

Travel and Adventure: Spring flowers around the world

by Ellen Clark

In the spring, a young man's fancy may well turn to thoughts of love, but for lovers of flowers it's more likely to turn to thoughts of colorful blooms of every description. Whether it's perfectly formed Dutch tulips or the exotic-looking flowers that pop out of desert cactus, the world becomes a garden when the chill of winter blows over and balmy replaces nippy.

KEUKENHOF GARDENS - For nine weeks every spring, the Keukenhof Gardens near Amsterdam welcomes more than 800,000 flower lovers, who are treated to 7 million flowers, including more than 1,000 varieties of tulips. CNS Photo by Ellen Clark. **HIGH DESERT POPPIES** - In March bright orange poppies carpet the high desert fields surrounding Lancaster, Calif. CNS Photo courtesy of Ellen Clark. **BLUEBELLS IN ENGLAND** - Bluebells herald the coming of spring in England in places like the Clivedon Woods, a National Trust property in the heart of the Thames River valley. CNS Photo by Ellen Clark **DOGWOODS IN TENNESSEE** - Dogwood flowers are the harbinger of Spring in the U.S. South. CNS Photo by Ellen Clark. Whether wild or cultivated, perfectly shaped and beautifully hued posies herald the end of winter. Famous gardens are bursting with color and smell, fields, deserts and mountains are carpeted in wildflowers, and towns around the world celebrate their favorite flower with festivals and special events.

One of the best-known flower-place connections has to be Holland and tulips. The Dutch have made a business of growing and selling flower bulbs, and in the spring flowering bulb plants are everywhere, with the most famous being richly colored tulips.

The tulip is not indigenous to the Netherlands, however, but was introduced in the 17th century from central Asia, where it grew wild. Over the centuries, the Dutch have made the flower their own, and in spring the country is a blaze of color. One of the most impressive tulip displays is at Keukenhof Gardens in Lisse. This 70-acre garden was established in 1949 as an open-air flower exhibition, and in the spring more than 7 million bulbs burst into flower, including tulips of every color and variety.

Across the channel in England, residents know that winter is over when the bluebells appear. Lovely little bell-shaped blooms on stalks, they cover the woodlands like a violet-blue carpet. In nearby Wales, the flower of choice is the cheery yellow daffodil, which starts flowering in March and is, along with the leek, the national symbol of Wales.

One of the most famous flower-related events in Europe is the Chelsea Flower Show in London at the end of May. One of the show's most popular attractions are the model gardens, ranging from wildflower to topiary, created by top garden designers. You can pick up gardening tips, buy plants or just enjoy this flowering extravaganza, but this three-day, pre-reserved-ticket-only event is fantastically popular, with flower aficionados traveling across oceans just to attend, so tickets should be purchased well in advance.

In Japan, the cherry blossom (sakura) is the unofficial national flower and has played an important part in Japanese culture for centuries. There are dozens of cherry tree varieties in Japan, and when they bloom in the spring the Japanese celebrate the blooms with cherry blossom-viewing (hanami) parties under the flowering trees. In Tokyo there are numerous places to see the trees in profusion, including the popular and crowded Ueno Park and Koishikawa Botanical Garden.

It's no surprise that Washington, D.C., also celebrates cherry blossoms, since, in 1912, Japan gifted the capitol city with cherry trees. Today more than 3,500 trees at East Potomac Park and around the Washington Memorial celebrate the coming of spring as they turn into umbrellas of pink and white.

In Highland Park in Rochester, N.Y., you can shake off the winter doldrums and celebrate spring surrounded by more than 1,200 sweet-smelling, pastel-hued lilac bushes. The park's first lilac bushes were planted in 1892, and today more than 500 varieties blossom over 22 acres. At a 10-day event in May, more than a half-million visitors celebrate the aromatic lilac at America's largest lilac festival.

You know spring has sprung in the southern United States when the dogwoods flower and azalea and rhododendron bushes are bursting with clusters of brilliant purple and pink flowers. Great Smoky Mountains National Park covers more than 800 square miles in the Southern Appalachian Mountains. With elevations that range from 875 to over 6,000 feet, the park has amazing biological diversity, which is perhaps most obvious in the spring when approximately 1,500 different kinds of flowering plants pop up around the park, including trillium, birdfoot violets and jack in the pulpits. While May is probably the primo time for wildflower viewing, even as late as October you're likely to see posies, such as the deep purplish blue monkshood and crimson jewel weed.

In the western United States, wildflowers pop up in some of the country's most arid areas. Normally

monochromatic deserts turn into a riot of color when the temperatures rise. Prickly cactus sprout shocking pink blooms, and high-desert prairies are filled with orange poppies and violet-blue lupin. When conditions are ideal, the profusion of desert wildflowers can be a spectacular sight, but if the winter has been a dry one, the display may be disappointing. On a good year, Arizona's Saguaro National Park and California's Anza Borrego State Park are great places for desert wildflower viewing. But even if you can't get to a national or state park, look for poppies, desert primrose, indian paintbrush and lupin in fields and by the side of roads in Nevada, Arizona, Utah and California.

Fifty-five-acre Butchart Gardens in Victoria, British Columbia, is spectacular any time of year, but nothing beats spring for color. This is when 250,000 bulbs reach their peak, mixing with less-formal blooms like wallflowers, forget-me-nots and English daisies.

You know it's spring when, from coast to coast and country to country, whether it's bright fuchsia posies popping out of spiky cactus, cultivated and stately flowering bulb plants or rows of lacy fruit trees, the world becomes one big flower garden.

IF YOU GO

Keukenhof, Stationsweg 166a, 2161 AM Lisse, Holland. Web site www.keukenhof.nl.

Chelsea Flower Show, Royal Hospital Chelsea, London SW3. Web site www.rhs.org.uk/Chelsea/2007/index.asp.

Highland Park, Rochester, N.Y. Web site www.lilacfestival.com.

Great Smoky Mountains National Park, 107 Park Headquarters Rd., Gatlinburg, TN, 37738, 865-436-1200.
Web site, www.nps.gov/grsm.

Saguaro National Park, 3693 South Old Spanish Trail, Tucson, AZ, 85730-5601, 520-733-5153 or
520-733-5158. Web site: www.saguaro.national-park.com.

Anza Borrego State Park, 760-767-5311, Web site [www.parks.ca.gov/default.asp?page\(underscore\)id=638](http://www.parks.ca.gov/default.asp?page(underscore)id=638).

The Butchart Gardens, 800 Benvenuto Ave, Brentwood Bay, BC, 866-652-4422. Web site
www.butchartgardens.com/main.php.

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