

Tunisia – Orchids, Butterflies & Dragonflies

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline Itinerary

Day 1	<u>Travel to Hammamet</u>
Day 2	<u>Cap Bon</u>
Day 3	<u>Hammamet – Nefza</u>
Day 4	<u>Nefza – Bou Salem</u>
Day 5	<u>Bou Salem – Tunis</u>
Day 6	<u>Tunis – Djerba</u>
Day 7	<u>Djerba – Douz</u>
Day 8	<u>Douz</u>
Day 9	<u>Douz – Sfax</u>
Day 10	<u>Sfax – Hammamet</u>
Day 11	<u>Departure</u>

Departs

April

Focus

Orchids, Butterflies, Dragonflies

Grading

A – Moderate driving distances and easy to moderate day walks.

Dates and Prices

See website (tour code **TUN03**)

Highlights

- Two-tailed Pasha and Plain Tiger
- Moroccan Orange-tip, Greenish Black-tip
- 30 Dragonfly Species including difficult to see desert species.
- 30 Orchid Species including a wealth of *Ophrys* 'Bee Orchids'
- Desert Larks and Wheatears
- Iconic Saharan Landscapes
- El Jem Roman Ampitheatre



Yellow Bee Orchid



Moroccan Orange-tip



Large Pincer-tail



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Introduction

Lying at the northern tip of Africa, Tunisia is a country shaped by striking contrasts, where lush Mediterranean hills give way to vast semi arid plains and, further south, the immense sands of the Sahara. Though compact in size, the country's landscapes are remarkably varied, and with them comes an impressive diversity of habitats that support a rich array of flora and fauna.

In the north, fertile plains and rolling hills stretch towards the Mediterranean. Here the Tell Atlas forms a backdrop of wooded slopes, its oak and pine forests interspersed with farmland, river valleys and a necklace of coastal wetlands. Among these is the celebrated Ichkeul National Park, a UNESCO World Heritage Site and a vital winter refuge for countless migratory birds that traverse the Mediterranean each year. Mild, damp winters and warm, dry summers create conditions ideal for both agriculture and wildlife, and it is in this region that the country feels at its greenest and most temperate.

Travelling southwards, Tunisia opens into a broad belt of semi arid steppe, a land of low hills, wide plains and shimmering salt pans. Chief among these is Chott el Djerid, one of the largest salt flats in the world — a vast, otherworldly expanse whose colours shift with the season and whose margins host hardy, drought resistant vegetation. During wetter periods, ephemeral wetlands attract a unique assemblage of birdlife, adding a seasonal pulse of biodiversity to an otherwise stark environment.

Beyond the steppe, the country yields to the arid wilderness of the Sahara. Here, towering dunes, gravel plains and rugged plateaus dominate the landscape, punctuated by oases such as Douz and Tozeur, where date palms flourish around precious freshwater springs. These oases support both people and wildlife, offering life giving green pockets within an otherwise harsh terrain. Despite its severity, the desert is home to specialised species adapted to heat, drought and vast open spaces.

Tunisia is flanked by over 1,300 kilometres of coastline, where sandy beaches, lagoons and islands, including Djerba, support important marine and coastal habitats. These shores provide feeding and breeding sites for seabirds and marine life, as well as sustaining many local



communities. Together, these contrasting environments create a mosaic of habitats — from wetlands and forests to steppe and deep desert — each contributing to Tunisia's natural richness. It is a country where biodiversity reflects the shifting geography, and where conservation remains essential to safeguard the wildlife that depends upon this tapestry of landscapes.

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 Hammamet

After arriving at Tunis Carthage Airport, we will drive for about an hour to our comfortable hotel in the coastal town of Hammamet, where we can unwind after the journey and enjoy our first Tunisian meal together.

Day 2

Cap Bon



Naked Man Orchid

Cap Bon, the northeastern peninsula of Tunisia, offers a wonderfully varied landscape shaped by its Mediterranean climate. Fertile plains, edged with olive groves, citrus orchards and vineyards, give way to rolling hills and coastal scrub rich in native flora. Along its shoreline, rocky promontories alternate with sandy beaches, providing valuable habitat for marine life, while wetlands such as Sebkhia Kelbia draw large numbers of migratory birds. Patches of forest, traditional farmland and open scrubland together form a diverse mosaic of ecosystems that makes Cap Bon a region of exceptional biodiversity.

Today will be spent exploring a selection of sites across the peninsula. Wildflowers will be abundant, and we should enjoy an excellent variety of Mediterranean orchids. Notable species here include the rare Two-leaved Gennaria, Flaming Bee Orchid and

Rainbow Ophrys (iricolor subspecies), along with many orchids that will soon become familiar, such as Large-flowered Butterfly Orchid, Bumblebee Orchid, Woodcock Orchid, Mirror Orchid, Naked Man Orchid and a range of Tongue Orchids.

