

Wildlife of Italy's Northern Alps, A Vegan & Vegetarian Tour

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline Itinerary

- Day 1** Travel - Naturno
- Day 2** Val Martello & Servizio Forest
- Day 3** Largo di Varnago & Cascata di Parcines
- Day 4** Stelvio Pass
- Day 5** Parco naturale Gruppo di Tessa
- Day 6** Biotopo Valsura & Seiser Alm
- Day 7** Stelvio National Park
- Day 8** Torbiera delle Viote and Depature

Departs

July

Focus

General wildlife and vegan dining

Grading

A – B. Moderate walking with occasional up and downhill sections.

Dates and Prices

See website (tour code **ITA20**)

Highlights

- Lammergeier and Golden Eagle
- An incredible display of alpine wildflowers
- The stunning Stelvio pass at 2750m
- Alpine Ibex and Chamois
- White-winged Snowfinch and Alpine Chough
- Iconic alpine butterflies including the huge Apollo
- Outstanding gourmet vegan dining



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Introduction

The northern Italian Alps surrounding Parco Naturale Gruppo di Tessa and Stelvio National Park are renowned for their rugged peaks, flower-rich meadows and exceptional biodiversity. These dramatic limestone and crystalline massifs host a mosaic of habitats ranging from subalpine woodlands and montane pastures to rocky scree slopes, glaciers and fast-flowing alpine streams. The steep elevation gradients, coupled with varied geology and local climate, create ideal conditions for an outstanding array of flora and fauna.

At lower elevations, woodlands dominated by Larch, Spruce and Fir provide shelter for numerous mammals, including Red Deer and Roe Deer, while the elusive Eurasian Lynx still roams these forests. European Pine Martens and Red Squirrels patrol both canopy and forest floor. As we move higher, these woodlands open into alpine meadows where hardy shrubs, wildflowers and grasses thrive, providing vital grazing for Chamois and Marmots. Overhead, Golden Eagles circle on rising thermals in search of prey.

Above the tree line, rugged cliffs and boulder fields support specialist wildlife adapted to the harshness of the high mountains. The Alpine Ibex, with its remarkable agility, navigates near-vertical rock faces, while small mammals such as the Snow Vole scurry among the stones. These lofty heights also harbour many characteristic alpine birds, including Lammergeier, Rock Ptarmigan and Alpine Chough.

In late spring and summer, alpine pastures explode with colour as Edelweiss, Gentians and numerous orchids come into bloom, attracting butterflies and day-flying moths in abundance. Together, the sweeping scenery, rich botanical displays and exceptional wildlife make these northern Alpine valleys and passes a superb destination for both nature lovers and landscape enthusiasts.

We will be staying at a gourmet vegan hotel that serves exquisite dinners created from organic, locally sourced ingredients – making this tour a treat for all the senses.



Itinerary

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.

Day 1

Travel to Naturno

After our arrival at Verona Airport, we will travel to our comfortable vegan hotel in the lovely town of Naturno, where we will relax after the journey and enjoy our first Italian vegan dinner together.

Day 2

Val Martello & Servizio Forest

Val Martello, nestled in the heart of Italy's Stelvio National Park, is home to a rich variety of wildlife. Its diverse habitats – from flower-rich alpine meadows to dense conifer forests – support species such as Red Deer, Roe Deer and Alpine Marmots. Higher up, the rocky slopes are inhabited by Chamois and the agile Alpine Ibex, while birdlife is abundant, with Golden Eagles and Lammergeiers often soaring overhead.

In spring, the valley bursts into life as wildflowers emerge, providing essential food for pollinators. As we explore the forests, we will look for the dazzling Firecrest, which is abundant here, and Nutcrackers may reveal themselves with their distinctive calls. Interesting plants include Nottingham Catchfly and the elegant Martagon Lily.

After a picnic lunch, we will travel further up the valley to Lago di San Valentino alla Muta, at 1,450 metres and close to the Swiss and Austrian borders. Waterbirds can often be found on the lake, while the surrounding meadows and woodlands are alive with woodland birds, alpine wildflowers and numerous butterflies. We will spend time enjoying the serene beauty of this alpine lake and, after a thoroughly enjoyable day in the field, return to our lovely hotel for another gastronomic vegan dinner.

Day 3

Lago di Varnago & Cascata di Parcines



After another lovely breakfast, we will travel up the Val Senales, north of Naturno, to Lago di Varnago. This picturesque lake, formed by a dam built in the 1950s, lies at an elevation of about 1,700 metres and is surrounded by breathtaking mountain scenery. Its striking turquoise waters are framed by lush forests and rugged peaks, and the area is a haven for hikers, with trails offering views of glaciers and ancient

Larch trees. Lago di Vernago is also of considerable cultural interest, lying close to the ancient routes used by Ötzi the Iceman more than 5,000 years ago.

