



Botanizing Greece

October 28 – November 8, 2019
\$2,940 double occupancy or \$3,640 single occupancy

Summary

The first rains of fall bring a “second spring” to Greece, when bulbs that have been baking in the hot summer sun come to life. Join our guide, Lefteris Dariotis, as we travel around the country to find as many *Crocus*, *Cyclamen*, *Colchicum* species and other fall-blooming plants as possible! During our 12-day tour we’ll travel through oak forests carpeted by *Cyclamen hederifolium* in the north to the rugged coastlines, limestone mountains, and ancient olive groves of the Peloponnese where *Crocus goulimyi* and *Crocus boryi* line the scenic roads. We’ll visit the *Crocus sativus* fields of Kozani (where some of the world’s best saffron is produced), climb up to the ‘elevated’ monasteries of Meteora, explore botanical highlights of areas around Athens (including Lefteris’ personal gardens), drive through medieval villages in Mani and Messinia, and enjoy some of the best culinary and visual highlights that Greece has to offer.

Day 1

Arrive in Athens. We’ll have the time to meet each other and enjoy some local wine at our welcome dinner in a traditional ‘taverna’.

Day 2

We’ll start our day early to travel north. We’ll stop to pay tribute at Thermopylae, where Leonidas and his Spartan soldiers gave their final battle, and then climb the foothills of Mount Oeta and Kallidromo to search for sternbergias and colchicums as we drive through shrublands dotted by the yellow and orange shades of smoketrees (*Cotinus coggygria*) and purple heathers (*Erica manipuliflora*) and wind through extensive Greek fir (*Abies cephalonica*) forests. Our hotel in Kalambaka, where we will be for 3 days, is located ‘in the shadow’ of Meteora, a UNESCO World Heritage Site.



Day 3

We’ll start our day by visiting one of the most imposing of the Meteora monasteries, the Megalo Meteoro Monastery and its historic grounds. If we’re lucky, the Meteora boulders will still be covered on their tops by the purple waves of *Prospero autumnale* (*Scilla autumnalis*). Afterwards, we’ll take a 2-hour drive through the central Pindos mountains, through the villages of Elati and Pyli and enjoy the vistas and plant communities of Mount Koziakas.

Day 4

We travel through the extensive oak forests north of Kalambaka, which are carpeted with *Cyclamen hederifolium*, to reach the village that goes by the name Krokos (not surprisingly!) that is famous for its saffron. We’ll visit fields of *Crocus sativus* in full flower and learn about their harvest from the Saffron Grower Association. On our way south to Kalambaka, we’ll follow a different route across artificial Lake Polyfytos and get glimpses of the mythical Mount Olympus.



Day 5

We’ll return back to Athens, but we’ll shortly stop at the area of Smokovo to look for bulb treasures on the serpentine rocks. After we arrive in Athens you’ll be free to relax and enjoy downtown Athens.

Day 6

We'll spend today botanizing around the prefecture of Attica, on the east and south sides of Athens. Sharing botanical roots with the Peloponnese and the Aegean, Attica has a rich bulb flora and we will aim to find big populations of several crocuses like *C. cancellatus* subsp. *mazziaricus* and *C. laevigatus* as well as the presumed progenitor of saffron, *C. cartwrightianus*. The smallest colchicum, *C. cupani*, will accompany us along the way and sternbergia will be in flower around the extraordinary Temple of Poseidon at Cape Sounion on the Aegean.

Day 7

Today we'll be visiting our guide's gardens in Peania to enjoy the autumn display of many New World salvias and to see his extensive collection of potted bulbs, including several fall flowering species in genera like *Cyclamen* and *Lachenalia*. But the highlight may be South African oxalis, with more than 140 species and varieties, most of which will be in full flower. We'll then take a hike on nearby Mount Hymettus to see the prolific displays of *Cyclamen graecum* and *Sternbergia sicula* and search for the rare *Colchicum sfikasianum*. We'll end at the grounds of the Vorres Museum, to enjoy its gardens as well as the important collections of both contemporary and folk Greek art.



Day 8

Today we leave Athens and enter the Peloponnese through the bridge above the Corinth Canal, where we'll make a quick stop. Afterwards we'll explore Mount Parnon, the smaller neighbor of Mount Taygetos, but with a great wealth of plant species and endemism. We'll be on the lookout for one of the rarest colchicums of Greece, *Colchicum peloponnesiacum*, search for *C. boissieri* and *C. bivonae* on higher elevations, and see autumn flowering *Allium callimischon*. *Crocus hadriaticus* and *C. biflorus* subsp. *melantherus* will complete the picture. If we're lucky we'll also smell the first *Narcissus tazetta* of the season. Tonight we'll be staying at the seaside town of Gytheion, capital of Mani.

