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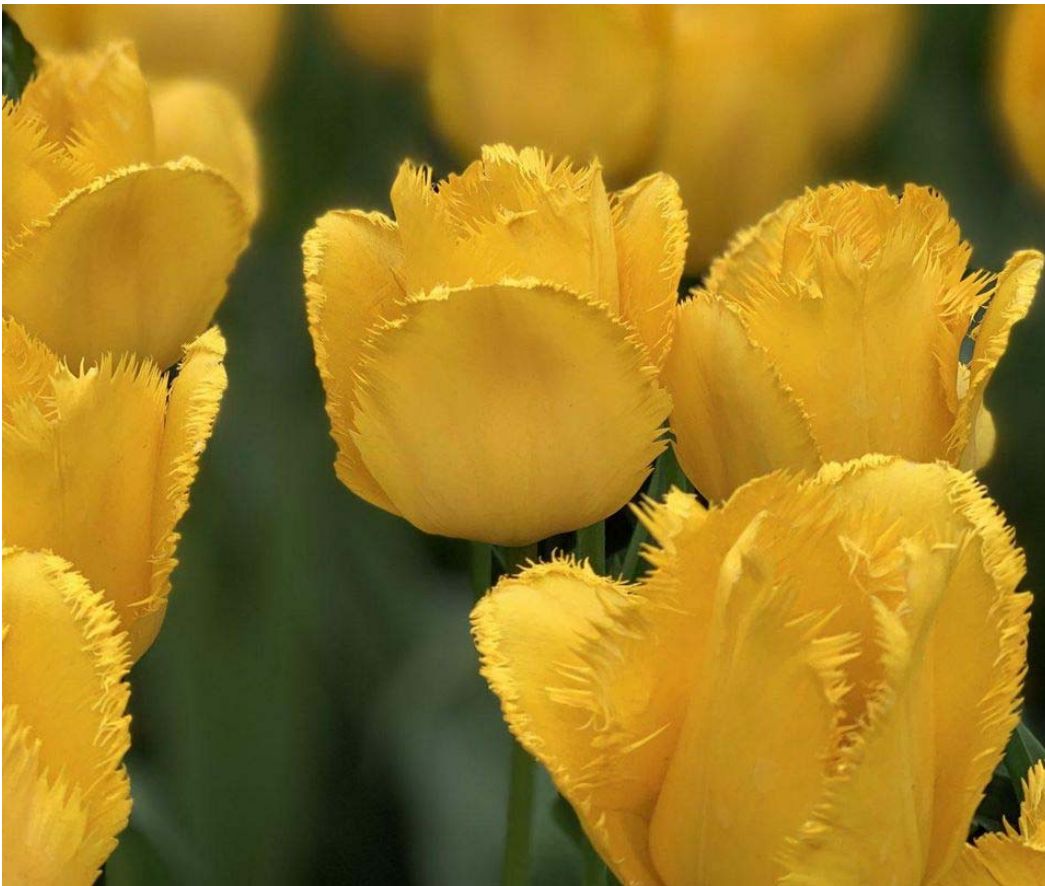
It's Not Too Early To Book Tulip River Cruises For Keukenhof 2020 In The Netherlands



Terri Colby Contributor

Travel

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In the Netherlands, spring is all about the tulips. TERRI COLBY

When the calendar turns to June, the focus is on summer vacations. But I'm still in thrall to my spring tulip river cruise in the Netherlands with a visit to Keukenhof gardens. It's not too early to book a tulip river cruise for 2020.

Springtime in the Netherlands is all about the tulips. And if you have any affection for the colorful blooms that signal spring's arrival, Holland is the place to be. There's nothing like a visit to [Keukenhof](#) gardens to make your jaw drop and exhaust your photo-snapping finger.

Keukenhof Gardens

The gardens just outside Amsterdam host more than a million visitors each year and hold more than 7 million bulbs on almost 80 acres. On the April day we visited the sun was shining, the tourists were swarming and I was entranced.

Keukenhoff Gardens dates to the 1400s when the area provided fruits and vegetables for Teylingen Castle. But today it's a thoroughly modern endeavor, each year for just two months showcasing the best bulbs on offer from nearly 100 Dutch growers.



Keukenhof gardens is open just two months a year, showcasing bulbs from Holland's top tulip growers. TERRI COLBY

And boy do they deliver. Keukenhof Garden tulip growers put on a show, for sure. The red and yellow blooms are familiar but extravagant in their densely packed groupings spreading like magic carpets to every corner of the garden. But there are other colors and multi-colored blooms and mixed beds with so many colors you have to stop in your tracks.



Windmills are the crowning touch on the gardens at Keukenhof. TERRI COLBY

Stripes of oranges and pinks and white, in varying sizes, mix with other bulb flowers like hyacinth or daffodils. White tulips with red tips, red tulips with white tips. Red and yellow striated blooms. Some varieties of tulips with ruffled edges

make them look more like peonies, or maybe roses. Hydrangeas are used in the beds too. One full-sized windmill and one in miniature form make for prime backdrops for images of the flowers.

