Tour Code
GR18

ADVENTURESABROAD

ULTIMATE GREECE

The Peloponnese, Cyclades & Crete

24 days

Created on: 21 Nov, 2026

Day 1 Arrival in Athens

This vibrant metropolis pulses with 5,000 years of history, from its Neolithic origins to its golden age when Athenian values shaped Western civilization. In 1834, Athens became the capital of modern Greece, transforming into an attractive metropolis that seamlessly blends archaeological treasures with contemporary European energy.

Tonight we gather with fellow travellers for our first evening meal, beginning our shared journey through the cradle of democracy and philosophy.

Overnight in Athens.

Included Meal(s): Dinner

Day 2 Athens - Mycenae & Epidaurus - Nafplio (Nauplia)

This morning we board our coach toward Mycenae, where massive stone fortifications crown a triangular hilltop between two dramatic gorges. Here stood the most powerful kingdom in Greece for 400 years (1600-1200 BC), its rulers building with enormous unworked stones in a style that awed even the ancient Greeks.

We enter through the famous Lion Gate, constructed in the 13th century BC, and explore the Great Court where legend claims Agamemnon met his tragic end. The Mycenaeans' mastery of this cyclopean architecture influenced fortifications across the ancient world.

Next we travel to Epidaurus, sanctuary of Asklepios, the healing god. These ancient "health farms" combined medicine with worship, drawing pilgrims seeking cures from across the Mediterranean. This prestigious centre flourished in the Classical period, receiving splendid 4th-century BC buildings. Epidaurus gained prominence when Athens adopted the cult in 420 BC, with tragedian Sophocles serving as its priest.

We then continue toward the charming seaside town of Nafplio.

Overnight in Nafplio

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 3 Naflplio - Mystra - Sparta

This morning we explore charming Nafplio's seaside character before embarking on a dramatic winding mountain drive toward Sparta.

We visit Sparta's unique Museum of the Olive and Greek Olive Oil, highlighting the culture and technology that remains inextricably linked with Greek and Mediterranean identity. Located in the heart of Laconia, one of Greece's premier olive-producing regions, this museum celebrates the liquid gold that has sustained civilizations for millennia.

We then continue to Mystra, an impregnable fortress built by Guillaume de Villehardouin in 1249. When Byzantines reclaimed the Morea from the Franks, Emperor Michael VIII Palaeologus made Mystra his capital, drawing refugees from the surrounding plains seeking protection from invading Slavs.

During the despots' rule, while the Byzantine empire crumbled elsewhere, Mystra experienced a remarkable renaissance. The city thrived under Venetian rule with 40,000 inhabitants and a flourishing silk industry, only to face repeated destruction by Russians (1770), Albanians (1780), and Ibrahim Pasha (1825). Since the 1950s, extensive restoration has revealed its former glory.

Back in Sparta, those interested may visit the archaeological remains of ancient Sparta, including the 2nd-century BC theatre - the site's most discernible ruin.

Overnight in Sparta

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 4 Sparta - Olympia: Site Tour

Today we travel to Olympia, arriving in the early afternoon for an extraordinary encounter with antiquity's greatest sporting spectacle.

After lunch we tour ancient Olympia, where rival Greek states laid down their weapons and gathered in sacred peace to honour the gods through athletic competition. The Temple of Zeus once dominated this complex, housing the 13-metre (43-foot) gold and ivory statue considered one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World.

We explore the Stadium where ancient athletes competed, and the Temple of Hera - the site's most intact structure and oldest building. Originally dedicated to both Zeus and Hera, this temple evolved from wood to stone construction, its mud-brick walls supporting a traditional tiled roof.

The Olympic Games represented the most prestigious athletic event in Greece, held in conjunction with festivals honouring Olympian Zeus. Three heralds announced dates to all Greek states, declaring universal truces that suspended hostilities. These sacred competitions ended in AD 393 when Emperor Theodosius banned all pagan festivals, with the temples destroyed in AD 426.

Overnight in Olympia

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 5 Olympia - Delphi Touring

We drive across the impressive Rio-Antirrio Bridge en route to Delphi, arriving in the early afternoon for a guided tour of this spectacular archaeological site and its excellent museum.

