



**CICERONI**  
T R A V E L

# CELTIC BLOSSOMS THE GARDENS OF IRELAND

TUESDAY 28 JUNE – THURSDAY 7 JULY 2022 (10 DAYS)

LECTURER: TOM DUNCAN

£4270

- **Discover Ireland's remarkable range of gardens**
- **Visits feature the world renowned Garnish Island, Birr Castle Demesne & Mount Stewart**
- **Other gardens included: Fota, Powerscourt, Jimi & June Blakes' in Co Wicklow, & Helen Dillon's new garden in Dublin**
- **Several private visits with hosted lunches**
- **Very comfortable 4 & 5\* hotels based at Ballymaloe near Cork, Barberstown Castle in Co Kildare and The Culloden near Belfast**



Monkstown, Helen Dillon's New Garden

## OVERVIEW

Ireland has been particularly blessed by Mother Nature – the fertile soil, mild climate and generous rainfall has allowed Irish horticulture to put down particularly firm roots. As a noted writer on Irish Gardens, Patrick Bowe, once put it “Irish gardens, like Irish people, are a little wild. It’s the moisture in the air.” This fecundity, aided by the warmth provided by the Gulf Stream, has helped create some of the most exciting gardens to be found in Europe. Summer in Ireland is not just about seeing “Forty Shades of Green!”; it is the abundant display of blossom provided by flowering trees, shrubs, perennials and bulbs which make this time of year so special for garden visitors.

Over the three stages of this tour we shall visit some of Ireland's most important gardens, guided by either the owners or head gardeners, in some of which we shall experience a level of hospitality particularly associated with Ireland. Indeed, our tour will begin in Cork, staying at the renowned Ballymaloe House Hotel, *the* icon of Irish hospitality, for four nights.

From here we shall visit the temperate environment of Bantry Bay in west Cork, host to one of Harold Peto's most magical creations, Garnish Island. The arboretum at Fota is a remarkable testament to the enthusiasm of the Smith-Barrys and the garden's current custodians. The River Blackwater may be better known as one of Ireland's premier salmon fishing rivers, but it is also home to a series of remarkable country houses and their gardens. We are fortunate to be able to visit two estates, Cappoquin and Kilshannig, where we shall be welcomed in true Irish style. In contrast to the generous scale of these ‘picturesque’ landscapes, the Kitchen Gardens at Ballymaloe Cookery School and Hester Forde's modern masterpiece near Cork will alter the scale in surprising directions.

Leaving for Dublin, we spend the day at Birr Castle Demesne, guests of the Earl and Countess of Rosse for a private tour of the amazing arboretum and walled gardens, with lunch in the Castle punctuating our day. From our hotel near Dublin, charming Barberstown Castle, we visit a series of spectacular gardens in Counties Kildare and Wicklow. Powerscourt has one of the finest landscape gardens in Ireland and has recently begun a programme of restoration and replanting. Mount Usher has one of the most atmospheric of riverside settings, truly a reflection of the influence of that irascible Irishman, William Robinson. But the modern ‘jewels’ will be the gardens of brother and sister, Jimi and June Blake at adjacent Hunting Brook and Tinode, and the new garden recently created by Ireland's most influential modern horticulturalist, Helen Dillon.

Our final stop will be near Belfast when we stay at The Culloden Hotel, at Holywood. From here we end our tour in spectacular fashion with a full day spent exploring Mount Stewart, surely one of the finest gardens in these islands? The creation of Edith, Marchioness of Londonderry, it has been lovingly maintained by her family, aided by the National Trust who now have care of it. In recent years it has undergone a remarkable series of restorations and transformations. Before we scatter and fly, we visit the restored wall gardens at Glenarm Castle, the home of the Earls of Antrim.

## ITINERARY OUTLINE

**Day 1:** Tuesday 28 June – We fly from Heathrow to Cork, and transfer the short distance by coach to **Ballymaloe** for a four-night stay; later that evening we have dinner at the hotel – wine, water and coffee are included with all group lunches and dinners.

