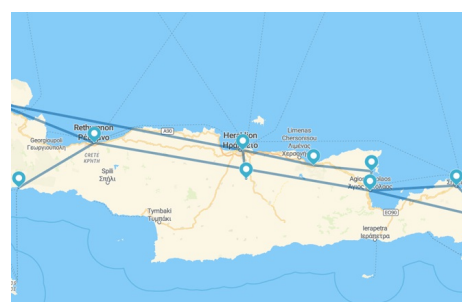




Greece (Crete), 9 Days · Tailor-made by car

Route through the Island of the Minotaur I

Travel to this European paradise that smells of land, sea and sun; and of olive trees, vegetables and fresh flowers. Few islands in the Mediterranean can compete with Crete when it comes to landscapes, natural treasures, history and strategic importance. Discover all the secrets of its glorious past and the ancient Minoan civilisation! This is where minotaurs were enclosed in labyrinths and the goddess Athena reigned supreme. Fancy unearthing its treasures? Some of them are archaeological, like the palaces of Knossos and Phaistos, the two largest archaeological sites in Crete. They are true must-visits thanks to the intricacy of the construction from several thousand years ago. The fascinating "Island of the Minotaur I" route will also give you time to worship the sun on Crete's very best beaches. One of those pristine beaches is at the end of one of the most interesting days, when you'll head down the Samariá Gorge. It's one of the top ten must-sees in Crete, along with Phaistos, Rethymnon or the glamour of Elounda, a resort with luxury hotels overlooking world-class beaches and coves. Apart from the beaches, the sun and the excellent climate awaiting you, Crete will surprise you with its outstanding Ottoman and Venetian heritage that you can admire in the majestic palaces and mosques of Chania and, of course, at the monuments and beautiful buildings of the capital Heraklion. Make sure you visit its fortress and its fascinating museums, where you'll find everything from El Greco paintings to the Phaistos Disc. All accompanied by delicious cuisine, excellent local wine, surprising cultural traditions and the warm and authentic character of the Cretans, always ready to invite you to enjoy their festivities. Travel to the island of Crete and discover the essence of Greek culture.



ARCHAEOLOGICAL

Departure date: Departures from June 2026 till June 2027

From: Cork, Shannon, Dublin

Travel details

DAY 1 · CITY OF ORIGIN - HERAKLION

Flight departure from the city of origin to Heraklion and rental car pick-up. Welcome to the capital of Crete and the largest city on the island! With a quintessential Mediterranean air, the appearance of the city reflects the influences that it has absorbed throughout its history. There are Arabic touches, Byzantine remains and Venetian prosperity on an exquisite Greek base. This means that a short stroll through the city will take you past a cathedral, a former mosque and a truly unique fortress. Depending on the time your plane arrives, you can focus part of the visit on Heraklion and then get your holiday off to a bang by enjoying some of the pristine beaches nearby. Just sixteen kilometres away from the city is Agia Pelagia, home to the truly amazing Ligaria Beach. It's a family-friendly beach, sheltered from the wind and with shallow water, lined with excellent restaurants and terraces overlooking the sea. Another option is Kokkini Hani, with a much livelier atmosphere than Ligaria Beach. You can end the day with a pleasant walk through the port of Heraklion (built in the thriving Venetian period) and dinner at a restaurant serving delicious local cuisine. Overnight stay in Heraklion.

DAY 2 · HERAKLION - PALACE OF KNOSSOS - THRAPSANÓ - ARCHANES - NIKOS KAZANTZAKIS MUSEUM (MIRTIA) - HERAKLION

Although at first glance Heraklion may seem chaotic, don't be fooled by appearances because you only need to rub a little bit to discover the genie hiding in this city. But first of all, it's best to head to the Palace of Knossos, the most outstanding archaeological site in the country. You'll be captivated by the materials used in its construction, as well as the frescoes and paintings that adorn the rooms and corridors. Guided tours are aplenty here, so it's a good idea to get there early. Check the opening hours and try not to arrive too late. You'll be thankful, for sure.

The palace is built around a central courtyard flanked by the King's and the Queen's Megarons, various chambers and the Throne Room, where King Minos most likely sat.

According to mythology, this palace was home to the famous labyrinth holding the Minotaur, a beast that fed only on human flesh. When you're finished, head back to discover Heraklion. It boasts an exquisite cultural life, a permanent market and a beautiful harbour for a leisurely stroll. The city centre has life all year round and is the perfect place to taste Greek cuisine. What's more, its list of museums is truly enviable.

The Archaeological Museum is a prime example. Don't forget to visit the Phaistos Disc! Meanwhile, the Historical Museum of Crete gives an insight into seventeen centuries of the island's history through multimedia content and includes two original paintings by El Greco, who was born in Crete.

