

# The Island of Samos

## Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

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### Outline itinerary

<b>Day 1</b>	Depart London for Samos
<b>Day 2/8</b>	A daily programme of botanical and natural history walks from our base in Karlovassi
<b>Day 9</b>	Fly London

### Departs

April

### Focus

Plants, birds, butterflies and other insects

### Grading

A/B. Day walks only.

### Dates & Prices

See website (tour code GRC06) or brochure

### Highlights

- Fabulous wildlife on this tranquil Aegean island, home of Pythagoras
- Rollers, Black-headed and Cretzschmar's Buntings & Rüppell's Warbler
- 30+ orchid species amongst a rich flora
- A wealth of reptiles, butterflies & other insects
- Rugged, scenic terrain with many historical sites
- Seven nights at a friendly, Greek, family-run hotel serving tasty home cooking



Images (from top to bottom) Black-eared Wheatear, Wild flower meadow & Rüppell's Warbler



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**NB. 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.**

## Introduction

Samos is one of the Sporades in the eastern Aegean Sea, separated by a one-mile strait from Turkey and the ancient site of Ephesus. Samos also has a long history and was the birthplace of the astronomer Aristarchus, one of the first to suggest that the Earth moved around the sun, and of Pythagorus, whose home town is now called Pythagorio.

Near Pythagorio are the ruins of the Temple of Hera, one of the largest Greek temples ever built. Samos was the reputed birthplace of Hera and the location of her wedding to Zeus. Their wedding night apparently lasted for three hundred years but we will not be staying for so long! Viticulture is a major industry of the island and is claimed to have been taught to the old Samians by Dionysos, the god of wine, himself. The local Retsinas are well worth trying during our visit.

We will be based at Karlovassi, a harbour town towards the western end of the north coast of the island. This is an excellent base for easy walking along this unspoilt coast and a good centre for our other explorations. Samos has much to offer all year round as spring starts early and autumn produces a marvelous flush of late-flowering bulbs, but we have chosen late April as the best time for the later spring flowers, bird migration and the showy insects should also be active. Although a popular island for walking it does not appear to have been well studied by naturalists, so we have the opportunity to make new discoveries. It lies on the same migration route as Lesbos, which is now well-known for its passage birds. Samos is more mountainous and wooded, so offers a much wider range of habitats for resident and other breeding birds, but more cover for the migrants so they may not be so obvious. However the greater variety of other animals and plants more than compensates.



Samos wildflower meadow

With our transport we will be able to explore the whole island and also visit some of the ancient sites which, as in the rest of Greece, are surrounded by flowers. There are a number of locations across the island, well known to the leaders that we might visit. Below is a selection of some of them.

## Day 1

### In Flight

We will commence our tour by flying from London to Samos, using the overnight scheduled services of Aegean and Olympic Airlines from Heathrow via Athens. This is the only way to reach Samos at this time of year.

## Day 2

### Karlovasi

On arrival we will drive across the island to our base in Karlovasi, a small, pleasant, family-run hotel.

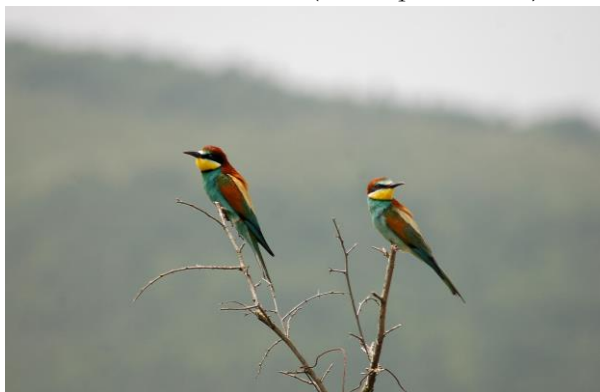
After a period for rest and relaxation after our journey, our exploration of Samos will start with a visit to Potami Beach, just west of Karlovasi.\* Here we will explore the shoreline, cliffs and a small meadow. The shore has Horned Poppy (*Glaucium flavum*) and Mallow-leaved Bindweed (*Convolvulus althaeoides*), and perhaps Audouin's Gull or some passage waders; out to sea, Scopoli's and Yelkouan Shearwaters can be seen, and there may be a rare sighting of Mediterranean Monk Seal. Upon our return to the hotel, if time permits, we will explore the track to the stream behind the hotel. This passes through rough fields, vineyards, and plantations, and is a good place for passage migrants to feed up, before continuing their journeys north. We will also visit this area daily, usually before breakfast or in the evening. Spanish Sparrow and Hooded Crow are resident here, whilst various hirundines, shrikes and warblers are often passing through.

