

FEATURE

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# Finding the ultimate retreat in Crete

## Inka Piegsa-Quischoffe has fallen quite a love with the Mourtzanakis Residence in Achlada

Stressed out? In need of some serious R&R? In love with Greece, in love with the island of Crete? There is no better place to go and treat yourself to a week or a fortnight of tranquillity, countryside, nature, wonderful food and a chance to socialise with a handful of like-minded people from Britain, the United States, Britain and Belgium, to mention a few.

The Mourtzanakis Residence in Achlada is a haven for those that desire to escape the stresses of daily life and to enjoy the tranquillity of the island of Crete.

Sitting at one of the tables on the terrace overlooking the valley and mountains which form the shoreline of Achlada and Pigeia, with the sun shining down over the sea glittering in the distance, Marios Mourtzanakis, one of the owners, reminisces, lulled along by a glass of his secret wine. "All the best you can have," he says, "is owned by our family for many generations. One day it came to me, my brother and myself and we were sitting at the same table, asking ourselves what we were going to do with this land and acres of rocks, thousands of olive trees, sheep, goats and our much-loved, it seemed more like a burden than a heaven".

Marios points to the "very magical sunset" that gives them the idea to create something unique, "a place which would become a spiritual retreat for people from all over the world" and at the same time help to preserve a great environment and keep the ecological balance which makes their beloved island such a great place.

**Getting out of the car after your somewhat nerve-racking drive, your nostrils are filled with the scent of herbs and flowers**

Born and raised in Berlin, having lived in various countries and worked in professions which had nothing to do with hotels or resorts, Inka and her family members moved all over the planet. Marios, his brother and his friends wife, Konstantina (also known as Genie), were no strangers to the concept of "international" large amounts of money were raised, only local

designers and architects were commissioned and materials from the island were used to create the beautiful old house Mourtzanakis Residence. Their individual styles are all around the main building. Each one is distinctly designed in a minimalist yet very style. The ground floor is an open living space and kitchen, and an upper open gallery, reached by a wooden staircase has bedrooms and bathrooms with open showers. White walls and ceilings far away from the bustle of modern life, the walls are a light grey with 7% HPI and HPI.

The centre of the resort is the main building with a huge communal dining room where breakfast is served, prepared by the catering service. Guests, families and kids, many of whom have become regulars, pick up the table and conversation immediately around the table for the day are made and take of previous trips and memories are shared.

There is a well-stocked library where you can sit on a porch and read or watch TV. Guests can also play with flying, the cute dog which is the best to get new guests when they arrive after negotiating a steep mountain road.

Stereo loves to cook. When she came to Crete she asked the no-idea about local cooking, but, quickly through the help of local women teaching her, she became a brilliant cook. Today her recipes and recipes are to be found in the kitchen. Marios and Genie have their own kitchen.

There is a lot of water, swimming pool and jacuzzi and for those who wish to take in the mountains or explore the Vitoria part of the nearby village Achlada, Marios will do out of his way to make arrangements to guide you himself. He can be the local expert for Achlada, having explored every rock and canyon and is an intimate knower with the local farmers.

Now the art of getting out of the car after your somewhat nerve-racking drive, your nostrils are filled with the scent of herbs and flowers. The herbs and spices of Crete's wild herbs are lovingly tended all around the house.

Your morning can be spent in one of the many courtyards and you can visit the cooperative which produces the outstanding olive oil, without which Crete food is not complete, as well as the bakery which is quite the star of the show.

A bonus day? The produce, head down the mountains to the romantic village of Agia Pelagia with four lovely beaches, shops and a Greek

taking shoreline, historical history? Go to the other direction to Pigeia and visit St George's birth house and, right opposite, a Byzantine chapel with outstanding wall paintings from which views to have been painted yesterday. And the Venetian castle or Crete's main fortress are only about 100 metres away and they make for a great day trip.

Even that the emphasis is on a family atmosphere, nobody has any special wedding anniversary gets celebrated in the morning. Marios and Genie will give you a bathroom and a table to take and decorated. Whoever is in residence, someone on the terrace around the bar house, helps himself to salads, soups and sweets and treats the staff of house.

Conversation flows freely in all with three different languages at any given time and after a few drinks of wine you find yourself fluent in Greek, Italian or any other language you didn't know a word of a few hours earlier. Any subject is possible to discuss under the star-filled night sky.

As Marios tells me, several friendships have been struck up at the Mourtzanakis Residence which last far beyond the building.

Inka Piegsa-Quischoffe has lived and worked for many years in Switzerland, Spain and the UK. She was an international attorney in Spain and England who found travel writing fun! Email: Inka@www.germanymytravel.com



Mourtzanakis Residence in Achlada, Crete



A well which surrounds the road Mourtzanakis road in Achlada.



An ancient olive tree is a feature of the resort.



The brothers Mourtzanakis who have created a haven in Achlada.



Inka Piegsa-Quischoffe of the set where guests can purchase delicious local produce.