

Yunnan

A Greentours Itinerary

Days 1 & 2

UK to Lijiang in Yunnan

We will spend our first night in the old quarter of Lijiang, a UNESCO world heritage site, and a charming place to wander in the early morning or enjoy the bustle in the evening when quintessentially Chinese streets are decorated with red lanterns.

Days 3 & 4

Wenghai & the Yulong Shan

Half an hour from Lijiang the Yulong Shan rises up to over sixteen thousand feet. Among the pine forests on the lower slopes are many creamy *Roscoea caulteooides* and purplish *Roscoea tibetica*, whilst the bright golden yellow *Primula forrestii* adorns the craggy limestone outcrops nearby, where tucked in the shade are colonies of diminutive *Primula yunnanensis*. Here and there are the delicate white-pouched 'slippers' of *Cypripedium plectrochilon* and its bigger relative the green-pouched *Cypripedium flavum*, the latter growing alongside the curious *Paris polyphylla*. On the flatter grasslands the magenta trumpets of *Incarvillea mariei* colour the ground and these are found in even greater profusion up at Yak Meadow, a pasture at fourteen thousand feet that we will reach by cablecar. Here the meadows are filled with the yellow of *Stellera chamaejasme*, the deep pink drumsticks of *Androsace spinulifera* and secreted among the dwarf rhododendrons are the gorgeous pale blue flowers of *Meconopsis horridula*, our first blue poppy.

The following day we'll visit Wenghai, a small village beside a lake that is surrounded by a fabulous carpet of bright pink *Primula bulleyana* subspecies *beesiana*. On the way are the yellow trumpets of *Incarvillea lutea* and the pretty lilac-pink flowers of *Thalictrum delavayi* that shiver in the slightest breeze.

Days 5-7

Zhongdian Plateau with Napa Hai and Tianchi Lake

Fork-tailed Swifts sweep over the travertine terraces of Baishui, like a smaller version of the famous Turkish site at Pamukkale, where mineral-rich springs have created beautifully sculpted bowls, pools and crystalline patterns. Wet flushes along the way are full of deep pink *Primula poissonii* and the pine woods are home to more orchid species with *Calanthe delavayi* and *Pleione bulbocodioides* tucked among the shrubs of shell pink *Rhododendron primulaeflorum*.

Zhongdian sits on a broad plateau surrounded by hills and mountains. At Napa Hai rocky roadsides are home to tall clumps of *Incarvillea zhongdianensis*, the brilliant orange-red *Androsace bulleyana*, and on more gravelly slopes the very handsome *Meconopsis prattii*, perhaps the finest blue poppy we'll see. Pine woods are full of yellow *Daphne calcicola*, both white and pink *Rhododendron decorum*, and stands of *Cypripedium flavum* whilst mixed forests hold our first *Nomocharis aperta*, deep blue *Iris bulleyana* and the strange brown orchid *Oreorchis erythrochrysea*. Climbing a little higher Rosy Pipits perform their display flights above slopes peppered with yellow *Rhododendron wardii*. Among these shrubberies hide colonies of sumptuous maroon-pouched *Cypripedium tibeticum* mixed with its charming cousin *Cypripedium guttatum*.

To the south east lies Tianchi Lake set at over thirteen thousand feet and fringed by fir forest and marshy flushes choked with brimstone yellow *Primula sikkimensis*. Buff-barred Warblers trill loudly from the shrubberies and among the dwarf rhododendrons are the brown bells of *Lilium souliei*, whilst here and there are stands of *Iris cuniculiformis*. Although much of the area has been logged this has created the ideal conditions for the borage *Cynoglossum ambile* with billowing masses of blue flowers and lower down in remnants of birch wood are superb stands of *Nomocharis aperta*, white *Morina alba* and thriving colonies of *Cypripedium flavum*.

Days 8-11

Shalui Shan – The Sichuan Loop

To the northeast of Zhongdian lies a complex of mountains and high passes that form the start of the vast Tibetan plateau and we will spend four days traversing these superb highland landscapes. Oceans of dwarf rhododendrons colour the land purple in the stark granite uplands that extend as far as the eye can see, before we cross the Da Xue Shan and its spectacular jagged peaks and vast high screes.

Our first day takes us across an undulating landscape through areas of forest full of lush *Primula hongshangensis* and the odd-looking creamy *Lilium lophophorum* with flowers that never seem to quite open. Rocky stream sides harbour *Corydalis hamata* as Grey-crested Tits forage in shrubberies and Nutcrackers watch our every move as we drive up successive passes to nearly fifteen thousand feet. Patches of stunning *Primula dryadifolia* and stands of *Meconopsis integrifolia*, along with a scattering of its gorgeous purple-blue cousin *Meconopsis lancifolia* and little cushions of *Androsace delavayi*, colour the alpine turf. The dramatic ridges and crags conceal picturesque lakes and we descend again into thick forest to our rustic guesthouse past deep purple-blue *Iris bulleyana*. Rocky gorges separate Yunnan and Sichuan and we will travel through these past idyllic picture postcard Tibetan villages of neat painted houses and immaculate fields eventually climbing again to find colonies of pale blue *Primula bellidifolia* and brilliant carpets of yellow *Trollius yunnanensis* and pink *Primula pulchella*. Prayer flags mark the summits of each pass and below us is a wonderful landscape reminiscent of Central Asia with broad green plateaux and rolling hills and

village streets lined with poplars. Ruddy Shelduck breed alongside Citrine Wagtail and Horned Lark in the lake-studded granite uplands of the Haizi Shan. The turf is spattered golden-yellow with mats of *Androsace bisulca* and here and there are stands of creamy *Primula chionantha*. Lower down it is the pretty dwarf *Iris ruthenica* and almost black-flowered *Thermopsis barbata*. The highest pass of the tour follows, a breathless fifteen thousand three hundred feet before we descend once again past more classic rural scenes.

