

# Northwest India

## A Tour for the Alpine Garden Society

### Itinerary

#### Days 1 & 2 to Chandigarh and then to Manali

We arrive into Delhi late in the evening and go to the Park Land Grand Hotel for a night's sleep before catching the morning flight up to Chandigarh. The road journey from there to Manali is still quite long but there's endless fascination on these Indian roads, as well as a tasty lunch to be had. Once we are up into the Himalayan foothills we will start to see stately forms of *Euphorbia royleana* and the Wild Date Palm *Phoenix sylvestris*. In the afternoon we'll reach the verdant Kulu Valley, the villages and countryside nestling amid tranquil orchards.

#### Day 3 Jalori Pass

Oriental White-eyes, Himalayan Bulbuls, and stunning Crimson Sunbirds will be in the garden as we take our breakfast. Today we'll explore the Jalori Pass, a relatively low pass by local standards, at a mere 3200m, but a good chance for us to start the acclimatization process. The lovely forests are not short of flowers too. Under impressive *Aesculus indicus*, *Picea smithiana*, *Taxus baccata* and *Rhododendron arboreum* are masses of pink *Iris milesii*. Among them are fabulous cobra lilies, *Arisaema utile*, *Aquilegia pubiflora*, a striking deep purple-pink *Cynoglossum*, various forms of pretty lilac *Geranium wallichianum*, and on the banks a dark purplish-blue form of *Campanula lactiflora*. We might just catch the last flowers of *Primula nana*, and a Butterfly Orchid is abundant under pine woodland. *Wulfenia amherstiana* decorates the rocks.

#### Days 4, 5 & 7 Rohtang La

The Himalayan Ranges are home to many of the World's most beautiful flowers, and in very many places the shows of choice alpinists are unbelievable. What makes the Rohtang La so special is that it is so easily accessible, the pass being only fifty kilometres from Manali, and on a good road. We'll spend three days exploring this botanical mecca which reaches just shy of 4000m on the pass summit. We'll drive up out of Manali and into forest where there is abundant *Anemone rivularis/demissa*, and striking *Roscoea alpina* on roadside rocks. Common Rosefinches and the lovely Pink-browed Rosefinch may be seen as we meet the first of many *Meconopsis aculeata*. Nearby are the pretty pink drumsticks of *Androsace sarmentosa* and the much larger drumsticks of familiar *Primula denticulata*.

The Rohtang La is a great area for *Primula*. There are lots of the lovely deep pink *Primula rosea* close to snow patches, and the delicate *Primula involucrata* enjoys similar habitats. Nearby we'll find the altogether more ravishing *Primula macrophylla* var *moorcroftiana*, a *nivalis* type primula with purple flowers. Elsewhere are abundant *Caltha palustris* and *Arisaema jacquemontii*, some *Trollius acaulis*, neat bushes of cerise flowered *Rhododendron lepidotum*, deep red *Potentilla atrosanguineum*, mauve *Phlomis bracteosa*, and speckled throughout the shorter turf is the deep blue of *Corydalis cashmeriana*. Among the larger boulders are great sprawling masses of *Bergenia stracheyi* and nice patches of *Anemone tetrasepala*.

A wet cliff face hosts a real beauty, the gorgeous sweet-scented *Primula reidii* with wide-open white bells. Nearby in damp areas we'll find blue spotted *Iris kemaonensis*, tall yellow-green *Fritillaria roylei* and dark *Thermopsis barbata*. The turf is smothered in sheets of yellow *Anemone obtusiloba* mixed with abundant blue spikes of *Lagotis cashmerianus*. Studding the turf are hundreds of *Gentiana carinata*. the little pink drumsticks of *Androsace sempervivoides* colour the turf pink. Barer areas are peppered with hundreds of pretty little *Primula reptans* the flowers considerably bigger than the leaves. *Primula elliptica* and *Adonis chrysocanthus* bloom by the snowpatches. Dwarf bushes of *Rhododendron anthopogon* are smothered in creamy flowers and cover the slope making fabulous photos with the fine mountain views as a backdrop.

