

The logo for VIRA NATURA TOURS features the company name in a white serif font. The word "VIRA" is on the top line, "NATURA" is on the second line, and "TOURS" is on the third line. A white, stylized arc or crescent shape is positioned behind the text, curving around the top and right sides.

VIRA NATURA  
TOURS

**LILIES OF THE BLACK SEA  
TRIP REPORT  
2018**

*Lavatera punctata*

**Day 1**                      **20 June**                      **To Amasya**

Only one flight each day arrives into Amasya and that's at the unsociable hour of 00.30! So, there was little choice but a late arrival.

**Day 2**                      **21 June**                      **Amasya**

Given our early arrival we started later this morning setting off at 10am for a short cultural tour. Our hotel was conveniently located right below the impressive tombs of the Pontic kings, which were created just prior to the Roman conquest of the region two thousand years ago. There were plants too with *Echinops orientalis* in flower with spherical blue heads, the peculiar trio of *Zygophyllum faganum*, *Peganum harmala* and *Tribulus terrestris* as well as a pink *Centaurea* and *Sedum album*. Next, we walked along the pleasant riversides with views of the wooden beamed buildings and water wheels before reaching the museum. This held a diverse array of things and was decidedly more interesting than many museums I've found myself in, with clay burial sarcophagi, Roman jewellery and some grisly mummies still with clear detail on the dried skin.

Lunch was above the town with great views of the town's flanking limestone cliffs and the river snaking through on its way to the Black Sea. The botany began afterwards when we drove out of town into the rolling countryside. A fine display of the pink form of *Salvia sclarea* brought us to a halt. It grew below a steppe fragment and the area held many interesting plants as well as some superb insects from huge carpenter bees, burnet moths and many butterflies. There was also *Salvia nemorosa*, *S. aethiopsis*, a particularly large dome-like specimen of *Ziziphora capitata*, abundant golden *Anthemis tinctoria*, *Delphinium regale* and *Anacamptis pyramidalis*. Moving onto our main site eventually found the track down to the river and then walked up past the woods and meadow patches. It didn't take long to find a cluster of twenty or so spikes of *Himantoglossum affine* growing with *Epipactis helleborine*. More of both were seen elsewhere with maybe forty spikes of *Himantoglossum affine* in total as well as the last flower on an *Ophrys scolopax*, the pretty *Dianthus carmelitanus*, *Genista tinctoria*, *Campanula rapunculoides* and a stand of *Dactylorhiza osmanica* in a small marshy patch.



*Salvia sclarea*

Day 2

22 June

To Ordu

Today was the chance to see Turkey's most range restricted lily. Heading out into ripening countryside we turned and drove across a flat area where we stopped for *Eryngium bythinicum* growing in fields with *Juncus acutus*. Then a superb roadside drift of *Lavatera punctata* brought us to a halt, the pretty pink flowers forming a low hedge along the road. The road climbed into warm hills that comprised a Mediterranean enclave flora with species such as *Cistus creticus*, *Arbutus andrachne*, *Vitex agnus-casti* and ultimately a relict population of *Cedrus libanii*, more typically at home in the Taurus Mountains way to the south. The Med flora gave way to northern Euxine flora as we neared the top with *Fagus orientalis* and it was here we enquired about the lilies. We were directed to an area where with a bit of searching we found several *Lilium akkusianum*, but sadly they were past their best. However, one good specimen was found, standing 1.8 metres tall with five good citrus-scented flowers. We were fortunate to find such a good plant in the early season. Nearby there were good patches of *Sedum stolonifera* too. And then driving back out we stopped for a superb stand of pale yellow *Phlomis russeliana* with *Verbascum speciosum* and *Leonurus quinquefolius*. Further down the road a rocky bank had many *Campanula persicifolia*, with red-pink *Cirsium hypoleuca* and more sedum.

From here we drove for a while crossing the plain and then climbing again to where we stopped in an area of oak woods. There were more, tall *Lilium akkusianum* with *Genista tinctoria*, *Epipactis helleborine* and *Epimedium pubigerum*. The vegetation grew lusher and greener as we neared the Black Sea with increasing numbers of hazelnut groves. The last stretch alongside the calm waters was quick enough and we went out for a pleasant dinner by the sea after a freshen up.



