



CLASSIC
EDELWEISS TOURS

CROATIA TO GREECE

“ A motorcycle tour that combines 3,000 years of history with lots of spectacular riding fun. ”

RIDING DAY 1 : DUBROVNIK - KOLAŠIN

Standard Route (235 km / 146 miles)

The fjord-like Bay of Kotor is treasured throughout Montenegro as the country's most beautiful and most sophisticated spot. Due to its strategic location in the bay the city of Kotor has been at the center of a tug-of-war between the European powers since its foundation in the 3rd century BC. They all left their marks, usually by strengthening the fortifications or by building churches or other prominent buildings. Much of what you see today, especially the massive ramparts, was built during the four centuries of Venetian domination. Today Kotor is Montenegro's number one tourist attraction; no cruise liner can sail down the Adriatic coast without coming into the bay. Some of those ships are several times bigger than the town, a sight that can be interesting or saddening, depending on your point of view.

Our route to Kotor takes us along the coast, across the border, past the city of Herceg Novi, and across the Bay of Kotor by ferry. After lunch and some sightseeing in Kotor we head up to Lovćen National Park. The high, barren mountains are impressive, but the best part is actually the ride up from the bay, featuring 25 tight hairpin turns! The views from the top down to the bay and the town, 900 m (3,000 ft) below, will leave you breathless.

Past the cities of Podgorica and Cetinje we soon reach Kolašin, our destination.

Highlights:

#1: Kotor



The history of Kotor can be traced back more than 2000 years. The natural harbour provided good protection which later attracted Illyrians already in the 3rd century BC who were followed by the Greeks and Romans. In 168 BC Kotor was mentioned as Ascrivium. At that time began the colonisation by the Romans. At the beginning during the emperor era the town belonged to the Province Dalmatia, then 500 years to Venice, but also Austria, Croatia, Serbia, Hungary and Bosnia had at times occupying power. The

Turks tried to sack the city but didn't succeed to scale the walls. In 1979 UNESCO declared Kotor a World Heritage culture and nature site.

The compact old town is inside the town wall comprised of twisting alleyways and buildings that were built between the 12th and 20th century.

The catholic cathedral is definitely one of the most beautiful churches in Montenegro. It was built in the 12th century. Inside there are sarcophaguses, a treasure-house and an altar, all worth seeing.

#2: Lovcen National Park



Directly behind Kotor is Mt Lovćen (1749m, the black mountain that Crna Gora (Montenegro) gave its name. This area occupies a special place in the hearts of all Montenegrins. For most of its history it represented the entire nation – a rocky island of Slavic resistance in the Ottoman Empire.

The national park is 6220 hectares large, of which two-thirds are covered by woods, particularly the black beech that gives it its muddy complexion. The park is home of various types of reptiles, 85 species of butterflies and large mammals such as brown bears and wolves.

RIDING DAY 2 : KOLAŠIN

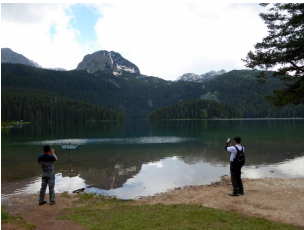
Standard Route (200 km / 124 miles)

Montenegro is a small but very mountainous country. Even today most of these mountains are remote and difficult to access, there are few ski resorts but still numerous bears and plenty of other wildlife. One of the highest and wildest regions are the Durmitor Mountains in the far north-west, a stunningly beautiful mountain range that has been part of the UNESCO's World Heritage List since 1980.

This is where we go today, on roads that are twisting their way up and around those mountains and along and across the area's famous gorges. 200 km will keep you busy most of the day, this is not just a little joyride in the afternoon. If this is not enough you can loop around the Durmitor mountains and look at them from every angle. Either way it is a stunning ride and looking at Tara Gorge, according to UNESCO the world's deepest, rounds off this amazing day.

Highlights:

#1: Durmitor National Park



Durmitor is a stunning limestone massif located in Northern Montenegro and belonging to the Dinaric Alps or Dinarides. It is also the name of Montenegro's largest protected area, the Durmitor National Park, which constitutes the heart of a landscape shaped by glaciers, numerous rivers and underground streams of which are embedded in the much larger Tara River Basin Biosphere Reserve. Some fifty peaks higher than 2,000 metres above sea level rise above

plateaus, alpine meadows and forests, including Bobotov Peak (2,525 metres above sea level). Numerous glacial lakes, locally known as "mountain eyes", cover the landscape.

