

THE
WILDFLOWER
TRAVEL
BOOK



THE WILDFLOWER TRAVEL BOOK

50 colourful destinations in nature

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INTRODUCTION

There is something captivating about wildflowers – the way they exist in the landscape largely without human intervention, carefree and unpredictable, often blooming after heavy rain and just the right amount of sunshine. Their fleeting beauty keeps them ever so slightly out of reach.

To walk through a woodland carpeted with bluebells or hike along a path dotted with orchids is something elemental and beautiful that, once experienced, you'll want to seek out again. Open your eyes to the seasonal changes all around you and it will bring a whole new dimension to the way you travel, as you start to see the world through a different lens.

Wildflowers are defined as flowering plants that grow in the wild without having been intentionally planted. They are often native to the country or, if introduced by humans, have become naturalised, but they all share the same characteristic of growing where they choose. They are often small, bursting into bloom when the time is right: at the side of the road, along a coastal path, or at the edge of a mountain trail.

In general, wildflowers bloom in the northern hemisphere from March to April and in the southern hemisphere from August to September. Alpine flowers bloom a little later,

after the snow melts, so theirs is a shorter but more intense season, as in the Alps, the Rocky Mountains and the Himalayas. In Mediterranean climates, a hot, dry summer preceded by a damp winter will produce the best flowers. This includes destinations around the Mediterranean Sea, in California, Western Australia and South Africa. Desert flowers bloom in spring after winter rains; they vary from year to year, but, in a good year, can produce spectacular superblooms such as those seen in the Atacama Desert in Chile.

Tropical countries generally have fewer opportunities for dramatic wildflower moments, as they do not experience the same seasonal shifts and temperatures remain fairly constant year-round. However, we have included a few key destinations where exciting floral displays occur that, while not being quite in keeping with the traditional definition of wildflowers, are nonetheless must-see events.

If you have an interest in plants but have only ever seen them in gardens or parks, then spotting a lupin casually growing at the side of the road can be a moment of surprise and joy. And that is what this book is about: it is not going to swamp you with Latin names and definitions, but instead point you towards places where you can enjoy the ephemeral beauty of flowering

plants. Flowers are for everyone, and the restorative power of nature is something we all feel when we spend time outdoors.

You don't even need to go that far to begin. On one of your regular walks, start by looking down at your feet. What is lurking in the cracks of the pavement, or clinging to the mortar in a brick wall? What was in flower here last week? What is in flower now? What is coming into bloom? In doing this, you'll likely notice birds and other wildlife too, because that is a big part of it.

As a writer and gardener, I have long been fascinated by the natural world. I spent part of my childhood in Southeast Asia, where I was outdoors much of the time and developed a love of tropical frangipani flowers and orchids. These days I chart the year not only through the plants I choose to grow, but also through walks in nature and observing the seasonal shifts: from the first primroses and snowdrops of late winter, through the bluebells and cherry blossom of spring, and into early summer, when frothy white cow parsley lines the footpaths.

I know from experience of growing plants in my garden in England that however much you try to tame nature, it will always have other plans. The longer I garden, the more I accept

plants that simply arrive without invitation – these blow-ins from the wild. It is nature quietly reminding us that it often does things better than we do, and that we should simply relax and enjoy its beauty and biodiversity.

Timing is everything when it comes to seeing wildflowers at their best, so always check ahead before travelling for the latest updates. Please remember that you must never pick or trample them, but do enjoy sketching or photographing them.

This book takes you around the world to show you 50 of the most spectacular wildflower destinations, from high-alpine pastures to the coastal cliffs of the Mediterranean, the jungles of Borneo to the Scottish Highlands.

In her poem 'Sometimes', writer Mary Oliver offers these instructions for living a life: 'Pay attention, be astonished and tell about it.' These feel like wise words for any budding wildflower traveller.

Caroline Kamp





NORTH AMERICA



Garibaldi Provincial Park, *British Columbia, Canada*

1.

Sprawling meadows to jagged mountains

WILDFLOWER SEASON: July to August

The rugged Garibaldi Provincial Park is located between the outdoor adventure towns of Squamish and Whistler in British Columbia. Centred on the dormant stratovolcano Mount Garibaldi, the landscape features turquoise alpine lakes and meadows of beautiful wildflowers. With over 90km of established hiking trails through dense forests of cedar and pine, it is a wilderness waiting to be explored. Keep in mind that local residents may include black bears, mountain goats, black-tailed deer and cougars.

