

North Cyprus – Birds, Flowers & Crusader Castles

<https://www.kudutravel.com/tours/cyprus-walking-tour>

11 – 23 April 2021

By mid-April, the eastern Mediterranean is already benefiting from warm sunshine and clear blue skies. An extraordinary profusion of wildflowers carpets the landscape and large numbers of northbound migrant birds pass daily, adding a special dimension to walks in the dramatic mountain and coastal scenery.

With few visitors, low-key development and monuments ranging from Phoenician and Bronze Age sites to Venetian fortifications and splendid Crusader castles, the North part of Cyprus is a tranquil and rewarding destination. We enjoy accommodation in one outstanding hotel and two sustainable tourism projects in traditional villages and sample excellent Turkish Cypriot cuisine and wines.

HIGHLIGHTS of the tour include:

- Bird watching walks in unspoilt Mediterranean countryside to find red-footed falcons, masked shrikes, Cretzchmar's buntings and golden orioles
- Orchids! Holy (Sancta), Bug, Pyramidal, Monkey, Naked Man, Ploughshare, Bee, Spider and the endemic Kotschy's
- A day participating in traditional village activities – baking bread in a brush-fired oven, milking goats & making fresh sheep's cheeses
- Exploring Crusader castles, the atmospheric site of Salamis, the 13C Bellapais Abbey and the Venetian fortifications of Famagusta
- 6 days discovering the wonderful Karpaz peninsula, a virtually untouched corner of traditional, old Cyprus

Guests' comments on this trip:

'We had a truly memorable trip. Wonderful location to be able to visit and have interpreted for us.'

'Most relaxing holiday in quiet, unspoilt places. Enjoyable walks and great food and company as always. Learning more about the history and people of Cyprus, particularly the remarkable Ismail and Lois, was an added bonus. I never cease to be amazed at the amount of research that goes into these trips – finding the perfect walk, the best food and accommodation.'

'One of the most enjoyable holidays ever. We are already looking forward to the next Kudu trip.'

Itinerary

Day one D included

After arriving at Larnaca airport, we drive through the mountains (1.5 hrs) to our hotel, where we are based for the next 6 nights. This very comfortable hotel, recently voted the best hotel in N. Cyprus, is owned by a particularly welcoming family, has an excellent Slow Food restaurant and is beautifully situated beside the 13th century Bellapais Abbey. It has an attractive pool, gardens scented with jasmine and orange blossom, Scops owls calling at night and superb views down to the coast.

Day two

B, L, D included

We set off this morning to explore the romantic mountain-top Crusader castle of St. Hilarion, with its extravagantly crenelated walls and towers and long history as the summer residence of the Kings of Cyprus. We walk on paths through the valley below. Wild iris and sages, anemones and rock roses are all about us and bird species include the Sardinian warbler and the endemic Cyprus pied wheatear and Cyprus warbler. We have an alfresco lunch in the whitewashed village of Karaman, then follow a quiet track, particularly rewarding for orchids. Dinner in a traditional village restaurant is a typical *meze*, an array of small dishes reflecting the centuries of Turkish, Lebanese and Greek influences.

Day three

B, L, D included

Cape Korucam to the west is an unspoilt area of maquis and small carob orchards, which is excellent in spring for the diurnal migration of bee-eaters, woodchat shrikes, hoopoes, black-eared wheatears and golden orioles. We walk a circular route past the lighthouse, seeing many orchids on the heathland, enjoy a local lunch, then have a free afternoon to explore the magnificent gothic ruin of Bellapais Abbey and Bellapais village, once Lawrence Durrell's home and the setting for 'Bitter Lemons'.

Day four

B, L, D included

A long morning walk on an easy forestry track in the mountains above Lapta village offers marvellous scenery and many birds and flowers, including myriad orchids. We enjoy lunch overlooking the yacht-filled harbour in Kyrenia and have a free afternoon to explore the fine 9th century Byzantine castle with its subsequent Lusignan and Venetian additions; visit an excellent Shipwreck Museum exhibiting a cargo ship wrecked in the fourth century BC, complete with its cargo of almonds and wine amphorae; or shop for ceramics, kilims and locally woven baskets.