Don't forget the Museum of Natural History. A good idea to go there with the family and enjoy features such as an amazing earthquake simulator. But art here isn't only found in museums. A stroll through the city centre will confirm this. A great place to start your sightseeing tour is Koules Fortress. It's the undisputed symbol of the city and is now used to host outdoor concerts, rather than to protect citizens from pirates. You can walk along its walls, of Venetian origin, and visit the tomb of Nikos Kazantzakis. Remember that name, because today you'll be able to visit his museum, but before then there's still lots to see in Heraklion. The old quarter is a good starting point. This is a very pleasant area to stroll around, so park your car and admire majestic temples such as the Church of Agios Titos and Agios Minas Cathedral, palaces such as the Venetian Loggia, and gardens such as El Greco Park. The city centre itself is very lively. You can check out this vibrant atmosphere in Eleftherios Venizelos Square and Kallergon Square.

When you finish, head back to the car and drive to Thrapsanó, known since ancient times for its ceramic craftsmanship. It's a really interesting visit because it's the only place in the world where artisans still make the jars once used by the Minoans to transport and store liquids. You can visit some of the workshops and even commission pieces to be sent back home. The region is also very famous for its olive oil, so make sure you try it out. Next stop will be Archanes, which lies in the central part of the island. It's famous for the Necropolis of Fourni, its picturesque streets and its palace. The day's fast coming to an end, so depending on how you're going with time, we suggest a quick trip to the Nikos Kazantzakis Museum, where you'll find out everything about the universe of this writer and activist. All that remains is to head back to Heraklion for dinner.

Overnight stay in Heraklion.

DAY 3 · HERAKLION - MALIA - NEAPOLIS - ELOUNDA - AGIOS NIKOLAOS

Today's itinerary is to the east to the island, where you'll have the chance to visit Agios Nikolaos. The route to the final destination is packed with interesting places. The first is Malia, just forty-five minutes from Heraklion. En route, you'll see a load of greenhouses and you'll probably want to know what's inside them. The answer is mini-bananas. They're really tasty and sweet, so buy a bunch to nibble on throughout the day. Malia is a very lively town, with great beaches and an excellent archaeological site. Take some time to visit it, as it's the only one you'll come across today. Don't miss the famous Malia Palace, which according to mythology was the residence of Sarpidon, brother of King Minos, and was built in 1900 BC. Next stop is the Neapoli valley. It's blanketed in olive trees that will point you towards the town of Neapolis. It's pocket-sized, to say the least, but has several places well worth seeing. For example, the Cathedral of Panagia, the second largest on the island, which is known as the church of the hundred doors. You'll recognise it as soon as you see it. Nearby is the bustling town square, where you can sit down for a quick coffee. Neapolis is also famous for its beaches, but they're a little bit out of town and there's no point taking a detour out to them, as the next two stops are beach destinations. Elounda is one of them. Welcome to the epitome of luxury! Here you'll find the most exclusive hotels on the island and an array of exquisite beaches and coves lapped by crystal-clear waters. This is why it's become the most tourist-friendly area of the entire island. You should definitely take a stroll around the quaint harbour and some of the resorts to get an idea of what paradise looks like. A little further south, nestled on Mirabello Bay, is Agios Nikolaos. It's not as luxurious as Elounda, but it's definitely more popular. And it has well and truly earned its popularity. One of its greatest attractions, besides one of the best sunsets in the world, is Lake Voulismeni, a natural lagoon that is connected to the sea by a canal. Life in the town revolves around this natural phenomenon of volcanic origin. There are plenty of shops and restaurants, while Greek mythology says that the goddess Athena reigned supreme here. Don't worry if you eventually arrive in Agios Nikolaos with little time to spare. This town will be your home for the next few days. That said, a must-do for today is a stroll through the fishing harbour, with its typical fishing boats and cosmopolitan atmosphere, even if it's after dinner. Overnight stay in Agios Nikolaos.