Durmitor National Park's exceptional scenic beauty has been shaped by glaciers and rivers. The alpine meadows on plateaus and smooth hills are set against the stark backdrop of the numerous high and rugged peaks. The dense forests and the glacial lakes add to the scenic diversity and appeal. The most dramatic elements of the spectacular mountain landscape are the deep river canyons, most notably the famous Tara River Gorge, Europe's deepest gorge and one of very few unaffected by dams and roads. (whc.unesco.org)

RIDING DAY 3 : KOLAŠIN - SHKODRA

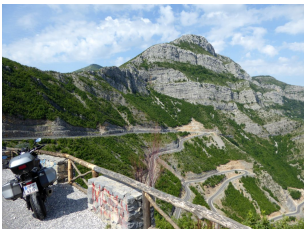
Standard Route (180 km / 112 miles)

From Kolašin it's only 85 km (53 miles) to the border to Albania, but due to the narrow, curvy road across Trešnjevik pass it will take us close to two hours to get there. Two fun hours, though. This border crossing was closed for several decades, then, after the end of socialist rule in Albania, it was opened for local traffic only. Now that it's finally open for everyone and the access road from Shkodra is not just a rough dirt road anymore this border crossing will become more popular in the future. But it will never get really busy here, it's just too remote.

Albanians are Europe's busiest road pavers. Road 21 from the border down to the coast leads through a stunning valley and even though it doesn't show up at all on some maps it is covered in brand new blacktop. It's great fun, enjoy!

Highlights:

#1: Albanian Alps



Albania's flagship region for mountain tourism are the Northern Alps, the National Parks of Thethi, Valbona and the region of Kalmendi. The "Accursed Mountains" are both truly spectacular and virtually impenetrable except for a series of high passes that link the small number of farmsteads and homes in the valleys below to the outside world during the summer months.

The road to Theth is paved only up until Thertor Pass (Qafa e Tërthores, 1786 m). It is a journey you'll want to have your camera ready for, full of extended mountain views, with water cascading down craggy hillsides and trees reaching for sunlight on rocky slopes. Up on the pass, where the views are the most stunning, a small mountain hut invites for a rest. (www.albania.al)

At 2,694 m (8,839 ft) Maja Jezercë is the highest peak in the Dinaric Alps and the second highest in all of Albania. The whole range is remote and difficult to access which makes them a valuable habitat for bears, lynx and eagles, among many other species. These mountains are also home to five active glaciers, the southernmost in Europe.

#2: Shkodra



Founded in the 4th century B.C. as the center of the Labeat tribe of Illyrians, Shkodra (or Shkodër) is one of the oldest cities in Albania. The city was occupied several times throughout history: First by the Romans (168 B.C.), then the Serbs (1040), the Venetians (1396), and finally by the Ottomans (1479). The country's fifth largest city (close to 150,000 inhabitants) is very rich in cultural heritage, the

city itself as well as the people bear pride in the large number of artists, musicians, painters, photographers, poets, and writers born here. Shkodra's main tourist attraction is Rozafa Castle, built by the Illyrians but enlarged and strengthened under Venetian rule. The fortress is in ruins, but the massive walls are still impressive and the sweeping views of the city and Lake Shkodra in the background are stunning.

RIDING DAY 4 : SHKODRA - OHRID

Standard Route (315 km / 196 miles)

The terrain in eastern Albania is rugged and mountainous, there aren't many roads and even fewer paved roads. We leave the coast right away in the morning and spend all day in the mountains as it is nice and cool up there and traffic is basically nonexistent.

Route SH5, a curvy road that is anything but well maintained, leads us to one of the most remote corners of the country. Kukës is by far the largest settlement around but still it is nothing more than a godforsaken, dusty town in the middle of nowhere. What's good about it is its location next to the Fierza Reservoir, a branched artificial lake created in 1978 in order to produce hydroelectric energy. Today the beautiful lake is protected as a nature reserve.