Nestled dramatically on Mount Parnassus's slopes, Delphi was far more than a geographical location to ancient Greeks - it was the "navel of the world." Zeus released two eagles from opposite ends of the earth, and their convergence here symbolized Delphi's central cosmic importance.

Initially revered by deities like Earth goddess Gaia, Themis (justice), Demeter (agriculture), and Poseidon (sea), this sacred site eventually became synonymous with Apollo after he slayed the serpent Python who guarded the oracle. This marked a shift toward reason, order, and the pursuit of excellence.

The Delphic Oracle wielded enormous influence throughout the Greek world. Here, the Pythia delivered prophetic pronouncements believed inspired by Apollo himself. These enigmatic utterances influenced political decisions, personal choices, and even colonial foundations.

Beyond prophecy, Delphi hosted the Pythian Games, a Pan-Hellenic festival predating the Olympics that celebrated athletic prowess and artistic expression, fostering unity among competing city-states.

Overnight in Delphi

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 6 Delphi - Kalambaka & the Monasteries of Meteora

Today we drive across central Greece's fertile plains, witnessing a landscape that testifies to the region's agricultural bounty. As we journey northward, rolling hills give way to increasingly rugged terrain, culminating in the awe-inspiring sight of Meteora's monolithic rock formations rising dramatically from the plain.

Later this afternoon, we embark on a panoramic drive around these "Rocks of the Air," marvelling at the sheer audacity of medieval monks who chose to build their monasteries atop these precarious peaks. The afternoon light casts golden hues across this extraordinary landscape, creating magical photographic opportunities that capture one of Greece's most breathtaking sights.

PLEASE NOTE: Depending on timing and logistical considerations, we may accomplish some monastery visits today and tomorrow morning. Your Tour Leader will advise in advance. Men must wear long trousers for monastery visits, while women must wear long wraps or skirts - available for purchase at sites for just a few euros.

Overnight in Kalambaka

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 7 The Monasteries of Meteora - Athens

Today we delve deeper into Meteora's mystique. This extraordinary complex, second only to Mount Athos in Eastern Orthodox importance, represents human ingenuity and unwavering faith. Perched precariously atop towering sandstone pillars, these monasteries offer breathtaking spectacles against the Thessalian plain's backdrop.

Due to periodic closures, we explore monasteries not visited yesterday, allowing nuanced understanding of this unique monastic community. We wander through ancient cloisters, admire Byzantine frescoes, and perhaps glimpse monks who continue inhabiting these sacred spaces.

Later, we journey toward Athens, stopping at Thermopylae - a site forever etched in Greek legend and history. Here, at this narrow mountain pass, King Leonidas and his 300 Spartans made their heroic last stand against Xerxes' overwhelming Persian army in 480 BC. This poignant stop serves as a powerful reminder of courage, sacrifice, and the unwavering human spirit of resistance.

This historic battlefield, where "the few" faced "the many," represents one of history's most celebrated examples of valor against impossible odds, inspiring generations with its message of duty and honour.

Overnight in Athens

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 8 Athens: City Touring

Today we enjoy a guided tour of Athens, the heart and soul of Greece.* A large part of the town's historic centre has been converted into a 3-kilometre pedestrian zone (one of the largest in Europe), leading to the major archaeological sites, reconstructing -- to a large degree -- the ancient landscape, thus allowing us to avoid the city's horrendous traffic. As such, much/most of our tour today will be conducted ON FOOT at a leisurely pace.

We start at the Acropolis (with hopes to beat the heat/crowds), near the site of the Dionysos Theatre. Constructed in the 6th century BC, it is one of the world's oldest theatres and the place where the great works of Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides and Aristophanes were first performed. We will also see a more recent theatre, the Odeon of Herod Atticus from the second century AD, which is still used for concerts and performances.

Ascending to the top of the Acropolis, we will see magnificent buildings dating from the 5th century BC, the Golden Age of Athens. On the highest point on the Acropolis is the Parthenon, often considered the finest monument to Greek civilization. The temple was dedicated to Athena "Parthenos," the virgin and patron goddess of the city.

