

**GRE****Crete â€¢ Santorini â€¢ Mykonos â€¢ Athens****11 days**

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**Day 1      *Arrival in Iraklion***

Today we fly into Iraklion (Heraklion), the largest city on the island of Crete. Crete is the largest and most southerly of the Greek Islands, blessed with a magnificent setting of rugged coastal scenery and warm waters.

Overnight in Iraklion.

**Day 2      *Iraklion: Knossos & Archaeology Museum***

Early this morning (to beat the crowds!) we travel the short distance to Knossos where our local guide will show us the ancient palace of King Minos, first built around 1900 BC. In 1700 BC it was destroyed by an earthquake and rebuilt to a grander and more sophisticated design. The city of Knossos consisted of an immense palace, residences of officials and priests, the homes of ordinary people, and burial grounds. The Palace, which covered an area of 22000 sq m (236,682 sq feet), consisted of royal domestic quarters, public reception rooms, shrines, workshops, treasures and storerooms around a central court. Knossos was excavated by Arthur Evans between 1900 and 1930.

We also visit the Archaeological Museum in Iraklion, one of the best museums in Greece. The exhibits, collected from excavations carried out in all parts of Crete, come mainly from the prehistoric era and form a valuable record of the artistic, social and economic life of the island during the ancient period. We finish with an easy walking tour of central Iraklion, including the impressive St Titus Church, Morosini Fountain and other Venetian legacies. The massive walls that surround the town of Iraklion were built by the Venetians in the mid-15th century.

Overnight in / near Iraklion.

Meal Plan: Breakfast

**Day 3      *Iraklion - Chania - Iraklion***

Early this morning we set off for Chania, a former capital of the island and the site of the ancient Minoan city of Kydonia. In the 13th century, Venice was becoming the maritime master of the eastern Mediterranean. At Chania they built large fortifications against pirates and the Ottoman Turks. Eventually, though, the Ottomans took Chania in the mid-17th century. Today many regard Chania as Crete's most beautiful city.

We have a walking tour of the old town of Chania. We pay a visit to the Archaeological and Folklore museums and explore the wonderful labyrinth of narrow streets in the historic quarter. We will discover "lost" Turkish fountains and bathhouses; quaint mediaeval back streets and alleyways; Venetian and Turkish houses; mosques, churches, fortifications, old tradesmen's shops and a host of other gems that are the secrets of this Greek city. The covered food market is outstanding.

Later this afternoon we return to Iraklion.

Overnight in Iraklion.

Meal Plan: Breakfast

**Day 4      *Iraklion - Santorini***

This morning we travel by local ferry to the island of Santorini (all ferry tickets are included in your tour). Vast geological upheavals have given this island its unique form resulting in the nickname, "Pre-Historic Pompeii." The effect of terracing makes this unlike any other island, Greece's most visually stunning. Santorini is also the island of churches, wine, and donkeys! From as early as 3000 BC the island developed as an outpost of Minoan civilization until around 1500 BC when the volcano erupted. At this point the island's history became linked with the legend of Atlantis.

\* Greek ferry schedules tend to change without notice; some itinerary adjustments may be necessary at the discretion of your Tour Leader. Uncontrollable factors such as weather may result in delays; a flexible attitude will enhance the enjoyment of your adventure. PORTERS ARE GENERALLY NOT AVAILABLE ON THE GREEK ISLES, OR ON FERRIES BETWEEN THEM. You MUST be able to carry / wheel your baggage on and off ferries.

Overnight on Santorini.

Meal Plan: Breakfast

**Day 5      *Santorini: Archaeological Museum***

This morning we visit the impressive Archaeological Museum in Fira. This museum features many pieces and exhibits specific to Akrotiri (presently closed for reburishment), as well as artifacts dating back to the time of the Cycladic Civilization, which can be divided into three periods: Early (3000-2000 BC), Middle (2000-1500 BC), and Late (1500-1100 BC). The most impressive legacies of this civilization are the statuettes carved from Parian marble--the famous Cycladic figurines. Like statuettes of Neolithic times they depicted images of the Great Mother. Other remains include bronze and obsidian tools and weapons, gold jewellery, and stone and clay vases and pots.

