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21 days
Duration

Cyprus, Greece
Destination

Level 2 - Moderate
Activity

Santorini, Crete and Cyprus Small Group Tour | Eastern Mediterranean Islands Tour



Apr 11 2024 to May 01 2024

Santorini, Crete & Cyprus Tour | Eastern Mediterranean Islands

On this Eastern Mediterranean tour of Santorini, Crete, and Cyprus, you experience, over the course of 21 days, the exhilarating mix of Greek island culture and history. This educational group tour visits four significant Eastern Mediterranean islands and features amazing voyages into antiquity, strolls through unique landscapes and scenery, a

taste of local cuisine, and a discovery of the Eastern Mediterranean's ancient ruins and natural wonders.

On these escorted tours on the Mediterranean Sea, travellers visit one of the Greek isles, beautiful Santorini, which contains a remnant of an ancient civilisation disrupted by volcanic action. On Crete, you explore the home of the Minoan civilisation aided by important archaeological finds at Knossos and Phaistos. You also visit Rhodes, inhabited since the Stone Age, as well as the island of Cyprus, where east meets west.

A selection of professional guides join your Program Leader or tour manager on this trip to share their knowledge of each island visited. As you explore these islands and learn about the cradle of Western civilisation, ancient cultures and history come to life. You take local ferries between the islands and spend an extended time exploring the many wonders that each has to offer.

Santorini, a municipality of Greece, is part of the group of islands called the Cyclades Islands ("circular islands"), located about 200 km (or 120 miles) from the Greek mainland. A single island before the devastating eruption of its volcano, Santorini (then called Thera) was sparsely inhabited during the Neolithic era (circa 4,000 BC, or the last stage of the Stone Age), the early inhabitants perhaps seafarers attracted to Santorini's rich sea and arable land.

More and more seafarers came and settled in a peninsula at the southwestern end of the island now called "Akrotiri". These settlers were primarily the ancient Cretans that archaeologists now refer to as the "Minoans", after the labyrinthine nature of a Bronze Age archaeological site unearthed in Crete, and which was probably the origin of the ancient tale of King Minos and the Minotaur.

Akrotiri grew to become a major urban centre and sea port during the Late Bronze Age (circa 2,000 to 1,627 BC), contributing to the growth of Minoan influence as the routes of commerce brought their culture and art across the Aegean and the Mediterranean. This allowed the Minoans to enjoy a trade relationship with Greece, Crete, Cyprus, Syria, and



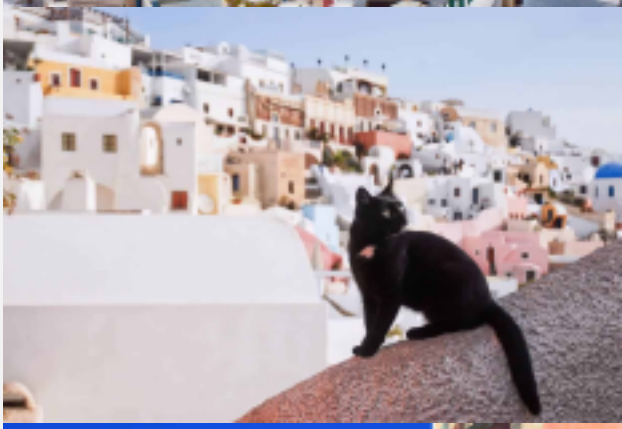




Egypt.

Around 1,450 BC (the exact date is still being debated amongst historians and archaeologists), the volcano on the island erupted, exploding with the force of several hundred atomic bombs. As the eruption buried Akrotiri, it gave rise to legends in the years that followed. The eruption was probably the source of Plato's story about the lost city of Atlantis, the plagues described in the Old Testament, and the "yellow fog, dim sun, [and] frost in July" described in the Bamboo Annals of China.







Santorini, Crete & Cyprus small group tour itinerary

The Eastern Mediterranean Islands small group tour will walk you through this history. We begin our adventure in Athens, the home of many Roman ruins and ancient archaeological sites. Its atmosphere has a mixture of classical Greek, Byzantine, Ottoman, and modern architecture, with the great Parthenon as its centrepiece. Ringed by mountains and conveniently located near Piraeus, its Mediterranean port, Athens epitomises both ancient and modern Greece.

