

Spring in North Cyprus

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

- Day 1** Fly Larnaca; transfer to Girne.
- Day 2/4** A daily programme of natural history walks from our base near Girne.
- Day 5/7** A daily programme of natural history walks from our base near Yeni Erenkoy.
- Day 8** Fly London.

Departs

March/April

Focus

Birds, plants & insects.

Grading

Day walks only. Grade A/B

Dates and Prices

Visit www.naturetrek.co.uk (tour code CYP01) or see the current Naturetrek brochure

Highlights:

- Up to 30 species of orchid possible, including the endemic Cyprus Bee Orchid.
- Visit towering Crusader forts & ruins of the Roman city of Salamis.
- Around 100 species of bird typically recorded including Cyprus Wheatear & Cyprus Warbler.
- Look for migrants on Cape Andreas including Rüppell's Warbler, Isabelline Wheatear & Wryneck.
- Wander the cobbled medieval streets of Girne.
- This tour can be combined with our 'The Island of Cyprus' holiday.



Cyprus Bee Orchid (Jenny Wilsher)



Black Francolin (Alan Outen)



Girne



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Introduction

Nestling in the north-east corner of the Mediterranean, Cyprus is the third largest island in the region, lying about 70 kilometres from Turkey. Separated by both politics and religion from the south of Aphrodite's island, the north has always retained a distinctive identity, its economy supported by the production of cereals, grapes, citrus fruits and potatoes on the fertile Mesaoria Plain. The sleepy Mediterranean charm of the region is epitomised by a sprinkling of little villages which seem barely to have been changed by the passage of time. However, this is an island that has witnessed over 8,000 years of civilisation and its history can be traced through the many Roman and other monuments and ruins still evident in the countryside. Inevitably, as in so many other parts of the Mediterranean, the last few years have seen an increase in tourism to the island and much development but there are still many areas of outstanding natural beauty to be found here, such as the dramatic scenery and forests surrounding the Crusader castles and the stretches of pristine coastline at Silver Beach.

Largely undiscovered by tourism for around 30 years and with an average of only 51 people per square kilometre, Northern Cyprus holds the enviable reputation of being relatively free of pollution, industry or high concentrations of population. Mountains are covered with rich pine forest, coastal beaches are often deserted and the plains are extensive. The terrain lends itself to excellent mountain and forest walks, whilst the many historical and natural attractions are a bonus to the landscape. The region currently attracts relatively few tourists so the pace of life is slow, allowing visitors the chance to experience the hospitality and culture of the Northern Cypriots. With 387 kilometres of coastline and pine, cypress and maquis covered hillsides the region is something of a haven for wildlife and it is not surprising that migrating birds and many plants thrive here.

The avifauna is of great interest, the north of the island sharing with the south the presence of two endemic birds, the Cyprus Warbler and the Cyprus Pied Wheatear. During the extended period of spring migration huge numbers of birds pass through Cyprus heading to northern breeding areas. At such times the interesting selection of resident species is augmented by an ever-changing variety of migrants, adding an exciting unpredictability to every excursion.

Like many Mediterranean islands, Cyprus has a varied flora, being situated between Europe, Asia and Africa. Northern Cyprus is renowned in the botanical world for the astonishing diversity of its flora. Over 1,250 plant species have been identified, 140 of which are endemic to the island (nine specifically to the north), with six endemic orchids. From February to May the land is ablaze with colour, the components of this floral mosaic changing in tone and form as the season advances.

The 50 or so species of wild orchid are particularly coveted by botanists, though due to their extended flowering period we will hope to find up to 30 during our trip, from the impressive Giant Orchid (*Barlia robertiana*) to the diminutive Dense-flowered Orchid (*Neotinea maculata*) with many *Ophrys* species such as *Ophrys mammosa*, *Ophrys morio*, *Ophrys apifera*, *Ophrys attica*, *Ophrys flavomarginata*, *Ophrys lapethica*, *Ophrys umbilicata* and the stunning endemic Cyprus Bee Orchid (*Ophrys kotschyi*). In addition, we should find many *Orchis* species such as *Orchis anatolica*, *Orchis fragrans*, *Orchis italica*, *Orchis punctulata*, *Orchis*

simia and *Orchis syriaca* and many species of *Serapias* as well. There are also approximately 26 different species of reptiles and amphibians on the island, together with many butterflies and moths.