Through more scenic remoteness we reach the next border. Macedonia welcomes us with yet another language and with Cyrillic letters on the road signs. We circle around the lake's northern end to find the city of Ohrid, where the picturesque lake front invites you to take a stroll, while the hotel's terrace tries to persuade you to stay and have a beer. Take your pick!

Highlights:

#1: Eastern Albania



The sparsely populated eastern side of the country is characterized by rugged mountains, deep gorges and very little infrastructure. The Black Drin River flows northward into a man-made lake named Fierza Reservoir, an important source of electricity for the country. Until very recently the road from Peshkopi to Kukës was nothing but a dirt track, but now it is paved. Still narrow, twisty, bumpy and all, but paved. And very, very scenic!

#2: Lake Ohrid



Being the largest and most beautiful out of Macedonia's three tectonic lakes, Lake Ohrid is about 30 kilometers (18 miles) long and round 288 meters (945 feet) deep. Its astonishingly clean and clear waters, together with the serene stillness of its mountain settings have captivated visitors since prehistoric times. While the lake is filled up by water from three rivers, most of Ohrid's water comes from

another lake - Prespa which is located on the other side of Mountain Galicica. Due to its higher elevation, Prespa spills its water down to Ohrid through mountain springs. With its unique flora and fauna characteristic of the tertiary period (2-4 million years ago), Ohrid is one of Europe's great biological reserves. Most of the lake's plant and animal species are endemic and unique to Ohrid. The most famous among these are two types of the Ohrid trout, named letnica and belvica.

Lake Ohrid straddles the mountainous border between southwestern Macedonia and eastern Albania. It is one of Europe's deepest and oldest lakes, preserving a unique aquatic ecosystem that is of worldwide importance, with more than 200 endemic species. The importance of the lake was further emphasized when it was declared a World Heritage site by UNESCO in 1979 and when, in 2010, NASA decided to name one of Titan's lakes after Lake Ohrid. (www.exploringmacedonia.com)

RIDING DAY 5 : OHRID - GJIROKASTRA

Standard Route (314 km / 195 miles)

Today's ride features two of Albania's major highlights: Berat, the "town of a thousand windows", and Gjirokastra, the "stone city". First, we ride along the northern shore of Lake Ohrid to the Albanian border, cross it, and follow the main road to Elbasan. Here we turn south and cut across the Dumreja plateau from north to south. This hilly region is dotted by more than 80 lakes, making the scenery pretty and the riding interesting.

Berat is one of the hotspots on Albania's tourism map. Narrow cobblestone alleys between whitewashed houses, many centuries of history, museums, fruit and souvenir stalls, and much more draw people here. We'll take our lunch here in town and have a look around.

Since route 74 south of Berat is still a rough gravel track we circle around the mountains in a big loop, pass the city of Fier and then head straight down towards Gjirokastra, our home for the night.

Highlights:

#1: Lake Ohrid



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CROATIA TO GREECE

#2: Berat



Berat weaves its own very special magic and is easily a highlight of visiting Albania. Its most striking feature is the collection of white Ottoman houses climbing up the hill to its castle, earning it the title of 'town of a thousand windows' and helping it join Gjirokastra on the list of Unesco World Heritage sites, in 2008. Its rugged mountain setting is particularly evocative when the clouds swirl

around the tops of the minarets or break up to show the icy peak of Mt Tomorri. Despite now being a big center for tourism in Albania, Berat has managed to retain its easy-going charm and friendly atmosphere. (Lonely Planet)

#3: Gjirokastra



Defined by its castle, roads paved with chunky limestone and shale, imposing slate-roofed houses and views out to the Drina Valley, Gjirokastra is a magical hillside town described beautifully by Albania's most famous author, Ismail Kadare (b 1936), in *Chronicle in Stone*. There has been a settlement here for 2500 years, though these days it's the 600 'monumental' Ottoman-era houses in town that

attract visitors. The town is also synonymous for Albanians with former dictator Enver Hoxha, who was born here and ensured the town was relatively well preserved under his rule; though he is not memorialised in any way here today. Far less touristy than Berat, the town is equally as charming and has several fascinating sights, as well as some excellent dining options. (www.lonelyplanet.com)

