

FLOWERS OF CRETE

SPRING FLOWER FINDING TRIP 2010

Week One: 16th – 22nd March

Week Two: 23rd – 30th March



Itinerary

Week One

Tuesday, 16th March

Guests will be collected from Heraklion airport and taken for a welcome drink at Babel bar in Elounda.

Accommodation for the first week will be at The Small House, Limnes or The Olive Press at Kritsa [www.olivepress.centerall.com] depending upon numbers.

After time to settle in, we will meet for dinner at the friendly and excellent Kantoyni Taverna at the village of Mavrikiano overlooking Mirambello Bay.

Wednesday, 17th March

A trip into the Thripti mountains to visit the villages of Thripti and Orino. Lunch will be taken at a traditional taverna in the mountains. On this excursion guests will have their first chance to wander in the pine forests and meadows of this spectacular area to find orchids galore! The Thripti mountains are famous for their flora and are one of the most important orchid sites on Crete. Expect to find a variety of Ophrys and Orchis including, *Ophrys fusca thriptiensis*, *Ophrys cretica* ssp *ariadne*, *Ophrys herae*.

Dinner will be at a well-known fish taverna at the water's edge in the quiet village of Mochlos. The taverna overlooks Minoan remains situated on the nearby island of Psira.

Thursday, 18th March

Today's outing will start with a drive to the south coast, passing through Ierapetra (the most southerly town in Europe) and on to Mirtos and Pano Simi. We will be exploring the southern flanks of Mount Dikte – birthplace of the God, Zeus. From the broad-leaf woodlands of Pano Simi, we will take one of the winding roads down to the sea, stopping at meadows full of spectacular orchids on the way. Expect to find *Barlia robertiana*, *Ophrys sicula*, *Orchis collina*

Lunch will be taken at a beach side fish taverna in the tiny village of Tertsa, with views over the Libyan Sea towards Africa. After lunch there will be a chance to photograph flowers, which prefer a sandy location or simply sit back and enjoy the atmosphere and tranquility.

Friday, 19th March

Today we will drive along Crete's northern coast, east to Toplou and Zakros, with its Minoan palace and the famous Gorge of the Dead. Here the plant life changes, the land is much drier and there is a chance to find new and exciting flowers to photograph and draw. Many endemic and endangered flowers grow in this area and it is also home to the rare Eleanor's Falcon, which can be seen in the area around the Monastery at Toplou. We will also visit the remote Cavo Sidero, site of the proposed golf development and have a chance to experience first hand the wonderful scenery and the special and often endemic wild flowers to be found there. Dinner will be taken at a traditional taverna in Paleokastro.

Saturday, 20th March

Today is a free day with a chance to visit the town of Aghios Nikolaos – here you can find the Iris Museum dedicated to the medicinal plants of the island. Explore the many shops and restaurants in this pretty town situated by the sea and on the lake or relax on one of the town's Blue Flag beaches. Guests will also have the chance to visit BioAroma Essential Oils factory where there is a small botanic gardens and a wonderful museum of Cretan life. The owner, Sakis, is a qualified chemist with a special interest in the herbs of his native island and he will be happy to explain the processes involved in extracting essential oils and in producing perfumes, dried herbs and many other products.

Sunday, 21st March

After a short drive into the mountains we will arrive on the Katharo Plateau to experience wonderful and breathtaking views of the snow covered mountains and winding crystal streams. The flowers of the Katharo are stunning and besides orchids, we may be lucky enough to find wild tulips and fritillaries. Here there are meadows of the rare and endemic *Crocus sieberii* and *Scilla nana*. In this clear environment flowers abound and there will be plenty to see. Lunch will be taken at Yannis' taverna. Guests will have the opportunity to talk about his life and his love of nature. Yannis has lived in these mountains all his life. As a boy Yannis helped his father, who worked as a charcoal burner in the forests above Kritsa. A real chance to experience and enjoy the reality of life on the island. Expect to find *Orchis lactea*, *Arum creticum*, *Cyclamen creticum*, *Fritillaria messanensis*, *Scilla nana*.

Monday, 22nd March

Today we take a short drive to Plaka and Vrouhas to visit another area rich in wildlife and orchids. Here we will find the *Gortys ophrys*, Butterfly orchids in their hundreds, Bee ophrys and many, many more. The views over Spinalonga islands are superb and the day will finish with a visit to one of the beach tavernas in Plaka for meze and raki. The taverna overlooks Spinalonga Island, setting for Victoria Hislop's best selling novel 'The Island'. Expect to find *Ophrys cretica* ssp. *bicornuta*, *Ophrys creberrima*, *Ophrys phrayganae*, *Orchis papillionacea* ssp. *heroica*, amongst many others.

