

Crete Self-Guided



As Greece's largest island with an extended road network and breathtaking mountains and seascapes, Crete makes a provocative destination for cyclists. Apart from splendid cycling, ancient Minoan ruins are an exciting feature en route, including famous sites like Knossos and Malia, and unheralded ones of equal interest, such as the Armeni Minoan cemetery and Fourni in Arhanes. Clients rave about the precious accommodations offered on this tour. Charming old villas, country inns and boutique hotels provide a personal, intimate exchange with the hospitable local hosts. Tour lasts 10 days, or 8 days if you start in Arhanes.

Trip Highlights

- Lassithi Plateau with mammoth Diktion Cave
- Traditional villages in the Psiloritis Mountains
- Romantic Venetian-era city of Hania
- Minoan palace cities of Knossos and Malia
- Rethymno's fabulous Fortezza

Start—End Points

The tour starts in Athens where you test your bike. You can either fly or take an overnight boat to Herakleion, Crete. From Herakleion early morning the next day you/bikes/luggage are transferred to Tzermiado for Day 1 of the tour. The tour ends in Hania with daily flights and boats back to Athens. You leave the bike in Hania.

Itinerary

Day 1: Tzermiado

The Lassithi Plateau, one of the highest farming areas in Greece, once had 20,000 windmills which only a generation or so ago were still in use, which gives you an idea of how traditional this region is. Make a giant loop of the plateau, stopping at Diktion Cave to marvel at the gigantic stalactites and stalagmites.

Day 2: Tzermiado

Descend almost 3,000 feet to the coast to the Minoan palace city of Malia. Most alluring are the giant earthenware pithos jars, as tall as you and the scent of orange blossoms as you enter the archaeology site. Stop for lunch in Krasi, known for its humongous plane tree and fresh water springs.

Day 3: Arhanes

Heading west, over mountain ridges, cycling on back roads with goats and donkeys. Listen for the sound of their bells. Your destination is Arhanes, a one-time Minoan village whose contemporary residents continue many of the same traditions, from growing grapes for wine to idling around shady trees.

Day 4: Arhanes

Visit the famed Minoan palace city of Knossos and the Herakleion Archaeological Museum with priceless frescos. Ancient Minoan was the first civilization on European soil. By all accounts it was a peaceful empire. Afternoon cycling loop to Nikos Katzantakis Museum (author of Zorba the Greek). **Note:** we suggest you get a taxi rather than bike to nearby Knossos because the road is a busy narrow highway connecting north and south Crete.



Day 5: Axos

The Psilorites Mountains epitomize traditional Cretan mountain villages with scenes of elderly women in black, artisans working looms and goat herds galore. Visit an organic farm, and depending on the season, you can participate in a grape harvest or olive picking or distilling *raki*, the spirit puts the fire in Cretan eyes.

Day 6: Rethymno

Leave the mountains and descend to the Cretan Sea hugging the coast. En route, visit Melidoni Cave and learn its poignant history. Final destination is Rethymno, the city we regard as Crete's best kept secret. Hania may be more famous but this Venetian era old city has just as much charm and history and enlightened citizens.

Day 7: Rethymno

Bicycle to Spili, a traditional village with lots of homemade products and an authentic flavor. Do not miss the dramatic lions head fountain. En route stop at Armeni to explore the fascinating and mysterious Minoan cemetery. Back in Rethymno it is now time to visit the Fortezza, that imposing Venetian fortress that gives the city so much character.

Day 8: Hania

The ride to Hania runs parallel to the sea on a mountain ridge before descending down to the flat coastal road. Hania's beautiful harbor with Venetian architecture is dominated by a mosque surviving from the 400 years of Ottoman occupation of Crete. Take time for a bit of shopping in Hania – handmade knives or gold jewelry.

Day 9: Hania

The road to Omalos climbs from sea level to 3600 feet but it only takes about 3 hours to ascend 23 miles, and half that to return. Gradually the scenery dramatically changes to alpine-like forests. Omalos is where hikers overnight to get an early morning start on descending the Samaria Gorge.

Day 10: departures

Exclusions

- Airfare to/from Greece
- Transfers from airport to Athens
- flight or overnight boat from Pireaus to Herakleion, Crete
- flight or overnight boat from Hania, Crete to Pireaus (Athens' port)
- Day 3 transfers to Knossos & Herakleion Museum (take taxi)
- Meals except breakfast
- Travel Insurance

Tour Price Per Person in Euros

10 Days

- 1 rider - 2835
- 2 riders - 2070
- 3 riders - 1890 + SS
- 4 riders - 1800
- Single Supplement - 230

Note: tour prices are based on the euro which is the official currency of Greece. Exchange rates found at www.xe.com

Inclusions

- Accommodations in 3-4 star hotels ranging from restored villas to family run guesthouses. Tasteful, clean, air-conditioned, private bath, abundant hospitality, comfort. All accommodations come with breakfast. Tour price based on double occupancy. Single supplement costs apply for individual rooms. Triples may or may not be available depending on the hotel, in which instance your party would book one double and one single.
- 4 luggage transfer, 2 bike transfers including your transfer to Tzermiado on Day 1 (or Arhanes if taking an 8 Day tour).
- Specialized bicycle: road Allez model with carbon fiber forks or hybrid Crossroads with suspension. Triple chain rings, 27 gears.
- Bike gear: water bottles, map holder, rear rack, odometer, helmet, lock. For hygienic purposes we encourage you to bring your own helmet.
- Bike tools and part: hand pump, tire irons, spare tube, bike tool with spoke truer, patch kit, spokes.
- Cue sheets
- Maps
- Trip packet with useful information (e.g., recommended tavernas, points of interest, phone numbers, etc.)
- 1 mobile phone per couple with 10 euros phone card
- CycleGreece jersey
- Gratuities, tips, VAT tax

Mileage Summary

Mileage

Total Miles 303 miles 493 km. Average Daily 33 miles, 54 km

Day 1 15 miles, 25 km, flat atop plateau, almost no hills

Day 2 32 miles, 54 km descend 2920 ft, ascend on return same route.

Day 3 27 miles, 44 km highest ascent 1968 feet

Day 4 28 miles, 46 km rolling hills

Day 5 40 miles, 64 km highest ascent 1640 feet, 7 km on main highway

Day 6 35 miles, 56 km almost all downhill and flat hugging the coast

Day 7 33 miles, 54 km several ascents, highest is 1460 feet

Day 8 47 miles, 76 km, climbing but no big ascents, 10km on a highway



*Ask about Libyan Sea coast
add-on hiking trip: colorful
local guide, Samaria Gorge,
villages accessible only by
foot or boat, Sfakia culture*

