Botanical Study Tour to North Sichuan in Southwest China

Gentians, Scenery and Culture

Our destination are the mountains of North Sichuan, where we will travel within Aba Tibetan Qiang Autonomous Prefecture. We will visit some of the most spectacular nature reserves in the northern hemisphere. These are boasting in majestic mountain ranges, harboring unique wildlife, such as the elusive Giant Panda (will not be seen in the wild), have spectacular limestone travertine formations, and are the home of Tibetan and Qiang ethnic groups with their colorful culture. But the highlight of the tour will be the experience of the richest temperate flora in Asia! Though in September most genera are at the end of their flowering season or have long finished blooming, some are at their height now. Our tour focuses on the gentians of the region, and we expect to see several splendid species in flower. On the tour we will mostly stay at altitudes between 2000-3500 m (6562-11483 ft.), the highest altitude will be 4860 m (15945 ft.), and we briefly are at this height during our visit of the Dagu glacier on day 10 of the tour.

13 days, from September 11. to 23., 2017
Itinerary:

1. Mo. 09. 11. International flight to China (not included in this offer, but see below).

2. Tu. 09. 12. Arrival in Chengdu (capital of Sichuan province), welcome and pick up at the airport, according to daytime visit of our nursery 10 km west of the airport or transfer to hotel. Overnight stay in a 5-star hotel.

3. We. 09. 13. Bus tour from Chengdu to Wolong, the national nature reserve with the largest panda population in the world. In Wolong botanizing at the Balangshan (Balang mountain). Overnight stay in the best local hotel.

4. Th. 09. 14. Bus ride through the Min valley to Huanglong national park. Botanizing along the way and short stop at Songpan, a famous old town in the mountains with an intact city wall and four gates from the Qing dynasty. Overnight stay in a 5 star hotel in Huanglong.

5. Fr. 09. 15. Excursion in the Danyun gorge, which is 18 km long and goes through the center of the national park. Botanizing along the road and in the side valleys of the gorge. Overnight stay in the same hotel in Huanglong.

6. Sa. 09. 16. Leaving the hotel with all luggage to be stored in the bus. Excursion in the Huanglong valley. In the afternoon botanizing at the pass above Huanglong. Overnight stay in a 4-star hotel in Chuanzhusi.

7. Su. 09. 17. Westward to the grassland heading for Ruoergai (Zoige). Botanical excursion in the grassland with visit to the bent of the Yellow River. Overnight stay in the best local hotel in Ruoergai.

8. Mo. 09. 18. Ride through the grassland to Hongyuan with botanizing along the way. Overnight stay in the best local hotel in Hongyuan.


10. We. 09. 20. Ride to the valley station of the Dagu glacier ropeway with botanizing along the way. Going up to the glacier at 4800 m with ropeway. In the afternoon ride to Kalong. Overnight stay at a local Tibetan family guest house with simple but clean facilities.


12. Fr. 09. 22. Return ride to Chengdu. Rest of the day free. Overnight stay in a 5 star hotel.

13. Sa. 09. 22. Return flight home. For the USA and Europe arrival likely at the same day.
General remarks: Please note that the itinerary as presented above is basically fixed, but due to unforeseen circumstances during the tour, i.e. bad weather or traffic problems, we might have to make minor adjustments, e.g. depart or arrive earlier respectively later as planned. If available hotels will be of 4-star level or higher. Due to the remoteness of several places we visit, hotels are not available in Kalong, where we will stay in simple but clean guest houses run by a local Tibetan family. In China the tour will be covered by a travel insurance according to Chinese travel regulations. Indispensable for joining the tour is a travel health insurance which you need to buy in your home country. Without this health insurance you would be solely liable for all costs that could result from possible health issues, should you experience any during the tour!

Health issues: No specific health hazards at our destinations in Sichuan came to our knowledge, however, we will stay at altitudes between 2000-3500 m (6562-11483 ft.) for most of the time on the tour, the maximum will be close to 5000 m (16400 ft.) for about 2 hours. The weather is expected to be humid and mildly warm (between 18-25 °C or 64-77 °F) in Chengdu and cool in the mountains (5-15 °C or 41-59 °F). With the end of the monsoon it is supposed to be sunny, but occasional rains have to be expected. We recommend summer clothing for the lowland and some autumn and winter clothing including rain gear and a warm jacket for the mountains. Protection from sun (lotion, sunglasses) and some high altitude headache remedy are recommended as well. Biting insects are unlikely to be encountered in the mountains. Shoes should be fit for city and field, and they should provide some protection from water. We will not conduct difficult mountain hikes, but on occasion we have to walk for some time in uneven terrain, and we will have to walk longer distances on ascending and descending boardwalks at higher altitudes in Kalong (up to 3500 m or 11500 ft.). Please consult your physician for recommendations regarding your fitness for the tour and for latest information regarding vaccinations etc.

International flights: Because the tour participants are expected to come from various regions, we do not offer prearranged international flights with this itinerary. Booking inexpensive international flights through your computer at home is easy and reliable these days. You will want to coordinate the flight schedule with us and if you have to arrive a day earlier in China or have to leave a day later, we will arrange additional hotel and airport transfer for you. In case you feel inconvenient with arranging the flights yourself, we can book the international flight for you as well.

