

Kyrgyzia, Tajikistan & Uzbekistan

The Glories of Central Asia

A Greentours Itinerary

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 stenanthrum* 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 Suusamyr Valley

En route to Bishkek we'll traverse the flower-filled Suusamyr 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 longistpitata*. 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 brevistolonifera*, 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

Bishkek to Almaty

There are no direct flights to Dushanbe from Bishkek, so today we fly across the Tien Shan Mountains to Almaty in Kazakhstan.

Day 14

Flight to Dushanbe

Today we fly to Dushanbe, and can have a chance to explore the city before returning to the botanising the next day.

Day 15

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 16

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 tschernjaewii* 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 17

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 18

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 19

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-stripped 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 stary bells of *Ixiolirion tataricum* will also be enjoyed. Then we'll head on to pretty Shakhrisabz and its blue-domed mosque.

Day 20

Amankutan

An hour from Shakhrisabz will see as 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 21

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 22 & 23

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 24

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 25

depart Tashkent

Bukhara Extension

Days 25 & 26

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 26.

Day 27

depart Tashkent

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