

Morocco's High Atlas & Crete in Spring

A Tour for the North American Rock Garden Society

18th March – 5th April 2026

Marrakech is our gateway to the majestic scenery of the High Atlas Mountains. The little hamlet of Imagira is our base, set in the valley above Asni on the route up to the famous Tiz n'Test Pass.

Day 1 18th March **From Marrakech and the Mountains**

An hour and a half from the airport we will have crossed the plain on which Marrakech stands and driven up through increasingly mountainous scenery before arriving at our lovely hotel. We'll gather in the attractive and homely sitting area for drinks before a supper that will feature many wonderful dishes – spiced stuffed pineapple, roasted carrots and potato, chicken fillet, squash stuffed with mackerel etc etc.

Day 2 19th March **The Kik Plateau**

This morning we'll head for the Kik Plateau. The beautiful white flowering gorse *Retama monspesia* flowers by the road on the way up alongside *Reseda phytoloma*, *Reseda elata* and *Reseda lutea*. Up on the Plateau we'll walk through some tiny fields before crossing over a rocky outcrop. Rocky field edges abound with *Aristolochia paucinervis*, *Asparagus horridus*, White Bryony and the lovely purple poppy relative *Roemeria hybrida*. *Lavandula multifida* is common and the nightshade family shrub *Withania frutescens* has green bell-like inflorescences. Reaching a rocky outcrop which protrudes from an arid hill with spectacular stripes of coloured rock, we'll find the lovely large pink flowers of *Ajuga reptans* and *Centaurea pullata*.

Descending the other side of the plateau we will stop for the unfailingly stunning orange stripy *Linaria ventricosa*. This grows amongst beautiful orange *Calendula stellata* and yellower *Calendula arvensis*, the rather fabulous *Cladanthus arabicus*, and purple *Fagonia cretica*. A gully with increased moisture has Red-horned Poppy *Glaucium corniculatum*, *Asphodelus ramosus* and the rather rare *Androcymbium gramineum*. Nearby we'll encounter the unusual brown bluebell *Dipcadi serotinum*. Our final rocky outcrop of the day has two fabulous plants, lovely blue *Iris planifolia*, and the truly gorgeous red-purple *Linaria maroccana*.

Day 3 20th March **Tizi Ouzane and Tougaramane Gorge, Amaziz Mountains**

A day full of unusual plants starts with the strange succulent chasmophytic aster *Kleinia anteuphorbium*. Nearby are the rather prettier tufts of the purple crucifer

Moricandia suffruticosa. Our next stop is dominated by white flowered *Cistus albidus* interspersed with plentiful *Lavandula multifida* and the rayless shrubby aster *Phagnolon rupestre*. Amongst this rather fine vegetation we'll find the cream 'dandelion' *Picris albidus* and the delicate scrambling snapdragon-flowered *Kickxia heterophylla*. Near Amizmiz the shrubby *Lavandula pedunculata* subspecies *atlantica* is common. Growing with it are some lovely little herbs including *Vicia subatlantica* and *Viola subatlantica*. Here we'll look for our first *Narcissus romieuxii*. Growing with these is the beautiful yellow (red-spotted) *Linaria amethystea* subsp *multipunctata*. *Allium roseum* flowers in both white and red forms and tucked in amongst the *Ferulas* (both *tingitana* and *communis*) are *Scilla peruviana* and Tassel Hyacinth. This is a rich area for pea flowers such as *Lathyrus setifolius*, *Vicia benghalensis*, *Vicia amphicarpa* and *Ononis laxiflora*. *Cistus heterophyllus* flowers pink on the hillsides amongst small 'bushes' of *Coronilla viminalis* and the chunky wine-red heads of *Anthyllis vulneraria reuteri*. Between the contorted boulders on a rocky promontory are flat green areas where a host of tiny plants grow. Here are lots of the purple stars of *Romulea bulbicodium* and between patches of Dwarf Palms is tiny white-flowered *Trifolium subterraneum*, the patch forming, teeny-leaved stemless yellow pea *Lotononis maroccana*, and a good number of the stemless asphodel *Asphodelus acaulis*.

