

Western Turkey – Wildlife & History

Naturetrek Itinerary

Outline itinerary

Day 1	Fly Izmir & transfer Selcuk
Day 2	Selcuk
Day 3/4	Lake Bafa
Day 5/6	Denizli
Day 7	Selcuk
Day 8	Fly London

Departs

April.

Focus

Wildlife and History

Grading

Grade A – Easy to moderate day walks.

Dates and Prices

Visit www.naturetrek.co.uk (tour code TUR02).

Highlights:

- Enjoy a gentle-paced wildlife holiday focusing on the wildlife and classical history of the region.
- 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 Orphee Warbler, Krüper's Nuthatch & Red-fronted Serin.
- Explore the Dilek National Park & the freshwater marshes of Lake Bafa.
- Led by expert naturalist guides.



From top: White-throated Robin, Ephesus & Rüppell's Warbler



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Introduction

By any criterion, Turkey is a remarkable country. Standing at the cross-roads of 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 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

Selcuk

We depart London on a direct service to Izmir, the third largest city in Turkey. On arrival we will meet our local guide and – if time permits – will 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 Selcuk, a journey for around an hour and a half.



Krüper's Nuthatch

Day 2

Selcuk

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 very rich botanically too. 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 impressive 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 Orphean 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 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 350B.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 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



Masked Shrike

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

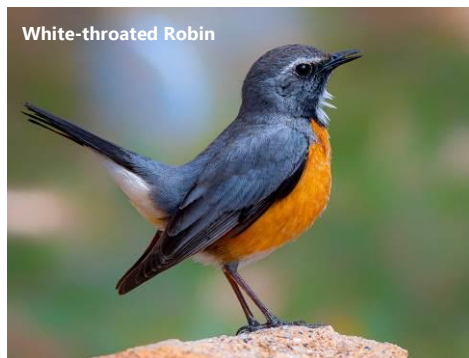
Today we leave the Menderes Delta and Lake Bafa region and follow the Maeander River to the town of Denizli, high on the Anatolian plateau at around 1,000 metres. From here we visit the ancient city of Hierapolis, a World Heritage Site which sits atop an area of geothermal hot springs and the terraced 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, Cretzschmar'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 next two 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.

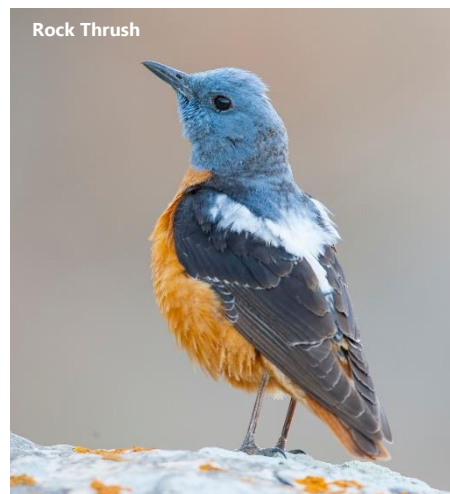
Later, we will shift to the freshwater lake Işıklı Gölü, the birthplace of river Meander. The lake is surrounded by high mountains and extensive reedbeds, and floating waterlilies. Whiskered Tern, Little Bittern and Night Heron breed here, whilst the surrounding juniper scrubland is home to Finch's Weather,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

Day 7

Selcuk

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 to 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 our drive back towards Izmir stopping once again in Selcuk 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 one and a half hours. Depending on the time of our return flight to London we may be able to stop for some final birding en route.

Grading

Grade A – Easy to moderately strenuous. The 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 Selcuk and Denizli we use modern 3-star tourist hotels, all rooms having private facilities. At Lake Bafa we use a smaller, family run, guesthouse 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 taken at the hotels and are included in the holiday cost, but lunches are not included; please allow £15 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 will be needed at the higher elevations such as Mount Honaz. 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 wildlife and fascinating history. The region's botany will be enjoyed but your tour leaders' expertise in this field is likely to be more limited.

How to book your place

In order to book a place on this holiday, you will need to read the Naturetrek terms and conditions in the back of our brochure or on our website, and then book either online at www.naturetrek.co.uk, by calling us on 01962 733051, or by completing and returning the booking form in the brochure together with a deposit of 20% of the holiday cost. If you do not have a copy of this brochure, please call us on 01962 733051.

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