

Lasithi Plateau Scenic Drive

Knossos, Krasi's ancient plane tree, the windmills of Lasithi and the Cave of Zeus. A full-day self-drive guide from getcarhire.com

The Route at a Glance

Start / end	Heraklion (or a nearby north-coast resort)
Distance	About 130 km round trip
Time to allow	A full day, 8 to 9 hours with stops
Highest point	The Lasithi Plateau at 840 m
Best for	History, mountain scenery, old Crete

The Drive, Stop by Stop

1. Palace of Knossos

Just 6 km south of Heraklion, about 15 minutes on the EO99. Europe's oldest city and the Minotaur's labyrinth. Arrive before 10am to beat the coaches. Allow 1.5 to 2 hours. Large paid car park opposite.

2. Kera Kardiotissa Monastery

About 50 km southeast of Heraklion on the climb up. A peaceful nuns' monastery known as Little Lourdes. Free to enter, a good leg-stretch.

3. Krasi Village

A mountain village at 600m with one of the oldest plane trees in Europe, over 2000 years old, and a stone spring-fed fountain. Tavernas on the square for coffee or lunch.

4. The Lasithi Plateau

A flat fertile bowl at 840 m, 11 km across, ringed by the Dikti Mountains and dotted with windmills. Drive the ring road via Tzermiado, Agios Georgios and Psychro. Cool even in summer.

5. Dikteon Cave (Zeus Cave)

At Psychro on the plateau's western edge. The mythical birthplace of Zeus. An 800m steep walk up (about 20 min); donkeys available. Atmospheric floodlit descent to an underground lake.

Driving Tips

- The mountain road is paved and well engineered, with steady switchbacks. A small car is fine; no 4x4 needed.
- Use a low gear on the descent to save your brakes, and pull over only at marked viewpoints.
- Fill up with fuel in Heraklion; stations thin out on the climb.
- Bring cash for village tavernas and the cave donkeys, and a light layer for the cool plateau.
- Wear proper shoes for Knossos and the smooth, damp descent into the Dikteon Cave.

Where to Eat

Eat in the plateau villages, not the coast. Tavernas in Tzermiado and Agios Georgios serve mountain Cretan food: slow-cooked lamb with wild greens, fresh bread, yoghurt with mountain honey, and the plateau's famous potatoes. In Krasi, sit under the ancient plane tree with a coffee or raki. Gentle prices, generous portions.

Guide by the Digitalhound.co.uk editorial team for getcarhire.com. Compare cheap car hire at Heraklion Airport at getcarhire.com/heraklion.htm. Drive times verified; roads and openings can change, so check locally.