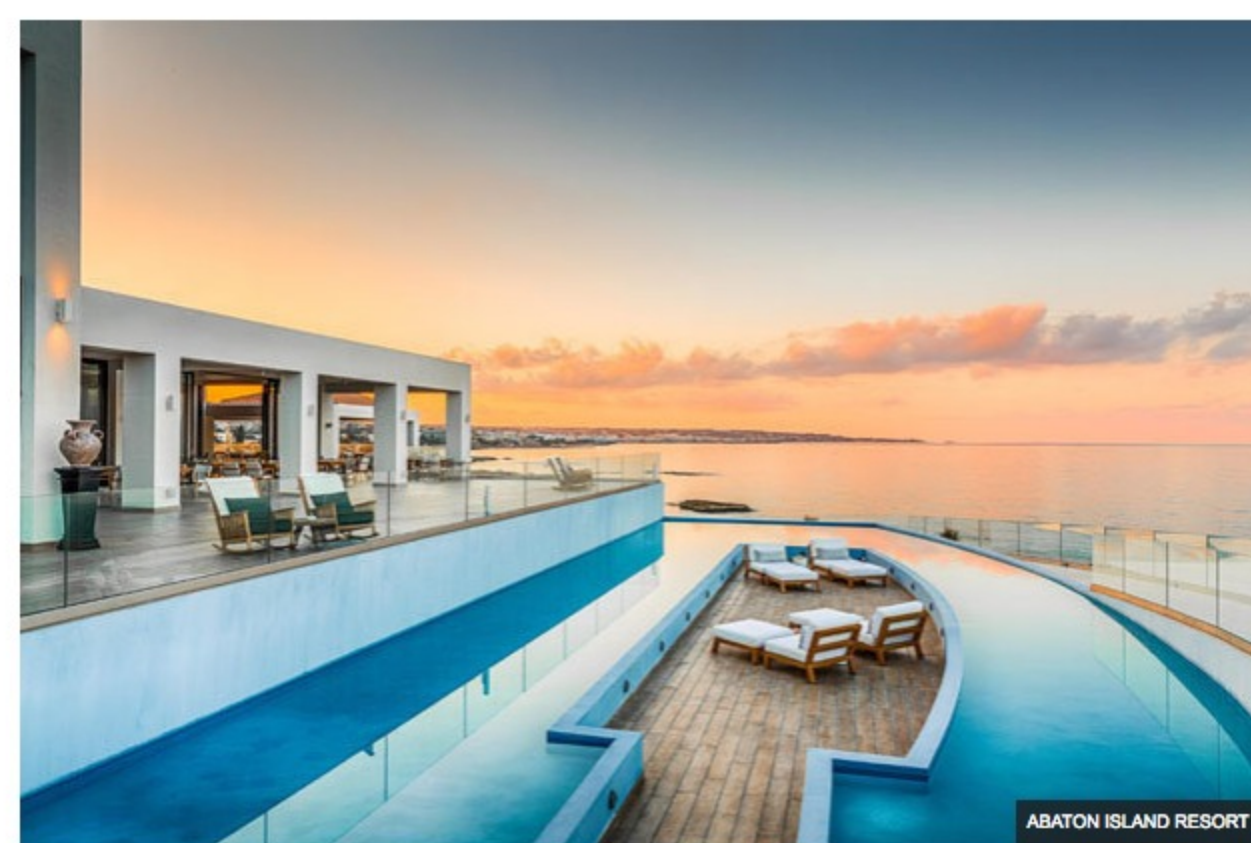


# Crete escape: Why this stunning Greek island should be your next adventure

BRACING myself for the first sting of icy water, I dive from the yacht into the Aegean Sea.



By Ruth McKee / Published 10th September 2018



WARM WATERS: The Abaton overlooks the Aegean and is the perfect base for exploring by boat

But I have forgotten the turquoise waters around Crete are not the wild Atlantic or the freezing English Channel. Jumping in here feels like a warm hug.

The crew on our sailing boat, booked through Fantasia Yachting, has taken a group of us out into a quiet cove where the waters are deep and still – ideal for a lazy swim to cool down after an hour or two sunbathing on deck.

I pause to stare up at the mountains fringing the coast and the blindingly white walls of villas perched on sheltered cliffs. In the distance, larger party boats drop anchor to let tourists take a dip, but they are far enough away not to disrupt the peace and quiet of my afternoon swim.

Back on board the yacht, I'm handed ice-cold cups of white wine home-made by our skipper.

