

**Informationen zur Umwelt und für Naturreisende auf Kreta:**
Information about the Environment and for travellers in Crete:**Trip from Ierapetra / South-east Crete to
Monastery Panagía Exakousti**An article from our members *Sigrid Wrona* & *Franz Jaeger*, Crete

We start our trip from the western city edge of **Ierapetra** towards **Mirtos** (direction **Ano Viános**) and turn right in **Grá Ligiá** (towards North) to **Kalamáfka**. The mountainous panorama road leads here through a impressive mountainous region. On the way to **Kalamáfka** a first stop / side trip to the catchments lake "Reservoir of Bramiana" is worth, one of the EU funded protection project for flora and fauna of Crete ("Life" Program); see also the NLUK info leaflet at [http://www.kreta-umweltforum.de/Merkblaetter_en/196-07E.pdf].

In **Kalamáfka** s longer stop is worth: especially the cave Church "of the Holy Cross" in **Kalamáfka** is worth seeing (which is to be reached over 230 stairs uphill). On the southern slope of the "church mountain", the Greek God Asclepius (God of healing) runs (based on legend) his "shadowy existence"; therefore see also the NLUK leaflet No. 195-07/E at: [http://www.kreta-umweltforum.de/Merkblaetter_en/195-07E.pdf].

From **Kalamáfka** we again take direction south to **Anatoly**. The village is almost extinct in the last decades. Residing here 1960 still almost 1900 people, today there are only 170. Financed by EU funds, currently old houses are being renovated, particularly in the South part of the town, old houses are also rebuilt.

From **Anatoly** we drive forward (in north-west direction) towards **Máles**. About halfway is our main goal, the **Monastery Exakoustí** is right below the street (signposted) (Attention!: very narrow access-road).



The old, original monastery was destroyed by the Turks during their occupation (1669-1898). The current monastery complex, including the St. Mary's Church, is about 150 years old and was orphaned until the beginning of the 20th Century, until it became a nunnery in



1976 and is currently inhabited by 5 nuns. The monastery is closed between 2 p.m. and 4: 00 pm; at the entrance is a bell by which you ask for admission. The visit is free of charge; appropriate clothing (e.g. shoulders covered, shawls can be hired if necessary) should be granted, as well as a "donation" of the monastery. The elaborately equipped St. Mary's Church is the heart of the complex, surrounded by the courtyard of the monastery, which leaves a lasting first impression by its magnificent plants.

In the western part of the complex, a featured small cave chapel is located behind a large cypress (the symbol of grief and resurrection)



A look inside the Church shows impressive and expressive Iconostasis, also the variety of existing icons is remarkable. Many silver and shining like gold votive plates are on the “pray pillar”, in appreciation of the recovery after disease.

Above the Episcopal throne (see figure right) and on the carpet in front of you see a two-headed eagle, which also represents the emblem of a Russian tsar (Ivan III. The Great, first Grand Duke, who also wore the name “Tsar of Russia”), and who described himself as successor of the Christian - Byzantine Empire after the fall of Constantinople in the year 1453 AD.

At the end of the visit to the monastery, a tour through the monastery's shop should not miss. There you can buy for example a good tea (mixed from 41 herbs), healing- and antibiotic ointment, and also craftsmanship, some made by the nuns.

After our visit to the monastery we continue through the village of **Máles** to **Christós**. Short before the village “**Agia Paraskevi**” is on the left a rustic tavern, right from that a large terrace tavern. Here leads a stairway uphill to a small cave church. The there adored Saint is the



patron saint of the blind and visual weakened and helps, based on faith, past a eye complaint. Also a stop by at the rustic tavern of **Agia Paraskevi** is recommended. The over-70s landlady cooks traditional, simple but delicious dishes.

Back to the village **Máles**, we drive, short after the village exit, right towards south to **Mirtos** and pass on this route at **Mithi** the “entrance” of the Sarakinas-Canyon; therefore see our NLUK leaflet No. 027-04/E at:

http://www.kreta-umweltforum.de/Merkblaetter_en/027-04E.pdf].

Arrived in Mirtos, (before we go back East to Ierapetra) its worth to stroll through the narrow streets and the promenade of this "sympathetic" village.

Short after the eastern village exit (at Néa Mirtos) is the excavation of an early Minoan settlement with a cottage.

Pictures: *Sigrid Wrona* (2009)