A popular hike begins at the Rubble Creek Trailhead, accessed by a paved road from the Sea to Sky Highway. The trail heads uphill through the forest for around 7.5km before arriving at the subalpine, wildflower-rich Taylor Meadows. In the summer months, these grasslands hum with insects and butterflies, so re-

member to pack insect repellent. A breathtaking variety of plants jostles for space, including pink and white heather, purple lupins, daisies, yellow glacier lilies, red paintbrush, pink monkeyflower (following pages right), valerian (following pages left), yarrow and the pollinator-friendly Pacific rhododendron, native to British Columbia.

Visitors often use Taylor Meadows as a base, camping on tent pads dotted throughout the forest before continuing on to more challenging hikes above Garibaldi Lake. These include the climb to the base of the jagged spire of Black Tusk – an easily recognisable, slightly intimidating landmark visible for miles – and the Panorama Ridge, famous for its stunning panoramic views. You can also camp at Garibaldi Lake and take the opportunity to swim in its glacier-fed waters.









OTHER THINGS WORTH SEEING

At Mount Revelstoke, you can drive to the summit along the 26km Meadows in the Sky Parkway, which winds steeply uphill in a series of hairpin bends through the forest to the subalpine meadows of Balsam Lake, filled with glacier lilies, mountain heather and arnica.



Waterton Lakes National Park, *Alberta, Canada*

2.

A kaleidoscope of colour

WILDFLOWER SEASON: mid-June to mid-August

Waterton Lakes National Park is known as the ‘Wildflower Capital of Canada’, thanks to the thousands of flowers blooming here each summer. This uncrowded, pristine wilderness lies a two-and-a-half-hour drive south of Calgary, where the prairies meet the Rocky Mountains. It is also a protected Biosphere Reserve, recognised for its rich diversity of habitats and species. To further burnish its unspoilt credentials, it was designated an International Peace Park, sharing an open border with Glacier National Park in Montana.

One of the most impressive plants here is bear-grass (opposite page), with fluffy, white, lollipop-like flowerheads made up of tiny petals. It earned its name not because bears eat the leaves, as is commonly believed, but because they use the leaves to line their dens. Other colourful flowers include pink fireweed, yellow glacier lily, arnica, purple lupin, Canada thistle, knap-

weed and red paintbrush. The pink-petalled prickly wild rose (*Rosa acicularis*) grows widely in roadside thickets, providing protective nesting sites for birds. In autumn, the rosehips are an important food source for the bears and coyotes that roam here. It is the official flower of Alberta and has long featured as an emblem on number plates alongside the evocative slogan ‘Wild Rose Country’.

The best way to engage with this landscape is to head outdoors. A short drive along the Red Rock Parkway brings you to the trailhead of the Bellevue Prairie Trail, a 9.5km hike through meadows of yellow, pink and purple flowers. Those with more energy, and several hours to spare, can hike the 20km Horseshoe Basin Trail, which rewards hikers with breathtaking views down the valley. Alternatively, you can enjoy tea at the famous Prince of Wales Hotel overlooking Upper Waterton Lake.





OTHER THINGS WORTH SEEING

Banff National Park is the gem of the Canadian Rockies and a major draw for visitors to Alberta. The best spots for wildflowers set against breathtaking mountain views include Helen Lake off the Icefields Parkway, Sunshine Meadows via the gondola, and Healy Pass.



Poppies along the highway

WILDFLOWER SEASON: March to May

What could be more fitting than seeing California poppies blooming at the roadside as you drive along the Pacific Coast Highway in the Sunshine State? These tiny orange blooms burst from the ground in their thousands along coastal bluffs and trails, signalling the arrival of spring (following pages). The intensity of the display depends on winter rainfall; the heavier the rain, the more spectacular the bloom.

Garrapata State Park has 3km of beachfront and is one of the best places to visit for a dreamy combination of ocean views, rugged cliffs and wildflower meadows of poppies, red Indian paintbrush and seaside daisies. Soberanes Point is a rocky headland where you can watch the waves roll in, spot seals frolicking and if you're lucky, even glimpse a whale. Hike the Soberanes Point and Whale Peak Loop through the canyon to see wildflowers among the redwood trees.

Thousands of white calla lilies have naturalised in what is known as Calla Lily Valley (left), just off Highway 1 within the park, creating an extraordinary monocultural visual display. Another dazzling sight you will be inexplicably drawn to in Big Sur is the dense clusters of blue and purple lupins that sprawl across hill-sides and meadows. At their best in May, these nectar-rich flowers attract bees and butterflies. A good viewing spot is along the Creamery Meadow Trail in Andrew Molera State Park, which leads to Molera Beach.



