

Northern Cyprus

Wildlife at Leisure

A Greentours Itinerary

Day 1

Arrival Kyrenia and to the Gillham Winery

The Kyrenian Mountains are not so high, the highest peak barely tops a thousand metres but they are very dramatic, rising precipitously behind a very narrow coastal plain on which the elegant port of Kyrenia lies. The geology of these mountains is complex with areas of Dolomitic Limestones and Marbles mixed with highly eroded chinks and breccias and in places by beds of pillow lava. History and geology combine here to produce a landscape where the land lies relatively untroubled by modern agriculture and so flowers bloom prolifically in the sunny March days the island is famous for. Our hotel for the first half of the tour is a real treat – the lovely Gillham's Vineyard Hotel. The well-appointed suites overlook vineyards on the outskirts of the beautiful village of Ilgaz, with the Kyrenian Mountains for a backdrop and the sparkling blue Mediterranean just three kilometres to the north. There's a pool and wine spa. Best though is the restaurant where internationally award-winning Chef Eyal Lavy's menus are exquisite.

Day 2

St Hilarion Castle and Kyrenia harbour

Perched high amongst dramatic pinnacles nearby is the castle of St Hilarion. Here we'll find the first of a surprising number of flowers that are endemic to the north of Cyprus, most of them centred on the Kyrenian Mountains and many, like the St Hilarion Cabbage, *Brassica hilarionis*, growing on vertical rock faces. Though classy for a cabbage it is other plants that might catch the eye more. Decorative Golden Henbane hangs from the walls in flowery clumps, endemic *Sedum lampusae* forms impressive rosettes on the cliffs, and poking from shadey corners are the deep purple spathes of *Arum dioscorides*. Sling-tailed Agamas sun themselves above crevices bedecked with the pretty little fern *Oeosporangium acrosticum*. Indeed there are plenty of reptiles about, particularly Troodos Rock Lizard and Snake-eyed Lizard, both common. Black Redstart and Common Rock Thrush both sing from the same rocks, whilst emanating from the maquis surrounding the castle are the Nightingale-like tones of Eastern Orphean Warblers. The yellow form of *Dactylorhiza romana* is found around St Hilarion and so too Monkey Orchid. Other fine plants we'll see during our visit include *Bellevalia nivalis*, *Arabis cypria*, *Onosma caespitosa*, *Muscari inconstictum* and *Ranunculus millefoliatus* with its almost filigree leaves.

In afternoon we'll head down to the coast to explore the old harbour of Kyrenia. This is a very picturesque place with a wonderfully relaxed atmosphere. The narrow streets

by the harbour are filled with cafes, bars and little shops and are a delight to wander amongst with the busy little harbour the focus. *Verbascum levanticum* grows on some of the older buildings.

Day 3

The Ridge Road and Kalkanli's Ancient Olives

Open pinewoods flank the slopes of the Kyrnenian Mountains. We'll spend the day exploring these. The *picta* form of Green-winged Orchid is often abundant mixed with Anatolian Orchid under the pines. The diminutive Fan-lipped Orchid is frequent alongside the aptly-named Giant Orchid *Himantoglossum robertianum*. A very special orchid here is *Orchis punctulata*, the yellowish-green eastern Mediterranean relative of the Lady Orchid.

A devastating fire damaged large areas of forest in 1995 but now regeneration is coming along apace and many areas are very flowery as the forest regrows. Particularly abundant now are massed displays of pink and white *Cistus creticus*, *Cistus salvifolius* and *Cistus parviflora*. Eastern Black-eared Wheatear and Sardinian Warbler are the typical birds of this habitat whilst Shreiber's Fringe-fingered Lizard scurry about the dry sandy soils. This is perfect habitat for bee orchids. Beautiful *Ophrys kotschyi* is a delight, the dark lips with complex silvery blue patterns. Here is also the lovely Rainbow Ophrys with its long lip picked out with a luminous blue. There's little *Ophrys umbilicata flavomarginata* and *Ophrys lutea galilaea* too. Dense-flowered Orchid is tolerably common if a little difficult to spot, not something that could be said of the vibrant pink Naked Man Orchid! *Cercis siliquastrum*, the Judas Tree, is quite a sight and will be at the height of its flowering time now. On the rocks hereabouts we'll find *Cyclamen persicum* and a selection of nice plants such as *Roemeria sicula*, *Lithodora sicula* and tiny yellow *Linum strictum*.

The magnificent Kalkanli Monumental Olive Trees are believed to have been planted in the 13th century and their age ensures that they stand out from the many other olive trees on this sunny island. It is estimated that there are two thousand trees of this age planted around Kalkanli. Many are impressively large but it is their marvellously intricate shapes which attract.

Day 4

Koruçam Peninsula

The lovely *Tulipa cyprica* flowers prolifically in lush garrigue alongside Gladiolus at the base of the Koruçam Peninsula. Orchids are abundant and varied. Among them we'll find the lovely Kotschy's Bee Orchid, again the beautiful *Orchis punctulata* and a whole host of bee orchids. Both *Ophrys umbilicata flavomarginata* and *Ophrys umbilicata umbilicata* are common, sometimes growing together. The gorgeous *Ophrys argolica elegans* will be a highlight. There's also *Ophrys lapethica*, *Ophrys mammosa* and its close relative *Ophrys transhyrcana*, and *Ophrys bornmuelleri* too.

