

Datça & Dalyan

Wildlife at Leisure

A Greentours Itinerary

Day 1

To Dalaman and Datça

After arriving in Dalaman we'll journey north for an hour through pomegranate and orange orchards before spending another hour reaching the lovely little town of Datça close to the end of a ruggedly beautiful peninsula. The latter part of the journey will open our eyes to the geography of this narrow arm of land that sticks far west into the Aegean. Turquoise-blue seas lay either side of multi-hued hills and mountains that are sometimes bare (but don't be fooled...) sometimes with forest with open pine woods, and sometimes covered in a richly aromatic and very flowery shrubbery. After reaching the town we'll settle into our comfortable little hotel for a five night stay.

Day 2

Boz Dağı

The wild Datça Peninsula is barely 80 kilometres from the modern tourist resorts around Marmaris yet it has managed to remain largely unspoilt and undeveloped into the 21st century. Much of the peninsula is protected as a national park that was set up more than fifty years ago initially to protect the last Western Anatolian population of Leopard. None have been seen for around fifteen years now however there are still Brown Bears and Wolves here and very many Ibex. We'll surely see the latter – posing on the limestone ramparts of Boz Dağı. This high mountain has impressive cliffs on which breed various raptors including Bonelli's Eagles, Peregrine and Lanner Falcon, and the northern slopes, almost completely uninhabited are clothed in some of the richest lushest maquis in Turkey. Ruppell's Warblers and Bonelli's Warblers are everywhere.

Ferula communis makes an immediately impressive contribution to a roadside flora that includes three *Convolvulus* species – *althaeoides*, *scammonia* and *elegantissimus* - these providing more than just a splash of colour. Amongst *Satureja* and *Coridothymus* bloom lovely *Gladiolus anatolicus* and lots of *Orchis anatolica*. There are plenty of other orchids too with helleborines, Violet Limodores, Giant Orchids, and a number of lovely bee orchids such as *Ophrys lyciensis* and *Ophrys heterochila*.

Day 3

Murdala and Mersincik

It would be difficult to find a flowerier place in the entire Mediterranean than Murdala and Mersincik close to the end of the Datça Peninsula. For much of the year these mountains are forbiddingly barren-looking but in April and May they erupt into spectacular bloom. The combination of multi-hued *Cistus* bushes, bushes

of blue *Lithodora*, neat mounds of flowering Euphorbias, and a variety of lovely Campanulas and Venus Looking-glasses is mind-boggling. Looking closer there's so much more. The gorgeous deep pink-lilac *Iberis pruitii* grows on bare tracks looking like someone's dropped packets of sweets as they've walked, and there's little mounds of the very woolly *Convolvulus compactus*. Orchids are everywhere, in particular bee orchids, and Datça has many species of them – *Ophrys candida*, *Ophrys minoa*, *Ophrys episcopalis* and *Ophrys ferrum-equinum* subspecies *mandalyana* are some of the finest. The north side of Boz Dagi has some spectacular scenery with the limestone pinnacles and cliffs dropping quickly to the sea through a particularly luxuriant maquis vegetation with unusually large strawberry trees, laurels and Phillyreas.

Day 4

Emecik Mountain and the 'Caracal' Forests

Serapias cordigera showers the open pinewoods with deep brick-coloured blooms and here they occur in unusual forms too with flowers sometimes wholly or partly lime-green. These same pinewoods are home to a population of Caracal – we'll go and look in the evening though chances are very slim, however we've a very good chance of seeing Wild Boar, Stone Marten and several owl species – Barn, Tawny, Long-eared and Scop's Owls are all likely. There's also a very nice flora under the trees with plants such as *Fritillaria forbesii* and *Allium subhirsutum*. Nearby is one of the very few remaining populations of the palm *Phoenix theophrasti* and there are also small pockets of emerald-green Liquidambar forests where we'll find Irises and see birds such Green and Lesser Spotted Woodpecker, Woodchat Shrikes and Golden Orioles.

Day 5

Knidos

Just thirty-five kilometres from Datça lies the remarkable archaeological site of Knidos. The location is in itself superb, the ancient city perched at the tip of the peninsula with just a square kilometre of land beyond that houses the famous lighthouse. The ancient settlement, one of the most important in Caria, had two harbours one facing northwest, the other southeast, and these just metres apart! Knidos is famed as the home of Praxiteles whose sculptures include the famous naked statue of Aphrodite. The amphitheatre is also quite special.

