

## Greece: Sparta, Monemvasia & the Peloponnesian Peninsula

### Bike Vacation Only

If you're looking for a Grecian cycling adventure that escapes the crowded tourist centers, this VBT vacation is a breath of fresh air. The Peloponnese Peninsula juts into the azure waters of the Aegean Sea, and here you'll experience authentic Greece. Cycling from historic Sparta, your Greek trip leaders introduce you to local traditions dating back to ancient times. Discover the region's important role in the Byzantine Empire as you explore the imperial capital of Mystras with a local archeologist. Learn the art of Byzantine cuisine—passed down through the generations to the local chef who guides your cooking class. As you spin past seaside villages dipping their toes in Aegean waters, you may even feel the heart of western civilization pulsing beneath your wheels.

### Cultural Highlights

- Uncover the treasures of the hillside medieval gem of Mystras, the Byzantine Empire's cultural capital for nearly a millennium, with an expert archaeologist-guide.
- Savor the recipes and the flavors of ancient Byzantine cuisine during a special dinner.
- Walk through the maze of alleyways in the medieval castle town of Monemvasia, a crossroads of civilizations with Byzantine, Frankish, Venetian, and Ottoman influences.
- Cruise around the monolithic Rock of Monemvasia.
- Join a taverna owner on a shrimp-harvesting excursion, then join him for a cooking lesson and prepare *garidopetoules*—a savory shrimp pancake.

### What to Expect

This tour features a combination of rolling terrain and moderate-to-challenging hills, making it ideal for energetic beginners and experienced cyclists alike. Most rides take place on rural, paved country roads with some traffic. Our VBT support vehicle is always available for those who would like assistance.

**Tour Duration:** 7 Days

**Average Daily Mileage:** 7-37 miles

**Average Cycling Time:** 1-4 hours

**Group size:** 14-20 max

### Climate Information

**Average High/Low Temperature (°F)**

April 67°/53°, May 75°/60°, June 84°/68°, July 89°/73°, August 89°/73°, September 83°/67°, October 74°/60°

**Average Rainfall (in.)**

April 1.0, May 0.6, June 0.2, July 0.2, August 0.4, September 0.4, October 1.9

## **DAY 1: Your VBT Vacation Begins / Travel to the Peloponnesian Peninsula / Lunch at a Greek Taverna / Warm-Up Ride / Welcome Reception and Dinner**

Your tour starts at 8:00 a.m. in the lobby of our pre-tour hotel, the Electra Palace Hotel, Athens, Greece. Your VBT representative will meet you there, holding a VBT sign.

VBT highly recommends arriving in Greece at least one day before the tour begins to allow time for rest and recovery from jet lag before sightseeing and cycling.

After brief introductions, your group boards a private motorcoach for an approximately 3.5-hour drive to the Peloponnesian Peninsula. Along the way, your representative shares insights into the fascinating cultural and historical significance of the region.

You'll meet your VBT trip leaders at a traditional Greek taverna outside the village of Mystras, nestled among the forested slopes of Mt. Taygetos. Take in breathtaking views of the valley of Sparta as you enjoy an included lunch. Afterward, travel to your nearby hotel, change into your biking clothes, and join your trip leaders for a safety and bike-fitting session. A short warm-up loop from your hotel leads you through shimmering olive groves.

This evening, gather for a welcome cocktail and reception at the hotel, followed by a delicious dinner featuring some of the chef's finest Greek specialties.

### **Today's Ride Choices**

Afternoon: Warm-Up Ride — 11.5 km (7 miles)

### **What to Expect:**

Today's warm-up ride offers a chance to get comfortable with your bike as you pedal along quiet country roads with minimal traffic. The route is mostly flat and takes you through scenic olive groves in the surrounding countryside.

Cumulative Distance Range: 11.5 km (7 miles)

Included Meals: Lunch, Dinner

## **DAY 2: Cycle the Sparta Valley / Olive Oil Museum Visit / Tour the Fortified Village of Mystras**

This morning, set out on your bike into the picturesque valley of Sparta, once the epicenter of a powerful city-state in ancient Greece. Olive groves and scenic meadows line your route to the town of Sparta and its fascinating Olive Oil Museum. Enjoy a short visit at your leisure before cycling to the famous statue of Leonidas, King of Sparta and legendary leader of the 300 Spartans at the Battle of Thermopylae in 480 BCE. Return to your resort for a leisurely afternoon, perhaps enjoying a poolside lunch on your own.

Later, shuttle to the nearby UNESCO World Heritage site of Mystras for an energetic walk with your archaeologist guide. This fortified town is one of the most historic treasures of the Peloponnese—once the cultural and artistic capital of the Byzantine Empire for nearly 1,000 years before its conquest by the Ottoman army.

