

South Korea

A Tour for the Alpine Garden Society

A Greentours Itinerary

Day 1

Depart UK/Europe

Day 2

Arrive Seoul and fly to Jeju Island

Due to the nine hour time difference it'll be the next lunchtime before we land in Seoul. We'll then connect with a flight down to Jeju Island arriving there around dusk and making the short transfer to our hotel.

Days 3 & 4

Jeju Island

Jeju is a popular tourist destination due to its subtropical location and a flight from Seoul lands every ten minutes at the airport. The impressive Hallasan National Park protects the interior slopes of the large volcano that is the island. As elsewhere in Korea the national parks have amazing access with superbly built trails and wooden walkways. At Hallasan a walkway takes us amongst fabulous shows of *Rhododendron yedoense* and *Rhododendron mucronulatum* and we'll also see *Tulipa edulis*, *Hepatica insularis* and *Disporum uniflorum*. Under an extraordinary forest of *Torreya nucifera* trees between five hundred and eight hundred years old is a stunning display of *Calanthe discolor* and *Calanthe sieboldii* orchids. The extraordinary Cobra Lily *Arisaema ringens* is abundant under the Torreyas whilst up on the volcano is much *Arisaema serratum*.

Everywhere in Korea we'll find *Asarums*. These stunning little plants come in many varieties though few species – the splitters are only just getting hold of them! In the leaf litter alongside the roads of Hallasan we'll find many of these little beauties in flower. We'll search for rare *Oreorchis coreana* amid forest where Yellow-rumped Flycatcher and Varied Tits provide avian colour.

In the afternoon of Day 4 we'll fly to Gwangju on the mainland where we'll soon notice how much more boreal are the forests than subtropical Jeju as we drive east to Jirisan National Park.

Days 5 & 6(am)

Jirisan National Park

Close to our hotel is a beautiful wooded river valley where we can find the simply sensational soft pink *Rhododendron schlippenbachii*. Floriferous *Weigela florida* is a common shrub and in the understory here we'll find two nice violets, *Viola diamantica* and *Viola verecunda*. *Carpinus tschonoskii*, *Broussonetia kazinoki*, and the sensational *Prunus sargentii* with abundant white blooms line the river.

Moving up into Jirisan National Park we'll walk a gently rising trail that winds for several kilometres through the most lovely forests. At this season the bright green fresh leaves of *Quercus mongolica* and *Quercus serrata* will only just be emerging. Siberian Blue Robins hop about in the understory whilst Varied Tit and the radiant Narcissus Flycatcher add colour to the boughs. We'll soon notice the attractive bark of *Stewartia pseudocamellia* whilst *Magnolia sieboldii* may just have its first blooms on show. As we get higher *Abies nephrolepis* and *Betula ermanii* come into their own and under them is a particularly beautiful dark maroon form of *Asarum sieboldii*. Yellow *Caltha palustris* blooms with Lilac and pink *Corydalis wandoensis* and sky-blue *Corydalis remota*. If there are two genera that really typify Korea's forest understory it is *Corydalis* and *Viola*. There are more than fifty species of the latter and surprisingly they are quite distinct from each other, with some truly beautiful species for instance in Jirisan the gorgeous white *Viola dissecta* var *chaerophylloides* and buttercup-yellow *Viola xanthopetala*. We'll have entered the sub-alpine zone by now and as we come out into the open on a mountain ridgetop a spectacular sight will greet us - a magnificent display of *Rhododendron mucronulatum* ablaze with princess-pink blooms. The reason all those other people were on the trail! Not too far from the national park we'll visit an area where the rare *Cypripedium japonicum* can be found.

During the afternoon of Day 6 we'll drive almost to the east coast and the green city of Gyeongju where if time permits we'll visit the impressive temple complex at Bulguksa. The track to the temple is lined with huge *Zelkova serrata* trees. Siberian Chipmunks scurrying among the visitor's feet, they are very tame here. Growing on the banks are abundant *Chrysospleniums*, *Streptopus*, *Adoxa moschatellina* and two large yellow *Corydalis* – *Corydalis speciosa* and *Corydalis heterocarpa*.

