

Tajikistan & Uzbekistan

A Greentours Itinerary

Day 1 Depart UK

Our flight takes us via Istanbul to Dushanbe, arriving in the early hours of the morning.

Day 2 Dushanbe and the *Iris bucharica* valley at Karatag

After a late breakfast we'll start the tour with a true spectacle. An Iris wonderland! Climbing out of the city it won't take us long to reach the Karatag, or Black Mountain, where we'll pass some fine *Astragalus* species before the valley becomes covered in mile after mile of *Iris bucharica*. The landscape is peppered with dense stands and drifts of them, there are literally millions. We'll be hard-pressed not to notice the abundant *Anemone petiolulosa*, groups of *Fritillaria bucharica* and the very rare *Eremurus albertii*.

Day 3 Romit

Today we'll head east out of Dushanbe, soon finding our first *Iris vicaria*, the blooms a subtle combination of white with lilac markings (on some) and egg-yolk yellow. These grow on a slope with striking deep purple *Bellevalia turkestanica*. It is high enough here for the Wallcreepers to be found feeding on roadside banks. *Anemone tschernjaewi* and *Scilla vvedenskii* are found amongst stunning clusters of extra-large flowered *Corydalis popovii*, with long slender pink spurs and deepest purple outer perianths.

This is an important site for the local 'crown imperial' *Fritillaria eduardii* with populations scattered throughout the area. It is a handsome plant and makes an impressive show. Under the trees are masses of *Corydalis popovii*. A little further on we'll find lots of *Crocus korolkovii* and plenty of lovely *Iris rosenbachiana* growing on steep banks.

Day 4 Ansob Pass

Today we'll head for the wonderful high Ansob Pass. On the way up we'll see the fine goblets of *Tulipa praestans*. The pass is magical, a snowy wonderland with multiple peaks and ridges all swathed in the white stuff. A distinct band of gold is formed by a simply stunning dense carpet of thousands of golden-yellow *Crocus korolkovii* that stretches across an area of flat turf with the snowy peaks as a backdrop, a magical scene.

On the way we pass through multicoloured hills and amazing rock strata, the slopes plunging steeply and the ragged peaks capped by snow. Apricot blossom will be at its peak around the tiny villages and looks wonderful against the mountain backdrops. As we picnic amongst the spectacular scenery we'll see various Rosefinch species and some pretty *Colchicum luteum* before returning to those fabulous Crocus colonies on the pass on the way back to Dushanbe.

Day 5

Nurek

Brilliant scarlet cut-leaved *Anemone bucharica* is found growing with *Anemone tschernjaewii* around a reservoir that supplies Dushanbe with water. The surrounding hillsides have a rich flora amongst purple-pink wild *Cercis griffithii* trees that mix with an impressive bulky yellow-green fennel, quite a combination of colours. *Iris bucharica* is numerous, and makes a fine photographic subject with a tremendous wall of snowy peaks stretching across the skyline. With luck we'll encounter the rare plum-coloured *Iris stolonifera*.

Day 6

To Uzbekistan and Shakrisabz

The long white-tipped spine of the magnificent Zerashan Mountains run alongside the road as we drive the hour to the border with Uzbekistan. Across the border we first find flat agricultural lands, before entering amazing convoluted multicoloured, multi-strata-ed hills tilted at improbable angles, with sloping flat-topped snowy crests in the distance. Egyptian Vultures are common and we'll see occasional Booted Eagles.

Soon the red glow of tulips will bring us to a halt. These are *Tulipa micheliana* with red-striped leaves and flowers with a large triangular gold-edged black blotch at the base of each tepal and black anthers. Nearby is the brilliant red *Tulipa korolkowii* with small yellow anthers scattered about the scree and rocks. The blue starry bells of *Ixiolirion tataricum* will also be enjoyed. Then we'll head on to pretty Shakhrisabz and its blue-domed mosque.