\*NB. Depending on our arrival time on the Island, we may take lunch at the hotel or we may have a picnic on the beach.

## Day 3

### Ydrousa towards Klondeika

Today we will walk on the edge of the Ambelos range between the villages of Ydroussa and Kondeika, a short drive from Karlovasi. This will be easy walking through varied habitats, along tracks encouraging a good range of flora and attractive insects, with butterflies as well as dragonflies being present. Woods will have Cretan Maple (*Acer sempervirens*) and Storax (*Styrax officinalis*) together with Carob (*Ceratonia siliqua*), while Mastic Bush (*Pistacia lentiscus*), the spiny *Genista acanthoclada* and Rosemary (*Rosmarinus officinalis*) will be in the more open areas. Other plants may include the very showy Peony (*Paeonia mascula*), as well as large numbers of *Scillas* and *Anemones*. The orchids include, Anatolian Orchid (*Anacamptis anatolica*), Holy Orchid (*Anacamptis sancta*), Heldreich's Orchid (*Ophrys scolopax*



European Bee-eaters

*subsp. heldreichi*), and Violet Bird's-nest Orchid (*Limodorum abortivum*) could also be found. This habitat is the home of Nightingales, whose song should be very obvious, louder than that of the Rüppell's Warbler and more tuneful than the Sardinian Warbler's scolding. Other species we might expect include Long-legged Buzzard, Lesser Grey and Masked Shrike. We will also need to continue to check for passage migrants, though the flocks of Bee-eaters are often obvious. Birds of prey, particularly Buzzard and Short-toed Eagle, should be breeding here. After our picnic lunch we should

have the chance of seeing the afternoon-flowering Barbary Nut (*Gynandris sisyrrinchium*). Throughout the day we will have changing views of the Kerkis range and across the whole island from coast to coast.



## Day 4

### Psili Amos & Mykili Beach

This morning we take a scenic journey along the north side of the island to Samos Town, and then to the south-eastern corner of the island at Psili Amos. Here a seasonal lake is home to Ruddy Shelduck, occasional flamingos possibly visiting from Turkey, and many passage migrants, especially waders. As this is the main expanse of water on the island virtually anything can turn up. The lake is set beside the ruins of an old salt-works.

Plants will again be abundant and will include further orchids, such as Horned Woodcock (*Ophrys scolopax subsp. cornuta*), Pyramidal (*Anacamptis pyramidalis*) and tongue orchids (*Serapias spp.*). We will also explore the shingle beach adjacent to the lake, here we will find a maritime flora, among which we may well encounter Tawny Pipit, Lesser Short-toed Lark and Zitting Cisticola.

After our picnic, we will move westwards to an area of coastal grassland and arable margins at Mykili Beach.

Plants here include Sea Lavender (*Limonium sinuatum*), Bumblebee Orchid (*Ophrys bombyliflora*), Bee Orchid (*Ophrys apifera*), Bean Broomrape (*Orobancha crenata*) and the Tongue Orchid (*Serapias lingua*). Extensive reedbeds may produce Eurasian Reed, Sedge, Sardinian and Great Reed Warblers, whilst overhead European Bee-eater, European Roller and Red-footed Falcon can all be seen. The rough fields have Crown Daisy (*Glebionis coronarium*), Rosy Garlic (*Allium roseum*), and Chaste Tree (*Vitex agnus-castus*).