The two main reasons for this amazing diversity are, firstly, that Cyprus was not affected by the last ice-age (which wiped out many species from areas further north), and secondly, that Cyprus is a critical stop-over for birds migrating between Africa and Eastern Europe.

Please note that this tour can be combined with our 'Island of Cyprus' holiday (CYP02). Please call the Naturetrek office on 01962 733051 for more information, or visit www.naturetrek.co.uk

Itinerary

Please note that the itinerary below offers our planned programme of excursions. However, adverse weather & other local considerations can necessitate some re-ordering of the programme during the course of the tour, though this will always be done to maximise best use of the time and weather conditions available.

Day 1

In flight, overnight Girne

We depart from London Heathrow Airport early morning on a British Airways flight to Larnaca in the south of the island. On arrival around mid-afternoon we will transfer across the border into Northern Cyprus and on to our hotel near the attractive town of Girne.

Days 2 – 4

Girne

Our first base is near the delightful seaside town of Girne, formerly known as Kyrenia and founded in the 10th century BC. The focal point of the town is its lively fishing harbour, around which are scattered numerous old Venetian houses and inviting tavernas. A network of cobbled medieval streets, lend a timeless attraction to Girne, and these picturesque qualities are enhanced by the peaks of the Besparmak Mountains which rise inland from the town.

The main range of mountains in Northern Cyprus is the Kyrenia Range (better known as the Pentadactylos Range), perhaps not as well known or as high as the Troodos Mountains in the south. However, a stretch of cliffs and magnificent jagged pinnacles of hard limestone, dolomite and marble (the highest of which is Mount Selvili at 1023 metres) forms a dramatic spine-like formation that stretches between Cape Kormakiti (Korucam Burnu) in the west and Cape Andreas (Zafer Burnu) in the east along the Karpaz Peninsula, or 'the panhandle' as it is known. On the peaks of this spine can be found Crusader castles such as those at St. Hilarion, Buffavento and Kantara. These locations are reliably good for both birdwatching and botanising. The faces of these peaks, particularly the north sides, feature Calabrian Pine and Evergreen Cypress forest with valleys of typical maquis scrub consisting of *Arbutus*, *Myrtus*, *Laurus* and *Quercus coccifera*. There are also areas of Phoenician Juniper, although some parts have been reduced to scrubby garigue by clearing and much goat grazing. Nearer habitation there are two of the economic mainstays of the Mediterranean, Carob and Olive, and also Terebrith and Lentisk.

Our field activities will focus initially on the abundant flora of the foothills and wooded slopes of these mountains but during our stay we will also be looking for migrant birds at various coastal locations and wetlands.

A wealth of historical sites provides diversions from the natural history and our programme will be flexible in order to accommodate a little of the history of the region alongside our botanical and ornithological activities. Towering Crusader forts and ancient monasteries compete for our attention with reminders of the Roman era, such as the ruins of Salamis city near Famagusta, which many historians regard as the best preserved examples of Roman architecture in the eastern Mediterranean. The ruins date back to the eleventh century BC when the city was a rich and important trading centre. Earthquakes and repeated raids from Arab pirates caused the demise of the city in 648 AD and the remaining inhabitants moved to what is now Famagusta. Flowers thrive here amid the ruins and we should find such orchids as *Serapias parviflora*, *Serapias vomeracae*, *Orchis simia* and many *Ophrys* species amongst the colourful profusion of poppies, Crown Daisies (*Chrysanthemum coronarium*), endemic *Gladiolus triphyllus*, Asphodel and handsome spikes of Giant Fennel (*Ferula communis*).

March is one of the best months to botanise in Northern Cyprus and other species we will be expecting to find will be carpets of *Anemone coronaria*, *Cyclamen persicum*, *Tulipa cypria*, up to 30 orchid species and some of the Northern Cyprus endemics such as St. Hilarion Cabbage (*Brassica hilarionis*), a tall handsome *Brassica* with creamy flowers, Cyprus Rock Cress (*Arabis cypria*), Kythrian Sage (*Salvia veneris*), Tufted Golden Drop (*Onosma caespitose*) and the pale pink *Silene fraudatrix*. At this season it seems as if every available space is occupied by a profusion of wild flowers providing both a wonderful spectacle and a delight for botanists. Whilst the myriad of blooms are unfurling to welcome a new spring, it is also a period of transition for birds as wintering species are replaced by the newly arrived migrants from Africa. We should see an interesting mix of species from wintering waterfowl, pipits and finches to the Cyprus specialities – the Cyprus Wheatear and Cyprus Warbler. Early migrants should include Great Spotted Cuckoo, wheatears, Rüppell's, Orphean and Subalpine Warblers and local residents like Dartford Warbler, Black Francolin and Serin.