Days 7 – 10(am) **Ulleungdo Island**

Wonderful Ulleungdo Island will be a tour highlight. Think of Clovelly (or perhaps Boscastle) dropped into the middle of the Sea of Japan and sprinkled with a liberal dash of mystery. It is certainly a unique place with a character all of its own. Dark cliffs rise abruptly out of the Sea of Japan to a mountainous interior with all manner of endemic plants.

We start though with the ferry journey from the east coast on the morning of Day 7. The ferries these days are modern, fast and enclosed. The seas in this part of the world can be flat calm, or really quite tumultuous! If calm we can watch out for Dolphins and Whales as we go and if its wavy we'll see abundant Streaked Shearwaters and other seabirds as we peek out the windows. On the island we'll head for lunch in Sadong before visiting the botanically rich woodlands at Jeodong-ri on the trails to the Bongrae Falls. Here amongst forests of *Acer pictum* var. *okamotoanum*, *Pinus parviflora* and *Tilia insularis* we'll find plenty of gorgeous deep red *Camellia japonica* in bloom. Abundant and diverse ferns such as *Arachniodes standishii* and *Polystichum retrosopaleaceum* line the path and growing amongst them are elegant white bloomed *Trillium tschonoskii*, *Disporum*

sessile, the impressive *Gymnadenia camtschatica*, and lots of the Cobra Lily *Arisaema robustum*. Violets include the lovely *Viola papilionacea* and deep purple-blue *Viola seoulensis*. There's *Arabis takesimana* and *Corydalis filistipes*, both known only from the island. *Schizophragma hydrangeoides* clammers up the maples and *Ilex integra*. On the coast below is some spectacular scenery with high rocky pinnacles and stacks arising from the waves. Slaty-backed Gulls and Harlequin Ducks can be seen and on the roadside cliffs the endemic *Sedum takesimense*.

We'll spend a whole day in the north of the island where vibrant green slopes descend from the island's highest peak, Seonginbong, in a series of ridges cloaked in largely untouched forests. A beautiful trail takes us up to the mountain top with lovely plants everywhere. Low down we'll find colonies of *Lathraea japonica* colonising the trackside under *Fagus mutinervis* and amongst swathes of *Maianthemum dilatatum* whose foliage dominates the ground cover as a swirling mass of geometric greenery.

Nearing the mountain top (Seonginbong is almost 1000m high) the understory is still in early spring and feels much more 'northern'. Here we'll find the well-named *Hepatica maxima*. Here we enter a beguiling woodland of *Acer pseudosieboldianum* subsp. *takesimense* and *Viburnum furcatum* with its very beautiful spring foliage. Unusual ferns such as shapely *Adiantum pedatum* and the grape-fern *Botrychium ternatum* emerge from leaf-litter where we'll find *Arisaema japonicum* var. *takesimense* with its distinctly variegated leaves, and a range of violets including *Viola takesimana*, endemic *Viola woosanensis*, delicate round-flowered *Viola verecunda* and a lovely form of *Viola dissecta* var. *chaerophylloides*.

Day 10(pm) & 11 Woljeongsa Buddhist Temple & Fir Tree Forest in Odaesan

A ferry takes us back to the mainland but this time much further north, to the port of Gangneung, from whence we'll make the two-hour journey to the Inje Speedium Hotel Resort. This is a rather odd but very comfortable place – the hotel overlooks, as its name suggests, a large racing circuit! Odd because it's right out in the middle of nowhere and is surrounded by beautiful forests full of flowers! There will not be any racing while we are there, but we will be able to walk out into the forest directly from the hotel door and enjoy such beauties as blue *Iris rossii* and the exceptional *Viola variegata*, one of the most gorgeous of all violets. A most unusual bulb under the forest here is *Heloniopsis koreana*.

