



Minoan Crete

History and archaeology

27 March–4 April 2026 (MM 907)

9 days • £3,830

Lecturer: Dr Christina Hatzimichael-Whitley

Concentrates on the extraordinary civilisation of the Minoans, but also pays attention to Classical and later cultures.

Time spent at Knossos and the main sites, but also many remote and little-visited ones.

Wonderful, contrasting landscapes at a beautiful time of year on the island.

'Land of contrasts' is the king of clichés, but for Crete it is difficult to avoid, not only because of the variety of natural environments but also because of the influence these have had on the built environment and the history of the island.

The contrasts in the landscape, vegetation and people are dramatic. Crete has its 'deserts and jungles, its arctic and its tropics'. The high mountains and upland plains are bleak and remote; the gorges in the highly erosive limestone are lush. The west provides a retreat from the more developed stretch of north coast between Heraklion and Agios Nikolaos. The south is difficult of access, scored by gorges and with the Asterousia mountains dropping sharply to the sea. The Sphakia region further west on the south coast is one of the most culturally distinct regions.

Lying between Europe, Africa and the Near East, variety also marks Crete's cultural legacy. The tour will focus primarily on the Bronze Age civilisation of the Minoans, the first great palace civilisation of Europe, which flourished in the second millennium BC. Wonderfully expressive, the art and influence of the Minoans spread throughout Greece, Egypt and the Near East. Pottery, sealstones, frescoes and architecture reached peaks of excellence unforeseen in the prehistoric Aegean.

Mycenaean, Hellenistic, Classical Greek, Roman, Byzantine, Venetian and Turkish domination followed. The volumes written on the island's Second World War history fill a bookshelf alone. And yet throughout millennia of foreign occupation and domination, Crete remained strong and proud and retained its own unique and captivating character.



Crete, wood engraving c. 1890.

Itinerary

Day 1. Fly at c. 12.15pm from London Gatwick to Heraklion via Athens (Aegean Airlines). First of five nights in Heraklion.

Day 2: Knossos, Heraklion. The capital of Minoan Crete and centre of the Bronze Age Aegean, Knossos is shrouded in myth both ancient and modern. At its peak it comprised a magnificent palace with courts, religious buildings and mansions. Excavated by Sir Arthur Evans early in the 20th century, his reconstructions not only protect the excavated remains but illustrate the splendour of palatial civilisation. Visit the Archaeological Museum in Heraklion, which houses the island's largest collection of Minoan art.

Day 3: Malia, Gournia, Agios Nikolaos. At Malia visit the Minoan Palace, the third largest and most provincial on the island. At Gournia, excavations of the Minoan town reveal over 70 cramped houses dotted about the hillside with a mini-palace at the top. The archaeological museum in Agios Nikolaos houses antiquities from the Neolithic to Roman times, including impressive grave goods from the early Minoan cemetery of Agia Fotia (3000-2300 BC).

Day 4: Arhanes, Heraklion. The attractive town of Arhanes possesses remarkable archaeological remains and one of the best excavated cemeteries on Crete, Phourni (this is a closed site and permission for access can sometimes be withdrawn at short notice). The town also has a beautiful museum. Some free time in Heraklion.

Day 5: Gortyn, Phaestos, Agia Triada. A day in the Mesara, a rich agricultural plain along the south coast. Gortyn was the Roman capital of Crete; a famous 5th-century BC inscription has details of Greek law. On a ridge, Phaestos is the second largest Minoan palace. Agia Triada, interpreted as the summer resort for Phaestos, has beautifully sited and architecturally elaborate villas. Fifth and final night in Heraklion.

Day 6: Rethymnon, Chania. Drive West to Rethymnon. The imposing fortress overlooking the city was built by the Venetians between 1573 and 1580 as an outpost against the Ottoman empire. The remarkable Minoan cemetery of Armeni – containing over 200 chamber tombs is considered a key archaeological site of the Late Bronze Age. Continue to Chania, the spiritual capital of

Minoan Crete
continued

Crete, a beautiful harbour town with delightful restaurants and artisanal shops, where the following three nights are spent.

Day 7: Aptera, Chania. One of the most powerful Graeco-Roman city states, Aptera is a huge site with Roman ruins, a theatre and a Turkish fort. View the Commonwealth War Cemetery at Souda Bay. Return to Chania for a walking tour of the old town. Some free time.

Day 8: Chania. The newly renovated Archaeological Museum of Chania opened in 2022. It houses around 3,500 archeological objects, including findings from excavations in several areas of the city that have taken place during the last 50 years. Moni Agias Triadas on the Akrotiri peninsula above Chania was founded in 1630 by Venetian nobles and has some of the finest monastic architecture on the island. Third and final night in Chania.

Day 9. Fly to London Heathrow* via Athens, arriving c. 3.30pm.

** Please note that, based on the 2025 schedule, our departure flight will be from London Gatwick, while the return flight will arrive at London Heathrow. We apologize for any inconvenience, but this arrangement was the best available option. Other alternatives would have either resulted in a very late arrival in Crete or required two stopovers. If Aegean Airlines updates their schedules for 2026, we will inform you accordingly.*

Lecturer

Dr Christina Hatzimichael-Whitley is an archaeologist and lecturer at Cardiff University specialising in the Aegean Bronze Age. She was born and brought up in Greece and now lives in Wales. She has travelled extensively throughout the Aegean and has excavated in Cyprus and in Greece, including in eastern Crete, where she was assistant director of the Praisos Project, a systematic survey and excavation of the Classical city of Praisos. Her teaching covers a broad range of subjects including Greek art and archaeology from the Bronze Age through the Classical to the Byzantine period, and Modern Greek. She holds degrees in art and archaeology from Thessaloniki (BA), Toronto (MA) and Cambridge (PhD).

Practicalities

Price, per person. Two sharing: £3,830 or £3,510 without flights. **Single occupancy:** £4,180 or £3,860 without flights.

Included: air travel (economy class) on scheduled flights with Aegean Airlines via Athens (Airbus Industrie A321 & A320); travel by private coach; hotel accommodation as described below; breakfasts, three lunches and five dinners with wine, water and coffee; all admissions to museums and sites; all tips for restaurant staff, drivers and guides; all state and airport taxes; the services of the lecturer and a local guide.

Accommodation. Megaron Historical Monument Hotel, Heraklion (gdmmegearon.com): 5-star hotel located in a historical building in the heart of Heraklion. **Kydon Hotel, Chania** (kydon-hotel.com): 4-star hotel well located close to the old town and port. *Single rooms are doubles for sole use throughout.*

How strenuous? There is a considerable amount of walking and scrambling over archaeological sites, this tour is not suitable for anyone who is not sure-footed. Average distance by coach per day: 56 miles.

Group size: between 10 and 22 participants.