Day 4 21st March **Azzaden Valley & Tizi Oussem**

We pass through the red canyon lands around Asni before turning into the Azzaden Valley and heading uphill. Soon we'll spot the striking purple and yellow *Polygala balanense*. The road continues along the side of a spectacular mountainous valley. Above are snow-topped mountains the slopes between with sparse *Thuya*, then quite suddenly we'll be in a dense oak woodland *Quercus coccifera* forest on a north facing aspect. This changes to scattered *Juniperus phoenicea* bushes and gnarled and ancient *Juniperus oxycedrus* trees. There are clumps of Dwarf Palms (*Chamaerops humilis*), towering to six feet tall, so probably reaching their maximum age of around fifty years. The bottom third of the precipitous valley is a marvel of ancient engineering, with incredible terracing over every possible inch and villages stacked on the steep slope. Next is the beautiful cerise flowered aster *Rhodanthemum gayanum*. Here are Atlas Ground Squirrels and Levaillant's Woodpecker. Hundreds of Alpine Chough fly acrobatically in the blue sky above waterfalls festooned with Maidenhair Fern. We'll find lovely *Bellis caerulea*, the yellow flowered shrubby *Adenocarpus anagyriifolius*, and *Borago trabutii*. On the return journey we may stop at mineral and fossil shacks, Morocco is justifiably famous for both!

Day 5 22nd March **Imlil: Tizi n'Tamatert & Tacheddirt**

En route we'll stop by a large boulder by to see beautiful clumps of flowering *Rhodanthemum atlanticum* an attractive white aster with pink undersides growing with architectural Rustyback Fern. Nearing the Tizi n'Tamatert pass we'll find an area of the endemic *Cedrus atlanticus* and stop to admire the

mountainous views. In a grassy area we'll find the brightest yellow *Narcissus jacquemoudii* amidst a mass of the purple stars of *Romulea bulbocodium*. *Narcissus waiteri* glows ghost-like on the serpentinite bluffs that rise above the road, these otherwise free of vegetation. *Daphne laureola* flowers here too. There are some really beautiful plants up here. *Anacyclus pyrethrum* appears nothing more than a simple white chamomile until one looks underneath – the petal undersides are deep, deep red. There's matt-forming alpine species such as white and pink *Ononis cristata* subspecies *cristata* and yellow *Medicago suffruticosa*. If desired we can stop in Imlil, a town famed for its hiking and mountain activities and with tourist shops to match. Some of the local shops have baskets heaped with local produce such as almonds, walnuts and thyme.

Day 6 23rd March

Sidi Fares & Oukaïmeden Ski Resort

En route to the high country of Oukaïmeden we'll stop to enjoy some glorious *Globularia eriocephala*. Nearby is the rare *Sideritis villosa*. Spectacular clumps of *Narcissus jacquemoudii* decorate roadside as we near the ski resort of Oukaïmeden. We'll walk the alpine slopes above where plump lilac *Colchicum triphyllum* is scattered throughout the short turf. Crimson-winged Finches and Shore Larks are amongst the alpine birds here.

Day 7 24th March

Marrakech: Majorelle Garden & The Secret Garden

En route to Marrakech we'll stop by a small reservoir where *Linaria moroccana* grows thickly by the roadside with other lovely flowers including *Volutaria lippii* and *Adonis macrocarpa*.

Inside Marrakech we'll start at the Majorelle Garden. The Majorelle is the result of a life-long love affair between the French-born artist Jacques Majorelle and Marrakech and the inspiration he found in the vibrant colours and street life of the city. Gradually, he purchased additional land, extending his holding by some 10 acres. In the grounds around the residence, Majorelle began planting a luxuriant garden which would become known as the Jardins Majorelle (Majorelle Garden). The garden became his life's work and he devoted himself to developing it for almost forty years. Following his divorce in the 1950s, Majorelle was forced to sell the house and land. After this, the garden was neglected and fell into disrepair. The garden and villa were rediscovered in the 1980s by fashion designers Yves Saint-Laurent and Pierre Berge. They set about restoring the gardens and the former's ashes were scattered in the gardens in 2008.

We'll also visit the Secret Garden, a historical monument dating from the Saadian dynasty situated in the Medina of Marrakech. Reflecting the magnificence of Moroccan architecture, it offers two green spaces, the "Tropical Garden" where plants from all continents live, and the "secret garden".

Connecting Morocco & Crete Days

Greentours will book our flights from Morocco to Crete. You will get an email for your passport information.

Please note that meals are included through the main tours but lunches on the 25th, 26th and 27th March, dinners on the 25th and 26th March and breakfast on 26th and 27th March, are not included.

Day 8 25th March Marrakech

You'll have the full day at leisure to explore the old town of Marrakech.