This evening, enjoy dinner on your own at one of the village restaurants near your hotel.

### **Today's Ride Choices**

Morning: Mystras Palace Hotel to Sparta — 28 km (18 miles)

### **What to Expect:**

Today's ride is mostly easy with a few rolling hills. You'll cycle primarily on quiet country roads, with a short stretch of city riding through Sparta.

Cumulative Distance Range: 28 km (18 miles)

Included Meals: Breakfast

## **DAY 3: Cycle to the Fishing Port of Gytheio / Travel to Monemvasia / Byzantine Culinary Experience**

After breakfast, cycle through the Sparta Valley toward the Peloponnesian coast, skirting the base of the soaring Taygetos Mountains—one of Greece’s highest ranges. Its summit, known as Prophet Elias, is among the oldest recorded mountain peaks in Europe and is even mentioned in Homer’s *Odyssey*. Pass through traditional villages before glimpsing the sea and following a scenic coastal road to the charming fishing port of Gytheio. After the morning’s invigorating ride, enjoy lunch on your own at one of the seafront tavernas—perhaps savoring the fresh catch of the day.

Following lunch, travel by motorcoach to the Aegean coast. Your next hotel lies just outside the walls of Monemvasia, a spectacular castle town shaped by Byzantine, Frankish, Venetian, and Ottoman influences. Linked to the mainland by a causeway, this rock island—known as the “Gibraltar of the East”—rises 300 feet (91 meters) above the sea and stretches about 1,000 feet (305 meters) wide and half a mile (.8 km) long. The remains of a medieval fortress still crown its summit.

This evening, discover the history of Byzantine cuisine during a special presentation by a local chef. Sample traditional dishes as you enjoy sea breezes from the hotel’s charming outdoor terrace.

#### Today's Ride Choices

Morning: Mystras Palace Hotel to Gytheio — 59 km (37 miles)

#### What to Expect:

Today offers a satisfying workout as you ride a longer distance and gain some elevation before descending to a scenic coastal route. You’ll follow mostly country roads, with occasional traffic in villages and as you coast into Gytheio.

Cumulative Distance Range: 59 km (37 miles)

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

## **DAY 4: Cycle to Limin Gerakas Wetlands / Cooking Demonstration & Traditional Greek Lunch / Monemvasia Walking Tour**

Enjoy a typical hearty Greek breakfast on your inn’s lovely terrace before setting out on your morning ride. Your magnificent route traces the eastern coast of the Laconia region, offering spectacular Aegean

vistas. Today's first destination is Limin Gerakas, a stunning port tucked within a unique Greek fjord. The village's lagoon and wetlands are part of Natura 2000—a vast network of nature preserves across the European Union.

Later, try your hand at catching shrimp with the owner of a local taverna. After the harvest, join your host for a cooking demonstration as he prepares *garidopetoules*—a traditional savory shrimp pancake—using your catch. Then, enjoy a fresh seafood family-style lunch at a traditional waterfront taverna. Cycle or shuttle back to the hotel and enjoy the remainder of the afternoon at your leisure.

Early this evening, join your trip leaders for a stroll through the walled medieval village of Monemvasia, dramatically perched atop the peninsula's cliffs. There'll be time afterward to explore local shops and enjoy dinner on your own in one of the village's renowned restaurants.

#### Today's Ride Choices

Morning: Lazareto Hotel to Limin Gerakas — 22 km (14 miles)

Afternoon: Limin Gerakas to Lazareto Hotel — 22 km (14 miles)

#### What to Expect:

Today's scenic ride features rolling hills and stunning sea views. Most of the route follows country roads, with some traffic expected when departing from and returning to Monemvasia.

Cumulative Distance Range: 22 – 44 km (14 – 28 miles)

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

## DAY 5: Cruise Around the Monemvasia Peninsula / Cycle from Monemvasia to Elia

Start your day at sea with a scenic cruise around the massive rock of Monemvasia. During your outing, you may witness the traditional fishing technique of casting nets into the water—a centuries-old way of life still practiced today. This rewarding morning offers breathtaking views of Monemvasia from the water and a glimpse into its maritime heritage.

Back on land, cycle into Laconia's fertile farmlands, blanketed with olive and orange groves. As you ride through the coastal hills, enjoy sweeping vistas of the Laconian Gulf. You'll arrive in the small fishing village of Elia in time for lunch on your own. Then continue to your seaside hotel, located within walking distance of the village. Consider treating yourself to a spa treatment or a refreshing swim in the crystal-clear waters surrounding your resort.

