



**Informationen zur Umwelt und für Naturreisende auf Kreta:**  
Information about the Environment and for travellers in Crete:

**Excursion to the cave of Agia Sofia  
and the “Chestnuts-Village ELOS”**



The cave *Agias Sofias* is located approx 30 miles south-west of *Chania*. The road in Crete’s furthest south-west edge (direction *Elafonisi*) branch off from the “Old Road” short before *Kissamos (Kastelli)* within the village *Kaloudianá*. You first drive through a wide fertile valley, the road becomes steeper not until the village *Voulgáro*. Past *Tópolia* it goes through a narrow gorge with very complex curves. At one point a single-lane road tunnel must be passed (the oldest of 3 tunnels in Crete, traffic light regulation, max. high 3 m). Short after a signs indicates the cave (at the right side of the road). By steep, fortified stairs the cave is to reach within 10-15 minutes.

The approximately 3,000 m<sup>2</sup> is a rather a spacious Grotto, in whose “lobby” (the cave entrance is around 30 x 15 m) you can “climb around” without lighting. Water is dripping down on many places; the moisture and incident light create ideal conditions for algae growth. Geologically, the cave was examined by E. PLATÁSKIS. The religious scientist P. FAURE was active within prehistoric area and discovered relics from the Neolithic period (5000 BC). Led by A. PETRO-CHEILOU, the cave was further explored and mapped.



In the entrance area of the grotto, where a belfry is in the middle, the small church of Saint Sofia is located left. A large group of high and mighty stalagmites "first blocks the view" inside the cave, a further room of approx 73 x 75 m, which is divided into sections by sintering columns. They are easily accessible as a "round tour" (equipped with a flashlight). There is a stunningly beautiful view on the **Tokoliano-Gorge** from the cave entrance. Below the cave (about halfway of the way up path) offers a tavern rest options.



The picture left shows the bell tower and right of it (build at the rock) the small church of Saint Sofia. Both are located within the left section of the cave entrance. The picture right show the inner room of the church with its iconostasis and the behind sanctuary.

**Pictures: U. Kluge (2004)**

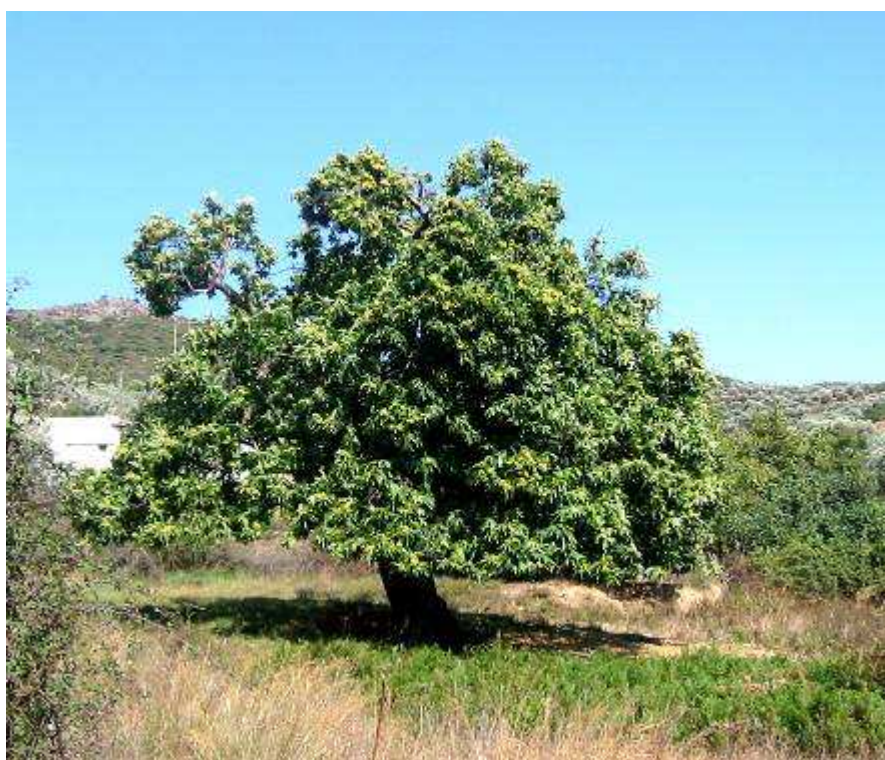


The picture left is showing the grotto entrance from inside (towards outside), the middle picture stalagmites from the farther end of the cave, which represent an optical pleasure by their pure white colour and "freedom from algae". The picture right is showing a view from the cave entrance into the Tokoliano-Gorge.

**Pictures:** U. Kluge / H. Eikamp (2004)

### “Chestnuts-Village Elos”

The village *Elos* is reached approx 5.6 miles after the cave and around 2.5 miles after the branch to *Paleochóra*. Around the small town grow many chestnut trees cultivated almost exclusively in the "wetter" west Crete. The trees become several hundred years old. The name of the village refers to a swamp (*elos*), which was formed close to the town by the river of XEROPOTAMOS. The chestnut (*Kastanea sativa*, *kastaniá*) is originally not native in Crete.



The pictures are showing chustnuts in detail and a centennial chestnut tree in Elos. On the first Sunday past the 20<sup>th</sup> of October, the so called chestnut festival happens in Elos, where roasted chestnuts and other products from chestnut are offered.

**Pictures:** U. Kluge (2004)

