15 of the best family hotels in Crete

Whether you're after a five-star resort with all the frills or a friendly base from which to explore Greece's largest island, we've got you covered

Creta Maris Resort, Hersonissos

Dana Facaros | Thursday August 08 2024, 1.54pm BST, The Times

Crete was made for family holidays. Its long sandy beaches are equipped with every kind of hotel, from cheerful affordable options to luxurious all-inclusive resorts with on-site waterparks, gourmet restaurants, sports facilities, kids' clubs, outdoor cinemas and all you need for your baby or tot. But Crete — Greece's largest and most populous island — is also one of the few that stays open all year. There is lots to do and see beyond the beaches, with its lively cities, remarkable archaeological sites and museums, mountains, gorges, caves, traditional villages, castles and trails into the heart of nature. It's also Greece's southernmost island, so there's always a good chance of catching some sun even in winter. Here is our pick of the best family hotels in Crete.

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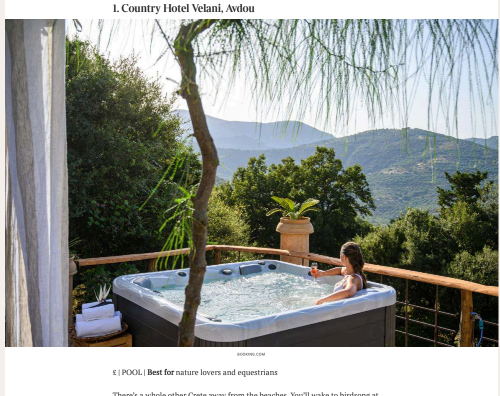

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£ | POOL | **Best for** nature lovers and equestrians

There's a whole other Crete away from the beaches. You'll wake to birdsong at this secluded, family-friendly estate, located 24 miles southeast of Heraklion and 1,100ft above the coast in the foothills of the Dikti Mountains, where the air is fresh and clear. Set amid evergreen oaks and olives, the dozen rustic chic rooms and suites have splendid views; there's an infinity pool, children's pool, superb restaurant specialising in slow-cooked food and an equestrian centre with English-speaking instructors for beginner riders, while those at home in the saddle can explore the gorgeous countryside. Don't miss the nearby Dikteon cave — said to be the birthplace of Zeus.

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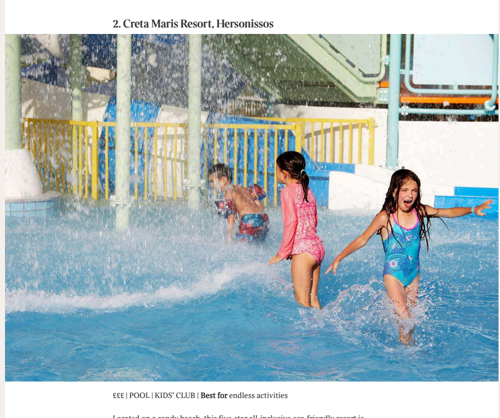
2. Creta Maris Resort, Hersonissos



£££ | POOL | KIDS' CLUB | **Best for** endless activities

Located on a sandy beach, this five-star all-inclusive eco-friendly resort is undeniably big, but it is the attention to detail and superb service that make it feel more like staying in a Cretan village. There's never a dull moment, with tennis, kid's clubs, water sports, cooking classes, mini golf and a five-a-side football pitch. Along with seven restaurants, the Creta Maris has three snack bars serving ice cream, gyros, smoothies and juices to keep everyone fuelled throughout the day, plus nightly entertainment and family films in the huge outdoor cinema.

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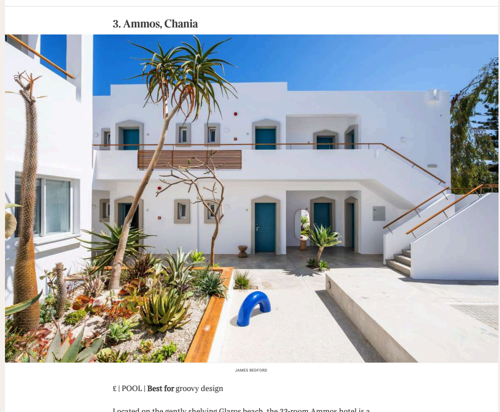
3. Ammos, Chania