Odaesan Mountain is the holy mountain of Manjusri, the bodhisattva of wisdom and intellect. On its slopes Master Jajang, who met Manjusri in person at Taewha Lake in Odaesan, started building the wonderful Woljeongsa Buddhist Temple in 643, in part to enshrine the Buddha relicts given to him by Manjusri. Today we find a sublimely beautiful temple complex, in a most gorgeous setting with fine forest in all directions. The forest floor under Odaesan's glorious fir forests offer a kaleidoscopic show of spring colour. The

ground is thick with blooms! sunny yellow *Hylomecon vernalis* making a colourful pastiche amongst hordes of *Corydalis* – blue *Corydalis ambigua* and *Corydalis grandicalyx*, yellow *Corydalis speciosa* and white *Corydalis maculata*. The nodding bright pink heads of *Erythronium japonicum* emerge from a sea of yellow *Chrysosplenium ramosum*. We'll see the fabulous yellow and white blooms of *Iris odaesenensis*, blue *Gentiana zollingeri*, *Pseudostellaria davidii*, *Isopyrum raddeanum*, and the large-flowered 'sage' *Meehania urticifolia* with two lines of purple-pink spots down a lip tipped with a beard. There's also elegant *Oxalis obtriangulata* the white petals traced with fine red lines, and *Violas* ...

Day 12 – 14

DMZ & Seoraksan National Park

The Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) in the north of the country protects a broad swathe of beautiful mountainous country where there has been little disturbance for more than half a century. The rich boreal forests are home to over fifty species of tree including *Quercus mongolica*, *Quercus variabilis*, *Phellodendron amurense*, *Larix kaempferi* and *Pinus koraiensis*. We'll find lovely lilac blooms of *Jeffersonia dubia*, soft furry vinous *Pulsatilla cernua*, delicate pink *Primula sieboldii*, the startling orange-red flowers of *Chaenomeles sinensis*, and *Iris odaesanensis*, a delicate beauty whose white flowers are traced with gold. In recognition of the importance of this region's flora the DMZ Botanic Garden was set up just a few years ago under the aegis of Korea National Arboretum in Seoul. This is a marvellous place to see the full range of species found within the area, much of which is of course still off-piste for the casual visitor. We'll take a walk round the garden which will be full of irises, including the yellow *Iris koreana*, *Pulsatillas*, and the like. *Oreorchis patens*, *Orchis cyclochila* and the fabulous pink slippers of *Cypripedium macranthos* can be found in the bogs of Mount Dosolsan just behind the botanic garden, the latter though will probably only just be in bud. Here also are *Eranthis stellata*, *Viola diamantica* and *Trillium kamtschaticum*.

Not far north of the botanic garden is a beautiful river gorge. Long-tailed Goral can be seen on the wooded rocky slopes, and some even wander around the carpark. Rhododendrons bloom in profusion along the river banks reminding one of the Oleander-laced rivers of the Eastern Mediterranean whilst under the forests are *Arisarums*, *Paris tetraphylla*, frilly *Viola tokubuchiana*, the stunning *Dicentra spectabilis*, *Corydalis lineariloba* and lovely *Paeonia lactiflora*.

During the afternoon of Day 14 we'll make the three-hour journey to the nation's capital Seoul.

Day 15

Depart from Seoul

After a leisurely breakfast we'll depart Seoul Incheon International Airport at lunchtime and arrive back in London by late afternoon!

Cultural Extension to Seoul

Days 15 & 16

Seoul's Buddhist Heritage

And the culture too. Korea's Buddhist heritage is everywhere to be seen and many of the most beautiful forests, even in Seoul, are part of temple complexes. Anyone wishing to thoroughly immerse themselves in Korean Culture might like to join us for a two day extension in the capital...

Day 17

Depart from Seoul

After a leisurely breakfast we'll depart Seoul Incheon International Airport at lunchtime and arrive back in London by late afternoon!

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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