GREECE - SOUTHERN PELOPONNESE - £1,750

21st April 2020 - 5th May 2020 (15 days)
Starting from Kalamata airport in the spring to tour the deep south of mainland Greece whilst the air is perfumed by orange blossom and roadside verges overflow with wild flowers. Cycle 60km - more or less - per day, through olive and citrus groves, green pastures and herb-scented hillsides sometimes in mountains (that may still retain a little winter snow) and very often by the sea. In addition to luggage support, this tour benefits from the services of an attentive local guide/van-driver who has arranged good quality accommodation and will ensure that we are all well fed.

There will be a whole day to explore the Byzantine remains of Mystras and half a day in Monemvasia (a Greek Gibraltar that time forgot). Other sites and sights include: the Venetian fort of Methoni, Navarino Bay (site of the last wind-powered naval battle), tower houses of the Mani, the verdant plains of Sparta, snow-capped Taygetos mountains, plus more rugged cliffs and idyllic coves than you can point a camera at!

HOLIDAY TYPE: Guided
TOUR MANAGER: Christopher Juden
GRADE: Moderate
BOOKING STATUS: Places Available
ACCOMMODATION: Hotel
BOARD BASIS: Half Board
TRAVEL ARRANGEMENTS: Land Only
HOLIDAY STYLE: Moving-on
VEHICLE SUPPORT: Full Vehicle Support
HOLIDAY REF NO: 03437

Holiday Itinerary

Tuesday 21st April
Meet at Kalamata airport. Transfer by coach (and van for luggage/bikes) 55km to Methoni at the south-west extremity of Greece, where a large Venetian fort - with pretty island fortlet - guards the sea passage between here and the isle of Sapientza. Assemble and check bikes. Stay 2 nights. Meals: D

Wednesday 22nd April
You’ll have a chance to visit the Fort before the mid-morning start of an optional ‘shake-down’ ride. This takes an inland route to Gialova, then by the lagoon (home to 256 species of bird) to a hilltop castle ruin overlooking beautiful Voidokilia cove. This viewpoint can only be reached on foot, with our support van and driver providing a change of shoes and security for parked bikes. Return by Navarino Bay (site of the last major battle between sailing ships) and Homer’s ‘Sandy Pylos’ to Methoni. 55km +/-700m. Meals: B D

Thursday 23rd April
Cycle the coast road, mostly but not always in sight of the sea, by the surf beach of Finikounta to pretty Koroni, where another Venetian fort - with Methoni - made ‘the twin eyes of the Republic’. Then it’s seaside all the way, through small towns and villages, to Bouka Beach on Petalidi Bay. 72km +/-1000m. An optional shortcut misses Koroni, cutting the distance and altitude gain/loss to 59km +/-800m. Stay 1 night. Meals: B D

Friday 24th April
Cycle by the coast to and through Kalamata, visiting the Railway Park (what has become of the ex-station, locomotives between the trees) and Battle of Kalamata memorial. Continue around the bay, which nevertheless entails climbing a spur of the Taygetos Mountains to over 400m by the Castle of Zarnata, to Kardamylí. We are now in 'The Mani', the bony middle finger of the Peloponnese, sparsely populated by a warlike people who regard themselves as Mani first, secondly Greek. In old Kardamylí a typical Mani tower house can be visited. 53km +/-750m. Stay 1 night. Meals: B D

**Saturday 25th April**

Cycle further down the increasingly mountainous coast, passing the house of Paddy Leigh-Fermor, climbing to Platanos, down to Oitylo and up again to the town of Areopoli, capital of the Mani and gateway to the Deep Mani the wildest part of this sparsely but fiercely populated region. 47km +900/-650m. Stay 2 nights. Meals: B D

**Sunday 26th April**

Rest day with two cycling options in the Deep Mani. The moderate option goes down the west coast as far as pretty Gerolimenas and back on an inland route, via a chain of typical Mani villages at the foot of the mountains. 55km +/-700m. Or you can attempt the challenging Deep Mani Loop (rated by a previous participant as "one of my ten best rides ever"), which continues to Cape Tenaro, southernmost point of mainland Greece, and back up the spectacular eastern coast via villages with particularly tall tower houses. 89km +/-1,700m. Meals: B D

**Monday 27th April**

Cycle a low pass through the mountains down to Kotonas on the eastern Mani coast. Follow the coast around rocky headlands and sandy bays to Gythio, the seaport of Sparta, where legend has it that Helen and Paris of Troy spent their first night on the Isle of Marathonisi (now linked by causeway to the town) when fleeing King Menalas. 52km +700/-950m. Stay 1 night. Meals: B D

