Crete small group tour: The Minoans

20 Apr 20 to 09 May 20

Learning about the Minoans | Crete Small Group Tour

This small group tour of Crete is designed around an innovative itinerary that traces the remnants of Minoan culture across the beautiful Mediterranean island. Combining education, a variety of local experiences with a touch of exploration and breathtaking scenery, the magnificent art, architecture and lifestyle of an ancient people long since vanished can be brought to life once again. We will discuss what may have brought about the demise of such a civilisation some 3,500 years ago as this tour of Crete takes you to the ancient cities, settlements, and palaces of the Minoans.
Crete is largest of the Greek islands

Situated just over 600 kilometres to the northwest of the great Egyptian city of Alexandria, Crete is the southernmost and the largest of the Greek islands. For thousands of years, the well-positioned and well-provisioned isle has been the focus of the ambitions of those wishing to control the land.

The ancient Cretans are now referred to by archaeologists as the “Minoans”, after the labyrinthine nature of the Bronze Age archaeological site unearthed in Crete, and which was probably the origin of the ancient tale of King Minos and the Minotaur.

Knossos was the capital of Minoan Crete, 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 into 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 on Thera (Santorini). A British archaeologist excavated the site in 1900 AD and restored large parts of the palace.

Minoans have been described as the manufacturers of the first luxury goods

Archaeological work, that we will witness in the archaeological museum, has revealed evidence, dating to the third millennium BC, of a thriving trade network centred on Crete that dealt in tin and copper, the constituent elements for bronze. It is likely that this particular commodity brought great wealth and prosperity to Minoans as they raised their great palaces and expanded their settlements across the entire island. As affluence increased so did trade in other goods, with excavations by archaeologists pointing to the import of items such as jewellery, wine and luxury foodstuffs. In exchange, the Minoans maintained an established export of ceramics, timber from their cypress
forests and even textiles, although the latter leave little trace from so long ago.

On this guided tour, you will be on Crete, the once vibrant hub of a cultural and trade network that radiated out from a thriving Minoan civilisation to influence communities spread around the Mediterranean. There were strong connections with Egypt, the Levant and with mainland Greece. There is also the strong likelihood that the Minoan sphere of trading influence extended westwards to Sicily and Italy.

The life of the Minoans at home revolved around an agricultural lifestyle and their diet was likely much the same as many of the modern people of Crete today. Seafood, vegetables, grains and dairy, supplemented by the ever-present olive and its delicious and functional oil would have been found on the tables of most households. Wine appears to have been plentiful and the Minoans also enjoyed barley beer. Their houses were comfortable, built from local stone, topped with mud-brick and wood.

Minoan civilisation declined and disappeared some time during the 15th century BC. Certain scholars point to the eruption of the volcano on nearby Thera, hypothesising that this devastated the cities of the Minoan trading allies thus causing their economy to collapse. Others believe there was an invasion from outside of the island taking over a government possibly riven by internal problems. It remains conjecture as to what actually happened but the influence and the legacy of this great people lives on.

**Crete Small Group Tour Itinerary**

On this 20-day trip designed for seniors and mature-aged travellers, we will go on wonderful excursions on the Aegean Sea as we wander the palace precincts of Knossos, Malia, Zakros and Galatas. We will consider the influences, the political organisation and the society that provided for such impressive structure and adornment. Stroll along the streets of the settlements of Phaistos, Tylissos or Agia Triada and let your imagination take you where it will, as the paved streets and water systems stretch from one side of the town to the other. Marvel at the
view from every home and shop across the island settlement of Psiera and think about explanations for its seemingly isolated position. Travel out over the now sunken causeway to Minoan Mochlos and wile away hours exploring its stone-lined streets and alleys. Revel for a time in the legend of Zeus as you look in awe upon the interior of the Dikteon Cave, and view firsthand the later Venetian influences around the old harbour precincts of Chania and Heraklion.