As we approach the garrigue is loaded with aromatic herbs attracting butterflies such as Southern and Scarce Swallowtails, Blue-spot and Ilex Hairstreaks and the strikingly brilliant Loew's Blue. Red-rumped Swallows scythe through the air, Sardinian Warblers nest in the shrubberies, and Spur-thighed Tortoises graze amid the many flowers. In spring a beautiful insect, the Thread Lacewing, *Nemoptera sinuata*, emerges among these flowers, looking something like a cross between a dragonfly and a butterfly with long-tailed cream and black wings. Starred Agamas are common and we've a good chance of finding a Glass Lizard or a Montpellier Snake. Typical birds at the end of the peninsula are Cirl Bunting, Black-eared Wheatear, Syrian Woodpecker, Woodchat Shrike, Roller and European Bee-eater, the latter can

be particularly common if we get the right week during migration. Dragon Arums make a spectacular sight. Here's we'll find butterflies visiting Origanum which flowers prolifically in the area attracting species such as Mazarine Blue, Long-tailed Blue and many hairstreaks whilst Lesser Lattice Brown perch on the fissured bark of the *Quercus aucheri*.

At Knidos itself Cory's Shearwaters and Audouin's Gulls are offshore along with Bottle-nosed Dolphins. There's a fine littoral flora and above the immediate coastal zone we can find *Allium hirtovaginum* and sweetly-scented *Muscari macrocarpum*.

Day 6

Via Çetibeli & Honaz Dağı to Pamukkale

Leaving the Datça peninsula we'll stop en route amid the pinewoods of Çetibeli to enjoy the plentiful orchids there before heading to the heights of Honaz Dağı, an impressive mountain at over 8350 feet (2570m) and which has a very different flora and fauna to that of the Datça Peninsula. The northern slopes have woodlands that wouldn't look out of place much further north with a mix of trees such as Limes, Sweet Chestnuts, Hazel and Maples. Higher slopes have much juniper with clumps of *Acantholimon* and *Astragalus* and some very nice flowers such as *Daphne oleoides*, the unusual yellow *Moltkia aurea*, and clumps of yellow *Iris suaveolens*. Finsch's Wheatears and Cretzschmarr's Buntings are amongst a birdlife redolent of areas further east. Short-toed Eagles circle overhead and Woodlarks sing from the junipers.

Day 7

Pamukkale

Pamukkale needs little introduction, images of the fabulous aquamarine travertine terraces that cascade down the mountainside near Denizli are featured everywhere that talks of Turkey. The terraces are visible from very many kilometres away and look very much like a giant petrified waterfall, and are even more beautiful up close. The ancient Greco-Roman city of Hieropolis was built above the remarkable terraces. You can even bathe in the mineral-rich waters in the ancient city. Pamukkale is one of the most popular tourist sites in Turkey but most visitors make the long drive from the coast so don't arrive until lunchtime so we can enjoy the site in the quieter morning before heading out into the hinterland to look for flora and fauna in the afternoon.

Days 8 & 9

Köyceğiz – Hamitköy Marshes & Köyceğiz Liquidambar Forests

We'll head straight back down to the coast from Honaz's heights and wonderful lake around Köyceğiz and settle into our hotel there on the shore. We'll be able to see Hamitköy's marshes and liquidambar forests even from our hotel and it takes only a few minutes to drive out there. Masses of tall egg-yolk yellow *Iris xanthosperia* dominate the meadows here in a spectacular show with the tall fluffy paler wands of *Thalictrum flavum* for company. This is migrant bird heaven with an unimaginable variety of warblers, as well as Wryneck, and lots of Shrikes – Woodchat, Red-backed

and Masked. The warblers include Eastern Orphean Warbler, Rüppell's Warbler, Lesser Whitethroats which can be abundant, Common Whitethroats, the occasional Subalpine Warbler, Wood Warblers, Icterine Warblers, Olivaceous Warblers, sometimes Olive Tree Warblers, and an assortment of 'reed' types including Marsh Warbler, Sedge Warbler, Reed Warbler and both Cetti's and Savi's Warblers. It is quite possible to see a dozen species of warbler here in a morning! Bee-eaters and Hoopoes will now be passing through and we'll enjoy the various forms of Yellow Wagtail, especially the local Black-headed one. This is the best area in southwest Turkey to find White-throated Kingfisher, several pairs breeding in the area.

