Climbing on Greece's Kalymnos Island - Alumni

Kalymnos, Greece
Dates: April 18 - 26, 2026



Features

- Explore the beautiful island of Kalymnos
- Single and multi pitch sport climbing
- Stunning limestone cliffs and caves above the Aegean Sea
- Explore the culture and food of Masouri and Myrties
- Stay at a beautiful hotel
- Fun and challenging climbs for all levels of experience and abilities
- Opportunity to visit local beaches

Cost: $3,695 including lodging
Minimum Age: 18

Max group size: 8 Participants
2 NOLS Instructors

Trip Description

Come and experience phenomenal climbing on Greece's beautiful island of Kalymnos. This trip will set up a "homebase" at a hotel in Masouri, one of Kalymnos's climbing villages, and venture out each day to nearby cliffs to sample some of the best limestone rock climbing in the world. With the ocean never too far away this trip combines the adventure of a rock climbing trip with the relaxation of a sunny island vacation.

We will visit a variety of Kalymnos's limestone crags sampling the popular tufa climbing as well as some of the quieter (but still exceptional) crags away from the crowds. Over this 8 day trip, we'll delve into topics such as anchor building and cleaning, rappelling and for those with appropriate skill levels, lead climbing, and climbing movement and technique. There may also be an opportunity to do multi-pitch climbs on the longer routes in the area.

Kalymnos is one of the Dodecanese Islands located in the southern Aegean sea between Greece's mainland and Turkey. Climbing focused tourism is relatively new to Kalymnos, however it has grown quickly over the last two decades. With new sectors being explored and bolted every year, there is an endless playground of high quality rock on Kalymnos.

The trip will start off with evening orientation the first day of the trip. You will meet your NOLS instructors and the rest of the group, chat about the plan for the week, and review gear. The next morning we will pack lunches and our bags and head to our first climbing destination. Over the next eight days we will tour the island's many crags, taking one rest day in the middle to explore the island's cultural history, visit local shops and beaches and take a short boat ride to neighboring

Telendos for dinner.

Kalymnos has an excellent range of local cuisine options. Seafood, of course, has a featured place on the Kalymnian table, but Kalymnos also has its own version of many Mediterranean favorites as well. Sheep and goat cheese are common, stuffed grape leaves, mermezeli (Kalymnian salad), and thyme honey are all local favorites. We will plan to eat several meals out at local restaurants to get a feel for the local flavor.

While this trip is suitable for all skill levels, newer to intermediate climbers will get the most out of this trip. Advanced climbers may have to sacrifice some time working on their objectives to be a part of the group.

Trip Environment

Early May is an excellent time to visit Kalymnos. The spring is relatively mild with the sun bringing pleasant warmth and ocean breezes helping to cool things off. Daytime temperatures are in the high 50s to low 70s. Although Kalymnos is climbable year round, visiting in the spring avoids the height of the tourist season during the summer months, and the busiest of the climbing season in the fall. Pack layers to be prepared for cooler mornings and having a jacket handy for belaying in the shade is a good idea. Kalymnos has a rather dry climate. Rain is possible in May, but unlikely and rock in Kalymnos tends to dry quickly.

Kalymnos was once known as "*isola umbrosa"* the Island of Shade, however this is something of a misnomer now. With few trees, the sun on Kalymnos is persistent. Vegetation mainly consists of low lying, sun loving shrubs like thyme and sage bushes.

Although the island may appear dry and rugged, many animals call Kalymnos home. Various birds including Little Owls, Sandpipers, falcons and songbirds inhabit the sky. Lizards, Greek Tortoises, and White Breasted Hedgehogs make their home in the ground. Goats are a common sighting at the crag. We will practice effective goat proofing to secure our lunches from these curious opportunists.

Mosquitos are active on Kalymnos year round. Bringing long sleeves and long pants to the crag will aid your comfort and/or consider bringing bug spray.

Identifying and managing the hazards of steep terrain, falling and rolling rocks, weather, animals, and other environmental considerations will be a constant theme in our instruction. Consistent risk management techniques and assumption of responsibility for yourself and other group members will help make your trip healthy and enjoyable.

NOLS Staff

Our staff are NOLS professionals and certified accordingly. This means they maintain certifications in wilderness medicine and are trained to NOLS' high standards in risk management. They are senior staff at NOLS who have spent years working and teaching in backcountry environments all over the

world. Additionally, our staff specialize in bringing together groups of strangers and building the group culture and camaraderie that makes NOLS trips great.