This small group tour learning about the Minoans on Crete is bound together by the thread of the Minoans, but we will also be able to learn more about contemporary Cretan life. You will sample Cretan culinary delights made with many of the same ingredients that the Minoans used, and look on while oil and wine is produced by ancient methods before you. You will sail on the blue waters of the Aegean over shipwrecks from across the millennia, but be back in time for dinner and wine tasting at a harbour-side local restaurant surrounding the small ports, or perhaps at a taverna in a local village.

The Crete small group tour is for 20 days staying at 6 different locations. As a small group, you explore and visit 26 different destinations with a program leader, national and local guides, who share their knowledge about the Minoans with you. The program also gives you time to relax and explore the island on your own.

You may also read our article on Crete history and the history of Santorini as well as related articles:

- Questions About Greece
- Dawn of Greek Civilisation
- Creating Athens
For our other Greece tours, click here.

For our tours to Europe, click here.

Top 5

1. Visit, learn & explore Knossos Palace Herkalion
2. Travel with an Archaeologist and specialist guides for the entire
3. Spend time on the island of Spinalonga with the Venetian fort
4. Visit the birthplace of Helena of Troy
5. See Cretan history, from Neolithic (c.7,000BC) to late Roman in the field

**Itinerary**

**Day 1**

**Locations:** Heraklion

**Overview:** Today, the group meet for introductions and enjoy a welcome dinner locally.

**Accommodation:** Overnight Ibis Styles Heraklion centre or similar

**Day 2**

**Locations:** Heraklion

**Overview:** Today we commence the program with a walking tour of Heraklion and its place in the history and settlement of Crete. Today we visit the Archaeological Museum. The Heraklion museum has antiquities that span several thousands of years, Minoan, post-Minoan and later periods that we will take some time to view and discuss. During our walk we visit the Morosini Lions Fountain, Dermatas Gate, the cathedral of Saint Minas and from the Venetian period, the Fort, the city walls and shipyards.

**Accommodation:** Overnight Ibis Styles Heraklion centre or similar

**Day 3**

**Locations:** Heraklion

**Overview:** Today we travel out to visit the ancient archaeological site of Knossos and then the town of Tylissos. This evening there is a group meal.

**Accommodation:** Overnight Ibis Styles Heraklion centre or similar
Day 4

Locations: Heraklion

Overview: Today is a break day. If you'd like, you can simply rest up. Or you'll have the opportunity to further explore Knossos palace or the ancient city of Heraklion.

Accommodation: Overnight Ibis Styles Heraklion centre or similar

Day 5

Locations: Agios Nikolaos

Overview: Today we travel some 30km to Agios Nikolaos. We visit and learn about the Minoans at Galatas and Malia. Tonight there is a group evening meal.

Accommodation: Overnight Avra Collection Hermes Hotel or similar

Day 6

Locations: Agios Nikolaos

Overview: Today we take the boat out to explore the island of Spinalonga and the Venetian fortifications for the day. We enjoy a barbecue lunch, before returning in the late afternoon.

Accommodation: Overnight Avra Collection Hermes Hotel or similar

Day 7

Locations: Agios Nikolaos

Overview: Today we explore Gournia Minoan Town as well as Mochlos city.

Accommodation: Overnight Avra Collection Hermes Hotel or similar

Day 8

Locations: Sitia

Overview: Today we transfer to Sitia. On our way we transfer across by boat to Pseira island. On the island we explore and more about the
Minoan culture. There is a group meal tonight.

**Accommodation:** Overnight  Sitia Beach or similar

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**Day 9**

**Locations:** Sitia

**Overview:** Today we continue our study, visiting the Zakros Minoan Palace, the Palaikastro settlement, and the Kazarma Fortress in Sitia. The remainder of the day is at your leisure.

**Accommodation:** Overnight  Sitia Beach or similar

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**Day 10**

**Locations:** Rethimno

**Overview:** Today we transfer to Rethimno. We visit the Dikteon Cave & Zeus Cave. This is the legendary birthplace of Zeus! There is a group dinner in the evening.