RIDING DAY 6 : GJIROKASTRA - METEORA

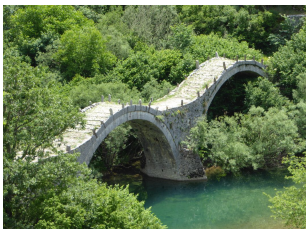
Standard Route (252 km / 157 miles)

We leave the Stone City behind and head east, towards Greece. After the border crossing – the last one on this tour – we quickly reach the Pindos Mountains, a wild and remote corner of Greece. A very narrow, very twisty road takes us to Zogória and to Vikos Gorge, the world's deepest. It's beautiful here and worth spending some time, so we have lunch, look at some of the old stone bridges and enjoy the views down into the gorge.

The road continues to be tiny all the way to Metsovo, but from there we may have to use the motorway. Katara Pass, at 1,705 m (5,600 ft) one of the highest in Greece, was officially closed to through traffic in November 2011 after the brand new, multi-lane expressway from Thessaloniki to Igoumenitsa was completed. Today's destination is Kalambaka, the gateway to Meteora. Kalambaka is a lovely old town nestled against the foot of the vertical Meteora rocks. The narrow alleys in the old town are steep and going for a walk may take a little effort, but it's worth it!

Highlights:

#1: Zagóri region



Between the city of Ioannina and the Timfi Mountains is the region known as Zagória, a hybrid of the Slavic 'za gora' (behind the mountain) and the Greek 'horia' (villages). As the name implies the terrain here is wild, rugged and difficult to access. 46 villages lie scattered around the area, with a total of 3,700 inhabitants. Before roads were built here in the 1950s they could only be reached on walking trails, across the stone bridges from the 18th and 19th

centuries that the region is famous for. There are more than 160 of them in the area. Due to the limited accessibility the villages and their buildings could retain most of their traditional look and atmosphere, even to this day. Not many visitors find their way here.

#2: Vikos Gorge



The spectacular Vikos Gorge, topped by massive rounded cliff buttresses and craggy walls in light grey and orange-yellow, is classified by the Guinness Book of Record as the world's deepest, plummeting some 1,600 feet, a gold based on both depth and width-to-depth ratio. A beautiful hiking trail runs through the gorge but for travelers in motorcycle gear this may not be the best option. Instead there are several beautiful viewpoints and several lovely villages, complete with central square and plane tree, inviting us for a coffee break.

RIDING DAY 7 : METEORA

Standard Route (155 km / 96 miles)

Meteora is an extraordinary place and one of the top tourist attractions in Greece. There are six monasteries you can visit and a paved road that leads up to them, so all it takes to enjoy a truly monastic experience is a bit of walking and climbing steps. Gone are the days when visitors had to be hauled up in woven baskets. What a pity.

Of course you can take your bike and ride from one monastery to another or you can hike between them or even climb some of the rocks, preferably with a local guide. All kinds of guided tours are available, all-day, half-day, sunrise or sunset, on foot, bicycle or horseback. The early hours are best for sightseeing as many people come here for a day trip from Athens or Thessaloniki.

If you don't want to spend all day looking at the monasteries but rather go for a little ride in the afternoon we have this loop prepared for you. It takes you around the Tringia and Kerketio mountains on a road that is narrow but well maintained, traffic-free and just great fun. Just the way we like them!

Highlights:

#1: Meteora



How could anyone describe this astonishing geological phenomenon, the breathtaking landscape, the inspiration and spirituality felt, the awe for man's achievements in an effort to express his religious drive when these are only some of the many things a traveler experiences when visiting this phenomenal land!

These immense, solid rocks, split by earthquakes, weathered by water and wind over millions of years, are nature's authentic masterpiece. Emerging about 25 million years ago as the elevated seabed material that was the outcome of strong tectonic movements, the Meteora rocks became a shelter of humankind. The first hermits arrived in this area to seek spiritual isolation and inhabited the caves of the rocks, with the sole aid of ropes and ladders. Common existential needs and strong religious faith compelled them to live united in the first monastic communities, their common drive of faith guiding them towards the unrepeated construction of monasteries of highest architectural and artistic value.

