



Butterflies of Croatia

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline Itinerary

Day 1 Fly Zagreb. Transfer Plitvice National Park.

Day 2 Plitvice Lakes National Park.

Day 3/5 Paklenica National Park.

Day 6/7 Velebit Mountains.

Day 8 Fly London.

Dates

June

Dates and prices

Visit www.naturetrek.co.uk (tour code HVR01) or see the current Naturetrek brochure.

Focus

Butterflies and general natural history.

Grading

A/B. Day walks only.

Highlights

- 10% of the tour cost donated to Butterfly Conservation.
- Around 100 species of butterfly typically recorded.
- Southern Festoon, Little Tiger Blue, Southern White Admiral & Balkan Marbled White all possible.
- Beautiful scenery of the Adriatic coastline.
- Interesting birds including Western Rock Nuthatch, Subalpine Warbler & Black-headed Bunting.
- Explore Paklenica & Plitvice Lakes National Parks and the Velebit Mountains.
- Reptiles, amphibians & other wildlife will also be enjoyed.
- Led by expert naturalist guides.



From top: Marbled Fritillary, Paklenica National Park & Southern Festoon. Images by Alan Outen.



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Introduction

Following on from our pioneering and successful spring trips to Croatia where birds, plants and indeed all aspects of natural history are covered, we are now offering a unique week-long holiday to the country that focuses on butterflies. An impressive total of 190 species of butterfly have been recorded in Croatia. We visit three main protected areas: the scenic Plitvice Lakes National Park with its cascades, the Paklenica National Park with its impressive limestone gorges, and the sub-Alpine Velebit Mountains, as well as other little-known areas in search of this wonderful diversity.

We should encounter many butterflies familiar from other parts of southern Europe, including a fine selection of spectacular species such as Cleopatra, Camberwell Beauty, Large Tortoiseshell, Southern Festoon, and Scarce and Southern Swallowtails. We will also be searching for some distinctly eastern and Balkan species such as Little Tiger Blue, Blue Argus, Anomalous Blue, Southern Comma, Marbled Skipper, Hungarian Skipper, Balkan Marbled White and Great Sooty Satyr. Indeed, this tour will also provide an opportunity to do a little ground-breaking, as the occurrence and status of some butterflies in the areas we visit is still somewhat unclear. Though day-flying butterflies will be our main focus we will not, of course, neglect other fauna and flora in this exciting destination. The photographic opportunities for butterflies, as well as stunning montane and coastal scenery, will be excellent.

Itinerary

NB. Please note that the itinerary outlined below offers our planned programme of excursions. However, adverse weather and other local considerations can necessitate some reordering 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

Plitvice Lakes National Park

We depart at 0830 hours from London's Heathrow Airport on a direct British Airways flight to Zagreb, the capital of Croatia. On arrival we will meet our local guide then make the 2-hour drive south to the Plitvice Lakes National Park (Plitvicka Jezera), where we will be based for the next two nights. Founded in 1949, Plitvice is a UNESCO World Heritage site, a picturesque forested karst lake-land fed by the clear waters of the River Korana and other karst streams, and dotted with lush meadows and pastures. The forests here are mostly old beech and fir with some maple, oak, hornbeam, elm, birch, spruce, pine and juniper. The centre-piece of the National Park is without doubt a series of stunning turquoise-coloured lakes, which are stepped one above the other, separated by travertines (these are formed by deposits from moss and algae which accumulate through the ages on the porous limestone beneath) over which waterfalls tumble. We will be based for 2 nights in a comfortable guesthouse at Dreznik Grad.