After our Acropolis tour, we'll descend by foot and enter the Ancient Agora located adjacent to the Plaka, the old town of Athens. Among the numerous sights in this archaeological park are the well-preserved Temple of Hephaistos and the landmark Roman era Tower of the Winds.

Our guided tour ends with a guided visit of the Acropolis Museum, located at the foot of the Acropolis. The museum was built to house every artifact found on the rock, from the Greek Bronze Age to Roman and Byzantine Greece; nearly 4,000 objects are exhibited over an area of 14,000 square metres. After our tour you are free to wander and explore on your own or make your way back to the hotel with your Tour Leader's assistance.

* The exact order of our sightseeing in Athens may be altered by your Tour Leader depending on several variables and their judgement on

how best to run today's tour.

Overnight in Athens.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 9 Athens - Ferry to Naxos

Today we travel by ferry to Naxos which, as the main hub for the Cyclades island group, will serve as a convenient and charming base for the coming days' activities. This will be the longest ferry ride on the trip, approximately 4-5 hours depending on ferry type and the number of stops en route. The stops are actually an interesting part of the journey, allowing for a glimpse of islands we do not visit, as well as to witness the organized chaos involved in the loading and unloading of Greek ferries.

Green, fertile, largely self-sufficient, Naxos has not needed to go all out to attract tourists. This wealthy agricultural island exports an abundant harvest of olives, grapes, and potatoes throughout the Aegean, and has only recently (since the early 2000's) begun to cater to tourists.

On arrival we have a walking tour of Naxos Chora, the main town and capital of the island. On our stroll you will note the architecture of Naxos, distinct from that of any other Cycladic isle. The Venetians ruled this island from 1207 until the island fell to the Turks in 1566. Some descendants of the Venetians still live here and the influence of Venetian architecture is obvious in the Kastro and the fortified Venetian towers. Also specific to Naxos is the remarkable abundance of small Byzantine chapels, many of which contain exceptional frescoes dating from the 9th to the 13th centuries.

Our walk ends at the Portara, the big marble gate that stands high on the island of "Bacchus" and is the remains of the ancient temple of Apollo. The ruins of the temple are called "Palace" implying the palaces of Ligdami the ancient tyrant of Naxos (6th century BC). The legend says that Theseus abandoned Ariadne there when he passed through Naxos after he slew the mythical minotaur on Crete.

Overnight on Naxos.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 10 Naxos: Island Touring

Today we have a tour of the highlights of Naxos, a fertile and mountainous island. Many visitors concentrate only on the main town/port and the coast of this beautiful island -- what a shame! Our tour inland reveals a charming landscape dotted by thousands of citrus and olive trees and many quiet villages that feel like the Greece of days gone by.

We stop in the village of Chalki, which has many Byzantine Churches. We see the 12th century church of Protothronos and the Venetian-era Frangopoulos castle. We'll drive through Filoti where the landscape is covered by farm terraces. Soon we'll have a good view of Mt. Zeus (Zas), 1010 metres/3,313 ft, the highest point in the Cyclades.

We arrive in Apiranthos, which has a unique atmosphere with Venetian mansions and a small museum of prehistoric artifacts. Next is Apollonas where we see the 10.5 metre/34 ft 'kouros' (fallen statue) of Apollo from the 7th century BC, followed by a break for lunch. There are a number of cafes/restaurants with indoor/outdoor seating alongside the harbour.

After some time for a break we depart Apollonos, arriving back at our hotel in the late afternoon.

Naxos is famous for its delicious dishes. As a relatively well-watered and fertile island, Naxos boasts a wide variety of local ingredients that make for one of the most varied cuisines in the Cyclades, with many meat-based specialities, seafood dishes, cheeses, and local herbs and vegetables, including Naxian potatoes for which the island is famous. Naxos is also famous for "kitron" (pronounced "kee-tron"), a liqueur made from the fruit and leaves of the citron tree, similar to a lemon but stronger and slightly different in taste.