A Day in the Life

Our days will begin between 7 and 8 am with relaxed group breakfast and coffee together on the hotel patio or other common space. We'll talk about the day's objectives and break into small groups by skill level or focus for the day and build more specific plans in those groups. An Instructor will be leading each group to ensure learning objectives are achieved and that everyone is climbing and belaying safely.

Participants will then return to their rooms to pack up gear and food for the day. We will then drive to our chosen climbing areas. Most approaches to climbing areas are between 15-20 minutes of walking and are not especially strenuous. Teams will work together on their goals for the day, building new skills and practice technique until late afternoon.

We will reconvene at our hotel in the early evening to head out for dinner in town or to prepare dinner in small groups in our hotel kitchens.

During this trip you will be rooming with one to two other people in single gender rooms, unless we know that you're a partner with someone on the trip or have expressed interest to room with your travel companion.

Difficulty Scale

This trip is rated 2 out of 5 on our difficulty scale.



We use a difficulty scale to help participants evaluate if a trip is right for them. It considers probable weather conditions, physicality of activities, and food and accommodations. You don't need to be a honed athlete, but pre-trip work to improve your strength, flexibility and endurance, is highly encouraged to improve your enjoyment of the place. If you have specific questions regarding physical preparation and your readiness please reach out to the Alumni Trips Department.

Food on the Trip

There will be plenty of food provided on the trip for everyone. We are happy to ensure that folks who have reasonable dietary needs and/or preferences are well taken care of throughout the entire trip. Listing those needs on your registration paperwork is critical for our success here.

If you would like to bring your own snacks along, that is highly encouraged. We all have treats that we enjoy and bringing something special is a great way to keep motivation high and not have to rely on the group's schedule for your munchies.

Curriculum

This trip focuses on many traditional NOLS skills, competencies, and concepts. The instructors will provide information necessary for the group to comfortably climb and explore, as well as optional

topics as desired by participants. These could include natural history, local history, leadership, decision making, and team function, among other things. Outside of the climbing curriculum normal “classes” are few and mostly optional, but informal discussions are plentiful.

This trip provides the opportunity to practice and learn climbing skills. We’ll cover climbing techniques and ethics, protection placement, anchor-building, and mock or true lead climbing (by participants displaying an appropriate skill level). We’ll practice LNT techniques for this environment. Developing safety and judgment is an important part of climbing and will be continually emphasized.

Specific topics that will be integrated into this trip are:

- Multi-pitch rock climbing
- Rappelling
- Safety awareness
- Judgment and decision-making
- Rock movement
- Anchor and protection placement
- Top-rope climbing and belaying
- Climbing ethics

Although the trip’s focus is on rock climbing skills, many participants also enjoy learning about the island, journaling, reading, or photography. Please articulate your trip and daily goals and interests and your instructors will try to accommodate you.

About Kalymnos

Kalymnos is the fourth largest of the Dodecanese Islands and has a population of just under 18,000. For centuries Kalymnos’s main industry was in the sea sponge trade which brought relative prosperity to the island. Kalymnos’s main port, Pothia, is the island’s capital. It’s a traditional yet lively town, and will be your landing point if you decide to take a ferry to the island from Kos or Rhodes.

Recorded history on Kalymnos dates back to antiquity. Homer wrote in the *Iliad* that Kalymnos contributed 30 ships to the Trojan War. Over its history, Kalymnos bounced between various outside rulers from Athenian to Persian to Roman in antiquity then to Ottoman, Italian and German in more recent centuries. Ancient and medieval fortifications built at highpoints on the island, many of which still stand today, are a physical testament to historic struggles with outside invaders. Kalymnos and the Dodecanese islands officially became part of Greece following WWII.

Long before climbing was discovered on the island as a revenue stream, Kalymnos was famous for its sponge trade. Kalymnian men dove beneath the vibrant blue waters to collect this delicate sea creature for trade around the Mediterranean and as far north as Russia. Although profitable, the sponge harvesting was a dangerous occupation. Voyages to harvest sponges lasted several months and “skin diving” (diving without the aid of scuba suits or modern equipment) required extensive skills and stamina. The harvest season typically began in spring and lasted through the summer with divers returning in the fall when the waters turned cold.

The sponge trade was Kalymnos primary economy from the mid 1800s to the 1980s. Although it is no longer Kalymnos primary economic driver, the culture and traditions of the island will always be interwoven with the sponge.