JAMES BEDFORD

£ | POOL | **Best for** groovy design

Located on the gently shelving Glaros beach, the 33-room Ammos hotel is a jewel hidden amid the sprawl west of Chania. Relaxed, laid-back, convivial and unpretentious, it dates from the early days of tourism, but since the late 1980s has undergone a total transformation by the owner Nikos Tsepetis, who has created a brightly coloured haven of avant-garde design. Families with young children love its friendly and homely atmosphere, playroom with lots of toys, money-saving kitchenettes and excellent Cretan cooking, including a kids' menu in the restaurant; the new sunset bar on the roof is a bonus for grown-ups.

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4. Kapsaliana Village Hotel, Arkadi

££ | POOL | **Best for** country living

Kapsaliana is a Venetian-era hamlet set in Crete's largest olive grove in the gorgeous hills above Rethymnon. It was close to being abandoned in the 1970s, but the architect Myron Toupoyannis fell in love with its old stones and began restoring it, adding 21st-century mod cons and a beautiful pool. Now a delightful rustic-chic hotel surrounded by gardens (including the vegetable patch that supplies the hotel's excellent restaurant), it's a chance for families to discover traditional life in Crete. Activities — including natural soap making — change with the seasons.

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5. Daios Cove, Vathi

£££ | POOL | KIDS' CLUB | **Best for** getting away from it all

Chiselled out of an isolated cove south of Agios Nikolaos, this chic but laid-back hotel has a spectacular infinity pool at its heart, and all the five-star goodies: a private beach, fabulous food and cocktails, a spa and sports and a games room with pool table, table tennis and video games, along with the chance to practise your punches at the BXR indoor-outdoor gym. The rooms, suites and villas all have sea views, and most have saltwater plunge pools. Children under 12 stay free, and Worldwide Kids run the crèche (four months to four years) and the childrens' club (four to twelve-year-olds). But what really keeps people coming back year after year is the exceptional staff.

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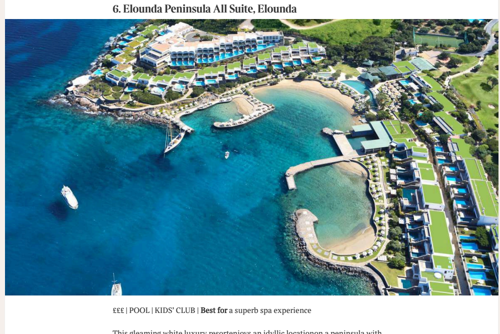
6. Elounda Peninsula All Suite, Elounda



£££ | POOL | KIDS' CLUB | **Best for** a superb spa experience

This gleaming white luxury resortenjoys an idyllic locationon a peninsula with mesmerising views of Mirabello Bay. The family suites have sea views and private seawater pools, and there's the largest Six Senses spa in Europe But that's only the beginning: there's also a nine-hole par-three golf course, several restaurants (including Tuscan bistro Il Borro), a private sandy beach and water sports galore. For the younger travellers there's a Valencia football camp and a crèche and club run by Worldwide Kids, as well as a children's wellness programme and an adventure programme for teens.

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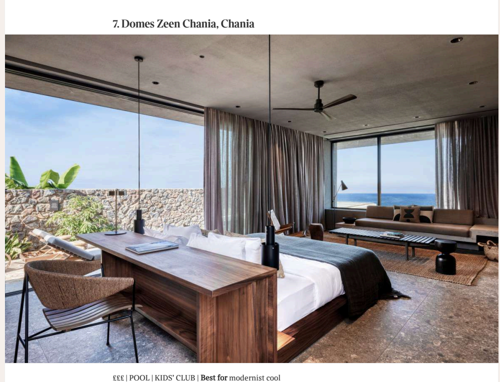
7. Domes Zeen Chania, Chania



£££ | POOL | KIDS' CLUB | **Best for** modernist cool

The name comes from the Greek "*ef zeen*", or "living well", and this family-orientated resort has set out to live up to it. Located on a pebbly cove a ten-minute drive (or 35-minute walk) east of the lovely city of Chania, the hotel has a relaxing vibe, minimalist design and an eye-catching black-tiled pool amid palm and banana trees. The family pavilions, suites and villas, sleeping up to six, come with private gardens and pools. For the grown-ups there's the Soma spa; for the offspring a children's pool and Montessori-inspired club with creative activities and the chance to sleep in a tepee.