Day 9 26th March Marrakech to Chania

After breakfast there's a 10.30 departure for Marrakech Airport. Your flight departs at 13.25 and is with Aegean Airlines via Athens arriving into Chania at 22.10. You'll be met at the airport and transferred to the hotel.

Day 10 27th March Crete – Georgioupolis

You'll have a chance to enjoy a relaxing day before the Crete tour convenes in the evening. Nothing is arranged, however there's plenty to enjoy – you can enjoy the quiet streets and beaches around the village of Georgioupolis or you can take a taxi into Chania and spend the day wandering the lovely old town and port there.

Our visit to Crete is timed to coincide with a truly spectacular spring floral display with great swathes of colour that sit cheek by jowl with wonderful scenery and famed archaeological sites. Anemones, Tulips and Orchids cloak the unspoilt mountainous country. We can expect to see around thirty species of Orchid, including some of the rarest and most beautiful in Europe. Swathes of *Orchis boryi* and lovely Milky Orchid mix with Pink Butterfly Orchid and yellow *Orchis pauciflora* even along the roads. We'll find all manner of beautiful and varied bee orchids such as richly-hued Spruner's Bee Orchid and large-flowered *Ophrys episcopalis*, as well as many Cretan specialities such as *Ophrys gortynia* and the local *creberimma*, *cressa* and *creticola* forms of *Ophrys fusca*. Elegant groups of Widow Irises, Cretan Arums and Fritillaries adorn the limestone slopes. We will explore the magnificent White Mountains and the slopes of Mount Ida. In these high areas are stunning groups of pretty *Crocus sieberi* and the limestone slopes are awash with a pink haze of *Tulipa bakeri*. This is a very relaxing holiday with a guaranteed wild flower show which will live forever in your memory.

Day 11 28th March
Rodopou Peninsula and Akrotiri Peninsula

There are two peninsulas that jut out into the Mediterranean either side of the town of Chania. Both the more westerly Rodopou and the 'plumper' Akrotiri are not large, but both offer distinctive landscapes and a long sense of history. And for us, they are a repository of the beautiful and the unusual. Tiny white *Gagea graeca* adorns the rocks, *Pyrus spinosa* insinuates itself into narrow crevices and we'll find the lovely yellow-orange *Adonis cretica*. There's white *Allium circinatum* and a whole range of orchids including *Orchis quadripunctata* and many species of bee orchid: *Ophrys bombyliflora*, *Ophrys cretica*, *Ophrys episcopalis*, *Ophrys tenthredinifera* and *Ophrys phryganae*. There are tongue orchids too in the shape of both *Serapias parviflora* and *Serapias parviflora*.

Day 12 29th March
Omalos

The sublime landscapes of the Omalos plateau are full of flowers. Thousands of pink *Tulipa bakeri*, forming a pink haze in some areas, and almost as many blue *Anemone coronaria* are found amongst a mix of scattered Hawthorn, Cretan Maple, and endemic *Zelkova abelicea*. Griffon Vultures soar overhead and Hoopoes call from the short turf covered in swathes of white *Anthemis chia*. There are tufts of the endemic yellow *Gagea omalensis* and scattered Widow Iris (*Iris tuberosa*), a stunning black and yellow/green iris! Yellow *Orchis pauciflora* is a beautiful sight and we'll find plenty of another pink tulip, *Tulipa saxatilis*, adorning rocky promontories decorated with *Daphne sericea*, *Arum idaeum*, *Ranunculus sprunerianus*, and the lovely tessellated bells of *Fritillaria messanensis*.

Day 13 30th March
Pachos Lefka Ori

Some magnificent Cretan Cyprus (*Cupressus sempervirens* var *horizontalis*) reach a thousand years in age on the highest slopes of the Lefka Ori, Crete's famed White Mountains. White in winter from the snow, white in summer from the rock, but in spring these mountains are adorned with delicate beauties amongst patches of purple *Aubrieta* and pink Creeping Cherry. Here are delicate *Scilla nana* and *Crocus sieberi* with orange styles and purple-fringed white tepals. We can find *Arum purpureospathum*, woolly-leaved *Lomelosia sphaciotica* and *Acantholimon androsaceum*. In the gorges below we hope to find the first flowers of *Paeonia clusii*.

