

Get a taste of the high life and top-quality cuisine at Crete's latest luxury hotel

Nothing will make weary travellers more aware of how hot and scruffy they may feel than walking through the doors into the lobby of Abaton Island Resort & Spa.

Vast and dazzlingly white with shiny marble floors, low-backed sofas and subtly placed sculptures, you'd be forgiven for thinking you'd walked into a swanky art gallery.

However, a warm welcome and a cold juice soon appear, and immediately you begin to unwind.

One of the newest luxury hotels to open on Greece's largest island, five-star Abaton has been drawing in fashionable crowds – including a number of celebrities – since it opened in April and is the perfect place for a romantic getaway.

Situated on the rocky coastline between the touristy streets of Hersonissos and party hot spot Malia, the resort is about as far removed from either of these as possible – quiet, elegant and a total retreat, despite its impressive size.

The rooms are chic and luxe, not dissimilar in style to the atrium: again, lots of white but with tasteful design touches to stop it feeling sterile – such as beachy wooden furniture, ornate carved headboards and woven baskets.

Nearly half of the 152 rooms have outdoor Jacuzzis or pools and the majority have sea views, but if it's complete privacy and all-out luxury you're after, the two-storey beachfront villas at the far end of the resort are real showstoppers and ideal honeymoon hideaways, with huge outdoor areas and their own decent-sized pools. They're obviously at the top end of the price list, but you'll never want to tear yourself away.

There are a handful of cheap and cheerful tavernas nearby but if you're after top-quality



Greek chic

cuisine, you're better off staying in the hotel. In addition to the main restaurant (included if you're staying half-board), there are four other speciality eateries to try in the evening. As its name suggests, Bony Fish offers up fresh seafood from the surrounding waters (go for the salt-baked sea bream), while Elemes serves authentic Cretan dishes such as smoked pork, raki and traditional cheeses.

For something a little different, try WOW Steak & Sushi, where the unconventional-sounding combination is a perfect pairing – a freshly rolled selection from the sushi bar makes an ideal starter, while the steaks are cooked to perfection. I could have made an entire meal of their pork belly bao buns.

Be sure to save room for breakfast, though, as it is, if anything, an even more impressive affair, with perhaps the biggest, most varied buffet selection I have ever seen.

The hotel quiets down in the evening, but we were more than content to sit in a rocking chair on the deck looking out at others partying further along the coastline, simply enjoying a

cocktail and the chilled-out tunes from the house DJ.

A visit to Abaton's Elemis spa is another luxurious must. To remind myself that I would, unfortunately, have to return home at some point, I opted for a Garden of England Rose Restore massage, which used soothing, skin-nourishing oils and expert muscle kneading to leave me feeling completely relaxed. In the spa there's also a spacious steam room, a relaxation room and an indoor pool, a pleasant respite for those wanting to escape the Greek sun for a moment.

This probably isn't the place for those planning to explore every corner of Crete, as you'd be mad not to savour every moment spent at this stunning hotel. But for an indulgent mini-break in a stylish setting, Abaton is up there on the A-list.

Laura Mulley

A Thalassa Deluxe Seafront Guestroom at Abaton Island Resort & Spa starts at £220.83 per night, including breakfast. Visit abaton.gr. Rooms at Premier Inn Gatwick Airport North Terminal (premierinn.com) start at £82.

Clockwise, from top right: Abaton lit up at night; the bedrooms ooze opulence; take a swim in the huge pool

