

Drakensberg

The Sani Pass & The Golden Gate

A Greentours Itinerary

Days 1 & 2 To Durban

Our overnight flight arrives in Johannesburg in the morning and connects with a short flight to Durban where we'll arrive at lunchtime and settle into our hotel and relax for the afternoon. Those that wish can wander round the hotel grounds where Citrus Swallowtail will be on the wing and where we'll see Knysna Turaco and Yellow-rumped Tinkerbird.

Day 3 Umtamvuna Nature Reserve & Port Edward

The Pondoland Centre of Endemism is often overlooked but these ancient sandstone gorges along the south coast have many endemics and specials tucked in amongst their forests and grasslands. Umtamvuna Nature Reserve is one of the best places to access this special flora. An as yet undescribed species of *Bulbine* flowers on rocky outcrops where we will also find *Cyrtorchis arcuata* and *Polystachya pubescens*. Here too is the orchid *Schizochilus zeyheri* and much *Agapanthus campanulatus*. Black Saw Wings and the oddly-named Lazy Cisticola are in the air as we reach yet more rocky botanical glory. Searching the crevices in the outcrops we'll find *Cyphia elata*, *Stachys nigricans*, *Albuca setosa*, *Aspidoglossum gracile*, *Erica cubica*, *Rangaeris muscicola*, *Tephrosia gnidioides*, *Lichtensteinia interrupta* as well as rare *Chironia albiflora* and the orchid *Stenoglottis woodii*.

Common Reedbuck move gracefully across the grasslands interrupted here and there with ancient cycads such as *Stangeria eriopus* and the Drakensberg Cycad. These extensive grassland have great floral variety with *Cassinopsis tinifolia*, *Syncolostemon parviflorus*, *Lobelia anceps*, *Erianthemum dregei*, *Alectra sessiliflora*, *Buchnera simplex*, *Selago trinervia*, *Secamone alpina*, *Athrixia phyllicoides*, *Senecio rhyncholaemus*, *Tarchonanthus trilobus*, *Tenrhynea phyllicifolia*, *Vernonia dregeanum*, *Indigofera shiluwanensis*, *Tephrosia polystachya*, *Watsonia densiflora*, *Dierama igneum*, *Aristea abyssinica*, *Tritonia disticha*, *Hypoxis filiformis*, *Scilla kraussii*, *Cyanotis speciosa*, *Alepidea peduncularis*, *Crotalaria globifera*, and *Tinnea galpinii* being just some of the species present. *Xysmalobium involucreatum* and *Pachycarpus asperifolius* are impressive asclepiads however the prize find in this diverse group here will be *Brachystelma australe* with its amazing spidery maroon and white blooms. *Brunsvigia grandiflora* is a beautiful species and we'll also encounter yet more orchids in the shape of *Orthochilus ensatus*, *Satyrium trinerve* and the very robust *Eulophia*

horsfallii. Butterflies will include Thorn-tree Blue, Rayed Blue, Harlequin Skipper, and the very local endemic Ketsi Blue.

Near Port Edward a marshy meadow has a population of impressive tall *Eulophia angolensis*. Fan-tailed Widowbirds flutter over a grassland that sweeps down to the ocean below us. Here we'll find the showy Natal Primrose *Thunburgia atriplicifolia*, *Wahlenbergia madagascariensis*, *Ceropegia carnosa*, *Hybanthus enneasperma*, and the orchid *Eulophia schnelliae*. *Strelitzia Nicolai* flowers here and there and there are many bulbs such as *Schizocarpus nervosus*, *Aristea torulosa*, *Bulbine asphodeloides*, *Commelina africana*, *Trachyandra asperata*, and *Tritonia disticha*.

