

Orchid Odyssey

Enjoy the beauty of Greece in spring with a relaxing week discovering the richness of Orchids and other flora of Rhodes!

Holiday focus

Orchids, plus other flora & spring wildlife

Dates

7th April – 14th April 2015

Price

£1,195 per person (no single supplement)

Highlights

- 40+ Orchid species & lots more flora
- Numerous Ophrys species such as mammosa, regis-fernandii, cretica ssp. beloniae, candica, colossaeae, rhodia & lots more!
- Rare & endemic flowers such as the Rhodes Peony & Fritillary
- Beautiful & diverse scenery & wildlife to be found on a Greek island in spring!

Outline Itinerary

Day 1 Arrival in Rhodes & transfer to hotel

Day 2-7 Exploration of the island

Day 8 Transfer to airport for departure



10% of holiday profits are donated to wildlife charities!

Introduction

Greece is a botanist's paradise. There are around 6,000 plant species and as a small Country it is fair



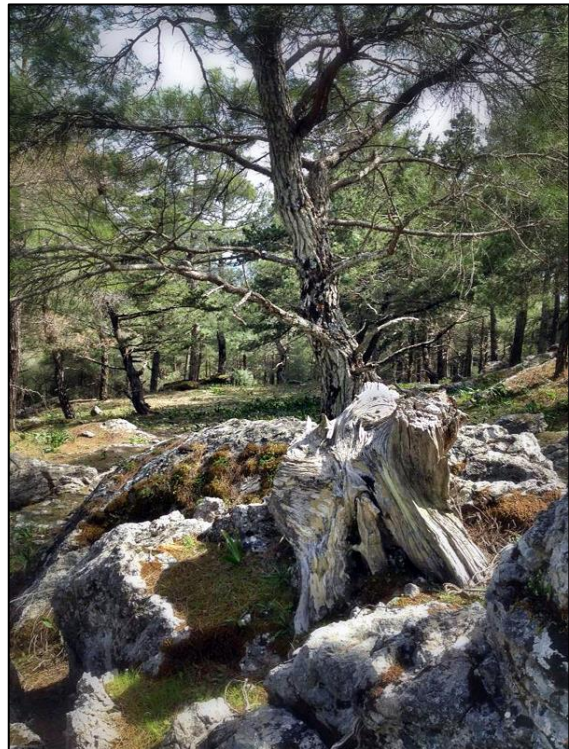
to say that for its area it has more species of wildflower than anywhere else in Europe! On top of that, more than 700 species are endemic to Greece. This degree of endemism makes it almost unique in Europe, with only southern Spain coming close.

In Greek mythology the island of Rhodes belonged to Helios (God of the Sun). Helios requested from Zeus and the other Gods for any land that was to rise from the sea to become his. As he spoke a beautiful island slowly emerged

from the bottom of the blue sea, Rhodes. Helios bathed Rhodes with his own radiance and made it the most beautiful island in the Aegean Sea. Indeed, it is blessed with over 300 days of sunshine a year and spring is a wonderful time to appreciate the natural beauty of this jewel in the Aegean!

Rhodes, the capital of the Dodecanese group of islands in Greece, is situated just off the coast of east Turkey. Therefore, it is blessed with an interesting mixture of east Mediterranean and Asian flora and fauna. Although the island is a popular destination for sun and beach loving tourists, there is much natural beauty to discover, if one takes the time! The island is blessed with 1,500 recorded plant species, including well over 50 species of Orchid - an impressive list for an island only 80km long and 30km at its widest point.

Rhodes has many varied biotopes, a factor in the distribution of Orchids on the island, including significant coverage of Pine forest and phrygana. It is one of the best Greek islands for orchids, with a large list of diverse and interesting species, particularly in the genus *Ophrys*. A visit in spring means meadows ablaze with flowers and alive to the tune of insects and the fluttering of butterflies. The forest floors are also decorated with a dazzling display of Orchids and other flowers. The wildlife and warm weather form a winning combination for a relaxing week of botany. We will of course look at anything else of interest, be it birds, butterflies, or anything else that catches our eye!



Our base for the week will be a stunning mountain retreat, surrounded by a rare and uniquely pristine Cypress & Pine forest. From here we'll embark on daily adventures around the island, followed by relaxing evening meals at our hotel and also in traditional village tavernas, serving only the best quality locally sourced and prepared Rhodian cuisine.

We will find orchids in a variety of habitats including old Olive groves, phrygana, river edges and forested mountain slopes. In the company of Yiannis, our expert botanist, we will tour many parts of the island. Yiannis will lead us to hidden glades and secret corners to show us as many different species as possible. We will of course be looking for some of the local specialities, such as the Colossus Orchid and King Ferdinand's Orchid, also known as the Earwig Orchid. The island has over 40 *Ophrys* species recorded, including several endemics.