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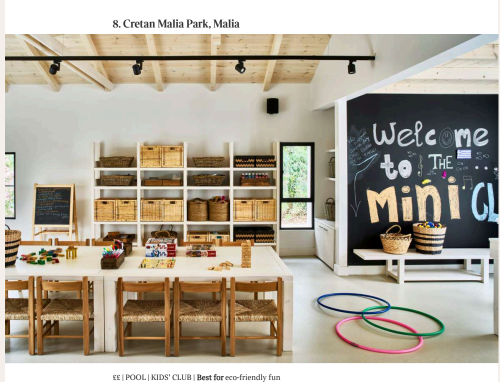
8. Cretan Malia Park, Malia



££ | POOL | KIDS' CLUB | **Best for** eco-friendly fun

Located on a blue-flag beach with turquoise water, a 20-minute walk from the ancient Minoan Palace of Malia, this resort in a lush Mediterranean garden gets 80 per cent of its energy from the sun. Parents can take a yoga or Pilates class; younger children can join the Little Explorers Kids' Club, which has environmentally focused activities; teens have their own space with hammocks and a whirlpool; and Friday is Cretan Soul evening, when families can pick their own veg at an organic farm and take Cretan cooking lessons at one of three restaurants before settling down to enjoy an outdoor film night.

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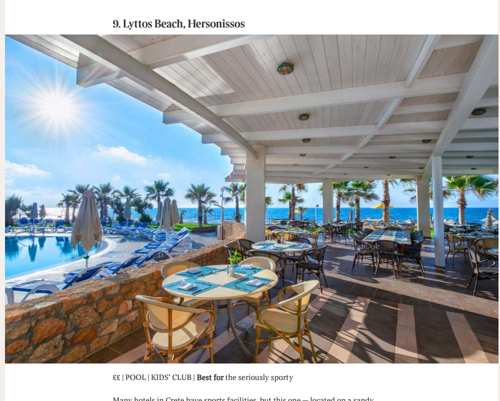
9. Lyttos Beach, Hersonissos



££ | POOL | KIDS' CLUB | **Best for** the seriously sporty

Many hotels in Crete have sports facilities, but this one — located on a sandy beach just east of Heraklion — wins gold. Does someone in your family dream of becoming the new Stefanos Tsitsipas? There are18 hard and clay tennis courts, four padel courts, a pickleball court (one of the first in Greece), ten ping-pong tables and a tennis academy for all ages, as well as basketball courts. There are also two Olympic-size pools and swim instructors, plus a river pool, a heated indoor pool and a waterpark that kids adore. Free coaching sessions are offered to any young footballers, and the restaurants and entertainment are excellent for an all-inclusive this size.

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10. Fodele Beach & Water Park Resort, Fodele

££ | POOL | KIDS' CLUB | **Best for** water sports

Built into a cliff above a golden beach, this all-inclusive with spectacular water slides, water sports and a scuba club offers the chance to stay wet all day. It has contemporary family rooms, suites and maisonettes (choose a lower one if steps are a problem) and exceptional Greek, French, seafood and Italian cuisines in the restaurants, including a self-service place open all day. Thirty minutes west of Heraklion and its airport, Fodele is also the birthplace of El Greco (you can visit his house), but you'll need a car if you want to explore further as the resort is fairly isolated.

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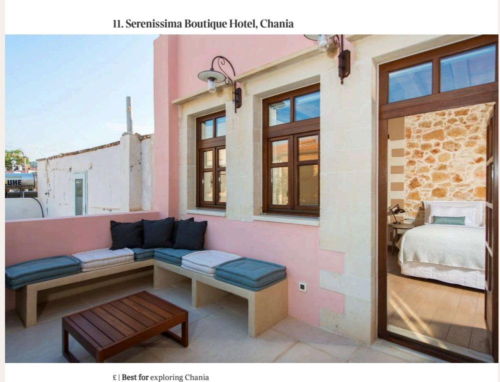
11. Serenissima Boutique Hotel, Chania



£ | **Best for** exploring Chania

Alongside a beach holiday, many families like to spend a few days in Crete's charming "Venice of the East". For full immersion in its special atmosphere, this serene little hotel in a 16th-century Venetian townhouse makes the perfect base. It offers a family suite and extra beds in other rooms and delicious home-cooked breakfasts that will keep everyone fuelled until lunch. The beach, Maritime Museum and the high-tech 9D Minoan's World cinema are within walking distance, and babysitting can be arranged for parents who want to enjoy night on the town.