Day 4 **Red Desert, Weza, and to Underberg**

This morning we'll start in the Red Desert. Not a promising name floristically speaking but in fact the Red Desert gets its name from red sandstone outcrops in a grassland full of fascinating flora. Here we'll encounter our first proteas *Protea roupelliae* and *Protea caffra*. Blooming in the grasslands will be *Hypoxis acuminata*, *Lasiosiphon (Gnidia) triplinervis*, *Osyris compressa*, *Anthospermum galpinii*, *Phyllica natalensis*, *Agathosma ovata*, *Ipomoea crassipes*, *Striga asiatica*, *Callilepis laureola*, *Vernonia corymbosa*, *Commelina erecta*, *Tephrosia kraussii*, and *Cryptocarya wyliei*. Black Mangroves grow along the banks of the Umtanvuna River below us and there's a gallery forest of *Schefflera umbellata*, *Tarchonanthus trilobus*, *Shirakiopsis elliptica*, *Gerrardina foliosa* and *Protorhus longifolia* amongst which we'll find the impressive milkweed *Schizoglossum atropurpureum virens* as well as *Lobelia pteropoda*, *Ipomoea mauritiana*, and *Dianthus mooiensis*.

Leaving the Indian Ocean coastal belt we'll head north, traversing sub-escarpment savanna, and reaching the sub-escarpment grassland bioregion. Red-footed Falcons perch on roadside wires as we pass, the orchid *Satyrium cristatum* flowering below them. Near Weza we'll visit a grassland that is home to the orchids *Disa chrysostachya*, *Eulophia parvilabris*, and *Satyrium sphaerocarpum*. Later in the afternoon we'll reach our fine guesthouse in Underberg, right under the Sani Pass.

Days 5 & 6 **The Sani Pass**

We'll base ourselves in the Underberg area for three nights to explore the gem of the southern Drakensberg, the Sani Pass. 4wds will take us up the pass and onto Sani Top where we'll stay the night before returning to Underberg by 4wd the next day. The journey will be a microcosm of our whole trip as we ascend through the different geological zones and floras. The scenery is spectacular as we ascend through the switch-backs of the final sections of the pass and see the looming basalt cliffs just below the plateau.

Crocoshmia paniculata flowers on the roadside as we ascend. We'll make a number of stops on the way up as all kinds of floral wonders will ensure that progress is slow! The orchid *Disperis lindleyana* flowers in leaf litter under planted pines. Golden-breasted Buntings feed amongst *Dioscorea sylvatica*, *Hermannia woodii*, *Asparagus cooperi*, *Aristea abyssinica*, *Rubus ludwigii*, *Cyphia tysonii*, and *Disa stachyodes*. Sometimes thousands of Amur Falcons can be seen along this stretch of road.

We'll stop by a cliff from which hang the lovely orange lanterns of *Sandersonia aurantiaca*, and at this spot white flowered *Hypoxis parvula albiflora* and *Polygala hottentota* also bloom. Proteas include *Protea subvestita*, *Protea roupelliae*, *Protea dracomontana* and the dwarf *Protea simplex*. It is quite a place for orchids; we'll see *Corycium dracomontanum*, *Disperis renibractea*, *Eulophia zeyheriana*, *Satyrium parviflorum*, and *Neobolusia tysonii*. Close to the South African border post we'll find the showy *Anisodonteia julii* as well as *Lotononis galpinii*, *Geranium pulchrum*, *Diascia cordata*, *Diascia integerrima*, and *Felicia filifolia*. A little higher and we will scan for the Suicide Lily *Gladiolus flanaganii*, so named to warn plant collectors not to risk getting too close on the slippery cliffs where it grows! Nevertheless we've found some that you can get close to. Chacma Baboons are much in evidence and Sentinel Rock Thrush will be seen. Lammergeiers and Cape Vultures are in the air.

