

Rhodes

More than three thousand years of history, beautiful sites and monuments make this a magical island. In a climate of great sweetness, Rhodes invites you to travel its trails to smell the jasmine groves, to discover its small villages and pristine and gorgeous medieval city, its creeks. Located in southeastern Greece, Rhodes, the Dodecanese capital, is one of the jewels of the Mediterranean. Its natural environment of exceptional beauty, countless beaches caressed by the Aegean Sea, the sun reigns 300 days of the year and a millenary history of which we find traces everywhere, make Rhodes one of the most famous vacation spots of the Mediterranean. The natural wealth of the island and its strategic location between East and West have made Rhodes a desirable object that has experienced multiple mixings of cultures, and both harmonious and dramatic cohabitations that decided its identity.

The city of Rhodes was founded in 408 BC, when the inhabitants of Ialysos, Lindos and Kamiros decided to build a powerful new city that would be the capital of the island. It had been designed according to the plans of Hippodamos of Miletus and was considered one of the most beautiful cities of the time. It was one of the important allies of Alexander during his campaign and became an important economic and cultural center. Under Roman occupation and subsequently Byzantine, it maintained its economic and cultural role, but lost its ancient splendor, however. In 1309 it was invaded by the Knights of St. John chased away from Jerusalem, who surrounded the powerful fortification, and turned it into a thriving medieval multinational. In 1523 it fell under the yoke of the Ottoman Turks and the Greeks were forced to move outside the walls, creating new neighborhoods, the 'marasia'. In 1912, the city of Rhodes was, like all the Dodecanese islands, under Italian occupation. The new owners transformed the architectural appearance of the city by constructing impressive high buildings and wide streets and squares. Finally, in 1948, Rhodes became part of Greece again.

The island of Rhodes is covering an area of approximately 1 400 km² and it has approximately 220kilometers of coastline with many beaches lined with blue sea. The interior of the island, exceptionally green and culminating at 1216 meters, focuses on farming.

The city of Rhodes is located at the northern end of the island and cultivates the originality of the island: Greek at heart, Byzantine in memory, Eastern in character and definitely Greek in everything else. It is composed of three different cities corresponding to three periods of its history, but although they overlap, they are easily distinguished. There is of course the ancient city and its ruins, the modern city marked by the Italian presence and finally the medieval town reminiscent of the presence of the Knights of Saint John during two centuries.

01 First day Arrival at the Diagoras airport of Rhodes.

Installation at the hotel. Choose a beach according to your preference and enjoy the pleasures of the Aegean Sea. Lose yourself in the streets of the old town that blends the past with the murmuring voices of people who have never ceased to live there and who make this the largest inhabited medieval town in the world.

02 Second day Guided tour of the city.

The visit will allow you to discover its history. On the trail of the ancient city, we can climb to Mount Smith, the acropolis of the city, where we can admire the ruins of the temple of Apollo, the ancient stadium and the remains of the ancient theater. From here we can enjoy a panoramic view of the city. Descending to the port Mandraki you will be told the story of the Colossus of Rhodes, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. We can also admire the two deer lining the entrance of the old port. Along the way we will discover the three windmills near Fort Saint Nicolas. We will drive along the new market, the stately buildings of public administration and underwater aquarium, traces of the Italian presence on the island blended in with the modern city. When leaving the asphalt, we will pass one of the medieval gates and walk through the cobbled streets of the old town on the trail of the Knights of St John, who occupied the island from 1309 to 1523. This military order founded during the Crusades, tried to survive in the Eastern Mediterranean after the end of the Christian presence in the Middle East and, in a context marked by an obsessive fear of invasions, began to transform the city into a stronghold. Bastion of Christianity at the threshold of the Middle East and closest to the Holy Land, Rhodes was a sort of anachronistic fortress of the Crusades. Its fortifications and the Knights of St. John managed to repel multiple attacks until the fatal siege in 1522, led by one hundred thousand men of Soliman II. This marked the beginning of the Ottoman occupation of the island. The visit to the medieval city will inform you all about the Knights of St John, who were formed after the dissolution of the Templar Knights in 1312, the most powerful military order in Christendom and which brought together knights from all over Europe. The medieval town is to be found within a 4 km long wall. It is divided according to the classic Western style, in a town high in the north and a lower town based in the south / southwest. Originally separated by a fortified wall, the upper town, or Collachium, was entirely built by the Knights and you can now enjoy one of the best examples of Gothic urbanism. The old town is classified as World Heritage Site by Unesco. Counting now 6000 inhabitants, it has never ceased to be inhabited. It is listed as the largest living medieval city. We will walk along the Street of the Knights to admire the "Inns" of Italy, France, Spain and the Provence, where the members of the order were housed according to their language. We will MEET the first hospital of the Knights and the inn of Auvergne. At the top of Collachium we will discover the church of St. John and the impressive palace where the great master ran his Order. We will visit the great hospital built between 1440 and 1489, which now houses the rich archaeological museum where we can admire, amongst other the famous Aphrodite of Rhodes. We will walk in the lower city where monuments' density is almost as important as the one of Collachium. In 1522, the lower city, with a population of 5000 inhabitants, had many churches, some of Byzantine construction after 1523, most of them were transformed into mosques, like those of Soliman, Kavakli Mestchiti, Djami Demirli . We will also admire the clock tower, the Commercial Court, the Archdiocese, the St. Catherine hospital, the synagogue in the Jewish Quarter and other monuments. We will also linger on the ramparts of the medieval town, partly built on the foundations of the Byzantine walls, which were constantly maintained and remodeled between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries.

