

Kyrgyzia

Bulbs of the Celestial Mountains

A Greentours Itinerary

Over ninety per cent of Kyrgyzia lies above the top of the UK's highest mountain! This is a land of alpine lakes, fast-flowing rivers, rolling steppelands and conifer forests that lie between the arms of the giant snow-capped peaks of the Celestial Mountains.

Day 1

Depart UK

An afternoon departure from UK/European airports.

Days 2 & 3

Bishkek: Kastek, Kemin, Kungei & Alexander Ranges. Also the Boom Canyon.

Bishkek will provide us with a comfortable base to explore the bulb-rich Alexander Range and the Besh-Kungei Hills. We'll arrive into Bishkek quite early in the morning and head to the hotel and enjoy a breakfast and possibly a short rest before heading out into the magnificent countryside that surrounds the city.

Tulips will be a major focus of this tour. In the Alexander Ranges we'll see swathes of yellow and white *Tulipa tarda* and the striking yellow and red *Tulipa zenaidae*. Decorating roadsides is variable *Tulipa ostrowskiana*, with its red, yellow or any combination in between blooms. Perhaps most exciting though will be a meeting with an as yet undescribed *Tulipa* – maybe it will have a name by the time you visit?! Of particular interest today will be plentiful *Malus sieversii*, the wild ancestor of the cultivated apple.

Day 4

Bishkek: The Alexander Range visiting Besh-Kungei Hills, and Serafimovka Gorge

In the immense landscapes of the Serafimovka Gorges we'll find the classical scarlet goblets of *Tulipa greigii* alongside more yellow and red *Tulipa zenaidae*. Spires of the genteel *Eremurus zoeae* dot the flowery hillsides. We'll find some lovely *Astragalus* today notably *Astragalus sieversianus* with its tall yellow wands and at least one species in the elegant and colourful *Myobroma* section of *Astragalus*. Steppe here is dotted with the white-flowered bushes of *Spiraea hypericifolia* and abounds with colourful flowers such as pink and white *Corydalis ledebouriana*, bright shining red *Roemeria refracta*, and lovely *Glaucium elegans*. The latter has variable flowers always with an orange centre and a yellow rim, just the amount of each colour varying across the slopes. Red-pink *Paeonia intermedia* will impress and on the same hillsides are the tall brownish wands of *Eremurus cristatus*.

Day 5

Bishkek: Oruu-Sai (Gorge)

The Oruu- Sai gorge is well-known in Kyrgyzia for its ski-ing. The landscapes are breathtaking and the flowers exceptional too. En route we'll pass clumps of fine leaved *Iris loczyi* before reaching higher ground where *Corydalis* will start to become common. As well as widespread *Corydalis ledebouriana* we'll find *Corydalis glaucescens* with long wands of delicate pink blooms. We'll find yet more *Tulipa zenaidae* but here it will be joined by swathes of the yellow white-edged stars of *Tulipa dasystemon*.

Further along are hillsides where we will also find brick-pink *Pedicularis albertii* and a pretty pastiche of violets with bright yellow *Viola acutifolia* and pale-centred blue *Viola suavis*.

Day 6

To Talas via the Suusamyr Valley and the Teo-Ashuu and Otmyok Passes

En route to Talas we'll traverse the flower-filled Suusamyr Valley in between the Fergana and Talas Mountains. Swathes of big-flowered *Viola altaica* adorn the steppe and we'll soon spot tulips among them. Again there's the pretty stars of *Tulipa dasystemon*, but soon we'll start to see *Tulipa tetraphylla*, a lovely species with yellow tepals are backed with a variable amount of red. On higher ground as we approach the high Otmyok Pass we'll find slopes liberally sprinkled with *Gagea liotardii* and little *Colchicum kesselringii*. Here are botanical gems such as the wonderfully unpronounceable *Iridodictyum kolpakowskianum*. This botanical treasure has falls dressed in blues and yellows and dipped in purple ink, making it a particularly photogenic species when set against the stunning scenery in the background. Here too is *Chorispora bungeana*, that classic alpine, a little mound of large pink flowers that almost completely covers the foliage. Its cousin *Chorispora sibirica* is yellow and is also found on this pass.

Days 7 & 8

The Talas Ridge: Besh-Tash Gorge and the Ak-Tash Mountains. The Urmara Gorges

Today we'll seek pure yellow *Tulipa talassica*. This rare species is found, thus far, only at the confluence of Kara-Koin and Urmara Rivers. En route we'll enjoy fine displays of *Eremurus lactiflorus* whose spires of almost luminous white blooms are topped with maroon-tinged brown buds and dot the hillsides like so many medieval torches. Here we'll also find *Allium caricifolium* and bright yellow *Glaucium fimbrilligerum*. The spectacular round heads of *Allium karataviense* are a wonderful sight too.

Days 9 & 10

The Talas Ranges: At-Oinok Ranges, & Toktogul to Bishkek

The At-Oinok Ranges of Fergana are home to a wonderful show of spring wild flowers. Here we'll seek the eponymous *Tulipa ferganica*, an elegant yellow-flowered species. Shrubs of *Rosa ecae* are smothered in bright egg-yolk yellow

blooms. Here we'll find delicate *Iris songarica* and the altogether chunkier purple *Iris alberti* and abundant tall yellow spires of *Eremurus fuscus*.

Day 10 & 11

To Karakul via the Chichkan Gorge and the Suusamyr-Too Range

Today we'll travel along the incredibly scenic Chichkan Gorge which carves its way through the Suusamyr-Too Range. The habitats are really quite varied with steppe and forest as well as riverine habitats and cliffs.

Much of the steppe hereabouts is a colourful show of *Corydalis*, *Glaucium elegans* and again the impressive *Allium karataviense*. There's another fine onion too in the shape of *Allium dodecadontum* with frilly pink umbels. Slopes with abundant *Louiseania ulmifolia* covered in lovely pink blooms make a stunning sight. Reaching high ground we'll find some nice snowmelt species including the unusual bright yellow *Colchicum luteum*.

Day 12

To Bishkek through the Itagar Gorge and the Ala-Bel and Teo-Ashuu Passes

We'll pass through the Itagar Gorge and thence the Ala-Bel and Teo-Ashuu Passes en route to Bishkek. We'll be back in the territory of *Tulipa zenaidae*, its yellow and red striped blooms poking out from the frilly leaves of *Prangos*. Near snow is pink and white *Corydalis ledebouriana* and clumps of fabulous *Juno orchioides* whose cream and yellow blooms catch the sun beautifully. Higher ground is a mass of violets with a fine mix of *Viola rupestris*, *Viola acutifolia* and *Viola suavis*.

Day 13

Departure from Bishkek

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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