

Greece: Sparta, Monemvasia & the Peloponnesian Peninsula

Bike Vacation Only

Cycle into past millennia in Peloponnese, legendary crossroads of civilizations, during our bike tour in Greece. On this famously scenic peninsula, Byzantines, Ottomans, Spartans and others once ruled the day. *You'll* rule the splendid bike routes amid sweeping coastal and mountain vistas. Traverse the fertile Valley of Sparta and Mount Taygetus, blanketed with olive groves, pine forests, and a storied military history. Coast into unspoiled fishing villages and cast nets with local fishermen. Ferry to the island of Elafonisos, home to Greece's most stunning beach. And marvel at the monolithic Rock of Monemvasia and the astonishing Corinth Canal. Local guides illuminate ancient capitals, perfectly located resorts make exploring easy and welcoming *tavernas* and a cooking demonstration introduce you to delicious Greek and Mediterranean cuisine.

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 dinner
- Walk through the maze of alleyways in the medieval castle town guide of Monemvasia, a crossroads of civilizations with Byzantine, Frankish, Venetian, and Ottoman influences.
- Learn about Greek fishing techniques from local fisherman during a scenic 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 offers a combination of rolling terrain and moderate-to-challenging hills and is ideal for energetic beginners to experienced cyclists. The majority of rides are on rural paved country roads with some traffic. Our VBT support vehicle is always available for those who would like it.

Average Daily Mileage: 7 - 37 miles

Average Cycling Time: 00:45 - 03:30

Climate Information

Average High/Low Temperature (°F)

Apr 67°/53°, May 75°/60°, Jun 84°/68°, Jul 89°/73°, Aug 89°/73°, Sep 83°/67°, Oct 74°/60°

Average Rainfall (in.)

Apr 1.0, May 0.6, Jun 0.2, Jul 0.2, Aug 0.4, Sep 0.4, Oct 1.9

DAY 1: Travel to the Peloponnesian Peninsula / VBT Bicycling Vacation begins / Greek taverna lunch / Warm-up ride / Welcome reception and dinner

Your tour starts at 8:30 a.m. at the Electra Palace Athens hotel, Athens, Greece, Phone + 30 21 0337 0000. Your VBT representative will meet you in the lobby with a VBT sign. If your arrival at our Athens hotel will be later than 8:30 a.m. or if you are delayed, please call the hotel and ask the front desk to pass the message on to your VBT representative.

VBT highly recommends flying to Greece at least one day before the tour begins; this allows you to rest and recover from jet lag before you begin 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 enlightens you about the fascinating cultural and historical significance of the Peloponnesian region.

You meet your VBT trip leaders at a Greek taverna outside the village of Mystras, situated among the forested slopes of Mt. Taygetos. Take in the breathtaking views of the valley of Sparta as you savor an included lunch. After, you travel to your nearby hotel, change into your biking clothes and meet 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 welcome reception at the hotel, followed by a delicious dinner featuring some of the hotel chef's finest Greek specialties.

Today's Ride Choices

Afternoon Warm-up — 11.5 km (7 miles)

What to Expect:

The warm-up ride will give you the opportunity to become familiar with your bike as you ride country roads with little traffic. The ride is fairly flat, mostly through neighboring olive groves.

Cumulative Distance Range: 11.5 km (7 miles)

Included Meals: Lunch, Dinner

DAY 2: Cycle Sparta Valley / Visit Olive Oil Museum / Tour the fortified village of Mystras

This morning set out on your bike into the picturesque valley of Sparta, once the epicenter of a prominent city-state in ancient Greece. Olive groves and scenic meadows point the way to the town of Sparta and its impressive Olive Oil Museum. Enjoy a short visit at your leisure before cycling to the famous statue of Leonidas, the King of Sparta and the legendary leader of the 300 Spartans at the battle of Thermopylea in 480 BC. Ride back to your resort for an afternoon at leisure enjoying a poolside lunch on your own.

Later, you 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 in the Peloponnese, the Byzantine Empire's cultural and artistic capital for nearly 1,000 years before it was conquered by the Ottoman army. In the evening, enjoy dinner on your own in 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 easy with some rolling hills. Most of the cycling is on country roads. There is some city cycling in Sparta.

Cumulative Distance Range: 28 km (18 miles)

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 3: Cycle to the fishing port of Gytheio / Travel to Monemvasia / Byzantine dinner

After breakfast, you cycle through Sparta Valley to the Peloponnesian coast, skirting the base of the soaring Taygetos Mountains, one of Greece's highest ranges. Its summit is known as "Prophet Elias" and

is one of the oldest recorded mountain peaks in Europe. It is even mentioned in Homer's classic work, The Odyssey! You pass through scenic traditional villages before catching sight of the sea and following a coastal road to the charming fishing port of Gytheio. After the morning's energetic ride, you are sure to be ready for lunch on your own at one of the seafront tavernas, perhaps savoring the fresh catch of the day.

