

Cyprus at Christmas

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

Day 1	Fly Paphos.
Day 2/3	Paphos.
Day 4/7	Latchi.
Day 8	Fly London.

Departs

December.

Focus

Plants, birds and other wildlife.

Grading

Grade A/B. Easy to moderate day walks only.

Dates and Prices

Visit www.naturetrek.co.uk (tour code CYP04) or see the current Naturetrek brochure.

Highlights:

- A 2-centre wildlife holiday focusing on birds, flowers and archaeology
- Enjoy Christmas in Cyprus
- Autumn & winter flowering flowers such as *Romulea tempskyana* & *Narcissus serotinus*
- Wintering birds including Finsch's Wheatear, Spur-winged Plover & Greater Sand Plover
- Early orchids such as *Ophrys israelitica* & *Anacamptis collina*
- Visit the archaeological site on Paphos Headland
- Explore the beautiful Akamas Peninsula
- Led by expert naturalist guides



Images from top: *Romulea tempskyana*, Roman Amphitheatre, Paphos and Greater Sand Plover. Courtesy of Yiannis Christofides and Shutterstock



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Introduction

The island of Cyprus sits in the clear blue waters of the eastern Mediterranean at the crossroads of Africa, Asia and Europe. At the end of December, when northern Europe has slipped deep into the clutches of winter's icy grip, Cyprus still enjoys a mild and sunny climate with a pleasant average day-time temperature of 18°C. However, whilst Cyprus can boast an impressive average of 340 days of sunshine per year, its rainfall tends to fall between October and February, watering landscapes parched and desiccated by the summer sun, encouraging Cyprus's autumn and winter-flowering plants to burst into life once more. This rejuvenated green land attracts an interesting variety of birds, amongst them such sought-after species as Finsch's Wheatear and Greater Sand Plover which overwinter on the island, and an increasing population of Laughing Doves.



Blue Rock Thrush

This two-centre natural history holiday also provides the opportunity for participants to partake in a Cypriot Christmas for a change. So, as well as searching for the varied plants, birds and other wildlife of this beautiful Mediterranean island, we will enjoy a more relaxed and far less commercialised Christmas than that experienced in the UK. We'll also no doubt sample a few of the island's traditional festive foods such as 'melomakarona' (a delicious honey cake) and 'kourabiedes' (an almond cake coated in icing sugar). So, let Naturetrek take the worry and stress out of your festive planning this year and join us in southern Cyprus for a relaxing week of wildlife, walking and a glass or two of the local Cypriot wine!

Itinerary

N.B. Please note that the itinerary below offers our planned programme of excursions. However, adverse weather and 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

Fly Paphos & overnight

We leave from London's Gatwick Airport this morning onboard an Easyjet direct flight into the town of Paphos, located on Cyprus's western extremity. We are due into Paphos Airport in the afternoon from where we will transfer to a comfortable hotel in the town and go out for dinner.

Days 2 - 3

Paphos

We now have two full days to explore the coastline, reservoirs and other habitats within striking distance of Paphos. On our first morning we will visit the archaeological ruins on Paphos headland, a World Heritage Site with remains dating from prehistoric times through to the Middle Ages. Paphos was founded by the Trojan hero Agapinor and became the capital of Cyprus during the Roman period. The town is included in the UNESCO list of cultural and national treasures and the whole surrounding area is rich with important archaeological remains. The floor mosaics in the House of Dionysius are of particular interest and one of the finest examples of Roman mosaics in Europe.

Paphos Headland is also an interesting spot for wildlife and should offer us our first autumn and winter flowering plants such as *Narcissus serotinus* and the endemic *Taraxacum aphrogenes*. Troodos Wall Lizards bask on the ruin walls, whilst birds to look out for include Woodlark, Crested Lark, Black Redstart and perhaps even a wintering Greater Sand Plover on the rocky beach.



Finsch's Wheatear

To the east of Paphos lie Agia Varvara and Anarita Park, great areas for birds throughout the year and regular wintering sites for Finsch's Wheatear, a sought-after species that only breeds from eastern Turkey into central Asia, but winters in small numbers in Cyprus. On another day we shall visit the Akrotiri peninsula, with its salt lake and marshes where we hope to see Greater Flamingos, Black-winged Stilts, Spur-winged Lapwings, Water Pipits and a variety of Gulls and wading birds. After each full day in the field, we will return to Paphos for dinner in a local taverna.