With such a profusion of flowers, we can expect a fine attendant cast of butterflies. Species to look out for include Moroccan Orange-tip, African Holly Blue, Spanish Grayling and Lambessa Grayling. This area also offers one of our best opportunities to observe Mediterranean dragonflies, among them Northern Banded Groundling, Scarlet Darter, Violet Dropwing, Mediterranean Bluet, Iberian Bluetail and White Feather-leg.

After an action-packed day in the field, we will return to our hotel in Hammamet for the evening.

Day 3

Hammamet – Nefza

Today we travel north and west to the town of Nefza in the Mogods region. The surrounding landscape is one of semi-arid plains, olive groves and low hills covered in drought-resistant

vegetation. Sparse woodland and scattered shrubs break up the terrain, while the nearby Medjerda River valley supports seasonal wetlands and pockets of productive agricultural land.

Our day will be spent exploring sites around Sejnene and Oued Maaden, where we will focus on a fine selection of orchids. Among the species we hope to find are Fragrant Bug Orchid, Eleonora's Bee Orchid, Numidian Bee Orchid, Ficalho's Sawfly Orchid, and both Small-flowered and Narrow-lipped Tongue Orchids.

Butterflies should also be well represented, with species such as Southern Scarce Swallowtail, Bath White and the charming Provence Hairstreak all possible. For those with an interest in Odonata, this region promises a rewarding variety, including our first Western Spectres, Saharan and Copper Demoiselles, Large and Faded Pincertails, and the elegant Epaulet Skimmer.

Satisfied with the day's discoveries, we will return to our comfortable lodgings in Nefza for the night.

Day 4

Nefza – Bou Salem

This morning we will visit the Khroufa Reserve, a protected area known for its semi-arid habitats and diverse wildlife. Situated near Bizerte, it is characterised by rolling hills, scrubland and pockets of Mediterranean vegetation. The reserve supports a wide range of birdlife, reptiles and mammals, as well as orchids, butterflies and dragonflies.



Epaulet Skimmer

We then continue into the Kroumiri region before finishing the day in the old town of Bou Salem, where we will stay the night. Our orchid targets today include the rare and unusual Violet Limodore and the Narrow-petalled Tongue Orchid. It may also be our final opportunity to see some of the commoner species, such as Bumblebee Orchid, Dusky Bee Orchid and Yellow Bee Orchid.

Butterflies to look out for include Cleopatra, Spanish Meadow Brown, Southern Gatekeeper, False Ilex Hairstreak and the Maghreb Orange Skipper. On the dragonfly front, Black Percher, Lucas's Clubtail and Red-veined Dropwing should provide plenty of interest.

Day 5

Bou Salem – Tunis

Today we visit areas east of El Kef in the Teboursouk region. This landscape is shaped by a varied Mediterranean habitat of fertile plains, rolling hills and stretches of forest. The region enjoys a mild climate that supports oak and pine woodland, together with olive groves and vineyards. Seasonal rivers and small wetlands provide valuable water sources for local wildlife. The proximity of important archaeological sites, such as Dougga, adds a cultural dimension to the day, with natural and historical features blending harmoniously across the countryside.

Among the new orchids we may encounter today are Numidian Bee Orchid and Milky Orchid, while this may also be our final opportunity to see Naked Man Orchid and Sawfly Orchid. New butterflies could include Abdelkader's Grayling, Spanish Marbled White and Moroccan Hairstreak, and dragonflies may be represented by Small Red Damselfly and Southern Emerald.

We end the day in Tunis, where we will spend the night.

Day 6

Tunis – Djerba



Pink (Large-flowered) Butterfly Orchid

We spend the morning close to Tunis before catching our internal flight south to the island of Djerba. This large island off Tunisia's south-eastern coast has a distinctive ecology shaped by its Mediterranean climate and semi-arid conditions. Djerba is characterised by sandy plains, palm groves and salt flats that support a flora of date palms, olive trees and drought-tolerant shrubs. Coastal lagoons and

wetlands attract migratory birds such as flamingos and herons, making the island an important stopover for many species. Offshore, the surrounding marine habitats include seagrass beds and coral-like structures that provide shelter for fish and other marine life. Agriculture and tourism both influence the ecological balance of the island, though much of its natural charm remains intact.

With the change in latitude and the warmer, drier conditions, we can expect a fresh suite of orchids. Species we hope to see today include Aspea's Bee Orchid, Battandier's Bee Orchid, Mourning Bee Orchid and Vallesian Rainbow Ophrys. This may also prove to be the day when we encounter one of the stand-out butterflies of the tour, with the exquisite Two-tailed Pasha a real possibility, along with the irruptive Plain Tiger.

The south also brings a new range of dragonflies adapted to drier habitats, and among these we hope to find Saharan Bluetail and Sicilian Skimmer.

We will spend the night at a pleasant hotel on Djerba.