The jagged spires of Da Xue Shan effectively divide Yunnan and Sichuan and as we approach the pass at fourteen thousand feet we hope to find *Meconopsis rudis* growing in shale crevices and carpets of *Androsace rigida*. From the pass we can explore the nearer crags and screes, home to stunning *Meconopsis lancifolia*, the creamy bells of *Fritillaria cirrhosa*, *Corydalis pachycentra* and beautiful yellow louseworts, looking out for Red-faced Rosefinches feeding in the turf as we go. The views from the ridge are some of the finest we'll see before we make the return to Zhongdian through yet more stunning landscapes.

Day 12

Zhongdian Monastery

After four days on often rough roads we'll spend the morning relaxing. Later we'll visit the impressive monastery to the north of town and perhaps enjoying some of the floral swathes of asters, euphorbias and louseworts.

Day 13

Weixi

West of Zhongdian a ten thousand foot pass divides the Yangtse and Mekong Rivers. We'll pass by the famed first bend in the Yangtse en route before climbing up through shrubberies full of white and pink *Rhododendron decorum*, the larger leaved *Rhododendron glischrum* and the creamy white lacecaps of *Hydrangea heteromalla*. Mixed forests have some of the best birdwatching on the tour and we hope to see the rainbow coloured Mrs Gould's Sunbird, White-naped Yuhina, White-browed Fulvetta and Lesser Cuckoo. Florally there are the peculiar spathes of *Arisaema elephas* and the simply beautiful *Nomocharis pardanthina* growing along field edges with improbably orange *Euphorbia bulleyana*.

Days 14-16

Dechen & the Baima Shan

The Mekong Valley changes dramatically as we progress, first through lovely green pastoral scenes passing occasional shrubs of *Cornus capitata* and roadsides billowing with *Incarvillea arguta*. At Cizhong we'll pay a visit to the church there where the plant hunter George Forrest stayed before narrowly escaping death at the hands of Tibetan lamas a century ago – the French missionaries were not so fortunate. They still

grow wine using techniques handed down by the missionaries and it's really not that bad at all! Climbing steadily we can enjoy the fabulous views of the drier hills and river below before reaching Dechen.

Below the magnificent Kawa Karpo, Yunnan's highest peak, we can explore the superb screes and alpine turf of the Baima Shan. The road up will produce mauve *Primula zambalensis* and pale pink forms of *Primula chionantha* subspecies *sinopurpurea*. For those that climb higher onto the scree there are the wonderful varied colours of *Corydalis melanchlora*, tight rosettes of purple flowered *Lamiophlomis rotata*, the brown bells of *Fritillaria delavayi* and pretty pink *Solmsbauchia pulcherrima*. Flitting about the shrubberies are Rufous-breasted Accentors and Blue-fronted Redstarts. We'll hope to see Tibetan Snowcock and we'll certainly hear their far carrying call. The crags and cliffs are home to *Paraquilegia anemonoides* and there is an accessible colony here with sensational dark colour forms, some plants are almost three feet across with hundreds of flowers! The *Rhododendron roxieanum* forest that clothe the slopes harbour the peculiar gentian relative *Megacodon stylophorum* and as we descend a little there are superb displays of deep pink *Primula secundiflora* and *Primula sikkimensis*. If we are lucky the huge Derbyan Parrot might even come to investigate our activity.

Day 17

Shika Shan

Rising above the plateau to the east is the fourteen thousand foot Shika Shan and we will take advantage of the new cable way there to whisk us to the summit, an area of superb alpine turf full of the pink cushions of *Diapensia purpurea* and electric blue *Corydalis pachycentra*. The land slopes gently down through sheets of thousands of gently nodding purple *Primula amethystina* as well as a scattering of *Primula deflexa* and the deep purple-blue *Anemone obtusiloba*. White-tailed Rubythroats skulk among the many rhododendron shrubberies and as we descend there will be several species in flower including the variable *Rhododendron phaeochrysum* which comes in all shades from white to pink. We descend through superb fir and hemlock forest full of big rhododendrons and marshy flushes with the tall yellow poppy *Meconopsis pseudointegrifolia*. The handsome marbled leaves and pink flowers of *Podophyllum hexandrum* will complete a wonderful day in the mountains.

Days 18 & 19

Zhongdian to UK

In the evening of day 17 we'll return to Zhongdian and on Day 18 we'll travel to Kunming departing there in the afternoon and arriving back in the UK on Day 19.

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