

**Informationen zur Umwelt und für Naturreisende auf Kreta:**
Information about the Environment and for travellers in Crete:**The Church of the "dormition of the Mother of God"
in Alikambos (with frescoes of painter *Ioannis o Pagomenos*)**[an article of our NLUK members *Diana P. Bailey* & *Maria Eleftheria*, Crete]

The Greek Orthodox Church, which around 97% of all Greeks belong to, enjoys a special status, which is explained by their role during the Ottoman rule, the Greek revolution, and the construction of the Modern Greek State. The term "Greek-orthodox" refers only to the rite, in which the service is celebrated, so the Byzantine or Greek Rite, in contrast to the Latin or Roman Rite of the Roman Catholic Church.

It shall have almost 1.000 churches and chapels on the island of Crete, where many of the mostly single room buildings are outside of villages and towns. Often, the inner walls of the churches are painted. Represented are themes from the life of Jesus, or the life of Holy women and men. By the veneration of icons the faithful pay homage to the depicted persons and thus God. The saints are role models in the faith and supplicant before the Almighty. The most important of all the Saints is Mary, the mother of God. The Church in Alikambos is dedicated to her.



Two miles behind Vrisses, at the street towards Chora Sfakion, is left the sign towards Alikambos, a small, and today more sedate place, whose people were at the front line during the rebellions against the Venetians in the 16th Century.

On the way to the village, the sign towards the church of Panagia in the gorge below the village is located within a hairpin bend. At the parking place, from where a path with stone slabs leads down to the chapel, is a Venetian fountain, where until today the animals are refreshed. In 1909 a new well was dug in addition.



The snug little church, whose front above the entrance is decorated with walled in ceramic bowls which represent the cross and the trinity and on whose reverse side is an old cemetery located, is usually closed (open only on the 25th of March, Annunciation Day, and 15th of August, the day of the dormition of the Mother of God (cf. Assumption of Mary)).



Papa Jannis, who gladly opens the chapel for interested visitors, bewares the key. The friendly priest is often in the tavern in the village square in Alikambos; or at least people know where the priest is just staying. Papa Jannis uses fragments of multiple languages, when he shows his Church full love, passion and pride.

The wall paintings in the chapel are all in good preservation. The frescoes are from the hand of the painter *Ioannis o Pagomenos* (late 13th Century and first half of the 14th Century). The paintings in the apse (picture below left) and on the triumphal arch are supposed to be performed by another artist. Unfortunately and in contrast to the largely intact wall

paintings is the founder font from the year 1316 quite ironically heavily damaged.



The painter *Ioannis o Pagomenos*, in English: John the iced (it's said that the family name origins from the fact that his ancestors lived in the "icy" highlands), has decorated six more, worth to see churches in the west of Crete between the year 1314 and 1332.

Agios Georgios in Komithadhes (Sfakia), (therefore see also our leaflet at: http://www.kreta-umweltforum.de/Merkblaetter_en/316-09E.pdf), Agios Nikolaos in Moni (Selino), Agios Georgios in Anidhri (Selino), Agios Nikolaos in Maza (Apokoronas), Michail Archangelos (Selino), and the church of the Panagia in Beilitika/Kakodhiki (Selino).



Above the road to Alikambos, within the bend, in front of the Church, mindful visitors will notice a cavernous entrance. A second is about 10 meters from the cistern right above the street. In the shafts from World War II, which lead about 20 metres into the mountain, stalactite like "calc-sinter noses" have already developed.

The surrounding area offer more interesting objectives, e.g. **Embrosneros** (therefore see our leaflet at: http://www.kreta-umweltforum.de/Merkblaetter_en/319-09E.pdf) and **Vaves** at: http://www.kreta-umweltforum.de/Merkblaetter_en/323-10E.pdf].

Should you plan a walk through the idyllic village of Vrisses, so take a look at our leaflet at: http://www.kreta-umweltforum.de/Merkblaetter_en/250-08E.pdf]; perhaps you see the resident chair maker *Vassilis* and can watch him at work.