

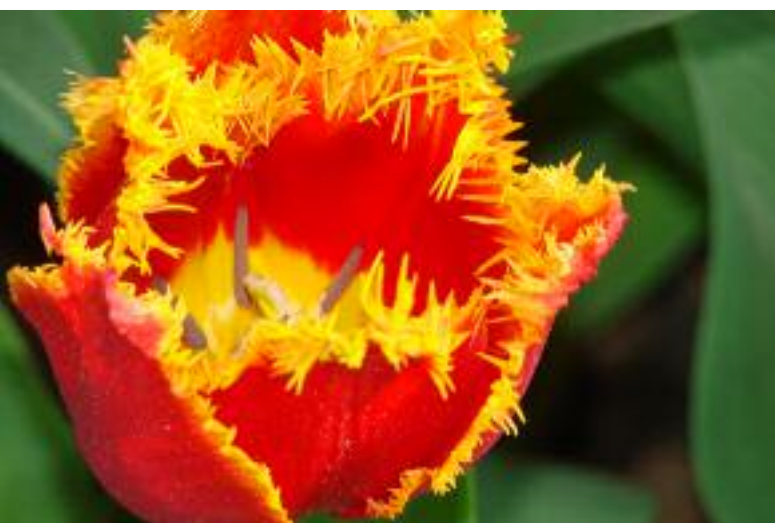
The Most Beautiful Spring Garden in the world

There are usually four reasons why you would like to visit the Netherlands. It could be because you are interested in Amsterdam, mills/traditional crafts and cheese, Van Gogh or bulbs and flowers so let's talk about the Netherlands and flowers. The Netherlands has a monarch and flowers have always played a special role with monarchs. Our Dutch destination is Keukenhof and unlike other tourist attractions, Keukenhof is open for only eight weeks of the year, but it far outstrips other attractions in the Netherlands in terms of visitors per week. The name Keukenhof which literally means "kitchen garden" offers an exceptional flower garden which bears no resemblance to that of its humble beginnings.

This March and for the 60th time and another eight weeks, under a new theme of "USA, New Amsterdam – New York 400, the 5th regional attraction for the Netherlands opened its doors to over 800,000 visitors. The event is officially opened by Her Majesty Queen Beatrix, and then over 800,000 people would visit the International Flower Exhibition and witness the Flower Parade in Lisse. The event is exciting for anyone interested in flowers and anything colourful especially as in March, the daffodils are already flowering; the hyacinths come into bloom and you can smell spring in the air as the tulips burst open in their countless varieties to display the full glory of the bulb fields

The Dutch call it the most beautiful spring garden in the world and quite right too. Queen Elizabeth of Great Britain (1962), HRH Princess Margaret (1979), Sarah Ferguson, the Duchess of York (1989) Hilary Clinton (1999), Princess Victoria of Sweden (2007), Donald Trump (2008) are among the many dignitaries who have walked the "Walk of Fame" at Keukenhof.





For sixty years, the flowers and colours of spring at Keukenhof have been more glorious than anywhere else. It is especially beautiful to watch the opening parade of beautifully arranged flowers in themes such as James Bond, Alice in Wonderland, and many other interesting themes.

Even though Keukenhof is an independent event, the showcase welcomes many visitors a year and acts as a platform for plant and flower-growers in the Netherlands. The tulips alone have countless stories to tell. In the 17th century, wealthy investors paid enormous amounts of money for tulip bulbs and then eventually, the middle class wised-up and grabbed the opportunity to earn some money by trading in tulip bulbs. So successful was the trade that some people sold their businesses and family jewels to trade in tulip bulbs. There is also an opportunity to see millions of bulbs in flower, fantastic flower shows and the largest sculpture park in the Netherlands. The costs of operating the park are defrayed by the growers, who do not charge for the bulbs.

Keukenhof is a festival of flower bulbs, cut flowers and perennial plants. According to statistics, day tourists in the bulb-growing region generate sales worth around 100 million euros. Another quarter of a billion is generated by long-stay tourism – 20 % of which takes place in bulb country. The success of the event can also be attributed to the fact that there not many other tourist attractions during the time of the event so the park attracts a lot of international tourists.

Tourists from all over the world come to Keukenhof to see the flower show and this year's parade included floral tributes to James Bond's Octopussy, Native American Indians, Moby Dick, musicals and many other famous themes.



Another reason to visit Holland - Holland scraps flight tax

After a survey which concluded that flight tax would account for a 2% year on year decline in visitor numbers, the Dutch government scrapped the flight tax on 1 July 2009. The flight tax was originally introduced on 1 July 2008 for all passengers who left Holland from a domestic airport. €11.25 was charged for short-haul flights; while €45 charged for long-haul passengers. The abolition of the flight tax is one of the measures by the Dutch government to stimulate the country's economy in these difficult times. The survey also found that the Dutch economy would be €1.3 billion worse off because of the flight tax. For more information please visit www.holland.com



Keukenhof Simple facts

The flower exhibition was first opened in 1949 and attained its 60th year in 2009.

The 2010 exhibition will be held from 18th March to 16th May 2010.

In the 15th century the area on which Keukenhof now stands was a stretch of unspoilt nature owned by four times married Jacoba van Beieren, countess of Holland, Zeeland and Hene-gouwen from 1417-1433. During her brief life, she also spent a number of years in prison and waged many wars, including one against one of her husbands! Apart from using it for hunting, the estate was also used to gather herbs for the kitchen at the castle – hence the name Keukenhof (literally meaning “kitchen Garden”).

Cycling through the bulb fields

One of the great pleasures of Keukenhof is cycling through the bulb fields. Cyclists can choose from six sign-posted routes and cycle through the vibrant fields of colour to appreciate the unforgettable experience. The experience usually takes place in March when:

- The daffodils are already flowering
- The hyacinths come into bloom and you can smell spring in the air
- and the tulips burst open in their countless varieties to display the full glory of the bulb fields

Cost of renting a bike is 8.50 euros including the route. You can rent a bike 7 days a week from 09.30 hours and must return it by 19.00hours. For more information please contact www.rent-a-bikevandam.nl or email info@rent-a-bikevandam.nl

How to get there:

Fly KLM into Amsterdam's Schipol airport and from Schiphol you can get to the Keukenhof either by public shuttle bus (number 58, leaving every 15 minutes in season) or taxi. It is about 20 minutes to get there.

Further information can be obtained from www.keukenhof.nl