**Tuesday 28th April**

Cycle around the Gulf Lakonikos. The headlands become smaller, the beaches longer and backed by orchards of orange and lemon trees. Their blossom will perfume our journey across the coastal plain of Sparta, which includes a 3km short-cut on gravel roads through the orchards (6km tarmac alternative if wet) to Leimonas. We return to the seaside at Kokkina and through Elia, inland to Papandiaka then back to the coast at Xilis Bay and the fishing village of Archangelos. 58km +/-600m. Stay 1 night. Meals: B D

**Wednesday 29th April**

Cycle via Elia and Pantanassa, then cross a 590m pass with panoramic sea views. Descending to the eastern coast, if you can lift your eyes for a moment from this narrow and twisty mountain road, they will be drawn to a mighty rock jutting like Gibraltar from the sea and also thinly joined to the mainland. This is Monemvasia, our destination, a few km north along the coast and across the causeway. We should arrive by midday, with all afternoon to explore this fascinating old town and even older remains atop the rock. 34km +/-700m. Stay 1 night. Meals: B D

**Thursday 30th April**

Cycle around Monemvasia Bay then over a few headlands divided by pretty inlets to Gerakas. From here we climb steadily. A couple of moderate downs and ups bring us to Charakas, which we leave via a cleft in the surrounding mountains, to emerge on a cliff face, 600m above the sea! The narrow road turns left along the cliff, to descend on a most spectacular corniche, to Kiparissi in its beautiful bay. 59km +/-1,100m. Stay 1 night. Meals: B D

**Friday 1st May**

Cycle north on a new coast road to Fokianos, then inland to Peleta. After Chouni the road is untarred for the 17km, 650m ascent to the village of Kosmas, at 1,150m on the slopes of Mt Parnonas. 68km +1,950/-800m (all-tar route via Leonidio adds 20km and 500m). Stay 1 night. Meals: B D

**Saturday 2nd May**

Cycle down Mt Parnonas and turn right to skirt the valley of Sparta through Gkoritsa, with views of the Taygetos mountains opposite. Descend to Skoura and cross the Evrotas river at Platanos, to cycle through well-watered fields and orchards to Mystras. Climb by old Mystras to Pikoulianka. 58km +/-700m. Stay 2 nights. Meals: B D

**Sunday 3rd May**

Rest/sightseeing day with opportunity to visit (included) the UNESCO World Heritage Site of old Mystras. This fothill of the Taygetos was fortified by a Crusader knight and became one of the most important places in Bzantium. Hours can be spent exploring the romantic ruins of this abandoned medieval city, which includes several well-preserved churches that are treasure troves of Byzantine art. Meals: B D

**Monday 4th May**

Cycle through the Taygetos mountains by the Langada pass, a well-graded ascent to 1,317m. There are two options for the descent to Kalamata: keep on the main road (not too busy since most traffic takes the motorway) or include a scenic minor road diversion via Nedousa (adds 7km +/-150m, whilst avoiding 14km of main road). Main road route: 52km +1,050/-1,600m. Stay 1 night. Meals: B D

**Tuesday 5th May**

Transfer to Kalamata airport where the tour ends. Meals: B

In the daily itineraries above the km figure is the distance cycled, with +/-m being the totals of ascent/descent. Meals are those included on that day B = Breakfast  D = Dinner

---

**Holiday Summary**

**Accommodation & Meals**

Accommodation will usually be two people sharing an en-suite room in hotels of 3-star standard or higher, with simpler but good quality accommodation in a few locations where that is the only option. Single rooms and en-suite facilities are sufficiently available almost everywhere, but at the smallest accommodation(s) it may be necessary to share a room and/or bathroom. Please note that payment of the single supplement does not guarantee a single room every night. Breakfast and dinner is included, usually in the hotel, sometimes at a nearby taverna. Vegetarian and other special diets can usually be catered for.
Please describe your particular dietary requirements (if any) under 'Special requests' when booking; if avoiding meat please indicate if you will nevertheless eat fish. It will be assumed that ‘vegetarian’ includes dairy and eggs, whilst ‘vegan’ does not.

**Vehicle Support**

Transport will be provided for the transfer of the group, plus bicycles, from Kalamata airport to the hotel in Methoni at the start of the tour and from the hotel in Kalamata to the airport at the end. There will also be a support vehicle for the transfer of luggage between hotels during the tour. This vehicle (subject to availability of the usual van) should be capable of carrying up to five passengers and bicycles, in addition to everyone’s luggage.

