

Hothouse Flowers

Are you a sun worshipper or a hothouse flower? To put it another way, do you run madly from the house in a frenzy of solar powered excitement at the first hint of warm weather or shy away from the sunshine and stay safely indoors until the danger has passed? As a child I was definitely a hothouse flower and needed some serious coaxing to tempt me outside however fine the day. My father was exactly the opposite. He would take advantage of even the mildest weather by whipping off his shirt and striding into the garden to perform manly, fatherly chores like cutting the grass or weeding the flowerbeds. The sunshine agreed with him and within moments he would turn an impressive bronze colour whereas the sun's rays seemed to make my pasty skin even paler. I didn't so much tan as bleach.

But as the years passed I began to warm to the healthier outdoor life and finally decided that there really is nothing lovelier or more temperate than a summer's day. I saw the light one glorious season in London which was spent almost permanently outside working as a steward at a series of music festivals. There was something about being out of doors, basking in the sunshine that brought out the best in everyone. A few sun kissed memories of this time particularly stand out – I once managed to sneak on to the stage where I stood behind a curtain just a few feet behind Neil Tennant of the Pet Shop Boys performing in front of about 5,00 people. Less impressive was acting as an escort for a Spice Girls tribute band at the Finsbury park Copycat festival. Just to clarify – I'm not talking about the Spice Girls here just a group of women who vaguely resembled them and made some kind of a living from imitating them – that's how lame that story is.

That a Spice Girls cover band would need protecting is just a symptom of the collective summer madness which seems to take possession of the usually housebound Brits as we cast off our tops and our inhibitions at the first glimpse of sunshine. The Japanese are well suited to sudden changes in weather and tend to act accordingly and wear suitable clothes but the Brits still get carried away, bearing flesh better kept safely under wraps and acting as if a once in a lifetime opportunity has suddenly presented itself.

It's all good fun though and these days our craving for alfresco entertainment is better served than ever before. There are now more music festivals than you can shake a parasol at, catering for all kinds of tastes, perhaps even Spice Girls fans.

<http://www.visitbritain.co.uk/things-to-see-and-do/interests/music-in-britain/britains-top-10-music-festivals.aspx>

Watch out too this year for outdoor screenings of games from the world cup in South Africa (handily located in the same time zone as the UK) which should continue until at least England's traditional quarter final exit on penalties. Culture lovers should also note big screen relays of marquee events such as Placido Domingo's performances at Covent Garden in June and July.

<http://www.roh.org.uk/whatson/bpbigscreens/index.aspx>

Failing all that you should at least indulge in one of the UK's most popular fair weather activities – outside drinking. Pop into any respectable pub with an inch or two of exterior space on any clement summer's evening, order a drink and then pop outside again and you should find yourself rubbing shoulders with some imbibing sun worshippers. Then assuming the ice hasn't all melted away in the balmy evening atmosphere you can break what remains with some easy to remember weather related conversation starters:

'Lovely day, isn't?'

'Hot enough for you?'

'Phew, what a scorcher!'

Just remember to dress appropriately.