Dinner is included this evening on the hotel's beautiful seaside terrace; please be sure to make a reservation for your preferred time.

#### Today's Ride Choices

Morning: Hotel Lazareto to Alas Resort & Spa — 35 km (22 miles)

#### What to Expect:

Today's rewarding ride includes some elevation gains as you cycle through the mountains toward the Laconian Gulf. Your route follows country roads, with sections of heavier traffic as you depart Monemvasia and pass through smaller villages. The VBT support vehicle will be available throughout the day for anyone who would like assistance.

Cumulative Distance Range: 35 km (22 miles)

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

## **DAY 6: Cycle and Ferry to Elafonisos Island / Farewell Reception and Dinner**

Enjoy a lavish breakfast buffet of locally sourced traditional Greek selections—a delicious and nourishing start to a rewarding day of cycling. Today's route features invigorating elevation gains that offer sweeping views of the sea and dramatic coastal mountain ranges. Your destination is the port town of Pouda, where you board a local ferry for a short cruise to Elafonisos, one of the most celebrated islands in the southern Peloponnese. Its white-sand Simos Beach is often considered one of the best in Greece—and even the entire Mediterranean. Enjoy leisure time swimming in the crystal-clear waters, basking in the sun, or exploring the island's charming village for last-minute souvenirs. Lunch is on your own. Later, meet your trip leaders for the return ferry to Pouda, followed by a shuttle back to the hotel.

This evening, gather with your fellow riders and trip leaders to enjoy the setting sun over the Laconian Gulf and reminisce about your week during a festive farewell reception and dinner at your resort.

#### Today's Ride Choices

Morning: Alas Resort & Spa to Elaфонisos — 50 km (31 miles)

#### What to Expect:

Today's route features the most significant elevation gains of the week. You'll follow country roads, with some heavier traffic in and around towns. The VBT support vehicle will be available throughout the ride for anyone who would like assistance.

Cumulative Distance Range: 50 km (31 miles)

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

## **DAY 7: Corinth Canal / Travel to Athens / Your VBT Vacation Ends**

Travel with a VBT guide to the Corinth Canal—a 19th-century engineering marvel that connects the Saronic Gulf to the Corinthian Gulf. This dramatic waterway, carved into bedrock, remains a vital international maritime passage, serving approximately 12,000 ships each year. You'll have time to admire its grandeur and enjoy lunch before continuing to the Sofitel Athens Airport Hotel, located within the Athens International Airport. Your tour concludes here at approximately 4:00 p.m. Departing flights before 7:00 p.m. are not recommended. If you have an earlier flight, you will need to make your own transportation arrangements to Athens from Elia.

Included Meals: Breakfast

## **Accommodations**

May vary depending on departure date.

**Mystras Grand Palace (Days 1-2)**

Located outside the village of Mystras, the 5-star Mystras Grand Palace Resort & Spa is set amid 30 acres (12 hectares) of lovely landscaped gardens and olive trees. This elegant, stone-built resort sits at the foot of dramatic mountains and features one indoor and two outdoor swimming pools, a luxurious spa, Jacuzzis, and a fitness center. During your stay, enjoy international cuisine and regional specialties at Palataki Restaurant, Elia Taverna, and Byzantino Café. Each air-conditioned room features either a terrace or balcony with splendid views of the resort's gardens or nearby mountains.

### **Lazareto Hotel (Days 3-4)**

Cozy and utterly traditional, the Lazareto Hotel rests at the base of the monolithic "Gibraltar of the East," the Rock of Monemvasia. The entry gate to the majestic walled Byzantine citadel is a mere 10-minute walk away. The complex of low-lying, stone-masonry structures—restored with deep respect for local architectural elements—exude a distinct Laconian character and blend seamlessly into the landscape. Relax in the gardens or on the terraces overlooking the sea, or take a dip in the crystalline waters of the Aegean. Air-conditioned rooms are furnished with local antiques, creating an atmosphere of homey warmth and style. Gracious and refined, it is the perfect place to end a day of exploring.

### **Alas Resort & Spa (Days 5-6)**

Elegant and luxurious, the Alas Resort & Spa is a stunning property nestled in a natural fold of the Laconic Gulf on the edge of a rocky peninsula just outside the village of Elia. Clear blue waters and magnificent open vistas surround you here. We have reserved Seaview Junior Suites for you, each featuring a comfortable seating area in an open floor plan, direct sea views, and air conditioning. The restaurant leads you on a gastronomic journey of Mediterranean cuisine amid stunning surroundings, while the spa offers irresistible treatments in a soothing setting. Enjoy a refreshing swim in the pool, or head to the private beach to dive into the crystal-blue sea.