

Western Turkey - Birds, Flowers & History

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

Day 1	<u>Fly Izmir & transfer Kuşadası.</u>
Day 2	<u>Kuşadası.</u>
Day 3/4	<u>Lake Bafa.</u>
Day 5/6	<u>Denizli.</u>
Day 7	<u>Kuşadası.</u>
Day 8	<u>Fly London.</u>

Departs

April.

Focus

Birds, history and other wildlife.

Grading

Grade A - Easy to moderate day walks.

Dates and Prices

Visit www.naturetrek.co.uk (tour code TUR02) or view the current Naturetrek brochure.

Highlights:

- Enjoy a gentle-paced wildlife holiday focusing on birds and classical history.
- Eastern specialties including White-throated Robin, Finsch's Wheatear & Rüppell's Warbler.
- Visit Ephesus & Hierapolis, two of the world's best-preserved classical sites.
- Masked Shrike, Eastern Orphean Warbler, Krüper's Nuthatch & Red-fronted Serin.
- Explore the Dilek National Park overlooking the Aegean Sea.
- Led by expert naturalist guides.



*From top: Krüper's Nuthatch, Ephesus & Rüppell's Warbler
Images by Geoff Carr, Paul Stanbury & Peter Dunn*



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Introduction

By any criterion, Turkey is a remarkable country. Standing at the cross-roads between Europe, Asia and Africa, it has always occupied a position of global importance and, for over a thousand years, was the heartland of the mighty Eastern Roman Byzantine Empire which was administrated from the magnificent capital city of Constantinople, known today as Istanbul. Later it became the centre of the Ottoman Empire which extended beyond the Mediterranean into North Africa and Arabia and lasted for over 500 years until the foundations of modern Turkey were laid down at the beginning of the 20th Century. Archaeological remains of this colourful history are found throughout the country and included in this Naturetrek tour will be visits to Ephesus and Hierapolis, two of the best preserved classical sites in the world!

Turkey is also a wonderful destination for the naturalist, especially in the spring. By mid April the stream of migrant birds arriving from Africa has grown into a veritable flood, bringing shrikes – including Masked Shrike – to adorn roadside telephone wires and filling the air with the song of countless Nightingales and warblers. Coastal lagoons are crowded with flamingoes, pelicans, terns and waders, whilst the mountain forests echo to the distinctive nasal call of the Krüper's Nuthatch. Throughout the countryside of western Turkey nature celebrates the new season with vivid displays of colour provided by the plumages of Bee-eaters, Rollers and Hoopoes and the profusion of anemones, buttercups, orchids and other wild flowers transforming the meadows with the brightness of their blooms.

Itinerary

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.

Day 1

Kuşadası

We depart London's Gatwick Airport around 0530 hours on a direct Easyjet service to Izmir - the third largest city in Turkey - arriving late morning. On arrival we will meet our local guide and head straight into the field so keep your binoculars handy! Birds to look out for include Pallid and Alpine Swifts, Red-rumped Swallow, Serin and Spanish Sparrow. Krüper's Nuthatch also lives in the pine-clad hillsides surrounding the city and this will be our first opportunity to look for this sought after species (Krüper's Nuthatch can also be found on Mount Honaz which we will visit near the end of the tour!). Later in the afternoon we will drive south to our base for the next two nights in the coastal town of Kuşadası, a journey for around an hour and a half.

Day 2

Kuşadası

This morning we head south to explore the Dilek National Park on the Aegean coast opposite the Greek island of Samos. Comprising rocky outcrops, scrub-covered hills, canyons and pine forests, the Dilek National Park is a haven for wildlife and also very rich botanically. It was one of the last refuges of the now extinct Anatolian Leopard and looking up at the crags it is easy to imagine one of these attractive cats soaking up the sun on a convenient ledge! Sadly, the leopards are now long gone, but larger mammals can still be found in the shape of

Wild Boar which root for food in the forests. Raptors soaring over the hills may include resident Bonelli's Eagles and Peregrines as well as visiting Eleonora's Falcons and perhaps other migrants such as Lesser Spotted Eagle, Black Kite and Hobby. Subalpine, Rüppell's and Eastern Orphee Warblers sing side by side from the low scrub covering the lower hill slopes whilst Western Rock Nuthatches noisily scold from their boulder strewn haunts.