Week Two

Tuesday, 23rd March

Those booked for the second week in the west of the island will travel with Julia to the village of Spili, above the town of Rethymnon, stopping at several locations on the way to see a variety of wild flowers and places of interest. First night at the quiet and comfortable Green Hotel in Spili. Spili is a charming village full of interesting shops and tavernas. Dinner is taken under the pergola at a quaint old taverna which specialises in local dishes.

Those guests returning home today will be driven to the airport in time to catch their flights back home.

Wednesday, 24th March

Today we drive west into the mountains above Spili to visit a water meadow, where the rare and beautiful *Ophrys candica* grows. Here, once again, the habitat changes and a wealth of different flowers can be found. The day includes a visit to an old and very skilled basket maker, who will offer us raki and walnuts and happily explain his art. Lunch will be in a wonderful taverna in Gerakari, where the owner will offer tiny glasses of her homemade cherry brandy. Not to be missed, as the owners make some of the best cheese pies in Crete! Expect to find *Cyclamen graecum*, *Arisarum vulgare*, *Ophrys candica*.

Returning to Spili, guests have a free evening for shopping and exploring.

Thursday, 25th March

As we travel towards Hania, there will be many places to stop and photograph as the area becomes more verdant and the vegetation thicker. Flowers can be found in abundance and in the evening we will spend some time comparing images and naming species. Expect to find a variety of endemic and unusual plants and flowers.

We will spend the night in Hania at Hotel Amphora [www.amphora.gr] overlooking the port and its ancient lighthouse. This hotel is housed in a Venetian merchant's palazzo and, despite its central location, is quiet and very atmospheric. Dinner will be taken at the famous Tamam – a wonderfully eclectic restaurant in a former Turkish bathhouse.

Friday 26th March

Today we will venture onto the Omalos Plateau to find rare, endemic species, such as *Crocus sieberii*, which grows only in the snow melt. These Mountains are very rich in flora and the day will be spent driving and walking to see what treasures we can find. Expect to find *T. bakeri*, *Orchis sancta*, several species of *Arum* and much more.

We will spend a second night at the Amphora Hotel and take dinner at the atmospheric Well of the Turk. As its name implies, this is another Turkish building set amongst the winding old streets of Hania but the food tonight will have a definite Moroccan influence.

Saturday, 27th March

This morning we leave Hania and travel through verdant chestnut forests to the eco village of Milia where we will spend the late afternoon and evening exploring the area, which is rich in orchids and cyclamen at this time of the year. The eco village is famous throughout Greece and has won many awards for its eco-friendly approach to

modern tourism. In the evening we will eat traditional Cretan food prepared in the traditional way. Expect to find *Cyclamen confusum* (formerly *Cyclamen hederifolium* ssp. *confusum*), *Cyclamen creticum*, many forms of *Ophrys* and *Orchis*.

Sunday, 28th March

As the area around the eco village is so rich in flora and fauna, Sunday is a free day for guests to 'do their own thing' and to relax and enjoy the peace and tranquility of the unspoilt forests around them. There are some wonderful walks and the views of the surrounding mountains are spectacular.

Monday, 29th March

Today we take a scenic drive to the south west corner of the island to visit the magical lagoon of Elafonissi, with its tiny, unspoilt island. Here a wealth of wild flowers can be found, some endangered and endemic to the island. We will wade through crystal clear waters to admire the coral sands of this truly exquisite spot. There will be a chance for the brave to take a swim and the rest of us to photograph some special flowers and plants. Elafonissi is now a conservation site and its flora and fauna are legally protected.

Our last night at the Amphora Hotel in Hania.

After a chance to enjoy the many lovely shops in Hania, we will take a short drive to Stavros beach, featured in the classic film 'Zorba the Greek' for our farewell dinner at one of the traditional tavernas dotted along the water's edge.

Tuesday, 30th March

Guests will be taken to Hania airport after a final morning 'get together' for coffee and cakes, with a chance to compare images and notes.

Please Note:

Places are limited to a maximum of 10 so please book early to avoid disappointment. Please contact Julia for further information.

Cost of first week: **€720**

Cost of second week: **€950**

Cost for two week holiday: **€1,500**

Cost of holiday includes: bed & breakfast accommodation in character and traditional hotels and apartments, lunch, all travel costs on the island, including airport transfers, all trips accompanied by Julia Jones, Founder and President of 'Flowers of Crete'; information and advice, including flower identification. Welcome drink and farewell coffee and cakes.

The cost of the holiday does not include international flights, dinner, international telephone calls from your hotel or beverages other than tea or coffee. Guests are advised to obtain their own travel insurance before their arrival.

The organisers reserve the right to change this itinerary depending on external circumstances.

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