*Lilium akkusianum*

Day 3

23 June

Egribel Pass

A sunny start boded well, but this is the north-east of Turkey and such things cannot be taken for granted. We drove straight up to our first flower meadow where there were some superb plants of *Lilium monodelphum* growing amongst abundant *Salvia forskahlei*, *Gymnadenia conopsea* and remarkable dark pink forms of *Anacamptis pyramidalis*. The creamy-yellow spires of *Pedicularis condensata* were also common with *Campanula sibirica*, and a few *C. latifolia*. A hidden corner had a few *Paris incompleta*. Then the rain arrived just as we reached our next meadow. This one was a bit tricky to access, especially since I could find the path up! Most of reached the area with many *Dactylorhiza urvilleana*, and a few *Astrantia maxima*. But then a mix up with the local jandarma had us coming down again. No matter, by the time we reached our next flowery location the rain had stopped. The steep slopes had many *Lilium ciliatum* growing with stately *Heracelum platytaenium*, *Caucasalia ponticum* and *Aster caucasica*. Lunch was equally flowery among a meadow of abundant *Silene marshalliana*.

Further up were even more (slightly more accessible) lilies in better condition alongside superb spires of *Campanula latifolia* and *Cyanus nigrifimbrius* and we clmbe dup to these, finding the obvious trail of a former botanical visitor passing from lily to lily! There was time to go higher, but thick mists had enveloped the pass and we couldn't see much at first. When it cleared there were the architectural forms of *Cirsium echinus*. Descending we stopped for a fine stand of pale yellow *Alcea hohenackeri* and then the white bells of *Campanula alliarifolia* growing with *Geranium sanguineum*. There was a final stop for some rather beleaguered *Buxus sempervirens* that had been ravaged by an invading moth. The clumps of *Saxifraga cymbalaria* next to them were healthier.

Day 4

24 June

Sumela

Brooding clouds unleashed some heavy rain as we drove the two and half hours to Trabzon, but by the time we arrived it had all finished and we enjoyed dry weather from then on. Before we reached Sumela there were cliffs with *Saxifraga paniculata*, but even better ones were further up, around a waterfall where we also found *Saxifraga cymbalaria*, *Paris incompleta*, whilst higher up near the viewpoint



*Lilium ciliatum*

of the monastery (which was closed for renovations) were some lovely white *Campanula betulifolia* and mauve *C. latifolia*. We drove back down for a tasty trout lunch.

The weather was good, so speeding up the improved road we soon reached a superb area of meadows with the finest lilies imaginable. They were set among flowery meadows brimming with the feathery plumes of *Aruncus vulgaris*. One specimen of *Lilium monadelphum* had three spikes with a total of thirty-five flowers. There were of good number of other big specimens and alongside these were many huge *Lilium ciliatum*. Some of these were 1.8 metres tall. Surrounding slopes had many more lilies and a rich array of meadow flowers including *Geranium ptilostemon*, *G. gracile*, *G. asphodeloides*, foaming masses of *Alchemilla mollis*, many purple-pink *Dactylorhiza urvilleana* with spotted leaves and swathes of *Rhinanthus angustifolius*.

**Day 5**

**25 June**

**Zigana Pass**

The extreme lushness of the seaward slopes quickly gives way to a different, drier landscape immediately after the pass. On the rocks were more (rather pink) *Campanula betulifolia* growing with various other steppic hypericum, salvia and an unknown asteraceae in bud – looking rather like a Chinese *Meconopsis*. A fine *Eryngium giganteum* was well worth stopping for, perhaps the most architectural and impressive species in the genus. A quieter side road climbed back towards the pass, or at least it was supposed to be quieter, but wall construction was ongoing on at the site for *Digitalis lamarckii*, an interesting foxglove with a pronounced white lip. Sadly, most of the *Morina persica* were finished this year. However, there were fine plants of *Salvia tomentosa*. On the grassier damper slope nearby, were superb drifts of hundreds of *Dactylorhiza iberica*, growing amidst dense *Juncus*. Two bee orchids were also found in the grass with several good spikes of *Ophrys apifera* as well as a few *Ophrys scolopax*. The scarlet-pink of *Lathyrus rotundifolius* tumbled about everywhere. Lunch was in a breezy spot, not a bad thing on such a warm day.