**Passports, Visa & Health**

EU Citizens must hold a passport that is still valid on the date of their return to their home country. Holders of non-EU passports are advised to check whether they require a visa. There are no compulsory health related requirements for UK residents, but you are strongly advised to check that your tetanus protection has not expired. You must also carry your European Health Insurance Card.

**Travel Insurance**

Our Booking Conditions stipulate that, for holidays outside the UK, travel Insurance is mandatory. Details of the level of cover needed and other conditions you should check are stated in the Booking Conditions. CTC Cycling Holidays & Tours Ltd cannot accept responsibility for any costs that may be incurred due to insufficient insurance cover.

**Price**

The price of £1,750 is based on a minimum number of 12 people taking part in the holiday; please note Booking Conditions, clause 3. If there are insufficient bookings by 11th February 2020, we will contact you and return all monies paid, although in certain circumstances the holiday may still run at below minimum numbers but at the same price.

**Price Does Not Include**

- Travel to and from Kalamata
- Drinks with dinner
- Lunches or refreshments at morning and afternoon stops
- Entry fees at any attractions not included above
- Any other personal expenses, fees, taxes & gratuities
- Travel Insurance
- Single occupancy supplement (£350, subject to availability)

**Payment Schedule**

A deposit of £500 per person is payable upon booking, with the final balance of £1,250 per person to be paid ten weeks prior to departure, by 10th February 2020.

**Cancellations**

Should you be forced to cancel your booking for any reason you must notify us in writing. Cancellation charges are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Written notice received:</th>
<th>Cancellation charge:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Before 10th February 2020</td>
<td>Deposit (£500)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From 10th February 2020 through to departure</td>
<td>100% (£1,750)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Area Covered By The Holiday**

The Peloponnese is the southernmost part of the Greek mainland (but almost an island, in legend the Isle of Pelops) that looks on a map like an outstretched hand. This holiday tours the 'fingers', beginning with the 'pinky' and tracing around the other two (there are only three) until we can see across the sea to a distant 'thumb', then heading back across a couple of 'knuckles' to Kalamata. These are very 'bony' fingers! Even by hugging the coast we cannot avoid some big ascents and descents, which are taken into account by shortening that day's distance. The middle finger is the boniest, with its Taygetos Mountains forming an almost unbroken ridge, from 1,000m up to 2,407m high. And the index finger's Mt Parnonas 'knuckle' isn't much lower at 1,934m. Swathes of easier country stretch between these knobbly ridges: forming the wheatfields of ancient Messene (west of Kalamata) and the well-watered vale of Evrotas, river of Sparta.

This holiday is a repeat, with some changes, of a tour that the Tour Manager ran in 2018. For pictures of that tour see this album on Flickr.

**Rides & Rest Days**

Apart from Kalamata, there are no big cities in this area and few towns on our route, so most of the roads are quiet. Some parts are so sparsely populated, however, that the roads are unsealed. Our itinerary includes two significant stretches of gravel road, which can be avoided only by going at
least twice as far over extra hills, and sometimes the tarmac is poor – all of which should be considered when deciding what type of bicycle to bring or hire.

The southern Peloponnese cannot boast of as many remarkable ruins as the north (the Spartans were indeed ‘Spartan’), so on most days we will mostly be cycling. There are one or two must-see sights, however, which we have scheduled time to see, most notably Mystras, which gets a whole day. Unfortunately this comes at the end of the tour, but it is where it is. (Anyone in need of a rest earlier in the holiday could omit the Mani loop.) There will also be a free afternoon in Monemvasia, and several other days will include short sightseening breaks. On most days you can expect to reach the destination in time to spend a few hours exploring and/or relaxing.

The Tour Manager will lead a loosely knit group at a moderate pace, using the ‘human signpost’ system to ensure that nobody misses a turn, with frequent stops for photos and regrouping. Anyone who prefers to make their own way, aided by the GPS tracks and detailed instructions provided, will nevertheless be very welcome to do so. Our Greek assistant (who speaks excellent English) will drive the support vehicle, which will make occasional contact with the led group and uplift riders in need, subject to available space. But you don’t go on a cycling tour to ride in a van! To enjoy this tour, riding 60km, day after day, the Tour Manager recommends that you should be capable of riding half as far again as a one-off day ride. That’s 90km, which should be ridden somewhere just as hilly.

In addition to lunch stops, the group will usually pause for refreshment at ‘elevenes’ and also mid-afternoon, unless the ride has finished by then, which is likely on several days. These stops will be at a kafenion (cafe) or taverna (restaurant) where there is one, or a picnic (usually with van-support) where there isn’t.

