

# Butterflies of the Dolomites

## Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

### Outline itinerary

- Day 1** Fly to Venice and transfer to the Fassa Valley
- 
- Day 2/7** A daily programme of alpine walks in search of butterflies from our base in the Fassa Valley
- 
- Day 8** Fly London
- 

### Departs

June or July

### Focus

Butterflies and other natural history

### Grading

Day walks only. Grade B. Between 880 and 2250 meters

### Dates and Prices

See website (tour code ITA01)

### Highlights

- A week of butterflies from an idyllic family-run mountain hotel
- Find Alpine Blue, Mountain Clouded Yellow & Common Brassy Ringlet
- Amanda's Blues dance in the meadows around our hotel
- Spectacular scenery in the Italian Dolomites



Titania's Fritillary (Alan Miller)



Alpine Blue (Tony Daniels)



Alpine Heath (Allan Miller)

In support of Butterfly Conservation

10% of the proceeds from this tour will be donated to Butterfly Conservation and invested directly in the conservation of British and European butterflies.



Naturetrek Mingledown Barn Wolf's Lane Chawton Alton Hampshire GU34 3HJ UK

T: +44 (0)1962 733051

E: [info@naturetrek.co.uk](mailto:info@naturetrek.co.uk)

W: [www.naturetrek.co.uk](http://www.naturetrek.co.uk)

**N.B. 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.**

## Introduction

Throughout this holiday, we will be based at the Hotel Gran Mugon situated in the village of Tamion in the Fassa Valley, which has been inhabited since the Iron Age. This comfortable, friendly hotel is run by a family of keen skiers who know every inch of the area. Here, as throughout Europe, farming practices have had an enriching influence on the vegetation and on the diversity of the plant communities.

Our holiday will take the turn-of-the-century alpine botanist, Reginald Farrer's book 'The Dolomites' as its starting point, and will explore both the limestone and granitic mountains which present dramatic scenery and fascinating habitats for alpine plants, some of which are unique to the area. Many of the plants will be in flower creating a wonderful colourful backdrop to our excursions. Amongst the rich mix of flowers we will look for Gentians, Edelweiss, Bellflowers, Orchids and many more beautiful plants. The rich flora supports a great diversity of butterfly and other insect species.

Whilst we will concentrate on the butterflies we will not neglect other fauna. We may be able to run a moth trap behind the hotel on some nights to experience the wide range of moths found in the area. On our daytime outings we will keep our eyes peeled for mammals such as Alpine Marmot or Mountain Hare; in the ponds for amphibians such as Italian Agile Frog and Common Toad; for reptiles such as the Italian Wall Lizard; and not forgetting the birds. Being at a high-altitude we may see some of the mountain specialists such as Spotted Nutcracker, White-winged Snowfinch, Citril Finch, Alpine Chough and the *alpestris* race of Ring Ouzel.

## Day 1

Sunday

### Fassa Valley

We will depart from London Gatwick on a flight to Venice. On arrival we will transfer to our privately hired minibus(es) for the drive north, into the Province of Trentino and the Dolomite Mountains. During the initial part of the journey, the vegetation will reflect aspects of the Mediterranean climate and then, as we get further north-east into the Adige Valley, low altitude mountain vegetation will start to appear. If time permits we will break the journey near Agordo before arriving in the high mountains. This has previously been good for Large Chequered Skipper *Heteropterus morpheus*.

On our arrival in the Fassa Valley we will settle into our hotel, using what is left of the day to explore our immediate surroundings. The woods and meadows all about us offer the most delightful walks, and will provide our first introduction to the butterflies of this region. In previous years, Amanda's Blue, *Agrodiaetus amanda*, has been found very close to the hotel.

## Day 2

### Fassa Valley

We will spend the morning exploring the richness of the meadows above the hotel, all with a differing flora and associated insects. The butterflies will include some familiar species like the Marbled White *Melanargia galathea*, and Dark Green Fritillary *Argynnis aglaja*, and less familiar ones like Mazarine Blue *Cyaniris semiargus*. We may also encounter several members of the Lily family, including *Paradisea liliastrum*, St. Bruno's Lily and the bright orange *Lilium bulbiferum*. Spotted Nutcracker frequent this area and can often be found high in the conifers. Whilst these have no significance for butterflies, they add joy to our meandering!

In the afternoon we take our minibus(es) and picnic below the granite slopes of Monzoni in a secluded meadow surrounded by wild orchids and cow wheat at about 1500m. Amongst the botanically rich sward, we see yellow and white Pulsatillas and many Gentians. Alpine butterfly specialities will include our first Mountain Ringlets, probably *Erebia medusa*, the Woodland Ringlet, and Titania's Fritillary, *Clossiana titania*. We may also expect Scarce Copper and Wood White.

## Day 3

### Gardeccia

This morning we start with a short cable car ride up to the Catinaccio group of mountains known as King Lauren's Rose Garden, whose peaks can be seen from our hotel, glowing red from early sunshine.

We will explore the alpine meadows near the cable car station then take a woodland walk towards the small hamlet of Gardeccia at 1948m where the scenery changes. The path leads us alongside a mountain torrent to scree and rocks rich with high alpine plants, some of which are endemic. The butterflies will be different from those in the valley below; Alpine Blue *Albulina orbitulus* and Alpine Heath, *Coenonympha gardetta* fly here, as does Shepherd's Fritillary *Boloria pales* and Mountain Clouded Yellow, *Colias phicomone*.

We will picnic in the alpine meadows near Gardeccia. Here Mountain Alcon Blue *Maculinea rebeli* and Geranium Argus *Eumedonia eumedon* can be found. Wherever we turn around we will retrace our steps to Gardeccia and back to the cable car checking to see what different species can be found in the meadows in the afternoon sun.