Day 2

Plitvice Lakes National Park

We will have a full day exploring Plitvice's habitats on its network of marked trails, some of which skirt the waterfalls. There will be no need to rush around and there will be no long drives today as we will be centrally located and lunch will be taken in the field, in a suitably scenic spot. Butterflies that we may find here include

Southern Festoon, Scarce and Common Swallowtails, Southern Small and Eastern Bath Whites, Sloe and Ilex Hairstreaks, Large and Scarce Coppers, as well as a selection of blues such as Short-tailed, Chapman's, Amanda's and Anomalous. We will also be hoping to see Nettle-tree Butterfly, Purple and Lesser Purple Emperors, Common and Hungarian Gliders, Camberwell Beauty, Cardinal and a range of fritillaries. The variety can be delightful here as Woodland and Great Banded Graylings, Woodland Ringlet, Meadow Brown, Pearly and Chestnut Heaths, and Large Grizzled, Olive and Hungarian Skippers may be seen on the wing, among others.

As we search for butterflies we will no doubt encounter other fauna and flora, including woodpeckers, warblers and a range of reptiles. A variety of frogs inhabit the clear blue waters of the lakes, above which Beautiful Demoiselle and other dragonflies are often commonly seen. Overnight stay in Dreznik Grad.

Day 3

Paklenica National Park

We will aim to have a flexible schedule today, and will either revisit the most productive Plitvice sites from yesterday or explore new areas. Later in the day we will head south-west towards the Dalmatian coast and gorges. Our next base will be in the Paklenica National Park at the southern edge of the Velebit Mountains. En route, we will pass through stretches of relatively uninhabited countryside, including lowland karstic depressions (known locally as 'polje'). These basins are typical landscape features of inland Croatia. The nationwide status of some butterflies such as Scarce Large Blue and Dusky Large Blue is unclear, and we will keep an eye open for these and other species that are endangered right across Europe.

The Paklenica National Park rises impressively from the Adriatic and is dominated by limestone features such as sink-holes, caves, crags, curious rock formations known as 'karrens', and the impressive gorges of Mala Paklenica and Velika Paklenica. Within a fairly compact area, the habitats range from sub-Alpine, through Black Pine forests, to valleys of oaks, limes and beech, then finally lowland and coastal – typically Mediterranean – 'macchia' scrub. With such a diverse range of habitats it is not surprising to learn that Paklenica is home to a rich flora and fauna, including an abundance of butterflies with over 80 day-flying species recorded. We spend the next 3 nights in a family-run hotel in the small town of Stari Paklenica.

Days 4 – 5

Paklenica National Park

We will have two full days to explore the various habitats at Paklenica National Park, an area which will provide a contrast to our previous base at Plitvice, being coastal, less wooded, drier and more rugged. We will take several walks, one or two uphill, through varied butterfly habitats and once again take a picnic lunch in a tranquil spot. There may be familiar species such as Scarce and Common Swallowtails, but also a chance of finding Southern Swallowtails. Other species here include Marbled Skipper, Southern Small White, Eastern Bath White, Balkan Green-veined White, Cleopatra, Duke of Burgundy, Purple-edged, Purple-shot and Sooty Coppers, Green, Black, Ilex and Blue-spot Hairstreaks. Blues found in Paklenica include Provencal Short-tailed, Eastern Baton, Silver-studded, Mazarine and Adonis whilst a varied range of fritillaries include Silver-washed, Dark Green, High Brown, Niobe and Marbled. Painted Lady, Small Tortoiseshell, Southern Comma, Southern White Admiral, Gatekeeper and, possibly, Southern Gatekeeper, Balkan Marbled White, and Great Banded and Eastern Rock Graylings should also be looked for. The *dalmaticus* race of Escher's Blue is possible too, and with a little luck we may find some rare ringlets such as Bright-eyed Ringlet.

Other wildlife includes several birds typical of dry, craggy habitats such as Rock Partridge, Western Rock Nuthatch, Blue Rock Thrush, Black-eared Wheatear, Rock and Ortolan Buntings and wild Rock Doves. Reptiles, especially lizards, abound at Paklenica, with Dalmatian Algyroides, European Glass Lizard and Dalmatian Wall Lizard all fairly common and Hermann's Tortoise likely. Overnight stay at Stari Paklenica.