After lunch, we will visit Ephesus, the most famous and best-preserved archaeological site in Turkey. Once the Roman capital of Asia, Ephesus had a population of over 200,000 by the first Century AD at which time it offered mariners the shelter of a harbour and the important commodity of a fresh water spring. Over subsequent centuries of colourful, and often blood-soaked, history the status of the city ebbed and waned but the eventual silting of the harbour lessened its importance and this once proud capital reverted to being an insignificant village by the time of the Byzantine Empire and was then finally abandoned. Today, the ruins of Ephesus attract thousands of visitors annually as it is one of the few ancient cities where you can feel the daily life of the past while strolling through its streets, houses, shops and fountains. There is much to see including the biggest amphitheatre in Asia with capacity for over 24,000, and the remains of the Temple of Artemis.

Later we conclude our visit to Ephesus with a look at a nearby wetland. Here we will turn our attention back to the wildlife and continue the daily theme of this tour by combining natural history with regular opportunities to glimpse the colourful past of Empires which for so long dominated Mediterranean Europe and the region of Asia Minor.

Day 3

Lake Bafa

This morning we drive to the bird rich shores of Lake Bafa, a journey of a couple of hours. We then have the rest of the day to explore the lake and its surroundings; blending a little sightseeing with visits to wetland areas. Beginning at Karina Golu and the Karina Fish Ponds we should find large numbers of egrets and herons, with perhaps White Pelicans too. A variety of waders should be present around the muddy margins including noisy pairs of Spur-winged Plovers and perhaps a few migrants such as Little Stint and Marsh Sandpiper. The Miletos Ponds offer further opportunities to see water birds plus an interesting wetland flora.

Later in the afternoon we will make our way to the ancient Greek city of Priene. Dating from either the 6th or 11th Century B.C., depending on historical authority, the city was originally part of the Ionian empire but later came under Lydian rule and was conquered by the invading Persian army in 494B.C. The buildings were completely destroyed by the Persian Commander Darius as punishment for resistance, but the city was rebuilt in 350 B.C. The following centuries saw periods of prosperity for Priene, and a succession of changes in rule but geographical separation from the sea led to a gradual diminution in importance and by the time it was captured by the Turks in the 14th Century it had become little more than an insignificant village. Built at the foot of a great rock cliff, the remains of the city are regarded as one of the best examples of the grid type of town planning associated with the name of Hippodamos.

After a full day enjoying the bird, botanical and archaeological delights of this region we will check into our comfortable, but simple, hotel set in an olive groves and overlooking Lake Bafa itself.

Day 4

Lake Bafa

Today we will continue our exploration of the Menderes Delta and Lake Bafa region and - as per previous days - mix birds and botany with a little history. This is superb area for birds including Pygmy Cormorant, White Pelican, Dalmatian Pelican, White-winged Tern, Squacco Heron, Little Bittern, Ferruginous Duck and Black-winged Stilt. Overhead hunt Long-legged Buzzards and Red-footed Falcons, whilst the rocky islands are home to breeding Ruddy Shelduck. We will also spend time seeking and appreciating some of the characteristic birds of the surrounding dry countryside such as Masked Shrike, Rüppell's Warbler, Sardinian Warbler, Eastern Olivaceous Warbler, Isabelline Wheatear and the shy Olive-tree Warbler.

Close to Latmos is the ancient site of Heraklea, former capital of Linkestisa, which was once an important military and strategic centre. Our local guide will fill in some of the historical background as we briefly divert from the natural history to see more of the splendours of bygone days. Finally we return to our hotel for a second night in the area.

Day 5

Denizli

Today we leave the Menderes Delta and Lake Bafa region and follow the Maeander River to the town of Denizli, high on the Anatolian plateau at around 1,000 metres. From here we visit the ancient city of Hierapolis, a World Heritage Site which sits atop an area of geothermal hot springs and the terraced white calcium cliffs of Pamukkale (the 'Cotton Castle'). Hierapolis was founded as a thermal spa early in the 2nd Century AD and today is one of the best preserved classical cities in all of Turkey. The large necropolis is filled with sarcophagi of various shapes, decorations and of different periods.

The surrounding dry scrubby bushland and rocky hillsides are home to an interesting variety of birds including the localised Finch's Wheatear, a species at the very western limit of its range. Red-billed Choughs glide along the rocky crags, whilst overhead we should keep our eyes open for Griffon, Black and Egyptian Vultures. Nearer ground level we will also look for Chukar, Cretschmar's Bunting, Calandra Lark, Lesser Short-toed Lark, Bee-eater, Black-eared Wheatear and Rock Sparrow. After another full day in the field we will retire to a comfortable spa hotel near Denizli, our base for the final 2 nights of the tour.

