

The Dutch and their *Bloemen*

Holland's flower obsession

Stilleven met Bloemen, Hans Bollongier 1623-1672 - Rijksmuseum



Tulip Mania in Holland

The curvaceous tulip, with its silky, puckered petals has long been a world-wide symbol of Holland. Stop the next person you meet and ask them the first thing that comes to mind when you mention the Netherlands. They'll most likely answer "the tulip."

Ever since it was first brought to Holland from Turkey during the sixteenth-century, the tulip has been all the rage. Carolus Clusius, an eminent horticulturalist at the time, planted the first bulb in the 1590s and then wrote a tome on the subject (an accomplishment he most likely regretted when the newfound popularity of the flower enticed trend hoppers to steal bulbs from his garden).

During the Golden Age, the tulip found a prominent place in paintings and festivals, eventually becoming such a hot commodity that it created the first economic bubble. Known as Tulip Mania, the bulbs eventually became so expensive they were used as money.

During the Second World War, the tulip came to the rescue of her people yet again, providing them with nourishment when food was scarce.

words Tiffany Jansen

Tulips are still a big part of Dutch culture and an important export product today. They're cultivated in fields throughout the country, their rich colours stretching as far as the eye can see.

The ubiquitousness of the tulip and the Dutch fascination with it have made it the unofficial national flower of Holland. And it's a symbol the Dutch carry with them wherever they go. As in the case of Dutch football greats Ruud Gullit, Marco van Basten, and Frank Rijkaard who were known in Italy as the "tulipani", meaning "the tulips." Or in areas still well connected to their Dutch roots, such as New York and Holland, Michigan in the United States, where tulip pride is displayed at annual festivals.

It's not all about the tulip

The Dutch love flowers in general, spending up to €60 (AU\$78.74) per person on flowers each year. Just about everywhere you turn, there's a flower market. A peace offering following an argument, a staple at weddings and funerals, a cheerful way to brighten the home, a sweet-smelling gift and a colourful way to say thank-you - there's seemingly nothing Dutchies won't break out the bouquets for. Even the Pope enjoys the occasional bunch of freshly cut *bloemen*. His annual papal address and Apostolic Blessing always includes a "thanks for the flowers, Holland!" Holland has long been the world's leading supplier of flowers, plants, and trees, a bit like an absurdly large

flower shop. More than 60% of world trade in cut flowers and plants is done through Dutch auctions. Though much of this is cultivated in greenhouses, there's a whole region along the coast from Haarlem to Leiden devoted entirely to bulb growing. Known as the Duin- en Bollenstreek (Dune and Bulb Region), the mild climate and chalky soil in this stretch of land make it the perfect place for bulbs of all kinds to grow and thrive. Bulbs are planted in the fall and bloom from March through the month of May, in wave upon wave of electrifying colour. The best place to see this fine art collaboration of nature and man is the Keukenhof in Lisse.

The world's largest flower garden

The Keukenhof is a renowned destination for flower lovers and garden enthusiasts worldwide. Known as "the world's largest flower garden," some seven million bulbs are planted there each year, including seven-hundred different varieties of tulip. Visitors will also find gorgeous specimens of roses, hyacinths, lilies, orchids, daffodils, and crocuses. Though, in all fairness, the Keukenhof is less garden and more horticultural attraction park. Visitors can climb to the top of the working windmill to get a fabulous panoramic view of brightly hued tulip fields. The soft, delicate flowers of the gardens are juxtaposed with modern and avant-garde statues strategically placed throughout the grounds.



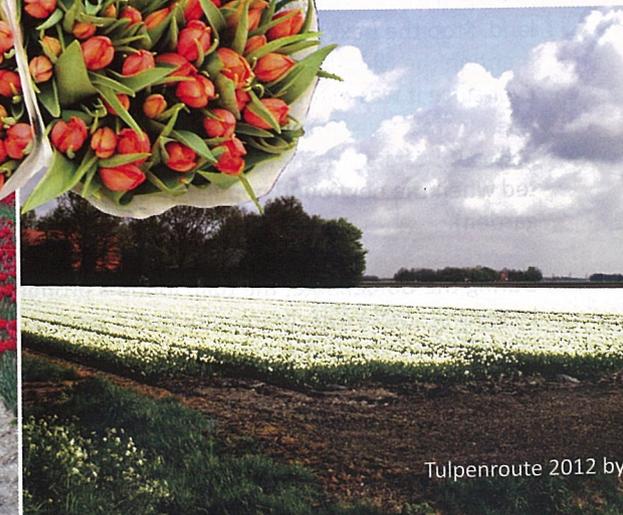
bloemenmarkt Amsterdam by ZakMC



Keukenhof by Rem



Tulpenroute 2012 by Pa3EMS



Tulpenroute 2012 by



Pavilions dot the thirty-two hectare park, housing more than thirty flower shows per season, such as the largest lily show in the world. More than six hundred growers show off their most prized flowers, expertly presented by leading flower arrangers.

