

Yunnan in Autumn

A Greentours Itinerary

Days 1 & 2

UK to Beijing

After an overnight flight we'll arrive very early in the morning in Beijing and then catch an internal flight to Dali. Our journey continues by road, a four hour drive takes us through countryside green and gold with the autumn rice harvest to Lushui, close to the Burmese border.

Days 3 & 4

Gaoligongshan & Bai Hua Ling

Handsome stands of *Anemone hupehensis*, the white flowers backed by deep pink, line the road as we ascend through misty forests into the verdant Gaoligongshan. Abundant yellow and purple *Impatiens delavayi* and a smattering of its blue cousin *Impatiens subcalcarata* mark our arrival into the zone where magnificent *Swertia bimaculata* flowers. Each plant is over a metre tall and a metre wide and has large star-like white flowers delicately speckled with black spots. Golden-spectacled Warblers and Grey-headed Canary Flycatcher buzz about above the powder blue *Cicerbitas* which bloom with the deep purple monkshood *Aconitum duclouxii* and its climbing cousin *Aconitum tsaii* which here twines around bamboo stems. Just over the low pass, a mere 3000 metres, we'll find the deep cerise drumsticks of *Allium wallichii* before exploring an area of tall grass and scrub which is home to the splendid *Swertia macrosperma* whose large creamy-white flowers are decorated with fine purple spots. We'll seek out the remarkable climbing gentian-relative *Crawfordia campanulacea* with pink and white striped bells. Further down are stands of the pretty columbine-like flowers of *Halenia elliptica* as well as *Herminium* orchids and the graceful racemes of a pendant *Indigofera*.

Days 5 & 6

Pianma & Bingzhongluo

Now we'll head through increasingly lush hills often topped by clouds passing through areas flanked by tracts of virgin evergreen forests including stands of *Rhododendron sinogrande*. A fragrant pink shrub and stands of *Anemone hupehensis* line our route to Pianma. Now we are right on the Myanmar border. From here we'll explore the richly diverse mountains between Bingzhongluo and Laomudeng. In pine clad hills are pretty purple centred blue *Codonopsis* as well as a larger relative, *Codonopsis convolvulacea* with wide open pale blue flowers. There's *Goodyera* ladies tresses orchid with attractive white veined leaves, and a lovely darkest purple form of *Geranium delavayi*. Handsome *Swertia cincta* has attractive green and purple flowers that prove irresistible to bees. Wet flushes host purplish-red *Clematis ranunculoides* and tall pink *Satyrium ciliatum*. Meadows are dotted with lovely pink and white *Spiranthes chinensis* while grassy slopes are

studded with purplish *Delphinium delavayi*. Yellow and white *Saxifragas* cascade down river-sculpted boulders. All the while we'll be passing through splendid rural landscapes, the golden rice terraces with harvested crops neatly stacked in mini-stocks. Nearing Deqen we'll traverse a 4000 metre pass encountering many lovely pale blue *Gentiana hexaphylla* and purple *Delphinium beesianum*. The hotel provides a fabulous vantage point. If the clouds disperse we'll see the magnificent Meli Shan, including Kawa Gebo, Yunnan's highest peak at 6740 metres with huge glaciers flowing from its flanks.

Days 7 & 8

Deqen & the Baima Shan

After a morning visit to Deqen's superb monastery, we'll head for the mountains. We'll explore the superb screes and alpine turf of the Baima Shan. The alpine turf is studded with *Lomatogonium cartharticum* and large flowered *Delphinium beesianum*. Climbing up through the dwarf rhododendron scrub we'll see the first of many, many stunning *Gentiana georgei*, far and away the commonest species at higher altitudes, the large lilac-purple trumpets blooming profusely in turf and loose ground. The little yellow flowered *Cyananthus lutea* decorates the base of the scree slopes and further up are the light to mid blue flowers of *Gentiana nanobella*. Lovely pale blue *Gentiana hexaphylla* and gorgeous *Aconitum hookeri* are two of the finer flowers up here. Screes up around the 4500 metre mark here are home to the extraordinary inflorescences of *Saussurea medusa*.

After a late lunch on Day 8 we'll travel to Zhongdian, the afternoon sun illuminating the autumnal colours of the many *Sorbus* trees behind which the towering peaks rise.

Day 9

Shika Shan

The high turf of the Shika Shan will see us admiring many *Gentiana arethusae* but whereas the Tianchi Hai population is quite uniform these are much more varied. The equally handsome *Gentiana georgei* has large purple trumpets emerging from tight rosettes of leaves. Occasional *Primula deflexa* is usually flowering out of season. On screes we'll see the large hairy-throated purple-blue flowers of *Cyananthus longiflorus* - a very fine alpine. We'll visit the botanic reserve at Napa Hai where we'll find many *Gentiana veitchiorum*, the deep blue trumpets striped darker blue and white, pale blue *Gentiana haynaldii* as well as some fine tall *Delphinium yuanum* with deep blue flowers. Nearby damp areas still have plenty of bright yellow *Pedicularis longiflora* subspecies *tubiformis* and *Gentianopsis grandis*.

