

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.

Day 2

Bishkek: Serafimovka and Issyk-Ata Gorges

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.

In the immense landscapes of the Serafimovka Gorges we'll find the classical scarlet goblets of *Tulipa greigii* alongside 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 pale pink *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 3

Kastek Mountain Range (Beisheke Gorge) & the Chon-Kemin Gorge

Tulips will be a major focus of this tour. In the Kastek 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. The superficially similar *Tulipa kolpakowskiana* is found here too, also exhibiting a bewildering variety of colour and form. 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.

Joining *Glaucium elegans* is the altogether more pastel and delicate *Glaucium squamigerum*. *Adonis chrysocanthus* pretends to be a *Trollius*! Amongst dwarfed Tien Shan cherry are colourful flowers such as pink and white *Corydalis ledebouriana*, plums-and-custard *Scutellaria transiliensis* and *Scutellaria mesostegia*, an eastern form of *Scutellaria orientalis*.

Day 4

Bishkek: Boom Canyon (Chu River Valley)

Tulips will be plentiful again today and we'll have another chance to enjoy populations of both *Tulipa zenaidae* and equally colourful *Tulipa ostrowskiana*, as well as the species 'nova'. Dry slopes are home to little beauties such as variable *Linaria transiliensis*, well named *Tragopogon ruber*, and both *Caragana kirghizorum* and *Caragana camilli-schneideri*, an important genus of often pretty pea-flowered shrubs in Central Asia.

Day 5

Bishkek: Oruu-Sai Gorge (Alexander Mountain Range)

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. Newly described *Tulipa lazkovii* will be a tour highlight. On higher ground as we approach the high Otmyok Pass we'll find slopes liberally sprinkled with *Gagea liotardii* and little *Colchicum luteum*. 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

Talas Ranges & Besh-Tash Gorge. The Ak-Tash Mountains. The Urmalar Gorges

Today we'll seek pure yellow *Tulipa talassica*. This rare species is found, thus far, only at the confluence of Kara-Koin and Urmalar 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 fimbriigerum*. The spectacular round heads of *Allium karataviense* are a wonderful sight too.

We'll spend more time with newly-minted *Tulipa lazkovii*, and there'll be another new tulip here for us in the shape of *Tulipa dasystemonoides*. Clumps of fabulous cream and yellow *Juno orchioides* blooms catch the sun beautifully and are joined by the strange fritillary-like *Korolkova sewerzowii* whose tiered bells range from pale greenish-butterscotch to almost black. The local 'chives', *Allium fedtschenkoanum* shades through green with lime and lemon hints to rose at the top of the blooms. This plant dominates runnels where the snow has already melted. Higher up on gravels we'll find lots of lovely cushions of *Androscae sericea*, and by snow patches themselves hundreds of superb glacier-white *Trollius komarovii*. Amongst shrubberies of *Rosa ecae* are *Papaver pavoninum*, its scarlet blooms each with a black ring around the centre. *Astragalus nematodes* and *Astragalus pallasii* are joined by the stunning *Corydalis ainii*, a choice member of its genus, bearing wands of a dozen or so bright yellow, white and pale pink flowers each fully two inches long

Day 9

The Talas Ranges: Through the Otmyok and Ala-Bel Passes to Toktogul

As we approach the high Otmyok Pass we'll pass through swathes of yellow *Colchicum luteum* and the stripey pink and white *Colchicum kesselringii*. Our second pass today, the Ala-Bel, is home to pretty *Oxytropis assiensis* and delicate pink *Primula algida*. Low alpine turf is dotted with masses of *Viola altaica*.

Day 10

via Toluk Village to Karakul

Surrounded by rugged river gorges, alpine meadows, and the towering, snow-dusted peaks of the Tien Shan Mountains is the remote scenic village of Toluk. Around the village we will come across the impressive pink starry pompoms of *Allium dodecadontum*. Here are fine displays of *Tulipa tetraphylla* and abundant tall yellow spires of *Eremurus fuscus*.

Day 11

Karakul Gorge (Suusamy-Too Range) and the Chychkan Gorge to the town of Toktogul

Today we'll travel along the incredibly scenic Chichkan Gorge which carves its way through the Suusamy-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 colorful show of *Corydalis*, *Glaucium elegans* and the impressive salmon-coloured *Allium pseudowinklerianum*. 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* and weird orange *Gymnospermium albertii*. Shrubberies and light forest are home to *Astragalus lorinserianus*, *Papaver litwinowii*, *Astragalus lorinserianus*, the chunky purple *Iris alberti*, and the local snakeshead fritillary *Fritillaria ferganensis*.

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 dasystemon*, *Tulipa tetraphylla*, and *Tulipa zenaidae*, its yellow and red striped blooms poking out from the frilly leaves of *Prangos* and *Ferula*. Near snow is pink and white *Corydalis ledebouriana* and both *Chorisporea bungeana* and *Chorisporea sibirica*. A last chance to marvel at the wonder that is *Iridodictyum kolpakowskianum*. Higher ground is a mass of violets with a fine mix of *Viola rupestris*, *Viola acutifolia* and *Viola elatior*.

Day 13

Departure from Bishkek

Call 01298 83563 or visit www.greentours.co.uk for the report from our previous tours to Kyrgyzia. 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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