The Lake Köyceğiz basin is home to one of the rarest habitats in Turkey, indeed anywhere in the Mediterranean. Some 90% of the world's *Liquidambar orientalis* is found within a few kilometres of the lake's shores and almost all the rest is scattered along streams in the area. Lianas, notably the Silk Vine and *Vitis sylvestris*, trail through the trees. Middle Spotted Woodpecker and Lesser Spotted Woodpecker are common and so too are Green Woodpeckers. Migrant Common Redstarts and Collared, Pied and even Semi-collared Flycatchers stop-off in these woodlands. The lovely Small Red-eye Damselfly favours well-vegetated pools within the woodland, and Lesser Emperor and Violet Dropwing perch on iris leaves. Marshy pools and reedbeds next to the Liquidambar woods are home to Eastern Willow Spreadingwing and the rare Turkish Red Damsel *Ceriagrion georgifreyi*.

Day 10

The Mountains – Ağla, Sandros Mountain & Eagle Mountain Lake

Inland of Lake Köyceğiz the mountains rise steeply behind the town. A road winds swiftly up to the yayla (summer village) of Ağla situated nine hundred metres above sea level where a small fast-flowing stream drops from the bare limestone slopes above. The village is a delight set amongst a streamside woodland of Calabrian Pine and Oriental Plane trees. The magical toy-trumpet calls of Krüper's Nuthatch resonate through the trees and we'll also see Sombre Tit, Green Woodpeckers, Short-toed Treecreepers and maybe even White-backed Woodpeckers here. Southern Commas, Great Banded Graylings and Nettle-Tree Butterflies are among a number of butterflies on the wing. Spurred Helleborines and the lovely deep red-pink '*rubra*' form of Violet Limodores are common under the trees. The open slopes above the village are full of flowers and often have small flocks of both Ortolan Bunting and Cretzschmarr's Bunting, these swirling up as a Long-legged Buzzard passes overhead.

Later we'll head up onto the highest, almost alpine areas of Sandros Mountain where we'll look for Black Woodpeckers, Goshawk and Krüper's Nuthatch around a small lake where snow may still be lying and *Colchicums*, *Merendera attica*, *Crocuses* and *Gageas* are in bloom.

Days 11

Hamitköy Marshes and Tepearası Liquidambar Forests

This morning we'll again explore Hamitköy's marshes, seeing what's stopped overnight – every day is different and the selection of migrants always intriguing.

Whinchat and Stonechats can be common, and various Wheatears too. We'll keep an eye out for passing Harriers, Marsh are reasonably frequent but all of the Western Palearctic harriers pass through this area.

After lunch on the lake shore we'll drive coastwards towards Dalyan, our base for the rest of the holiday. Colourful cliffs beset with Lycian Rock Tombs dominate this pleasant little town, nestled against a bend in the Dalyan (ancient Calbys) River. Dalyan could hardly have more diverse habitats. Within a few kilometres are reedbeds, lakes, beaches, limestone maquis, pine forests, globally important Liquidambar Forests, mountains and cliffs. Not surprising then that Dalyan is so rich in wildlife.

Close to Dalyan we'll explore more Liquidambar Forest. The trees have exquisitely shaped leaves and a very rough bark which in some places in the forests is still tapped for the sap which has been used as an insect repellent by the locals for centuries. Horseshoe Ophrys and Yellow-Wort grow along the track edges while Southern White Admirals and Southern Swallowtails are a common sight cruising up and down these tracks. Hawfinches, Golden Orioles, Rollers and Syrian Woodpeckers also make these emerald-green woodlands their home.

For the next four days we will be staying at the excellent Dalyan Resort by the river in Dalyan. Like most of Dalyan the hotel is single storey, a result of enlightened low-impact development regulations imposed two decades ago by the local authorities. The well-equipped rooms are very comfortable and are spread through the grounds. The restaurant produces great fare, and there's a good-sized swimming pool and even a hamam or Turkish bath and sauna. The centre of Dalyan is a ten-minute stroll, and an excellent place for a bit of Turkish carpet shopping!

