

A tree as a postbox



- 1 On a chilly afternoon deep in northern Germany's Dodauer Forest, 100km north-east of Hamburg, a postman wearing a bright yellow uniform was walking through the woods. When he reached an open place, he rummaged through his bag and then slowly climbed a 3m-tall wooden ladder to deliver a purple envelope to a 500-year-old oak tree. "Just one today," he told me, before crunching back through the forest and disappearing towards the next letterbox on his route.
- 2 The purple envelope was from Denies in Bavaria. She's 55, isn't afraid to laugh at herself and loves nature. She knows what she wants, doesn't mind being alone but wonders if there's a man out there who can surprise her. If so, she hopes that he, too, is looking for love inside the tiny knothole in this oak tree.
- 3 Known as 'Der Bräutigamseiche' (the Bridegroom's Oak), this ancient timber outside the town of Eutin has been matching singles long before matchmaking platform Tinder, and is reportedly responsible for more than 100 marriages. Today, people from all over the planet write letters addressed to the tree, hoping that for the price of a postage stamp, they may find a partner.
- 4 "There's something so magical and romantic about it," said 72-year-old Karl-Heinz Martens, who delivered letters to the tree as its postman for 20 years, starting in 1984. "On the internet, facts and questions match people, but at the tree, it's a beautiful coincidence – like fate." Though retired now, Martens still keeps a scrapbook filled with photographs, letters and newspaper clippings from his time as love's official messenger. In his two decades of service to the oak, Martens delivered letters from six continents, often in languages he didn't understand. He explained that while today many people know about the tree, 128 years ago it was a secret shared by two lovers. The only rule, Martens explained, is that if you open a letter you don't want to answer, you should place it back in the tree for someone else to find.

- 5 “The tree receives about 1,000 letters a year,” said Martin Grundler, spokesman for Deutsche Post. “Most come in the summertime. I suppose that’s when everyone wants to fall in love.” For those sweet on someone specific, there’s a legend that says if a woman walks around the oak’s trunk three times under a full moon while thinking of her beloved, without speaking or laughing, she’ll marry within the year.

- 6 Today the Bridegroom’s Oak remains the only tree in the world with its own mailing address. Six days a week for the past 91 years, a postman has walked through the forest – rain, snow or shine – and climbed the ladder to stuff letters from starry-eyed singles into the tree. To visit it in person, take the B76 road from Eutin towards Plön, turn right at the Alex Münster distillery and you’ll see a wooden sign pointing towards the tree on the left.

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