Accommodation & Meals
In addition to what is stated in the Holiday Summary, on an actual tour, staying and eating somewhere different most nights, it is difficult to generalise and essential to embrace the philosophy that variety is the spice of life!

About snoring: if anyone has ever said that you do, please request a single room, and in case someone hasn’t, bring earplugs!

Breakfasts are not usually a big meal in Greece, but hotels will usually put on a perfectly adequate spread. Dinners will often start with ‘sharing plates’ followed by a main course and sweet. The timing is traditionally late, but we try to be eating by 8pm.

Lunches are not included in the tour price, so it’s entirely up to you as to lunchtime. There often won’t be much choice however, between the only taverna in the village or a picnic, and sometimes it’ll be picnic or nothing! So be sure to bring at least a knife, spoon and cup. Sometimes our assistant will organise a group picnic, using a ‘kitty’ collected from participants to purchase food in bulk and transporting this by van to a suitable location. The van will always carry bulk containers of water to refill your bottles.

Travel
There is no travel included in this tour, thus it is very important that you note that neither your Tour Manager nor CTC Cycling Holidays & Tours Ltd are responsible for you in any way until the appointed time at the designated meeting point. Should you fail to arrive at the appointed time for whatever reason, we will not be responsible for any additional expenses you may incur in order to meet up with the tour group. Before finalising travel arrangements to meet the tour, you should ensure that you have read and understood our booking conditions. Should this tour not attract sufficient bookings to reach the minimum operating size, we may cancel the tour at any time up to 10 weeks before departure. It is therefore recommended that you book fully flexible and refundable transport and accommodation, or wait until you have been informed that the tour is going ahead, as in the event of the tour being cancelled, we will not be responsible for any losses incurred.

Group Information
The maximum number of participants will be 16 excluding the Tour Manager(s).

Weather & Clothing
April is an excellent time to visit the Peloponnese. It should be somewhat like an English summer, neither excessively hot nor cold. The mountains however, can be much colder, so bring one set of warm cycling clothes. In April the Mediterranean is still far too cool for swimming by Greek standards, but perhaps not by yours. Some hotels have pools, which were used by some participants on the previous tour.

Cycles & Equipment
A touring, trekking or hybrid bike is ideal. Likewise a gravel bike. A narrow tyre road bike is less suitable, but could be used with care. You should ensure your cycle is well maintained, paying particular attention to wheels, tyres and brakes. A low bottom gear (e.g. small chainring the same size or smaller than the largest cog on your rear wheel) is recommended. If unsure about gears, please contact the Tour Manager. Mudguards are always recommended. New tyres too, preferably of at least 28mm section for comfort on the sometimes roughly surfaced roads.

This being a fully supported tour, you shouldn’t have to carry very much on the bike. You will nevertheless need some things with you: a waterproof, an extra layer of clothing, some snack food, your picnic kit and sunscreen. Participants will also be expected to carry sufficient spares and tools to deal with punctures and minor adjustments. Lights should not be needed but can be useful in case of poor visibility. Helmets and hi-vis are not legally required for cycling in Greece, so remain a matter of personal choice.

Rental bikes are available via our local agent. Please contact the Tour Manager for further details.

Maps & Guides
You should carry a map (or mapping GPS) in case you become separated from the group. Recommended is the topographic road map of the Peloponnese, R2, published by Anavasi (ISBN 9789608195639) on a scale of 1:200k, with contours and shading etc.

Travel Insurance & Advice
In addition to travel insurance, EU nationals should carry a European Health Insurance Card, obtainable from www.nhs.uk/NHSEngland/Healthcareabroad/EHIC/. This enables you to take advantage of emergency medical services free or at a discount under a reciprocal provision that exists between EU member states. Your travel insurer may refuse to meet the extra costs of medical treatment if you do not carry this card.

Before booking you should check the latest travel advice from the Foreign & Commonwealth Office including security and local laws, plus passport and visa information, at www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice or on 0845 850 2829.

Other Information
The Tour Manager will be assisted by Yorgos and/or Panos Paraskevopoulos. Yorgos is a professional cycling tour leader from Kalamata who has worked since 1999 with the American company Experience-Plus and now, with the help of his brother Panos, also runs his own holidays in Greece. Both speak excellent English, know exactly what cyclists need and provide most attentive assistance.
Tour Manager's Contact Details

If you require any assistance, or have any queries, please don't hesitate to contact the Tour Manager using the information provided below.

Christopher Juden

Email:
chris.juden.ctc@gmail.com

Mobile:
07709 881270