

Go Slow on Menorca

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

Day 1 Fly Mahon and transfer to Matchani Gran

Day 2 – 7 Daily birdwatching and botanical excursions from our base near Mahon

Day 8 Fly London

Departs

April – May

Focus

General natural history

Grading

A. Day walks only, all straightforward (and optional)

Dates & Prices

See website (tour code ESP67)

Highlights

- Vetches, Cistus, gladioli & Alyssum among the colourful dune flora
- Balearic specialities & Menorcan endemics among a host of wildflowers
- Europe's only sedentary population of Egyptian Vulture (60+ breeding pairs)
- Purple, Night & Squacco Herons among a wealth of wetland birds



From Top: Sawfly Orchid, Hoopoe, Menorca



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Introduction

Our programme of 'Go Slow' Naturetrek holidays aims to allow you time to enjoy the natural world at a more leisurely pace, and with a great deal more leisure time, than on a conventional Naturetrek holiday. This 'Go Slow' tour offers a relaxing week of birding and, as is typical with Naturetrek tours, there will be an emphasis on enjoying our surroundings and other wildlife, as well as the birdlife.

As Menorca is only some 30 miles long and 12 miles wide, it is possible to reach most parts of the island from our delightful 18th century Menorcan Farmhouse base, Matchani Gran. Set in ten hectares of unspoilt countryside, with a large outdoor swimming pool, this is a most relaxed setting. The road system primarily links the major settlements, leaving large areas of the island accessible only on foot. Days will usually begin with a short drive, followed by a walking excursion to areas of interest for their wildlife, returning to the hotel by road at the end of the afternoon. Sometimes days may be split, with perhaps short stops during the outward or return journeys or visits to more than one locality during a single day. Considerable flexibility in the programme will be possible: clearly, the interest of particular localities may vary according to such things as the season and the weather and the programme may be varied to take account of these and other factors.

UNESCO recently declared Menorca a Biosphere Reserve, envisaging that large parts of the island should be protected as either Areas of Special Natural Interest or Areas of Rural Landscape Interest. The island has suffered much less from tourist development than the other large Balearic Islands (Mallorca and Ibiza) and further development began to be restricted a number of years ago.

It is more or less impossible to visit Menorca without coming across some of the prehistoric remains with which the island is liberally scattered. It has, in fact, the greatest concentration of stone prehistoric structures to be found anywhere on earth. Some have now been cleared and excavated, sometimes also restored, but many remain more or less overgrown. We shall certainly see some of them during our stay on the island, if only because they are often good places to look for plants. Several different kinds of structures exist: the oldest, dating from around 2,000 BC, are cave dwellings carved in cliffs. Slightly more recent are the T-shaped megaliths called *taulas*, assumed to have had some kind of religious significance, and the tapering towers of boulders, either solid or hollow inside, called *talayots*.

The magnificent natural harbour of Mahon gave the island great strategic importance. In 1708, during the War of Spanish Succession, the English occupied the island and it remained under their control until 1756. It was the failure of Admiral Byng to bring relief to the defending British forces that led to his execution 'pour encourager les autres', as Voltaire famously commented. The French occupation lasted only a few years, however, and Menorca was returned to Britain in 1763. Not until 1802 did it finally pass to Spain. One probable legacy of the period as a major British naval base is the gin which continues to be distilled on the island.

NB. 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.

Itinerary

Day 1

Fly Mahon, Transfer to Matchani Gran

Today we board our flight direct to Mahon (regional departures are available from around the UK – please contact us or state your preference upon booking) and transfer to our accommodation for the week which is a short drive away. Depending on flight times, we will have plenty of time to settle in and begin our explorations of the pretty countryside nearby, including the grounds of the hotel itself.

