

Wild Flowers in Spring

A delightful holiday, designed to introduce you to a wealth of beautiful coastal and low mountain wild flowers, many of which endemic to the Balkan region. We will explore the Black Sea coast, the Eastern Balkan, the Strandzha and the Eastern Rhodope Mountains.

The tour starts from the northeastern corner of Bulgaria – the steppes of Coastal Dobroudzha and the sea cliffs around Cape Kaliakra. Here are the last remnants of the Great Steppe, formerly occupying the bigger part of the region. The kaleidoscopic hues of wild peonies, irises and adonises in spring create the special appeal of this area.

Some of the key plants to be seen here: *Paeonia tenuifolia*, *Paeonia peregrina*, *Artemisia pedemontana*, *Asphodeline lutea*, *Iris pumila*, *Scutellaria orientalis*, *Salvia nutans*, *Nonnea atra*, *Ruta graveolens*, *Euphorbia myrsinites*, etc.

While in the area we will visit the picturesque sea town of Balchik with its beautiful limestone cliffs, facing the seashore. In biotopes of bush and herbaceous vegetation we will be looking for *Matthiola odoratissima*, *Tanacetum millefolium*, *Achillea clypeolata*, *Inula ensifolia*, *Aster oleifolius*, *Ajuga laxmanii*, *Jurinea stoechadifolia*, *Astragalus sprunerii*, *Veronica barelierii*, etc. Further north we will explore the sea shore, sand dunes and water-fringe vegetation of the coastal lakes Durankulak and Shabla for *Alyssum borzaeanum*, *Silene thymifolia*, *Glaucium glavum*, *Euphorbia lucida*, etc.

Driving southwards we will visit the Pobiti Kamani – a unique site covered by surface tertiary sands with standing stone columns. There we will look for psamphytic, endemic and relict species of plants like *Anthemis regisborisii*, *Anchusa velenovskyi*, *Silene frivaldskyana*, *Sempervivum zeleborii*, *Ephedra dystachya*, etc.

Then we turn inland, at the foot of the Eastern Balkan Mountain with a stop at the Kamchia Nature Reserve. This area is remarkable for its variety – unique riverine flooded forests (*Fraxinus oxycarpa* + *Quercus pedunculiflora*), beaches with high sand dunes, marshy remnants of old riverbeds, cutting deep into the forest. The unusual coexistence of ash, oak, elm, alder and maple trees with lianas climbing between their branches, creates the impression of a tropical forest. There we expect to find *Jurinea albicaulis* ssp. *killaea*, *Iris suaveolens*, *Anacamptis pyramidalis*, *Smilax excelsa*, *Periploca graeca*, etc.

Our next stop is Sinite Kamani (The Blue Rocks) Nature Park: we will explore the Park's rocky biotopes, grasslands and bush formations for *Iris reichenbachii*, *Syringa vulgaris*, *Tulipa australis*, *Orchis pinetorum*, *Fritillaria pontica*, *Iberis saxatilis*, *Anthyllis montana*, *Globularia aphyllanthes*, *Doronicum hungaricum*, *Cephalanthera damassonium*, *Potentilla rupestris*, etc.

All too soon it will be time to drive to the Eastern Rhodopes. The Rhodopes are the mountain considered to be the oldest land on the Balkans. The mountain's rolling hillsides alternate with rugged landscape of jagged peaks, towering cliffs and sparsely vegetated slopes. The range of beautiful and rare plants in the Eastern Rhodopes includes *Haberlea rhodopensis*, *Verbascum rorripifolium*, *Hypericum moutbretti*, *Onosma thracica*, *Inula adschersoniana*, *Campanula cervicaria*, *Smyrniium perfoliatum*, *Orchis papilionacea*, *Ophrys mammosa*, *Ophrys cornuta* etc.

Mid-April – May

For the last part of the tour we will drive back to the coast and reach the Strandzha Mountain. It is an endless chain of mild crests and folding wood-covered tops. Small villages, with their pastures and meadows, lie dispersed on the mountain slopes between the meanders of several picturesque rivers. The Strandzha occupies one of the first places in Europe in terms of biological diversity. Its forests are representative of the typical temperate broad-leaved oak forest and oriental beech forests with laurel undergrowth, featuring the native *Rhododendron ponticum*.

In the next three days we will explore the lower basins of the Strandzha rivers with their thermophilous forests, coastal cliffs and sand dunes. Here we will try to find *Tulipa thracica*, *Leucojum aestivum*, *Ruscus aculeatus*, *Leymus racemosus* ssp. *sabulosus*, *Silene euxina*, *Linum tauricum* ssp. *bulgaricum*, *Stachys maritima*, *Eryngium maritimum*, *Limodorum abortivum*, *Verbascum bugulifolium*, *Verbascum phoeniceum*, *Salvia forskahlei*, *Trachystemon orientale*, *Cistus salvifolius*, *Cistus incanus*, *Serapias vomeracea*, *Orchis morio*, *Orchis papilionacea*, *Iris sintenisii*, *Geranium asphodeloides*, *Silene copmacta*, *Jurinea mollis*, *Calystegia soldanella*, *Crambe maritima*.

Finally we will spend a day in the heart of the Strandzha Mountain woods of *Fagus orientalis*, *Quercus polycarpa*, *Quercus hartwissiana* with *Daphne pontica*, *Rhododendron ponticum*, *Epimedium pubigerum*, *Laurocerasus officinalis*, *Ilex colchica*, *Mespilus germanica*, *Pyracantha coccinea*, *Stachys thracica*, etc. It's the kind of place you could spend weeks!

Itinerary:



- Day 1 Arrival at Varna Airport and transfer to Coastal Dobroudzha
- Days 2 & 3 Coastal Dobroudzha steppes and sea cliffs
- Day 4 Varna region
- Day 5 Drive southwards, to the Eastern Balkan Mountain, with a stop at the Kamchia riverine forests
- Day 6 Sinite Kamani Nature Park in the Eastern Balkan Mountain
- Days 7 & 8 The Eastern Rhodope Mountains
- Day 9 Drive back to the coast
- Day 10 The Ropotamo River Nature Reserve
- Day 11 The Strandzha Mountain
- Day 12 The Strandzha Mountain
- Day 13 Departure



Haberlea rhodopensis



Orchis papilionacea



Paeonia tenuifolia



Iris pumila, Kaliakra steppe



Rhododendron ponticum



Brimstone

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