Cyprus Wheatear may already be back on territory on this dry peninsula. The low garrigue vegetation of *Sarcopoterium* and *Cistus* suits it well. Amongst the pink and white cistus roses we'll find more orchids such as Holy Orchid, the *syriaca* version of Green-winged Orchid, and a confusing array of Tongue Orchids!

The Turban Buttercup showers the landscape in a shower of white blooms, in some places it is a rather curious pale lemon colour. Amongst this we'll find *Bellevalia trifoliata*, *Linaria chalepensis*, pink-red *Tragopogon porrifolius* and the lovely orange pea *Lathyrus blepharicarpos*. The lime and black blooms of *Anagyris foetida* are very special, presumably it's the horrible smell of the plant that is the reason it is not more widely cultivated! It is common on rocks where *Aristolochia sempervirens* trails through the vegetation, and *Narcissus tazetta* emerges from little cracks where with some patience we might find the Budak's Snake-eyed Skink

Day 5

Bellapais and to the Karpaz Peninsula

One can hardly drive far without a new site of antiquity emerging from the tranquil countryside. One such is Bellepais, its name of course meaning 'beautiful country' - the extensive remains of this abbey are indeed in very pleasant surroundings full of fruit, vines and wild flowers. Nearby we'll look for Cyprus Scops Owl.

In the north east of North Cyprus lies the 'Panhandle', or Karpaz Peninsula, extending all of eighty kilometres out into the Eastern Mediterranean. During the afternoon we'll traverse this wild landscape. Hardly cultivated and with few people, this is real haven for wildlife.

Days 6 & 7

Cape Apostolos Andreas & the Karpaz Peninsula

One of the most unspoiled places anywhere in the whole of the Mediterranean region, the Karpaz and its northern and eastern shores have some of the most beautiful and deserted beaches on the island. Perhaps surprisingly given the general aridity of the landscape, the Karpaz region has a number of subterranean water reservoirs, so crops including fruit, olives and tobacco are grown locally. In many of the small villages dotted around the region a tractor is still a novelty and some of the farming still relies on traditional horse-drawn machinery. The other main source of income for the region is fishing particularly from the villages of Bogaz and Kumyali.

Above one of the many pristine crescent beaches on the Karpaz are the well-preserved ruins of Ayios Philon church. This was the site of the ancient city of Karpasia, founded by King Pygmalion of Cyprus. There's some faded but intriguing mosaic floor remains presided over by Sling-tailed Agamas whilst overhead fly Bonelli's Eagles. We'll search for Schneider's Skink, Middle East Tree Frogs and European Blind Snake. A little night foray from our hotel might reveal Cyprian Green Toad, Mediterranean

House Gecko, Mediterranean Chameleon or perhaps Long-eared Hedgehog. Birdwatching around Cape Apostolos Andreas, right at the tip of the peninsula, is excellent. This is an ideal place (and time) to witness bird migration as almost any species that migrates between Africa, Asia and Eastern Europe can potentially be found here. Flocks of Herons, Egrets and Glossy Ibis fly along the coast heading for the crossing to Turkey and so too waders such as Spur-winged Plovers. Many raptors fly over, including Long-legged Buzzard, Pallid Harrier, Short-toed Snake Eagle and Lesser Spotted Eagle. Woodchat Shrike, Masked Shrike and Eurasian Hoopoe will be arriving while Chukar, Black Francolin, and Audouin's Gull are all resident whilst the endemic breeder Cyprus Wheatear should be back on territory by now.

The sandy shore habitats have a nice flora at this season with most of the species in flower. *Echium angustifolium* and *Echium arenarium* are common and with them *Cakile maritima*, blood-red *Lotus tetragonolobus*, *Spergularia diandra*, *Medicago marina*, the unusual chenopod *Tetraena alba*, and the lovely pink knapweed *Crocodylium creticum*. We'll look for the diminutive Eastern Mediterranean Thin-toed Gecko. On rockier coastal areas we'll find a very low-growing sparse garrigue of *Juniperus turbinata*, local *Genista fasselata*, *Pistachia lentiscus* and soft pink *Cistus parviflorus*. The herbaceous flora is rich and includes yellow-flowered *Adonis macrocarpa*, white *Bellevalia flexuosa*, the afternoon-blooming Barbary Nut, and a fabulous range of clovers and medicks. And of course orchids. *Ophrys umbilicata* is super-abundant and we'll also find *Ophrys kotschyi* and plenty of tongue orchids including *Serapias orientalis*. Naked Man Orchid is plentiful and we can find both *Anacamptis coriophora* and *Anacamptis fragrans* here.

Day 8 Departure

Depending on our flight times we may well have a last chance to explore the wilds of the Karpaz Peninsula this morning catching up on anything we may have missed.

If you would like to ask about any other aspect of this holiday, please call 01298 83563 or email us at enquiries@greentours.co.uk.

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