**HERAKLION (KRETE)**

IRK02 - KNOSSOS PALACE AND SHOPPING

Duration: approx 4.5 hours

You do not need to have an expert’s knowledge of Greek history or Cretan civilizations to appreciate the fabulous Minoan Palace of Knossos. More than just a collection of stones or ruins, the Palace structure is still visible and visitors can wander the maze of rooms. A British archaeologist, Arthur Evans, who led the excavation of the site in the 1900s, reconstructed the Palace. Pictures on the walls help visitors gain a sense of the scale of the Palace – which was originally 20,000 square metres - and an idea of life here during the late Bronze Age. The Palace of Knossos is built on the ruins of a larger Neolithic settlement and of the supposed 1,300 rooms that made up the five-storey Palace, 800 are left today. After the visit, we will drive to Heraklion for free time exploring and shopping. Please note: guests using a wheelchair are advised that they must be accompanied by a paying helper to provide assistance with getting on and off the coach and that wheelchairs must be collapsible/foldable since the coach has neither a ramp nor a lift. Guests using a wheelchair who would like to participate in this tour are requested to contact the Shore Excursions’ Desk promptly once they are on board so that arrangements can be made.

IRK03 - EXPLORING CRETE

Duration: approx 4.5 hours

Come and pay homage to Dionysus, the Greek god of wine-making and revelry! Leave the port and drive southwards through ancient vineyards that have flourished here since the Minoan period, around 1,600 BC. Our first stop will be at a modern winery to see how wine is produced today and to taste the flavoursome, sherry-like Cretan wine. We will continue exploring the island, travelling through Crete’s picturesque villages before taking a break for photographs at Vathypetro. This Minoan country house and archaeological site is one of the oldest farmhouses in Crete. The tour continues through the island’s hilly countryside which is rich in olive groves and vineyards before arriving at the village of Archanes, just 10 km south of Knossos Palace. Enjoy free time in this lovely village which has been named the 2nd best-restored village in Europe and sample the local food and drink. We will take the scenic route back to the ship via the ruins of the Minoan Palace of Knossos. Please note: guests using a wheelchair are advised that they must be accompanied by a paying helper to provide assistance with getting on and off the coach and that wheelchairs must be collapsible/foldable since the coach has neither a ramp nor a lift. Guests using a wheelchair who would like to participate in this tour are requested to contact the Shore Excursions’ Desk promptly once they are on board so that arrangements can be made.

IRK05 – FODELE VILLAGE & RETHYMNON TOWN

Duration: approx. 6 hours

Leave the port and drive along the northern coastal road to the charming village of Fodele located in a pretty valley full of orange groves. The village is the birthplace of the famous painter El Greco who was born here in 1541. You can take a short walk through the village before continuing to Rethymnon. With its aristocratic XVI century buildings and fascinating mix of Byzantine and Hellenic-Roman remains, this town exudes a charming air of faded grandeur. Rethymnon is a mixture of Venetian and Turkish influences and is dominated by a Venetian fortress; you will have time to wander the narrow streets, admire the architecture and browse the local shops.

IRK06 – THE MINOAN PALACE OF PHAESTOS

Duration: approx. 4 hours

This tour will take you through some of the most beautiful areas of Crete that are characterized by lush vineyards and ancient olive trees. We will drive across the Aghia Varvara Pass to the southern part of Crete to reach the traditional village of Aghia Varvara where we will stop for a short visit. Our next destination will be the Messara Plain where we will explore the Minoan Palace of Phaestos. The Palace, situated in a magnificent location overlooking the Messara Plain and Ida Mountains, is second in importance and size to the palace of Knossos. The Italian archaeologist Frederico Halbherr excavated the Palace at the beginning of the XX century. The earliest settlements on the site date from the Neolithic Period and small settlements from the early Minoan period were scattered over the hill where the Palace stood. Phaestos was the centre of southern Crete, with two harbours, Matala and Kommos. Please note: this tour is not suitable for guests using a wheelchair.

IRK07 – THE VILLAGES OF CRETE

Duration: 5 hours

Drive along the coastal road and through the spectacular ravine of Saint George to Kritsa passing some villages on the way. Upon you arrival, right at the entrance of the village, you will find the Byzantine church of Panagia Kera which boasts 700-year old frescoes depicting Biblical stories. Soon after the visit, you will have a little free time in the village before continuing along the northern coastal road to reach the typical Cretan coastal town of Aghios Nikolaos. You will see a small lagoon – Lake Voulismeni – right in the centre of the town; the lake, according to local legends, is bottomless. Walk along the lakeshore or explore the pretty streets and browse the shops selling typical souvenirs. Enjoy free time before returning to the port. Please note: this tour is not suitable for guests using a wheelchair.

IRK08 - KNOSSOS & ARCHAEOLOGICAL MUSEUM

Duration: 5 hours

Take yourself back to the Aegean Bronze Age for a few hours to discover relics left by the Minoan civilisation that thrived on Crete from about 2,600 to 1,400 B.C.. You will first board a coach and head for the outskirts of Heraklion to reach the archaeological site of Knossos, the one-time seat of King Minos. A guide will show you around the labyrinthine palace complex, which includes the royal living quarters, rooms used for state occasions, a theatre, storage areas and potters’ workshops. Although discovered by a Greek national in 1878, the site only began to be excavated around the turn of the century under the direction of the British archaeologist Sir Arthur Evans. Next up is a visit to the Heraklion Archaeological Museum to continue the Minoan theme. The museum is home to an impressive collection of Minoan artefacts, from terracotta, marble and alabaster idols, through gold, jewellery, ivory and figurines to frescoes and sarcophagi, all of which go to provide a fascinating insight into the artistic flair of this ancient civilisation Enjoy some free time in Heraklion before returning to the ship. Please note: this tour is not suitable for guests using a wheelchair.