

Samaria Gorge and more

a walk in southern Crete

from www.weekwalks.co.uk/walks.htm,
which also links to a photo album

This is a great walk, even though we didn't manage the first or the last part! The coast is spectacular, accommodation and food is cheap and plentiful, the sea is particularly clear, and the hospitality is wonderful. There are no roads. A delightful mix of exertion and relaxation.

1. Walking days and practicalities

Four, assuming you are in Chania. The best times to go are April/May or September/October. For swimming, and to be sure the Samaria Gorge is open, the autumn months are preferable.

2. Getting there and away

EasyJet flies to Chania (3½ hours from Gatwick); the town is nearby, with buses every half hour. Chania old town is a delight too - worth a stay.

3. Navigation

We are assuming you have *Landscapes of Western Crete* (Sunflower books) for maps and descriptions. We also used *Terrain Cartography 448, Western Crete* for a more detailed map of Chania, and *Anavasi Topo 25 Lefka Ori* for a larger map of the paths around Loutro.

4. The Route:

Day 1: The Samaria Gorge (Landscapes Walk 21). This is *the* walk in Crete. Unfortunately we went in April and the gorge doesn't open until May and the snowmelt is gone. However we caught the 8.15 bus to Hora Sfakion and the 10.30 ferry to Agia Roumeli, and had a delightfully relaxed day getting the feel of the coast. If this sounds too lazy, there is an adventurous way: get a taxi from Hora Sfakion up the wiggly road to Agios Ioannis and walk down (shown on the Topo 25 map).

Day 2: Agia Roumeli to Loutro (Landscapes Walk 22). This is gorgeous, though the section before Marmara Bay is less varied and has no shade. There is a lovely Taverna there for a break.

We spent a day in Loutro, exploring the Aradhena Gorge; you could easily spend more time here.

Day 3: Loutro to Hora Sfakion. You can walk along the coast here (Landscapes Walk 24), but we decided on a high-level route and were glad we did. Looking at the Landscapes map of Walk 23, we first went up to Anapolis. All the books suggest going via the Agia Eikaterina chapel to the main square, but we took a short cut... when the track hits a dirt road we turned left, rounded a sharp corner (now going right) and continued until the track met the tarred road. There is a Taverna here. You then walk right along the tarred road, round one corner, to a sharp right turn below a radio aerial where you go steeply downhill (marked on the Landscapes map as a dotted line). Below are three paths: you take the middle one, the start of a small gorge. At the second water/electricity installation the blue-marked path starts, to the right of the gorge. At first on the right of the gorge, then on the left, and finally in the gorge itself, where you have to slither down little (dry) waterfalls. Keep an eye out for the blue (sometimes red) markers - when they stop look left for a way out (we missed this and had to clamber up a few waterfalls later). The path takes you down to a larger gorge (Ilingas), where you turn right to the road, and left into Hora Sfakion.



Hora Sfakion

Day 4: The Imbros Gorge (Landscapes Walk 25). Most people take the bus up to Imbros and walk down; we were planning to walk up, but while we were on the road to Komitades the worst wind we've ever been in suddenly got up - Jeremy's glasses were blown away, and it was at times impossible to stand. So we caught the bus back to Chania. Our plan was to catch the last bus back from Imbros, and we hear that if they are full they just go on past, which would have left us stranded.

