

# Kyrgyzia

## Early Spring in the Celestial Mountains

### A Greentours Itinerary

Over ninety per cent of Kyrgyzia lies above the top of the UK's highest mountain! Independent after the collapse of Soviet rule in Central Asia, this stunningly beautiful country never actually existed before the Soviet Union, rather it was invented (as an autonomous region) in the 1920s by Stalin. Perhaps not surprising then that few of us know much about this land of alpine lakes, fast-flowing rivers, rolling steppelands, conifer forests and rare walnut forests that lie between the arms of the giant snow-capped peaks of the Celestial Mountains.

Time waits for nobody and that's certainly true of spring bulbs. Hence we are offering two tours to Kyrgyzia a month apart. Quite simply there is a very different range of bulbs to be seen on the two trips. This, the first, concentrates on some fabulous Juno Irises, some of the most beautiful of all the irises, as well as some stunning Frits and early Tulips.

### Day 1

#### Depart UK

An afternoon departure from UK/European airports.

### Day 2

#### Arrive Osh. Foothills of the Kichik-Alai Range including Almalyk Gorge

We'll land early in the morning and head for breakfast in the town. Though tired, the sight of those fabulous mountains just outside the city will draw us out into the countryside. Today we'll explore the foothills of the Kichik-Alai Range and the Almalyk Gorge. We'll soon make the acquaintance of lilac *Iris narynensis* whose falls are centred deep purple. The first of an extraordinary seven species of these fabulous irises. Our first tulips too – these likely to be the floriferous white blooms of *Tulipa turkestanica*. Little stars of *Gagea tenera* are everywhere and we'll see patches smothered in the yellow heads of *Eranthis longispitata*.

### Day 3

#### Sokh River Valley

Along the Sokh River we'll find a particular beauty, the lovely *Juno narbutii* with strongly two-toned yellow and blue blooms. *Anemone petiolulosa* has bright yellow flowers, the undersides of the petals often almost red. Also along this serene and tranquil valley we'll find the delicate *Corydalis nevskii* whose glaucous leaves and yellow and orange flowers are a wonderful sight.

## **Day 4**

### **Through the Fergana Range to Tash-Kumyr**

The shiny white stars of *Tulipa jacquesii* adorn the roadside as we cross the Fergana Range en route to Tash-Kumyr. Reaching high ground we'll find some nice snowmelt species including the unusual bright yellow *Colchicum luteum*. Growing with these is the rare *Juno austrotadchatkalica* with pale greenish-white blooms. *Gagea circumplexa* and the well-named wild almond *Amygdalus spinosissima* are characteristic of lower ground where we also find masses of elegant yellow *Tulipa ferganica*.

## **Day 5**

### **the Abyshev Pass between the Kepeli and Bozbu-Too ranges**

Reaching the Abyshev Pass between the Kepeli and Bozbu-Too ranges we'll again find lovely *Juno narynensis* and snowmelt here is a rich hunting ground for the botanist - we'll find *Scilla puschkinioides*, more *Colchicum luteum*, and *Anemone gortschakowii*, which like *Anemone petiolulosa*, has bright yellow flowers, the undersides of the petals often red. Descending there's both *Tulipa ferganica* and *Gagea ferganica*. Fritillary-like *Rhinopetalum rugillosum* is a beautiful plant, though small in stature it is hung with numbers of stunning pink bells. Another prize plant will be *Primula fedtschenkoi* with gorgeous dark-eyed deep pink blooms.

## **Day 6**

### **Naryn River Canyon**

Along the scenic Naryn River Canyon we'll find the stacked leaves of *Juno graberiana* packed full of bright blue blooms, as well as the little-known *Juno rodionenkoi*. The white stars of *Tulipa jacquesii* illuminate the canyon's landscapes with yellow *Tulipa ferganica*. Newly minted *Tulipa pseudofegania* grows in dry areas alongside the unusual white sub-shrubby *Vinca erecta* and weird orange *Gymnospermium albertii*. Some fine petroglyphs can be found in the vicinity of the village of Ryazansay and we'll certainly take time out from botanizing to visit them.

## **Day 7**

### **The Talas ridge and the Ala-Bel and Otmyok Passes**

We'll pass through the Ala-Bel Pass and then as we approach the high Otmyok Pass we'll pass through swathes of *Colchicum luteum*. Later there will be displays of tulips as we descend to the city of Talas.

## **Day 8**

### **Besh-Tash Gorge and the Echkelyu-Too Ridge**

Today we'll explore the Besh-Tash Gorge (Talas Ridge) and the Echkelyu-Too Ridge. Here we'll find the pinkest of the little pink Fritillaries, this one *Rhinopetalum karelinii*. The Besh-Tash gorge is part of a large protected area, the name coming from the five human-set stones we'll pass in the valley, though Besh Tash's fame is more to do with its' spectacular alpine scenery. The flora is outstanding. We'll find

variable *Juno subdecolarata* which comes in palest yellows, whites and a cold blue. Even more variable is *Tulipa ostrowskiana*, with its red, yellow or any combination in between blooms. Again we'll find *Anemone gortschakowii* and *Tulipa turkestanica*, here with *Gagea rufidula*. There's quite a rich and unusual flora with *Euphorbia ferganensis*, architectural *Euphorbia rapulum*, *Astragalus aulieatensis*, and *Astragalus testiculatus* whose pods leave you in no doubt as to how it came about that name!

## **Day 9 Ak-Tash Mountains**

Exploring the Ak-Tash Mountains above Talas we'll find all manner of beautiful plants. Fritillary-like *Rhinopetalum stenanthum* offers its glorious pink bells and there are some fine colour forms of variable *Juno subdecolarata*. Many species of Tulip adorn the montane steppe. We'll be familiar by now with *Tulipa turkestanica*, but *Tulipa bifloriformis* and *Tulipa orthopoda*, the latter a perfect miniature tulip with plants hardly taller than 4cm, will be new to us. There also yet more of the variable *Tulipa ostrowskiana*.

## **Day 10 from Talas to Bishkek along the Suusamyр Valley**

En route to Bishkek we'll traverse the flower-filled Suusamyр Valley in between the Fergana and Talas Mountains. *Colchicum kesselringii* will be in fine form along our route. This unusual little Colchicum has white funnels with the outside striped in deep purple-violet with contrasting yellow anthers in the centre.

## **Day 11 Foothills and gorges of the Kyrgyz Range - Besh-Kungey and Serafimovka Gorge**

Bishkek will provide us with a comfortable base to explore the bulb-rich Besh-Kungei Hills. By patches of snow are the white stars of *Crocus alatavicus* and more lovely *Eranthis longispitata*. 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. Another botanical gem of the highest calibre is the gorgeous ice-blue *Juno kuschakewiczii*.

In the immense landscapes of the Serafimovka Gorges we'll find the yellow pyramids of *Leontice ewersmannii*, little *Gagea brevistolifera*, the floriferous shrubby dock *Atraphaxis pyrifolia*, and *Tulipa binutans* whose multi-headed blooms are white with a yellow centre and with a dusky reddish-violet wash on the outside.

## **Day 12 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](mailto:enquiries@greentours.co.uk).

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