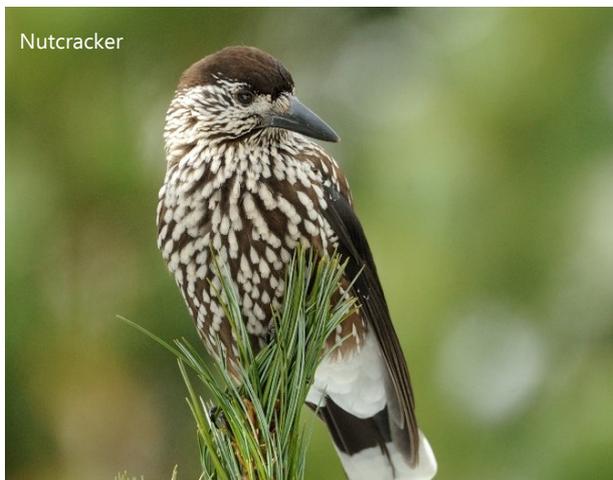
We will scan the surrounding peaks for raptors, with Eurasian Griffon Vulture, Lammergeier and Golden Eagle all possible here, together with Alpine Ibex and Chamois. Many butterflies will be on the wing, and iconic species such as Apollo and Scarce Copper may be seen.

After lunch in the field, we will visit the Cascata di Parcines, a beautiful waterfall fed by constant snowmelt. Surrounded by alpine meadows and pine forests, the area supports a wealth of wildlife and offers superb photographic opportunities.

After another rewarding day in the clear alpine air, we will return to our hotel, where a five-course vegan gastronomic dinner awaits us.

Day 4

Stelvio Pass



Nutcracker

Today promises to be a fantastic day as we visit a high alpine pass. The Stelvio Pass, one of Europe's highest mountain passes, lies at an elevation of 2,757 metres and connects the regions of Lombardy and South Tyrol. Its dramatic landscape is characterised by steep, winding roads, rugged peaks and flower-rich alpine meadows. The pass forms part of the Stelvio National Park, a protected area renowned for its rich biodiversity and pristine high-mountain habitats.

This is an excellent place to explore the unique flora of the high Alps. Species such as Edelweiss and the electric-blue Gentians thrive in the harsh mountain environment, and careful botanising may reveal real alpine specialities including Alpine Toadflax and Glacier Crowfoot tucked among ice patches and boulder fields.

The birdlife here is equally impressive. High-alpine species that may be seen include Alpine Accentor, Water Pipit, White-winged Snowfinch, Rock Ptarmigan and Alpine Chough, while Alpine Swift and Eurasian Crag Martin often wheel overhead. As we ascend towards the pass, the meadows are typically alive with butterflies, including fritillaries, Scarce Copper, Apollo, Swallowtail and Large Grizzled Skipper.

The views throughout the day are breathtaking, with towering peaks, glaciers and deep valleys offering classic alpine scenery and countless photographic opportunities.

If time allows later in the afternoon, we may explore the area around the hotel on the valley floor, where we can look for Serin, Black Redstart, Grey Wagtail, Dipper and the ubiquitous Italian Sparrow.

Today's altitude and fresh mountain air will no doubt help us build a hearty appetite for this evening's vegan delights back at the hotel.

Day 5

Parco Naturale Gruppo di Tessa

The southern slope of Monte Sole in the Val Venosta hosts secondary steppe vegetation, shaped by its dry climate, with only around 550mm of annual rainfall, frequent sunshine, and centuries of grazing. Sparse Junipers and berry-bearing shrubs create ideal habitat for Mediterranean and Eastern European steppe species. Common reptiles include Asp Viper and Green Lizard, while characteristic birds such as Woodlark, Barred Warbler and Tawny Pipit can be found. Heat-loving species like Rock Bunting and Rock Partridge are also widespread here, though often difficult to see.

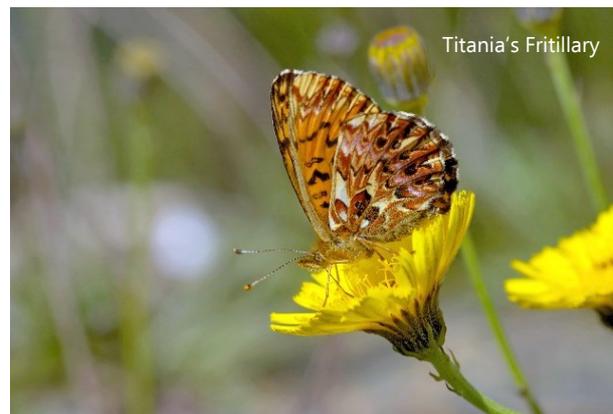
The Texel Groupe mountains feature mixed forests of deciduous trees and Scots Pine up to about 1,000 metres, with Beech and Fir occurring in damper areas and Chestnut and Oak on drier soils, creating rich habitat for deer, woodland birds and small mammals. Meanwhile, Val Senales is carpeted with Larch forests that play an important role in preventing erosion, while the Val di Plan and Val Passiria offer Spruce-dominated woodlands that support species such as Black Woodpecker, Squirrel and Crossbill.

