

Datça & Kaş

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 in April and May. 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 candica*, *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

Aphrodisias, Honaz Dağı and on to Pamukkale

Leaving the Datça peninsula we'll travel northeastwards to Aphrodisias, the famed city of beauty and love. Named after its patron goddess Aphrodite, Aphrodisias was founded in the 2nd century B.C. on the site of a rural sanctuary of Aphrodite. In the 1st century B.C., Aphrodisias came under the protection of the first Roman Emperor, Augustus, and this initiated a period of prosperity and growth. A nearby marble quarry supplied the ancient city and sites around the empire such as Hadrian's Villa in Tivoli, with a supply of high-quality white and blue marble. The unusually well-preserved marble ruins that remain today reflect that period of wealth. Eastern Black-eared Wheatear and Blue Rock Thrush both make the ruins their home and Cirl Bunting's somnolent notes emanate from surrounding maquis. Glass Lizard and Green-underside Blue are often seen along the site's paths.

In the afternoon we'll take a pass over the shoulder of Honaz Dağı. This impressive mountain reaches over 8350 feet (2570m) and 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 Cretzschmar'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.

Day 8

To Antalya and Elmali's Orchard Valley

This morning we'll head south into the mountains and to a long wide valley famed throughout Turkey for its apple orchards. Up here it will still be early spring and the apples will only just be coming into flower. We'll settle into our comfortable hotel in Elmali for a two night stay.

Day 9

Ak Dağı

The highest mountain in the region, the imposing 3000m Ak Dağı has a road that will take us up to its serenely beautiful yaylas, summer pastures of bright green turf around small deep green lakes, where fresh cold water still flows strongly from melting snows before plunging down an impressive waterfall. Here rocks are decorated with the large blue saucers of *Omphalodes luciliae* and the vast cushions of *Aubrietia* would make any English gardener purple with envy. Snow will still be plentiful on the mountain and by it a wonderful snowmelt flora. The little brown bells of *Fritillaria pinardii* are everywhere and there are Grape Hyacinths and yellow Stars of Bethlehem as well as *Corydalis*. Green Hairsreaks and False Apollos fly about the highly scented white and brown wands of strange *Muscari racemosa*. We'll find the lovely *Fritillaria crassifolia* whose large bells are tessellated green and brown. On dry ridges there are delicate crucifers of great beauty and the gorgeous white and blue *Muscari bourgaei*. Snowfinches feed around snowpatches where abundant *Merendera attica* and *Scilla bifolia* bloom and Red-fronted Serins, Finch's Wheatears and Cretzschmarr's Buntings are amongst a birdlife redolent of areas further east. Alpine Accentors will still be in their winter flocks even at this season.

Day 10

Sinekçibeli Pass

We'll explore the high Sinekçibeli Pass where Eastern Festoons, Powdered Brimstones and False Apollos still fly. Stately Oriental Plane Trees line the stream courses and among them we shall look for Redstarts and Woodpeckers, while under the surrounding Calabrian Pines and Cedars we'll find Violet Bird's Nest Orchid and the beautifully patterned *Ophrys reinholdi*. On the highest ground blue *Anemone blanda* produces a fine display and a highlight will be the fabulous yellow bells of *Fritillaria carica* atop a small hill above our picnic site. The valley below is often full of migrants especially Redstarts and various Flycatchers.

Heading coastwards we'll stop for a population of the local speciality *Fritillaria kitanae*, whose blooms are stiped olive, grey and yellow. Further down we'll reach a gorgeous woodland of *Quercus macrolopis*, the trees home to Kruper's and European Nuthatches, and Middle Spotted Woodpeckers too. Here yet another Fritillary puts in an appearance, the rather larger *Fritillaria acmopetala* growing with a few scarlet Anemones for company. A further stop will be for the rare *Erica bocquetii* blooming long the roadside. In the end we'll have to descend to Kaş where we'll stay for the rest of the tour. Kaş is a veritable playground for the naturalist with a

wonderful range of flora and fauna, superb landscapes, fine marine life and with the comforts of a very fine hotel and a wide choice of great restaurants to enjoy it makes the perfect base for a wildlife at leisure tour.

Kaş itself is a lovely place, the narrow shops lined with tempting little shops, cafes, bars and restaurants as the town rises up from its picturesque harbour. Past the amphitheatre a road takes us out to the flower-filled Peninsula, now the domain of beautiful villas and hotels, yet only forty years ago this entire coast didn't have a single tarmac road!

Day 11

Andriake, Kekova and the Islands

Andriake's wetland though small has a huge list of birds and we'll see a range of waders, egrets and herons, ducks, and migrant passerines. Spoonbills and Great White Egrets lounge by the roadside and Spur-winged Plovers, Spotted Redshank, Ruff and Black-winged Stilts are much in evidence. Water Rails call from the reeds whilst dunes behind the shore offer shelter to passerine migrants that will likely include Isabelline Wheatears, Woodchat and Masked Shrikes. The dune flora is striking with a colourful pastiche of Silenes, Helianthemums, medicagos, lotuses, stocks and rare *Anchusa aggregata*.