*Eryngium giganteum*

Day 6

26 June

Uzungol

A fine misty dawn was greeted with copious bird song across the very pleasant valley, with the village strung along it in colourful tones. We descended to the Black Sea and after sorting out supplies continued along the coast before turning inland and climbing back up to the hills. Nearing the lake, we stopped for a small population of our fourth lily, *Lilium ponticum* and arrived just in time as a lady was busy cutting the area for hay. Fortunately, the lilies were spared (so far) and she kindly allowed us to photograph them. Lunch was beside the river, looking across at another fine but unreachable lily.

Uzungol itself is very much a crowded tourist trap, but the verdant hills above are full of good plants. We climbed up past slopes swathed in the feathery plumes of *Aruncus vulgaris*, rock patches peppered with intense pink *Silene compacta* and then a fine six flowered *Lilium ponticum*. The flower was attended by a hummingbird hawkmoth, a lily beetle and a voracious caterpillar that was devouring the stamens – the latter had to go! The number of lilies increased as we continued, stopping first for a few growing near a superb *Campanula betulifolia*, as well as *Trifolium trichocephalum* and a fine *Verbascum sp.*, plentiful *Dactylorhiza urvilleana* and water loving veronicas. However, the final meadow-clad slope was the proverbial bees-knees, full of colourful herbs with *Stachys macrantha*, *Aquilegia olympica*, *Polygonum bistorta* subsp. *carnea*, *Silene marshalliana*, *Campanula collina* and of course many superb *Lilium ponticum*. Some of the lilies had large purple-stained centres and the whole ensemble looked wonderful in the swirling mist. It was hard to leave such a ravishing flower scene. There was time on the way back to stop for a fine plant of *Campanula lactiflora* in full flower and then we pushed on in the rain to Ikizdere and our comfortable hotel, ready for tomorrow's botanical feast.

Day 7

27 June

Ovit Dag

There was a short stop for the orange form of *Lilium ponticum* and the another for some very orange *Papaver lateritium* growing beside the rushing river, all beautifully backlit. The big fourteen-kilometre tunnel through the mountain was now open and roadworks on the pass road meant we had to go through this and back up the other side to reach the 2600-metre pass. The turf here was studded with all manner



*Lilium ponticum*

of lovely alpines with plentiful *Gentiana pyrenaica*, *Pedicularis nordmanniana*, streamsides with *Primula auriculata* and the dainty mauve flowers of *Pinguicula balcanica*. Various gems revealed themselves as we walked finding drier ridges plastered with hundreds of *Campanula tridentata*, the magenta of *Geranium cinereum*, the white daisies of *Tripleurospermium oreades* and then a solitary but superb *Fritillaria latifolia*. Searching higher among the braided streams we found good clumps of intense blue *Gentiana verna* and then a good population of plum and blue *Corydalis conorhiza* growing near the strong yellow of *Caltha polypetalata*. Rocks nearby had the purple of *Primula elatior* subsp. *meyeri*, whilst John and Hilary found a superb patch of *Daphne glomerata* smothering a rock mound in scented ivory flowers.

Lunch was taken on the sunny turf, where else? The flowery turf was to be replaced by swathes of other flowers in the afternoon. Whizzing back through the tunnel we then climbed to a high yayla. Almost immediately we found flowering shrubs of *Rhododendron caucasicum* and glancing up we could see the upper hillsides had a dense frosting of these shrubs in full bloom. Accompanying them were huge numbers of *Anemone narcissiflora* and these continued throughout our pleasant flowery amble back down the road. Various populations of *Lilium ponticum* were found, along with the remarkable dark purple spikes of *Pedicularis atropurpurea*, golden-yellow *Senecio pseudo-orientale*, deep blue *Cyanus nigrifimbrius*, a few *Inula orientalis* and some stunning *Aquilegia olympica* poised beside the road with a magnificent mountain backdrop of forested ridges and emerald hills. It's fair to say that this one view probably held more unadulterated flower meadow than the whole of the UK. Wet areas had concentrations of pretty osiris blues taking salts too as a superb juvenile golden eagle soared over us. *Geranium ibericum* became more common, its red-veined mauve flowers beautifully backlit and to round things off there were impressive purple-pink spikes of *Orchis mascula* and dozens of more restrained *Coeloglossum viride* (now *Dactylorhiza viridis*).

