bars, mini golf e.t.c.



Gargadoros beach..." Right after Ammos beach, in a rather isolated, secret place, Gargadoros beach lies next to splendid hotels and offers quiet swimming.

Kitroplatia beach..." This is another beach for swimming and sports, right in the heart of the city. Surrounded by tavernas, restaurants, hotels, banks e.t.c., it is a lively and busy place offering a great many opportunities for interesting walks. This place was named after the citrons (kitra), which, many years ago, were gathered at this very spot and were packed, in order to be exported.

Akti Themistokleous beach..." A small, clean beach next to the port overlooking the island of Agion Pandon. **Ammoudi beach...**" A small, enjoyable sandy beach, ideal for quiet, unforgettable swimming and water sports (surfing, water-skiing, diving, e.t.c.).

Havania - Municipal beach..." Along the coast road to Elounda, one can find the organized Havania Municipal beach. A marvellous sandy beach that is ideal for swimming, sunbathing and sports.



Almyros - Municipal beach..." Taking the pedestrian way by the sea, at the southern side of the city, the

organized Almyros Municipal beach is a marvellous beach with shallow waters, making it ideal for swimming, sunbathing and sea sports. This beach can also be reached by car. It is about 1.000 meters after the Kritsa junction towards Sitia. The scenery is superb because of the thick sprouting of reeds which grow in bardish spring water, the rushes and the high trees. It is also one of the most important natural reserves with aquatic birds.

Sports...

Agios Nikolaos is the ideal place for all sorts of water sports . For the athletes, the sports fans and those who want to combine vacations and sports, there are several organized gyms, the national stadium, the national swimming pool, basketball and volleyball grounds, various tennis courts and a well equipped riding center.

Agios Nikolaos, Museums

Archaeological Museum.

The Archaeological Museum of Agios Nikolaos was founded in 1970 in order to house the numerous new archaeological finds from eastern Crete, which until then, were housed in the Museum of Heraklion. Its collections include:



Findings from the Early Minoan (3000-2000 B.C.) cemetery at Gaia Photia of Sita. Findings from the Early Minoan II settlement at Fournou Koryfi of Myrtos. Findings from the Early Minoan II-III (2600-2200 B.C.) cemetery on the islet of Mochlos. Findings from Middle Minoan (2000-1550 B.C.) peak sanctuaries: Petsophas, Modi, Traostalos, Kalamaki, Prinias, Etiani, Kephala Finds from the Late Minoan III (1400-1200 B.C.) tombs of Milatos and Kritsa. Findings from the Geometric deposit at Anavlochos Vrachasiou. Findings from the Daidalic deposit at Seteia (beginning of 7th century B.C.) Findings from the Archaic deposit at Olous (end of 7th-6th centuries B.C.) Findings from Lato pros Kamara (modern Agios Nikolaos) dated to Greek and Roman times .

Telephone : ++30-28410-24 943

Folklore Museum of Agios Nikolaos

The Folk Art Museum of Agios Nikolaos, in collaboration with the "Cultural Society of Eastern Crete", founded in 1978.

The Touring Club of Agios Nikolaos generously offered all the original and important material. Since then more objects have been added to the collection. A visit to the Folk Art Museum will



help you to become familiar with the sort of work and activities the people of this area had in the old days. The Museum houses a rich and beautiful collection of hundreds of genuine samples of Cretan popular art and mainly hand woven and embroidered pieces, some of which are unique.

There are some, interesting Byzantine icons to be seen, a complete series



of wooden carved small objects, Cretan costumes, household articles, handicrafts and some old manuscripts and books. The Museum houses also two private collections kindly offered by two well known people of this area (an example for others to follow) a)

General Ioannis Alexakis' Military Arms, b) Mrs Hrysoula Xanthoudides- Koundourou's special embroidered double faced pieces. The Museum is open daily except Saturday from 09.30 to 13.30 and 17.00 to 21.00 Location: Oposite the bridge, next to the Tourist Information Office **Tel.: ++30-28410-25093**

Agios Nikolaos, general information

The Municipal Tourist Information Office is always here to help you through any particular information or booking request, offering maps, brochures, excursion leaflets and currency exchange (at bank rates) open from 8.30 am to 9.30 pm by the lake.