Keukenhoff was why we booked an 8-day spring tulip cruise, the 2019 Highlights of the Netherlands sailing with [Emerald Waterways](#). The tulips were outstanding and were definitely the highlight. But there was so much more.

Emerald Waterways Tulip Cruise

The cruise began and ended in Amsterdam, traveling almost 400 miles across a mix of rivers, lakes and canals including the Nederrijn, Lake Veerse and the Amsterdam-Rhine Canal.



The Emerald Sky docks in Amsterdam very close to the city's central train station, a convenient spot for sightseeing. TERRI COLBY

We were docked in Amsterdam, close to the city's Centraal train station, on the first night of the cruise. It wasn't until the end of the second full day that we began moving. As the 182-passenger Emerald Sky cruised toward Rotterdam, some travelers headed to the third-floor lounge for karaoke. But my husband and I were ready for bed.

The staterooms on the Sky are small, 180-square feet, but have an outstanding feature called the panorama window. Essentially, it's a large picture window that takes up most of the outside wall with a top half that drops down at



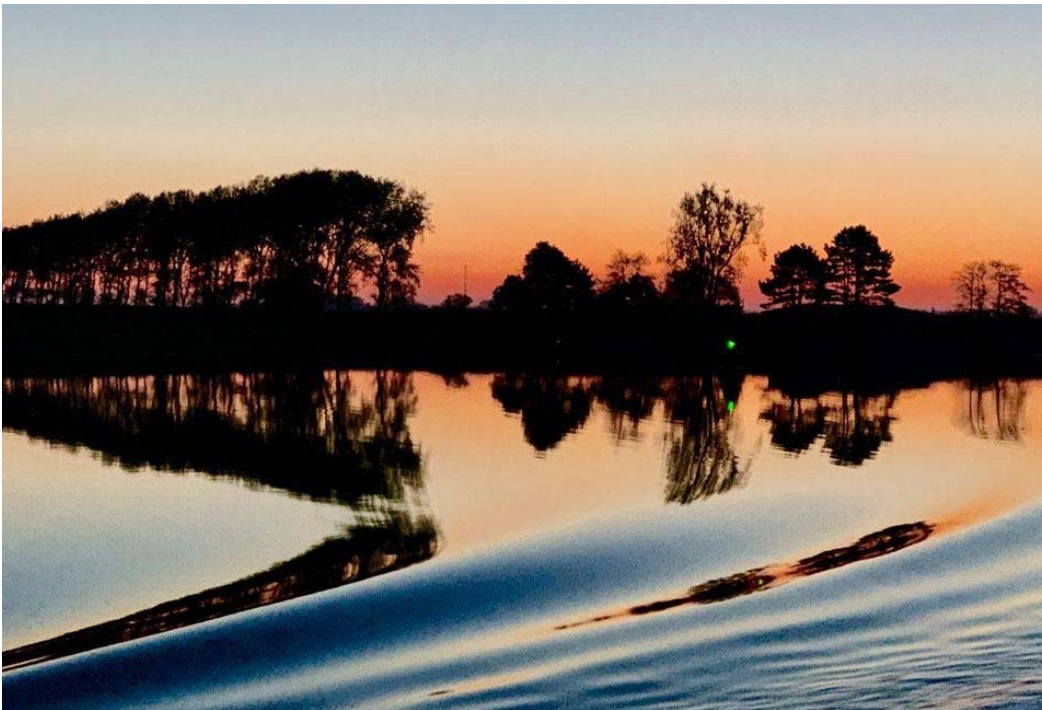
the touch of a button.

Climbing into bed, we turned off the lights,
rolled up the shades and opened the window.

It was a sublime indoor-outdoor experience,
lying on the comfortable mattress with soft sheets, feeling the night breeze as the
ship headed southward. The rhythmic murmurings of the water slapping the hull
made me smile in the darkness.



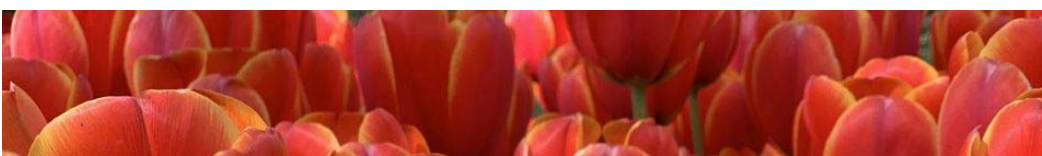
There's plenty of time to walk around
Amsterdam to check out its canals and
architecture. TERRI COLBY



Lovely pink sunrises are possible when traveling on an Emerald tulip cruise. TERRI COLBY

Occasionally there would be lights visible from shore, but mostly I saw only bare-branched youngish trees in straight lines along the water's edge. Sleep was easy and came quickly, thanks I think to the cool fresh air and the boat's lulling movements. But when I awakened in the night the dark waters glistened, reflecting the nearly full moon. And sunrise with an open window made for a morning scene pretty as a pink postcard.