Day 6

Velebit Mountains

Today we head northwards up the scenic coastal road with the Velebit channel on our left and the steep slopes of the Velebit Mountains on our right. We then head up into the heart of the Velebits, which are part of the Dinaric Alps – a rugged chain that runs in a north-west to south-east direction through Croatia. As we climb we will be treated to some stunning panoramas of the Adriatic coastline and Croatia's innumerable offshore islands.

The Velebits will provide yet another contrast to the sites visited in the preceding days, being more montane than both Plitvice and Paklenica. The highest areas (though this is not a particularly high range with Vaganski vrh at 1,757 metres being the highest peak) are alpine-like in nature with bare limestone and dolomite peaks, screes, meadows, pastures and forested karst valleys and basins. The vegetation, flora and fauna are influenced by both Mediterranean and alpine forces as well as the 'bura', a chilly wind that comes in from the northern Adriatic. Over 130 butterfly species have been recorded in the Velebits. They are also rich in folklore and said to be the home of the 'Vila Velebita', a benign mountain spirit that is said to also reside in the heart of the Croatian people. During our stay we will certainly try some of the famed local produce, such as goat and sheep cheese and honey. We will spend the final 2 nights of the tour in a comfortable hotel in the Velebits.

Day 7

Velebit Mountains

We will spend most of today in the Velebit National Park, which is a UNESCO biosphere reserve. At this time of year meadows and pastures here are often productive for butterflies, as are the numerous karst valleys. Another good area lies along the Tereziana Nature Trail, a short 3-kilometre route that winds through coastal and montane habitats, which follows an old Austro-Hungarian stone road.

Butterflies to look out for include Clouded Apollo, Apollo, Black-veined White, Southern Small White, Mountain Small White, Scarce Copper, Blue-spot Hairstreak, Large Blue, Silver-studded Blue, Mazarine Blue, Turquoise Blue, Amanda's Blue, Meleager's Blue, Cardinal, Queen of Spain Fritillary, Marbled Fritillary, Twin-spot Fritillary, Nickerl's Fritillary, Heath Fritillary, Southern Comma, Southern White Admiral, Large Wall Brown, Pearly Heath, Chestnut Heath, Bright-eyed Ringlet, Mountain Ringlet, Marbled White and Woodland Grayling. With luck we might also encounter a rare upland species, the Balkan Copper. Other wildlife found here includes Chamois and, though we stand little chance of encountering them, Brown Bears and Wolves. On a smaller scale, there are also Short-toed and Golden Eagles, Alpine Swift, Tawny Pipit and Alpine Chough to look out for. Reptiles include the attractive Leopard Snake, the Nose-horned Viper and the endemic Horvath's Rock Lizard. There are also over 70 endemic plants.

Day 8

Fly London

Today we head back north-eastwards to Zagreb airport in time to catch our midday British Airways flight back to London's Heathrow Airport arriving early evening .

Grading

Grade B - Easy to moderately strenuous. We will be on foot, on rough trails, for the best part of each day (please note that some of the trails are steep and rocky in places!), and will probably complete 5 to 10 kilometres on a typical days. This tour is therefore suitable for most people with an average level of fitness who enjoy walking.

Focus

This tour will focus on Croatia's butterflies. Other wildlife such as birds, reptiles and so on will also be enjoyed.

Optional extensions

For those of you wishing to see more of the attractive and interesting city of Zagreb we would be happy to arrange a couple of nights accommodation at the end of the tour.

Netting

For those who own and wish to use their nets, netting is permitted in many of the areas we plan to visit. Indeed, nets are essential equipment (though sparingly used) to enable the identification of particularly difficult species and families such as the blues. We always aim to keep the butterfly for as short a time as possible and always release those caught. Absolutely no collecting is permitted under any circumstances but we will allow plenty of opportunities for photography.

Food & accommodation included in the price

All food and accommodation are included in the price of this holiday. Hotels/guesthouses are comfortable but simple and not luxurious. All rooms have private facilities. (Please could we also ask you to bring a plastic plate, fork and mug for your picnic lunches).

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.