The first climbing routes on Kalymnos were bolted in the late nineties and over the last 25 years it has transformed into one of the most celebrated sport climbing destinations in the world. Thanks to support from the local municipalities, guidelines were set for developing new climbs and promoting the island as a climbing destination to the outside world.

Expectations of Participants

The alumni trip atmosphere is more relaxed than a typical NOLS expedition. However, it's not a full-service vacation or guided experience. You'll have to participate, carry your load, and help out as needed. These expeditions are fun, but they still require self-reliance, self awareness, risk management and sound decision making as we trek through remote areas where evacuation to modern medical facilities can take several days.Like all NOLS courses, these expeditions emphasize hands-on learning and the application of new skills in a variety of situations.

All participants need to complete and submit application materials, including a medical history form. These forms highlight the intersection of your trip's anticipated physical rigor and your current health and fitness status. Your forthright and timely completion and submission of the forms sets you and your trip up for success in the outdoors.

Alumni trips allow electronics and alcohol (for those of legal age in the country of the trip). Many participants find that these luxuries can add to the course experience and local flavor. Excessive alcohol consumption is not a part of the culture of Alumni trips.

Trip Itinerary

This is an example of what the skills progression might look like. Depending on your experience and how we split into small groups, each person might experience learning these things at a different pace.

April 16/17	Depending on travel plans participants will leave home on this day.
April 18	Arrive in Kalymnos either by direct flight, or flying into Kos and taking a ferry into Kalymnos. **7pm orientation at hotel this evening. Dinner is on your own before orientation.**
April 19	Ground school- knots, belaying, Top Rope site management
April 20	Anchor building; lead climb demo; anchor cleaning
April 21	Climb; multi-pitch demo; rappelling station

April 22	Rest day - may vary depending on group desires.
April 23-25	Climb
April 26	Final day climbing together. Closing celebration dinner together!
April 27	Return home or travel onward on your own.

Trip Logistics

Getting to Kalymnos

Option 1: Fly into Kos airport (KGS) then ferry to Pothia, Kalymnos's port town. This is the most common way to get to Kalymnos. Kos is a larger island southeast of Kalymnos. It is a popular tourist destination and has an international airport making it relatively easy to find flight options from other major European cities.

When you land in Kos, take a taxi to the Mastichari port (about 10 minutes). There will be a taxi queue outside the arrivals gate. Taxis on Kos are silver and have the "taxi" sign on them. Then catch the next ferry to Kalymnos. Ferries run between the two islands about every 2 hours. The ferry ride only takes about 40 minutes and costs between 8-10 Euro. When you arrive in Pothia, you can take a taxi or bus to Masouri. Taxis wait at the port and are readily available. There is a tourist information office across from the port that can direct you to the nearest bus stop.

It is always a good idea to ask your taxi driver for a rate before you set off. Taxis from KGS airport to Mastichari and from Pothia to Masouri should cost around 15-16 euros.

Option 2: Fly to Athens, then fly to Kalymnos. Kalymnos does have a small airport that is served by Sky Express. There are a few flights a week between Athens and Pothia, Kalymnos. When you arrive in Pothia, take a taxi to Masouri.

Option 3: Fly to Rhodes, then take a ferry to Kalymnos. Once you land in Rhodes, head via taxi to Rhodes main port, Mandraki. Between spring and Autumn there is a daily ferry between Rhodes and Kalymnos. The ferry takes about 3 hours. When you arrive in Pothia, take a taxi to Masouri.

Lodging

For the entirety of our trip we will be staying at a hotel in Masouri. Keeping a home base for our trip will allow us to spend more time exploring the island. Each hotel room is equipped with a very small kitchenette which we will be using for breakfast, pack lunches and most dinners will be out around the town. We will put two or three to a room in single gender rooms, unless you are a couple or have expressed preference to room with your travel companion. Our hotel is only a short walk from the beach. The ocean can still be a bit chilly in the spring, but a relaxing visit just to sit on the sand can be a great way to end a long climbing day.

We will host orientation at your hotel, Ambiance Hotel, on the evening of the 18th.

Storage of Personal Belongings
Personal baggage that doesn't go with us each day to climb will be kept in the hotel. This is reasonably secure storage, but nothing is 100 percent guaranteed. NOLS assumes no responsibility for your stored baggage.

Rental Climbing Gear
If you know that you plan to rent any equipment, we recommend reaching out to a climbing shop ahead of your arrival to ensure they will have rentals (especially shoes) in your size.