The 24 monasteries emerged on the countless summits of the rocks from the 14th until the 16th century, 6 of them remaining to be explored and admired by all. These monasteries became the centers of the Orthodox creed in the Byzantine era, having produced some of the best pieces of religious art and craft and still possessing a collection of precious manuscripts, which today are on display in their museums. The Meteora monasteries have been included in the UNESCO World Heritage List and the Meteora-Antichassia region has been officially declared a Natura 2000 Ecological Zone by the Greek Ministry of Environment, for the protection of rare species of birds and flowers. (www.visitmeteora.travel)

RIDING DAY 8 : METEORA - DELPHI

Standard Route (320 km / 199 miles)

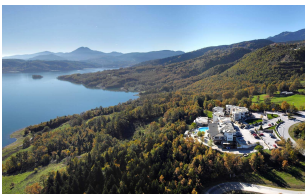
The Pindus mountain range is often referred to as the "Spine of Greece" as it runs across the mainland from north to south. We're talking serious mountains here, up to 2,637 m (8,652 ft) high, serving as a watershed between the Adriatic and the Aegean seas. Today we follow the Spine of Greece on the leeward (dry) side.

Our main highlight of the day is Plastira reservoir, a lake almost too beautiful to be artificial. The scenery is simply stunning and not really Greek anymore, it looks more like Canada or the northern Alps, in fact the region is known as "Little Switzerland". After circumnavigating the lake, taking in the views and maybe a cup of coffee in one of the pretty little villages along the lovely road, we continue south towards Lamía on Route 3, a road that is scenic but full of traffic as the motorway to Trikala is not finished yet.

Before we get to Delphi we take a look at another mountain, Mt. Parnassus, a very prominent peak. Delphi is actually sitting on its south-western slope. There won't be much time left to see the archeological site; if you do get to see the Oracle you can ask it if it was the right decision to take the long route today. From a rider's perspective it certainly was!

Highlights:

#1: Lake Plastira



The crystal-clear waters of Lake Plastira and the rich greenery surrounding it blend harmoniously with the mountain tops of the Agrafa region and its traditional little villages. The remarkably balanced beauty of the central Greek location makes it hard to believe that this lake is actually artificial. The artificial lake resulted from an idea proposed by Nikolaos Plastiras, an early 20th-century

military general and politician, who envisioned the construction of a dam on the Tavropos river to resolve the age-old irrigation issue troubling the Thessalian plain. Although the idea was first discussed in 1925, the project was not completed until 1959. The resulting lake can hold up to 400 million cubic meters of fresh water. The 70 km road around Lake Plastira ranks as one of the most fulfilling road trips in Greece's mountain areas. (www.greece-is.com)

#2: Mt. Parnassus



According to Greek mythology, Mt. Parnassus is the home of the Muses. Over the years (or better millennia) people began to associate the mountain with poetry, music, and learning. Now if you think you have never heard about Mt. Parnassus before you might actually be wrong. Think about Paris and that picturesque quarter on the left bank of the Seine that is full of artists, galleries and street performers,

what's the name of that quarter again? Yes, Montparnasse. "Parnassism" was a poetic-artistic trend of 19th century France and the place where those "Parnassists" used to hang out eventually adopted the name.

At 2,457 m (8,061 ft) Mt. Parnassus is Greece's 8th highest mountain. To protect the significant biodiversity of the area a national park was established in 1938. It is a paradise for hikers while skiers head straight for the peak which is just outside park boundaries. There are also some lovely mountain roads for riders like us.

#3: Delphi



After the Acropolis, Delphi is the most popular archaeological site in Greece. Many people don't even know why they are going to Delphi. It's just something they know they are supposed to do when they go to Greece. But for those people who read, Delphi has a special meaning, more than just another collection of ruins in a country that is full of them. Delphi in ancient times was considered the center of the known world, the place where heaven and

earth met. This was the place on earth where man was closest to God. In Mythology, Delphi was the meeting place of two eagles, released by Zeus and sent in opposite directions. Where they met indicated the center of the earth. Delphi is known as the center of worship for the God Apollo, son of Zeus who embodied moral discipline and spiritual clarity. But even before the area was associated with Apollo there were other deities worshipped here including the earth goddess Gea, Themis, Demeter, and Poseidon, the well-known god of the sea. By the end of the Mycenaean period, Apollo had displaced these other deities and became the guardian of the oracle.

