



**Oregon: The Gardens of Portland &
the Farm-to-Table Bounty of the Willamette Valley
August 19-23, 2024**

Q&A with AHS Host Holly Shimizu & Mercedes Bryant, Director of Travel Studies

This AHS travel program is a special journey to explore gardens, sustainable horticultural practices, and the farm-to-table culture in Portland and the Willamette Valley. Among many other incredible experiences, we'll be visiting a family pasture-based farm to explore holistic land management, pasture-raised animals, and rotational grazing. What can AHS travelers take away from this experience?

Our Oregon adventure will take us into the heart of farm-to-table, to some of the best wine country, and to experience innovative sustainable horticulture. Our gardens and nursery visits highlight the sophisticated horticultural endeavors taking place in the Pacific Northwest. Oregon is a leader in sustainable food and farming systems and has the most protective land-use policies. The incorporation of sustainable systems means that food is not transported long distances so that it supports local economies, improves soil and, ultimately, results in superior quality as well as healthier food.

We will learn directly from farmers about their innovative practices. There is much activity in regenerative agriculture on farms and ranches in Oregon. We will hear from farmers who have successfully made the transition to regenerative farming which does not rely on synthetic fertilizers, pesticides, or land degrading practices. Benefits include restoration of ecological processes to support healthy soils resulting in more nutritious crops, water retention, and increased habitat for wildlife.

A delicious aspect of the program is enjoying farm-to-table meals. Can you share some insights on the importance of regenerative farming and locally sourced ingredients?

Although the farm-to-table movement is not new, it is highly developed in many parts of Oregon. Serving fresh food directly from the farmer to consumers results in eating a diet that follows the seasons, is more diverse, and often organically grown. Many restaurants are working

in partnership with inventive farmers to enhance the quality and freshness of their food. Locally grown food can be harvested at its peak ripeness resulting in enhanced flavor and healthier produce.

When AHS travelers visit the Oregon Garden, they will learn about the diverse botanical beauty of the region and beyond. What are you most looking forward to exploring there with AHS travelers?

I remember hearing about this garden in its early stages in the 1990s. The idea initially emerged through the Oregon Association of Nurserymen and was fully realized in 2001 when it was opened to the public. Since then, it has filled in significantly and is made up of twenty specialty gardens. I think the Conifer Garden is especially interesting since Oregon is famous for growing some of the best coniferous evergreens in the country.

We'll be visiting Natalie's Estate Winery on this program, specially chosen for its focus on small batch and sustainable winegrowing practices. What factors contribute to the success of wine production in the Willamette Valley?

The Willamette Valley of Oregon is known for its variety of microclimates and its rich volcanic soils. The region is world famous for its fine Pinot Noir and an assortment of other red wines. This success relates to the soil which is well drained and fertile. It is known as Jory soil. This Valley is known for its gentle growing conditions in a maritime climate and the area has become renowned for stewardship practices. Approximately 48 percent of the Willamette Valley's vineyards are certified sustainable.

The program includes private guided tours of the Portland Japanese Garden and Lan Su, regarded as one of the most authentic Chinese gardens outside of China. How do these cultural experiences tie into this special program?

The Portland Japanese Garden is truly amazing. I have traveled extensively in Japan and was astounded at this garden's quality, attention to detail, and harmony. The garden has meandering paths and delicate water sounds which create a contemplative feeling, an element of surprise and enchantment for those who are lucky enough to enjoy visiting. While immersed in the beauty of this landscape, one will understand that it's considered by many to be the most authentic and beautiful Japanese garden outside of Japan. The Portland Japanese Garden is a must see.

A walk through the Lan Su Chinese Garden is also inspirational. As one enters this garden, you feel that you have stepped into the world of Chinese culture. Located on a Portland city block, this Chinese garden was built by 65 Chinese artisans and modeled after a Chinese home in the

Ming Dynasty. The exquisite architecture, sculpture, wood carving and painting are all done with fine details. A rich variety of mosaic stone paving are works of art. Poetry is an element throughout the entire garden. I found this garden impactful in understanding and experiencing a Chinese Garden.

The Annual Dahlia Festival at Swan Island Dahlias offers a unique experience. What makes dahlias significant in the horticultural world, and what can participants look forward to discovering about dahlias?

A visit to Swan Island Dahlias in August is like going to dahlia heaven. At peak season, we will experience more than 375 varieties on almost 50 acres. Dahlias are incredibly beautiful. The variety of size, the symmetrical petals, and bold colors make dahlias special. They are excellent long-lasting cut flowers. I am always amazed by the dinner-plate dahlias that really are as big as dinner plates. Swan Island is the largest and leading grower of dahlias in the US and is a family-owned company. It will be a treat to be there in August.

Are there additional reflections you would like to share with those who are considering joining this program and becoming part of this journey into the world of sustainable gardening, farm-to-table culture, and horticultural excellence?

From these many fantastic experiences in Oregon, I believe we will be inspired and better able to practice sustainable horticulture in our own gardening efforts such as working with soil, understanding insects, and quality of vegetables, wine, and food. Undoubtedly, we will see all kinds of interesting plants along with some extremely fine garden design.