Between the Kyrenia Mountains and the rich alluvial central plain lies a hilly area known as the Badlands. Although not immediately the most attractive place, it contains reservoirs which are a useful human contribution to the landscape. These reservoirs are often very productive for birdwatching and aquatic plants. At Akdeniz, Koprulu, Arapkoy and Gecitkoy Reservoirs we should find Little Crane, Little Bittern, Little and Great White Egret, Purple and Squacco Heron, Marsh Harrier and possible migrants among the reeds, together with terns and waders. There is also an area of limestone scrubland where we should find Sage, Oregano and the gorse-like plants of *Calycotome* and *Genista* and the prickly humps of *Sarcopoterium*. In this habitat we will also look for the strange parasitic *Cytinus*, which we might find in both colour forms.

Days 5 – 7

Yeni Erenkoy

On Day 5 we will transfer to our second location near Yeni Erenkoy, ideally situated to allow us easier access to the eastern part of the island. Our hotel is on the coast half-way along the Karpaz Peninsula. Here the mountain range loses height as it extends along the narrow, largely uninhabited, peninsula or 'the Panhandle'. Some of the best beaches in Cyprus are found in this area, miles of empty bays with pure white

sand, whilst there are also numerous historical sites such as ancient Bronze Age settlements and even Neolithic remains.

We will particularly spend time searching for migrants on the eastern part of the peninsula, near Cape Andreas, which is one of the best sites on the island for visible migration. Falls can be spectacular and we will watch out for possible Pallid and Montagu's Harriers, Short-toed Larks, Woodchat and maybe Masked Shrikes, Hoopoes, Tawny Pipits, warblers, chats, wagtails and perhaps Wrynecks and some early flycatchers too.

The Karpaz Peninsula is also a rich botanical area with literally hundreds of species of wild flowers from Crown Anemones (*Anemone coronaria*) to colourful rockroses, irises and poppies and we will make a thorough exploration of its floral treasures during the final part of our tour.

Day 8

London

Depending on flight schedules we may have time for a last walk this morning, before leaving our hotel for the return drive to Larnaca airport and our onward flight to London.

Tour grading

This holiday is graded A/B. It will include gentle to moderate birdwatching and botanical walks on most days. Our pace will be slow to allow us to examine the plants and birds. All walks are day walks and therefore optional.

Focus

Plants, birds and all-round natural history.

Weather

At the time of our visit daytime temperatures are normally warm enough for summer clothing but in the evenings one might feel the need of a fleece and/or light jacket. In addition, it is worth noting that the weather can be unpredictable in spring and we would advise you to bring some warmer clothes, together with waterproofs.

Food, accommodation & extra expenses

All food and accommodation is included in the cost of this holiday. This is a two-centre holiday with all rooms having private facilities. Entrance fees to various castles, forts and other historical sites are not included in the cost of the tour. Please note that there is a limited choice of accommodation on the Karpaz Peninsula

(Yeni Erenkoy) and whilst our hotel is comfortable and clean with en-suite facilities, it is somewhat simple and basic in nature.

Your safety & security

You have chosen to travel to Northern Cyprus. Risks to your safety and security are an unavoidable aspect of all travel and the best current advice on such risks is provided for you by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. In order to assess and protect against any risks in your chosen destination, it is essential that you refer to the Foreign Office website – www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice or telephone 0870 6060290 prior to travel.

How to book your place

In order to book your place on this holiday, please give us a call on 01962 733051 with a credit or debit card, book online at www.naturetrek.co.uk, or alternatively complete and post the booking form at the back of our main Naturetrek brochure, together with a deposit of 20% of the holiday cost plus any room supplements if required. If you do not have a copy of the brochure, please call us on 01962 733051 or request one via our website.

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