The oracle of Delphi was a spiritual experience whereby the spirit of Apollo was asked for advice on critical matters relating to people's lives or affairs of the state. Questions were asked to the Pythia, a priestess who 'channeled' the spirit of the God. Whether one believes in the channeling of Gods or spirits is an individual thing. But even the most skeptical person must realize that there was something 'magical' going on in Delphi for several thousand years and the fact that the town still attracts a million visitors a year is a hint that some of that magic is still there. Many people who come to Delphi claim they have felt 'something'. It may depend on your receptivity and your belief system, but there are people who believe that the spirit of Apollo still resides in Delphi and just as he was thousands of years ago, he is still available now, to answer questions and give personal advice on affairs of the state. One might keep in mind that a visit to Delphi is also on the itinerary of visiting dignitaries and the list of Greek politicians who have not visited the sacred oracle would be a short one. Just food for thought, but visiting Delphi with an open mind may be an enriching experience. (www.greecetravel.com)

RIDING DAY 9 : DELPHI - OLYMPIA

Standard Route (245 km / 152 miles)

Today's ride from Delphi to Olympia spans many millennia. Starting point and destination are among the most important archeological sites not only in Greece, but in the world. Just like in Delphi you could also spend a lot of time in Olympia. Fastest way to get there (app. 3.5 hours) is via Routes 48 and 9, with the latter of the two being very boring and possibly causing fatigue. If you follow our route you'll be on much nicer roads, not terribly curvy (at least not always), but interesting enough to keep you awake.

There is quite a bit of traffic along Route 48 but it is still a very nice ride, simply because the views are outstanding all the way from Galaxidi to Nafaktos. A little break at the pretty little port then it's time to cross the bridge. From its southern end it won't take you long to reach Olympia.

Highlights:

#1: Náfpaktos

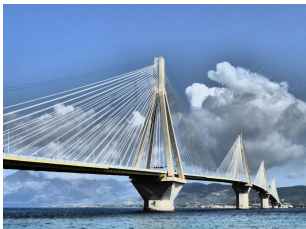


This town of less than 20,000 people stretches from the sea all the way up the hill, but its nucleus is the picturesque old port. The giant fortress up on the hill was built by the Venetians, who fortified the town and the harbour in order to defend it against the Ottomans. In 1499 it took Bayezid II. an army of 150,000 men to capture it!

But the Venetians came back and this time they brought some powerful friends, among them Spanish forces, which is why you can find a monument to Miguel Cervantes, world-famous author of "Don Quixote", down at the port. In 1571 he fought in the Battle of Lepanto and helped destroy the naval forces of the Ottoman Empire.

The fortress up on the hill offers nothing but the view, but this view is quite amazing as it sweeps across town, port, two coasts and the emerald colored water of the Gulf of Corinth. Even the Superbridge can be seen from up here.

#2: Rion – Antirion Bridge



Since Harilaos Trikoupi's vision when he was Prime Minister of Greece one hundred years ago, Greece had the great dream of a bridge crossing the 3 km of the Corinth Gulf's strait. In 2004, this long-standing dream became reality. The Rion – Antirion Bridge is the landmark of Greece's 21st Century and a part of the country's daily life which it was destined to change, thus contributing to the economic development of the area. (www.gefyra.gr)

Here are some facts: the bridge crosses the Gulf of Corinth at its narrowest point, between the towns of Rion and Antirion. It is 2,252 m (7388 ft) long and its foundations on the seabed are up to 65 m (215 ft) below the surface. The world's longest multi-span cable-stay bridge has four piers, each one 230 m (755 ft) tall and with a foundation that measures 90 m (295 ft) in diameter. The bridge spans two tectonic plates (the Peloponnese moves away from the mainland at a rate of 10 mm (0.39 inches) per year) so it is designed to "grow" about 2 m (6.5 ft) during its expected 120 years of service life. It is also designed to withstand a magnitude 7 earthquake, winds of up to 140 km/h (87 mph), and a tanker collision. It took 6 years and 800 million Euros to build - and you can cross it on your motorcycle for only 1,90 €!

