

Hiking trail Southwest Crete



View of Loutro from Agia Ekaterini

A multi-day hike in the southwest of the island of Crete: the Sfakia region. It is a region that offers the hiker a range of unique experiences. Obviously that of the Samaria Gorge, the most famous asset of this area. But here's more, much more.



The E4 on Crete, along the south coast

Possibly less known is that there are more fissures here. However, these are just as beautiful and challenging. Such as the Imbros gorge or the Aradena gorge, or "just" the smaller "gorges". The whole of Crete has 300 gorges. In the region are also the southern flanks of the Lefka Ori, the White Mountains. Dozens of mountain peaks above 2000m. With a chance of snowy peaks until April and May. While in that period you can also lie on the beach, and walk of course.

And then you can also walk a part of the E4 – part of a European network of long-distance trails – along the south coast of this island during this multi-day trip. For example, between Chora Sfakion and Loutro to Agio Roumeli, where the Samaria Gorge flows into the Libyan Sea.

You already get a first picture of the Sfakia region when you drive more than 70 kilometers from Chania airport in the north by car or bus to the south coast. Away from the tourist crowds on the north coast. The route becomes more beautiful and more beautiful. And when the views of the Libyan Sea come into view, the word *impressive* does apply.

We then ended up in Chora Sfakion, our starting point for a multi-day circular walk in and through a fascinating landscape. To discover the real Crete on foot we used the services of [Happy Walker](#), a tourist office that knows the island down to the smallest hiking details.

Imbros gorge

If you take the early bus from Choria Sfakion to Chania and get off after about half an hour in the village of Imbros (780m), the descent back through the Imbros gorge starts behind a *kafeneion* (Greek café). In the beginning you walk through a grove with holm oaks, cypresses and maples. You pass an old well from the Venetian Period (1200 – 1600) and more and more the path gets the allure of a real gorge. With rocks up to 300 m high, several narrow passages and limited but beautiful vegetation. It is a stony path and because you started high it is fairly relaxed walking. The gorge is open all year round, with a running time of 2.5 hours (9 kilometers and more than 700m of descent). Bring enough water!

You have arrived in the village of Komatides. Kafeneions enough! From here it is another 16 kilometers to the next stage place: Loutro. First we bite along an asphalt road, but with beautiful views of the Lefka Ori and the Mediterranean Sea. Through the starting point of this day and then via the E4 – the European long-distance hiking route – to Loutro.



The colors of Crete

The European long distance path E4

A fantastic coastal walk! Often on a rock path, which is sometimes carved into the rock wall. Along real sandy beaches, over small fields with a kind of tundra vegetation and the chapel Ekklesia Timios Stavros. Again and again you come across those beautiful images of the azure sea. At the end of this stage you will arrive in Loutro via a detour. The white-blue village can only be reached on foot or by (ferry) boat. From Chora Sfakion it is 11 kilometers (3.5 hours walk).

Circular hike and Aradena gorge

From Loutro you can make a varied day-round walk, inland. Via the remains of a Venetian castle just above Loutro and on an old, challenging path to the village of Livianiana (250m). Then the walk continues through the Aradena gorge, whether or not scrambling.

From Aradena it continues to the characteristic village of Anopolis. Here you can find several *kafeneions* for rest and something to drink. Anopolis is a historic village, at 600 m altitude, with some old Roman walls. During the Venetian, Roman and Turkish rule, Anopolis had an important position in this region. Many uprisings against the rulers

were organized from Anopolis and its surroundings. In the village square you will find the statue of merchant Daskalogiannis, leader in the uprising against the Turks (in 1770). Just outside the village you can see the church Agia Ekaterini (650m) with, really..... genuine..... a phenomenal view of the Libyan Sea. Nearby also starts the path back to Loutro. Running time 6 hours (ascent and descent 650 m – 16 kilometers).



White Mountains from Aradena

Agia Roumeli and Samaria Gorge

From Loutro you walk further to Agia Roumeli. Partly a walk along the coast, partly a bit more inland. You can also get here via the E4. With a real explosion of flowers in season. On two-thirds of the route you will see Ekklisia Agios Pavlos, which means St. Paul's Church. Almost in the exit of the Eligia Gorge. It is a small church from the tenth century, with the stones of the beach itself built on the beach. The church would stand on the spot where Apostle Paul was shipwrecked on his way to Rome. Or the place where he baptized, or both. A lot of water was also used at baptism at that time. Advice: sit here, call home and say you'll be home a week later...

Agia Roumeli is the village at the exit of the Samaria Gorge. Here it can also only be reached by foot or by boat. In Roman times it was a city with its own coins and temples. The remains of a temple can be seen on the outskirts of Agia Roumeli; dedicated to the Greek God Apollon or the Goddess Artemis.

And, of course, from here you have all the possibilities to explore the Samaria Gorge. Open from mid-April to mid-September. After half an hour of climbing you have reached the narrowest part. The so-called Iron Gate. This gorge is the result of an impressive piece of natural violence, with fractures in the earth's crust, between 6 and 20 million years ago. Running time 5 hours (100 m. ascent and descent – 15 kilometers).



E4 between Chora Sfakion and Loutro

Agia Roumeli, Aradena, Agios Ioannis, Anopolis and Chora Sfakion

A new highlight through pine forests and the iconic bridge over the Aradena gorge, which is about 150m deep here. The abandoned village of Aradena has a Byzantine chapel from the fourteenth century. The story goes that an argument between two boys from Aradena – about a goat bell! – eventually resulted in a vendetta and the death of almost all inhabitants. You will find rocks, stones in all kinds of colors, walls, tree stumps and dark red paths. The proximity to the White Mountains is overwhelming. Along the way you can encounter sheep that manage to find a straw of green.

In the middle of nowhere you will also come across the Agios Ioannis (St John), with the small church of Panagia with frescoes in good condition. After which you arrive (again) in Anopolis, known from an earlier walk. With its preserved cyclopean walls ("*stacked on*

*top of each other by giants") and with that magnificent view of the Sea, Loutro and the mountains behind the church. Walking time 6 hours (800 m. ascent – 16.5 kilometers to Anopolis). Then you go descending through the *Ilingias gorge* on an old foot and donkey path to Chora Sfakion.*

General hiking tips

1. Difficulty of this route: medium, with some tough climbs;
2. Total length of this tour: about 65 kilometers;
3. Especially in April, flower lovers will get their money's worth more than completely! You can book a [special flower tour](#) in April.



Loutro



View from the E4



Flower tour Foto: Happy Walker Crete