Day 7

Amankutan

An hour from Shakhrisabz will see us at the start of the Amankutan Pass. We'll soon see our first impressive pale lilac *Iris magnifica*, growing among large granite boulders and on loose slopes with a bulky fennel and flowering *Amygdalus* bushes. Here and there are a few bright red *Tulipa fosterana*, and big hairy yellow flowered *Astragalus seversovii*. Just a little further up the pass is a colony of the stunning *Iris warleyensis*. These are real beauties, and we'll spend plenty of time amongst them.

Upwards we'll find snow patches where lovely *Primula fedtschenkoi* blooms with *Corydalis maracandica*. This is a beautiful *Corydalis* and here is another, with cherry-red lower half the lip edged with gold and a broad virtually erect pink spur.

This may be a form of *Corydalis ledebouriana* but if it is, it is certainly a very beautiful form. Tiny *Gagea gageoides* is abundant and by snow we'll see a colony of purple-striped white *Colchicum kesselringii* amid *Anemone petiolulosa*. *Tulipa turkestanica* is common alongside the road and by yet more snow patches are *Crocus korolkovii*, *Eranthis longistipitatus* and the golden-yellow stars of *Tulipa hissarica*.

Day 8

Samarkand

We'll spend a day visiting the wonderful sights of Samarkand with stunning blue-domed mosques, blue-tiled mausoleums, yet more blue-domed mosques, amazingly decorated interiors (much of it made with paper mache!) and after lunch at a Turkish café, we'll visit the remains of Ulugbek's observatory.

Days 9 & 10

Beldersay

Heading into the hills again we'll soon stop for a fine population of tall bronze and green-belled *Fritillaria severzovii*. Scattered among them are *Solenanthus circinnatus*, *Scilla puschkinoidea* and a more normal-looking form of *Corydalis ledebouriana*. A handful of yellow *Iris tubergeniana* bloom amongst masses of *Gymnospermium albertii*. We'll find many pretty *Fritillaria stenantha* in perfect pink flower amongst a fine spring show of flowers. Siberian Rubythroats flit from one gnarled juniper to another as we admire little *Crocus alatavicus* blooming close to snow.

Beldersay has abundant *Tulipa biflora* as well as some *Tulipa kaufmanniana*, a handsome species with bicoloured red and yellow flowers. Higher are carpets of tiny *Gagea minutiflora* that stretch across the hills mixed with two larger species. Rock Buntings are common up here and we'll undoubtedly flush a Chukar or two as we enjoy a fantastic population of *Colchicum luteum* with hundreds scattered across the slope all the way down from the top to the bottom, with some fine twins and triplets. The rare *Iris pseudocapnoides* adds creamy blooms to the show.

Day 11

The Chimgan Valley and to Tashkent

The Chimgan Valley is smothered in *Tulipa turkestanica* whilst scree slopes have a dazzling mixed population of *Tulipa tschimganica* with red, orange and yellow forms. The tulips continue with red *Tulipa kaufmanniana* and then to areas of familiar bicoloured forms. Alongside these are magnificent stands of *Fritillaria severzovii*, many violets, and screes full of *Anemone petiolulosa*. North-facing slopes have many *Colchicum luteum* at times mixed with *Crocus alatavicus* and by now familiar *Corydalis ledebouriana*, *Gymnospermium albertii* and then the bristly-stamened spires of *Solenanthus circinnatus*. Rufous-naped Tits buzz around the junipers as we move into limestone areas. Here are lovely groups of the delicate *Corydalis darvasica* and a yellow cushion-forming brassica. From the

ridge are fine views of the Tien Shan and Chimgan Peak. There are impressive stands of *Astragalus severzovii* as we drive on towards Tashkent.

Day 12
depart Tashkent

Bukhara Extension
Days 12 & 13

A chance to see this famed city, with its superb mosques and madresehs. We'll travel by fast train to Bukhara and back, returning to Tashkent during the evening of Day 13.

Day 14
depart Tashkent

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