Day five

B, L, D included

This morning, we stroll from the hotel down an ancient cobbled track once used by the Crusaders, then drive high up into the Besparmak mountains to walk on a well-graded track through a beautiful natural forest of Calabrian pine, the indigenous Evergreen Cypress and Eastern Strawberry Tree. Birds such as masked shrikes, Cretzschmar's buntings and great spotted cuckoos may be seen and raptors, including goshawk and peregrine, often soar above the crags. We return to our hotel for some time to relax in the gardens. Dinner tonight, within the floodlit ruins of Bellapais Abbey, is a memorable experience.

Day six

B, L, D included

We drive round to the south side of the Kyrenia range for a day looking specifically for orchids and Cyprus endemics. We investigate a small wetland, with breeding spur-winged plovers, follow an escarpment edge, good for little owls and raptor watching, and hope to find Holy Orchid, Bug Orchid, Ploughshare Orchid, Pyramidal Orchid, Giant fennel and many anemones, as well as the wild asparagus that all Cypriots collect to eat in the spring.

Day seven

B, L, D included

En route to the Karpaz peninsula, the island 'panhandle' which extends northeast towards the coast of Anatolia, we visit the superbly sited Crusader castle of Kantara. Traditionally considered to be where Commenus surrendered to Richard the Lionheart in 1191, the castle

enjoys commanding views, with Alpine swifts and very occasionally griffon vultures floating above the cedar forests. We walk gradually down a track with long views, as we make our way to a small Karpaz village where we stay for three nights in comfortable, newly built rooms surrounded by an orange grove and run as a sustainable tourism project.

Day eight

B, L, D included

This morning, we have the opportunity to immerse ourselves in Cypriot village life, learning to bake traditional Cypriot bread in a brush-fired oven, make fresh goat and sheep's cheeses, and prepare organic vegetable dishes, culminating in eating the fruits of our labours for lunch. We also explore the village on foot, seeing the olive oil mill and village handicrafts, including artefacts carved from olive, juniper and cypress, wild fennel stools and hand woven bags. In the afternoon, we walk along a ridge above the sea, enjoying marvellous views and looking out for migrating golden orioles and bee-eaters.

Day nine

B, L, D included

After a short drive, we wander through the impressive ruins of Salamis, reputedly founded by Teucer on his return from the Trojan War. We walk or swim from the sandy beach and visit the monastery of St. Barnabas, now an icon museum. In the mediaeval centre of Famagusta, the 14th century Lusignan cathedral was converted into the Lala Mustafa Pasha mosque by the Ottomans, following the terrible siege of 1571. We admire the colossal Venetian fortifications (Leonardo da Vinci acted as consultant) and Othello's Tower, Shakespeare's inspiration, then enjoy tea and delicious Turkish pastries before investigating a wetland area which usually holds good numbers of waders including black-winged stilts, ruff and purple heron.

Day ten

B, L, D included

Following a leisurely start, we drive the old road on the protected southern side of the Karpaz peninsula, pausing for some short birding walks along the way. After a village lunch, we walk for a couple of hours down from the escarpment to the sea, then settle into our final small hotel, an imaginative group of stylish stone village 'houses'.

Day eleven

B, L, D included

We spend the day exploring this remote and unspoilt peninsula, virtually uninhabited and a proposed national park. Colourful rollers perch on olive trees and the curious grating call of the black francolin is the only sound. 'Falls' of migrants can occur, with good numbers of larks, pipits, wagtails and warblers. The very rare Audouin's Gull breeds just offshore. After visiting the Greek Orthodox church of St. Andreas, we swim or walk on a delightful long sandy beach. Dinner may well be a classic Cypriot dish of lamb, herbs and vegetables, baked for hours in a clay oven, accompanied by robust red wine from the Turkish mainland.

Day twelve

B, L, D included

Continuing our exploration of Karpaz, we walk on paths through the aromatic maquis, where we often surprise the famous wild donkeys, looking out for turban buttercups and Cyprus gladioli and observing raptor migration overhead, especially falcons and harriers. Red-rumped swallows swoop around us as we enjoy lunch beside the 10th century Byzantine church of Ayios Philon, its ruined mosaic flooring half smothered in wildflowers. In the afternoon, we may swim from the beach or look for birds and flowers along the coastal track, before returning to our hotel for a farewell dinner in the village.

Day thirteen

B included

Driving west, we pass fields where hay is already being harvested and red-footed falcons often gather to feed on crickets. We pause to join the sheep wandering the mosaic floors of the delightfully bucolic 5th century basilica of Ayas Trias, then continue to Larnaca airport for flights home.

