



**CICERONI**  
T R A V E L

# CELTIC BLOSSOMS SPRING GARDENS OF IRELAND

SUNDAY 18 – THURSDAY 29 APRIL 2021 (12 DAYS)

LECTURER: TOM DUNCAN

£4490

- Discover Ireland's remarkable range of gardens famed for their rhododendrons, azaleas, magnolias & spring bulbs
- Full day visits to each of the world renowned Mt Stewart, Birr Castle Demesne & Mt Congreve
- Others include Rowallane, Mt Usher, Kilmacurragh, Powerscourt & the modern gardens of Jimi & June Blake plus Helen Dillon's new garden
- Several private visits with hosted lunches and very comfortable 4 & 5\* hotels



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 – for gardeners 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 at the renowned Ballymaloe House Hotel, *the* icon of Irish hospitality, for five nights. From here we 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 original enthusiasm of the Smith-Barry family 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 visit Cappoquin House, where we shall be welcomed in true Irish style followed by lunch at Kilshannig and a visit to Cosheen, Hester Forde's garden.

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. We continue to our hotel, charming Barberstown Castle, we visit a series of spectacular gardens in Kildare and Wicklow. Powerscourt has one of the finest landscape gardens in Ireland and has recently begun a programme of restoration. 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 Kilmacurragh, a true ‘Sleeping Beauty’ now awakened and revived once again. On a more intimate scale we shall visit three of the finest private gardens in Ireland: Jimi Blake's Hunting Brook, June Blake's Tinode and Helen Dillon's new town garden near Dublin.

We continue to Co Down to visit lovely Rowallane. Our northern base will be the Culloden Hotel, at Holywood, near Belfast. From here we shall visit the recently restored gardens of Glenarm Castle and a full day will be spent exploring the spectacular 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:** Sunday 18 April – We fly from Heathrow to Cork (flights from other UK airports can be booked on your behalf), 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:** Monday 19 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 gardens. Upstream from **Youghal**, we are fortunate to be able to visit **Cappoquin** and **Kilshannig**, guided by the owners and welcomed in true Irish style. Lunch is included and we have dinner at Ballymaloe.

**Day 3:** Tuesday 20 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 4:** Wednesday 21 April – **Fota Island** estate was the seat of the Smith-Barry family, who created a remarkable arboretum, now under care of the Irish State. After our morning here, then free time in Cork for lunch, we continue with a visit to **Coosheen**, noted for its display of spring bulbs. We have dinner at Ballymaloe.

**Day 5:** Thursday 22 April – At **Mount Congreve** near **Waterford** we shall be guided by the former Head Gardener who has spent his life in this garden, our day broken by a simple group lunch. We dine at Ballymaloe.

**Day 6:** Friday 23 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 four-night stay and we have dinner in the hotel.

**Day 7:** Saturday 24 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. Lunch is not included today and we have dinner in the hotel.

**Day 8:** Sunday 25 April – Today we visit three of the finest, smaller private gardens in Ireland. Jimi Blake’s **Hunting Brook** is a remarkable interpretation of naturalistic planting controlled by a masterly sense of colour. June Blake’s **Tinode** could not be more different, its muscular bones lending structure to her amazing plantings. Finally, **Helen Dillon’s** newly created garden displays her trademark marriage of innate style and innovative planting. Lunch and dinner are both included today.

**Day 9:** Monday 26 April – The jewel in Co Wicklow’s horticultural crown is surely **Kilmacurragh**. The estate was owned by the Acton family, now resident in Melbourne, and when sold it fell into neglect. It was rescued by the Botanic Garden in Glasnevin, and subject of an exemplary restoration. Lunch is included and we have dinner at Barberstown.

**Day 10:** Tuesday 27 April – This morning we drive up to Co Down, to visit **Rowallane**, where there will be some free time for lunch on arrival. This is one of Ulster’s most important gardens and it will be familiar from the many plants which include its name. We stay for two nights at The Culloden Hotel where we also have dinner.

**Day 11:** Wednesday 28 April – We spend the day at **Mount Stewart**, 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 which now has care of it. In recent years it has undergone a remarkable series of restorations and transformations. We have lunch in the house and dinner at our hotel.

**Day 12:** Thursday 29 April – **Glenarm Castle** is the seat of the Earls of Antrim and we spend the morning exploring the exemplary restoration of its surrounding gardens. After our final lunch we make the short journey to Belfast City Airport for the return flight(s).

## PRACTICALITIES

**Price** £4490 **Without Flights** £4325 **Deposit** £650 **Single Supplement** £465 (Double Room for Sole Use)

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

**Flights** Aer Lingus

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

Return: **EI936** 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, 3 lunches



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