Book a stay

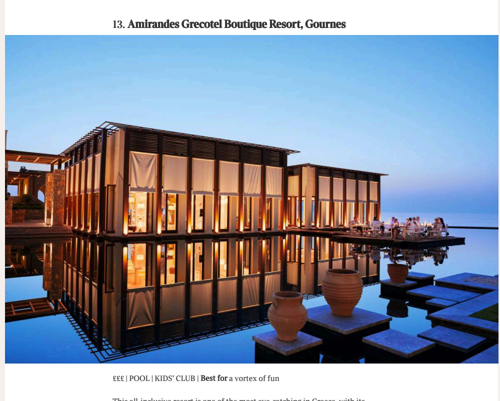
12. Petra Mare, Ierapetra

£ | POOL | KIDS' CLUB | **Best for** guaranteed sun

Down on Crete's southeast coast, away from the sometimes blustery Aegean winds, Ierapetra is the sunniest city in Europe — which makes this hotel with family suites and apartments a particularly good bet during the shoulder season (it is open from April to October). Children have their own pool with a pirate ship to play on, special buffet and evening entertainment; adults have a spa and a selection of good on-site restaurants. Unusually for an all-inclusive beach resort, Petra Mare is in town, so you can get a taste of everyday Greek life and easily make an excursion from the port in Ierapetra to the fascinating desert island of Chrysi.

Book a stay

13. **Amirandes Grecotel Boutique Resort, Gournes**



£££ | POOL | KIDS' CLUB | **Best for** a vortex of fun

This all-inclusive resort is one of the most eye-catching in Greece, with its marble, stone and wood buildings echoing a Bronze Age Minoan palace. Private pools are included with many family bungalows or villas, where under-12s stay free. Besides Amirandes' many amenities (including a column-lined Olympic seawater pool, free snack bar for kids, Greek dancing lessons, family disco and visits to a Cretan show farm), Gournes is Crete's epicentre of family fun, home to Watercity — the island's largest waterpark — as well as the CRETAquarium and Dinosauria Park.

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14. Lato Boutique Hotel, Heraklion

£ | **Best for** an out-of-season visit

Overlooking Heraklion's bijou Venetian harbour, this friendly hotel in the heart of Crete's capital is a rare choice, with family rooms sleeping up to four. It's ideal for a few days based in the city, even in winter, with Crete's extraordinary archaeology museum just a few minutes' walk away and Knossos a few minutes by city bus. The Lato hotel has been there for decades and gets better all the time; one of its restaurants enjoys lovely views over the harbour and the free parking is a bonus if you're touring.

Book a stay

15. Grecotel Marine Palace & Aqua Park, Panormo

££ | POOL | KIDS' CLUB | **Best for** water babies

If the kids were to design a hotel they would include a waterpark — which is exactly what you get in this all-inclusivefamily hotel, on a sandy blue-flag beach an hour from Heraklion airport. Spacious rooms and bungalows are arranged Greek village-style, with suites and apartments sleeping up to six, ready with all the baby and tot gear you need (if you book ahead). Besides the kids' club, youngsters can learn to water ski, visit a traditional farm with a mini zoo and strut their stuff in the kiddie disco; and there are special activities for teens, plus windsurfing and other water sports, plus entertainment six evenings a week.

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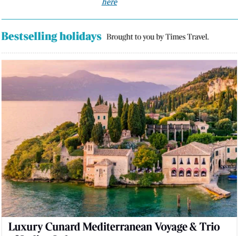

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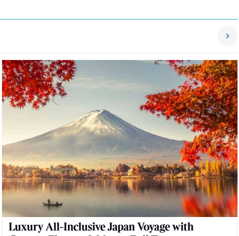

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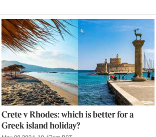

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