The strange *Glumicalyx nutans* represents an endemic genus, we'll also see *Glumicalyx goseloides* a little higher. Streamsides have fine *Helichrysum montanum*, *Cyrtanthus epiphyticus*, *Polygala ohlendorffiana*, *Trifolium burchellianum*, and the pineapple lily *Eucomis schiffi*. We'll see *Moraea albicuspa* and the very special asclepiad *Schizoglossum hillardiae* before we even reach the Lesotho border. The variety of plants up here is quite incredible – here's just some highlights - *Disa cephalotes*, *Cineraria dieterlenii*, *Brownleea macroceras*, *Hebenstretia cooperi*, *Kniphofia ichopensis*, *Kniphofia ritualis*, *Gladiolus dalenii*, *Wahlenbergia krebsii*, *Sutherlandia montana*, *Geranium schlechteri*, *Geranium wakkerstroomianum*, *Zaluzianskya ovata*, *Schizoglossum bidens*, *Schizoglossum atrorubens*, *Aster erucifolius*, *Euryops decumbens*, *Papaver aculeatum*, *Diascia anastrepta*, *Jamesbrittenia pristisepala*, *Nemesia rupicola*, *Sopubia cana*, *Sutera floribunda*, *Pentzia cooperi*, and *Ursinia montana*. Orchids include *Pterygodium cooperi*, *Pterygodium hastatum* and *Schizochilus angustifolius*.

In the morning we'll awake to the beautiful scenery of Sani Top. Stunning Malachite Sunbirds feed on *Kniphofia caulescens* and Slogett's Ice Rats will be visible just outside our rooms. Vast numbers of *Rhodohypoxis baurii* flower in the damp rock sheets alongside mats of *Lobelia galpinii* and *Wahlenbergia polytrichifolia dracomontana*. Also here will be *Erica frigida*, *Eumorphia sericea*, *Trifolium burchellianum* and *Ranunculus multifidus*.

We'll have time to explore a little further into Lesotho's Black Mountains before returning to Underberg. We'll see the 'pyjama flower' *Androcymbium striatum* as well as *Eucomis humilis*, *Watsonia lepida*, *Watsonia pillansii* and *Hypericum aethiopicum*.

Orchids include impressive *Orthochilus welwitschii*, *Habenaria clavata* and *Habenaria laevigata*. Some exceptional birds likely up here are Buff-streaked Chat, Red-necked Wryneck, Gurney's Sugarbird and African Quailfinch.

Day 7 Kamberg

Between Underberg and Kamberg we'll pass through some low mountains with all sorts of botanical gems. There's the pink spires of *Watsonia densiflora*, beautiful *Brunsvigia undulata* and impressive *Asclepias macropus* in flower. The citrus-coloured Bokmakierie sings from cover. White Storks are common in wet areas where we may also see Grey-crowned Cranes and Black-winged Lapwings. Beautiful and brilliant *Hesperantha coccinea* grows by streamsides and we'll see *Satyrium parviflorum* and the impressive tall pink flowered *Dierama latifolium*.

Black Wildebeest graze the grasslands of the Kamberg reserve. Here we'll see Southern Bald Ibis stalking marshy grassland where we'll find the gentian *Chironia krebsii*, *Zaluzianskya natalensis*, *Disa versicolor*, *Satyrium longicauda*, *Wahlenbergia krebsii*, and *Kniphofia laxiflora*. Drier areas host fine *Brunsvigia undulata* and amazing numbers of *Dierama latifolium*. Continuing our towards Giant's Castle we'll see lovely *Orthochilus welwitschii*, striking *Brunsvigia radulosa* and the orchid *Disa cooperi* too.

Mid-afternoon we'll arrive at Giant's Castle, in the central part of Maloti Drakensberg Park World Heritage Site. After we settle into our spacious rooms there'll be time for a stroll down to the Bushman's River. Near the river the shrubby pea *Calpurnia sericea* is dominant and amongst them we'll see the River Bells *Phygelius aequalis*. There's also *Eulophia ovalis* and an unusual borage *Afrotysonia glochidiata*. Paths through the local gardens also reveal an excellent range of native flowers including *Greyia sutherlandii*, *Dais cotinifolia*, *Melianthus villosus*, *Bowkeria verticillata*, *Halleria lucida*, Southern Shell-flower, *Plectranthus grallatus* and *Geranium wakkerstroemianum*.