The topography of Rhodes can best be described as moderately hilly, with the highest mountain, Attavyros, reaching 1,215m. During our week on Rhodes we'll climb to between 600-800m, where there are some fantastically rich floristic areas to explore and the plants to discover include some Rhodes specialities! The Rhodes Paeony **Paeonia clusii rhodia**, a strikingly beautiful rare and endemic white flowered Peony is one such plant. The perfume from its blooms fills the forest air and it really is a treat for the senses! Another is the Rhodes Fritillary **Fritillaria rhodia**, an elegant and delicate endemic species that favours Pine forest. Beneath large, old and gnarled Cypress trees, the forest floor is also carpeted with delicate endemic

Cyclamens **Cyclamen rhodia**. On the limestone cliffs of Mount Attavyros we'll also see the fascinating Star Thistle **Centaurea lactucifolia**, endemic to Rhodes and nearby Halki Island. The striking flowers are used by locals for both decorative and culinary purposes.

We hope to welcome you on what will be a relaxing week at a wonderful time of year to enjoy orchids and the other fascinating flora and fauna that the island has to offer!

Holiday Itinerary

Day 1

On arrival at Rhodes Airport you will be met by your English speaking guide, who will accompany you throughout the trip. From the airport we head south towards our base for the week. Depending on your arrival time we may make one or two stops on our journey to view our first orchids, or to look at any other wildlife of interest. We will be staying at an excellent hotel amongst the picturesque and very atmospheric forested slopes of one of the island's three mountains.

Day 2

Our first full day will focus on exploring our immediate surroundings and it will not be long before we are amongst a wealth of orchids and other interesting flora upon what is a beautiful and ancient forested mountain. As we tread carefully through seas of **Cyclamen rhodia** and **Anemone blanda** our eyes will be drawn to the orchids in between. Species to see include **Ophrys reinholdii**, **Ophrys ferum equinum**, **Ophrys polyxo**, **Anacamptis papilionacea**, **Orchis anatolica**, **Orchis provincialis**, **Orchis italica** and **Ophrys umbilicata ssp. rhodia**, a member of the *Ophrys umbilicata* group with green sepals.

We'll take a break from orchid spotting to enjoy a freshly prepared picnic lunch. We'll either rest in a forest glade or take our leisure time in a nearby village, next to an impressive Italian made fountain. The fountain is home to some of the island's endemic freshwater **Gizani fish** (which always appreciate some bread from visitors!). Our lunch will include some traditional and homemade snacks such as dolmathes (stuffed vine leaves) tiropita (cheese pies) and pitaroudia (chickpea fritters) – plus the classic Greek village salad topped with delicious and fresh Feta cheese and oregano!



Our day will be enhanced by searching for the beautiful and endemic white-flowered **Rhodes Paeony** and if we find it in good flower we'll be rewarded by its sweet perfume filling the forest air! As the

day goes on we should get closer views of the aptly named **Eastern Festoon** butterflies, roosting in curious formations as they do on the stems of the *Asphodel* flowers, upon which they had earlier been busily nectaring from.

Day 3

Today we will venture further afield and head to the lowlands to visit some different habitats and look for more orchid species. We'll split our time between forested slopes first and then the more open, hotter and drier phrygana and olive groves.



One of the first orchids we hope to see will be **Ophrys mammosa** or Breasted Ophrys. On the surrounding thorny Genistas, pink **Cistus cretica** and also on the Small-flowered Rockrose **Cistus parviflorus** we could see **Green-underside Blue**, **Eastern Baton Blue** and **Green Hairstreak**, butterflies, nectaring on the abundant **Small-fruited Asphodel**. Further orchid treats in this area include **Limodorum abortivum** and **Ophrys bombyliflora**.

In sunlit olive groves we'll look for the large **Serapias carica** and we should also see some of our first **Anacamptis fragrans**. At this time of year glorious magenta coloured *Gladiolus* **Gladiolus italicus** can also be seen in groves and nearby agricultural fields. We should also be able to find *Ophrys* **attaviria**, **Ophrys blitotherpa**, **Ophrys polyxo**, **Anacamptis pyramidalis**, **Ophrys sicula** and **Ophrys phrygana**, amongst others.

To finish the day we'll look for one of the rarest and most beautiful orchids, a subspecies of the Cretan Bee Orchid **Ophrys cretica ssp. beloniae**, which on Rhodes can only be found in the southern half of the island. In addition we will aim to show you King Ferdinand's Orchid **Ophrys regis-ferdinandii**, also called the Earwig Orchid on account of its similarity to an Earwig.