Tour Leader

Fi Lowry has been an elected member of the British Ornithologists Union since 1985 and in 1993 was elected a Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society. She has led bird trips to numerous European and North African destinations plus Jordan, Israel, Syria, East Africa and South Africa.

Fi has also travelled extensively, on an independent basis, to the majority of the important European birding sites (from Iceland to the Danube delta), the Okavango Delta in Botswana, Uganda, Zaire, Sudan, Kenya, Ethiopia, Zimbabwe, Malawi, Rio Tambo Pata Reserve in Peru, Bolivia, Argentina, Chile, Costa Rica, Panama, the Galapagos Islands, Patagonia, Oman, Nepal, Bhutan, India, Trinidad and Tobago, Cuba and Madagascar. She has participated in many scientific expeditions, including the original ornithological survey of South Yemen and Socotra island, the Cyprus Akamas Peninsula Migration Survey and the ICBP migration survey in Senegal.

Activity Level

Standard

Eleven walking days, 2 to 3.5 hours daily at an appropriate pace. Good paths, some short rocky stretches, sand dunes – some steep steps up and down within the Crusader castles. Swimming (in a pool and the sea) possible, though not yet very warm, almost every day.

Temperatures

North Cyprus temperatures throughout April range between 20°C and 29°C. Daily averages are 23°C, but evenings are cooler.

Accommodation

- 6 nights in Bellapais, in a welcoming family hotel which was recently awarded the title of 'Best Hotel' in North Cyprus and has a Slow Food restaurant and a swimming pool
- 3 nights in an arched stone house in a small Karpaz village, recently converted as a sustainable tourism project
- 3 nights in an imaginative group of stylish stone village 'houses' in Dipkarpaz

Trip Price, per person sharing:

£2,765.75 until 10th July 2020

£2,840.50 until 10th October 2020

£2,915.25 until 10th January 2021

£2,990 after 10th January 2021

<https://www.kudutravel.com/faq#discounts>

£320 single supplement

£400 deposit per person

Please note that the single room supplement is imposed by the hotels and not by Kudu Travel. If you are willing to share, but no other suitable guest books on the trip, we regret that the supplement will be payable. We shall endeavour to obtain double rooms for single occupancy whenever possible, but hotels in some countries do have single rooms that are small and less well positioned. In this case, the supplement is simply ensuring your privacy.

Price Includes

- Accommodation for Days 1 to 13, on a twin/double shared basis
- Meals, with wine at lunches and dinners, as listed in the daily notation
- Land transportation in a private vehicle as described, except during free periods
- Entrance and sightseeing fees, except during free periods
- Gratuities for the driver and hotel and restaurant staff (appreciation for your tour leader is at your discretion)

Price does not Include

- Flights to and from Larnaca
- Trip cancellation, medical or other insurance
- Immunisations, prescriptions or other medical requirements
- Passport, visa and health documentation
- Personal expenses (laundry, alcohol other than wine with group lunches and dinners, free time activities, etc.)
- Meals noted as excluded in the daily notation
- Transport and transfer of excess baggage
- Cyprus departure tax, if any

VALUE FOR MONEY - SO MUCH IS INCLUDED

On Kudu trips, you will only need money for postcards, presents to take home, the odd G & T or an irresistible ice cream. Festival and opera tickets, museum and gallery entrances, National Park fees, all meals (with a very few exceptions specified in individual itineraries), wine with lunch and dinner, access to specialist books carried by the guides, gratuities for porters and hotel and restaurant staff, boat rides, train trips, internal flights, wine tastings, 4WDs with drivers, the services of skilled local guides and trackers etc. are ALL INCLUDED in the cost of your holiday.

We are confident that, like previous very satisfied guests, you will discover that our tours give you excellent value for money.

Visa and Health Requirements

Currently all visitors require a valid passport, but not a visa, for entry to North Cyprus. At present, there are no specific and compulsory health requirements for entry to North Cyprus. You may also wish to check the advice given to travellers by the Department of Health (<https://www.nhs.uk/using-the-nhs/healthcare-abroad/healthcare-when-travelling-abroad/>) and the FCO (<https://www.gov.uk/browse/abroad>).

Insurance

It is essential, and a condition of booking, that you protect yourself with a suitable travel insurance policy as soon as you book this trip. We can arrange comprehensive cover for UK residents. For further details, please see the website or ask our office.

Size of Party

This trip will run with a minimum of 4 and a maximum of 14 guests.