**Accommodation:** Overnight  Ionia Suites or similar - apartment

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**Day 11**

**Locations:** Rethimno

**Overview:** On our first full day based in Rethimno as a small group we visit the Agia Triada archaeological site, the archaeological site of Phaistos, Kommos and the Monastiraki Minoan Palace. There is a group dinner this evening.

**Accommodation:** Overnight  Ionia Suites or similar - apartment

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**Day 12**

**Locations:** Rethimno

**Overview:** The day is free for individual touring of Rethimno. In the evening we have a group meal at a local organic farm.

**Accommodation:** Overnight  Ionia Suites or similar - apartment
Day 13

Locations: Chania

Overview: Today we travel onto Chania. We will take a break in the beautiful village of Stylos. In the afternoon we enjoy a guided walking tour of Chania. Tonight there is a group meal.

Accommodation: Overnight Belmondo Hotel or similar

Day 14

Locations: Chania

Overview: Today, we pause to luxuriate in this picture postcard seaside small town. The day is yours to relax and reflect, explore or just sit, read & watch.

Accommodation: Overnight Belmondo Hotel or similar

Day 15

Locations: Chania

Overview: Today there is a walk along the Imbros gorge with a local guide. The walk starts near the town of Imbros and finishes at Komitades. There is free time in Komitades to allow you to explore before returning to Chania. There is a group meal at a local Taverna this evening.

Accommodation: Overnight Belmondo Hotel or similar

Day 16

Locations: Kissamos

Overview: In the morning we travel around 40 kilometers to Kissamos. In Kissamos after lunch at your leisure, we visit the local museum, located in a fine old building which was once the Venetian, then Ottoman, command-post. The ground floor contains flawlessly labelled finds from nearby ancient Polyrhenna and Phalasarna. It is primarily pottery amongst a myriad of intriguing exhibits organised by chronology and provenance. But the museum’s pride and joy lies upstairs: two Roman mosaics from a late second or early third century
AD villa. The first juxtaposes the Roman Four Seasons with Three Horae (Dancers) symbolizing the traditional Hellenic tripartite division of the year. The second panel, damaged but still vivid, is devoted to Dionysiac themes. There is a group dinner this evening.

**Accommodation:** Overnight Gallini Beach Hotel or similar

**Day 17**

**Locations:** Kissamos

**Overview:** Today we travel to the ancient city of Falassarna. This Minoan city had a direct maritime link to Alexandria in Egypt, a major contributor to its prosperity. However, the local sailors did not limit their activities to peaceful trading; like the inhabitants of other coastal cities of the time, they were also particularly fond of piracy. This ancient city after an earthquake is now some 100m from the coast. The late afternoon is at your leisure.

**Accommodation:** Overnight Gallini Beach Hotel or similar

**Day 18**

**Locations:** Heraklion

**Overview:** Today, we return to Heraklion. In the afternoon we return to Knossos Palace to refresh our original interpretation of what we saw in this incredible ancient Minoan city, before arriving in Heraklion.

**Accommodation:** Overnight Ibis Styles Heraklion centre or similar

**Day 19**

**Locations:** Heraklion

**Overview:** Today, we spend time exploring the role of Crete in WWII with a local guided walk and museum visit. There is a farewell evening meal for the group today.

**Accommodation:** Overnight Ibis Styles Heraklion centre or similar
Day 20

Locations: Heraklion

Overview: Program finishes after breakfast.

Accommodation:

Inclusions / Exclusions

What’s included in our Tour
- 19 nights of accommodation.
- 19 breakfasts, 3 lunches, and 9 dinners.
- Services of Tour Leader for the duration of tour.
- Transport in comfortable and modern coaches or 4x4 vehicles
- All excursions, entrance fees, and local guides.
- Gratuities and necessary tips.

What’s not included in our Tour
- International airfares and departure taxes.
- Comprehensive travel insurance.
- Items of a personal nature such as telephone calls and laundry.
- Porterage

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