



Royal
Botanic Garden
Edinburgh



Gardens of the North of Ireland 24 - 28 July 2019

5 days from £945 per person

Itinerary

Day 1

We depart from Edinburgh on a morning flight to Belfast. On arrival we will meet our coach and travel to our first visit - **Belfast Botanic Gardens and Palm House**. First established in 1828, the gardens have been enjoyed as a public park by the people of Belfast since 1895. There is an extensive rose garden and long herbaceous borders and the tree enthusiast can seek out the rare oaks planted in the 1880s, including the hornbeam-leaved oak. Designed by Charles Lanyon, The Palm House is one of the earliest examples of a curvilinear cast iron glasshouse and a fine example of horticultural Victoriana. Its construction was initiated by the Belfast Botanical and Horticultural Society in the 1830s. The two wings were completed in 1840, and were built by Richard Turner of Dublin, who later built the Great Palm House at Kew Gardens. Over the years, the Palm House has acquired a reputation for good plant collections such as fuchsia and begonia. We will enjoy a tour here.



We continue to our hotel. Dinner will be served in the evening.

Day 2

Following breakfast, we travel to **Mount Stewart (NT)**, the dazzling and idiosyncratic gardens which bask in the micro-climate of low rainfall and humid coastal air that exists here. The Italian Garden south of the house is in the form of a giant parterre, edged in startling golden thuja or smouldering purple berberis and filled with plantings of carmine, yellow and scarlet on one side, with cooler blue, lavender and grey on the other. Elsewhere, there is a Spanish garden with huge eucalyptuses looming in the woods behind, and an exuberant and formal sunken garden surrounded by a fine pergola planted with clematis, honeysuckle and roses. The entrance façade of the house overlooks an entirely different landscape, a scene of serenity with noble trees leading gently uphill to a lake. The banks of the lake are planted with long drifts of arum lily. This is one of the most attractive and stimulating gardens, where traditional features are carried off with exuberance and panache. We will also enjoy a tour of the house. Lunch is available here (not included).



Our second visit today is to a nearby **private garden**. The garden, which has featured in the BBC TV programme ***Greatest Gardens***, was made in a quarry site surrounded by woodland, where several paths lead across streams and by ponds to vista points. The lawns in front of the house are surrounded by colourful shrubs and trees; herbaceous plants abound by the conservatory and there is also a kitchen garden.

We return to our hotel in time for dinner.

Day 3

After breakfast we travel to **Rowallane Garden (NT)**. The first impression is one of mystery as you approach the house through a dark tunnel of conifers and rhododendrons, but this is quickly dispelled by the flower-filled spectacle which opens up before you. The liveliest gardening is to be found in the walled garden, where mixed borders are stuffed with big old shrubs. Astilbes, hostas, meconopsis and much else form the underplanting. The walled garden has a kind of inner sanctum, where a lawn is planted with specimen trees and shrubs. Lunch is available here (not included).

This afternoon we enjoy a visit to a small **private garden**. This garden was a winner in the Belfast Telegraph's Blooming Marvellous competition and in 2015 & 2017 it won the Best Medium Garden Award from Comber and District Horticultural Society. A very colourful garden with tropical ginger lillies, roses, clematis, agapanthus, succulents and more awaits us.

We return to our hotel in time for dinner.

Day 4

After breakfast we travel to **Ballyrobert Cottage Garden & Nursery**, Ballyclare, Co Antrim. Maurice and Joy Parkinson work this six acre garden and provide an exquisite display of cottage garden plants. The garden is sub-divided into themes or individual garden areas and includes the lakeside garden; the front cottage garden; the formal cottage border; the sheltered garden; and a woodland and wildlife haven. Despite the heavy clay soil, and being located in a frost pocket, a wide range of plants flourish and includes phlox, hosta, rudbeckia, rodgersia and ornamental grasses.



Our next visit is to **Antrim Castle Gardens**, an absolute historical gem. These unique gardens, located close to Antrim town centre, recently underwent a major restoration on many of the key features which date back to the late 17th century. The site features a number of notable new, restored and ornamental gardens which retain a strong sense of history and intimacy. Lunch is available here (not included).

On the way back to our hotel we call in at a **private garden**. The six-acre garden comprises herbaceous borders, an alpine bed, wildlife ponds and shrub and woodland gardens. Traditional areas are contrasted nicely with a more contemporary garden.

Dinner will be served back at our hotel in the evening.

Day 5

After breakfast we check out of the hotel and transfer to the house and gardens at **Benvarden** in Ballymoney. Here we find a rose garden, a box and lavender parterre, a well-stocked kitchen garden with hot houses; a vinery, melon house and espalier-trained apple trees against the high curved brick walls.

Our final visit is to the **Giant's Causeway**, where an impressive new National Trust visitor centre has enhanced this famous beauty spot. The 37,000 hexagonal basaltic columns were created by ancient volcanic eruptions some 60 million years ago, along the same chain of seismic activity that created Fingal's Cave on Staffa, a hundred miles or so to the north. Of course, there is also a more romantic explanation – that it was built by the giant Finn McCool, as the consequence of a gargantuan spat with a Scottish adversary, although another version of the legend has it that he was merely trying to reach his girlfriend. Either way it is an impressive sight. Lunch is available here (not included).



We later transfer to Belfast Airport in time for our return flight to Edinburgh.

Included in the price:

- Four nights' dinner, bed and breakfast at the 4-star Benedict Hotel, Belfast (or similar)
- Return flights from Edinburgh to Belfast
- Comfortable coach travel throughout
- Visits to Belfast Botanic Gardens; the gardens of Rowallane, Antrim Castle; selected private gardens; Ballyrobert Cottage Garden & Nursery, house and gardens of Mount Stewart and Benvarren, Giant's Causeway
- Services of horticulturalist Trevor Edwards as Tour Manager

Not included (per person):

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| • Single room supplement | £180.00* | If you would be willing to share please do let us know |
| • Non-National Trust Member supplement | £30.00 | |
| • Insurance | Price on request | |
| • Lunches | | |

To make a booking please contact Brightwater Holidays direct on 01334 657155.

Priority booking for Friends of RBGE opens immediately until the 31 January 2019.

Bookings for non-Friends will open on the 1 February 2019 at a supplement of £40.00 per person.