Day 12

Sulungur Lake, Dalyan Beach & The Turtle Protection Site

Dalyan means 'fishery' in Turkish and not surprisingly water plays an important part in local life. There is a maze of channels downstream from the small town and the huge Köyceğiz Lake upstream, both surrounded by reedbeds and marshes. At this time of year the wetlands are very rich in birdlife as there are plenty of migrants about. We shall see Little Egrets, Squacco Herons, Spoonbills, Pygmy Cormorants and Little Bitterns passing through as well as small groups of waders and terns. Today we'll start by heading down to the coast, with the possibility of Red-footed Falcons on the wires, White Storks in the air, or maybe a Great Spotted Cuckoo or two in the small trees separating the pomegranate orchards. Sulungur Lake itself doesn't hold much birdlife, maybe the odd egret or two, but it's the cliffs behind that offer us the chance of seeing Rollers 'rolling' and Rock Nuthatches building their nests.

Long-legged Buzzard and Short-toed Eagles drift overhead as we visit Dalyan's four-kilometre long beach. Loggerhead Turtles will be just beginning their nesting season so the Turtle protection project will be in full swing. They keep the beach closed from dusk until eight in the morning. However the Loggerhead Turtles are of course there and we can see them basking in waters just off Dalyan's gently shelving sandy

beach. There's plenty of migrants about as well sometimes including large flocks of Yellow Wagtails.

Day 13

Kaunos Ruins and Ortaca's Canyons & some serpentinite!

A walk past the famous Lycian rock tombs takes us to the ancient ruins at Kaunos. Along the track we can find the spectacular Dragon Arum and both Holy Orchid and *Ophrys sicula*. Butterflies are abundant with Eastern Festoon and Scarce Swallowtail prominent among them. At the ruins we will see Red-rumped Swallows and Rock Nuthatches nesting in the old walls and Balkan Green Lizard and Agama Lizards amid the many flowers. The Thread Lacewing, *Nemoptera sinuata*, emerges among these ruins, looking something like a cross between a dragonfly and a butterfly with long-tailed cream and black wings. Spur-thighed Tortoises munch their way through a rich herbage of bellflowers, campions and boraginaceae allowed to grow amongst the rocks of ancient temples, flushing up butterflies such as Blue-spotted Hairstreak and Loew's Blue.

We'll head inland a little in the afternoon to a convoluted landscape of limestone gorges and gravelly serpentinite ridges. This is botanically exceptional with many unusual plants. Prime amongst them are the red goblets of *Tulipa undulatifolia* and the strange green flowered *Fritillaria bithynica*.

Day 14

Köyceğiz Lake and Hot Springs

We'll use one of Dalyan's many boats to explore the river system and Lake Köyceğiz, a wonderfully relaxing trip, and with plenty of birds; Purple Herons, Squacco Herons and Great Egrets, Whiskered Terns and White-winged Black Terns, Black-winged Stilts and Pygmy Cormorants. We'll see groups of Little Egrets and Glossy Ibis migrating through as well as a good scattering of Marsh Harriers. Lesser Emperor Dragonflies and Slender and Small Skimmers race by, or perch on the boat's rails. The loud yet somehow somnolent croaking of Great Reed Warblers is sometimes joined by an orchestra of Marsh Frogs. We'll also hope to see the Nile Soft-shelled Turtles – over a metre long with extraordinary leathery shells and tube noses.

There are many thermal springs near Dalyan. These range from pools of warm aquamarine water, through mud baths to a large mosque-like building where you can alternate between cold lake water outside, and almost scalding sulphurous water inside! There will be a chance to visit both the big mud baths and the sulphurous hot pools, perhaps followed by ice creams under the shade of olive and pistachio trees, or you can look for migrant birds in the trees as Egyptian Vultures and Alpine Swifts fly overhead. The trees are often loaded with migrant birds including Eastern Orphean Warblers, Blackcaps, Common Whitethroats and Olivaceous Warblers. Crakes are occasionally spotted by secluded pools. The beautiful Indigo Dropwing visits these pools too.

Day 15

Departure

As our return flight isn't until the evening we'll have a chance to catch up on whatever has eluded us this morning, or to concentrate on whatever has most interested us. Maybe a trip down to the beach to look again for turtles and migrant birds, or perhaps a boat trip up the river and into Lake Köyceğiz. Maybe it'll be the rare and lovely dragonflies of the Liquidambar woodlands that will draw us for a final visit, or perhaps we'd prefer to just go and relax by the hot springs, before enjoying a final slap-up meal in one of the many very good restaurants in Dalyan.

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