Day 7

Djerba – Douz

After breakfast we leave Djerba and head out into the desert proper. The Douz region, lying on the edge of the Sahara, is characterised by vast sand dunes, arid plains and scattered oases. Vegetation is sparse, consisting chiefly of date palms, drought-tolerant shrubs and small grasses. The oases provide vital water sources, supporting palm groves and small pockets of agriculture, while the surrounding desert is home to a variety of specially adapted reptiles, small mammals and insects. Orchids are not a feature of these desert landscapes, so today our focus shifts to the distinctive butterflies and dragonflies of this remarkable region. Among the butterflies we may encounter are Desert Orange Tip and Greenish Black-tip, while the Odonata may include Black Drop-wing, Sabine's Skimmer, Saddlebag Emperor and Desert Bluet.

For the birdwatchers in the group, the wide open desert plains may also reveal species such as Desert Lark, Bar-tailed Lark, Hoopoe Lark, Thick-billed Lark, Desert Wheatear, African Desert Warbler, Maghreb Wheatear and Red-tailed Wheatear.

Our hotel for the evening is in the evocative desert town of Douz.

Day 8

Douz

Today will be another day exploring the environs of the Sahara around Douz. Often referred to as the “Gateway to the Sahara”, Douz has a long and fascinating history shaped by its position on ancient trans-Saharan trade routes. For centuries it served as an important caravan stop, linking North Africa with regions far to the south, and the indigenous Berber communities — particularly the Mrazig tribe — were central to its development. Over time, Douz became well known for its date production and for its tradition of camel herding, both of which continue to characterise the town today.



Two-tailed Pasha

Butterflies and dragonflies will remain very much on our agenda, and we will be looking for species we may not yet have encountered. These could include Laing’s Short-tailed Blue, Sahara Blue, Little Tiger Blue, Sinai Darter and Kirby’s Dropwing. Birds will again be a feature, with desert species such as Brown-necked Raven, White-crowned Black Wheatear, Lilith’s Little Owl, Long-legged Buzzard and Lanner Falcon all possible.

We will spend a second night in Douz.

Day 9

Douz – Sfax



Red-veined Dropwing

After breakfast we begin our journey northwards, with our first stop being Bouhedma National Park. Located in central Tunisia, this important protected area was established in 1980 to conserve the semi-arid steppe ecosystem. Covering about 16,500 hectares, it comprises wide plains, acacia woodland and desert-like habitats. The park is home to several endangered antelope species — including Scimitar-horned Oryx, Addax and Dorcas

Gazelle — all of which have been reintroduced as part of long-running conservation programmes.

The flora is equally characteristic of the region, with native plants such as *Acacia raddiana* and *Ziziphus lotus* prominent across the landscape. Bouhedma supports a diverse community of birds, reptiles and mammals, and plays a crucial role in safeguarding Tunisia's steppe biodiversity.

This will also be our final opportunity to see any southern butterflies and dragonflies that we may have missed earlier in the tour. Resident birds here include Cream-coloured Courser and Barbary Partridge, alongside a good range of Mediterranean and steppe species.

After spending a few hours exploring the park, we continue north to our hotel in the attractive coastal town of Sfax, where we will spend the night.

Day 10

Sfax – Hammamet

After breakfast we continue our journey north, stopping first at the El Jem Amphitheatre. One of the best-preserved Roman monuments in the world and a UNESCO World Heritage Site, this remarkable structure dates from the 3rd century AD and could seat up to 35,000 spectators. Built entirely of stone, it stands as a testament to the scale and sophistication of Roman engineering. Once the setting for gladiatorial contests and public spectacles, the amphitheatre remains a powerful symbol of Tunisia's Roman heritage.

After lunch, we travel on to the Metbassta Wetlands. These wetlands support a rich diversity of dragonfly and butterfly species, their combination of freshwater, reedbeds and surrounding vegetation creating ideal conditions for a wide range of insects. They also host a wealth of Mediterranean wetland birds, adding further interest to our final afternoon in the field.

At the end of the day, we continue north to Hammamet, where we will enjoy our final dinner together at our pleasant hotel.

Day 11

Departure

After breakfast we will transfer to Tunis Airport for our flight back to the UK.

Tour Grading & Focus

Grade A – This is an easy to moderate tour. Walks are generally short and taken at a relaxed pace, though the terrain can at times be undulating and a little rough underfoot. While the tour is not demanding, an average level of fitness will help participants get the most from the holiday. There are some moderate driving distances, but these are broken by regular stops and the roads are generally reasonable. The focus throughout will be on orchids, butterflies and dragonflies.

Weather, Clothing & Equipment

We expect generally warm and sunny weather, with temperatures typically ranging from the high 20s to the low 30s degrees Celsius, although it can occasionally be warmer or cooler. Sunblock, sunglasses and a suitable hat are advisable. Rain is unlikely, though an occasional shower may occur, particularly in the coastal regions.

Accommodation and Food

We use comfortable tourist hotels, all of which offer rooms with private facilities. Breakfasts and evening meals are taken at the hotels 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 comfortable hotels and guest houses that includes breakfast and 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 in arranging extensions, should this be of interest. Please contact Dan Lay (Dan@naturetrek.co.uk or 01962 733051) for further information and/or make sure to stipulate any interest in a possible extension upon booking.

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 at the time of booking.

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