As visitors wander the fifteen kilometres of footpaths, a visit to the Keukenhof also becomes a learning experience. Discover the journey from bulb to bloom, learn why the majority of the world's bulbs come from Holland, and figure out just what's involved in a bulb peeling. Some ninety bulb growers will also be on hand to share their expertise (and sell their wares).

For the kids, there's a scavenger hunt, a petting zoo, two playgrounds, and a maze.

A number of restaurants and food stalls provide just about every morsel imaginable. With an emphasis on traditional Dutch food, of course. The Keukenhof even has multiple gift shops, selling everything from the obligatory commemorative magnet or shot glass to lavishly-decorated wooden clogs and tulip-adorned cheese cutters. As is to be expected, the Keukenhof is the best place to purchase bulbs.

The Keukenhof of yore

But the Keukenhof wasn't always one of the most popular destinations in the world. In fact, it got its start during the fifteenth century as the kitchen garden for castle Slot Teylingen. Hence the name Keukenhof, which means kitchen garden.

While flowers did make an appearance, the main vegetation were herbs, vegetables and fruits to be served to the castle's occupant Jacoba van Beieren, Countess of Holland, Zeeland and Henegouwen.

Upon the Countess' passing, the castle fell into the hands of a wealthy merchant family, eventually becoming the property of Baron and Baroness van Pallandt during the nineteenth century.

They hired J.D. and L.P. Zocher - the landscape architects responsible for Amsterdam's Vondel Park - in 1840 to re-design the gardens. Their design is the same English landscape style still seen at the Keukenhof today.

Roughly one hundred years after the Keukenhof got its new look, the mayor of Lisse set out to organise an open air flower show together with some of the area's leading bulb growers and exporters. The idea was to create a permanent venue to showcase Lisse's thriving plant and flower industry.

The Keukenhof opened to the public in 1949, welcoming more than 200,000 visitors. That outstanding success ensured the Keukenhof's place as a prime attraction.

...and now

Since that day sixty-four years ago, the Keukenhof has ushered more than fifty million visitors from all over the globe through its gates, including high-profile guests like Queen Elizabeth and Bill Clinton. The Keukenhof now receives more than a million visitors annually.

This year, the Keukenhof will be open from 21 March to 20 May, with the majority of the bulbs flowering some-

time between late April and early May.

Each year, the Keukenhof has a theme in honour of one of the countries of the world. In 2012 it was *Poland – Heart of Europe*, which showcased aspects of Polish culture and saw Polish First Lady, Anna Komorowska on hand to open the season.

This time, the Keukenhof will be tipping its flowered hat to the UK for 2013's theme: *United Kingdom – Land of Great Gardens*. Quite fitting really, as the Keukenhof was designed after the English style.

There will be an exhibition on English gardens, with British and Dutch gardening experts on hand to offer tips and advice. But the piece de resistance is sure to be the much-lauded flower sculpture. This year's bulb mosaic will be a colourful rendition of London landmarks Big Ben and Tower Bridge.

It's sure to be a blooming' brilliant time! 

Holland: The Flower Child Country

The Keukenhof isn't the only way to get your flower fix. Here are a few other examples of Holland's immense flower power.

FloraHolland

The largest flower auction in the world sells more than twenty million flowers and plants daily. Auctions are held by the company FloraHolland and visitors are welcome. Locations are in Naaldwijk, Rijnsburg, Venlo, Bleiswijk, and Eelde, with the largest auction being held in Aalsmeer. <http://www.floraholland.com/en/>

Floriade

This world horticultural expo is held in a different Dutch city every ten years. The most recent one took place in Venlo in 2012, but the seventh edition has already been scheduled for 2022 in Almere. <http://www.floriade.nl/>

National Tulip Day

First celebrated in 2012, National Tulip Day takes place on the third Saturday in January. It's the official opening of the tulip season. <http://www.tulpen.nl/nl/Tulpendag>

Floating Flower Market

Along the Singel in Amsterdam, a row of floating barges is home of the world's only floating flower market. The Floating Flower Market is open seven days a week.

Amsterdam Tulip Museum

A museum featuring films and exhibits about – you guessed it – the tulip. Learn everything there is to know about Holland's unofficial national flower. <http://www.amsterdamtulipmuseum.com/>

Flower Parade

Also called the Bloemencorso (or Bulbflower Parade), this parade features floats and luxury cars decked out in flower sculptures. The forty-kilometre route runs from Noorderwijk to Haarlem. This year's parade will take place on 20 April and the theme is Bon Appetit! <http://bloemencorso-bollenstreek.nl>

