

Southwest Turkey

A Greentours Itinerary

Days 1-5

Akseki & Gembos Yayla

We arrive in the evening and after a night in Antalya we'll drive up to Akseki where we'll settle into the Ali Pasha Lodge, around a thousand metres up in the Taurus Mountains.

The annual migration of herds and herdsman from warm lowland valleys to the rich green pastures of the mountains has been a fact of life since long before the Seljuk invasion of what is now Turkey. Even today, when rural depopulation has seen a dwindling of both farmers and livestock populating the Turkish heights, there is hardly a family in Turkey that doesn't have relations who used to go to the yaylas, as these summer pastures are known. As snow recedes in spring the mountain meadows green up and a profusion of flowers bloom. Blue Scillas, pink Colchicums, white Ornithogalums and yellow Gageas all rush to flower and set seed between the snows and the grazing teeth. At Gembos there is an extra special show in prospect as two species of Crocus burst forth in flashes of brilliant colour. Egg-yolk yellow *Crocus chrysanthus* with orange stamens and purple-striped blue *Crocus biflorus* subspecies *isauricus* have hybridised extensively and the result is a kaleidoscopic array of colours with all intermediate forms on show. You can photograph ten plants next to each other and not one will have the same set of colours! Add carpets of bright yellow *Eranthis hyemalis* and blue *Anemone blanda* to the profusion of crocuses and the effect is mesmerising.

One should not forget the landscapes too, for the Taurus are exceptionally beautiful with high craggy peaks covered in snow, and made that much more photogenic with a stately Cedar of Lebanon in the foreground. The ground flora includes *Corydalis wendelboi*, lovely little *Muscari anatolicum*, and *Ornithogalums* a-plenty. The elegant bells of *Fritillaria elwesii* mix with blue *Hyacinthus orientalis*, and no less than four species of *Colchicum* are in flower, *burtii*, *psaridis*, *szovitsii* and *triphyllum*! A little lower and we'll enjoy Calabrian Pine forests with *Daphne sericea* already flowering and in quiet valleys huge Sweet Chestnuts and Plane trees line the many streams and rivers. Lower still on the edge of the Pamphylian Plain we'll look for the beautiful dark violet flowers of endemic *Hyacinthella heldreichii* and the early flowering *Iris pamphylica* amongst Mediterranean macchie. Rare *Iris masia* blooms in an old graveyard where we can also find *Aristolochia lycica*, the foodplant of Eastern Festoons and Falso Apollos, both already on the wing. Cretzschmar's

Buntings and Red-backed Shrikes will be among the first waves of migrants whilst up on the higher slopes we'll find Shorelarks, Snow Finches and plentiful Chukar. Snowy Dedegol Mountain rises to over ten thousand feet to the west of the lake and will make a superb backdrop to another endemic iris, the lovely deep purple *Iris stenophylla*.

Turkish bulb populations have in the past been under severe pressure from the bulb trade and it is pleasing to see moves afoot to repair the damage inflicted. By the mid-eighties vast numbers of *Galanthus elwesii* that flowered at two nearby yaylas had all but disappeared. Conservation measures and sustainable harvesting techniques have allowed them to recover so successfully that they once again bloom prolifically.

Days 6 & 7

Sundance & Phaselis

Now we'll head westwards, soon reaching the precipitous mountains that stretch westwards along the coast from Antalya. *Ophrys heterochila* and *Orchis syriaca*, the latter a beautiful 'green-winged' type varying from ivory to pink, bloom under coastal woodlands near our lunchspot. At Sundance Stripe-necked Terrapins and various hawkers and skimmers live alongside the small river that wends its

way through the organically farmed fields past the restaurant and to the sea. Unspoilt beaches with a colourful seaside flora of Dyer's Alkanet, medicagos, lotuses, stocks and rare *Anchusa aggregata* spread in each direction. Migrant waders and herons stop off by the river and warblers, shrikes and buntings populate the bushes and trees behind the beaches. Pines cover rocky headlands that in places open to garrigue. The whole property is a microcosm of what untouched Mediterranean coastal habitats should be. Protected by the owners, it makes a fine nature reserve.

Across the blue waters of the bay lies Phaselis. As we wander amongst the cobbled streets of this beautifully positioned archaeological site we'll encounter some wonderful plants. There are several bee orchids present, the most common being the colourful and often many-flowered *Ophrys minoa*. Pretty mats of *Cymbalaria longipes* drape from ancient archways.

