

THE PRICE OF LOVE

Valentine's Day is the festival of love and lovers, but it has also become one of the biggest events on the commercial calendar.

Lovers all over the world spend a small fortune on Valentine's Day. Every year more and more money is spent on chocolates, cards, flowers and other romantic gifts. For advertisers it is the third most important date in the year after Christmas and Easter. Last year on Valentine's Day people in the UK gave 9 million red roses, sent 78 million text messages and posted more than 12 million cards. And that's not counting all the candle-lit meals and engagement rings.

Flowers are still the most popular present on Valentine's Day. Very romantic... until you consider where they come from. Most of the flowers given in Britain are imported from Ecuador, Colombia, Kenya and Zimbabwe for a grand total of 4 billion Euro. Kenya alone exports 38 thousand tonnes of fresh flowers, for a total of 100 million Euro for this day. This day in Valentine's flower gives work to around 500 thousand people in Kenya, most of whom are working long hours for less than the minimum wage as well as being exposed to dangerous pesticides and fertilisers. The same goes for Colombia, which is the second-largest flower-producer in the world after the Netherlands. The flowers industry employs some 60 thousand people in Colombia. In all these countries intensive farming and the use of fertilisers and other chemicals is seriously damaging the environment.

In India, Valentine's Day hype has truly caught on in the last few years, and a whole new industry is now created to market "love". The biggest Valentine card in the world is in Bombay. It contains over 5000 love notes.

According to Amnesty International: "People in many countries give diamonds to their loved ones on Valentine's Day but they have no way of knowing where their diamond comes from or if they have contributed to human rights abuses. In Angola, the Congo and Sierra Leone the sale of diamonds have funded civil wars resulting in horrendous human rights abuses. For people in these countries diamonds do not symbolize love, but war, misery and poverty".

The same can be said for chocolate. According to many international associations, most of the chocolate that is sold in the United States originates in Africa. In countries such as Ivory Coast, Nigeria, Ghana and Cameroon 300 thousand children work on cocoa plantations. Conditions are poor and often dangerous and more than half of the children are under 14 and have been separated from their families.

But I still think that it is romantic to get or to give flowers, chocolate or even diamonds for Valentine's Day. I love Valentine's Day and I don't think it's a waste of time or that it's all hype because we feel love in the air on Valentine's Day.

GLOSSARY:

Being exposed to: coming into contact with

Candle-lit: with candles

To do the track: to be enough

To fund: to provide money for

Hype: excess advertising

To be really into sth.: to be very interested in sth.

Plantation: large farm, especially in tropical countries

Soppy: too romantic

To catch on: become popular

To consider: to think

Expose to: to put someone in a situation that may be harmful or dangerous

REFERENCE:

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