Overnight on Naxos.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 11 Naxos - Day Trip to Paros

This morning we hop on one of the frequent regular ferries that stops at Paros (+/- 30 min), Naxos's laid-back and idyllic neighbour to the west, best known for its high-quality white marble, its quaint capital, attractive villages, and some important sites of interest.

We'll explore the main town Parikia on foot, with a visit to the famous church of Katapoliani, one of Greece's most important Byzantine monuments. We also include the Venetian castle and the Archaeological Museum with its exhibits from the ancient history of Paros and Antiparos.

Farther afield, Paros has many beautiful sandy beaches and tiny bays, enclosed by extraordinarily "sculptured" rocks; others are long and wide. The countryside features terraced hills and magnificent rock formations, endless vineyards, olive groves and fruit trees. There is a large number of attractive villages in the traditional Cycladic style -- glowing white houses along labyrinth-like streets, decorated with arches, pretty balconies, bright flowers, and fragrant herbs. Using the local bus system or flagging a taxi allows one to explore as you like and according to your interests and energy level (your Tour Leader can help you plan).

After our leisurely explorations and a chance for a relaxing lunch, we return to Naxos in the mid-afternoon. Foodies – while on Paros, keep you eyes open for black-eyed beans with celery, snails with myrtzeli (handmade barley), cod with spinach, cuttlefish with fennel, hare stew – just a few of the specialties for which Paros is known.

Overnight in Naxos.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 12 Naxos - Day Trip Delos & Mykonos

Today we have a full-day boat excursion to the sacred island of Delos and the adjacent island of Mykonos.* The boat journey is shared with the general public, but our guided tour on Delos and time on Mykonos will be private.

Delos gave the surrounding island group its name — the Cyclades, so called because they form a circle (kyklos) around it. For nearly 1,000 years this was the political and religious centre of the Aegean, birthplace of the twins Apollo and Artemis, and at its Hellenistic height a cosmopolitan hub of merchants, mariners and bankers from as far away as Egypt and Syria.

Our guided walking tour of Delos lasts approximately three hours — come prepared, as the site is large and hilly with very little shade. Highlights include the Sanctuary of Apollo, the three temples of Apollo, the Sanctuary of Dionysus, and the House of the Masks with its celebrated mosaic of Dionysus riding a panther. The island's theatre once seated 5,500.

We then continue to Mykonos for about three hours of independent exploration — the harbour waterfront, the dazzling whitewashed labyrinth of streets (deliberately designed to confuse pirates), the iconic windmills, and the many churches, tavernas and craft shops. Try the local Kopanisti cheese, Mykonian sausages, or an Amygdalota almond cookie before we return by boat to Naxos.

* If you're wondering why we don't overnight on Mykonos: despite its enduring romantic reputation, today's Mykonos is crowded, expensive and firmly geared toward cruise passengers and the party-going jet set. It's well worth a few hours, but we much prefer the laid-back quiet of Naxos as our base.

Overnight on Naxos.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 13 Naxos - Ferry to Amorgos

Today we take a local ferry to Amorgos, the easternmost island of the Cyclades and the nearest to the neighbouring Dodecanese island group. There are fewer ferries to choose from for Amorgos, a less-visited out-of-the-way destination. As such, our total journey time can range from 1.5-3 hours depending on the vessel and scheduling.

Amorgos's timeless monastery, scattered churches and pleasant beaches offer both respite from tourists on the other islands and a taste of traditional Greece. For many, Amorgos has become the highlight of the tour, accurately described as "the soul of Greece." The locals are

extremely friendly, the mountains surrounding the port majestic, and the sunsets stunning. It has been the location of several movies and is a stunning place for casual walks through idyllic olive groves.

Our hotel is located at the eastern end of the island associated with the port of Aegiali.

Overnight on Amorgos.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 14 Amorgos: Chozoviotissa & Chora

This morning we travel by road to medieval Chora, the capital of the island. Looking at a map, you'll see that Amorgos is a long island, which is also very mountainous. Before the road was built connecting its full length, the only way to access both east and west was by sea, hence the two ports at either end. We will pause here to stroll about Chora, set high above the sea protected from pirates of bygone days, surrounded by windmills. At the top of the hill one may see the Venetian Castle of the 13th century that dominates the village as well as the church of Kira Leousa, dedicated to Mother Mary.