DAY 4 · AGIOS NIKOLAOS - SITIA - ITANOS - VAI - ZAKROS - AGIOS NIKOLAOS

And today, even further east, which you'll know is where the sun comes up. That's why there are few places in Greece better than Agios Nikolaos to admire the sunrise. Make sure you take a shareworthy photo! The first visit of the day is Sitía. It will remind you of Agios Nikolaos, but without as many tourists. It's less touristy and definitely quieter. Here you'll find the best wines on the island thanks to a good raw material and the meticulous work of the local wineries. Without question, this is the perfect opportunity to taste the local wines. You'll enjoy strolling through its harbour and the Kazarma Fortress, and obviously enjoying an aperitif at one of the waterfront cafes. Its imposing Venetian castle towering upon a hill offers a beautiful landscape for all visitors. The main attraction of Sitía is the Archaeological Museum, located 400 metres south of the city centre. If you're travelling in summer, enjoy some time on its beach before heading to Itanos. Between Sitía and Zakros you'll find Vai, a site that reflects the golden age of this important commercial centre, when East and West would be constantly trading with one another. Only the structure and very little else remains today, but it's located in an area of pristine white-sand beaches, which are out of reach of tourists without a rental car. So don't forget your swimming gear today! And just as life is full of choices, today you'll have to make an important decision. You'll have to choose between Europe's largest natural palm forests at Vai Beach and Zakros Gorge ("Valley of the Dead"). This means either going north towards Vai or south towards Zakros. If you go for the northern option, you'll come across a beach with fine white sand and turquoise waters. When you think you're in paradise, turn around and head into the palm grove, a stunning "forest" of palm trees full of dates. Meanwhile, if you choose to go south, you'll arrive at a paradise for hiking lovers and discover one of the biggest archaeological sites on the island. Legend has it that the Minoans opened countless routes to foster trade. Here there are several. Zakros Gorge is the most famous, with its caves and burial sites. It's important to inform yourself well before descending the trail, make sure you're properly equipped, and follow the indications so as not to go off course. You'll need around ninety minutes for the entire descent. Don't worry about the return journey back up, as there are frequent busses that cover the route. Bear in mind that the drive from Zakros to Agios Nikolaos takes about two hours. If you don't want to drive at night, keep an eye on the time. Overnight stay in Agios Nikolaos.

DAY 5 · AGIOS NIKOLAOS - PHAISTOS SITE - AGIA TRIADA - MONI ARKADIOU MONASTERY (OPTIONAL) - RETHYMNO

There'll be quite a lot of driving today, as you'll be saying goodbye to the east of the island to explore the centre. To reach Phaistos, you'll pass by Heraklion and then head southwards on the 97. After Knossos, it's the most important archaeological find on the island. It is a spectacle! It's incredible to think how such a complex could have been built in 1600 BC, and which has resisted everything except natural phenomena such as earthquakes. You'll probably start building up a mental picture of the town as you stroll past its wineries or the Royal Archive. There's usually a special price for anyone visiting the Palace of Phaistos and Agia Triada, your next visit. It's just 20 minutes from here. It cherishes the same magic as its predecessor, but with less crowds. You'll be able to head around the palace and also admire the Chapel of Agios Georgios. The theory that the king lived here with his entourage is based largely on the quality of the materials used for its construction: from slate and alabaster floors to the perfectly-preserved sarcophagi. After visiting Agia Triada, check the time and decide what to do next. A few kilometres away is the beach of Matala, where you could take a refreshing dip in the sea. (Note: Matala is also the name of the charming seaside town next to the beach. The place rose to fame in the late sixties and early seventies following the massive influx of hippies who set up home in the caves. Matala still has hints of the famous hippy spirit that turned this beach into a true flower-power icon). And about 2 hours to the northwest is Arkadiou, the most beloved monastery of the Cretans. You may be wondering: why do the islanders love a specific monastery? Because this is where locals held out against the Ottoman army for the island's freedom. They fended off the Turks for two days until they finally entered the monastery, but then the Cretans blockaded there blew up the ammunition store... and everyone in the building. They immediately became heroes and today the monastery is a memorial to the courage of those men and the freedom that this place symbolises. Whichever option you choose, accommodation tonight is in Rethymno. It's an hour's drive from Arkadiou and around one and a half hours from Agia Triada. Overnight stay in Rethymno.

DAY 6 · RETHYMNO - HORA SFAKION - SAMARIÁ GORGE - RETHYMNO

After wandering around the harbour and having some breakfast at one of the bars there, set off for Hora Sfakion, which is approximately 1 hour and 20 minutes away. You'll cross the island from north to south on the E75 to reach one of the most characterful villages in the whole of Crete. It's so beautiful. In fact, it's like a patchwork blanket of whitewashed houses with blue shutters that look out over the crystal-clear sea. This area is the least built-up in terms of tourism, so you'll immediately find unspoilt spots to enjoy. So much so that you probably won't want to leave. So, for now, stick around and luxuriate on one of the pristine beaches or coves in the area. And make sure you try the local cuisine, especially sfakianes pites, a kind of crepe stuffed with cheese and honey. You could alternatively head one of the most amazing natural features on the island, i.e. Samariá Gorge, one of Europe's longest canyons. Islanders say it's one of the ten most outstanding places in Crete. Quite a lot. That said, check the forecast before you head there, as weather conditions and the season can make it difficult to approach the gorge, and sometimes visitors are even banned from entering. The hike lasts between 5 and 7 hours, depending on your pace over the 16-kilometre descent. That may sound exaggerated, but the stages are simple and it's all downhill. You'll walk over wooden bridges, between pines and cypresses, jumping over ravines and passing through the famous Iron Gates. The final destination will definitely not disappoint: the gorge hits the sea in Agia Roumeli, where you can have a refreshing dip and then board the boat that will drop you off near Xyloskalo, where you left the car at the start of the hike. Overnight stay in Rethymno.