## Day 5

### Ambelos mountains or Nisi peninsula

We will have a complete change of habitat today as we walk up to the summit of Karvouni at 1,140 metres. We drive first to the village of Pandrosos and then start off through phrygana with Spanish Broom (*Spartium junceum*) and *Genista* towards woods with Hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*), Small-flowered Black Hawthorn (*Crataegus pentagyna*) and Italian Plum (*Prunus cocomilia*). We then enter pine forest, which includes Greek Pine (*Pinus brutia*). Here we will look out for Sombre Tits and Chukar Partridge. Orchids here include Early Purple (*Orchis mascula subsp. mascula*), Toothed (*Neotinea tridentata*), Roman (*Dactylorhiza romana*), Violet Bird's-nest (*Limodorum abortivum*) and Late Spider (*Ophrys fuciflora subsp. fuciflora*). The forest leads to the open summit plateau with stunted plants clinging to the cracks in the rocks, a very different flora from the Eastern Mediterranean plants we have previously enjoyed. These alpine flowers have the typical intense colours of mountain plants and are endemic or local species, especially of *Veronica*, *Geranium*, *Erodium*, *Sedum* and *Saxifraga*. *Sedum tenuifolium*, *S. laconicum* and *S. hispanicum* as well as *Saxifraga sibirica*, *S. graeca* and *S. hederacea* are all reported from this area. Birds here include Buzzard, Short-toed Eagle, Goshawk and also Lanner Falcon and Rüppell's Warbler.



Naturetrek picnic lunch

Again we will have wide views across to the Kerkis range, with the peak of Vigla as the highest point of the island at 1,440 metres.

As an alternative location, the Nisi peninsula is situated on the north-east coast of the island, above Samos Town, jutting out into the Aegean Sea. The cliff top scrubby grassland phrygana leads down to a secluded bay. Rüppell's Warbler, Common Whitethroat, Red-rumped Swallow and Common Buzzard can all be seen, as well as Yellow-legged Gulls and Yelkouan Shearwaters out to sea. Plants to be seen include *Anthyllis hermanniae*, Syrian Thistle (*Notobasis syriaca*), Arabian Fumana (*Fumana arabica*), Greek Spiny Surge (*Euphorbia acanthothamnos*) and Late Spider Orchid (*Ophrys fuciflora* subsp. *fuciflora*). Among the insect life there is Eastern Bath White, Cleopatra, Southern Festoon and Clouded Yellow butterflies. If time permits, there may be an opportunity to swim.

## Day 6

### Marathokambos, Kastania, Limnionas, Paleochori & Plaka

It is possible to make two days out of the south-west coast of Samos. Travelling over the island's central ridge, will take us down to the south coast at Marathokambos Bay and the foothills of Vigla, the highest peak of Samos. The extensive beach should produce typical Mediterranean shore plants including Mallow-leaved Bindweed (*Convolvulus althaeoides*) and *Anthemis cretica*, and it provides a resting and feeding place for migrant birds. A little further inland suitable conditions favour Bug Orchid (*Anacamptis coriophora*), Holy Orchid (*Anacamptis sancta*), *Ophrys umbilicata* and several species of tongue orchid (*Serapias*) can all occur in good numbers. The phrygana has Etruscan Honeysuckle (*Lonicera etrusca*) and the Sloe is the eastern form, *Prunus spinosa* subsp. *dasyphylla*. A scenic road with views to the neighbouring islands of Fournoi and Ikaria takes us around the south-western corner of the island through rich grassy, scrubby hillsides, olive groves and boulder-strewn headlands also rich in wildlife. We should continue to find new plants, such as Honeywort (*Cerinth major*), and Horseshoe Orchid (*Ophrys ferrum-equinum*). Black-headed Buntings, Rüppell's Warbler, Sardinian Warbler and Cretzschmar's Bunting are all typical Balkan and eastern birds which are found here, as are Long-legged Buzzard and Bonelli's Eagle. This part of the island is the warmest, and as such tends to be a very good area for butterflies. It is in this region that we may encounter the Samos and Balkan Graylings, if the season is right.

On the return journey to Karlovassi, we take a diversion through Marathokambos and Kastania. The quiet roadside verges are home to Reinhold's Bee Orchid (*Ophrys reinholdii*) and Giant Orchid (*Himantoglossum robertianum*). Common Nightingale, Cretzschmar's Bunting, Chukar Partridge and Tawny Owl are all resident in this area.