Following lunch, you enjoy a scenic drive to Aegean shores. Your next hotel is just outside the walls of the historic castle town of Monemvasia, a crossroads of civilizations with Byzantine, Frankish, Venetian, and Ottoman influences. This spectacular little island, linked to the mainland by a causeway, is known as the Gibraltar of the East for the massive rock that dominates its landscape. The behemoth rises some 300 feet above the sea and measures about 1,000 feet wide and a half-mile long and hosts the remains of the medieval fortress.

This evening, discover the history of Byzantine cuisine during a special and unique presentation by a local chef. Sample some of these historic dishes while enjoying the sea breezes on our hotel's charming outdoor terrace.

Today's Ride Choices

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

What to Expect:

Today will give you a great workout as you ride a longer distance and gain some elevation before descending to a lovely coastal ride. You follow mostly country roads with some occasional traffic in the 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 follows the eastern coast of the Laconia region, delivering you to scenic Aegean vistas. Today's first destination is Limin Gerakas, a stunning port hidden within a unique Greek fjord. The village's lagoon and wetlands are part of Natura 2000 – a vast network of nature preserves throughout

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 – with your catch. Enjoy a fresh seafood family-style lunch in a traditional waterfront taverna. Cycle or shuttle back to the hotel and enjoy the remainder of the afternoon at leisure.

Early this evening, join your trip leaders for a stroll through the walled medieval village of Monemvasia, dramatically perched above the peninsula's cliffs. There'll be time after to explore the 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 with scenic sea views. Most of the cycling is on country roads with some traffic as you leave and return to Monemvasia.

Cumulative Distance Range: 44 km (28 miles)

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

DAY 5: Cruise around Monemvasia Peninsula / Cycle from Monemvasia to Elia

Start your day at sea as you cruise around the massive rock of Monemvasia. During your outing, you'll witness the traditional fishing technique of tossing nets into the water. This rewarding morning gives you a breathtaking view of Monemvasia from the water and some insight into a centuries-old way of life here.

Back on land, you cycle into Laconia's fertile farmlands blanketed with olive and orange groves. As you ride through the coastal hills, take in splendid long-distance vistas of the Laconian Gulf shores. You arrive in the small traditional fishing village of Elia in time for lunch on your own. Then cycle to your seaside hotel, located within walking distance of the village. Treat yourself to a spa treatment or go for a swim in the crystal blue waters surrounding your resort.

Dinner is included on the hotel's lovely seaside terrace this evening, but you need to make a reservation for the time that suits you best.

Today's Ride Choices

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

What to Expect:

Today's rewarding ride includes elevation gains as you cycle through the mountains to the Laconian Gulf. Your route follows country roads with some heavier traffic as you leave Monemvasia and as you pass through smaller villages. The VBT support vehicle will always be available for anyone seeking 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 longer riding day full of endless rewards. Today's route offers invigorating elevation gains that provide sweeping views of the sea and dramatic coastal mountain ranges. Your destination is the port town of Pouda, where you embark a local ferry for the short cruise to Elafonisos, one of the most famous islands in Southern Peloponnese. Its white-sand Simos Beach is one of Greece's best; by some accounts, it is the best Mediterranean beach. Enjoy leisure time here swimming in the crystal-clear waters or catching some sun and set out to explore the island's charming village for last-minute souvenirs. Lunch is on your own here. Later, meet your trip leaders for the return ferry to Pouda and a shuttle back to the hotel.

This evening join your fellow riders and trip leaders to enjoy the final setting sun over the Lakonian Gulf as you reminisce about your week, during your festive farewell reception and dinner at your resort.

Today's Ride Choices

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

What to Expect:

Today's route offers the most significant elevation gains of the week. You follow country roads with some heavier traffic in and around towns. The VBT support vehicle will always be available for anyone seeking assistance.

Cumulative Distance Range: 50 km (31 miles)

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

DAY 7: Corinth Canal / Athens / VBT Bicycle Vacation ends / Begin Post-Trip Extension

Travel with a VBT guide to the Corinth Canal – a 19th-century engineering masterpiece connecting the Saronic Gulf to the Corinthian Gulf. Today this dramatic waterway cut into the bedrock remains an international maritime hub and serves approximately 12,000 ships per year. There'll be time to take in its magnificence and have lunch here before continuing to the Electra Hotel in Athens. The tour concludes here at approximately 4:00 p.m. You will need to make your own transportation arrangements to the Athens airport. Departing flights prior to 7:00 p.m. are not recommended. If you have an earlier departure, 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.

Electra Hotel Athens (Day: 7)

Located just off Syntagma square, the Electra Hotel Athens is perfectly located in the center of Athens within easy walking distance of many of the finest restaurants and shops. During your stay, enjoy Greek and Mediterranean flavors at the Terra Café and Wine Bar and at XFloor, where you'll enjoy views of the Acropolis from the 10th floor. Each air-conditioned room is adorned with soft palettes, marble bathrooms, wood floors and streamlined furnishings, creating a classical, comfortable ambiance.