

Crete – The Minoan Kingdom

Tour Code GC

27 April – 5 May 2022

Like all Mediterranean islands, Crete has a rich history defined by the number of different people who invaded it or came to dominate it. Inhabited since the Middle Palaeolithic, it became a dominant power in the Mediterranean in the 3rd millennium BC when the people we referred to as Minoans constructed palaces on a scale not known in Europe at the time, as we will see when we visit the Palaces at Knossos and Phaistos. Although the island never recovered this status after it was dominated by the Mycenaeans, it was prosperous enough to produce the impressive remains seen at Gortyn, which is unique important for the legal code which is preserved in an extant inscription. Much of the charm of the Crete we see today stems from the influence of the more 4 centuries of Venetian rule which saw a flourishing in the island's architecture and arts as witnessed by the islands more famous artists, El Greco and the writer Kalliakis. This is a tour which has it all: stunning archaeology, romantic cities like Chania and dramatic landscapes accompanied by the island's wonderful cuisine



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Sunset over the Minoan Palace of Knossos

Ancient harbour of Chania

Day 1 – Fly to Chania

Fly direct from London Gatwick with Easyjet to Chania, arriving in the afternoon. We transfer to the Kydon hotel in the heart of the city, close to the charming old town of Chania. Welcome dinner at a local restaurant (D)

Day 2 – In Chania

Today we delight in the lovely harbour town of Chania, with its charming Venetian architecture. We start with the Archaeological Museum, housed in the Venetian Gothic former Church of San Francesco – turned into a mosque in the Ottoman period – where we see a plethora of remains dating from the Neolithic to the Roman periods. Highlights of this museum include Minoan ceramics and terracotta figures of bird faced women, as well as a 3rd century mosaic dating from the Roman period. In the afternoon, we will have a walking tour of its pretty Venetian quarter, including the narrow alleys of the Kastelli region and the wider streets of the Jewish district which dates to the 16th century when Jews, exiled from Spain and Southern Italy, made their home here (B)

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Day 3 – Kissamos – Phalasarna

Today begins at Kissamos Archaeological Museum, housed in a Venetian building called the Dioikitirio, which displays artefacts from the Neolithic period to Late Antiquity. Highlights include stunning mosaics from the Roman period, as well as a Hellenistic tomb. We continue to the ancient city of Polyrhena; whose acropolis looking out over the Cretan sea is dominated by an imposing Byzantine fortification. We end the day at the Hellenistic town of Phalasarna where we see impressive remains of fortifications built to protect the harbour, including 5 towers and a curtain wall (B)

Day 4 Visit Aptera – Heraklion

Leaving Chania, we visit Aptera, whose stunning and strategic positioning ensured it was powerful from the Minoan to the Hellenistic periods. Here we see remains of a 12th century monastery dedicated to St John Theologos, as well as remains of a Classical temple and an impressive Roman cistern. We continue to Heraklion, stopping en route to explore the excellent new Museum of Eleutherna in Rethymnon which displays finds from Eleutherna, including an archaic statue, the Lady of Eleutherna, reminiscent of the statue of Demeter known as the Lady of Auxerre in the Louvre, and grave goods from the Bronze Age (B)

Day 5 – Knossos and Vathypetro

We visit the Bronze Age palace site of Knossos, one of the pivotal sites of Bronze Age Greece. Excavations here have been overseen by the British School at Athens and the Greek authorities for many years. We continue to the Minoan house at Vathypetro with elaborate shrine and a well-preserved wine press. We return to Heraklion and the Heraklion Museum, with its exquisite jewellery and brightly-coloured wallpaintings (B)



Day 6 – Gortyn, Mesara and Ayia Triadha

We enjoy a morning at the important Graeco-Roman site of Gortyn. The site is best-known for its collection of 5th century stone blocks, inscribed with the law codes of classical Greece, which provide fascinating insights into property division, adoption, slavery and adultery. We return to the Minoan era at the elegant 'palace' at Phaistos, which dominates the fertile plain of the Mesara. Famous finds include the terracotta 'Phaistos Disc', stamped with a series of pictographic symbols; and thousands of documents, some inscribed with the earliest known occurrence of the (still undeciphered) writing of the Minoans – Linear A script. We continue to Ayia Triadha, a grand but ruinous Bronze Age villa. Lavish finds include a cache of copper ingots, bronze figurines and three elaborately-carved stone vessels (B)

Day 7 – Gournia and Mochlos

We visit the well-preserved Minoan town of Gournia on the northern coast. The remains are clustered around the sides of a hill which is crowned by a 'palace'. The majority of the houses are on the east slope, built up against each other along paved and stepped streets. We enjoy lunch in a seaside taverna before travelling by fishing boat to the tiny island of Mochlos, once a peninsula, on which stood an important Minoan town. We walk up to the ruins at beautifully situated ruins of Chamaizi, most famous for a Middle Minoan building located on the summit of the hill. (B,L)

Day 8 – Malia, Sissi and Elounda

Today we visit the Palace of Malia, one of the largest Minoan sites, which includes a Late Minoan palace which has a large central courtyard and impressive monumental facades. We continue to the nearby site of Sissi which has been excavated for the last ten years, revealing settlements from the Early and Middle Minoan periods, including graves with rich finds. The afternoon is free for you to relax in Elounda, where you might relax or take a boat trip to the evocative island of Spinalonga, site of a former leper colony. Tonight we enjoy a farewell dinner in a traditional taverna (B,D)

Day 9 – Heraklion to London

After a leisurely morning with time to enjoy some last minute shopping or perhaps simply stroll through the old quarter of the city and enjoy a final Greek coffee, we transfer to Heraklion International airport for our flight home (B)

Price £1695.00 per person based on sharing a twin room
£300.00 single room supplement charge

Price includes –

- * Organised private tour led by Patrick Syder
- * Specialist Cretan guide throughout the tour
- * All transportation by a/c minibus with driver
- * Full sightseeing programme including entrance fees
- * Boutique hotel in Chania (three nights), comfortable three star hotel (five nights) in Heraklion
- * All breakfast, fish lunch and two taverna dinners included
- * Airport transfers
- * Group size (max 9 passengers)
- * Porter, hotel and restaurant staff gratuities

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