Day 8 Giant's Castle

rushing rivers carve channels through the afro-montane forests and grasslands of the Maloti Drakensberg Park. This is a rich hunting ground for the botanist. We'll take a walk to caves that boast some impressive San rock art. *Acraea horta* and Common Dotted Border fly amongst *Polygala gracilentata*, *Helichrysum acutatum*, *Oxalis depressa*, and *Stachys aethiopica*. Greater Double Collared Sunbirds visit *Melianthus* flowers. The walk takes us through extensive open grassland, the river below us, and dramatic scenery all around. The orchid *Disa patula* blooms by the path and here we'll find the sundew *Drosera natalensis*. New plants will come thick and fast: *Diclis reptans*, *Lobelia vanreenensis*, *Erica albospicata*, *Passerina montana*, *Valeriana capensis*, *Rhoicissus tridentata*, *Moraea brevistyla*, *Argyrolobium marginatum*, *Lotononis corymbosa*, *Rhynchosia cooperi*, *Gnidia polyantha*, *Aster bakerianus*,

Helichrysum krookii and *Helichrysum hypoleucum*. The extraordinary white spires of parasitic *Harveya speciosa* are impressive.

The habitat changes dramatically as we reach the afro-montane forest. The orchid *Stenoglottis fimbriata* flowers on shady boulders, with *Peperomia retusa*, and attractive *Albuca fastigiata*. Along the path are many fine *Streptocarpus gardenia*. *Stachys grandiflora* is common, and we'll see *Euclea crispa*, *Lithospermum afro-montanum*, *Polygala confusa* and *Satureja reptans*. Highlights will be the orchid *Disperis fanniniae* and attractive *Xerophyta viscosa*.

Verreaux's Eagles soar over the forest whilst back down in the grasslands we might admire black and red Koppie Foam Grasshoppers, butterflies such as Water Bronze and Marsh Blue, and even the rather lovely *Paralethe dendrophilus*, known as the Forest Beauty. Elegant Blesbok graze as we walk by.

Day 9 – 11(am)

Golden Gate National Park

En route to the Golden Gate National Park we'll stop at Spionkop Dam Nature Reserve sited under the Spion Kop itself, site of a famous battle in 1890. Impala, Burchell's Zebra, Blesbok, Warthog, and Tsessebe mark our progress through the grasslands. We'll see plants such as *Striga elegans*, *Blepharis obtusisepala*, *Berkheya echinacea*, *Tephrosia purpurea*, *Polygala rehmanni* and *Hypoxis hemerocallidea*. Spionkop is also a good spot for butterflies too and we can see Common Scarlet, Swanepoel's Copper, Black-striped Hairtail, Topaz-spotted Blue, *Spialia spio*, Yellow Pansy and *Biblia illythia*.

The Golden Gate National Park protects the northern reaches of the Drakensberg. This national park spans an impressive range of altitudes and is most famous for its breath-taking sandstone cliffs, visible from our hotel. The sunlit cliffs are what gives the park its rather evocative name. Blesbok, Burchell's Zebra, and Springbok will be seen as we arrive at our hotel and there may be some groups of Eland around too.

Inside the park we'll explore the grassy and rocky slopes and small forest patches. Lone bull Black Wildebeest hold territories spread across these grasslands all year. We may also see Grey Rhebuck and Red Hartebeest. We have even seen Meerkats near here, and we might also see the Giant Sungazer, a species of lizard that peeks out from its underground burrows. We can see the beautifully marked Painted Reed Frog in this area.