We'll explore valleys where we'll see superb creamy *Aquilegia fragrans*, the pale blue bells of *Codonopsis clematidea* and drifts of cerise *Pedicularis siphonantha* among the Marsh Marigolds and ever present mauve *Geranium himalayense*. Though initially quite steep the walk soon levels out and here are some gorgeous drifts of *Androsace sarmentosa* and fine clumps of *Epilobium latifolium* growing with stands of two blue borages *Lindelofia anchusoides* and *Lindelofia longiflora*. Massed displays of *Polygonum affinis* quite literally carpet the ground pink.

In glacial moraines are stout yellow spikes of the fabulous lousewort *Pedicularis bicornuta*. The glaciers are retreating fast in this area and have left behind them flowery gardens brimful of geraniums, bistorts, *Silene moorcroftiana*, the purple pea *Cicer microphyllum*, and many lovely edelweiss *Leontopodium himalayanum*. White-tailed Rubythroats seem impatient with our photography! Some very fine *Corydalis govani* and *Dactylorhiza hatigera* inhabit a bewilderingly anatasomsing stream, whilst on the boulder sands is *Waldheimia tomentosa*, a fine pink daisy with woolly leaves that sprouts from between granite rocks. Black Redstarts and Sulphur-bellied Warblers inspect the cliffs where we find *Eritrichium nanum*, *Morina coulteriana* and the delicate *Silene tenuis*.

## **Day 6**

### **Baralacha La**

We drive north towards the drier lands of Ladakh passing along spectacular valleys with snowy peaks popping up everywhere and huge braided rivers dissecting the valley walls. As we gain altitude the rocks become more intensely coloured with

great sprawling moraines. The Baralacha La pass is at a giddy 4850 metres where we'll find a broad snow-streaked landscape speckled with small tarns. On the rocky slopes by the road are green domes of the wonderful cushion plant *Thylacospermum caespitosum*, which occurs between 4800 and 5700 metres so at the summit of Baralacha La it is at the low end of its range! In damper spots are fantastic spreads of pretty *Primula minutissima* that colour the ground pink in places. Pretty yellow *Saxifraga stenophylla* and *Rheum moorcroftianum* flower on nearby scree where they grow with woolly-centred *Saussurea gnaphalodes*. Big domes of *Potentilla biflora* stud the cliffs with orange-centred yellow flowers. The sun illuminates the grand mountain views as we stop to photograph hanging glaciers and big landscapes with flowery bushes of *Rosa webbiana* dotted here and there. Red-faced Rosefinches pose on boulders around which are superb flowering plants of *Aster flaccidus* and reddish-leaved *Pleurospermum govanianum*.

## **Day 8**

### **Kunzum La & Spiti Valley**

Many waterfalls tumble down immense green-caked cliffs on either side of the valley as we drive upwards. An area of birch forest has many lovely *Aquilegia fragrans*, *Dactylorhiza hatagirea* and the odd *Polemonium caeruleum*. Further on and up and the landscapes become truly stupendous. The road winds past granite boulders among which grow plentiful *Minuartia himalayica* and great stands of *Dracocephalum nutans* that colour the turf blue. Rocks ledges have *Primula involucrata* and lovely cushions of *Arenaria festucoides* smothered in white flowers, and in damp flushes nearby is the handsome *Pedicularis bicornuta* and more orchids. Big clumps of *Waldheimia tomentosa* greet us on the pass where Blanford's Snowfinches feed on the tight turf. Everywhere is pretty blue *Eritrichium nanum* and fine groups of *Saxifraga stenophylla* with their long red runners.

We enter the high dry landscape of the Spiti Valley dominated by towering ochre-coloured cliffs and red slate mountains, huge braided rivers with fluted banks riddled with bizarre earth towers all set beneath a pure blue sky. Red-fronted Rosefinch will be yet another species of this lovely family of birds, and we'll stop for *Allium carolinianum* with deep pink flowers, while on the river shingle are huge clumps of *Aquilegia fragrans*.

