

The Island of Samos

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

2010

Outline itinerary

Day 1	Depart London for Samos
Day 2/8	A daily programme of botanical and natural history walks from our base in Karlovassi
Day 9	Fly London

Dates

Friday 23rd April – Saturday 1st May 2010

Cost

£1,195 (London/London); £1,075 (Samos/Samos)

Single room supplement

£130

Grading

Day walks only. Grade A/B

Focus

Plants, birds, butterflies and other insects



Monkey Orchids



Beach at Megalo



Agami Lizard



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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.

Introduction

Samos is one of the Sporades in the eastern Aegean Sea, separated by a one-mile strait from Turkey and the ancient site of Ephesus. Samos also has a long history and was the birthplace of the astronomer Aristarchus, one of the first to suggest that the Earth moved around the sun, and of Pythagorus, whose home town is now called Pythagorion.

Near Pythagorion are the ruins of the Temple of Hera, the largest Greek temple ever built and therefore one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. Samos was the reputed birthplace of Hera and the location of her wedding to Zeus. Their wedding night apparently lasted for three hundred years but we will not be staying for so long!

We will be based at Karlovassi, a harbour town towards the western end of the north coast of the island. This is an excellent base for easy walking along this unspoilt coast and a good centre for our other explorations. Samos has much to offer all year round as spring starts early and autumn produces a marvellous flush of late-flowering bulbs, but we have chosen late April as the best time for the later spring flowers and bird migration and the showy insects should also be active. Although a popular island for walking it does not appear to have been well studied by naturalists, so we have the opportunity to make new discoveries. It lies on the same migration route as Lesbos, which is now well-known for its passage birds. Samos is more mountainous and wooded, so offers a much wider range of habitats for resident and other breeding birds, but more cover for the migrants so they may not be so obvious. However the greater variety of other animals and plants more than compensates.

With our transport we will be able to explore the whole island and also visit some of the ancient sites around Pythagorion which, as in the rest of Greece, are surrounded by flowers.

Day 1

Saturday

In Flight

We will commence our tour by flying from London to Samos, using the overnight scheduled services of Olympic Airlines from Heathrow via Athens. This is the only way to reach Samos at this time of year.

Day 2

Sunday

Karlovassi

On arrival we will drive across the island to our base in Karlovassi, a small, pleasant, family-run hotel.

After a period for rest and relaxation after our journey, our exploration of Samos will start with a visit to a small marsh with Giant Reed, which is home to dragonflies and damselflies and gives shelter to warblers, such as Cetti's and Savi's. The shore has Horned Poppies and *Convolvulus althaeoides* and perhaps some passage waders; out to sea could be shearwaters and even Storm Petrel. We return along the coastal road and past the harbour.

Day 3**Monday**

Karlovassi

Today we will walk on the edge of the Ambelos range around the villages of Ydroussa and Kondeika, a short drive from Karlovassi. This will be easy walking through varied habitats, along tracks and crossing streams encouraging a good range of flora and attractive insects, with butterflies as well as dragonflies being present. Woods will have Cretan Maple and Storax, together with Carob and Mastic, the spiny *Genista acanthoclada* and Rosemary will be in the more open areas. Other plants should include the very showy *Paeonia mascula*, as well as large numbers of Scilla and Anemone. The orchids, *Orchis anatolica*, *Epipactis helleborine* and *Neotinea maculata* could also be found. This is again the habitat of Nightingales, whose song should be very obvious, louder than that of the Ruppell's Warbler and more tuneful than the Sardinian Warbler's scolding, other residents which also occur here. We will also need to continue to check for passage migrants, though the flocks of Bee-eaters are often obvious. Birds of prey, particularly Honey Buzzard and Short-toed Eagle should be breeding here. After our picnic lunch we should have the chance of seeing the afternoon-flowering Barbary Nut (*Gynandris sisyinchium*). Throughout the day we will have changing views of the Kerkis range and across the whole island from coast to coast.

Day 4**Tuesday**

Karlovassi

This morning, a very scenic journey past roadside stalls of produce and honey-sellers takes us to the south-eastern corner of the island, Psili Ammos. Here a seasonal lake is home to a flock of Flamingos which are usually accompanied by Little Bittern, Cattle Egret, Ruddy Shelduck and many passage migrants, especially waders and crakes. As this is the main expanse of water on the island virtually anything can turn up; a White-breasted Kingfisher has even been recorded from here.

Plants will again be abundant and will include further orchids, such as Horned Woodcock, Pyramidal and laxiflora. We will also have the opportunity to visit the ancient ruins around Pythagorion - the defensive walls of the Acropolis, a tunnel which brought fresh water from the Ambelos Mountains and the Temple of Hera. Plants of these sites include i (Crown Daisy), *C. segetum*, *Allium roseum* (Rosy Garlic), *Iris ochroleuca*, *Hyoscamus aureus* and Chaste Tree. Later in the afternoon, there are other ponds near the airport which are worth checking before our return journey.