Visa: For every nation different visa regulations for entering China as a tourist apply. Please inform yourself about the necessary procedures for your country. For the US the Chinese embassy provides information under http://www.china-embassy.org/eng/visas/faq/ We will provide formal invitations and a precise schedule with hotel addresses for your visa application, but we cannot arrange the visa for you. You need to apply for the visa yourself and pay the necessary fees, which are different for each country.

The tour will take place when at least 10 persons have signed for it, the maximum number of participants is limited to 15. The fee for the tour as listed on page 3 is US $ 2900.- and single bedroom surcharge is US$ 450.-. The price includes all meals, soft drinks, bus, hotels, special permission fees, entrance fees, insurance and tips. International flights are not included.

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About us: We are both fluent in English. In addition Wenqing, a linguist born in China, having lived in Japan for many years and being a German citizen since 2000, speaks and writes also fluently German, Chinese and Japanese. Holger, a native German, only masters English as second language. We met on a botanical study tour in Sichuan in 1997 and married in 1998. Until summer 2001 we lived in Germany. After that we moved to Sichuan, where we work for the administration of Huanglong national park and also run our own company, Hengduan Mountains Biotechnology, Ltd., which is specialized in laboratory propagation and nursery raising of orchids, but also produces fruit crops like blueberry shrubs and other plants. Since 1999 we regularly organize and conduct 1 to 3 botanical study tours in China annually, mainly in temperate mountain regions of Southwest China, but since 2010 also in the subtropical to tropical mountains of South China. Our guests come from all over the world and many have participated in 2 or 3 tours with us, some in 5 or more!
Wenqing and Holger Perner on the Xueshan pass, alt. 4000m, high above Huanglong valley. (July 5, 2012)

Day 2: Visit at the nursery of Hengduanbiotech in Chengdu, alt. 500 m. (September 12, 2011)

Day 3: The Balangshan is extremely rich in alpine flowers, here *Primula limbata* and *Meconopis integrifolia* in early summer, alt. ca. 3800m. (June 10, 2005)

Day 3: Alpine meadow at Balangshan in early summer, alt. ca. 3600 m. (June 13, 2007)

Day 4: in the Min valley, alt. ca. 1800 m. (October 6, 2008)
Day 4: Approaching Huanglong from the pass, here at ca. 3900 m altitude.  
(September 20, 2008)

Day 4: *Gyps himalayensis*, the Himalayan Griffin, at the Huanglong pass, 3950 m.  
(September 14, 2007)

Day 5: *Neottianthe cucullata* in the Danyun gorge, ca. 2300 m altitude.  
(September 14, 2011)

Day 5: *Gentiana rubicunda* in the Danyun gorge, altitude ca. 2300 m.  
(September 14, 2011)

Day 7: Botanizing at the pass above Huanglong, altitude 3850 m.  
(September 14, 2011)
Day 7: *Gentiana georgei*, left, and *Meconopsis punicea*, right, at the Xueshanliang pass above Huanglong, alt. 3950 m. (Sept. 20, 2008)

Day 7: *Gentiana farreri*, white form, and *Saussurea stella* on the grassland, altitude ca. 3600 m. (September 16, 2011)

Day 7: *Gentiana veitchiorum* (left) and *Gentiana lawrencei* var. *lawrencei* (right) on the grassland near Ruoergai, altitude ca. 3600 m. (Sept. 16, 2011)

Day 7: *Gentiana straminea* (left) and *G. lawrencei* var. *lawrencei* (right) near Ruoergai, alt. approx. 3600 m. (September 16, 2011)

Day 8: Botanizing at the Yellow River near Ruoergai, alt. ca. 3600 m. (Sept. 17, 2011)
Day 8: Left side: from left to right *G. straminea*, *G. stipitata*, *G. veitchiorum*. Right side: *Gentiana stipitata*. Photos taken at the Yellow River near Ruoergai, alt. ca. 3600 m.

Day 8: Color variations of *Gentiana veitchiorum* at the Yellow River near Ruoergai. (September 17, 2011)

Day 8: Stupas on the way to Hongyuan. (September 17, 2011)

Day 9: *Gentiana lawrencei* by the hundreds of thousands on the way from Hongyuan to Dagu glacier nature reserve. (September 25, 2004)

Day 9: The way down towards Heishui and the Dagu glacier nature reserve. (September 18, 2011)
Day 10: *Triosteum himalaicum* on the way to the ropeway base station. (September 19, 2011)

Day 10: *Saussurea quercifolia* at the Dagu glacier, altitude 4860 m. (September 19, 2011)

Day 10: *Gentiana crassicaulis* in the valley of the Dagu river. (September 19, 2011)

Day 11: In the Kalong valley with its rich travertine structures and primary forest. (September 20, 2011)

Day 11: Trees festooned with lichens at Kalong valley. (September 20, 2011)

Day 11: The Tibetan guesthouse we stay at Kalong. (June 28, 2015)

Day 13: Good bye, Chengdu!
Through Google or other search engines a lot of additional information about our destinations can be found, here are some links:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chengdu


http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Huanglong,_Sichuan
(The page has some facts wrong!)


https://www.tripadvisor.com/Attraction_Review-g1795662-d1795885-Reviews-Dagu_Glacier-Heishui_County_Sichuan.html

Coordinates of some of our more remote destinations (check Google Earth):

Dagu glacier reserve: 32°12'30'' N; 102°44'15'' E
Kalong: 32°23'55'' N; 103°19'59'' E