

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

Sunday: Welcome to Crete

Individual arrival to Crete

Meals: Dinner

Accommodation: Petronikolis or similar

Monday: Knossos - Archanes

We start at the archaeological site of Knossos and we walk south towards the village of Agia Irini and further 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 Jukhtas. Jukhtas, 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 10km - Time 5 hrs - Ascent 450m - Descent 150m

Meals: Breakfast, lunch / Accommodation: Petronikolis or similar

Tuesday: Archanes - Jukhtas - Profitis Ilias

From the village square, we walk westwards towards Mount Juchtas 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 8.5km - Time 5 hrs - Ascent 150m - Descent 630m

Meals: Breakfast, lunch / Accommodation: Villa Kerasia or similar

Wednesday: Profitis Ilias - Kyparissi - Agios Thomas

The village of Profitis Ilias was called Kanli Kastelli before 1955, which translates as 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 12km - Time 5 hrs - Ascent 510m - Descent 320m

Meals: Breakfast, lunch / Accommodation: Villa Kerasia or similar

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Thursday: Agios Thomas - Lakes of Gergeri village

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 you can admire the oldest olive tree in Crete, which is about 3,000 years old. Our destination today are the lakes of the village of Gergeri. One is a natural lake and the other an artificial one to irrigate the fields of the area.

Route 11.5km - Time 5 hrs - Ascent 210m - Descent 370m

Meals: Breakfast, lunch / Accommodation: Hotel Idi or similar

Friday: 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 reach the village of Faneromeni. Here our hiking tour ends and afterwards we are taken via Phaistos to Kalamaki beach, where you can refresh yourself in the sea before enjoying the farewell dinner.

Route 13km - Time 5 hrs - Ascent 130m - Descent 420m

Meals: Breakfast, lunch / Accommodation: Hotel Alexander or similar

Saturday: Farewell to Crete

Drive to the airport and return flight home

Meals: Breakfast