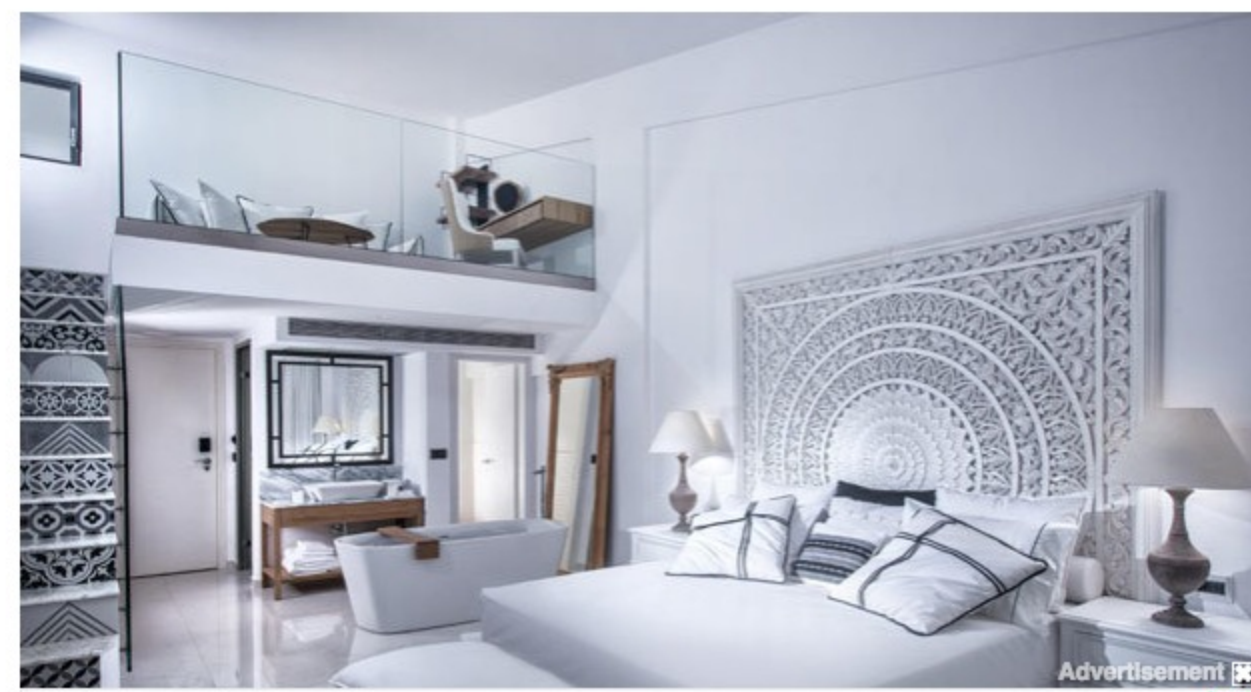
And once the sails are hoisted and the wind is pushing us into open water, a huge platter of fresh fruit is placed in front of us.

Later, back on dry land, I relax on the private beach of my hotel, the five-star Abaton Island Resort & Spa, which opened in April.

Couples lounge by the edge of the sea on double day beds, sheltered from the sun by large, black umbrellas.

Ice buckets filled with bottles of cold bubbles are propped up on the sand beside them.

From the poolside beach bar, waiters discreetly stroll between loungers delivering cold beers, bottles of crisp Cretan wine and nibbles.



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LUXURY: You can rest your head in the comfortable and stylish hotel suites



DINNER FOR TWO: You can enjoy a meal overlooking the waters

The rhythmic beat of waves breaking on the sand is interrupted only by the occasional snore.

Before dinner I relax with cocktails on the sun terrace to the sound of piano music drifting down from the bar.

"Look up at the third floor," Elina Kaloutsaki, the owner of the hotel, tells me.

"It's a very special evening."

Glancing up we see a couple enjoying dinner on their private terrace, when suddenly the man gets down on one knee.

Within minutes the couple are hugging and celebrating – much to the relief of their small audience on the terrace who were holding their breath until the moment the diamond was placed on the woman's hand.

"It is a popular place to get engaged," Elina explains.

"And we are planning on hosting weddings on the private beach."

By now ravenous from an afternoon sea swimming and sunbathing I dine at one of the hotel's restaurants – Wow Sushi and Steak – which overlooks the beach and pool.