From Athens we travel to Santorini. The island remains a stunning example of white washed villages, clinging to volcanic cliffs above black sand beaches. While on Santorini we take a walking tour of Akrotiri. We also visit the Prehistoric Museum of Thera which displays archaeological treasures from Ancient Thera and Akrotiri.

We also take a walking tour of the volcanic island of Nea Kameni in the caldera.

While on Santorini you visit a winery and explore their fascinating vineyards. The vineyards on Santorini are a site to behold as Santorinians use the indigenous grape variety, assyrtiko. As it can get very windy on the island, the residents weave assyrtiko vines into

basket shapes low to the ground instead of tying the vines to trellises.

The remainder of our small group tour explores three other islands in the Eastern Mediterranean: Crete, Rhodes and Cyprus. From Santorini we travel to Crete and spend 5 days exploring its natural beauty as well as its many Minoan palace sites. Our tour includes four nights on Rhodes, which has been inhabited since the Stone Age and contains a broad spread of history from ancient times though the medieval period to the present day.

From Rhodes we journey to Cyprus where we spend seven nights. This gives us the chance to explore north Cyprus, including Lanarka and the Khirokitia Neolithic site.

This Eastern Mediterranean Islands History small group tour is for the mature couple or solo traveller curious to learn about the Greek civilisation across the islands. Odyssey Traveller also offers a 10-day short version of this tour, Eastern Mediterranean Islands short tour

If you want to learn more about Greece or Cyprus, visit our country profiles where all the other tour departures are listed as well. For more details, click the ‘Top 5’ or ‘Itinerary’ buttons above! If you’re keen to experience this tour, please call or send an email. Or, to book, simply fill in the form on the right hand side of this page.







Tour Notes

- Group size is limited to a maximum of 16 participants.

Highlights

1. Explore Santorini, a stunning example of a Cycladic with white washed villages, clinging to volcanic cliffs above black sand beaches.

2. Visit the archaeological sites of Akrotiri, possible site of the lost city of Atlantis.
3. In Crete visit the Minoan Palaces of Knossos, Phaistos and Malia.
4. Experience Rhodes, including a visit to the fortified Palace of the Grand Masters.
5. Spend time in Cyprus visiting Larnaca, Nicosia and the Northern Cyprus sites of Khirokitia and Salamis.







Itinerary

Day 1

Locations: Athens

Overview:

We will begin our tour in Athens, a bustling modern metropolis, home to many of the world's most famous archaeological sites. The city is a melting-pot of classical Greek, Byzantine, Ottoman, and modern architecture. Ringed by mountains and conveniently located near Piraeus (its Mediterranean port), Athens epitomises both ancient and modern Greece. Upon arrival in Athens, we will arrive to the hotel individually. We will have a meeting with our tour leader at the hotel, followed by a welcome dinner.

Accommodation:

1 night at Titania Hotel or similar.

Day 2

Locations: Santorini

Overview:

After breakfast we will travel to Santorini. Colonised by the Minoans in 3000 BC, this volcanic island erupted in 1450 BC, forming Santorini's present distinctive crescent shape. The island is widely believed to be a candidate for the lost kingdom of Atlantis. Originally named Thira by the Dorians in the 8th century BC, it was renamed Santorini in honour of St. Irene by the Venetians who conquered the island in the 13th century.

The island remains a stunning example of a Cycladic island with white washed villages, clinging to volcanic cliffs above black sand beaches, best explored when the cruise ships have left.

In the afternoon, we will visit the Prehistoric Museum in Fira, which displays archaeological treasures from Ancient Thera, Akrotiri and Potamos.

Accommodation:

3 nights at the El Greco Hotel or similar.

Day 3

Locations: Santorini

Overview:

We will take a morning visit to the town of Oia and lunch at Ammoudi, which is 300 steps below Oia. In the afternoon, we will visit the archaeological site of Akrotiri, which was destroyed by a volcanic eruption circa 1613 BC. Our exploration for the day will end with a visit to the site of Ancient Thera.

Accommodation:

El Greco Hotel or similar.

Day 4

Locations: Santorini

Overview:

We will take a walking tour of Fira. We will visit Agios Stylianos, which is a chapel clinging to the edge of a cliff, and we will visit the Frankish Quarter, which features a maze of arcaded streets. We will then take an excursion to the volcanic island of Nea Kameni in the caldera.

In the afternoon, we will visit a winery and explore the fascinating vineyards on Santorini. Because it can get very windy on the island, the residents weave vines into basket shapes low to the ground instead of

tying vines to trellises.

