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24 JULY 2016 ISSUE 29

Mamma Mia, I want to go again!

Greece is the word when it comes to idyllic holiday destinations...

BEST TRAVEL WRITER KELLY ALLEN



best for ESCAPES

ABBA great time soaking up the culture of Crete!

GETTING THERE

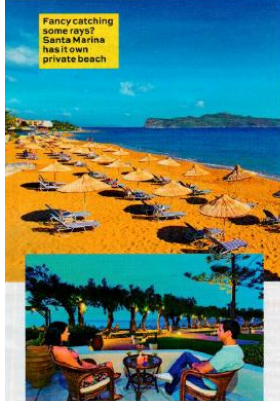
There are plenty of flight options to get to Chania: BA from Heathrow (ba.com), easyJet (easyjet.com) and Norwegian (norwegian.com) from Gatwick, and Ryanair (ryanair.com) from Bristol, East Midlands, Glasgow, Leeds Bradford, Manchester and Stansted. Prices start from £31.99 one-way.

STAYING THERE

The four-star Santa Marina Beach Hotel is located in Aghia Marina village, just 8km from Chania. There are two pools, a private beach, a beach bar and an outside spa. Rooms from £70 per night for a double room on a bed-and-breakfast basis. Visit santamarina.beach.gr for more information.

FOOD AND DRINK

Santa Marina Beach Hotel offers an all-inclusive stay with two buffet restaurants, but it's worth visiting the exclusive Azzurro à la carte restaurant. Tucked away on a private terrace looking out to sea, it's the perfect place to watch the pink sunset while tucking into some Grecian delicacies. The Santa Marina Beach Resort helps visitors immerse themselves in Cretan culture with cooking lessons, as well as wine and olive oil tasting.



Fancy catching some rays? Santa Marina has its own private beach

TRAVEL SNAPSHOT

With *Mamma Mia! Here We Go Again* set to hit the cinemas this week, who isn't dreaming of escaping to a beautiful Greek island? Whether you're looking for sandy beaches, a clear blue ocean or mouth-wateringly Greek cuisine, Greece has something for everyone. There are numerous islands that are worth visiting, including Santorini and Mykonos, but the largest island, Crete, is by far the most popular choice.

INSIDER'S GUIDE

Chania (pronounced Hania) is the second-largest city in Crete, and famous for its Venetian harbour, waterfront restaurants and narrow shopping streets. Or book a boat trip around the magical island of Thodorou. Greek mythology says the island was created when a huge monster threatened a town, and the gods turned it into stone. From the beach, you can see the 'open mouth' of the monster. It has also been used as a military base to protect Crete from invasion by the Turks. If you fancy a snorkel, you can spot a wide range of wildlife, as well as a WWII German plane on the ocean floor directly in front of the island.

Chania offers fine food and fab shopping



BEFORE YOU GO

Read up on your Greek mythology. The legendary Minotaur – a half man/half bull creature was said to have dwelt in a labyrinth beneath Knossos Palace, near Crete's capital, Heraklion.

DON'T MISS...

...the famous Samaria Gorge. The 17km gorge offers jaw-dropping views, and the Santa Marina Hotel offers 'Sports Tours Hellas', which provide a range of bike and hiking tours to it.

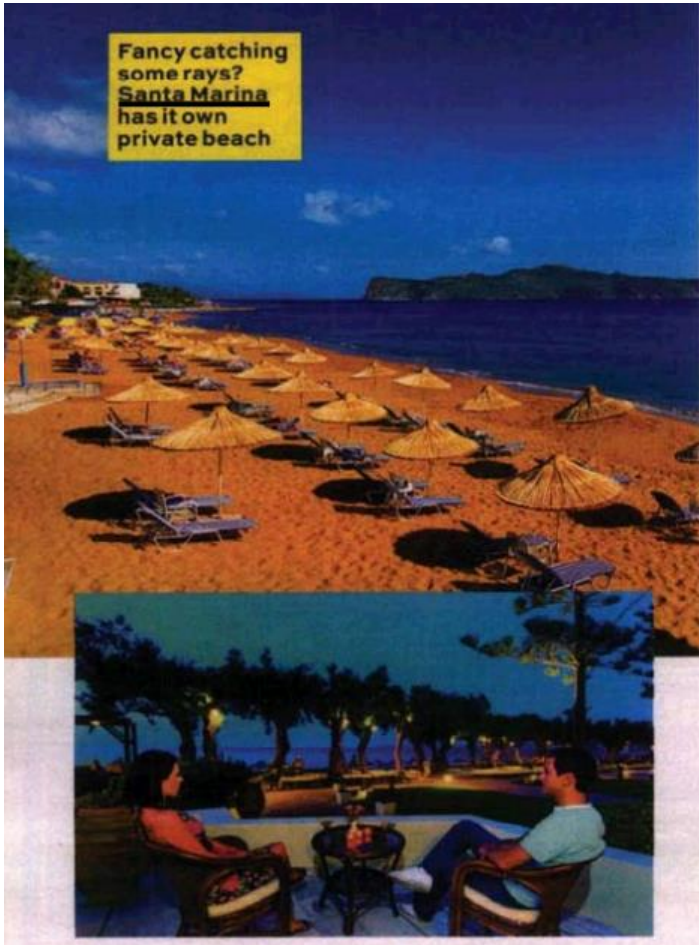
OUT AND ABOUT

Venture out of the hotel to visit the old harbour, where there are plenty of restaurants and bars, including Hammam – the cafe at 43 Zampeliou. Try their spanakopitas – spinach-filled pastries. Or, if you're more peckish, venture to Tamam, at the site of the old Ottoman baths, which serves traditional Cretan cuisine. For drinks and dancing, visit Plataniak. The resort is cosmopolitan, and has a thriving club scene. Dine at Symposium or Cosmos, before a spot of bar-hopping. Try the Eklipse, Utopia and Splendid for some cocktails and dance music.

Thodorou is steeped in history and mythology

MAMMA MIA! IS BACK

We had a dream... and it came true! The cast of hit ABBA musical *Mamma Mia!* will take us back to Greece for a second outing. Lily James and Cher join Meryl Streep and Pierce Brosnan in the film of the summer.



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PICTURES: GETTY, JONATHAN PRIME

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