Day 14 31st March
Gious Cambos then moving to the Dom Hotel, Heraklion

Perfoliate Alexanders, Three lobed Sage and drifts of tiny white *Gagea graeca* and pink *Silene colorata* line our route up onto to the timeless landscape of the

Gious Cambos. This is a flowery place. Groups of orange *Tulipa doerfleri* draw the eye, this tulip is endemic to Central Crete. Pink frilly Naked Man Orchids (*Orchis italica*) and the endemic *Orchis boryi* will soon make themselves known, along with *Anemone hortensis ssp heldreichii* and the brightly coloured bee orchid *Ophrys heldreichii*. Indeed this plateau is famous for its orchids. There's the Dense-flowered Orchid (*Neottinea maculata*), pastel-pink Milky Orchid (*Orchis lactea*), the tongue orchid *Serapias lingua*, an endemic bee orchid in the shape of *Ophrys cretica*, and the uncommon *Orchis sitiaca*.

On the limestone outcrops are *Valeriana asarifolia*, the bright yellow wallflower *Erysimum raulinii* (endemic to Western Crete) and large-flowered *Ranunculus creticus*. In the grassy areas plentiful deep red Crown Anemone (*Anemone coronaria*). Up on the rocks are white endemic *Cyclamen cretica* and some impressive pink and yellow *Tulipa saxatilis*.

Day 15 1st April **Mount Ida**

After breakfast we will checkout from our hotel and drive for a couple of hours towards the Observatory on Mount Ida which is part of the great Psiloritis Mountains. We will have few stops on the way wherever we see any flowers. This is a day with amazing views and much geological interest. Up on the mountain we will see both *Arum creticum* and *Arum idaeum* and hybrids between these two species. Delicate and lovely *Crocus sieberi* flowers abundantly on the highest slopes and we'll find *Prunus prostrata*, *Tulipa cretica*, *Iris unguicularis* subspecies *cretica*, *Cyclamen creticum* and diminutive *Scilla nana* too.

Day 16 2nd April **Lasithi Plateau and surroundings**

This morning we will head up through Mochos to the Lasithi Plateau. On the way we should see carpets of *Romulea bulbucodium* decorating the little flat dolines, areas of red soil filling little hollows in the landscape. Here we can find the unusual bee orchid *Ophrys omegaifera* var. *basilissa* as well as the Pink Butterfly Orchid *Anacamptis papilionacea*. We will drive down from the plateau passing through Mesa Potami to Neapoli and Malia, again with stops on route for botanizing.

Day 17 3rd April **Kavousi and Sitia area**

Today we'll explore the eastern end of the island. Between Kavousi and Sitia lies some beautiful countryside replete with flowers. Amongst a host of lovely blooms we'll encounter today are *Bellevallia sitiaca*, *Muscari spreizenhoferi*, *Anacamptis laxiflora*, *Orchis prisca*, *Ophrys fusca*, *Ophrys sphegodes* subspecies *mammosa*, *Ophrys sphegodes* subspecies *cretensis*, *Ophrys sicula*, *Orchis pauciflora* and some impressive *Serapias cordigera*.

Day 18 4th April
Psiloritis from its southern part and Nida Plateau

After breakfast we will head once more to the Psiloritis range, this time driving up into the mountains from their southern side. We will drive to the village of Gergeri from where we will take the dirt road all the way up passing through beautiful scenery. All the while there are tranquil rocky valleys and at every turn views of the sea. We'll pass through areas with ancient trees such as *Quercus coccifera*, *Acer sempervirens*, *Arbutus andrachne* and others. The blue-anthered blooms of *Anemone heldreichii* are prolific sheltered from grazers by a variety of different shrubs. In rocky crevices we'll find little white-pink *Tulipa cretica* whilst delicate *Scilla nana* is sheltered by *Euphorbia acanthothamnus* alongside *Scrophularia lucida* and the yellow-flowered *Lysimachia serpyllifolia*

Day 19 5th April
Departure from Heraklion

Tour Price:

The price is \$7300 per person based on a double occupancy room; single occupancy is \$8715.

Included in the price

Dinner and transport from airport to hotel on March 18 and breakfast to return to airport on March 25. Services of your leaders. Please note: Drinks, tips, and items of a personal nature such as travel insurance, are not included. Please note that if you arrive earlier than the 18th or stay later than the 25th, airport transfer is on your own.

Please note that meals are included through the main tours but lunches on the 25th, 26th and 27th March, dinners on the 25th and 26th March and breakfast on 26th and 27th March, are not included.