From the harbour here we'll take a boat trip through the islands off Kekova marvelling at the underwater archaeology and the glorious scenery. We'll no doubt see a goodly number of Green Turtles and maybe a loggerhead or two. Audouin's Gulls are a regular sight and we'll see the uncommon Mediterranean race of Shag. We'll have a couple of chances to snorkel from the boat. The marine life is very good in this part of Turkey, indeed Kaş is the favoured destination for Istanbul's divers. Fish are abundant and include many colourful Wrasse as well as the elegant Cornetfish. If you are lucky you may catch a glimpse of a Yellow-spotted Mediterranean Moray Eel, or an Octopus, which are common in Kaş's waters. Squid often hover close to the boats' mooring ropes...

Day 12

Kasaba and the Demre Canyon

Kaş has perhaps the richest orchid flora in Turkey and though we'll be too late for the early flowers we'll still see many fine species especially in the hills just inland around Kasaba. Pine woods have large populations of both Spurred Helleborine and Violet Limodore, the forming a large-flowered helleborine which grows in floriferous lumps, the latter a tall orchid with large purple blooms. Bee orchids are tremendously varied and we'll see *Ophrys lyciensis*, *Ophrys phaseliana*, and even the *chlorantha* form of Bee Orchid. There's also some fine forms of *Orchis fragrans* and Kaş very own endemic bee orchid, the distinctive and impressive *Ophrys lycia*.

Starred Agamas are common and we can look for Caecilians under rocks, and we've a good chance of finding a Glass Lizard or a Montpellier Snake. Ahatli though a dry area, is rich in birdlife with typically species being Cirl Bunting, Black-eared

Wheatear, Syrian Woodpecker, Woodchat Shrike, Rollers and European Bee-eaters, which are particularly common.

Lesser Spotted and Middle Spotted Woodpeckers frequent the riverine trees along the river that has formed the Demre Canyon. Dragon Arums make a spectacular sight. Here's we'll find butterflies mud-puddling and visiting *Origanum* which flowers prolifically in the area attracting species such as Loew's Blue, Mazarine Blue, Long-tailed Blue and many hairstreaks whilst Lesser Lattice Brown perch on the fissured bark of the *Quercus macrolepis*.

Day 13

Kaş's Cedar Forest

Just a few kilometres as the Eleonora's Falcon flies the land rises sharply to over a thousand metres and here we'll wander in cool Cedar Forests where Irises still bloom alongside the newly described *Campanula aktasii*, lovely *Silene crytpogramma* and the delicate foxglove *Digitalis carica*. Cute Krüper's Nuthatches work the outer branches of the cedars – they are common here. Overhead are Short-toed Eagles, Long-legged Buzzards and Goshawks and in the cedars there are various Woodpeckers, Goldcrests and Coal Tits. Everywhere there are Star-of-Bethlehems including the green and white striped *Ornithogalum nutans*, *Aristolochia hirta* Asphodels, Tassel Hyacinths and, of course, Anatolian Orchids. The deep red goblets of *Tulipa armena* subspecies *lycica* will be in full flower amongst an intriguing population of *Iris germanica*, here in as natural a setting as you could wish. *Orchis anatolica* is plentiful and we'll find both Monkey Orchid and Reinhold's Bee Orchid. A highlight will be a plentiful *Paeonia mascula* in bloom.

Day 14

Patara

The coastal road westwards from Kaş takes us along a very unspoilt coast where thousand metre mountains plunge directly into the sea. We'll pass one of Turkey's most iconic beaches, Kaputaş, where an improbably narrow and deep gorge reaches the sea via an improbably scenic beach. We'll stop awhile to see the *Asphodeline lutea* and the rare Cretan Cabbage, whilst above Rock Nuthatches and Blue Rock Thrushes will be seen. Ibex spend the night just above the road on these cliffs but usually move off soon after first light...

We'll visit nearby Patara, where the ruins of an ancient city will hold our attention for a while, especially so now that the reconstruction of the ancient Lycian Lighthouse has completed. The site too is rich in flora, and especially butterflies – it will already feel more like summer here. Behind Turkey's longest beach is a vast area of duneland and marshy delta. This is a superb birdwatching area with many a rarity being found and from our perspective will give us a chance of seeing many migrants such as Shrikes, Bee-eaters, and an abundance of warblers. Great Spotted Cuckoos breed in the sparse woodlands and if there's water in the large shallow lagoons we can expect large flocks of herons, egrets and waders. The duneland flora is also quite

different from anything we will have seen with lots of pretty little annuals flowering in the damp sands.

Day 15

Departure from Dalaman

You'll no doubt have had chance to explore the garrigue around the hotel that is rich in flowers and loaded with aromatic herbs attracting butterflies such as Southern and Scarce Swallowtails, Blue-spot, Ilex and Sloe Hairstreaks and the strikingly brilliant Loew's Blue. Green Turtles swim just offshore of the hotel and are common in these coastal waters. Red-rumped Swallows scythe through the air whilst Yellow-vented Bulbuls and Rüppell's Warblers nest in the shrubberies around the hotel, 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.

And then it will time to head to Dalaman Airport for our departure...

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