Wild sport has two locations on Kalymnos, one in Masouri. They rent shoes, harnesses, and helmets for 6 euros each per day.

Currency
Greece uses the Euro as its only currency. You might want cash for miscellaneous purchases and throughout the trip such as snacks, alcohol, or souvenirs. You'll receive the best exchange by simply taking money out of ATM's, but your bank might charge you additional fees for this. U.S. credit cards will work in most locations, but it's often a good idea to give your credit card company a heads up that you're traveling internationally. About 100 will be plenty of cash for the trip for incidental purchases.

Travel Insurance
Travel insurance is worth exploring in case unforeseen events cause you to change your plans or if NOLS has to cancel a trip for any reason. Check with your personal insurance carrier and credit card to understand what you already might have or check out cat70.com for a wide variety of options.

Carbon Footprint and Offset
Current estimates are that the Travel Industry accounts for ~8% of global emissions. This percentage includes everything from transportation to accommodation and shopping. NOLS recognizes that our business contributes to this problem but we do not have a comprehensive strategy at this point.

If you would like to offset part or all of the carbon emissions related to your Alumni trip, we recommend South Pole. Their calculator can help easily calculate your footprint and choose a project to contribute to. Here is a link to their calculator.

Tipping
Tipping in the service industry is common practice at restaurants and 5-10% tips for service ranging from fair to very good is acceptable. It is best practice to leave a tip in cash on the table or to give it directly to the person you want it to go to.

For taxi service, round up to the nearest euro. Tips are not generally expected, but drivers will not typically give exact change under a euro.

While tipping is common in the outdoor guiding culture, your NOLS Instructors are not driven to excellence by tips but rather a love for taking people outdoors. You are welcome to tip the Instructors if

you choose, but many instructors are honored by a donation in their name to the NOLS Annual Fund which supports scholarships for future NOLS students.

Immunizations / Vaccinations / Travel medications

International travel poses special health considerations. NOLS strongly advises that all participants traveling to international locations carefully consider what vaccinations or inoculations are required, recommended, or suggested for their specific travel itinerary. Consulting with a physician, travel medicine specialist, or other healthcare professional is strongly advised.

Visa / Passport - Attention International European travelers - Must read… Action Required

If your travels have you **entering or transiting (passing through or laying over in) the UK**, you will need to apply for and have an approved Electronic Travel Authorization (ETA) to continue to your destination.

This article explains that starting Jan 8, 2025, US and Canadian citizens will need to apply for the ETA to enter the UK.

Here's the link for how to apply.

As well, for NOLS International Alumni trips, your **passport must be valid for a minimum of 6 months post trip**. For example, if your trip in Europe concludes on July 30, 2025, your passport must be valid through January 30, 2026.

At some point in the future Europe (EU) will be requiring a travel authorization for most countries that are visa-exempt. This includes USA citizens. Once this system goes into effect, you will need to apply using this new system before traveling and pay a small fee for the authorization.

You can read about this new program, check your requirements, and view the most up to date expected implementation date here.

Electricity stuff

Electricity is available at our hotel. You will need a Type F adapter in order to plug your things into the plugs at our hotel.

Trip Registration

The best way to register is through the trip information page on the nols.edu website. A non-refundable deposit secures your spot on the trip. If any issues arise, please call the NOLS Alumni Department at (800) 332-4280. Your enrollment is complete with receipt of your full tuition and your completed application forms; these are **due 60 days before the start of your trip.**

All participants are required to submit registration materials, including a medical form. These forms highlight the intersection of your trip's anticipated physical rigor and your current health and fitness status while also providing NOLS information about things like your dietary needs.

NOLS is not responsible for additional costs incurred by late arrivals or evacuations. Those expenses are the responsibility of trip participants and we recommend purchasing travel insurance to mitigate the impact of unforeseen circumstances.

Do not book travel greater than 60 days before the start of the trip unless you have confirmed with NOLS that the trip will run. On rare occasions, we do cancel trips due to low enrollment.

Cancellation and Transfer Policy
For your reference, here is the Alumni Trips Cancellation and Transfer Policy. When enrolling on a trip, you will need to agree to this policy.

