

GTL Start-Up of October 2022: THE GROVE CRETE



Name of Start-Up	THE GROVE CRETE
Name of Founders	Serhat Ünaldi Hamza Houssaini
Country & Region	Greece, Crete
Main Topic	 Sustainable Tourism
Date of Launch	21/04/2022
The Journey from Idea to Start-Up	<p>After meeting in Berlin, we realized that big city life was no longer for us. The prospect of hosting guests from all over the world and reconnecting with nature had much greater appeal. We both share family roots in the Mediterranean region. That is why Crete was a natural choice for the location of THE GROVE CRETE – not just because we admire Greek history, mythology, cuisine and handcraft. The island is located right between Asia minor, Europe and North Africa, with a South coast that has remained almost untouched by mass tourism, harbouring bountiful natural and cultural resources. In the face of climate change, the sustainable use of these resources became our guiding principle.</p> <p>Our professional backgrounds are in facility and project management as well as government affairs. Starting next year, we will move to Crete permanently and manage a small hotel on the island while driving our own plans for THE GROVE CRETE forward. Having traveled the world extensively, we came to know what we personally expect from the hospitality sector in the 21st century. So we planned a hotel that we ourselves would want to stay in: well-designed, relaxed, friendly, and with a vision that is conscious of its local impact - making sustainable living fun and not overburdening guests with a sense of mission.</p>

In order to realize our plans, the first step was to find a plot on which to realize our vision for a small hotel that will offer guests a stay with the smallest carbon footprint currently possible by way of an off-grid and renewable energy supply solution. We found a plot near the beautiful mountain village of Saktouria, where Cretan's mountain slopes meet the Lybian Sea. The remote piece of land offers stunning 180 degree ocean views and is the perfect place for guests to get away from it all. We proceeded to register our company in Crete, developed the building plans together with our brilliant architect and are now waiting for the final building license to be issued.

Meanwhile, we have built an invaluable network of people on the island who share our vision of making Cretan tourism more sustainable. We all build on the bountiful natural resources on the island, which we want to preserve and at the same time share with our customers. The advice and encouragement of our friends in Crete has kept us going in spite of some challenges.

We have a general agreement with an investor to finance the project, but given the current economic climate we would feel more comfortable if other financial sources were available to us. Unfortunately, most funding programs are aimed at larger projects, overlooking that small hotels make up the vast majority of the Greek hospitality sector and are increasingly favoured by tourists who appreciate personalized and sustainable services. We are confident, however, to receive funding for our off-grid energy supply, which will include innovative solar technology solutions, a heat pump, a combined heat and power plant that can be converted to green hydrogen use, and a battery for electricity storage.

The ideal scenario would be to receive the building license by December 2022 and to start constructing in February 2023 in order to open THE GROVE CRETE for guests during the main season of 2024, welcoming them to the first certified passive house hotel on the island.

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Description of the Business Idea

The architectural plans for THE GROVE CRETE have been supervised by the Hellenic Passive House Institute (EIPK) in order to obtain certification as the first passive house hotel in Crete. We will offer a year-round holiday experience with the smallest carbon footprint currently possible, creating a “community economy” with local suppliers that benefits Crete’s cultural, social and economic capital while creating personalized experiences far removed from established package tourism. Studies have shown that a substantial share of visitors to Crete are looking in vain for more sustainable offers. THE GROVE CRETE is tapping into this unsatisfied demand, which can be assumed to increase as climate change prevention becomes more and more a deciding factor for holiday makers.

Our target customers will be nature- and culture-loving tourists who want to preserve the beauty of their destination for future generations and who want to learn about how to implement sustainability into their daily lifestyles. Guests arriving by train and ferry will receive a ten percent discount, while guests arriving by plane can compensate carbon emissions from air travel by planting a tree in Crete or donating to a Greek environmental NGO.

They can also sponsor old-growth olive trees in our own olive grove on property.

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