**Day 2:** Wednesday 29 June – At **Ballymaloe Cookery School** Darina Allen has created a wonderful fruit and vegetable garden to support the School's courses, with supporting flower borders. We continue towards Cork to visit **Hester Forde's Garden**, with its extraordinary abundance of rare and unusual plants. **Fota Island** estate was the seat of the Smith-Barry family, who created a remarkable arboretum, now in the care of the Irish State. After a simple group lunch we have a guided tour of the gardens after which we return to Ballymaloe and dinner.

**Day 3:** Thursday 30 June – West Cork is a most romantic part of Ireland and this morning we travel down to **Bantry** where we spend the morning at **Bantry House & Garden**. That afternoon we visit one of Harold Peto's most magical creations, **Garnish Island**, its shores washed by the Gulf Stream, which has helped create the conditions to allow this veritable 'paradise' island to prosper. Lunch is included and we have dinner at Ballymaloe.

**Day 4:** Friday 1 July – The River Blackwater Valley is home to a series of remarkable country houses and their gardens. We are fortunate to be able to visit privately two of these estates, **Cappoquin** and **Kilshannig**, guided by their owners, Sir Charles Keene and Hugo Merry. Both houses have remarkable histories and their surrounding gardens are truly 'picturesque'. We have coffee at Cappoquin, lunch at Kilshannig and dinner at Ballymaloe.

**Day 5:** Saturday 2 July – Leaving for Dublin, we spend the day at **Birr Castle Demesne**, guests of the Earl and Countess of Rosse for a private tour of the amazing arboretum and walled gardens, with lunch in the Castle. We continue to Barberstown Castle in Co Kildare for a three-night stay and we have dinner in the hotel.

**Day 6:** Sunday 3 July – A gentle day in Co. Wicklow with the morning spent at Jimi Blake's **Hunting Brook** Garden where in recent years he has battled with nature to create his hill-side garden of great sophistication. We have lunch with Jimi after which we visit **Tinode**, the adjacent garden created by his sister, June. This is utterly different in scale and content. We return to Barberstown and have dinner in the hotel.

**Day 7:** Monday 4 July – **Mount Usher** enjoys the most atmospheric of riverside settings, truly a reflection of the influence of that irascible Irishman, William Robinson. Nearby, **Powerscourt** in Co Wicklow is one of the finest landscape gardens in Ireland and has recently begun a programme of restoration and replanting. Lunch is not included today and we have dinner in the hotel.

**Day 8:** Tuesday 5 July – We drive to the outskirts of Dublin to visit **Helen Dillon's New Garden**, hidden away in the quiet of Monkstown, close by the sea. Helen has done it once again, in what she says will be her final garden! We have free time in **Dublin** for lunch, not included, after which we drive up to Co. Down to stay at **The Culloden Hotel** for two nights, where we also have dinner.

**Day 9:** Wednesday 6 July – **Mount Stewart** is one of the finest gardens in these islands. Created by Edith, Marchioness of Londonderry, it has been maintained by her family, aided by the National Trust who now have care of it. In recent years it has undergone a remarkable series of restorations and transformations. We lunch in the garden restaurant and have our final dinner that evening in our hotel.

**Day 10:** Thursday 7 July – North of Belfast we visit **Glenarm Castle Walled Gardens**, recently restored in splendid fashion. After our guided tour and group lunch, we travel to Belfast City Airport for the return flights.

## PRACTICALITIES

**Price** £4270 **Without Flights** £4095 **Deposit** £600 **Single Supplement** £375 (Double Room for Sole Use)

**Hotels** 4 nights at Ballymaloe House; 3 nights at 4\* Barberstown Castle; 2 nights at the 5\* Culloden Estate & Spa. All accommodation with breakfast.

**Flights** Aer Lingus

Outward: **EI715** Departs London Heathrow (Terminal 2) **1355**, arrive Cork **1515**

Return: **EI936** Departs Belfast City Airport **1740**, arrive London Heathrow (Terminal 2) **1855**

**Price includes** All dinners & 7 lunches with wine, water & coffee, all local transfers, City Tax, entry fees & gratuities, services of Tom Duncan

**Not included** Travel to/from Heathrow, 2 lunches



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