Accommodation:

El Greco Hotel or similar.

Day 5

Locations: Heraklion

Overview:

In the morning we will take a coach to the airport and fly across to Heraklion, in Crete. We will arrive in Heraklion, in Crete, and transfer to the hotel. Crete is one of the most beautiful and traditional regions of Greece. Although Cretans have fought generations of invaders, they are a people whose courtesy and hospitality to travelers is legendary.

Accommodation:

3 nights at the Ibis Styles Heraklion or similar

Day 6

Locations: Heraklion

Overview:

In the morning, we will visit Knossos, which was the capital of Minoan Crete. Knossos was inhabited for several thousand years until its destruction in 1375 BC, which marked the end of Minoan civilization. The palace of Knossos was built circa 1900 BC on the ruins of previous settlements. It was destroyed for the first time along with the other Protopalatial palaces around Crete in 1700 BC, probably by a large earthquake or foreign invaders. It was immediately rebuilt to an even more elaborate complex, and until its abandonment was damaged several times during earthquakes, invasions, and in 1450 BC by the colossal volcanic eruption of Thera. A British archaeologist excavated the site in 1900 AD and restored large parts of the palace. According to Greek mythology, the palace was designed by famed architect Dedalos with such complexity that no one inside could ever find its exit. King Minos, who commissioned the palace, then kept the architect prisoner to ensure that he would not reveal the palace plan to anyone. Dedalos, who was a great inventor, built 2 sets of wings so he and his son Ikaros

could fly off the island, and so they did. On their way out, Dedalos warned his son not to fly too close to the sun because the wax that held the wings together would melt. However Ikaros, young and impulsive as he was, flew higher and higher until the sun rays dismantled his wings and the young boy fell to his death in the Aegean sea. The palace is also associated with the legend of Theseus killing the Minotaur.

In the aftrnoon, we will visit the Heraklion Archaeological Museum, which is one of the largest and most important museums in Greece. The museum, located in the town centre, was built on a site previously occupied by the Roman Catholic monastery of Saint Francis, which was destroyed by an earthquake in 1856. The museum's building is an important example of modernist architecture and was awarded a Bauhaus commendation. The museum's architect, Patroklos Karantinos, applied the principles of modern architecture to the specific needs of a museum by providing good lighting from the skylights above and along the top of the walls, and facilitating the flow of large groups of people. He also anticipated future extensions to the museum. The museum houses representative artifacts from the Neolithic period to the Roman rimes. The museum's Minoan collection contains unique examples of Minoan art, many of them true masterpieces.

Later we will take a walking tour of Heraklion, including a visit to the Morosi Fountain, the Bembo Fountain, Venetian Loggia, Agios Titos Church, the Koules Fortress (Venetian), and the if time permits we stop at the local Market.

Accommodation:

Ibis Styles Heraklion or similar

Day 7

Locations: Heraklion

Overview:

This morning we will go to the Nikos Kazantzakis Museum, which pays tribute to the important intellectual, author, thinker, philosopher, politician, and traveler, Nikos Kazantzakis, author of "Zorba the Greek." The museum is made up of a cluster of buildings in the central square of the historical village of Varvari, now known as Myrtia. The museum was founded by set and costume designer Yiorgos Anemoyiannis, a

pioneering figure in Greek theatre. His fundamental aim was to preserve the author's memory and promote his work and thought. Significant assistance was offered by Eleni Kazantzaki, the author's second wife.

The Museum holds manuscripts and notes by the author; samples of his correspondence with major thinkers, politicians and authors of his time; first editions of his works in Greek and other languages; rare photographic material; souvenirs from his travels; personal effects; models, costumes and other material from theatre productions of his works in Greece and abroad; portraits and sculptures of the author; and dozens of foreign-language editions of his works from all over the world.

We will stop for a wine tasting and lunch. After lunch, we will visit the Minoan Palace of Malia. This is the third-largest Minoan palace in Crete, built in a wonderful setting near the sea on the road linking eastern and central Crete. This palace, which was first constructed circa 1900 BC, was the mythological seat of Minos's brother Sarpedon. The palace was destroyed and rebuilt numerous times, and today we can walk around the actual palace, just as it was uncovered by archaeological excavations. Most of the ruins visible today belong to the Neopalatial complex – the second palace – whose rooms are set around 3 courts: the Central Court, the North Court and the Tower Court. The majestic size and complex plan of the palace make it a fascinating place to visit.