Day 4

Latchi

Next, we transfer to the small coastal town of Latchi, located at the foot of the beautiful Akamas Peninsula. En route we will stop at Kritou Terra for flowers such as *Ranunculus bullatus*, *Crocus veneris* and *Cyclamen cyprium*. Our 4 nights in Latchi will be based in the comfortable Aphrodite Beach Hotel close to the 'Baths of Aphrodite', an attractive natural pool where the goddess of love was fabled to bath.

Days 5 - 7

Latchi

We will spend much of our time here exploring the beautiful Akamas Peninsula. This is an area of outstanding natural beauty and has largely escaped the development that has blighted other regions of coastal Cyprus. According to legend, Akamas took its name from the Greek mythological hero of the same name, the son of Theseus, who came to Cyprus after the Trojan War and founded Akamantis. The area lies at the easternmost point of three major European floral zones and is therefore extremely botanically rich, including 35 endemic species together with a wide variety of other flora and fauna.

The Akamas Peninsula is edged in dramatic limestone cliffs and clothed in maquis vegetation and a patchwork rocky fields and olive groves. With perseverance we hope to find the shy Black Francolin, plus a variety of other species including Long-legged Buzzard, Sardinian Warbler and Spanish Sparrow. Starred Agamas and Troodos Lizards will be sunning themselves on the carob trees, whilst for the botanist an interesting variety of plants may include *Arisarum vulgare*, *Narcissus tazetta*, *Spiranthes spiralis* and the first *Anemone coronaria* and *Cyclamen persicum* of the year. There should also be one or two early flowering orchids on show such as *Ophrys israelitica* and *Anacamptis collina*. We will spend one day in the hills at Stavros, passing through some fascinating geology and looking for the Cyprus sub-species of Coal Tit, Jay and Mouflon plus the beautiful endemic Cedar. We will return each evening to our base in Latchi.



Sardinian Warbler

*Cyclamen persicum*

Akamas Peninsula

Day 8

Fly London

We should have time this morning to take one final short walk near our hotel before returning to Paphos to check-in for our early afternoon Easyjet flight to London's Gatwick Airport. If time permits we shall visit Mandria Beach for a variety of birds such as pipits, finches and larks.

Tour grading

Grade A/B - We will use our own minibus to travel around the island, and reach the areas in which we will be walking. Essentially this is a holiday of leisurely walks over mostly easy, undulating, terrain with plenty of stops although some of the footpaths can be uneven and rocky in places. No luggage needs to be carried apart from field equipment such as binoculars, field guides etc. and a bottle of drink.

Weather

Cyprus usually enjoys a mild and sunny climate in late December with an average daytime high of around 18 degrees C. Early mornings and evenings will be cooler, as will be in the mountains should our itinerary take us up into the hills. In the late autumn cold and wet spells can affect the island from time to time, however, and so it will be wise to include some warm clothes for such eventualities.

Food & accommodation

This is a two-centre holiday and all meals are included in the cost of the holiday from dinner on Day 1 to breakfast on Day 8. For the first 3 nights of the tour we will be staying in a comfortable Axiothea Hotel in the coastal town of Paphos whilst we explore the nearby wildlife and archaeological sites, eating dinner each night in a local taverna. We will then travel to Latchi, for our final 4 nights where we will be based in the Aphrodite Beach Hotel just to the west of Polis and near the Baths of Aphrodite on the north coast of the Akamas Peninsula. Rooms in both hotels have private facilities.

Your Safety & Security

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 – <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/cyprus> regularly prior to travel.

How to book your place

In order to book a place on this holiday, you will need to read the Naturetrek terms and conditions in the back of our brochure or on our website, and then book either online at www.naturetrek.co.uk, by calling us on 01962 733051, or by completing and returning the booking form in the brochure together with a deposit of 20% of the holiday cost. If you do not have a copy of this brochure, please call us on 01962 733051.

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