Leaders

Stephano Doglio, Julia Corden in Morocco/ Oron Peri, Todd Boland in Crete

Group Size

Minimum is 5 and the maximum is 15. Only one leader will accompany a group of 8 or less.

Weather and Pace

It will be warm and sunny for much of the time. Rain is possible, usually as short-lived showers or thunderstorms. It can be cool, or even cold, in the highest areas. Walking is restricted to no more than two or three miles in any one day, and always at a slow pace, ideally suited to photography. Though the area is mountainous, much of the fauna and flora is visible from, or close to, the roads. However, sturdy footwear is still suggested.

Gratuities

Gratuities are included for meals but tips for bus driver and/or guides are at your own discretion.

Information Related Registration, Payments, and Cancellation

You must be a NARGS member to register. If you need to renew your membership or to join the society, please do so via the NARGS website (www.nargs.org) or contact Bobby Ward at nargs@nc.rr.com if you have questions or need help.

Registration will be on a first come, first serve basis. Space on this tour is limited to 15 guests. Your space is not guaranteed until a deposit is paid. The deposit is \$1000 USD.

Before submitting your deposit, send an email to nfld.todd.boland@gmail.com to confirm space availability. You will receive an email confirming space availability and a link to the Google Registration Form. Guests travelling together must EACH fill in a Google Registration Form.

Deposit Payment

To pay the deposit for the tour, use the PayPal link on the NARGS website (www.nargs.org). After logging onto the website, click on the "Donate" button at the top of the homepage. Then type Morocco/Crete Tour in the "Purpose of Donation" box, select Educational trips from the "Program" picklist, select Other for the "Amount" list, then fill in the \$1000 USD deposit amount, and then click the "Add to Cart" button. On the next page, check that the amount is correct and then click the "Checkout" button. On the next page, select "Secure checkout" with Credit Card or with PayPal account as the "Payment method" and confirm your address. You will then be routed to the PayPal website where you can pay via either a PayPal account (if you have one) or select Pay with Debit or Credit Card.

Final Payment

NARGS will email a reminder regarding final payment information in early January 2026. The preferred method for final payment is by check from a U.S. bank denominated in USD. The check should be payable to NARGS, note Morocco/Crete Tour on the memo line of the check, and be mailed to NARGS, POB 18604, Raleigh, NC 27619-8604. Payment may also be made via credit card through our Stripe payment system which should be up and running by January 2026. Failure to make final payment by February 1, 2026 will result in reservation cancellation and full loss of the deposit.

Cancellation

Cancellation requests must be submitted in writing to NARGS by the person making the reservation. Cancellations after deposit is paid but prior to the final payment due date will forfeit 50% of deposit. Failure to submit final payment by due date will result in forfeiting 100% of deposit. Cancellations after final payment is made but more than 30 days before start of the tour will forfeit 50% of tour cost.

No reimbursements or credits will be given for cancellations within 30 days of start of tour unless another person can be found to fill the space. Each registrant is urged to obtain private trip insurance to cover any emergency requiring cancellation. If the tour is cancelled by NARGS for any reason, all payments minus banking fees and incurred expenses will be refunded to registered participants. If the tour is cancelled by NARGS, any person who had previously cancelled will not be entitled to this refund.

Information Related to Insurance, Waivers, and Public Health Requirements

The tour price does not include insurance to cover costs associated with medical treatment, repatriation, flight cancellations, baggage loss, travel interruptions, cancellation fees, or other expenses. Each registrant is urged to assess their personal situation and to obtain private insurance to cover these costs if needed.

Waiver of Liability

By submitting a tour deposit, you are acknowledging that you are aware of the risks associated with travel and that you will not hold NARGS or others associated with the tour responsible for any delays; changes in itinerary, staffing, or accommodations; injuries, illnesses, or deaths; or any circumstances beyond the control of NARGS.

Public Health Requirements

All participants must comply with public health requirements for international travel in their country of residence and in the tour host country. During the tour, participants may be in close contact with other participants and the general public. To the extent possible, participants should comply with U.S. and local public health guidelines, and must comply with all local public health requirements. If you do not feel well during the tour, let the tour guide know. The guide will assist in locating medical services, but these services may be distant and less extensive than those available at home. Each participant will be individually responsible for paying the cost for these services and associated transportation.

QUESTIONS?

If you have any questions, please contact Todd Boland at nfld.todd.boland@gmail.com