

Levens Hall and Gardens Hails the Advent of 'Topiary Tourism'

Levens Hall and Gardens, a heritage property close to Kendal in the Southern Lake District, believes it has created a new concept in the world of travel – topiary tourism.

Ahead of its own special celebration of the art of clipping trees into geometric, abstract and themed shapes, World Topiary Day (May 12th), the owner of the world's oldest topiary garden has created a worldwide phenomenon, making topiary truly cool once again.

Levens Hall and Gardens founded World Topiary Day in lockdown and celebrated as it could, with only its gardens able to open, on May 12th last year. The date is significant for Levens Hall and Gardens, as it was that on which its infamous Radish Feast was held in the late 17th and early 18th centuries and also at a time of year at which the topiary garden is at its most pristine, having enjoyed its over-winter pampering.

The concept of having a World Topiary Day has really taken off, however, and nearly 60 gardens around the world are known to be celebrating this special day this year. Whilst Levens Hall and Gardens remains at the heart of it all, the day will be celebrated by over 30 different gardens in France, including big-hitters, the Palace of Versailles, Les Jardins Suspendus de Marqueyssac and Eyrignac et Ses Jardins, by various gardens in the USA, and in Belgium, Madeira and Spain.

Each is contributing their own spin on topiary tourism. At Levens Hall and Gardens, head gardener, Chris Crowder, will be pouring over 30 years' experience of managing the Guinness-World-Record-holding topiary into three specific topiary tours, at 11am, 1pm and 3pm. There will be quizzes and topiary themed items in abundance as souvenirs, plus an online quiz in which each answer relates to one of the participants from around the world.

In France, many gardens are holding talks and workshops. In California, Jardin de Buis is bringing in a jazz band and offering a topiary pruning workshop, given by a former contributing editor to Martha Stewart, the name behind last year's Discovery Channel programme 'Clipped', a reality TV show focused on topiary challenges.

In other parts of England too, gardens, like Elton Hall in Cambridgeshire, are also embracing the opportunity to put their topiary centre stage.

"Suddenly, topiary tourism is a 'thing', whether people want to appreciate quirky shapes, breathe in the benefits of biophilia, achieve mindfulness, or learn how to start a new hobby," says Levens Hall and Gardens' owner, Richard Bagot. "A garden art form that has always gone in and out of fashion, is suddenly à la mode again and we could not be prouder of the part we have played."

Of course, topiary never went out of fashion at Levens Hall and Gardens – a rather remarkable situation that has left trees from the original 1694 garden, started by Monsieur Guillaume Beaumont, in situ today, with over 300 years of history to impart. Now, the heritage gardens are rightfully championing the glories of clipped trees on a worldwide stage, ensuring that topiary will be on our map for a very long time to come but also creating the brand-new concept of 'topiary tourism' – a breath of fresh air for many of the world's most historic gardens.

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