



CICERONI
T R A V E L

CELTIC BLOSSOMS SPRING GARDENS OF IRELAND

WEDNESDAY 24 APRIL – FRIDAY 3 MAY 2019 (10 DAYS)

LECTURER: TOM DUNCAN

£3750

- **Discover Ireland's remarkable range of gardens famed for their rhododendrons, azaleas, magnolias & spring bulbs**
- **Full day visits to each of the world renowned Mount Congreve, Birr Castle Demesne & Mount Stewart**
- **Other gardens include Fota, Kilmacurragh, Powerscourt & Rowallane**
- **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**



Rhododendrons, Mount Congreve

OVERVIEW

Ireland has been particularly blessed by Mother Nature – the fertile soil, mild climate and generous rainfall has allowed Irish horticulture to put down 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 spring gardens to be found in Europe. Spring in Ireland is not just about seeing the green shoots emerge; it is the abundant display of blossom provided by the magnolias, rhododendrons, azaleas and other flowering trees and shrubs 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 five nights.

From here we shall visit Mount Congreve, where the gardens reflect the extraordinary level of horticultural excellence achieved by the late Ambrose Congreve - acre after acre of amazing flowering trees and shrubs greet one at every turn, an extraordinary experience. The more temperate environment of Bantry Bay in west Cork is 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 neighbouring estates, Cappoquin and Salterbridge, where we shall be guided round their respective gardens and welcomed in true Irish style.

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 local jewel is surely Kilmacurragh, a true ‘Sleeping Beauty’ now awakened and revived once again.

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 visit to lovely Rowallane in Co Down and a final 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.

ITINERARY OUTLINE

Day 1: Wednesday 24 April – We fly from Heathrow to Cork (flights from other UK airports can be booked), and transfer the short distance by coach to **Ballymaloe** for a five-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: Thursday 25 April – **Mount Congreve** near **Waterford** reflects the extraordinary level of horticultural excellence achieved by the late Ambrose Congreve - acre after acre of amazing flowering trees and shrubs greet one at every turn, an extraordinary experience. Guided by the former Head Gardener who has spent his life in this garden, our day will be broken by a simple group lunch and we have dinner at Ballymaloe.

Day 3: Friday 26 April – **Fota Island** estate was the seat of the Smith-Barry family, who created a remarkable arboretum, now in the care of the Irish State. We spend the morning here and after a group lunch we continue with a visit to a small, **private garden** noted for its display of spring bulbs. We have dinner at Ballymaloe.

Day 4: Saturday 27 April – 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. Upstream from **Youghal**, we are fortunate to be able to visit two neighbouring estates, **Cappoquin** and **Salterbridge**, guided round their respective gardens and welcomed in true Irish style. Lunch is included and we have dinner at Ballymaloe.

Day 5: Sunday 28 April – 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**. Lunch is included and we have dinner at Ballymaloe.

Day 6: Monday 29 April – 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 7: Tuesday 30 April – **Powerscourt** in Co Wicklow is one of the finest landscape gardens in Ireland and has recently begun a programme of restoration and replanting. **Mount Usher** enjoys the most atmospheric of riverside settings, truly a reflection of the influence of that irascible Irishman, William Robinson. Lunch is not included today and we have dinner in the hotel.

Day 8: Wednesday 1 May – The jewel in Co Wicklow's horticultural crown is surely **Kilmacurragh**, a true 'Sleeping Beauty' now awakened and revived once again? The estate was owned by the Acton family, now resident in Melbourne, and when sold it fell into neglect. Rescued by the Botanic Garden in Glasnevin, it is the subject of an exemplary restoration. Lunch is included and we have dinner at Barberstown.

Day 9: Thursday 2 May – A later departure this morning when we drive up to Co Down, stopping for an early lunch after which we visit **Rowallane**. This is one of Ulster's most important gardens and it will be familiar from the many plants which include its name. We stay at The Culloden Hotel where we also have dinner.

Day 10: Friday 3 May – **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 have lunch in the house and after our guided visit we make the short journey to Belfast City Airport for the return flight.

PRACTICALITIES

Price £3750 **Without Flights** £3595 **Deposit** £375 **Single Supplement** £235 (Double Room for Sole Use)

Hotels 5 nights at Ballymaloe House; 3 nights at 4* Barberstown Castle; 1 night at the 5* Culloden Estate & Spa. All accommodation with breakfast.

Flights Aer Lingus

Outward: **EI715** Departs London Heathrow (Terminal 2) **1350**, arrive Cork **1510**

Return: **EI36** Departs Belfast City Airport **1720**, arrive London Heathrow (Terminal 2) **1840**

Price includes All dinners & 8 lunches with wine, water & coffee, all local transfers, City Tax, entry fees & gratuities, services of Tom Duncan

Not included Travel to/from Heathrow, 1 lunch



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