We will spend the day exploring this outstanding area, making the very most of the wildlife and varied habitats it has to offer.

Day 6

Biotopo Valsura & Seiser Alm

After breakfast, we depart eastwards to visit a small wetland at Valsura. Great Bittern, Little Owl and Common Kingfisher can all be found here, together with a range of common wetland birds, dragonflies, and characteristic wetland plants. Afterwards, we continue further east to the spectacular high meadows of the Seiser Alm, Europe's largest high-altitude alpine pasture, lying between approximately 1,680 and 2,350 metres.



This vast plateau is renowned for its lush, flower-filled grasslands, which stretch beneath a dramatic backdrop of towering alpine peaks, offering a striking contrast between colourful meadows and rugged rock. In spring and summer, the turf bursts into life with wildflowers such as Gentians,

Edelweiss, and Arnica, creating a vibrant mosaic that provides excellent grazing for cattle and supports traditional alpine farming.

The Seiser Alm's diverse grasslands and woodland edges support a rich variety of wildlife and offer superb opportunities for gentle walks with expansive mountain views. Common butterflies include Marbled White, Meadow Brown, Small Heath, Black-veined White and White Admiral, while day-flying moths such as Chimney Sweeper, Black-veined Moth, Spotted Sulphur, and various Burnet species are also features of the area. Reached by cable car, the high meadows provide excellent birdwatching opportunities, with Honey Buzzard, Fieldfare and Alpine Swift all possible.

This is a spectacular location, with flower-laden meadows set against high, snow-capped peaks and an azure blue sky. Time spent here is a real privilege. After this feast for the senses, we return to our lovely hotel for another evening of vegan treats.

Day 7

Stelvio National Park



Today we venture into the Stelvio National Park. Established in 1935, it is Italy's largest national park, spanning over 130,000 hectares across the regions of Lombardy, South Tyrol and Trentino. Dominated by the Ortler–Cevedale mountain range, the park encompasses dramatic alpine landscapes, including glaciers, rugged peaks, lush valleys and dense forests.

As we explore this magnificent area, we hope to encounter new butterflies such as Small Apollo, Alpine Grayling, Glanville Fritillary and Brassy Ringlet. This is also an excellent opportunity for final encounters with the remarkable raptors of the northern Alps: Lammergeier, Eurasian Griffon Vulture and Golden Eagle are all possible here, together with both Honey Buzzard and Common Buzzard.

We will search the meadows for additional wildflowers and the woodlands for songbirds, including Western Bonelli's Warbler. After a final rewarding day in the field, we will return to the hotel to enjoy our last meal together and reminisce about the wonderful week we have spent in this stunning region of Italy.

Day 8

Departure

Today we say goodbye to our lovely hotel and, after a final hearty breakfast, we will head down the valleys towards Verona to catch our flight back to the UK. If time allows, we will make one or two stops along the way to enjoy a last taste of this beautiful region and make the very most of our remaining time here.

Tour Grading & Focus

Walks are taken at a gentle pace over generally undulating terrain, which may be a little rough in places. There will be some steeper uphill and downhill sections, but nothing that should pose difficulty for anyone with a moderate level of fitness.

Weather, Clothing & Equipment

We expect generally warm and sunny weather, with temperatures typically in the high 20s to mid-30s°C (occasionally warmer or cooler). Sunblock is advisable, along with sunglasses and an appropriate hat, as sunburn can be severe at altitude. Rain is likely at some point, so please pack accordingly.

Accommodation and Food

We use a comfortable vegan hotel, with all rooms having private facilities. Breakfasts and evening meals are taken at the hotel and are included in the holiday cost. Lunch is also included and will be a packed meal taken in the field.

What's Included

- Accommodation in a comfortable vegan hotel, including dinner.
- Packed lunches
- Ground transport and transport from and to the airport.
- Expert guiding at all times

Extending Your Holiday

We would be happy to assist with arranging extensions, should this be of interest. Please contact Dan Lay (dan@naturetrek.co.uk or 01962 733051) for further information, and/or be sure to indicate any interest in a possible extension when booking.

How to Book Your Place

In order to book your place on this holiday, please call us on 01962 733051 with a credit or debit card, book online at www.naturetrek.co.uk, or alternatively complete and return 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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