Things to do in Masouri and the surrounding areas

- Visit the Chryssocheria Castle in Pothia
- Visit the Kalymnos Archaeological museum in Pothia
- Visit Telendos island. A short 5 minute boat ride from Myrties takes you to an island that was separated from Kalymnos in 535 A.D. by an earthquake.
- Visit the Monastery of Agios Savvas. The Monastery has a panoramic view of Pothia. The Monastery is dedicated to St. Savvas, patron saint of Kalymnos.

Suggested Readings:

- *The Bellstone: Greek Sponge Divers of the Aegean* by Michael Kalafatas

Equipment List

Gear provided by NOLS			
First Aid kits	**Reference Books**	**Technical climbing gear**	**Satellite/Cell phone**

Upper Body Clothing	
Equipment	**Notes**
Mid weight top	Fleece or wool sweater. Vests are a great addition also.
Top layer (Fleece or “puffy” jacket)	A warm, synthetic or down-fill “puffy” jacket
Long sleeve shirt	Important for sun protection, synthetic or wool
Wind shirt (optional)	A lightweight, breathable, durable nylon wind shell, in either pullover or parka style
Rain Jacket	Waterproof, breathable rain jacket.
T-shirts (2-3)	2-3 cotton, wool or polyester t-shirts for your climbing days.You can substitute a long sleeve sun shirt here.

Sports Bras (2-3)	Wool, synthetic, or cotton
Warm hat	Synthetic or wool
Sun Hat or Baseball Cap	A baseball hat, wide-brimmed sun hat, or visor
Lower Body Clothing	
Equipment	**Notes**
Climbing Pants	Comfortable cotton, nylon, spandex or polyester pants to protect your legs while climbing.
Shorts	Longer shorts are best to wear with a harness.
Underwear (2-3 pairs)	Wear what's comfortable
Climbing Equipment	
Rock Shoes- rentable	Rock climbing specific shoes, snug-fitting with rubber sole and small toe box. We recommend not buying climbing shoes that force your toes to curl; they should be suitable for wearing and climbing all day. You're welcome to bring a pair for comfort and a "performance" pair.
Rock Climbing Harness- rentable	You can rent this item, but if you own one, bring it along.
Rock Climbing Helmet- rentable	You can rent this item, but if you own one that you would like to use, bring it along.
Chalk Bag and chalk (optional)	These hold chalk while climbing to keep your hands dry.
Belay gloves (optional)	Great for belaying
Belay glasses (optional)	Nice for neck comfort, but not required.
Footwear	
Equipment	**Notes**
Approach or Hiking Shoes	A sturdy pair of shoes to hike in and scramble to and from the cliff.
Sneakers or non-hiking shoe	Something comfortable to wear around town.
Socks (3-5 pairs)	½ crew to crew length wool or cotton socks.
Water Shoes/ beach sandals (optional)	For walking on the beach.
Miscellaneous Personal Gear	
Equipment	**Notes**
Duffel Bag or Suitcase	A large-sized nylon duffel bag (4,000 - 8,000 cubic inches) for packing/storing all your gear in base camp.

Climbing Day Pack	Medium-sized (40 to 50 liter capacity) backpack for carrying your daily personal items (e.g. water, food, clothing layers) and group climbing gear.
Water bottles/hydration bladder	2-4 Liters capacity.
Food Bowl	A 16-24 oz tupperware with a sealable lid for carrying lunches. Rectangle shaped works particularly well for sandwiches
Lip balm (1-2)	SPF 15 or greater
Sunscreen	SPF 30 or greater
Sunglasses	Good-quality sunglasses with 100-percent UV protection
Headlamp	Might be useful on occasion.
Toiletries	Toothbrush, toothpaste, comb, brush, skin lotion, tampons, etc. (travel or trial sizes are enough), ear plugs and eye covers can be nice
Bandana (1-2)	Most folks enjoy having a bandana and women often use one for personal hygiene
Bathing Suit (optional)	For going to the beach
Towel (optional)	For drying off at the beach.
Optional Items	
Trekking poles	Most approaches are short, but they’re nice to have
Hydration system	Very handy and popular
Book or e-reader	Bring something fun to read.
Camera	We would love to see your photos post-trip!
Casual clothes	Shirt/pants/skirt for dinner or hanging out around the hotel
Sunglass Retainers	Something for keeping your glasses or sunglasses on.
Prescription Glasses And Contacts (1-2 pairs)	Bring at least one spare pair of glasses or lenses. Prescription sunglasses are a nice item to have.
Notepad and Pencil/Pen	A small, lightweight pad if you would like to take notes.
Bug Spray	We may encounter mosquitos.