

The gorge of Agia Irini



The small village of Agia Irini is located in a narrow valley along the winding road that leads from Chania to Sougia in southwest Crete.

From the South end of the village of Agia Irini, at an altitude of around 560 m, the gorge of Agia Irini is a deep cut along the western edge of the White Mountains which will take you all the way down to the shores of the Libyan Sea at [Sougia](#).

The gorge of Agia Irini is an excellent alternative to the gorge of Samaria:

- it is far less crowded. Instead of hundreds (and at busy times thousands) of hikers per day you will only find a handful (and at busy times maybe a hundred people a day)
- it is much shorter: 7.5 km to the exit of the gorge instead of 16 km for the walk through Samaria
- the amount of descent is only around 500 m instead of 1250 m so it is easier on the knees
- it is open all year around whereas Samaria is only open from May to October
- most of the walk is in the shade so it is also suitable for walking on hot days

And of course it is a wonderful place to come to if you have already visited the gorge of Samaria (and maybe the gorges of Imbros and Aradena) and want to see another one. Like people, every Cretan gorge has its own personality, looks and character so it will be a new experience.

Facts

From the entrance of the gorge of Agia Irini (just by the road below the village of Agia Irini) to the exit of the gorge at the Oasis Taverna the walk is 7.5 km long and the descent is around 500 m. It takes around two and half hours to walk on a well maintained path. Most of the gorge is in the shade with plenty of pine trees, plane trees and oleander bushes.

From the exit of the gorge to the village of Sougia the walk is on a (mostly traffic free) road with only little shade and the distance is around 7 km so if you want to go to Sougia on a hot day it is probably best to arrange for [transport](#).

The gorge is open all year around but there is a small river running through it and after heavy rains it could make parts of the gorge impassable or at least unsafe.

During the tourist season (from April to October) a small fee of 2 Euro is taken at the entrance of the gorge (or exit if you are walking up the gorge). This is used entirely to pay for maintenance of the path, rubbish collection and generally making sure that things are OK along the walk.

The walk through the gorge

The path into the gorge of Agia Irini starts at the exit of the village of Agia Irini (see photos on the right) at an altitude of 590m. A

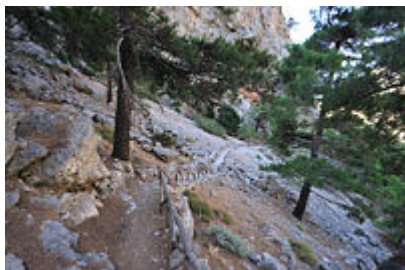


[Crete Photo of the Day](#)

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short walk down a wide path which will go past a stone house where the entrance fee is collected (if the warden is busy elsewhere he might collect it later when he meets you along the way). The path narrows, crosses the river bed on a small wooden bridge and continues along the eastern side of the gorge.

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After around 30 minutes (from the beginning of the walk) you will reach a large cistern and around 15 minutes later a shaded rest area with toilets, benches and water.

The path is always clear to follow and is shaded most of the time by plane and pine trees. There are a few ascents along the side of the gorge but the path always descends back into the bottom of the valley, crossing the river bed several times. There are a few other rest areas with water (but not always working so best to carry a supply of water).

A little further down the gorge there are a couple of spots where you might need to use your hands to get over some boulders but on the whole the path is easy and after around 2 hours 30 minutes (7.5km) the gorge widens, you start seeing olive trees and terraces and a sign points out to the exit on the left hand side where you reach the road. There is a small taverna which should be open from April to October.

From that point on if you have chosen to walk on to Sougia it is best to stick to the road as the walk in the river bed is a little stony and uncomfortable.

In the spring the gorge is full of wildflowers but most of them dry out by late May and get replaced by flowering oleander bushes.

Of course you can also walk up the gorge. Because the height difference between start and finish is only 500m walking up is not much more effort than walking down. If you choose to leave your car at one end and return (therefore doubling the length of the walk) it will take you around 5 hours of walking time to cover 15km. This would be roughly the same as walking through the gorge of Samaria so really quite possible if you are reasonably fit.

What to take with you, what to watch for

- There are a few water places where you can refill your bottle with drinking water but they do not always work all year around so it is best to have some water with you just in case.
- The path is quite good and generally well maintained but, like everywhere in Crete, it is stony and there are a few spots where you might need to scramble a little so it is best to have, if not walking shoes, at least comfortable trainers.
- If it rains avoid walking in the gorge. There are some high cliffs and rain can dislodge stones.

Also avoid the gorge if it has rained heavily recently as the river can be a little high. You will see quickly what sort of water levels

there are in the river near the entrance of the gorge. If it seems too high you might have difficulties further down. If in doubt ask someone.

- Even though there is a lot of shade take some sunscreen and use it.

