

Crete in Spring

A Tour for the North American Rock Garden Society

27th March to 5th April 2026

Our tour 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* 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.

27th March Day 1

Arrival, transfer to Hotel Orpheas in Georgioupolis

We'll convene at Hotel Orpheas in the village of Georgioupolis half an hour east of the town of Chania. This hotel has a delightful and peaceful setting right by the sea and at the foot of the hills that rise rapidly to the south.

28th March Day 2

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*.

29th March Day 3

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*.

30th March Day 4 **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*.

31st March Day 5 **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*.

1st April Day 6

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.

2nd April Day 7

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 papilionaceae*. We will drive down from the plateau passing through Mesa Potami to Neapoli and Malia, again with stops on route for botanizing.

3rd April Day 8

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 *Bellevalia 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*.

4th April Day 9

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*.

5th April Day 10

Departure

Tour Price:

The price is \$3590 per person based on a double occupancy room; single occupancy is \$4175.

Included in the price

Dinner and transport from airport to hotel on March 27 and breakfast to return to airport on April 10. 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 March 27th or stay later than April 10, airport transfer is on your own. Please contact Greentours to book extra nights.

Leaders

Oron Peri, Todd Boland

Group Size

Minimum is 5 and the maximum is 17. 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 17 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 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 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

Insurance

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