## **Day 9**

### **Pin Valley & Ki Gompa**

As we enter the Pin Valley we'll be greeted by the sight of thousands of pale-blue bells of *Codonopsis clematidea* mingling amongst countless *Geranium pratense* and yellow brassicas, a quite magical sight. Small cliffs have purple *Cicerbita macrorhiza*, tufts of *Campanula pallida*, *Gentianopsis paludosa*, and hopefully an early flowering plant or two of *Gentianella moorcroftiana*. Near the village of Kibba are drier slopes where we'll find white-flowered *Dracocephalum heterophyllum* and bushes of scented *Lonicera spinosa*. Blanford's Snowfinches and Alpine Choughs seem as at home as the people in the traditional Tibetan style

houses here. Down the valley we'll visit the Ki Gompa, an idyllic-looking monastery spectacularly perched high on a rock with commanding views of the valley and mountains beyond.

## **Days 10 & 11** **Sangla, Chitkul and the Baspa Valley**

The Baspa Valley is bordered to the north by the relatively dry Kinner Kailash Range, mountains held sacred by the local populace. Here we'll look for the superb *Primula obtusifolia* whose deep pink or purple pink flowers have a dark centre ringed with yellow. We'll find various colour forms of *Geranium wallichianum*, this geranium seems to have decided to mimic all the other purple, pink and blue flowered Geraniums in Asia and so you imagine you are finding many different species! We'll also find the spectacular pink and white spires of *Morina longifolia*.

During the afternoon of Day 11 we'll drive to Sarahan where we'll spend the night.

## **Day 12** **via Shimla to Chandigarh and flight to Delhi**

Though we will have taken a chunk out of the journey back to Chandigarh we've still a way to go before catching our late afternoon flight from there back to Delhi.

## **Day 13** **Departure**

After a night in the Park Land Grand Hotel we'll transfer to Delhi Airport for our homeward flights.

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## **Twin Passes Trek**

### **Day 12** **to Rangalti Camp**

In the main the walking during the main tour is not hard, distances small, only the altitude making us a little breathless. So now you've thoroughly acclimatized why not try the trek? The walking will be much more strenuous on this. You will need to be able to complete three back to back walks (one on each day!) and on each of which you will need to be able to go uphill for between 800 and 1000 metres altitude gain, with descents of the same magnitudes on each of the days too. The paths will be steep in places, with some rocks, scree and possibly snow patches. The upper altitude intended is 4600m for both passes.

The scenery around Rangalti Camp is superb, with snow-capped giants up the valley, grassy slopes uphill from the camp and a large braided river below.

*Cremanthodiums*, a rather choice genus, bloom across the slopes, and there are various Geraniums, Gentians and the like close by the camp.

### **Days 13 – 15**

#### **Rupin Pass, Nalgan Pass and to Sangla**

The flora on these two high passes is outstanding. Fabulous pink and blue *Corydalis* species inhabit the rock gardens where we'll find a range of *Primula* including *Primula elliptica*, *Primula minutissima* and more of the *Primula macrophylla* var. *moorcroftiana*, Lovely *Cremanthodium reniforme* grows by damp runnels. *Saussurea obvallata* is a fine member of a very choice genus from truly high mountains, however it will be eclipsed by the white-wooly pink-tinged daleks known as *Saussurea simpsoniana*, a species here at its lowest limit, indeed this plant has been found higher in the Himalayas than all but a couple of crucifers! Orange-centred *Lloydia longiscapa* flowers on the Nalgan Pass where cliffs are home to spectacular clumps of *Paraquilegia anemonoides* and amongst a number of choice *Pedicularis* is a nice pink form of *Pedicularis rhinanthoides*. Later in the afternoon of Day 15 we'll depart Sangla and drive to Sarahan where we'll spend the night.

### **Day 16**

#### **via Shimla to Chandigarh and flight to Delhi**

Though we will have taken a chunk out of the journey back to Chandigarh we've still a way to go before catching our late afternoon flight from there back to Delhi.

### **Day 17**

#### **Departure**

After a night in the Park Land Grand Hotel we'll transfer to Delhi Airport for our homeward flights.

Call 01298 83563 or visit [www.greentours.co.uk](http://www.greentours.co.uk) for the report from our reconnaissance visit to Northwest India. If you would like to ask about any other aspect of this holiday, please call 01298 83563 or email us at [enquiries@greentours.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@greentours.co.uk).

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