Day 2

Matchani Gran

This morning, and every morning, weather permitting, we will offer the chance of a pre-breakfast walk around the area immediately surrounding the hotel. There are usually migrant warblers and flycatchers to be seen along the tree-lined entrance road. Hoopoes and Turtle Doves are usually to be seen on the power lines, and there is always a chance of coming across one of the Stone Curlews which breed in nearby fields. Nightingales should have arrived at the time of our visit and will be singing from the bushes along the track.



Setting off after breakfast, we shall head north towards the marsh and water meadows at Tirant, probably with at least one stop along the way. Dependant on the winter rains, Tirant Marsh is the only habitat of its kind on the island. The short grass affords excellent views of herons, storks and egrets if there is enough water, and any muddy edges should produce waders. Booted Eagles and Marsh Harriers hunt the adjacent land. We will have our picnic lunch near the beach at Cala Tirant, after which we will visit the extensive dunes immediately behind the beach. Kentish Plovers breed here, while Audouin's Gulls are frequently seen in the bay. Other likely sightings include Black-winged Stilt, various sandpipers and other waders, Little Grebe, and several species of warbler. There is a rich flora growing on the dunes, and tortoises and terrapins may be encountered here. It is also a good area for butterflies and dragonflies.

Finally, we will drive back to Matchani Gran for a late-afternoon rest and our evening meal.

Day 3

Matchani Gran

This morning we will visit the Cap de Cavalleria. This promontory, covered with low scrub, hosts many of the specialised cushion plants of the Balearic Islands and is the most northerly point on the island. Shearwaters, (Yelkouan, Balearic and Scopoli's), can often be seen from the headland, and many migrants pass northwards along it at the period of our visit, with the resident Egyptian Vultures patrolling the cliffs. Blue Rock Thrush is resident here, and are often seen on the cliff edges, while Thekla's Larks are common. Peregrines are often seen here, finding feral pigeons a convenient food source. After parking near the lighthouse, we will explore the rocky habitat to find many of the endemic plants including the small violet 'daisy' *Senecio rodriguezi*, named after the Menorcan botanist Juan Joaquin Rodriguez. On the way to and from the Cape itself we will stop several times to view birds and plants, one stop being at Cala Viola.



In the afternoon we will visit Mongofre Nou, an area of old disused saltpans at the head of an inlet from the sea. This is usually an excellent area for waders, including Common, Green and Wood Sandpipers, Redshank, Greenshank, and often a few Greater Flamingoes. Ospreys hunt in the sheltered inlet, and butterflies abound in the trackside vegetation.

On returning to the hotel there will be time to relax before dinner, and some might like to enjoy a dip in the large swimming pool.

Day 4

Matchani Gran

Today we will drive to Son Bou on the south coast, where we will walk along part of the 'Cami de Cavall', a bridleway and footpath which runs around the entire island. The path overlooks an area of wet fields and reedbeds where we may find Marsh Harriers, Western Swamphen, Black-winged Stilt and various waders and waterfowl. Continuing on, the path reaches a marsh where we will look for the typical plants of this habitat.

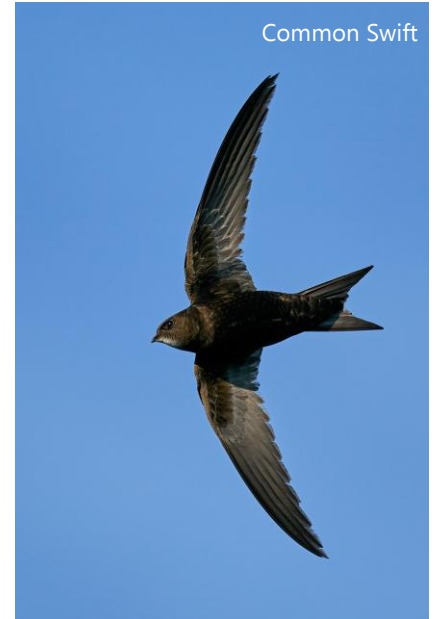
Re-tracing our steps to the vehicles, we will drive the short distance to a picnic area near the beach where we will have lunch under the shade of the pine trees.

