

From immensely diverse rainforests to deserts containing a handful of species, the flora of a country can be equally as fascinating and spectacular as its animal life. Here, our specialists select a few of their botanical favourites from amongst many.

Blooming MARVELLOUS



Atacama bloom



Impatiens Kilimanjaro

Atacama Desert, Chile

Springtime in the Atacama Desert in the north of Chile can witness a remarkable phenomenon, the “desierto florido”, or flowering desert. When enough winter rains come (which tends to occur in El Niño years) the desert becomes an astonishing spectacle with thousands of flowers in bloom simultaneously. Species often flower in sequence, so that one day a valley will be entirely purple, and the next week it could be yellow. This stunning show does not happen often, but if you are lucky enough to witness it you are in for a treat!

Phil Chanel: 01993 838 611

Impatiens Kilimanjaro, Tanzania

Most trekkers on Kilimanjaro climb with one goal in mind - reaching the snowy peak of Africa’s highest mountain. For botanists however, the lush lower slopes of the mountain can be far more rewarding. Impatiens Kilimanjaro grows only on Mount Kilimanjaro. This tiny red flower is found on the wet southern face of the mountain, shaded by the forest canopy. Amongst the abundant vegetation, the flower is not easily spotted, but as you climb, look out for it nestled amongst the mossy branches of a tree, or sheltering under the broad leaves of a fern.

Alexandra Matts: 01993 838 512

Cherry Blossom, Japan

Much loved by the Japanese and visitors alike, the flowering of the delicate pink sakura cherry blossoms is not only one of the most beautiful and ephemeral images of Japan, but also one of the most anticipated events in the social calendar. The traditional symbol of the ancient samurai class, who found much to identify with in the transient nature of the cherry blossoms, nowadays the opening of the blossom brings about an almost carnival-like atmosphere, with lively celebrations taking place among the trees. Notoriously difficult to predict, and lasting only a few short days, the cherry blossom season traditionally begins in late March/early April around Kyoto and Tokyo, although it can take a further month to reach the more northerly Tohoku and Hokkaido regions.

Lou Mullineux: 01993 838 209



Cherry blossom, Japan



King Protea, Cape Floral Kingdom

WEB PLUS

www.audley.co.uk/features/download-desktops

View a selection of our favourite images to brighten up your desktop



Project Crimson is committed to protecting and re-establishing the endangered Pohutukawa tree. Whilst in New Zealand, you may like to consider purchasing a bottle of Crimson 2005/2006 pinot noir from Martinborough or through the website www.projectcrimson.org.nz in support of the trust's work.

Rafflesia, Borneo and Indonesia

Named after Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles who led the expedition in 1818 that discovered the first of the Rafflesia species, the world's largest flower is often referred to as "corpse flower". In order to attract pollinating insects rafflesias give off a foul smell like rotting meat. The plant is a parasite of vines taking all of its nutrition from its host, and therefore requires no leaves or roots. In some species, including those found in Borneo and Sumatra, the flower may reach one metre in diameter and weigh up to ten kilogrammes. You will need a good guide and lots of luck to find a flowering Rafflesia but you won't forget the aroma!

Sid Davis: 01993 838 123

Cape Floral Kingdom, South Africa

The Cape Floral Kingdom is one of only six recognised floral kingdoms in the world and its main vegetation type has the collective name 'fynbos' ('fynbos' comes from the Dutch word for 'fine leaved'). It is the smallest floral kingdom in the world but with 1,300 species per 10,000 square kilometres it is the richest. The most conspicuous of the fynbos plants, the King Protea, is South Africa's national plant and when travelling through the Cape you cannot complete the stunning journey without smelling the various strong scents of fynbos.

Charlotte Mellor: 01993 838 414

The Pohutukawa Tree, New Zealand

The hardiest and most adaptable of New Zealand's coastal plants, this solitary member of the myrtle family (also known as the 'New Zealand Christmas Tree') is renowned for its bright red flowers which bloom over Christmas. It's used decoratively in place of holly and conifers over the festive season. The first settlers prized it for its hard timber and called it *Metrosideros*, from the Greek for ironwood, whereas the Maori regard it as sacred and named it after the sea spray mists which often envelope its silvery foliage in its remote coastal haunts.

Chris Wilson: 01993 838 807

Rhododendrons, Nepal and Bhutan

Nepal, along with its neighbour Bhutan, is one of the best places in the world to see wild rhododendrons, as the Himalaya is this plant's native habitat. If you travel to Nepal or Bhutan in the months of April and May, you will be able to see these beautiful plants in full bloom. Some of the plants are huge, and are a real sight to behold, especially with a back-drop of lofty mountain peaks. Aside from rhododendrons, there are opportunities to spot some wonderful wild orchids, and there are many other blooming plants at this time of year, bathing the foothills in a blaze of colour.

Beatrice Bowen: 01993 838 313



Rafflesia flower, Indonesia



Rhododendrons, Nepal