## Day 7

### Pyrgos, Triadas Moastery, Pythogorio & Polokaki Beach

The center of the island provides the back-drop for today's excursions. We begin in some scrubby phrygana above the village of Pyrgos. This location has produced Spur-thighed Tortoise and Common Quail in the recent past. Plants here include, Branched Catchfly (*Silene dichotoma*), Disc Medick (*Medicago disciformis*) and Hairy Mallow (*Althaea hirsuta*), with Anatolian Orchid (*Orchis anatolica*), Naked Man Orchid, (*Orchis italica*) and another tongue orchid (*Serapias bergonii*). European Bee-eaters, Eurasian Turtle Dove, Peregrine Falcon, Sardinian Warbler and Rüppell's Warbler, can all be found here.

We will now move on to an area of arable fields and scrubby woodland near Agias Triadas. The onion *Allium nigrum*, Corn Buttercup (*Ranunculus arvensis*), Field Gladiolus (*Gladiolus italicus*) and Giant Orchid (*Himantoglossum robertianum*) are found here. It is also a good place to get good views of Corn Bunting.

We will have our picnic lunch at the Triadas Monastery. European Rollers are known to nest in the walls of the monastery and, if the season is right, we often see four or five individuals. Within the grounds, it is possible to find Lax-flowered Orchid (*Anacamptis laxiflora*) and Three-leaved Bellevalia (*Bellevalia trifoliata*). We have also seen the curious European Glass Lizard on more than one occasion. From here, we make our way into Pythagorio for coffee and a short explore of the harbour, before finishing the day on the coast by the airport at Polokaki Beach, a popular birding spot. Whiskered Tern, Collared Pratincole, Great Reed Warbler, the Black-headed (*feldegg*) race of Yellow Wagtail, Purple Heron and Cetti's Warbler may all been seen here.

## Day 8

### Karlovassi and West of Potami Beach

Our last full day on Samos will be spent exploring the coast to the west of Potami beach, according to weather conditions and what we have seen thus far. The coastal track leads through woodland, interspersed with olive groves and steep hillsides. Common Nightingale, Northern Raven, Blue Rock Thrush and Eleanor's Falcon are all highly likely sightings. A good path then takes us along the rocky headland where Small-flowered Cistus (*Cistus parviflorus*), the pink *Cistus incanus*, Yellow Bee Orchid (*Ophrys lutea subsp. galilaea*), Giant Catchfly (*Silene gigantea*) and Tree Spurge (*Euphorbia dendroides*) all grow. The prickly climber Smilax (*Smilax aspera*) provides cover for birds such as Sardinian Warbler, Blue Rock Thrush and Black-headed Yellow Wagtail. If the season is late, Persian Sowbread (*Cyclamen persicum*) and Dwarf Star-of-Bethlehem (*Ornithogalum nanum*) may still be visible.

## Day 9

### London

We must now return to the airport for our flight back to London, via Athens. If time permits, we will visit the extensive ruins of the Temple of Hera, before arriving at the island's Airport.



European Roller

## Trek grading

On this holiday we will be based in the one hotel on Samos. We will explore the varied habitats of this scenic and still unspoilt island to search out the wide range of wildlife. Our pace will be gentle to allow us to take a close look at the plants, birds and insects and other subjects of interest. We will generally be keeping to tracks and way-marked footpaths.

## Weather

We have chosen this period as the best time for the flowering plants, the bird migration should be continuing, resident and breeding birds will be marking-out their territories and insects should be very obvious. The weather should have settled down but even in the Mediterranean we should be prepared for some variable weather.

## Food and accommodation

All food and accommodation is included in the price of this holiday.

## Flights

If you do not like the idea of overnight flights to Samos, it is possible to take a day time flight to Athens, spend the night in a hotel, and then continue on to Samos the next morning. If you would like a quote for this, please ask.

## Plant, bird & mammal lists

These are provided with the final joining instructions but will gladly be sent to you before, if you wish for a more detailed preview.

## 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](http://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.