For those who wish, this afternoon we will visit the prehistoric site at Torre d'en Galmés, one of the largest of many such sites on the island. There is a range of buildings, some partly restored and others just as they were left over 2,000 years ago.

Day 5

Matchani Gran

This morning we will drive the full length of the island towards Cuitadella on the west coast. To the north of Cuitadella is the rocky headland of Punta Nati, which is a very good area for Blue Rock Thrush and Short-toed Larks, and a large colony of swifts (Common and Pallid) nest on the cliffs. This area is also home to the island's (and probably the Mediterranean's!) largest colony of Scopoli's Shearwater, and the birds are often seen offshore here, depending on the wind strength and direction.



After spending some time here, we will return to the vehicles and drive to the northern end of the Algendar Gorge, which runs from the south coast into the centre of the island. The main Egyptian Vulture colony is in the gorge and the birds can often be seen soaring overhead and gliding along the gorge, frequently being joined by Booted Eagles and Peregrines.

The way in and out of the gorge is either a reasonable paved track or the old pack-mule route which is narrow and steep in places, but well worth seeing for the variety of endemic plants.

Day 6

Matchani Gran

We will have a slightly earlier start this morning, driving to Mahon, from where, weather permitting, we will take a boat trip out to the Isla de l'Aire. This offshore islet is where most of the bird ringing in Menorca takes place and we will be able to see the ringing procedure at close quarters. We will also walk out to the lighthouse where Peregrines are often seen, and passing shearwaters are sometimes visible. The islet is home to the endemic Lilford's Wall Lizard, a dark, almost black lizard which is now only found on offshore islets of Menorca and Mallorca, having disappeared from the main islands.

This afternoon we will visit the large wetland reserve at S'Albufera d'es Grau where we hope to see Ospreys hunting, as well as Great Crested and Little Grebes, herons and egrets and warblers in the scrub surrounding the lake. We will drive to the nearby village of Es Grau where we can make use of a boardwalk to view a different part of the lake, before having a coffee/ice cream break at a café in the village.

Day 7

Matchani Gran

Mirror Orchid



On our last full day, we will drive to Cap de Favaritx for a look at the spectacular wind-swept landscape around the lighthouse. The temporary brackish pool before the lighthouse is a good place to find various species of plover and a short walk to the point beyond the lighthouse is an excellent place to watch Balearic and Scopoli's Shearwaters.

After Cap de Favaritx we will drive to the wooded area of Sa Rocca for lunch and search for Violet Limadore and other orchids.

Our last stop of the day will be Monte Toro, the highest point of the island, from where the views are spectacular. We are likely to see raptors from here, including Egyptian Vulture, Booted Eagle and Red Kite, and also Crag Martin, Blue Rock Thrush and possibly Alpine Swift.

We will then have to make our way back to Matchani Gran for our final evening meal together.

Day 8

Fly London

Sadly our time on the island ends today and we travel from Matchani Gran to the airport nearby, before the return flight to Britain.

Tour Grading

All the walking involved in this tour will be day walks and will be optional. The holiday grade is A. The island is rocky and terrain may be rough, especially on the northern coast. There are no very high hills on Menorca, but short steep slopes are by no means uncommon. The walks are generally quite short and generous time has been allowed so that they can be taken at a slow pace, with plenty of time to look at plants and birds and enjoy the beauty of this lovely island. Some of them are circuits, with possible shorter routes for those who do not wish to walk the full distance.

Weather

During Spring the weather should mainly be warm, dry and sunny, but one wet day during the week can be expected and more are not impossible. Maximum daily temperatures should be in the mid-20s Celsius, but will be lower on wet or windy days. The sun will be hot and protection against it will be needed, especially during excursions with limited shade.

Food & accommodation included in the price

All accommodation and meals are included throughout the holiday. Wine is also included with the evening meals at the Matchani Gran



Matchani Gran

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. Please stipulate any special requirements, for example extension requests or connecting/regional flights, at the time of booking.