Your Tour Leader will then take you on an orientation walking tour of Fira town. A popular thing to do after the tour is to walk down to the old port and then return to the rim via donkey or cable car (optional exence). You might also consider an optional caldera boat tour or an excursion to the site of Akrotiri (your Tour Leader will help you plan your day).

Overnight on Santorini.

Meal Plan: Breakfast

**Day 6      *Santorini - Mykonos***

We take a ferry or hydrofoil (depending on scheduling) journey to Mykonos.

From the harbour waterfront, you can watch the local fishing boats, or venture into the labyrinth of dazzling, whitewashed streets to the many churches, tavernas, or shops selling artisan crafts, jewellery and the latest fashions. In the distance stand a string of windmills that once harnessed the breezes of days gone by. The sugar cube buildings are stacked around a cluster of seafront fishermen's dwellings. The labyrinth design was intended to confuse the pirates who plagued Mykonos in the eighteenth and 19th centuries. The main town has immaculately whitewashed houses concealing hundreds of little churches, shrines and chapels.

Overnight on Mykonos.

Meal Plan: Breakfast

**Day 7      *Mykonos: Walking Tour & Boat Trip to Delos***

This morning your Tour Leader will take you on an orientation walking tour of Mykonos Chora. We wander the pirate-proof streets of town and see the Paraportiani Church near the quay, an architectural masterpiece of five chapels in one.

As one of the most cosmopolitan Greek islands, Mykonos is legendary for its shopping and nightlife. We then meet the boat that will take us to the tiny sacred island of Delos (20 minutes away). Delos gives the whole group of islands surrounding it their name, the Cyclades -- so named because they form a circle (kyklos) around Delos.

For nearly 1000 years this sanctuary was the political and religious centre of the Aegean. Leto, pregnant by Zeus, gave birth to the twins Apollo and Artemis on Delos. In the 18th century BC, the annual Delia Festival was established on the island to celebrate the birth of Apollo. Delos was populated during its height in Hellenistic times with wealthy merchants, mariners and bankers from as far away as Egypt and Syria.

We will see the Agora of the Competialists, Roman merchants or freed slaves who worshipped the guardian spirits of crossroads; the Sanctuary of Apollo, the three temples of Apollo and the Sanctuary of Dionysus. In the House of the Masks we are able to see a mosaic portraying Dionysus riding on a panthers back. The theatre here could seat 5,500 people.

Overnight on Mykonos

Meal Plan: Breakfast

## **Day 8**      ***Mykonos - Athens***

Today we take the ferry to Pireaus (Athens).

Overnight in Athens.

Meal Plan: Breakfast

## **Day 9**      ***Athens: City Tour***

Today we enjoy a guided tour of Athens, the very heart and soul of Greece (public transport). Our first visit takes us to the National Archaeological Museum, an unrivalled treasure house of Cycladic, Minoan, Mycenaean and classical Greek art. One of the most interesting sections is the Mycenaean hall with all of Schliemann's gold finds from Mycenae. The museum contains the world's finest collection of antiquities and treasures from all over the ancient Greek world, spanning some 7,000 years.

We then proceed to the Acropolis, adorned with magnificent buildings dating from the 5th century BC, the Golden Age of Athens. It was during this time, under the leadership of the great statesman, Pericles, that Athens was the most glorious intellectual and artistic centre of the ancient world. The prosperity of Athens and new wealth enabled Pericles to initiate the magnificent building programme on the Athenian Acropolis.

On the highest point on the Acropolis is the Parthenon, called the "finest monument of Greek civilization." The temple was dedicated to Athena "Parthenos," the virgin and patron goddess of the city. The temple had a dual purpose: to serve as a treasury for Athenians, and to house the magnificent ivory and gold cult statue of the goddess made by Pheidias, the same sculptor who was commissioned for the enormous cult statue of Zeus at Olympia.

The afternoon is yours to explore on your own. Later this evening we enjoy a farewell dinner for our final night in Greece.

Overnight Athens.

Meal Plan: Breakfast

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**Day 10**     ***Departure***

Departure from Athens.

KALO TAXIDI!!

Meal Plan: Breakfast