Accommodation:

Ibis Styles Heraklion or similar

Day 8

Locations: Chania

Overview:

We will visit the Minoan Palace at Phaestos. The Palace of Phaestos lies on the east end of Kastri hill at the end of the Mesara plain in Central Southern Crete. To the north lies Psiloritis, the highest mountain in Crete. On the slopes of Psiloritis is the Kamares cave, which was likely a religious or cult centre for Phaestos and the Mesara plain. A very fine pottery style was discovered in this cave from the Middle Minoan period, which has been named Kamares Ware after the cave in which it was found. Kamares Ware has only been found at palace sites like Phaistos and Knossos, suggesting that it was specially produced for

whoever was based in the palaces.

A couple of kilometres to the west of Phaistos is the important Minoan site of Ayia Triadha. To the south of Phaistos are the Asterousia mountains beyond which lies the Libyan Sea. To the southwest is Kommos, the ancient port of Phaistos, and to the east, the vast Mesara plain which is the single largest fertile area in Crete and was populated with small settlements and distinctive tholos tombs in Minoan times. We will also visit the mountain village of Zaros which is famous for its natural spring water, and see the Moni Agios Nikolaos at the mouth of the Rouvas Gorge.

Accommodation:

2 nights at Hotel Kriti or similar.

Day 9

Locations: Chania

Overview:

We will take a full day excursion along the west coast. Our first stop will be Rethymo, where we will visit the Venetian fortress and the Old Quarter, including the Rimondi Fountain and the Venetian Loggia.

We will visit Chania to explore Venetian fortifications. We will see the Church of Agios Nikolaos, which the Ottomans converted into a mosque in 1645 until it was returned to an Orthodox Church in 1918. We will also experience the Agora, or covered market. Our final visit for the day will be to the Allied War Cemetery at Souda Bay.

Accommodation:

Hotel Kriti or similar.

Day 10

Locations: Rhodes

Overview:

Today we will take a local flight and travel to Rhodes.

Rhodes is the capital of the Dodecanese and has been an important centre of civilisation since the 5th century BC. It was part of both the

Roman and Byzantine Empires before being conquered by the Knights of St. John, who occupied Rhodes from 1306 to 1522. Ottoman and Italian rule followed, and the island is still rich in cultural history and atmosphere.

On arrival we'll enjoy a tour of the city, including entrance to the fortified Palace of the Grand Masters, the impressive Archaeological Museum and a visit to the Acropolis.

We end our day with dinner at a local restaurant.

Accommodation:

Hotel Mediterranean or similar.

Day 11

Locations: Rhodes

Overview:

Today we continue our exploration of Rhodes with a visit to Kallithea Springs area, located only a few kilometers from the city. The thermal springs have been popular since the 7th century BC. We'll view the Rotunda build by the italians in the early 1900s and the explore the surrouding area and stunning beach.

Lunch will be at a local restaurant today and the remainder of the afternoon is at leisure.

Accommodation:

Hotel Mediterranean or similar.

Day 12

Locations: Rhodes

Overview:

We will explore the ancient city of Lindos and its inspiring acropolis.

The afternoon is at leisure and in the evening we enjoy a group dinner at a local restaurant.

Accommodation:

Hotel Mediterranean or similar.

Day 13

Locations: Rhodes

Overview:

Today we visit the ancient city Lalysos, a Doric city that attracted successive invaders over the centuries. Next we will go to the nearby Bee Museum, where we will learn about the history of beekeeping in Rhodes. Next, we will travel on to Petaloudes, the Valley of the Butterflies. We will take a lovely walk along a forest path lined with streams and pools along the way.

Our last visit of the day will be to Kamiros to see the ruins of a Doric city on a hill above the west coast. We will see a Doric temple, houses from the Hellenistic period, and the Temple to Athena.

In the evening we'll have a group dinner at a local restaurant.

Accommodation:

Hotel Mediterranean or similar.

Day 14

Locations: Pafos (Cyprus)

Overview:

Today we take a flight from Rhodes to Larnaca. On arrival we'll meet our local guide and transfer to Limassol for a walking tour in the area of the Old Port followed by a visit to the Castle. We then continue our journey to Pafos with a stop in Kolossi to visit the Medieval Castle.

In the evening we enjoy a group dinner at the hotel.

