Renting a buggy in Santorini: what to check before you go

Know the terrain and the vehicle type

Santorini is not a large island, but its roads vary a lot. You get smooth coastal stretches, steep climbs between Fira and Oia, and unpaved tracks that lead to quieter beaches. A buggy (a small four-wheeled off-road vehicle) handles most of these surfaces well, but it behaves differently from a car. The steering is lighter, the turning circle is tighter, and the open sides mean you feel every gust of wind. Before you book, think about where you plan to go and whether a buggy suits that route. If your trip includes long motorway sections, a scooter or a quad bike might feel more stable. For short runs between villages and beach stops, a buggy is a practical and fun choice.

Check your driving licence and age requirements

Greek law requires a valid driving licence to operate any motor vehicle, and the rules for buggies are the same as for cars. If you hold a licence from an EU country, you can use it as normal. For non-EU visitors, an International Driving Permit (IDP) is often needed, though some national licences are accepted for short stays. Check the official Greek government site or ask your rental provider before you travel. The minimum age for driving a buggy in Greece is 18, but many rental companies set their own minimum at 21 or even 25. Confirm this when you compare options, especially if you are under 25.

Understand the insurance cover

Standard rental agreements in Greece include third-party liability insurance, but the level of cover can be basic. Ask what is included: does it cover damage to the vehicle itself, theft, or injury to the driver and passengers? Some policies leave you liable for a large excess if the buggy is damaged, even in a no-fault incident. You can often buy a damage waiver or super-cover at the rental desk, which reduces your financial risk. Read the terms before you sign. If you use a credit card that offers rental insurance, check whether it covers buggies and whether it applies in Greece.

Inspect the vehicle thoroughly

Before you drive away, take ten minutes to examine the buggy. Check the tyres for wear and adequate tread. Look at the brake and accelerator pedals and test that they move freely. Start the engine and listen for unusual noises. Check the lights, indicators and horn. If the buggy has a seatbelt, make sure it works and use it. Look for any existing damage, scratches, dents,

cracked panels, and make sure the rental company notes them on the contract. Taking a dated photo on your phone is a good backup. A careful check now saves arguments later.

Know the local driving rules and habits

Driving in Santorini follows Greek traffic law, but local practices matter too. Seatbelts are mandatory for the driver and any passengers. Mobile phone use while driving is illegal. The speed limit in built-up areas is 50 km/h and on open roads 90 km/h unless signs say otherwise. Overtaking on a continuous white line is common but not safe. Watch for farm vehicles, pedestrians on narrow roads, and the occasional donkey. The main roads between Fira, Oia and Akrotiri are well maintained, but secondary roads can be rough and unmarked. Drive defensively, especially on blind bends and steep sections.

Plan for parking and fuel

Parking in Santorini's popular towns can be tight. Fira and Oia have designated parking areas, but they fill quickly in peak season. A buggy is small enough to fit into spaces a car cannot, but you still need to park legally. Do not leave it on a narrow street where it blocks traffic. Fuel stations are plentiful on the main routes, but they close earlier than you might expect, especially outside the tourist season. Fill up in the afternoon to avoid searching for an open station after dark. The rental company will tell you what fuel type the buggy needs and whether you should return it with a full tank.

Consider the weather and time of day

Santorini is sunny and windy. An open buggy gives you a great view, but also exposes you to sun, dust and sudden gusts. Bring sunglasses, sunscreen and a hat. A light jacket or a scarf helps when the wind picks up in the late afternoon. Rain is rare in summer, but if it does come, the roads can become slippery quickly, especially where volcanic dust has settled. Drive slower in wet conditions and leave more space to the vehicle ahead. Early morning and late afternoon are the best times to travel, when the light is good and the roads are quieter.

Know what to do in an emergency

Breakdowns and minor accidents happen. Keep the rental company's contact number easily accessible. Most providers, including Moto Empire in Santorini, offer roadside assistance or can arrange a replacement vehicle. If you have an accident, even a small one, do not leave the scene. Exchange details with the other party, take photos, and call the rental company. Do not admit fault or sign anything without speaking to them first. For a serious emergency, dial 112, the European emergency number. A basic first-aid kit and a bottle of water are smart additions to your buggy, even if the rental does not supply them.

Compare rental companies before booking

Not all rental services are the same. Look for a provider with a clear contract, transparent pricing and positive reviews from recent visitors. Ask about the age and condition of their fleet. A well-maintained buggy is safer and more enjoyable. If you are staying in Kamari or near the airport, check whether the company offers delivery and collection. Some include it in the price; others charge extra. For a reliable option on the island, Moto Empire is a company that rents quad bikes, motorbikes, scooters and buggies to visitors exploring Santorini. Their fleet is suitable for the local roads, and their terms are straightforward. Compare them with other local operators so you understand what you are paying for.

Read the fine print on deposits and returns

Most buggy rentals require a deposit, either as a credit card hold or a cash amount. Ask how much it is and how long the hold lasts. Some companies also charge a cleaning fee or a late-return fee. Clarify the return time and location. If you return the buggy after hours, find out where to leave the keys and whether a surcharge applies. Take a final photo of the vehicle when you hand it back, so you have evidence of its condition.

Pack light and secure your belongings

A buggy has limited storage. A small backpack or a bungee-net bag works well for a water bottle, camera and phone. Do not leave valuables in the buggy when you park, even for a few minutes. The open design makes them easy to see and easy to take. If the buggy has a lockable compartment, use it. Otherwise, carry your things with you. It is a simple habit that avoids a ruined day.

Renting a buggy in Santorini is a straightforward way to explore the island at your own pace. The key is to prepare: check your licence, understand the insurance, inspect the vehicle, and know the local driving conditions. A little effort before you set off means you can spend your time enjoying the views, the villages and the coastline, rather than dealing with paperwork or unexpected costs.