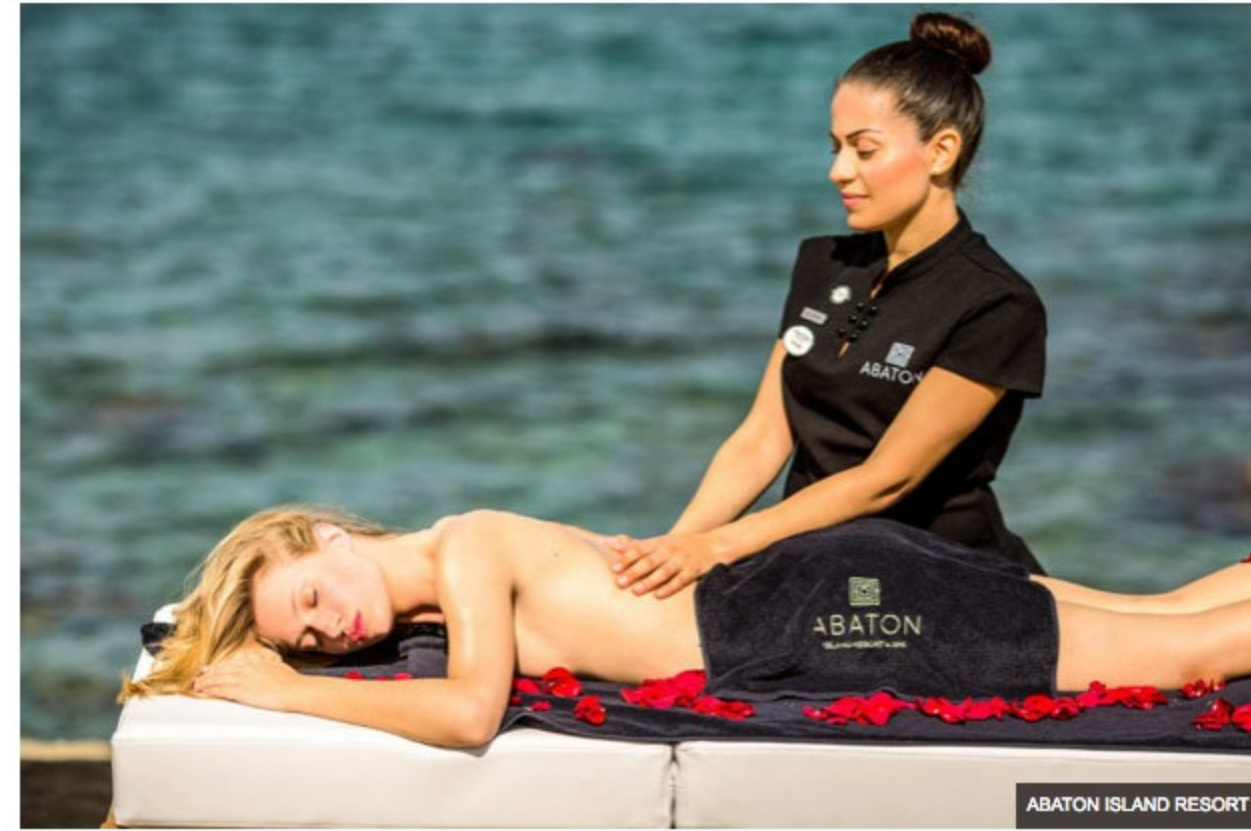
A slab of steak arrives and I finish the lot watching the sun set as lights flicker in the capital.

The hotel also offers seafood at Bony Fish and another restaurant featuring Cretan cuisine sourced from local farms.

As night falls I step on to the terrace of my suite and walk down the steps to my very own pool – one of 71 at the resort.



STAYING COOL: Ruth McKee enjoyed her stay at the five-star resort



HANDS ON: The hotel spa offers a full range of relaxing treatments

Even though I know I am surrounded by holidaymakers in the other rooms – the hotel's design makes me feel as though I am the only one for miles around.

The feeling of tranquillity continues in the spa, which is lit by candles guiding the pathway to the treatment rooms.

The spa offers a range of facials and beauty rituals, but I choose a Swedish full body massage.

As my therapist works the Elemis oils into my muscles, relaxing scents of lavender fill the cool, dark room.

Stepping back into the sun, I look over at the tennis courts, fitness centre and watersports.

I think about catching a cab to the Bronze Age Knossos Palace, or venturing to Heraklion to gaze at Koules, its imposing Venetian castle. But I find myself sinking into a sun bed and drifting off to the crashing waves.

## FACT FILE

**Getting there:** Flights are available with easyJet (easyJet.com), Jet2 (jet2.com) and Ryanair (Ryanair.com) from a range of UK airports.

**Where to stay:** Rooms at the Abaton Island Resort & Spa, Crete, cost from £148.87 per person per night in October. Book at abaton.gr

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