Fun for all the family...

Come along and play a round of Mini Golf. If you don't fancy any kind of exercise you can just lay back and relax at the Snack Bar watching people playing around!



Transportation...

Agios Nikolaos is served by the airport of Heraklion, which is less than an hour away, by car. The very good road network allows easy access to other towns and villages of the area as well as the rest of Crete. Agios Nikolaos has direct link by boat with Piraeus, Sitia, Milos, Santorini, Karpathos, Kassos, Kos, Rhodes, etc. Scheduled bus service to Heraklion -Ierapetra - Sitia - and many villages, is frequent and efficient. There are also many agencies for car or motorcycle rentals.

Traveling in Nature

The area of Kato Mirabello with the town of Agios Nikolaos and the largest hotel premises of the Lassithi plateau lays on a strategic point of the road network of Crete and is the ideal departure point for daily excursions all over the island by bus, car, or motorcycle. The best way of exploring the



area though, is by foot or biking through the most magnificent landscapes, those who are hidden far from the busy roads! The 17 tracks, proposed in this leaflet, are carefully designed so that you can easily reach all the unknown paradises of our area, enjoy the view from the best observing points, discover old chapels, interesting archaeological sites and small picturesque villages hidden all over the area of Kato Mirabello!

So, walk! Or rent a mountain bike. You need nothing more than a pair of suitable shoes, a hat and dark glasses for the strong sun, a camera and a flask with water to keep you fresh on the way between mountains and villages.



The climate, renowned as the most healthy of Europe, is always mild and dry, with rarely changing weather conditions all over the year. Rich vegetation exists even during the long hot summer (due to the olive groves). Spring explodes its flowered almond trees among the green, spreading a soft intoxicating fragrance over thick carpets of yellow "oxalides" (a special kind of clover), red poppies white daisies and millions of wild flowers, trimming stone remainings of past, covering fields and mountain sides over the lacing seashore with the blue transparent waters...

We have pointed all the tracks, so that you can start from major town centres and pass regularly through main road stopovers where you can find drinking water, telephone, taxi, regular bus service, First Aid facilities and food. In this leaflet, apart all our detailed maps, you can also find useful telephone numbers for any emergency or further information, interesting tips of naturalistic and archaeological interests. The most important thing is that we have put new signs all over the way of each track! They are easily spotted, with black letters on yellow, signing the same number of track referred in this leaflet, the next suggested stop, number of hours (walking distance) or number of kilometres (mountain biking distance) up to the next suggested stop. Whenever you find a fence on your way, simply open the nearest door and please close it again behind you.

WATCHING THE BIRDS AND THE ANIMALS...

Walking through the paths, you will meet many rabbits and squirrels. In the forests, you will enjoy the company of sparrows, partridges, goldfinches, shallows, blackbirds, mockingbirds and tree-frogs, you may even meet a fox! In Almyros and by some of the small seaside lakes, you can find turtles, herons, water-hens, eels and rarely found aquatic birds. Over the highest altitudes, with a bit of luck, you may watch a unique kind of wild eagle!



OBSERVING THE NATURE... One can easily spot many of the 6000 kinds of different flowers and plants flourishing all over Crete, but you can also discover another 170 species, growing only here and are unique

in the world! Also rare plants and flowers, as well as a unique kind of cypress named "minoa" (*Juniperus phoenicias*), within the cypress grove of gorge in "Katharo" upland). In the beginning of Autumn, over the seashore, you can also see the famous "lily of sea" (pictured in almost all Minoan and Theraean frescoes). And of course you can see apple trees, pear trees, almond trees and all the luscious vegetables and fruits planted according to the traditional way, all over the area of Kato Mirabello!

MAPS

Greece and Crete



Crete Details



Map of the Agios Nikolaos Area

