

# PILGRIMAGE BETWEEN THE OLDEST CITIES IN EUROPE - FROM KNOSSOS TO PHAISTOS

**Sunday: Welcome to Crete**

**Individual flight to Crete**

**Meals: Dinner**

**Accommodation: Apartments Petronikolis, Choudetsi**

**Monday: Knossos - Archanes**

After visiting the archaeological site at Knossos, we walk south towards the village of Agia Irini and continue parallel to the river Katsampas or Kairatos as the Minoans called it. The path leads through olive groves and vineyards until we reach the holy mountain Juktas. Juktas, seen from Heraklion, appears like the profile of a man's face. This mountain is considered the sacred mountain of the Minoans. Archaeologists discovered in 1979 on the north side of the mountain, at Anemospilia, Minoan sanctuary destroyed by an earthquake, where four human skeletons were found, one of them in a special position and pose. It is believed that people were sacrificed at this time. After visiting the sanctuary of Anemospilia, we continue walking to the foot of the mountain where one of the beautiful villages of Crete, Archanes, is located. In the village square, traditional dishes and meze can be enjoyed at any time and the best local wines can be tasted.

**Route 12km Time 5 hrs Ascent 450m Descent 150m**

**Meals: Breakfast, lunch / Accommodation: Apartments Petronikolis, Choudetsi**

**Tuesday: Archanes - Juktas - Profitis Ilias**

From the village square, we walk west towards Mount Juktas until we reach the path that leads us to the top of the mountain. From there we have a fascinating view not only of the sea but also of the largest wine-growing area in Crete. On the top of the mountain at 811 metres is the Jesus Church, which is celebrated every year on 6 August. This means that this mountain has been sacred for 5,000 years. Then for the ancient Greeks and today for the modern Greeks. We then follow the dirt road down the mountain and further west to the village of Profitis Ilias. Most of the inhabitants of this village are involved in agriculture and the area is characterised by hills where vineyards thrive.

**Route 13.5km Time 5 hrs Ascent 630m Descent 670m**

**Meals: Breakfast, lunch / Accommodation: Villa Kerasia, Kerasia**

**Wednesday: Profitis Ilias - Kyparissi - Agios Thomas**

The village of Profitis Ilias was called Kanli Kastelli before 1955, which means the Bloody Castle, because of a very bloody battle that took place here in 1647 between the Ottomans on one side and the Venetians and Greeks on the other. The road to Profitis Ilias goes downhill and offers a view of the olive groves and vineyards of the area and the mountains of central Crete. The first village we pass through is Kyparissi, where we can drink delicious mountain tea in the village square. The road continues downhill to the local torrent and then uphill to the village of Agios Thomas. Here we cross hills with cattle farms and the landscape here offers a different picture than before. In this village you can visit the 5,000-year-old Minoan wine presses, Roman tombs from the 3rd century AD and several other very old churches.

**Route 16km Time 5 hrs Ascent 510m Descent 320m**

**Meals: Breakfast, lunch / Accommodation: Villa Kerasia, Kerasia**

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## **Thursday: Agios Thomas - Gergeri**

Already at the beginning of the hike, a different landscape presents itself than before. The numerous vineyards and olive groves are replaced by many small livestock farms and grain fields that serve as fodder. After about 7 km, we are offered a panoramic view of the massif of Psiloritis (Ida) and the villages at its foot. In the village of Panasos we can admire the oldest olive tree in Crete, which is about 3,000 years old. Before reaching our destination, the village of Gergeri, we walk past the lakes of this village. One is a natural lake and the other is a man-made one to irrigate the fields of the area. In this mountain village you can eat very tasty lamb prepared in the traditional shepherd's way. It also offers some of the most delicious cheeses of Crete to try.

**Route 16km Time 5 hrs Ascent 300m Descent 400m**

**Meals: Breakfast, lunch / Accommodation: Hotel Idi, Zaros**

## **Friday: Zaros' Lake - Rouvas Forest - Zaros**

Today's destination is the Rouvas holm oak forest, 5 km from the lake of Zaros. The route goes uphill and first passes the monastery of Agios Nikolaos. After a landscape full of oleanders, plane trees and pines, we reach the entrance of the Rouvas gorge. The vegetation here consists mainly of holm oaks of various sizes, which form the largest forest in Crete. After 2 km we reach the centre of the forest, where there is the church of Agios Ioannis with many benches, tables and water fountains. A suitable place for a rest before we start the way back to the green village of Zaros, perhaps the most water-rich village in all of Crete. Here you can visit an old water mill that was still in operation until the 1970s. A workshop with traditional looms demonstrates the impressive art of this handicraft on a wide variety of weavings. The culinary speciality of Zaros is trout, which is farmed here in tanks located next to the restaurants.

**Route 11km Time 5 hrs Ascent 550m Descent 550m**

**Meals: Breakfast, lunch / Accommodation: Hotel Idi, Zaros**

## **Saturday: Zaros - Phaistos**

The last excursion starts in Zaros and heads south, parallel to the Agoutsakitis River, which ends at the Faneromeni Dam. This has been in operation since 2005 for the irrigation of the fields in the Messara plain. We walk parallel to the dam on its eastern side and then, after leaving the village of Faneromeni behind us, we reach the main village of Vorri with its picturesque village square. Here we take a break before tackling the last part of the route, which ends after a short climb at the Palace of Phaistos. After visiting the Phaistos Palace, we will be taken by minibus to the beach of Kalamaki, where we will spend the night after a farewell dinner.

**Route 17km Time 5 hrs Ascent 130m Descent 420m**

**Meals: Breakfast, lunch / Accommodation: Hotel Alexander, Kalamaki**

## **Sunday: Farewell to Crete**

**Drive to the airport and return flight home**

**Meals: Breakfast**