

Go Slow on Greece's Pelion Peninsula

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

- Day 1** Fly Thessaloniki and transfer Lagou Raxi, South Pelion
- Day 2/7** Natural history excursions around Pelion from Lagou Raxi
- Day 8** Transfer to Thessaloniki and fly London Gatwick

Departs

April

Focus

Spring flowers and other wildlife

Grading

Grade A – easy walks, see grading section for further information.

Dates and Prices

Visit www.naturetrek.co.uk (tour code GRC17)

Highlights:

- A gentle-paced, single centre holiday based at the comfortable Lagou Raxi Country Hotel
- Easy walks of around 2 miles each day, often using the cobbled 'kalderimi' (mule paths) that cover the peninsula
- Abundant Mediterranean flowers including asphodels, spurge, herbs and rock-roses.
- Numerous orchids including Pyramidal, Man, Naked Man, Mirror and Green-winged Orchids.



From top: The view from Lafkos, *Ophrys reinholdii*, Lagou Raxi



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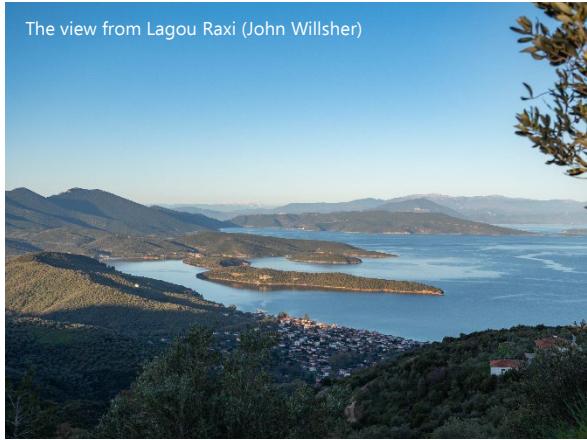
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Introduction

According to Greek legend, Mount Pelion was the summer residence of the Gods of Olympus, and the homeland of the magical Centaurs. Situated mid-way between Thessaloniki and Thessaloniki, the Pelion Peninsula extends south from this mountain, surrounded by stunning beaches and beautiful turquoise waters, and is covered in beech and oak forests and shady olive groves. Each spring, the peninsula bursts into life, and is covered in beautiful wild flowers and orchids. This Go Slow holiday is based base for seven nights at the small and comfortable Lagou Raxi Country Hotel. Situated on the edge of the unspoiled village of Lafkos, where white-washed houses surround village squares shaded by plane trees, our hotel features beautiful gardens and stunning views over the islands of the Pagasetic Gulf.



We are also delighted to offer a 'botanical art special' based at Lagou Raxi in September 2020, with natural history excursions each morning followed by botanical art workshops back at our hotel each afternoon, under the tuition of Volos-based botanical artist Maggie Niagassas.

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

Fly Thessaloniki, transfer Lagou Raxi

We begin our holiday with an early morning flight from London to Thessaloniki. This flight will land us in the ancient capital city around mid-morning, ready for our transfer over to the Pelion Peninsula. The drive is long, expecting to take roughly four hours, however wonderfully scenic with us driving through the Greek central mountains and along stunning coastal roads. We will continue our journey up to the Pelion to our base- the Lagou Raxi Country Hotel- situated on the edge of the village of Lafkos. We are expected to arrive in the late afternoon, and we will take the rest of the day to check into our rooms, get comfortable and relax after a long day of travelling.

Lagou Raxi is a small, contemporary hotel built in a traditional style. Rooms are split across three 'houses' which are set amongst beautifully maintained gardens. There is a swimming pool (though unheated... so perhaps a little chilly in April!), and the restaurant's terrace has stunning views across the islands of the Pagasetic Gulf. We will eat at Lagou Raxi each morning and evening, before retiring to perhaps read a book or complete our daily checklist. As well as the large sitting room and bar (with fireplace for cooler evenings), there is a library for reading, painting and other quiet activities. The library is well stocked with books covering the local area, Pelion's wildlife and both

local and Greek history, and the bar has plenty of cosy sofas from which to enjoy a cup of tea or a beer after returning from our daily excursions.

Days 2 – 7

Excursions from Lagou Raxi

We will keep our plan for the week flexible, but most days will consist of a leisurely morning walk through the beautiful olive groves or along flower-filled paths to the coast, making use of the many 'kalderimia', or cobbled mule paths, to aid our exploration of the peninsula. We will pause for a picnic lunch or stop a taverna to sample some of the delicious local cuisine, before returning to our hotel in the mid-afternoon. On a couple of days, we may also offer an optional afternoon outing later that day.