#3: Olympia



The first Olympic games in 776 BC were the beginning of a sport event which took place in regular intervals of four years. The games started out as a tribute to Zeus. Greek athletes from all over Greece, which was split into many different countries at that time, met for five days. For three months all the fights between the different people had to be stopped. Only "free Greeks" were allowed to participate. Barbarians, which means non-Greek citizens, were allowed

to watch the games as spectators while slaves were banned of course. Women were also not allowed inside the Olympic grove after the start of the games.

The site of ancient Olympia is gigantic: The temples of Hera and Zeus, the hippodrome and stadium, the Greek baths, Gymnasion and Palaestra, all this and more can be discovered here, so your visit may take some time...

RIDING DAY 10 : OLYMPIA - KALAMATA

Standard Route (180 km / 112 miles)

Ancient Olympia is one of the largest and most important archeological sites in Greece. The giant statue of Zeus, one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World, is unfortunately no longer there, but the numerous buildings and the countless exhibits on display in the museum are interesting enough to keep you busy for days, if not weeks. Of course we don't have that much time, but even scratching the surface will make you gaze in amazement.

Olympia is only two hours away from Kalamata and if you want to leave late due to more sightseeing you'll easily find your way. But between the two cities are mountains, many mountains, and mountains always mean twisty roads and fun rides. So you can extend your riding day to several hours of pure fun on roads that are - thanks to EU money - in excellent condition.

On the extraordinarily scenic route 74 we ride to Dimitsana. The town has a long tradition of milling gunpowder; an old powder mill is on display - among other things - in the Water Power Museum. Through the lignite mining town of Megalopoli, which is not as big as its name implies, we continue south, on tiny secondary roads that take us all the way to Kalamata. The second-biggest city in the Peloponnese (70,000 people) is the home of the famous black Kalamata olive and boasts a busy port, a lively yacht marina and some pretty downtown beaches.

Highlights:

#1: Water power museum



The Open-Air Water Power Museum highlights the importance of water-power in traditional society. Focusing on the main pre-industrial techniques that take advantage of water to produce a variety of goods, it links them to the history and daily life of the local society over the ages.

On display are restored traditional installations and water-powered mechanisms. A fulling mill, a flourmill with a horizontal paddle-wheel, a distillery which used to be set up out of doors after the grape harvest for the production of tsipouro (a kind of schnapps or eau-de-vie) made from the skins of the pressed grapes. There is a two-storey building housing the tanner's home (upstairs) and the tannery (ground floor), as well as a gunpowder mill.

Gunpowder, a vibrant element of the region's cultural identity, remains alive in the memory and tales of Dimitsana's inhabitants. During the 1821 Greek War of Independence against Ottoman rule, their forefathers supplied the insurgents with this necessary ammunition material. In his memoirs, Kolokotronis, chief of the irregular troops in the Peloponnese, wrote: «Gunpowder we had, Dimitzana made it». Here, you can see the moving mechanism of a gunpowder mill with pestles (or pounders), extinct in Europe since the 18th century, while in Dimitsana it was used during the 1821 Revolution and up to the early 20th century. (www.piop.gr)

RIDING DAY 11 : KALAMATA - NAFPLIO

Standard Route (300 km / 186 miles)

Seen from space Peloponnese peninsula (or island, thanks to the canal of Corinth) looks like a giant hand with four fingers jutting out to the south and south-east. Nafplio sits between the "thumb" and the second finger; this is where we go today.

The third and longest finger is known as Mani. We cut across its base on a stunning yet nameless pass road, pass by the ancient city of Sparta and finally reach the Argolic Gulf. Along its coast a brand new road is waiting for us, carved into the sheer cliff, a dream come true for any rider. Not a very long road, but certainly a highlight all in itself!

North of Leonidis the road is still amazing and guarantees loads of riding fun. It continues all the way along the Argolic Gulf and finally we reach Nafplio, a pleasant seaside town and a great place to mingle with the locals, to sip a glass of Greek wine or some Ouzo, or to go for a swim in the balmy waters of the Argolic Gulf.

