

Poolside paradise

Kelly Ranson enjoys authentic Cretan life and laidback luxury at the newly opened Asterion Suites & Spa

Our goal is to make you feel better than when you arrived."

A bold statement, some might say, but this is the motto of the new Asterion Suites & Spa in Crete. And within minutes of entering my room, with its calming minimalist decor, opening the patio doors and plunging into my refreshing swim-up pool, I'm already feeling the stress of the day's travels melt away.

Part of the Louis Hotels brand, the five-star boutique hotel, which is

named after the first king of Crete, is set on a quiet spot on Pyrgos Psilonerou beach on the island's northwest coast. It's just a 30-minute transfer from Chania airport, which has plenty of airlift from the UK including flights with easyJet, Tui and British Airways.

WELLBEING FOCUS

Kostas Plaskasovitis, general manager of operations for Louis Hotels Greece, explains that Asterion Suites & Spa, which ➤

DESTINATIONS

GREECE & CYPRUS | CRETE



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Asterion Suites & Spa; Chania's Old Venetian Port; Chania; Karavitakis winery **PREVIOUS PAGE:** Asterion Suites & Spa

is the company's sole property in Crete, is focused on relaxation.

He says: "The concept of the hotel is all about privacy, comfort and wellbeing. It's our ambition to achieve this for our guests, especially after the last few years we have all had. We want to show this through our design, interaction with staff and the services we offer." And the concept works.

The interiors of the hotel and its 67 rooms are light, with natural, muted tones, which are in keeping with the outside environment. The rooms range from 322sq ft to 560sq ft and include superior rooms with sea or garden views, one-bedroom swim-up suites, two-bedroom suites (great for families), one-bedroom suites with private pools and finally a dreamy suite with its own private panoramic rooftop pool.

There's a sense of calm at Asterion, and while there's

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background music playing around the main pool throughout the day, the evening entertainment is no more than light chatter at the bar over after-dinner drinks and the sounds of the sea. Families are welcome, and there's a children's pool, but no kids' club or organised entertainment.

Guests can further relax at the Orion Spa, which has a treatment list packed with Greek-inspired offerings that combine local ➤

EXCURSION: CRETAN COOKING CLASS

As our wonderful host Despina Nikolakakis carefully puts our lovingly prepared dish Cretan dish into the clay oven, she proudly tells us that no electricity is used at the family restaurant, Frosinis Garden – it's wood stoves and iron cauldrons all the way. Located close to the village of Neriana, which is just a 15-minute drive from Asterion, the farmhouse of Frosinis Garden sits in its own oasis. Not only can you wander around the aromatic herb gardens to select freshly picked ingredients for your dish, you can also sit below the orange trees with the family's dogs and enjoy the Cretan countryside. The dish of the day was Boureki, a Cretan gratin-style dish made with courgette, potato and, yes, a whole lot of goat's cheese. After slicing vegetables



Despina Nikolakakis

like professionals and adding our handpicked herbs, we chatted away about Greek cooking and life on the farm before it was time to get our creation into the oven ready to be served later that evening.

The tour, which also includes a short visit to a local winery, costs from €50 per person.

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ABOVE: Local, organic ingredients and wine sourced largely from the Greek islands feature on the restaurants' menus

PICTURE: Shutterstock/Yulia Grigoryeva

products. Options include a Cretan herbal experience where dictamnus and sage are used to cleanse and detoxify the skin, and the hydra face, which uses avocado from Chania and Cretan olive oil as part of the facial. The spa also features a seaside gazebo for bespoke treatments by the beach and there's a small gym and yoga studio at the property.

EPICUREAN DELIGHTS

Food is taken seriously at Asterion. Its two restaurants, Matter, the main venue, and 35°, the à la carte offering, are adjacent to each other

and foodies will delight at the menus, which are created using organic ingredients from local producers.

Guests can opt for B&B or half-board to enjoy traditional Greek dishes with a modern twist such as Dakos salad, smoked aubergine, souvlaki and grilled octopus. The wine list is largely filled with wines from Cretan and other Greek vineyards.

While you could easily spend days lazing on the hotel's daybeds or bean bags by the pool or beach, the staff at Asterion encourage guests to get out and explore with

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their 'crafted experiences'. With an emphasis on connecting with locals, the excursions include a visit to a village winery near Chania, learning traditional Cretan dancing and taking a scenic trek through a nearby botanical park.

The hotel is also a 10-minute drive from the town of Platanias,

which is packed full of restaurants, bars and shops. In its upper part (note: it's a steep walk, but worth it) there are a handful of tavernas with enviable views out to the Aegean Sea and Agioi Theodoroi island, as well as a World War II Museum and memorial. Farther afield, around 30 minutes' drive, is the historic town of Chania with its old town and gorgeous Venetian-influenced harbour.

Asterion Suites & Spa is a hidden gem on Crete's north coast, so whether your clients are couples or families, if they're looking for laidback luxury with a local flavour, it's a winner. Add to this the welcoming Cretan hospitality and charm, and the hotel will definitely achieve its goal of making you feel better than when you arrived. **TW**



LEFT: Real Cretan Cooking Experience offered by the hotel

BOOK IT

Jet2holidays offers a seven-night stay at Asterion Suites & Spa from £848 per person in a superior room on a B&B basis, including transfers and return flights from Stansted to Chania. The price is based on a September 30 departure. jet2holidays.com

fast fact

As part of Louis Hotels' Active Incentive Programme, agents who book five nights or more at participating Louis Hotels in Greece and Cyprus before October will receive a free night's stay for two at a Louis Hotels property of their choice in Cyprus.

louishotelspro.com/active-incentive-programs