

Mad about tulips



REFLECTIONS: Keukenhof gardens.

by Heather Campbell Hapeta

KEUKENHOF is one of the world's great gardens – in fact it's the world's largest flower garden. Very different from most gardens that tourists visit, it concentrates on one plant in one short season – yet still manages to attract some 800,000 people from late March to May.

Most people think the tulip originated in the Netherlands – the correct name for what we often call Holland – but this is not so. The “beloved bulb” as it is often referred to originated as a wild flower in Central Asia and eventually the Turks started cultivating them (tulip is thought to mean turban).

They were introduced to Europe in the 1500s and it was in 1637 that the Dutch fell in love with them. In fact, so obsessed were they, that for one season fortunes were made and lost by people speculating on them. Those days of mad passion are over but the thought of tulips and the Netherlands is firmly embedded in people's mind as belonging to each other. The Dutch are the world leaders in growing both the flowers for sale and bulbs which get shipped around the world.

Keukenhof, about 10km from the beautiful university town of Leiden, covers some 32ha and is laid out to display the tulip. While some plots are solely of tulips, many others have hyacinths, crocuses and daffodils as a foil to the many-coloured tulip.

It is easy to get to the gardens – or anywhere else in this diverse and tiny country – driving or cycling through the bulb fields from Lieden, or taking a train from Amsterdam then transferring to a bus at Leiden. Many tour buses include the gardens as part of a wider tour. If you love flowers and gardens I recommend you make it a day trip just to the tulip region.

Further details on the website www.keukenhof.com



LOVELY CONTRAST: Tulips and hyacinths

Superstitions and travel

As Western travellers we are often amazed at the superstitions of those “other” exotic races and cultures, but

don't acknowledge our own.

Do you walk under ladders? Throw spilt salt over your shoulder? Pray to unseen beings? Many of us will do these without even thinking that other cultures may think this is not only strange but absurd.

I carry a bone carving with me on all my travels. Commissioned especially for me by a Maori organisation I was involved with, it was to take me safely on my journey with its twists and turns and would bring me back to where I belong. It's a real treasure.

The unexpected gift, given to me at the airport as I left for my first major sojourn overseas, never came off my neck and I take it on all my travels. I don't wear it as constantly as I did in the past but it's a vital piece of my travel necessities.

“You Kiwis,” said an Aussie in Egypt, “are so tied to the land. You all wear those damn bones or greenstone around the neck. I can recognise you before you even open your mouth!”

I took it as a compliment.

Sportspeople often have special clothes they wear – red socks, or moves they make and prayers they say. Travellers are the same. The most frequent item I saw was a St Christopher, the patron saint of travellers. What do you carry? What have you been given to protect you from the vagaries of the road and did it work? (Let me know).

When leaving for a sailing trip I was given black coral by my seafaring sister to ensure the sea didn't take me ... and it hasn't. My mother gave me a year of travel insurance – the modern version of ensuring all is well.

People I've met along the road have given me little momentoes and in particular small cards with prayers and blessings. I value them all. One, hand written for me, is a benediction from a New Mexican poet.

Benidicto

May your trails be crooked, winding, lonesome, dangerous leading to the most amazing view. May your river flow without end, meandering through pastoral valleys tinkling with bells, past temples and castles and poets' towers into a primeval forest where tigers belch and monkeys howl, through miasmal and mysterious swamps and down into a desert of red rock, blue mesas, domes and pinnacles and grottos of endless stone and down again into a deep vast ancient unknown chasm where bars of sunlight blaze on profiled cliffs where deer walk across the white sand beaches where storms come and go as lightning charge upon the high crags where something strange and more beautiful and more full of wonder than your deepest dreams waits for you – beyond the next turning of the canyon walls.

Edward Abbey

Although the poem offers me a dream of all being great, it also warns of the dangers that we travel with. “Tigers belch” in many ways, “dark primeval forests” are in every town or city and “mysterious swamps” lie waiting for the wrong footstep. It is to save us from those that friends give us protection in many forms – and for that I am grateful.

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