

OPTIONAL HIKE THROUGH THE SAMARIA GORGE MAY 13 TO 15, 2008

Following the tour, instead of departing Crete for home, participants may choose to spend an additional two nights in Hania, Crete. Tuesday, May 13, we'll hike the impressive Samaria Gorge. The next day, Wednesday, May 14, will be spent resting and exploring Hania on your own. Departure from the airport in Hania, Crete, will be on the morning of Thursday, May 15.



ABOUT THE SAMARIA GORGE HIKE

Hiking the Samaria Gorge is a phenomenal experience. One of the natural wonders of Crete and the longest gorge in Europe, it is formed by a river that flows between two towering mountains down to the sea. Over time, the river has sliced a steep, cavernous gorge that begins on the plain of Omalos at 8,000 feet and plummets to a sheltered cove beach on the Sea of Libya. During the first two hours of hiking, the trail descends rapidly to the gorge floor, where a well-maintained path takes you through lush forests, along stony creek beds and through the remains of several villages, including a Roman glass blowing factory. The scenery along the trail is dramatic and beautiful.

The eleven mile gorge is one of the truly wild places on an island that has been continually inhabited by humans for 9,000 years. Hiking the gorge is one of the best ways to experience Crete's diverse plant life. Remnants of ancient forests give shelter to a stunning array of wildflowers that include endemic orchids and wild irises, along with native herbs such as thyme, rosemary, sage, oregano, and the elusive Cretan dittany.

The Gorge of Samaria, supervised by the Department of Forestry, was the first National Park in Greece. It opens in early May when water levels in the river drop enough to make the trail safely accessible. The path passes many lovely springs, eliminating the need to carry lots of water. Rangers and their rescue mules are stationed along the way, ready to be summoned by radio to hikers in distress. There is also a doctor and small first aid clinic in the abandoned village of Samaria, about half way through the park. Toilets are located at several places along the trail.

The hike is long but not difficult or treacherous. About 6 or 7 hours are needed to cover the entire distance, allowing time for plant-watching, resting, and enjoying the experience. Due to the varied terrain you'll encounter, Samaria provides its greatest physical challenge by forcing you to navigate rocks, stream beds, rough steep stairs, and narrow trails on your journey. People who make the hike without proper preparation may have a miserable experience. This is not a hike for people with knee, ankle, or hip problems, or those who do not exercise regularly.

If you'd like to attempt Samaria with us, we suggest that you start to prepare now. If you can easily hike two to three miles at a brisk pace on a trail that includes steep inclines, and you have good aerobic capacity, with no joint, ligament or tendon problems, you should be fine. Other factors that may cause problems for hikers are new or poorly fitting shoes that lack proper ankle and arch support, blisters caused by the wrong shoes or socks, and dehydration. Should you decide to join us for the hike, we'll send you detailed recommendations on what to bring and how to make sure that you're fit and prepared for the hike.

After a few hours of walking, you'll get your rhythm and begin to feel yourself swept along the gorge down to the sea. When you arrive at your destination in the village of Agia Roumeli, you'll celebrate a wonderful sense of accomplishment among other happy, tired hikers at a friendly open air taverna serving delicious Cretan dishes. Be sure to pack your swimsuit, as the crystal clear Sea of Libya awaits you after your long hot walk!

SAMARIA GORGE ITINERARY

Our tour to the Samaria Gorge begins around 5 a.m. on the morning of Tuesday, May 13, 2008, when our drivers collect us from our Hania hotel for the winding 1.5 hour drive to the beginning of the gorge high on the Omalos plain. After approximately 6 or 7 hours of hiking, we'll arrive in the village of Agia Roumeli around 3 p.m., where we will enjoy several hours of free time for lunch, swimming and resting. Then we'll board a ship for an hour long cruise along the largely uninhabited south coast of Crete to the village of Frangokastelli, where we will meet our drivers for the return drive to Hania.

Wednesday, May 14th, will be a free day for resting or exploring the charming town of Hania on your own. Our hotel is conveniently located near the automobile-free old town center. We'll have maps on hand and tips on where to go on your explorations. In the early evening, we'll gather in the hotel lobby and walk to a wonderful restaurant for our farewell dinner and good-byes.

On Thursday morning, you'll depart by taxi to the nearby Hania airport for your flight to Athens.

SAMARIA GORGE REGISTRATION AND TOUR PRICE

The price of the Samaria Gorge Hike is 600 euros per person, double occupancy. Single rooms are available; please contact us for details. We will need a minimum of 6 people registered to offer this tour.

A deposit of 200 euros is required to hold your place. Space is guaranteed by your final payment of 400 euros before February 13, 2008. Please see our cancellations and refunds policy.

Please note: In addition to your deposit, we require a signed copy our Medical Questionnaire, and signed Release and Acceptance of Risks form. Due to the physically demanding nature of this hike, all participants must also submit a medical release signed by their primary care physician stating that they are physically capable of hiking eleven miles at a brisk pace on uneven terrain.

The price includes:

- Patricia Kyritsi Howell and Robinette Kennedy as your exclusive guides through the Samaria Gorge.
- Two nights lodging (double occupancy) and breakfast at a four-star hotel in Hania.
- Private transportation from the hotel in Hania to the Samaria Gorge trailhead.
- Passage via public ship from Agia Roumeli to Frangokastelli at the end of the day.
- Private transportation from the village of Frangokastelli to the hotel in Hania.

Not included:

- All meals and beverages, other than the two breakfasts described above.
- Items of a personal nature (laundry, alcoholic beverages, drinking water, optional excursions and other items not cited above).
- Optional gratuities for guides, taxi drivers, hotel staff and other service personnel throughout the tour.
- Taxi travel from your hotel in Hania to the airport on the morning of your departure from Crete. (Cost is approximately 25 euros.)
- Any costs of excursions not included in the itinerary.
- Airfare to and from Crete, Greece.

Optional Tour to Athens and/or Santorini (Thera), Greece

If you'd like to visit Athens and/or Santorini (also known as Thera) either before or after your visit to Crete, we'd be happy to arrange a tour tailored to your interests. Please contact us for more details.