The kalderimi from Lafkos to Milina

On our first morning, we will take a gentle walk below the hotel to get our bearings, before continuing by coach down to Milina (the small town on the coast below us). We will make one or two stops from here, enjoying a short walk, or pausing for a coffee, and admiring the grassy verges which at this time of year should be covered in Pyramidal Orchid (*Anacamptis pyramidalis*), Mirror Orchids (*Ophrys specula*) and huge stands of *Serapias*. We will then continue to a beautiful garden owned by our friends Vito and Vida, enjoying delicious home cooked mezze created by our next hosts, as we sit on their garden terrace and marvel at their beautiful views across the sheltered bay.

Early on in the week we will take the kalderimi path from Lafkos village down to the coast in Milina. The route takes us gently downhill for around 2 miles, and we will take our time this morning and stop for a picnic lunch along the way. As we go, we will enjoy identifying the prolific plant life which includes asphodels, spurge and other Mediterranean species; Jerusalem Sage, Narrow-leaved Lupin, Pale Flax, Spotted Rockrose, Purple Viper's Bugloss and Shepherds Needle grow amongst the poppies and anemones under the olive trees. Reaching Milina, we enjoy a delicious mezze picnic in the beautiful garden of our local guide.

During our stay in Pelion, we will also spend a day much further north, visiting the Pelion Orchid Centre. This will be a longer day as the drive is around two hours in each direction, but we hope it will be well worth it! Fifty-two species of orchid have now been identified in north Pelion, and we will start by meeting local orchid enthusiast Dimitris Ikonomidis at his Orchid Centre. Together with Dimitris, we will drive above the village where we may find Green-winged Orchid (*Anacamptis*



morio), *Ophrys reinholdii* and Man Orchid (*Orchis anthropophora*), whilst in the woodlands, dominated by Downy Oak, we should find *Orchis provincialis*. On our return south to Lafkos we will make a stop at Lake Karla, an important area for wildlife which includes one of the largest colonies of Dalmatian Pelican in Greece and wintering Pygmy Cormorant, along with Spoonbill, Little and Great White Egret and Great-crested Grebe.

On another day, we will travel to Trikeri, on the southern tip of the peninsula, from where we can take another of the kalderimi down to the coast. Here we will find abundant herbs and the parasitic *Cytinus hypocistus* amongst the Cistus scrub, and we will enjoy the beautiful views as the path slowly winds itself down to the sea.

Besides the flowers, we will be interested in all aspects of natural history. Bird life is not prolific around the peninsula, but Hoopoes and European Bee-eaters are both commonly seen, we can look for a variety of warblers including Sardinian, Olivaceous and Subalpine, and we will hear the beautiful song of the Nightingale almost everywhere that we go. Common Dolphins are frequently seen off the coast so it is always worth a scan as we walk or drive past, and depending on the weather, we may see a variety of butterflies too. All in all, our diverse programme for the week will encompass all aspects of natural history, as well as some delightful taverna lunches and an excursion to a local vineyard where we can enjoy a wild flower walk above the vineyard before sampling a few of the delicious local wines!



Day 8

Transfer Thessaloniki, Fly Gatwick

We will have a leisurely morning this morning, perhaps choosing to walk down to Milina for a dip in the sea before a final lunch back at our hotel. We will depart for the airport around Midday for our evening flight back to London.

Tour grading

Grade A – we enjoy walks of up to around 2 or 3 miles, all taken at a leisurely pace. Our coach driver will be at our disposal each day, so it is possible to opt out of the odd excursion and meet the group for lunch if you wish. Walks on the kalderimi cobbled paths are mostly slow descents, occasionally steep at times but only for a matter of perhaps 50 metres.

Focus

The beautiful wild flowers and scenery of Pelion, plus wider natural history and a little of local life.

Food & accommodation

All meals and accommodation are included in the cost of this holiday, except for any meals required during travel (likely dinner on Days 1 and 8) as EasyJet does not provide in-flight meals. We will be staying in the comfortable Lagou Raxi Country Hotel, close to the village of Lafkos. All rooms have private facilities and balconies or terraces.



Weather

The weather at this time of year can be changeable, and whilst we hope for warm, sunny conditions, it can be cold, wet and overcast at times. You should come prepared for all possibilities!

Your Safety & Security

You have chosen to travel to Greece. 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> regularly 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. Please stipulate any special requirements, for example extension requests or connecting/regional flights, at the time of booking.

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