We leave the village and follow a dramatic road going down to the Monastery of Chozoviotissa.* The monastery is home to the revered icon of the Virgin from the Holy Land. The dazzling white building, founded in the year AD 1099, clings precariously to a cliff face. The icon was found in the sea below the monastery, having arrived here unaided from either Asia Minor, Cyprus or Jerusalem. We will enter the monastery and climb into its snug interior. Hopefully the docent will be available to show us around and provide access to the tiny but fascinating museum.

We then continue down the road to Katapola, the other port of Amorgos, where we can explore the village and have a break for lunch before heading back to Aegiali. Amorgos is a well-grazed island with herds of cows, sheep, and goats, which means that meats dominate most menus. It also means that there is a delicious selection of cheeses! Non-meat options include fava beans boiled with onion, capers, oil, and lemon, and pies traditionally made with wild chard and local herbs.

* PLEASE note that our visit comes with a dress code. Women must wear a long loose-fitting skirt or sarong -- something light and wrap-around is easiest -- over your shorts/pants for our visit. Men should wear long pants.

Overnight on Amorgos.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 15 Amorgos: Walk Tholaria to Langada

Today you can join your Tour Leader on a moderate hike along the old cobbled donkey path that was once the only way to access these two remote villages high above the sea. Our route takes us past a tiny old chapel and the ruined village of Stroumbos. We pause in the picturesque village of Langada (Lagada), where, depending on our timing, you can lunch, no doubt surrounded by forever blooming bougainvillea. Langada is a genuine Greek village with narrow alleys, traditional whitewashed houses, and small churches.

From Langada one can continue walking down the old mule path down to Ormos Aegiali (the port area) and catch the local bus from there back to our hotel, or hop on the local bus from Langada.

Balance of the day at leisure for some shopping/exploring in and around the port, or to enjoy the beach for which this area is known.

Overnight on Amorgos.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 16 Amorgos - Ferry to Santorini

Today we take a ferry or hydrofoil (depending on scheduling) to the island of Santorini (likely with a brief stop at Naxos) -- once again trip

duration can vary depending on scheduling and vessel type. This island will be a bit of a "shift of gears" after the relative quiet of Amorgos, but we will always include it for its spectacular one-in-a-lifetime uniqueness, and because it has an airport ;)

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 the island of churches, wine, and donkeys! From as early as 3000 BC the island developed as an outpost of Minoan civilization until around 1650 BC when the volcano erupted. At this point the island's history became linked with the legend of Atlantis.

At some point in our visit, we'll stop in at the The Museum of Prehistoric Thera. It was built on the site of the old Ypapanti Church, destroyed in the 1956 earthquake. The museum houses a very large number of ancient artifacts from various excavations on Santorini, such as at Akrotiri and at the nearby Potamos site.

Overnight on Santorini.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 17 Santorini: Akrotiri & Island Tour

Visually, Santorini is the most spectacular of the Cycladic islands. With its brilliant flooded caldera, high cliffs and charming villages, it is the Greek Isle of everyone's dreams. Our coach tour today will take us to Santorini's many highlights.

We begin with a visit to Akrotiri for a thorough guided tour. Excavations have revealed a complete prehistoric Minoan city with squares, streets, and two-storey houses, which contained marvelous frescoes. The buildings date to the late 16th century BC. No skeletons or treasures have been found in Akrotiri, so historians think that the inhabitants were forewarned of the eruption and were able to escape. The excavations have yielded evidence that has revolutionized our knowledge of the Late Bronze Age; indeed the town has been called a "Bronze-age Pompeii."

We will also visit the hilltop village of Pyrgos, once the capital of the island and home to more than 30 churches. The village is composed of traditional houses built around the Venetian Castle and the small streets follow the shape of the hill. Climbing from the square up to the castle of Pyrgos, the stone houses crowd more densely together within the labyrinth of narrow vaulted lanes.

Our drive around the island will also take us up to the Prophet Elias Monastery built on the highest point of the island in 1711 AD. Though we will not visit inside the monastery, the view from here is breathtaking.