A tulip cruise is the way to go for visiting this part of the world. We came for the tulips, but along the way we also got to see quite a bit of [Amsterdam](#), explore the amazingly modern city of Rotterdam, the ancient city of Delft and its famed pottery, the artsy city of Antwerp, where you can visit Rubens' house, and the World War II battlefield of Arnhem.





These orange beauties were captivating. TERRI COLBY

It wasn't until Day 7 of the cruise that we visited the gardens. Emerald offered an early morning excursion to Keukenhof with the option of a visit of about 2 ½ hours or about 4 ½. We needed to take the shorter trip because of other plans we had for the afternoon. The shorter duration was just enough to get a solid overview of Keukenhof. But if I return I'll opt for the longer stay and perhaps rent a bicycle or take a boat ride while I'm there.

Emerald Waterways has for the past four years been named the [best value for the price](#) in the river cruising category by Cruise Critic. Emerald says the award reflects its generous list of inclusions: complimentary shore excursions in every port; free airport transfers; prepaid gratuities and complimentary wine and beer offered at both lunch and dinner.

Cabins are tight but include lots of drawers for storage and the full window opening to make your whole room feel like an indoor-outdoor private space.

Public spaces are modern, spacious and welcoming. The third-floor lounge and bar offered comfortable seating and a small outdoor deck where you could eat light lunches or breakfasts, have drinks or afternoon tea. When the boat was moving, it was a popular spot, providing protection from the wind and tables and chairs with the option of sun or shade. The top deck offered lots of lounge chairs and table seating in sun or shade as well as a walking track around its edges.

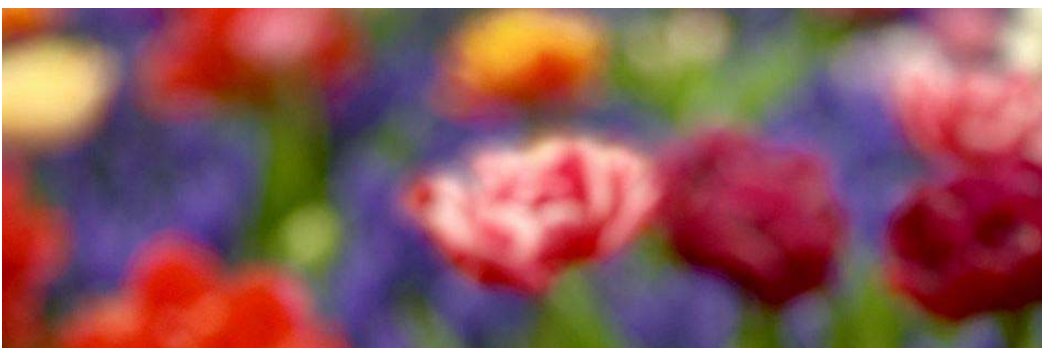
The dining room on the second level was where all meals were served except for the small optional lunch buffet or breakfast snacks in the third-floor lounge. The breakfast buffet in the dining room offered lots of choices including yogurt, fruits,

juices, pastries, hot and cold cereal, egg dishes and breakfast meats as well as made-to-order omelets and eggs. Salads, soups, meats, cheeses and hot entrees like pasta or chicken filled the buffet tables but passengers could also order an entrée such as a grilled meat or fish dish as a main course. At dinner, all the items were a la carte with a few standard options always available: salmon, chicken, steak. Passengers unhappy with one of the featured menu options were welcome to exchange it for something else.



Keukenhof gardens is where you want to be in spring, when the tulips are in bloom. TERRI COLBY

It's not too early to book springtime cruises for 2020 to the the Keukenhof Gardens tulips. In fact, Emerald's April 10 tulip cruise is already sold out. An April 17 sailing offers rooms like the one I had for \$3,795 per person, based on double occupancy.





Color is everywhere, and it's hard to stop taking photos, during a visit to Keukenhof. TERRI COLBY

Also for 2020, Emerald is offering a new sailing between Basel and Amersterdam that includes an excursion to the Keukenhof Garden tulips. With several departures in late March and April, it's called [Tulips & the Rhine](#). Prices start at \$2,295 per person.

Scenic Luxury Cruises, the Australian company that owns Emerald Waterways, also offers several 8-day [April tulip cruises](#) for 2020. The five-star luxury cruises start at 4,045 per person.

Happily telling stories about travel and discovery in Chicago and around the world.



Terri Colby Contributor

A Chicagoan by birth and by choice, I'm happy to be on the road exploring new destinations, especially in February, often the grimmest of the city's winter months. I hol... **Read More**