Day 9

On our first day on the Mani peninsula (home to the tough Maniot people, medieval architecture, and thousands of bulbs), we'll explore the eastern part of the Taygetus mountain range and cross the peninsula to reach the village of Areopoli which will be our base for the next 2 days. Numerous bulbs will be awaiting us but the star of the day will be *Crocus goulimy* and its prolific displays.



Day 10

Today we'll travel to the southernmost point of the Mani peninsula, Cape Tainaro, where *Colchicum psaridis* will be greeting us as we approach the 'Gate of Hades'! We will hike to the southernmost point of the mainland of the Balkans with views to the islands of Cythera and Anticythera where the Ionian and Aegean seas merge. Deserted stone towers and villages will set the background for the bulbs we'll see.

Day 11

As we leave the drier Lakonian to enter the greener Messinian Mani, we'll look for fields of *Crocus boryi* and visit the idyllic house and gardens of garden designer Katerina Georgi near Kardamyli. The tiny *Narcissus serotinus* will be lining the roads that connect the traditional Messinian villages among hundred years old olive groves. We'll overnight in Kardamyli or Kalamata.

Day 12

On our last day we'll travel back to Athens, but not without stopping at some of the smaller northern gorges of Mount Taygetus to admire the beautiful fall flowering snowdrop, *Galanthus reginae-olgae*. We will stop for a farewell lunch at a local tavern. We should be back in Athens by late afternoon. Depending on your final travel plans, we'll drop you at your hotel near the airport or, for those of you who want to spend more time in Greece, at the starting point for your additional travels.

Post-Tour Extension

While in Greece, would you like to spend a few more days exploring the history, archeology, culture, and cuisine of Athens? We have not put together a specific itinerary for such a visit, but want to know if you are interested. When you pre-register for the tour, please indicate whether you would like to spend a few days and what you would like to see or do. Based on your responses, Lefteris has offered to coordinate with professional guides in the Athens area to put together one or more 2-3 day customized tours. The cost of these additional activities will depend on the number of participants and their interests.

What is included in the tour price:

- **Guide Services:** Eleftherios (Lefteris) Dariotis (known on Facebook as Liberto Dario) will be our tour guide. Lefteris is an internationally known plantsman who grew up and gardens in Peania (a small town near Athens). He studied Plant Biology in California and Horticulture in the UK. He owns a small seed and bulb mail order business and travels extensively through Greece exploring native flora and collecting seeds. His plant interests include drought tolerant Mediterranean plants, anything Lamiaceae, and South African bulbs. He spoke at a number of NARGS chapters in the fall of 2016.
- **Lodging:** Eleven nights. All hotels will be of 3- or 4-star level with full breakfast and other amenities (air conditioning and free wifi). They will generally be within walking distance of town centers, restaurants, etc. Example hotels are the O&B Boutique Hotel in Athens, the Divani Meteora Hotel in Kalambaka, and the Ktima Karageorgou in Areopolis. Double beds in Greece are mostly queen size.
- **Meals:** When in Greece, eat like the Greeks! Breakfast is generally fairly light (cereal with milk, yogurt, boiled eggs, bread, and coffee). A late morning snack, such as cheese or spinach pie (tyropita or spanakopita), is eaten around 11:00. Lunch is the main meal of the day and is served around 1:30. Depending on the planned activities for the day, it may consist of a stew or casserole, salad, and bread or a picnic-style meal with bread, meat, cheese, olives, tomatoes, and fruit. Dinner is typically a lighter meal and depends on how hungry you are. The tour price includes breakfast, late morning snack, and lunch. We will provide recommendations for dinner but the selection and payment will be the responsibility of each participant, except for the welcoming dinner on the first night of the tour.
- **Transportation:** Air conditioned vans or minibuses driven by professional drivers will be used during the tour.
- **Entrance Fees:** Entrance fees to all listed gardens, museums, and archeological sites.
- **Hikes:** Most of the hikes will be on relatively gentle slopes. Participants need to be in reasonable shape, but the goal of the tour is to botanize and to not to test endurance and climbing skills
- **Group Size and Price:** The tour price is based on 10-20 participants and a Euro to U.S. dollar exchange ratio of 1.17. The pre-registration instruction sheet for the tour discusses what will be done if the group sign up is fewer than 10 or the exchange ratio differs significantly.

What is NOT included in the tour price:

- International Flights
- Transportation between airport and hotel on day of arrival and departure
- Alcoholic beverages (except during included meals) and personal items
- Post-Tour Extensions
- Travel Insurance
- Tips: Tour guide and driver costs are included in the tour price. However, tips for exceptional service are always welcome. Tips in restaurants and bars are not obligatory but it is customary to leave roughly 5% after meals and 1-2 euros for drinks.