Day 4

We head to the highest mountain on Rhodes today, Mount Attaviros, with a peak of 1,215 metres. In Greek mythology Althaemenes (son of Catreus, king of Crete) founded an altar to Zeus on the mountain. He was said to have chosen the site as the only point on Rhodes from which his homeland of Crete could be seen. The remains of the sanctuary can be seen near the summit. Upon the mountain there were, it is said, brazen bulls which roared when anything extraordinary was going to happen – we must listen out for them during our visit!

In some of the foothills we'll look for large Aegean Butterfly Orchids, **Anacamptis papilionacea ssp. heroica**, Horseshoe Orchids **Ophrys ferrum-equinum**, **Ophrys regis-ferinandii** and **Anacamptis pyramidalis**. We may also be fortunate to find some late flowering examples of **Ophrys speculum**. These sites are usually a good place to see **Black-veined white** and **Cleopatra** butterflies too, which are an endemic subspecies **Cleopatra ssp. fiori**.



As we climb higher we should be able to locate good numbers of Enamel Bee Orchids **Ophrys**

candica, **Orchis anatolica**, **Ophrys omegaifera ssp. omegaifera**, **Neotinea maculata** and **Ophrys reinholdii** amongst the **Pinus brutia** dominated forest. Higher still and above the tree line we'll look for Shadow Bee Orchid **Ophrys fusca ssp. cinereophila**, **Neotinea lactea** and **Orchis fragrans**. And who knows what other surprise finds our exploration of the mountain may turn up!

After a picnic lunch spent on the mountain we'll venture to some sites in and around some of the traditional villages in this part of the island. Fantastic honey is produced in these places and we may stop to sample Pine, Thyme and Heather types. There are some fantastic flowers to see, such as the rare and endemic Star Thistle **Centaurea lactucifolia** and the Large Rhodian Bellflower **Campanula hagiela**, with its beautiful violet flowers.

Day 5

We start the day a little early, in order to fit in some bird watching with our botanising. At a wide river mouth, adjacent fields and beach we'll look out for, amongst others, **Crested Lark**, **Bee-eater**, **Corn Bunting**, **Woodchat Shrike**, **Spanish Sparrow**, **Alpine Swift**, **Wood Sandpiper**, **Little-ringed Plover**, **Stone Curlew**, **Marsh Harrier**, **Long-legged Buzzard**, **Glossy Ibis**, **Black-crowned Night Heron** and **Squacco Heron**.



We'll also visit a **Lesser Kestrel** colony, where we get fantastic and quite unique views of these beautiful birds. To watch their aerial displays accompanied by those of **Alpine**, **Pallid** and **Common Swift** is a real spectacle! We should also be able to spot **Blue Rock Thrush**.

One of our main orchid targets will be the Colossal Bee Orchid **Ophrys holserica ssp. collosaea**. It is a tall and robust species, coming in a variety of forms and living up to their name, which is taken from the somewhat mythical statue of the Colossus of Rhodes. In addition we should see **Ophrys umbilicata ssp. rhodia**, **Serapias bergonii**, **Ophrys mammosa** and **Ophrys Calypso**. We may also find some of the first Holy Orchid **Anacamptis sancta** of the season in flower too. Whilst we're focusing at the ground level we may also be able to see some of the island's numerous reptile species, including **Snake-eyed Lizard**, **Ocellated Skink** and **Snake-eyed skink**.

Day 6

We head south and east today, to areas in central Rhodes. In addition to several hidden glades we'll visit the largest freshwater lake on the island, for a day of botany and birds, and to enjoy whatever other wildlife we can find. One special orchid for the day is a red variety of the Violet Limadore **Limodorum abortivum var. rubrum**. In addition we should find numerous other orchids, such as **Orchis italica**, **Ophrys candica**, **Ophrys sicula**, **Ophrys ferrum-equinum** and **Ophrys bombyliflora**. At one fine spot we should enjoy a profusion of **Anacamptis laxiflora**, accompanied by similarly good numbers of **Ophrys polyxo** and **Serapias bergonii**. We'll finish the day with a meal in one of the areas traditional village tavernas.



Day 7

For our last full day we'll spend more time in the mountainous areas, searching new spots for orchids we may not have seen already and revisiting sites to check for fresh flowers and

photography opportunities. Orchid species we may be able to add if not already seen during the rest of the week may include **Orchis anthropophora**, **Anacamptis morio ssp. picta** and **Ophrys oreas**. If we have time available later we may also fit in a visit to an archaeological site or to the imposing medieval old town of Rhodes, one of the finest and still inhabited medieval towns in Europe and designated as a World Heritage Site.

Day 8

Today we travel to Rhodes airport for our flight home. Depending on the flight schedule we may be able to make some final excursions; to revisit favourite locations or to explore one or two new sites.

Further information & booking

Phone us on 01473 436096 or visit our website at www.greenwings.co for more information about this or any of our other holidays. You can also email us at enquiries@greenwings.co

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