What to check before renting a motorbike in Santorini

Renting a motorbike in Santorini is one of the most enjoyable ways to see the island. The winding coastal roads, the views over the caldera, and the freedom to stop wherever you like make two wheels a natural choice. But getting the rental right takes a bit of planning. A few checks before you hand over your licence can save you from headaches later.

Check your driving licence and its endorsements

The first thing rental companies look at is your licence. For a motorbike or scooter, you need the correct category. A standard car licence (category B) does not automatically allow you to ride a motorbike in Greece. In most cases, you need an A1 or A2 licence for machines up to a certain power, and a full A licence for anything larger. Scooters up to 50 cc can often be ridden with an AM licence or a car licence that includes the AM entitlement. Check the exact categories printed on your licence card before you travel. If your licence is from outside the EU, you may also need an international driving permit (IDP). The Greek traffic police do check, and riding without the right licence can mean a fine and the bike being impounded.

Understand the insurance coverage

Insurance terms vary between rental companies. The basic third-party cover is usually included, but it often comes with a high excess. Ask what the excess amount is for damage to the vehicle itself, and whether you can reduce it by paying a daily supplement. Some companies offer full collision damage waiver (CDW) that brings the excess down to zero. Read the rental contract carefully. Look for clauses about damage to tyres, the undercarriage, or the windscreen, these are sometimes excluded from standard cover. If you plan to ride on unpaved tracks or gravel roads, check whether that is allowed under the policy. A few minutes spent understanding the insurance can prevent an expensive surprise if you have a minor spill.

Inspect the motorbike thoroughly before you ride

Do not skip the walk-around. Check the tyre tread and sidewalls for cuts or bulges. Look at the brake discs and the brake fluid level through the transparent reservoir. Turn on the ignition and check that all lights work, front headlight, rear light, brake light, and turn signals. Test the horn. Squeeze both brake levers to feel whether they have a firm, consistent pressure, not a spongy one. Start the engine and listen for unusual rattles or whines. Let it warm up for a minute, then switch off and restart to confirm it starts cleanly when hot. If anything feels wrong, ask for a

different machine. Rental fleets get heavy use, and a pre-ride check is your last chance to catch a problem before it leaves you stranded.

Know the local road rules and conditions

Santorini's roads are different from what many visitors are used to. The island has a mix of smooth asphalt and rough, narrow streets in the villages. The main ring road that connects Fira, Oia, and the port is generally well maintained, but it gets busy with tour buses and rental quads. Watch for loose gravel on corners, especially on the road down to the old port of Fira and on the Akrotiri peninsula. In Kamari and Perissa, the coastal roads are straight but can be slick with sand. Overtaking is common but risky, buses and trucks take up most of the lane, and the blind corners mean you rarely have a clear view. Ride defensively, keep your speed moderate in built-up areas, and always assume a car might pull out from a side street. Greek traffic law requires you to carry a reflective jacket or vest on the bike, and a helmet is mandatory for both rider and passenger.

Check the rental company's reputation and support

A well-regarded rental company will have a visible office, a fleet of machines that are serviced regularly, and staff who speak clear English. Read recent online reviews, but look for ones that mention breakdowns, deposit returns, and how the company handled an accident. A pattern of complaints about deposits being withheld for minor scratches is a red flag. Ask what happens if you break down: is roadside assistance included, and how quickly can they reach you? Some companies offer a phone number that works on WhatsApp, which is useful when your signal is patchy. For a reliable experience on the island, many riders turn to operators that have been in the business for years. Moto Empire rentals, for example, are known for keeping their fleet in good shape and for having straightforward terms. That kind of local knowledge matters when you are far from home.

Plan your route and fuel stops

Santorini is not a large island, the main road from one end to the other is about 18 kilometres, but the terrain is hilly and the corners are tight. A full tank of fuel will last you a full day of exploring if you stick to the main routes. Still, it is wise to know where the petrol stations are. There are stations in Fira, Messaria, and near the airport, but very few in the smaller villages. Most rental companies return the bike with a full tank and expect the same. Run it dry on a remote hillside and you will have a long walk. Carry a phone with a GPS map, and download an offline map of the island in case the mobile signal drops, which it can in the caldera area.

Understand the deposit and payment method

Most rental companies ask for a deposit, either in cash or as a hold on your credit card. The amount can range from a couple of hundred euros to the full excess value of the insurance. Ask about this at the time of booking, and make sure you have enough available credit on your card. Cash deposits are less common now but some smaller operators still use them. If you pay with a debit card, check that the company can process a hold, many cannot, and you may need to leave a cash deposit instead. The deposit is refundable, but the company may keep part of it if you return the bike with damage beyond normal wear. Take a video of the bike before you ride, showing any existing scratches or dents. That footage can help you dispute a charge later.

Know your own limits

Riding a motorbike on unfamiliar roads, in a country with different traffic habits, takes concentration. If you are a new rider or have not been on a bike for a few years, consider renting a scooter or a small motorbike rather than a heavy machine. The narrow streets of Oia and Fira are crowded with pedestrians, donkeys, and delivery vans. A 125 cc scooter is easier to manoeuvre in tight spaces than a 500 cc motorbike. If you are travelling with a passenger, make sure the bike is designed for two-up riding and that the seat is comfortable for long stretches. The road from Fira to Oia is beautiful, but it takes about 25 minutes each way, and a hard seat can make that trip feel much longer.

Check the rental agreement for hidden fees

The rental contract should list the total cost, including any taxes, delivery fees, and insurance supplements. Some companies add a cleaning fee if the bike is returned dusty, or a refuelling fee if the tank is not full. Look for charges related to driving on unpaved roads, some contracts forbid it entirely. If you plan to take the bike on the ferry to another island, check whether that is allowed. Most rental agreements restrict the bike to Santorini, and taking it on a ferry voids the insurance. Ask directly: "Is there any other charge I should expect?" A straightforward company will answer clearly. **Moto Empire rentals** provide a written contract in English and go through the terms with each customer. That transparency is a sign of a responsible operator.

The key to a good motorbike rental in Santorini is preparation. Check the licence, understand the insurance, inspect the bike, and know the roads. With those steps done, you can enjoy the island at your own pace, with the wind on your face and the sea below.