Day 6

Denizli

We will use today to explore the two locally contrasting sites, the saline waters of Lake Acıgöl and the freshwater habitats around Işıklı Gölü. Lake Acıgöl is surrounded by extensive Central Anatolian steppe and steep limestone hills. Few species such as Greater Flamingo, Slender-billed Gull and Avocet can tolerate the lake's extremely saline waters, but freshwater springs in the foothills attract a much wider variety of species and plenty of passage migrants. The rocky juniper-dotted scrub that cloths these foothills are also home to noisy flocks of Alpine Swifts, plus Western Rock Nuthatch, Rüppell's Warbler, Eastern Orphean Warbler, Rock Bunting, Red-fronted Serin, Cirl Bunting and the enigmatic White-throated Robin.

Later, we will shift to the freshwater lake Işıklı Gölü, the birthplace of river Meander. The lake is surrounded by high mountains and extensive reedbeds, and floating waterlilies. Whiskered Tern, Little Bittern and Night Heron breed here, whilst the surrounding juniper scrubland is home to Finch's Weather, White-throated Robin, Eastern

Orphean and Rüppell's Warblers. At the end of another exciting day, we return back to our hotel near Denizli for our final night in Turkey.

Day 7

Kuşadası

We will spend this morning exploring the various altitudes on the drive up Mount Honaz, the centre piece of Mount Honaz National Park. The foothills of this 2,500 metre high mountain are covered with extensive tracts of Turkish (Calabrian) Pine, home for Krüper's Nuthatch, amongst others. As we ascend, the vegetation - and associated birdlife - gradually changes until we reach the barren upper slopes, clothed in an alpine flora and home to Snowfinch, Horned Lark (of the Anatolian subspecies), Red-fronted Serin and Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush.

Following lunch we will start the drive back towards Izmir stopping returning to Kusadası for our final night in Turkey. There should be time to break the journey with a couple of birdwatching stops enroute and we aim to arrive back at our comfortable hotel late in the afternoon.

Day 8

London

Following breakfast we must complete the drive back to Izmir, a journey of around an hour and a half. Our flight is scheduled to depart around midday hours and is due into London's Gatwick Airport around 1400 hours.

Grading

Grade A - Easy to moderately strenuous. Terrain is generally undulating in nature and a little rough in places. Whilst this is not a difficult tour an average level of fitness is required to get the most out of the holiday.

Accommodation and food

At Kuşadası and Denizli we use modern 3-star tourist hotels, all rooms having private facilities. At Lake Bafa we use a smaller family run hotel on the shores of the lake; rooms are simple and basic in nature but all have private facilities. Due to a lack of suitable rural accommodation in western Turkey, the hotels we use for this tour are generally located within the towns, but within easy reach of the wildlife and historical sites. As outlined above the hotel at Lake Bafa is surrounded by an olive grove and is close to the shores of the lake.

Breakfasts and evening meals are included in the holiday cost, but lunches are not included; please allow £5-£10 per day for lunches.

Please note that the accommodation outlined above may - very occasionally - need to be amended. Replacement hotels will always be of the same standard as the ones outlined in the itinerary and will in no way affect your holiday. Should we have to implement any changes to the above we will notify you as soon as possible.

Weather

We expect generally warm and sunny weather, with temperatures in the low to mid 20s degrees C (occasionally warmer/colder). It is likely to be but cooler in Denizli, however, where warmer clothing may be needed at the higher elevations. The occasional rain shower or wet day is possible and should be packed for.

Tour focus

The primary focus of this holiday will be Western Turkey's varied birdlife and interesting history. Whilst other aspects of the region's wildlife - such as flowers, insects and reptiles etc - will also be looked for and enjoyed, your tour leaders' expertise in these fields is likely to be somewhat more limited.

Your safety & security

You have chosen to travel to Turkey. 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 – www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/turkey or telephone 0870 6060290 prior to travel.

How to book your place

In order to book a place on this holiday, you will need to read our main Naturetrek brochure and complete and return the enclosed booking form together with a deposit of 20% of the holiday cost. If you do not have a copy of this brochure, please call us now on 01962 733051. Alternatively you are welcome to book on the internet by visiting www.naturetrek.co.uk, or telephone us and make a booking with a credit or debit card.

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