

Informationen zur Umwelt und für Naturreisende auf Kreta:
Information about the Environment and for travellers in Crete:

Ρωμαϊκό Νεκροταφείο
Roman Cemetery

Excursion to the caves of Matala / Prefecture Iraklion Prickly Pear (*Opuntia ssp.*) also know as Paddle Cactus

Matala [Ματαλά] is located on the South coast within the bay of *Mesará*, [Όρμος Μεσαρά] about 6 miles south-west of *Phaistos* [Φαιστός] (or 9 miles south-west of *Mires* [Μοίρες]). In the 1960s and 1970s *Matala* became known by the "hippies", who lived in the caves on the beach. Originally the caves were tombs hewn in the rock. The ruins of the "ancient *Matala*" can be seen underwater in the North-East of the Bay, which was first port *Phaistos* and later *Gortyna* [Γόρτυνα]. The caves above the beautiful (but tiny) sandy beach are today fenced and can be visited during the tourist season (3 € entry); outside the season, you can enter the caves without payment (by always "open" fence). Today *Matala* itself is a pure "tourist village", in which taverns and souvenir shops rank next to each other; his original character is unfortunately only here and there to found!



The figure left shows the funerary caves complex with sandy beach in the Mesará Bay of Matala. Opposite (**right**) is the last line of houses of the village where still individual houses of Cretan character are **left**.



The figure **left** shows a detail of the caves which are often connected themselves; the **right** figure shows a size comparison of space and size of single caves with a person.

Photos: U. Kluge (2004)



The pictures are showing the various forms of tombs inside the funerary caves. Many of the burial niches contained sarcophagi, others allowed multi inhumation.

Photos: H. Eikamp (04/2004)

Prickly Pear (*Opuntia ssp.*) also know as Paddle Cactus

Opuntias are bush- or tree-shaped, usually rich branched cacti. The name Opuntia probably comes from in ancient time's common called thistle species, which was widespread within the area of the *Opuntiani*, a Greek tribe. Phylogenetic, cacti are part of the "carnation-like" plants. Opuntias make the largest genus within the subfamily of Opuntioideae with over 200 types. Leaves of Opuntia are tiny shed, which quickly welk and fall. Cladodes, often mistakenly called as leaves are sprout succulents, evolutionary seen as secondary flattened strain parts, whose different alignment are relevant for the photosynthesis of the plant. The "Areolen" take still bunch of bristles-like spikes in addition to the strong spikes (Glochidien), which enter easily into the skin but are difficult to remove. The best-known because most popular common representative of Opuntia is the species *Opuntia ficus indica*, which can form the low bushes as well as tree-shaped plants. They are also called prickly pear or figs thistle. Fruits of these Opuntias are eatable.



Picture left: This Opuntia bush measures more than 2 meters in high. The ripeness begins in July on Crete. Centre picture shows a flower, the picture right Cladodes with lots of fruits, where some already show a yellowish colouring, indication of oncoming ripeness.

Photos: H. Eikamp/U. Kluge (2004)