Fira is the capital of the island and the most important village. Perched on the edge of an impressive cliff 260m high, the town offers great panoramic views over the submerged volcano. Here the small streets are filled with all kind of shops, cafes, and restaurants. After an orientation walk through the town, you might choose to visit the impressive Archaeological Museum in your spare time (optional). This museum features many artifacts dating back to the time of the Cycladic Civilization. The most impressive legacies of this civilization are the statuettes carved from Parian marble -- the famous Cycladic figurines. Like statuettes of Neolithic times they depict images of the Great Mother. Other remains include bronze and obsidian tools and weapons, gold jewelry, and stone and clay vases and pots.

Return to Kamari Beach (those who wish to extend their time in Fira can return to Kamari using the public bus system).

Overnight on Santorini.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 18 Santorini: Fira - Imerovigli - Oia / Free Afternoon

This morning we will head to the small town of Oia, situated at the northern tip of the island. We start by taking the public bus to Fira, where we enjoy the stunning caldera views and dramatic setting. From here we will follow the scenic path along the vast caldera rim. Our route leads up through the village of Firostefani and brings us to the village of Imerovigi. The views are ever-changing as the perspective of the island changes minute by minute. We will look out to Skaros, the remains of a Venetian Castle built in 1207 by Marco Sanudo, the ruler of all Cyclades islands at that time.

From Imerovigli we will continue by bus to Oia (pronounced "EE-ah"). Built on a steep slope of the caldera, many of Oia's dwellings nestle in the niches hewn in the volcanic rock. This was once a major fishing port but is principally known these days as perhaps the most dramatically

situated towns in the whole of Greece. The peak of prosperity for this small port town was reached in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. At that time the locally based merchant fleet plied its trade in the eastern Mediterranean, especially from Alexandria to Russia. The two-story captains' houses built on the highest part of the village are a reminder of the village's former affluence. Oia is a place where many artists have found their inspiration... and here we will wander the narrow streets and old ruins, and enjoy the stunning views of the caldera with panoramic views of the rest of Santorini and the Aegean Sea.

After a break for lunch we will make our way back to Kamari. While on Santorini, you may see a tomato fritters, a local speciality on menus, along with tarama salata (made from fish roe), and a wide range of sweets featuring local pistachios. Those who wish to extend their time in Oia or Fira can return to Kamari using the public bus system (your Tour Leader can assist).

The balance of your day is free to explore on your own; your Tour Leader can assist with options -- perhaps enjoy some time on one of Santorini's famous black beaches or hike up to the ruins of Ancient Thira.

Overnight on Santorini.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 19 Santorini - Ferry to Iraklion, Crete

Today we travel by ferry to Crete, the largest and most southerly Greek island, blessed with magnificent rugged coastal scenery and warm waters. Upon arrival, we enjoy an easy walking tour of central Iraklion, including the impressive St Titus Church, Morosini Fountain, and other Venetian legacies.

The massive walls surrounding Iraklion were constructed by Venetians in the mid-15th century, creating one of the Mediterranean's most impressive fortification systems. These defensive works testify to the island's strategic importance during centuries of maritime conflicts.

Crete's position at the crossroads of Europe, Asia, and Africa has made it a cultural melting pot throughout history. From ancient Minoan civilization to Byzantine, Venetian, and Ottoman periods, each era left distinctive architectural and cultural imprints visible throughout the island.

This evening, we settle into our Iraklion accommodation, preparing for the coming days' exploration of Crete's remarkable archaeological treasures, stunning natural landscapes, and vibrant cultural heritage that spans over 4,000 years of continuous human habitation.

NOTE: Ferry schedules may require conducting our walking tour tomorrow instead of today, depending on arrival times and logistics.

Overnight in Iraklion

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 20 Iraklion: Knossos, Archaeological Museum & Lassithi Plateau

Early this morning 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.

This afternoon we will proceed to the Lassithi Plateau, one of the highpoints of Crete, both in altitude and atmosphere, for it is unique: a green carpet hemmed in on all sides by the Díktean Mountains, snowcapped into April and irrigated in summer by windmills. As the excavations carried out on various sites have shown, this inaccessible area has been inhabited since Neolithic times. The plateau was also farmed by the Minoans and later by the Dorians. In 1293, however, it was such a nest of resistance that the Venetians forced everyone out and demolished the villages.