## Day 4

### Panevèggio

We will spend today in the National Park of Panevèggio, about an hour's drive from our hotel. Our first stop will be near Predazzo where Apollo (*Parnassius Apollo*) has previously been found. We will then move to the Visitors' Centre just outside the park and take a butterfly walk on the south facing hillside looking for more Fritillaries, Ringlets and Skippers. We then drive uphill to Val Venegia (this valley is reputed to have all the flowers of the Dolomites!).

After a picnic lunch we start by walking through damp meadows with Marsh Orchids and masses of Bird's Eye Primrose. Here we could find Arran Brown *Erebia ligea* and Woodland Ringlet *Erebia medusa*. We then climb through rocky spruce woods, to come out with a view of the magnificent mountain Cimon de la Pala. Nutcracker frequent the woods and as the view opens out we may well be lucky enough to see a Golden Eagle circling above. Our scenic stroll will take us as far as the mountain café from where we retrace our steps back to the vehicle.

## Day 5

### Sella Pass

Today takes us northwards through the pretty villages of Val di Fassa, and up to our highest walk above the Sella Pass at 2200m. Here we can explore and picnic beneath the towering Langkofel, with a fine view of Marmolada and its glacier. There are yet more *Erebias* to be found at this altitude, like the Water Ringlet *Erebia pronoe* flying near the squelchy watercourses, as well as the more numerous Mountain Fritillary *Boloria napaea*, Shepherd's Fritillary *Boloria pales* and Alpine Blue *Albulina orbitulus*. Here we will find outcrops of edelweiss and sheltered glades between the rocky outcrops beneath the idle ski lifts. The higher area is also home to high-altitude birds such as White-winged Snowfinch and Alpine Chough, and also to Alpine Marmot, all of which we will hope to see.

Back at our hotel, evening strolls may give us glow-worms and bats, and the woods behind the hotel provide the opportunity to run a moth trap on suitable nights to give us a taste of the Italian moth fauna.

## Day 6

### Eggental

The Eggental is a gentle descent towards the warmer climate of Bolzano, where deciduous trees support a different range of species not found at the sub-alpine levels. Here we may see Swallowtail *Papilio machaon* and Scarce Swallowtail *Iphiclides podalirius*, Marbled and Lesser Marbled Fritillaries *Brenthis daphne* & *ino* and some interesting Blues including Meleager's Blue *Meleageria daphnis* and Provençal Short-tailed Blue *Everes alctas*. We will spend the day checking riverside meadows and a disused quarry before returning over the Costalunga Pass where we will stop to check the hillside meadows in the late afternoon sun.



Provençal Short-tailed Blue by K Bailey

## Day 7

### Miralago

The drive to the San Pelegrino Pass brings us to a chalky hillside above a lake called Miralago, at 1920m. A wealth of legumes and scabious support an abundance of blues, fritillaries and Erebias. Here we can expect Cranberry Blue *Plebejus optilete*, Chalkhill Blue *Lysandra coridon*, and Silver-spotted Skipper *Hesperia comma*, as well as Marsh Fritillary *Euphydryas aurinia*, Almond-eyed Ringlet *Erebia alberganus* and Yellow-spotted Ringlet *Erebia manto*. After a picnic lunch we will follow a track the short distance to Val Dai Be where we will spend the afternoon checking the



Cranberry Blue by K Bailey

meadows. We should find Mountain Clouded Yellow *Colias phicomone* and if we

are lucky Mountain Green-veined White *Pieris bryoniae* and Darwin's Heath *Coenonympha darwiniana*. Again there are spectacular views for those not too determined to check every butterfly on the mountainside.

[Note: the species listed above are some of the more interesting or unusual ones; there are many more to be seen, old friends from the British list, and other scarcer species that are sure to surprise us.]

## Day 8

### London

Today will be a short day and if time permits a last walk in the meadows en route to Venice where we will catch our plane back to London.

---

## Tour grading

On this holiday we will be based at one hotel throughout, exploring the mountains of this spectacular region. We will take daily walks, usually between four and eight kilometres in length. The pace will be gentle with time to explore and pauses to inspect and photograph insects. We will have the support of one or two minibuses (depending on group size) to allow the maximum flexibility, and enable us to plan alternative options for each day's programme if necessary.

## Weather

Although snow has fallen in the month of June in the Fassa Valley, we hope that by the time of our tour in July we will enjoy good sunny weather with long days and clear skies. We should, however, be prepared for changeable weather and good waterproof clothing with some warm walking gear is advisable. When sunny, the days should be warm (up to 80°F or 26°C) but the evenings may be slightly chilly.

## Food & accommodation

All food and accommodation is included in the price of this holiday. Past clients have been delighted at the standard of our hotel's catering! We will ensure that the daily picnic lunches which we carry with us onto the mountains will be excellent and will reflect, as far as possible, the local produce.

## Your safety & security

You have chosen to travel to Italy. 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.fco.gov.uk/travel](http://www.fco.gov.uk/travel) or telephone the Travel Advice Call Centre on 0845 8502829 prior to travel.

## How to book your place on the tour

In order to book your place on this holiday, please give us a call on 01962 733051 with a credit or debit card, book online at [www.naturetrek.co.uk](http://www.naturetrek.co.uk), or alternatively complete and post the booking form at the back of our main Naturetrek brochure, together with a deposit of 20% of the holiday cost plus any room supplements if required. If you do not have a copy of the brochure, please call us on 01962 733051 or request one via our website. Please stipulate any special requirements, for example extension requests or connecting/regional flights, at the time of booking.

## Receive our e-newsletter

Join the Naturetrek e-mailing list and be the first to hear about new tours, additional departures and new dates, tour reports and special offers. Visit [www.naturetrek.co.uk](http://www.naturetrek.co.uk) to sign up.