

# Minoan Palaces



The first civilization to thrive on European soil arose in Crete. The ancient Minoans initially worshipped fertility goddesses in caves, but eventually with wealth acquired through maritime prowess the earliest Cretan peoples flourished. Artistic frescos, work in gold and semi-precious stones, plumbing and Europe's first writing system characterize the refined Minoan culture.

Minoans concentrated their power around palaces located in four areas of Crete: Knossos, Malia, Zakros and Phaestos. In order to see all of these sites we make a grand loop around eastern Crete. We travel to each palace and via private guided tours we descend into the essence of Minoan life. Apart from walking the length and breadth of these archaeological sites, we also take walking excursions in Crete's countryside.

## Trip Highlights

- Admire the king's throne at Knossos Palace
- View original Phaestos disc
- Explore Dikteion Cave, birthplace of Zeus
- Visit the Venetian fortress on Spinalonga island
- Swim in the Libyan Sea

## Day 1: Arhanes

From Herakleion you head south about 15 miles to Arhanes, a quaint mountain village. On a short walk you'll visit the nearby Minoan cemetery Fourni and then a short drive to the Minoan winery Vathypetro. Dinner in a converted olive oil factory with traditional Cretan music.

## Day 2: Tzermiado

The grandest Minoan palace at Knossos is a mere 15 minutes from Arhanes. Tour it early so that you'll have time to enjoy a visit to the Herakleion Archaeology Museum which holds the famous Phaestos disc, the oldest printed document in the world.

Afternoon take the Lassithi Plateau loop, stopping at the eco-park with traditional weaving and other locals at work on handicrafts

## Trip Duration

8 days

## Start & End Points

Start: Arhanes  
(near Herakleion)

End: Rethymno

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## Day 3: Tzermiado

Malia down on the seacoast is the second Minoan palace city on your trip. This site was excavated by the French and digging is ongoing.

If you're hungry for a hike you might want to walk the loop of eighteen villages in the Lassithi Plateau. Stop at the mammoth Dikteon Cave where Zeus was born. The Lassithi Plateau once had 10,000 windmills.

## Day 4: Sitia

En route to Sitia take a small boat to Spinalonga. Outside of Agio Nikolao, this island was a Venetian stronghold and later housed a leper colony until the 1950s. It is now abandoned and makes a fantasy-like site for strolling amidst ruins.

## Day 5: Aspro Potamo

Your third great Minoan palace city is Zakros on the far eastern coast of Crete. It has a villa rich with wall paintings, wine presses, cellars and tombs cut into the side of cliffs.

Overnight in a small stone cottage settlement originally built more than a century ago by olive harvesters from the nearby village of Pefki. The cottages have been lovingly restored offering a peaceful simplicity. All electricity is solar-generated.

### Travel Times

Select your own travel dates. Minoan Palaces traverses terrain that is residentially settled all year round, so places and services do not shut down like on the small islands. Optimum time to travel in Crete is roughly April 1 to October 31.

## Trip Price

Trip price depends on the number in your party, level of accommodations, extent of services requested and optional activities sought. See "Pricing" link on website and "Vacation Profile Contact Form"

Basic price for Minoan Palaces 8 days is 1190 euros per person (roughly \$1750 USD) and includes 3 and 4 star hotels (based on double occupancy), daily breakfast, maps, day to day itinerary with activities and logistics, and a pre-tour trip packet with info about Greece, the region you will visit, recommended places to eat, phone numbers and other useful information.

### Transport Options

- ◆ Private car (valid driver's license required and international driver's permit)
- ◆ Private car with personal driver
- ◆ 5-8 persons, mini-van with or without personal driver
- ◆ More than 8 persons, coach or mini-coach with personal driver

### Hotel Upgrades

- ◆ 5 star hotel available in Rethymno

### Optional Activities

- ◆ Private archaeology tours with professional guides in Knossos, Malia, Zakros or Phaestos
- ◆ Professional guide to accompany you throughout the trip
- ◆ Traditional Greek cooking class
- ◆ Greek wine tasting seminar
- ◆ Transfers to/from airport

### Optional Soft Adventures for 4 persons and up

- ◆ Rethymno — bicycle to historic Melidoni Cave
- ◆ Hike the Samaria Gorge, an 11 mile descent through an amazing natural wonder land

## Day 6: Rethymno

Phaestos, your last Minoan palace, is where the still undeciphered Phaestos disc was found, said by scholars to be the earliest printed document in the world.

Visit Spili, a very traditional mountain town with a picturesque fountain of lions heads. Shops sell a potpourri of handmade and organic local products.

## Day 7: Rethymno

Visit Armeni, the fascinating Minoan cemetery just north of Rethymno.

Rethymno will delight you with its Fortezza — the Venetian fortress that dominates the old city. Walk the old alleyways and you'll marvel at the architecture of a bygone era.

## Day 8: departure

Rethymno has a port but no airport. Herakleion is roughly 2 hours drive from Rethymno while to the west Hania is a one hour drive. Both Herakleion and Hania have ports with nightly boats to Piraeus and airports with several flights a day to Athens.

## Driving Notes

Daily driving as per the itinerary averages 1-2 hours between overnight destinations.

Herakleion is the pick-up and drop-off point for private vehicles. Additional charges incur to drop-off the vehicle at Rethymno or Hania.

Herakleion is the start and end point for pick-up by a private driver. Depending on location, additional charges may incur if pick-up or drop-off is not within the Herakleion region or somewhere other than the designated itinerary.

## Short Version

Pressed for time? Ask about a 5 or 6 day version of this trip. You will need to decide which sites and destinations to bypass.