**Day 8**

**28 June**

**To Savsat**

A long drive lay ahead of us, but we experienced good things at either end of it. There was a quick stop for *Silene compacta* near the hotel and then we sped once again through the long tunnel, stopping on the other side for a lovely meadow. It was packed with flowers including *Verbascum armenum*, *Nepeta nuda*, *Hypericum scabrum*, *Asymuema* sp, abundant *Vicia cracca* and some superb big scarlet *Papaver pseudo-orientale*. Huge plants of *Anchusa azurea* were attracting Scarce Swallowtails nearby. Further down were a few pure white *Alcea calvertii* with *Onosma sericea*, *Centaruea depressa* and *Teucrium orientale*. The road entered the impressive Coruh river valley and we stopped next for the bright pink of *Pelargonium endlicherianum* growing with *Glaucium corniculatum* and abundant white *Sedum album*.

*Daphne glomerata*



There were still plenty of kilometres to get through so we pushed on for an hour, stopping at a shady lunch spot with fine views of the varied rock formations. It was hot!

The colossal dam construction projects have made the journey longer than in the past so we gritted teeth and completed the final two and a half hours onto the pleasant and cooler green surrounds near Savsat. Our hotel was located adjacent to superb meadows, brimming with *Astrantia maxima*, *Geranium ptilostemon*, *Rhinanthus angustifolius*, *Campanula latifolia*, the curved beaks of *Rhynchosorys orientalis* and most important of all many fine *Lilium kesselringianum*. The best forms of this had the distinctive yellow band on the tepals and grew on lush slopes with *Lathyrus roseus* and *Aruncus vulgaris*. It was a delightful place to end the day.

**Day 9**

**29 June**

***Lilium szovitsianum***

The flowery expanses of eastern Anatolia provided the backdrop to today. There were quite literally oceans of *Filipendula vulgaris*, blue sweeps of *Echium vulgare* punctuated with the yellow spires of *Verbascum georgicum* and the mixed pinks of so many polygala and gladioli. However, our first stop was in the less than pristine environment of the local industrial estate as the brakes needed a check! Nonetheless, there were fine verbascum, *Ononis arvensis* and *Consolida orientalis* to look at while we waited. Arriving at our main location we set off for the nearby slopes walking through increasingly flowery meadows to where *Lilium szovitsianum* towered above everything else. They grew on a slope with *Papaver pseudo-orientale*, *Linum hypericifolium* and *Asyneuma* sp. at the top of the slope were different flowers including *Campanula glomerata*, *Echium russicum* and cerise *Trifolium alpestre*. In fact, the latter grew more dominant and mixed delightfully with *Trifolium pannonicum*, *Gymnadenia conopsea* and *Campanula collina* across the slope in a wonderful swirl of colours. Another fine stand of *Lilium szovitsianum* was reached some spikes having over twenty big yellow flowers. Below rocks were smothered with a pretty mixture of *Trifolium campestre* and *Thymus longicaulis*. Following the slope down we passed through a big stand of *Geranium pratense* to more lilies and then onto a meadow of *Filipendula vulgaris* with the upright stems of *Phlomis tuberosa*. The flowers kept coming with a drier rock mound holding a fine specimen of *Delphinium crispulum*, and an attractive white-and-pink form of *Centaurea triumfetti*.

Lunch was in the shade of some willows. Driving back, we could have stopped a dozen times for the massed displays, but had to limit ourselves to a big stand of thousands of *Gladiolus kotschyanus*, a



*Lilium szovitsianum*

dense field of *Consolida orientalis* and then climbing back to the pass, the orange bowls of *Papaver orientale* spread out on the pastures in fiery groups with abundant *Campanula stevenii* and *Nepeta transcaucasica*. Fine views of the Kackar mountains completed the journey.

**Day 10**

**30 June**

**To Kars and flights**

This being a slightly early season the journey to Kars was very flowery with lovely stands of poppies, echiums, verbascums and various foamy white umbellifers lining the road. We made the airport in good time and all connections connected, with Hilary, John and I continuing onto Thessaloniki for a tour of the Pindos.



*Gladiolus kotschyanus*

For information on our tours  
please contact  
[info@viranatura.com](mailto:info@viranatura.com)

*Campanula betulifolia*