Day 8

The Kemer Valley

The variety of flora that occurs from source to sea along the Kemer Valley is staggering as habitats range from dry olive groves to fern and moss-laden gullies, and from bare rocky mountain to rich maquis and woodland. Amongst oleanders and heathers are some fine orchids. We'll find the striking local bee orchid *Ophrys climacis* and lovely *Ophrys*

straussii as well as Monkey Orchid and Naked Man Orchid. Mats of the gorgeous toadflax *Cymbalaria microcalyx* and a classic 'rockplant' *Ajuga bombycina*, with yellow flowers and silvery-hairy foliage, adorn limestone outcrops. The pink spikes of Anatolian Orchid and purple-blue *Muscaris* mix with architectural ferns in deeply fissured rocks by the many streams and rivers. Perhaps most spectacular are the large flower spikes of *Astragalus lusitanicus*. Abundant Danford's Lizards sun themselves on rocks whilst butterflies such as Turkish Vernal Copper, Gruner's Orange-tip and Eastern Festoon open their prettily marked wings on the forestry tracks. Where there are festoons, there are *Aristolochias*, and here there's plenty, and where these grow then we'll also find translucent-winged False Apollos.

Day 9 Olympos & Adrasan Bay

A mountainous peninsula spreads southwards from ancient Olympos, the ruins themselves being another good orchid site! The quiet roads that wander this convoluted landscape offer many places to explore the varied habitats. Some of Turkey's most glorious flowers are here - *Lathyrus belinensis* is a fabulous 'pea' with bright citrus yellow and orange flowers. Nearby we'll find orange *Lathyrus gorgonii* and the beautiful bright pink *Lathyrus lycica*, each exquisite bloom lined with dark maroon. Down by the coast is a bay backed with marshes where we'll find an assortment of waders as well as Purple Herons, Little Bitterns and various egrets. Great Reed Warblers call stridently from reedbeds where patches of open water are speckled white with water crowfoot. A tiny scarlet Tulip flowers prolifically here. Inland grassy fields mix with maquis in a bulb rich environment. Acres of tongue orchids have *Ophrys brevipennis*, *Ophrys umbilicata* and *Ophrys cinereophila* flowering amongst them as well as hundreds of *Ophrys mammosa* and the large velvety blooms of *Ophrys ferrugineopurpurea*. The strongly waisted flowers of *Fritillaria acmopetala* mix with *Bellevalia trifoliata*, asphodels and alliums.

Day 10 Finike, Limyra & the South Coast

Impressive springs issue crystal clear water along the base of the mountains inland of Finike. At the ancient site of Limyra springs coalesce to form a sizeable river lined by yellow *Iris xanthosperia* and frequented by kingfishers and herons, demoiselles and darters. The lovely blue, white and yellow *Convolvulus sicula* will attract photographers as will the blue and orange tinted male agamas as they display fearlessly on rocky parapets. Amongst *Cistuses* and *Storax* we'll find *Coronillas* and *Calicotome*, *Anthyllis*

and Astragaluses, Medicks and Melilotuses, Lotuses and Lathyruses, Restharrow and Birdsfoots. Rüppell's Warblers sing and Sombre Tits call as summer visitors such as Cretzschmar's and Ortolan Buntings start to appear.

Days 11 & 12

Gulmez Yaylas & Susuz Dagi

Summer pastures in the mountains above Finike will be at their floriferous best as spring brings a flush of colour to the whitest of limestones. Peeking out of crevices are deep purple *Romulea tempskyana* and plentiful pink *Orchis sezikana*. Rare *Ophrys lycia* will just be opening up and the pretty green and brown lined bells of *Fritillaria elwesii* inhabit woodland edge. Sombre Tits, and both Lesser Spotted and Middle Spotted Woodpeckers are common in the large *Valonia* Oaks. Higher up are fabulous pink *Anthemis rosea*, the large yellow daisies of *Doronicum orientale*, and the only recently described *Corydalis pashei*. The unusual brown-tipped ivory flowers of *Muscari muscarimi* emit a delicate yet powerful scent, these blooming with blue and white *Vicia cypria*, *Alkanna tubulosa*, two species of *Scilla*, and the lovely mat-forming *Viola crassifolia*. We'll visit the large lake at Avlan, where we'll see Ruddy Shelduck, Garganey and Pochard in some numbers and very probably White Stork and the spectacular White-tailed Eagle. On the dry limestone slopes of Susuz Dagi we'll enjoy a picnic surrounded by orchids, Aubretias, Gageas and both *Cyclamen alpinum* and *Cyclamen coum*. The little yellow bells of *Fritillaria carica* mix with *Scilla biflora*, *Ornithogalums*, and beautiful *Alkanna attilae* under Cedars and Hop Hornbeams.

Day 13

Antalya & return to UK

Or...

Istanbul Extension

Days 13-15

Nezahat Gokyigit Botanical Garden

A chance to see some of the many famous cultural sites in Istanbul and to visit the Nezahat Gokyigit Botanical Garden. Adil Güner has for several years been designing and constructing the most ambitious botanical garden in Turkey. It has the largest collection of native bulbs and many of them, especially the irises, will be flowering now.

Trip reports are available from previous trips. If you would like to see a copy, or to ask about any other aspect of this holiday, please contact us on 01298 83563 or email on enquiries@greentours.co.uk.