Highlights:

#1: Fokiano-Kyparissi coast road



The coastal road between Fokiano and Kyparissi is only 20 km (12 miles) long, but it is one of the best rides in the country. It was built in 2017, features a smooth but grippy surface and many beautiful curves. There is no traffic whatsoever, probably because most maps don't even mention it. What an amazing ride!!!

#2: Nafplio



The pretty little town of Nafplio (14,000 inhabitants) sits in a sheltered bay of the Argolic Gulf, between the first and the second "finger" of the Peloponnese. The picturesque fishing port and the numerous shady squares full of cafés and taverns give it a laid-back atmosphere. The town features an interesting archaeological museum and a huge fortress named Palamidi. If you climb the 999 steps to the top you can enjoy stupendous views of the town, the gulf and the mountains in the background. There is also a road up....

RIDING DAY 12 : NAFPLIO - ATHENS

Standard Route (250 km / 155 miles)

The amphitheater of Epidauros is our main highlight today. It is the largest antique amphitheater in Greece so it takes a bit of time to visit. Don't miss the opportunity to experience the astonishing acoustic properties here by performing the "match-stick-test" or the "coin-drop-test".

Then we leave the Peloponnese which used to be a peninsula, but in the late 19th century the Corinth Canal turned it into an island. We cross the canal, take a few pictures and a coffee break and then continue towards Athens. This metropolis of about 5 million people (nobody knows for sure) may welcome us with some rush hour traffic, but after all these days of navigating the roads of the Balkans we are sure you know how to handle it.

Highlights:

#1: Epidaurus, large Amphitheater



The famous theatre at Asclepius of Epidaurus is one of the most important monuments of ancient Greece and a world-class attraction. It combines perfect acoustics, elegance and symmetrical proportions. It was built around 340-33 BC, so that the patients of the Asclepion could watch theatrical performances and was in use until the 3rd century AD. Imagine it how it once was, when musicians, singers and actors performed here every four years in the spring.

Imagine the dramatic performances and rituals that honored the god of medicine, Asclepius, and be transported to another time.

An institution from 1955 onward, the ancient theater of Epidaurus once again holds a prominent position in modern Greek culture. It has hosted acclaimed ancient dramas, operas, symphonies and dance performances, featuring top Greek and foreign actors, directors, set designers, choreographers, musicians and composers. The most famous of all the performances were those of the Greek National Opera in 1960 and 61 when the legendary diva Maria Callas sang Bellini's 'Norma' and Cherubini's 'Medea' respectively.


This lush green landscape in the Peloponnese, with its sunny climate and numerous thermal springs was the perfect location in which to build the Asclepion – the headquarters of antiquity's god-physician and the most important healing centre in the Greek and Roman world. Its fame travelled beyond the borders of the Argolid and it is known as the birthplace of medicine. Its monuments are renowned masterpieces of ancient Greek art and have borne witness to the practice of medicine in ancient Greece. The worship of the god Asclepius was established here in the 6th century BC. (www.discovergreece.com)

#2: Corinth Canal



Connecting the Adriatic and the Aegean Seas is a dream that was first dreamed 2,700 years ago. Cutting across the narrow isthmus, where the Peloponnese is attached to mainland Greece, would shorten a ship's voyage by 325 km (200 miles). Several attempts to dig the canal failed or never came past the planning phase, due to a shortage of labor, money, or knowledge, or a combination of these. In 67 AD Roman emperor Nero was the first to attempt to really construct the canal and personally removed the first bucket of soil from the construction site, but after his assassination the project was abandoned. After Greece gained formal independence from the Ottoman Empire the idea of the canal resurfaced, but it took another half century for it to be finally realized. In July 1893 the canal was finally opened.

Unlike other canals this one was cut across the land at sea level, so no locks were necessary. The limestone walls of the canal are 90 m high and very steep, making them prone to landslides. This requires frequent closures for maintenance. The canal was never used to its full potential and was soon outgrown by modern cargo ships. Ships wider than 17.6 m (58 ft) can't pass through, therefore it is mainly tourist traffic that uses the waterway today. More than 11,000 ships pass through it annually.



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