DAY 7 · RETHYMNO - CHANIA

Today you'll have time to explore the city of Rethymno. Sheltered by lofty mountains (snow-capped in winter), it is a perfect example of a town that has undergone invasions by very different civilisations throughout its history. Very prevalent here are Ottoman and Venetian influences on a deeply Greek foundation. Must-sees are its fortress, with its spectacular outer walls, and the Rimondi Fountain, found inside the mosque of Sultan Ibrahim Han. From almost all the city you'll see a minaret. It belongs to the former Neratzes Mosque, which was once also a church and is now a conservatory of music. The next stop will be Chania. Located at the foot of the Lefta Ori (White Mountains), Chania is one of the island's most important ports. The old part of the city is centred around a charming Venetian port and fortress built in 1538. It never ceases to fascinate visitors. Stroll around and you'll see the Fortress, the old Port, the Chania Lighthouse, the Municipal Market, the Henitsaros Mosque and the Etz Hayyin Synagogue. Overnight stay in Chania.

DAY 8 · CHANIA - ELAFONISSI BEACH - CHRYSOSKALITISSA MONASTERY - CHANIA

Chania is pretty much Crete in a nutshell, even though it doesn't have an archaeological site. The city is exceptional and the beaches are the longest and most stunning on the island. As you can imagine, its splendour is mainly due to the Turkish and Venetian influence, which is an important cultural legacy reflected by the presence of fortifications, palaces and minarets soaring up from ancient churches. As any good coastal city, it boasts an inviting waterfront promenade and a very interesting naval museum, located just at the entrance to the Firkas Fortress. Temples are also prevalent in the city, so it's always a good idea to visit some of them. There are many to choose from. From the Cathedral in Mitropoleos Square to Etz Hayim Synagogue and the Minaret on Daliani Street. All a melting pot of cultures that live in harmony within the same city. After enjoying the charms of Chania, you can set off for Elafonissi. This is our favourite beach in Crete and one of the must-visit natural sights on the island. Approximately 1 hour and 30 minutes from Chania, it's the westernmost point that you'll reach on this trip. (Note: You can walk out far from the shore, as the water is very shallow, especially in the summer season). If you have time, make a final trip to Chrysoskalitissa Monastery, some 72 kilometres from Chania. It takes the shape of an old fortress, built on a 35-metre-high promontory with stunning sea views. Today's your last night in Crete, so stretch the holiday to the fullest: enjoy lazing on the beach; admire the best sunset in the area; and head back to Chania for an al fresco dinner on the waterfront. Overnight stay in Chania.

DAY 9 · CHANIA - HERAKLION - CITY OF ORIGIN

Organize today's day depending on the departure time of your flight, in Heraklion, located about 2 hours away by driving.

Arrival at the airport with enough time to drop off your rental car and flight back to the city of origin.

Arrival. End of the trip and our services.

Your trip includes

Your trip includes

- ✓ Return flight.
- ✓ Stay in selected hotel in Heraklion.
- ✓ Selected meal plan in Heraklion.
- ✓ Stay in selected hotel in Agios Nikolaos.
- ✓ Selected meal plan in Agios Nikolaos.
- ✓ Stay in selected hotel in Rethymnon.
- ✓ Selected meal plan in Rethymnon.
- ✓ Stay in selected hotel in Chania.
- ✓ Selected meal plan in Chania.
- ✓ Rent-a-car.
- ✓ Amount of the supplement for collection and return of the vehicle in a different office.

Your trip doesn't include

- ✗ Accommodation taxes in Greece direct payment in facility.
- ✗ Possible toll charges.
- ✗ Insolvency protection.

Destinations Visited

Heraklion



Archanes



Malia



Elounda



Agios Nikolaos



Sitia



Zákros



Rethymnon



Hora Sfakion



Chania



Important remarks

- Triple rooms in Europe are generally rooms with twin beds or a double, in which a folding bed is installed to accommodate the third person. Due to the inconvenience this causes, we advise against using this option as far as possible.
- Check-in time at the hotel on the day of arrival depends on each establishment, but in no case will it be before 3:00 p.m., unless otherwise indicated.
- The proposed excursions and tours for each day are purely suggestions, as you can tailor the trip to suit your times, tastes and needs.
- A credit card is considered a guarantee, so sometimes you will need one for check-in at hotels.
- Hotels usually have cots available. Otherwise, babies will have to share a bed with an adult.
- To pick up your rental car, you'll need a credit (not debit) card in the name of the person who made the booking, who must also be the named driver of the vehicle.
- Consult the necessary documentation to enter the destinations visited and for transit in the countries where air stopovers are made.

