



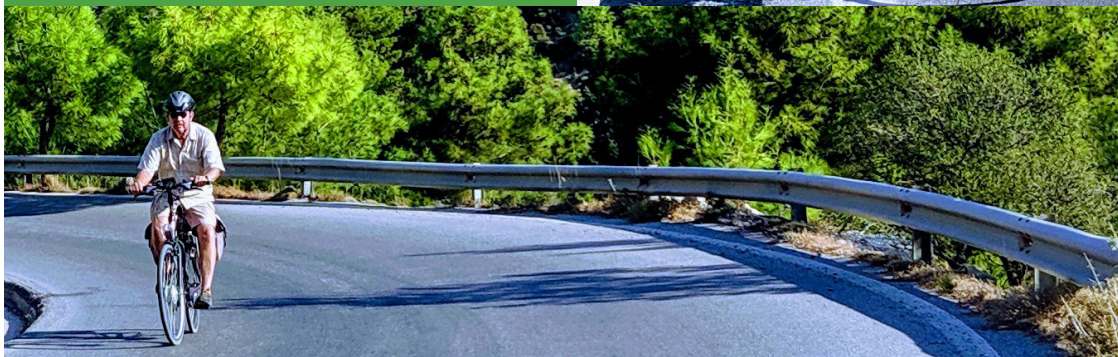
# Biking in Rhodes

Connecting with history and slow travel on two wheels

BY CATHY SENECAI

As I career around a curve and begin a long descent to the harbour, my jaw drops. The village of Lindos appears, stunning enough in its maze of whitewashed buildings, but near magical against an acropolis high atop a sea-flanked mountain.

My Greek history professor would be disappointed. His colourful stories of Spartan battles, told between dizzying chapters of Herodotus' *The Histories*, included locations to see "when you go to Greece," never "if you go to Greece." He assumed anyone living in a democratic country must visit the country of the first known democracy. But on this trip, a cycling adventure through Rhodes, I was focused less on notable battlefields and much more on freewheeling like a kid on a bike down a big hill.



## A perfect place to bike

At 80 kilometres long by 38 kilometres wide, Rhodes is the perfect size to explore by bike. I was here with two longtime friends, Joyce and her husband, Peter, to follow a six day self-guided itinerary. Accommodations and luggage were taken care of. Stops, whether suggested or spontaneous, were always interesting, such as the Castle of Kritinia, with views out to Alimia and Halki, islands in a sea hundreds of feet below, or a gnarled olive tree found roadside. Mostly, the bike route kept us off busy roads and instead, had us humming along past sapphire seas, either Aegean or Mediterranean, speeding high up into cool pine forests, or dawdling through villages and citrus laden orchards in the quiet interior.

## Ancient history and breathtaking beauty

To ancient Greeks, Rhodes was "more beautiful than the sun." Our view this warm September day out of Kalavarda shows blue Aegean waves crashing against black rocks as big as stoves. At our backs, four shaggy goats watch us from a tawny ledge. Later, we breeze into the spectacular palm and minaret lined Old City of Rhodes, another jaw dropping descent. Rhodes has a centuries long history, from the Phoenicians here before the Trojan War to the





Knights of St. John to the Italians who left in 1945. This island is now part of the Dodecanese, filled with monuments resulting from those many influences. One such gem is the aforementioned Old City, dating back 2000 years. A hotel stay here made it easy to explore the narrow lanes, synagogues and Arabic style markets of this UNESCO World Heritage City—amid restaurants, shops and stone homes where people still live.

### Food as good as the scenery

We were lost only once thanks to clear directions. Sights proved to be a good mix of ancient and modern, such as Kallithea Spa, whose springs were known by Hippocrates. Each day we rode to the door of that night's accommodation, always a simply furnished but bougainvillea bedecked surprise. We ate at places with a few outdoor tables rich with local banter. At one hidden spot, Nikos and his wife Maria, when asked to "offer us whatever is cooking" served us a memorable meze of Greek salad, a distinctive moussaka and roast cauliflower. The total bill: \$20. At one patio near Faliraki, Alexi pulled leaves from fronds overhead and introduced us to his elderly parents rolling dolmas—grape leaves stuffed with rice and fresh herbs—in their kitchen. Innkeeper, Rosa filled our hands with fresh walnuts and figs from her garden.



### Having fun with E-bikes

When Peter suggested we book e-bikes, my guffaws turned to curiosity, and later, after our first long hill, to fist pumping approval. E-bikes made it easy to cycle together, each choosing our preferred level of power. Any effort required to pedal is set by a power shifter on our handlebars. Each night, we unplugged a book sized battery from our bike and recharged it in a room outlet to be ready for the next 35 kilometre day.

### Saying yes to slow travel

I didn't see Delphi or the Acropolis in Athens. But I sauntered with pals through quiet ruins devoid of others, chatted with Rhodians and felt the breeze on long, pine-scented descents. I prefer slower travel and love the connection it provides with the outdoors—in the people that a slower pace delivers. For me, cycling around Rhodes will remain my little Iliad for a long time to come.

