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CHANIA, CRETE

Crete is Greece's largest and most southerly island. It has a warm climate and fertile soil, which makes it the country's largest producer of fruits and vegetables. The city of Chania in the west is divided into the New Town, which is full of shops and offices, and Old Town, whose heart is the Venetian harbour with its narrow streets lined with tavernas, restaurants and old buildings. Two kilometres from Chania's city centre and a hop, skip and a jump from some of its beaches is Lefka Apartments. Built in 1989, Lefka originally operated under a tour company, but for the past four years it's been a family-run hotel geared toward independent travellers. It has eight studios, which can accommodate up to three people, and eight apartments, which can sleep two adults and two kids. All have a kitchenette equipped with a refrigerator, microwave, two-ring cooking hobs, toaster and coffeemaker -- there's a supermarket across the street. The rooms are simply yet tastefully decorated. There's also a large, outdoor pool. High-season rates start at \$92 for studios and \$106 for apartments. (011-30-282) 103-3855; www.lefka-apartments.gr.



Chelidonia Villas.

ATHENS

The Art Hotel is located north of Omonia Square next to Vathis Square, a short walk from the National Archaeological Museum, home to the world's greatest Greek antiquities. Housed in a neoclassical building from the 1930s, the four-star, boutique hotel opened in 2004. It has 30 guestrooms and suites, each designed and furnished individually with wood and white marble along with different wall colours and original artwork. All are equipped with the basics: a telephone, TV, Internet access, an electronic safe-deposit box for your laptop and a mini bar. The suites also have Jacuzzis. In the basement, there's a large hall that hosts art exhibits. High-season rates from April to October start at \$140 per room a night, single or double occupancy, including buffet breakfast. (011-30-210) 524-0501; www.arthotelathens.gr.

OIA, SANTORINI

While Santorini is home to 14,000 people, 500,000 tourists call this island home for a few days every year. And why not? The Cyclades' southern-most island, Santorini is said to have the best sunsets, one-of-a-kind white-, red- and black-sand beaches as well as a large caldera, the result of one of the world's biggest volcanic eruptions. The volcano's last upsurge was in 1956, which devastated the village of Oia and buried what is now Chelidonia Villas. Excavated and restored in the early 1980s, Chelidonia's nine villas, better described as cave homes, opened to the public in 1986. The caves date back to the Middle Ages and each differs in size and structure depending on who built them. All have a built-in stone bed, antique as well as handmade wooden furniture, and handmade rugs. They also have a kitchenette and a terrace so guests can enjoy the view of the bay and volcano. High-season rates from June to September start at \$190 per room, double occupancy. A minimum three-night stay is usually required. If you reserve seven nights or more, there's a 10 percent discount. Kids stay for free. (011-30-228) 607-1287; www.chelidonia.com.

-- Camille Chin

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