Our main focus with the flora here will be to use our base to access the high basalt peaks that loom to the south and which are crammed with alpine endemics which should be at their best at this time of year. We'll drive up to lofty heights where South Africa and Lesotho meet below the Sentinel Peak. One truly feels on top of the world here with sweeping, panoramic views as a backdrop to the floral wonders, such as

Crocasmia pearsii, *Eucomis bicolor*, *Dianthus basuticus* and *Agapanthus* and *Moraea* species – we'll see half a dozen of these lovely Irids during the tour. Lanner Falcon often soars overhead. Ground Woodpeckers frequent boulders where both *Albuca shawii* and *Hibiscus trionum* bloom. In marshy grassland we'll see *Gladiolus papilio* and fine *Cycnium racemosum*. Other fine plants include *Helichrysum tenax*, *Gladiolus crassifolius*, *Felicia muricata*, *Delosperma hirtum*, *Silene burchellii*, *Pellaea calomelanos*, *Haplocarpha scaposa*, *Cotyledon orbiculata*, and *Hypoxis argentea*. Amongst butterflies we are likely to see are Riley's Copper and Variable Blue and the impressive Mountain Pride.

Secretary Birds stalk the grasslands. Attractive orange *Jamesbrittenia aurantiaca* grows with clumps of *Galtonia regalis* making a fine sight. Amongst many other fascinating plants of these grasslands are fringed *Dianthus basuticus*, red *Crassula alba*, white *Crassula natalensis*, *Erica aestiva*, the attractive geranium *Monsonia attenuata*, *Pelargonium capituliforme*, *Pelargonium luridum*, *Gnidia caffra*, *Kniphofia evansii*, *Hypericum lalandii*, white *Ajuga ophrydis*, pink *Oxalis obliquifolia*, *Diclis rotundifolia*, *Glumicalyx flanagani*, *Hebenstretia comosa*, violet *Nemesia caerulea* and white *Nemesia sylvatica*.

We'll visit the famous alpine site at Oxbow in Lesotho where the extensive boggy meadows host such specials as *Disa fragrans* and spectacular clumps of *Xerophyta viscosa* are found at the base of cliffs.

Day 11(pm) – 13(am) **Witsieshoek**

Our hotel at Witsieshoek affords fine views of the Sentinel, which reaches 3615m into the blue skies. Walking directly out from our rooms we'll encounter fine grassland with an amazing floral show. *Moraea inclinata* is numerous, and we'll see *Kniphofia triangularis*, *Ornithogalum graminifolium*, *Craterocapsa tarsodes*, *Helichrysum krookii*, *Rhodohypoxis baurii* and *Heliophila rigidiuscula*. Amongst a variety of orchids are *Habenaria dives*, *Corycium nigrescens*, and *Satyrium longicauda* as well as amazing numbers of *Eucomis bicolor* and *Eucomis autumnalis*.

Beautiful white *Streptocarpus pusillus* blooms on roadside rocks home to Drakensberg Crag Lizards and Rock Hyraxes. We'll see plenty of stunning 'daisies' on this tour but few can be better than the vibrant purple-pink blooms of beautiful *Dimorphotheca jucunda*. We'll take a walk through a wonderful floral show closer to the Sentinel featuring *Kniphofia thodei*, *Crocasmia pearsii*, *Schizochilus angustifolius*, *Lobelia preslii*, *Sebaea thomasii*, *Hirpicium armerioides*, *Geranium magniflorum*, *Glumicalyx montanus* and the orchids *Disperis stenoplectron* and *Disperis tysonii*. We'll see the strikingly-marked Drakensberg Rockjumper and butterflies will likely include Burnished Opal and Geranium Bronze. *Nerine bowdenii* will certainly be a plant highlight and other fine species we'll encounter today are *Romulea thodei*, *Moraea trifida*,

Nemesia caerulea, Lobelia flaccida, Kniphofia fibrosa, Gladiolus ecklonii, Hesperantha baurii, Erica woodii and Bulbine abyssinica.

Day 13 (pm)

To Johannesburg and departure

We'll have plenty of time in the morning to further explore around our wonderfully situated hotel in Witsieshoek before heading off to Johannesburg to catch our evening flight.

Day 14

Arrive UK/Europe

Call 01298 83563 or visit www.greentours.co.uk for the report from our previous tours to the Drakensberg. 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.

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