Bonsai – The Journey East To West



Since its beginnings in China, during the **4 day guided masai mara tour** Han Dynasty over two thousand years ago, the art of growing miniature trees in containers, bonsai, has had an interesting history. Initially, penjing as it is called in China, was considered too spiritual for the common folk and only nobles were permitted to own one. During the 14th century, the Chinese invaded Japan and brought with them many aspects of Chinese culture, including religion, calligraphy and penjing. Even today, the Japanese characters for bonsai remain the same in Chinese.The Japanese developed and refined this art form, still remaining the privilege of the nobles. When they began to lose interest, the art form almost died out completely and was only practiced by a few people. Bonsai rose in popularity, but with the leaning towards coloured flowers and variegated leaves. The development of bonsai as we know it really began during the last century.Although Westerners had encountered bonsai on their travels in the Far East, and a few had even written articles about them, it wasnt until the end of WW2 that the hobby really began to catch on in the United States. GIs returning from Japan brought with them small samples of these fascinating trees.Many of them only survived for a short time, but there were enough people curious about bonsai to try to find out how to care for them correctly. The large Japanese-American population in the United States was the major source of information and encouragement, and for many years their knowledge and skills were in demand.Today bonsai has become a household word. Small cuttings planted in shallow pots are sold as bonsai in department stores, garden nurseries, open air markets and even at gas stations. These are not true bonsai such as produced by artists in Western countries as well as Japan, but they are a start. They at least introduce newcomers to the idea of growing a miniaturized tree in a pot. It is then up to the individual to read books, join clubs and meet other bonsai enthusiasts in order to learn and improve their skills.As your knowledge and enthusiasm grows, you will surely become more ambitious and begin to create your own bonsai from native plants. You will find the art of bonsai a hugely absorbing and satisfying pastime that will give years of pleasure.