



MINOS BEACH ART HOTEL CRETE, GREECE

There are few places better to soothe a frazzled urban soul than poolside at Crete's tranquil Minos Beach Art Hotel. Nestled between the whitewashed towns of Agios Nikolaos and Elounda, the low-rise, 1961-built idyll is surrounded by pines and framed by the turquoise Mirabello Bay, its fragrant, contemporary art-filled gardens constituting an eclectic outdoor art gallery. It is hardly surprising that Walt Disney himself chose to holiday here.

Offering 15 room categories, the design is one of clean lines, pendant lighting, fluttering voile curtains and rustic basketry. Boutique bungalows boast sun-dappled private terraces so close to the shore that you can dip your toes while sunbathing. Inside, airy interiors are fitted with a state-of-the-art lighting and AV system, while bathrooms have walk-in rainforest showers.

When it comes to dining, there is no need to stray very far. Take ambrosial breakfasts alfresco at the main restaurant, Bacchus (whose slow-cooked pork at dinner, incidentally is the stuff of Greek legend), lunch at Terpsis (think whole grilled fish, succulent souvlaki, *keftedes* and baklava) and, at least once

during your stay, dine at La Bouillabaisse, renowned since the Seventies for its refined Mediterranean plates. Later, the softly lit fire pit – and an array of quality craft cocktails – beckon.

If you can tear yourself away from the hotel, the surrounding area has much to offer: the Cretan Olive Oil Farm for insight into production techniques ancient and modern, a clutch of high-end diving schools, and the hauntingly beautiful Spinalonga island, made famous by Victoria Hislop's best-selling 2007 novel *The Island*. JA. Doubles from £230. minosbeach.com

Places

This month, we find joy in an unspoilt corner of a winning Cotswolds inn, join the jet set in Rome

VILLA CLARISSE ÎLE DE RÉ, FRANCE

It is a singularly chic municipal edict that denotes that all shutters and doors on the Île de Ré – an idyllic 85 sq km island off France's west coast – must be painted in one of 16 permitted shades. Against a palette spanning dove grey to moss green via duck-egg blue, the sublime Villa Clarisse blends in seamlessly. Accommodation comprises five suites and four rooms, with minimalist design throughout. Subtle lighting, lime-washed walls and elegant furniture create a peaceful haven, while outside, a heated pool awaits. Breakfast on flaky croissants and fresh fruit, perfectly poached eggs and smoky bacon, attended to by the delightful staff, then lunch at big sister Hotel de Toiras, a stone's throw away, on the Saint-Martin-en-Ré harbourfront. Here, chef Antonio Sanna delivers a gourmet French menu rich in fresh local produce. Just don't be surprised if, on your return back to Blighty, you feel the need for a spot of repainting. JA. Doubles from £225. villa-clarisse.com