Day 5**Wednesday**

Karlovassi

We will have a complete change of habitat today as we walk up to the summit of Karvouni at 1,140 metres. We drive first to the village of Pandrosos and then start off through phrygana with Spanish Broom and Genista towards woods with the local hawthorns (*Crataegus monogyna* ssp. *azarella* and *C. pentagyna*) and *Prunus cocomilia*. We then enter pine forest (including *P. brutia*) where we will look out for Sombre Tits and Chukar. Orchids here include *Orchis mascula* ssp. *pinetum*, *O. tridentata*, *Dactylorhiza romana*, *Violet Limodore* and Late Spider. The forest leads to the open summit plateau with stunted plants clinging to the cracks in the rocks, a very different flora from the Eastern Mediterranean plants we have previously enjoyed. These alpine flowers have the typical intense colours of mountain plants and are endemic or local species, especially of Veronica, Geranium, Erodium, Stonecrop and

Saxifrage, (*Sedum tenuifolium*, *laconicum* and *hispanicum* as well as *Saxifraga sibirica*, *graeca* and *hederacea* are all reported from around here). Birds here include Buzzard, Honey Buzzard, Short-toed Eagle, Goshawk and also Lanner.

Again we will have wide views across to the Kerkis range, with the peak of Vigla as the highest point of the island at 1,440 metres. We will have to drag ourselves away to return to our transport for our journey back to our hotel.

Day 6

Thursday

Karlovassi

We now travel over the island's central ridge and back to the south coast at Marathokambos Bay and the foothills of Vigla, the highest peak of Samos. The extensive beach should produce typical Mediterranean shore plants including *Convolvulus althaeoides* and *Anthemis cretica*, and it provides a resting and feeding place for migrant birds. A little further inland suitable conditions favour the Mirror Orchid (*Ophrys speculum*) and species of *Serapias* orchids can occur in large sheets. The phrygana has *Lonicera etrusca* and the Sloe is the eastern subspecies *dasyphylla*. A scenic road with views to the neighbouring islands of Fournoi and Ikaria takes us around the south-eastern corner of the island through rich scrub to extensive pine forests. We should continue to find new plants, such as Honeywort, Sawfly Orchid and *Orchis fragrans*. Black-headed Buntings, typical Balkan and eastern birds, are found here as are Long-legged Buzzard and Bonelli's Eagle.

Day 7

Friday

Karlovassi

For our last day we will return to the spectacular wild coast near Karlovassi and drive to Potami beach. We will then continue the walk along the coastal path through holly oak and pine woods, scrub and old orchards to the secluded bays of Mikro and Megalo Seitani to search out any plants or other creatures which may have eluded us so far, or perhaps even to have a swim! Here we are truly in the wilds as this part of the island is extremely remote. After Potami we have to rely on this path as there are no villages or roads. The coastline with its two secluded bays ranks amongst the finest in the Mediterranean. This remoteness is appreciated by the wildlife; the woods and scrub hold several bird species, Black-headed Buntings are found here as are Black-eared Wheatears, Rock Bunting, finches, warblers and tits. Reptiles include chameleons and the rare Mediterranean Monk Seal has also been seen here. Out to sea we will look for Cory's and Mediterranean Shearwaters and will continue to check for migrant birds. The varied habitats should provide new plants such as Sword-leaved Helleborine, *Orchis italica*, Dragon Arum, *Helichrysum stoechas*, *H. orientale* and *Sedum littoreum*. All this should provide a fitting climax to our week on Samos.

Day 8

Saturday

Karlovassi

Our last full day on Samos will be spent according to weather conditions and what we have seen thus far. We may make the gentle climb up to Old Karlovassi. The valley here holds Nightingales and in spring the bright red lattice of the fungus *Clathrus ruber* can be found. A good path then takes us over the rocky headland which is covered with a typical scrub, here known as phrygana, of *Cistus* (*C. parviflorus* as well as *C. incanus*) with orchids, *Gladiolus* and festoons of *Smilax aspera* providing cover for birds such as Blue Rock Thrush and the black-headed (*feldegg*) race of the Yellow Wagtail. *Cyclamen persicum* could still be present with dwarf Star-of-Bethlehem (*Ornithogalum nanum*). The path drops down towards a ruined castle and a taverna or two. Viticulture is a major industry of the island and

is claimed to have been taught to the old Samians by Dionysos, the god of wine, himself. The local Retsinas are well worth trying during our visit!

Day 9

Sunday

London

We must now return to the airport for our flight back to London, although a glance at the map will show that there still remains quite a bit of the island unexplored. A reason to return!

Trek grading

On this holiday we will be based in the one hotel on Samos. We will explore the varied habitats of this scenic and still unspoilt island to search out the wide range of wildlife. Our pace will be gentle to allow us to take a close look at the plants, birds and insects and other subjects of interest. We will generally be keeping to tracks and way-marked footpaths.

Weather

We have chosen this period as the best time for the flowering plants, the bird migration should be continuing, resident and breeding birds will be marking-out their territories and insects should be very obvious. The weather should have settled down but even in the Mediterranean we should be prepared for some variable weather.

Food and accommodation

All food and accommodation is included in the price of this holiday.

Flights

If you do not like the idea of overnight flights to Samos, it is possible to take a day time flight to Athens, spend the night in a hotel, and then continue on to Samos the next morning. If you would like a quote for this, please ask.

Plant, bird & mammal lists

These are automatically provided on booking, where available, but will gladly be sent to you before, if you wish for a more detailed preview.

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 or email info@naturetrek.co.uk