Day 10

Tianchi Hai

We'll cross the Zhongdian Plateau where the villages will be preparing for winter with tall timber racks hanging with hay, turnips and barley and the fields coloured

scarlet by the abundant senescing *Euphorbia nematocypha*. Tianchi Lake is set at over thirteen thousand feet and fringed by fir forest and marshy flushes adorned with a mixed population of *Gentiana veitchiorum* and *Gentiana haynaldii* as well as the pretty blue *Lomatogonium rotatum*. The road is lined almost the whole twenty kilometres by thousands and thousands of powder blue *Comastoma pulmonarium*. Closer to the lake we'll encounter our first deep purple *Gentiana delavayi* and taller *Gentiana atunsiense*, but by the lake itself awaits a true beauty. The silvery waters are backed by fir forests and around the edge, among many dwarf rhododendrons, are the stunning light blue trumpets of *Gentiana arethusae* each perfect flower lined with darker blue. Some clumps contain around fifty open flowers! The autumn glory doesn't end there as the marshy flushes around the lake are full of deep blue *Gentiana sino-ornata* in a variety of colour forms and markings, together with the pretty palest lilac *Lomatogonium forrestii*.

Day 10

Hong Shan and/or DaXue Shan

Today we'll make a long day trip to explore the Hong Shan in search of beautiful *Gentiana caelestis* as well as *Saussurea leucoma* and *Saussurea heiracioides*.

Days 12, 13 & 14

Haba, Yulong Park/Baisha, Tiger Leaping Gorge & Wenhai

We'll travel along an old road to Lijiang and the fabulous Yulong Shan, passing some classic rural landscapes with immaculate terraces and neat farms nestled into the green mountains. Nearing our destination the roads are lined with a scented white-flowered climber and the yellow-flowered bindweed *Meremia hungaiensis*. We will spend the next two nights in the old quarter of Lijiang, a UNESCO world heritage site, and a charming place to wander in the early morning or enjoy the bustle in the evening when quintessentially Chinese streets are decorated with red lanterns.

Half an hour from Lijiang the Yulong Shan rises up to over sixteen thousand feet. Among the pine forests on the lower slopes we'll find the reddish purple *Clematis ranunculoides* and superb colonies of the pink orchid *Satyrium cilliatum*, the latter mixed with at least three species of edelweiss and two musk orchids. Descending through open pinewoods we'll encounter the large deep blue flowers of *Delphinium grandiflorum* and the pale blue twining *Codonopsis convolvulacea*, a common but beautiful relative of the bellflowers.

We'll see plenty of *Cyananthus longiflorus* and the very handsome white scabious *Pterocephalus hookeri*. *Gentiana primuliflora* blooms prolifically, the dark blue flowers opening in the sunshine along with white *Gentiana yunnanense*, purple and yellow *Pedicularis alopecuroides*, and the pale yellow *Pedicularis hirtella*. The delicate lilac-pink chasmophyte *Silene longicornuta* is tucked into rock crevices. Elsewhere are the softly fringed white flowers of *Swertia pubescens*, yellow *Saxifraga eregia* and a twining mass of blue *Aconitum tsaii*. On the flatter plateau

areas many tall spikes of soft yellow *Salvia digitaloides* and deep yellow *Spenceria ramalana* colour the turf, along with deep purple *Dracocephalum forrestii* and blue *Gentiana primuliflora*. The lovely pink and white *Spiranthes chinensis* blooms on Lanping, a relatively low 3000m pass, where we'll also see purplish *Delphinium delavayi*, the green and purple downward pointing blooms of *Swertia cincta* and rocks covered in a jumble of yellow and white Saxifrages.

We'll visit the famous Tiger Leaping Gorge. Climbing out of the bamboo-clad gorge, the murky Yangtse far below, we'll drive into extensive pine forests. Here are two new Gentianaceae, pink *Swertia delavayi* and similar *Swertia patula*, the latter lilac with purple veins. Passing more gentians and saxifrages we'll stop for a colony of palest blue *Lomatogonium bellum* surrounded by superb mountain vistas with elegant firs draped in Spanish moss in the foreground. Streamsides have soft blue, white-centred *Comastoma pulmonarium*, white *Gentiana yunnanense* and little mats of deep blue *Cyananthus macrocalyx*. We'll move to a marshy area thronging with the elegant striped blue trumpets of *Gentiana sino-ornata* and then its equally lovely cousin, deeper blue *Gentiana veitchiorum*, growing in much drier grassland.

One afternoon we'll visit the mountains in the vicinity of the picturesque village of Wenghai. Pine cone collectors will be busy along the lower stretches of the road where we'll find the tall spikes of *Cimicifuga foetida* and where purplish *Delphinium ceratophorum* grows amongst limestone rubble. Wet meadows are the home of *Gentiana sino-ornata* and *Gentiana yunnanense*, the latter becoming increasingly common as we move up. A damp cliff holds a population of the wonderful *Corallodiscus lanuginosus*, the delicate tubular purple and white blooms on wiry quivering stems, these blooming with a fine tumbling yellow saxifrage and fringed pink *Arenaria barbata*. Purplish *Gentiana cephalantha* hangs from roadside banks where we'll see two yellow balsam species and some lovely clumps of deep purple flowered *Cyananthus longiflorus*.

Day 15

Return Journey

We depart from Lijiang on a flight to Beijing and thence our onward flights go home.

Call 01298 83563 or visit www.greentours.co.uk for the latest report from our previous tours to Yunnan in Autumn. 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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