Overnight in Iraklion.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 21 Iraklion - Rethymnon - Chania

We leave Iraklion today and travel to Chania via Rethymnon. The old town here still retains its original aristocratic appearance, with buildings dating back to the 16th century as well as Byzantine and Hellenistic-Roman remains and a small Venetian Harbour. We will have some time here to wander and explore and soak up the charming atmosphere.

We then continue to Chania via the Akrotiri Peninsula, which rises just north of the bay of Suda, one of the biggest natural harbours in Greece. This peninsula east of Chania was once called Kiamon, and today is associated with the liberation struggles of Crete. While on the peninsula we will visit the monastery of Agia Triada, originally built in the 17th century. Today it is one of the few monasteries in Crete where monastic life is practiced.

Chania is 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.

Overnight in Chania.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 22 Chania: Walking Tour

This morning we'll delve into the rich history of Crete with a visit to the spectacular Archaeological Museum of Chania. The museum is home to an impressive collection of artifacts that showcase the island's fascinating past, from the Minoan civilization to the Roman era. As we explore the museum's exhibits, we'll gain a deeper understanding of the cultural and historical significance of Crete.

Following our visit to the museum, we'll embark on a guided walking tour of Chania's enchanting old town. We wander the narrow, winding streets of the historic quarter, and visit the Folklore Museum, which offers a glimpse into the traditional way of life in Crete with exhibits featuring local costumes, textiles, and handicrafts.

As we wander through the old town, we'll discover a treasure trove of architectural and historical landmarks. We'll see remnants of the city's Ottoman past, including beautifully preserved Turkish fountains and bathhouses. We'll explore quaint medieval backstreets and alleyways, lined with charming Venetian and Turkish houses, some of which date back to the 16th century. We'll also visit historic mosques and churches, and see impressive fortifications that attest to the city's strategic importance throughout history.

Our walking tour will also take us through the old tradesmen's shops and markets, where we can see artisans at work and sample local delicacies. As we navigate the labyrinthine streets, we'll uncover a host of other secrets and surprises that make Chania one of the most captivating cities in Greece.

The afternoon is yours to enjoy Chania at your own pace. You might choose to visit the famous Chania Market, where you can sample local specialties and shop for souvenirs. Alternatively, you could stroll along the picturesque harbour, admire the stunning views of the sea, or simply sit back and enjoy a coffee or meal at one of the many charming cafes and tavernas. Whatever you choose, you're sure to fall under the spell of this enchanting Greek city.

Overnight in Chania.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 23 Chania: Elafonisi & Monastery of Chrysoskalitissa

This morning we make an interesting excursion to Elafonisi via the scenic Topolia Gorge, experiencing Crete's dramatic mountain landscapes

and traditional villages.

Our drive takes us through forested mountains, and before reaching Elafonisi Beach, we stop to photograph the Monastery of Chrysoskalitissa. Perched 35 metres (115 feet) up on a large rock overlooking the Libyan Sea, this monastery is reached by climbing 90 steps carved into the cliff face.

According to local legend, one of these steps is made of solid gold, visible only to the sinless - adding mystique to this already dramatic clifftop location with panoramic sea views.

We'll have opportunities to relax and perhaps swim at Elafonisi Beach, considered among Crete's most beautiful. The emerald waters here are surrounded by distinctive pink sand dunes and dramatic black rocks, creating a natural artwork of extraordinary beauty and colour contrasts.

This unique beach environment results from crushed marine organisms mixed with traditional sand, creating the famous pink hue that makes Elafonisi internationally renowned among beach enthusiasts and nature photographers.

Later today we return to Chania, completing our exploration of western Crete's most spectacular coastal attractions and monastic heritage sites.

Overnight in Chania.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 24 Departure

Departure from Chania airport (CHQ), concluding our comprehensive journey through Greece's most treasured islands and archaeological wonders

KALO TAXIDI/BON VOYAGE!

Included Meal(s): Breakfast