03 Third day West Coast of the island

We invite you to discover the remains of two towns founded after the arrival of the Dorians on the island around 1100 BC., Kamiros and Ialysos, and an exceptional natural site, the Valley of the Butterflies. After one hour drive along the west coast of the island we will arrive at Kamiros. Kamiros was one of three ancient cities of the island that flourished in the sixth and fifth century. BC, thanks to its rural economy. The remains of the city were discovered in 1859 in a wooded area. The imposing

public buildings, the Agora, temples, private residences and the acropolis at the top of the hill testify to the splendor and wealth of ancient Kamiros. After the creation of the city of Rhodes in 408 BC. begins the decay of the ancient city. Kamiros is an exceptional archaeological site that allows visitors to travel back in time, to understand how the ancient city was organized and how its inhabitants lived. Residents were simple peasants and artisans, or often potters that brought about the reputation of Kamiros beyond the borders of the island. The city is built on a hillside facing the sea and surrounded by orchards, fig and olive trees. The landscape has not changed, the colors neither. Remnants of white marble are embraced by green nature with as its horizon the azure of the sea. After Kamiros we will continue towards the valley of the Butterflies, a natural paradise where people gather every summer from mid-June to mid-September to enjoy the thousands of beautiful butterflies of the *Callimorpha quadripunctaria Himalaiensis* species. Attracted by the resin produced by the sweetgum tree bark, the butterflies find refuge in the valley where the climate is cool and wet. This is a moment of intense pleasure and freshness for the traveler. We will take the road to the hills of Filerimos covered by cypress and pine trees and located southwest of the city of Rhodes. This is where the remains of the ancient city of Ialysos lay. Here are the remains of the ancient acropolis, the ruins of the Doric temples dedicated to the goddess Athena and Zeus. This is an exceptional site where layers of history overlap. Visiting Filerimos is to tell the story of how successive occupants of the island of Rhodes, once they all settled on the spot and gave in to its posterity, left some trace of their passage. Besides the ancient ruins, we can admire the remains of an early Christian baptistery and the small church dedicated to St. George that evokes the Byzantine period. In the 13th century a monk from Jerusalem brought with him an icon of the Virgin which he installed in a small church he built. The Knights of St. John stationed there in the 14th century and enlarged the monastery and turned the church into a basilic, in which you can admire the clock tower that survived destruction during the Ottoman occupation. Italians, who occupied the island after the Turks, reconstructed the monastery, which was occupied by the Capuchins until the end of World War II, and is worth visiting. We will end the tour with a walk along an ordeal moved by the Italians and that leads to a small square where we will have a magnificent view of the region.

04 Fourth day East Coast of the Island

The ancient city-state of Lindos is located a half hour drive from the city of Rhodes, along the east coast of the island, perched on a rock overlooking the sea. Lindos was certainly the richest of the three ancient cities of the island. Port facilities and maritime force ACCOUNTED for a large share of trade in the Mediterranean. The city was also known for the quality of its sculptors working in bronze. The Colossus of Rhodes was the work of a sculptor from Lindos. The ancient city saw its heyday in the 6th century BC. At the founding of the city of Rhodes in 408 BC. its shipyard and sculpture workshops lead to relocate part of the population. However it remains, through all occupations, an important commercial seaport until the 18th century. To reach the top of the rock where the remains of the ancient city lay, but also from the Byzantine period and the period of the Knights of St. John, we will cross the picturesque village of Lindos. It is unique for its architecture in Greece. It is made of narrow streets, lined with many houses DATING from the 17th and 18th century and that climb to the impressive Acropolis. The visit of the four levels of the acropolis will show us the trace of the history of Lindos. We can admire, among others, the remains of the temple of Athena, the magnificent relief sculpture carved on a boat rock dating from the 2nd century BC. We will also trace the Byzantine epoch by water tanks, storage of wheat and the remains of the church of Saint John. We will also of course

admire the castle and its walls built by the Knights of St. John. Climbing the Acropolis of Lindos is returning into three thousand years of history and laying our eyes at the end of our visit onto the vast blue of the Aegean Sea as did all those who traveled to such historical places before us.

05 Fifth day Visit the island of Halki

You can visit the island of Halki, a small picturesque island, just an hour by boat from Rhodes. You can admire the splendid village of Nimborio with its neoclassical houses, that are staged on the hillside around the harbor. You can walk up to the abandoned village of Chorio, where you can enjoy a splendid view. You can of course also enjoy the beaches and the crystal clear sea.

06 Sixth day

Simi is certainly one of the most beautiful islands of the Dodecanese located two hours by boat from Rhodes. The serpents of the mountains that plunge into the deep blue sea, its many coves with crystalline waters and especially its neoclassical houses that are staged on the hillside around the harbor to the top of the village, all offer a breathtaking view.