Accommodation:

King Jason Hotel or similar

Day 15

Locations: Pafos

Overview:

We have a full day exploring Pafos and visit the ancient city of Nea Pafos, where we will see excavated Roman villas and their beautiful

mosaics. We will see the houses of Dionysus, Aion, Theseus, and Orpheus, as well as the theatre, Odeon, and Asklepion. We will also see the Necropolis (Tombs of the Kings) from the Ptolemaic Period. Time permitting we will visit Chrysopolitissa, which is a basilica constructed at the end of the 4th century AD.

We stop for lunch at Kourion and later we visit archaeological site which contains remains from Hellenistic, Roman, and early Christian Era.

Accommodation:

King Jason Hotel or similar

Day 16

Locations: Troodos

Overview:

Today we depart Pafos and travel via Omodos where we will visit the Monastery of the Holy Cross, the oldest monastery in Cyprus. We will also have an opportunity to taste homemade kommandaria, which is a local wine that has been made here for over 4,000 years (even Homer wrote about it!).

In the afternoon, we will visit some of the other UNESCO World Heritage listed Byzantine Churches: Archangels Michail, Agios Ioannis Lambadistis Monastery, and Panagia tou Moutoulla.

Note for April departures: If your tour dates fall during Orthodox Easter some visit may be impacted by changed opening times or local closures due to the public holidays. More detailed information will be provided closer to departure.

Accommodation:

Casale Panayiotis or similar

Day 17

Locations: Troodos to Nicosia

Overview:

We will drive to Nicosia, where we can visit the tiny Byzantine church of Panagia tou Araka that has frescoes dating from 1192. In the afternoon

we will visit the Cyprus Handicraft Service and watch pottery, woodwork, embroidery, and a range of other skills. Next we will see Kornesios Mansion, which is a building restored in Ottoman style that shows the lifestyle of upper classes in this period. If time permits, we will also visit the Archaeological Museum.

Lunch will be at a local restaurant in Nicosia.

Accommodation:

Hilton Park Niscosia or similar

Day 18

Locations: Nicosia

Overview:

In the morning we will enjoy a walking tour of the Old Town to see the Archbishop's Palace, and the Agios Ioannis Church. We'll also visit the Archaeological Museum, which is the oldest and largest in Cyprus. The museum traces the long history of civilization since prehistoric times. After lunch we pause for lunch (own arrangements) we will visit Turkish Nicosia to see the Buyuk Han, the Bedesten, the Mevlevi Shrine Museum, and the Pasha Ethnographic Museum.

Dinner tonight will be at our hotel.

Accommodation:

Hilton Park Niscosia or similar

Day 19

Locations: Larnaca

Overview:

We will take a full day excursion to North (Turkish) Cyprus to see the Shipwreck Museum, Salamis ancient site, the Royal Tombs, and Famagusta – "Ghost Town".

Later in the afternoon we return to the hotel for a group dinner.

Accommodation:

Hilton Park Niscosia or similar

Day 20

Locations: Larnaca

Overview:

Today we will visit the traditional lace makers of Lefkara as well as the Khirokitia Neolithic Site and Larnaka Salt Lake. Next to the lake we will see the Hala Sultan Tekkesi Mosque, which is the burial place of the prophet Mohammed's aunt.

We'll stop at the Archaeological Museum, it was renovated in 2022 and houses a large collection of archaeological finds from the area.

We will visit the Lazarus Church and the archaeological site of Kition, and return in time for our farewell dinner at the hotel.

Accommodation:

Hilton Park Niscosia or similar

Day 21

Locations: Larnaca

Overview:

The tour will conclude today after breakfast.

Inclusions / Exclusions

What's included in our Tour

- 20 nights of hotel accommodation.
- 20 breakfasts, 7 lunches, and 15 dinners.
- Transport by coach, local flights, ferry travel, and field trips as indicated.
- Applicable entry fees and services of local guides.
- Service charges and gratuities.
- Services of a tour leader.
- Detailed tour information booklet.

What's not included in our Tour

- Return international airfare and departure taxes.
- Comprehensive travel insurance.
- Items of a personal nature.

Level 2 - Moderate

Participants must be able to carry their own luggage, climb and descend stairs, be in good health, mobile and able to participate in 3-5 hours of physical activity per day, the equivalent of walking/hiking up to 8 kilometres on uneven ground.

Please do not hesitate to contact us with any requests for further information about this tour or any others offered by Odyssey Travel.