

Best of Ireland

Co-Sponsored by the Maryland Horticultural Society and Federated Garden Clubs of MD

May 31 – June 12, 2024



Day 1: Friday 31st May

Arrive in Dublin, meet for welcome dinner.

Overnight: **Dublin** (Dinner)

Day 2: Saturday 1st June

Depart hotel this morning and visit **Malahide Gardens and Castle** with lunch in on-site café. Explore this magnificent and historic 800-year-old medieval castle with its fascinating history dating back to the 12th century,

set in the pretty seaside town of Malahide.

Set on 260 acres of parkland, the gardens and Butterfly House at Malahide Castle are a tranquil retreat just minutes away from Dublin city center, home to over 4,000 exotic flowers and shrubs. The gardens were largely the creation of Lord Milo Talbot between 1948-1973. An avid collector of rare plants, he travelled the world in search of rare species.

Afterwards continue north crossing into Northern Ireland for a visit to **Mount Stewart**. Voted as one of the top ten gardens in the world, Mount Stewart reflects a rich tapestry of design and planting artistry bearing the hallmark of its creator, Edith Londonderry. Her passion for bold planting schemes, coupled with the mild climate of Strangford Lough, allows rare and tender plants from across the globe to thrive in this celebrated garden. Each of the formal gardens exudes a distinct character and appeal.

Following a three-year £8 million restoration program, the 19th-century house has been significantly transformed, making it a not-to-be-missed attraction.

Overnight: **Belfast** (Breakfast, Lunch)

Day 3: Sunday 2nd June

Travel to **Rowallane Gardens**. Created in the mid-1860s by the Reverend John Moore, Rowallane Gardens is one of the most beautiful gardens to visit in Northern Ireland and reflects the beautiful natural landscape of the surrounding area. Carved from the County Down landscape, it is a mix of formal and informal spaces with many unusual vistas and unique plants from across the world. There are spectacular displays of shrubs, including a large collection of

rhododendron species and several areas managed as wildflower meadows.

Rowallane Gardens is also home to a notable natural Rock Garden Wood with shade-loving plants. The outstanding Walled Garden includes spectacular displays of herbaceous plants, shrubs and bulbs.

Arrive back in Belfast for a driving tour and visit to the Titanic museum. Situated within the heart of Titanic Quarter just a short walk from Belfast's city center, Titanic Belfast is the world's largest Titanic visitor experience, exploring the Titanic story in a fresh and insightful way.

Overnight: **Belfast** (Breakfast)

Day 4: Monday 3rd June

This morning depart Belfast for a visit to **Antrim Castle Gardens**.

The Antrim Castle Gardens site is an absolute gem and you will find nothing like these 400-year-old gardens anywhere else. A recent £6m restoration project has now preserved this historic site for generations to come. The Gardens are a unique living museum, with layer upon layer of design features and plantings added over the centuries. Indeed, rarely is so much history preserved on one site. The many exceptional features include the ancient Motte, the Large Parterre, the Yew Tree Pond and the Pleasure Gardens.

Continue to the striking **Giant's Causeway**, an iconic and unusual geological formation located on the scenic Antrim coastline. Over 40,000 basalt columns stretch down to the sea, formed by a volcanic activity over 60 million years ago.

This afternoon, we continue our journey to **Londonderry (Derry)** for a tour of the city walls. Derry is the only completely walled city in Ireland. The Walls were built during the period 1613-1618 as defenses for early seventeenth century settlers from England and Scotland and have a rich history.

The Walls, which are approximately 1.5km in circumference, form a walkway around the inner city and provide a unique promenade to view the layout of the original town which still preserves its Renaissance Style street plan to this day.

Overnight: **Donegal** (Breakfast & Dinner)

Day 5: Tuesday 4th June

Depart Donegal for a stop at 800-year-old **Ashford Castle**, which is also one of Ireland's most prestigious hotels. Discover creative Irish cuisine inspired by the finest seasonal ingredients from the West of Ireland and produce foraged from the Ashford Estate. The walled garden has pebbled pathways connecting the fruit, vegetable, and flower borders abundant with herbaceous perennials.

An optional food and drink walking tour of Galway ends the day.

Check-in to your hotel.

Overnight: **Galway** (Breakfast, Lunch)

Day 6: Wednesday 5th June

Depart for a tour of Connemara. Discover an ever-changing landscape of majestic mountains, spectacular beaches, the wild Atlantic, mist covered lakes, pre-historic bogs and shady glens. A landscape peppered with quaint but lively villages where it is possible to step back in time to a more relaxed and friendly era.

First stop of the day is at Lough Corrib for a one-hour scenic cruise of the beautiful lough.

Continue to Clifden the largest town in Connemara. This picturesque market town is nestled between the Twelve Bens mountains and the Atlantic Ocean, at the mouth of Clifden Bay. Lunch will be included here.

This afternoon visit **Kylemore Abbey and Victorian Walled garden**. The Benedictine monastery was founded in 1920 by nuns who fled Belgium in World War I on the grounds of Kylemore Castle in Connemara. The dramatic landscape and iconic image of a baronial castle reflected in a Connemara lake has made Kylemore Abbey a world-famous attraction.

The 6-acre Victorian Walled Gardens built at the same time as the construction of Kylemore Castle between 1867 and 1871 was one of the last walled gardens to be built during the Victorian period. It once boasted 21 heated glass houses and a workforce of 40 gardeners and was considered so advanced for the time that it was even compared with Kew Gardens in London.

Overnight: **Galway** (Breakfast & Lunch)

Day 7: Thursday 6th June

Depart Galway this morning and travel through the **Burren**, a remarkable landscape of bare limestone rock that resembles the surface of the moon. A short walking tour will allow time to explore this intriguing geological area including an introduction to the local flora and fauna which feature arctic, alpine, Mediterranean, and maritime plants.

From there, continue to the **Cliffs of Moher**, a spectacular stretch of the Atlantic coast with cliffs almost 700 feet high. The view from the top of the cliffs is breathtaking - on a clear day you can see the Aran Islands off in the distance. The cliffs are also home to a great variety of seabirds, including a puffin colony.

Drive to **Caher Bridge Garden**, a delightful award-winning garden nestled in the heart of the Burren near Fanore. The garden is based around a restored riverside cottage. It was created from what was a dense hazel and blackthorn scrub. Caher Bridge Garden has an established sense of maturity and blends sensitively with its surroundings. There are many unusual plants including large collections of snowdrops, daffodils, hostas, daylilies, and crocosmia.

Later this afternoon, stop for tea in a village of County Limerick.

Overnight: **Killarney** (Breakfast & Tea)

Day 8: Friday 7th June

Today depart for a tour around the **Ring of Kerry** circuit, a classic south-west Ireland adventure. See the full variety of Ireland's best scenery – lakes, mountains, peat bogs, valleys and the ocean. Travel via Killorglin, famed for the Puck Fair, Cahersiveen (hometown of the

Liberator Daniel O'Connell), Derrynane, Sneem and Kenmare. Return through Moll's Gap to the Lakes, including an optional jaunting-car ride along the lake.

Later this afternoon visit **Muckross House and Gardens**, a nineteenth century Victorian mansion situated close to the shores of Muckross Lake amidst the beautiful scenery of **Killarney National Park**.

The gardens adjoin Muckross House and are informal in style. They date back to the mid-19th century when extensive landscaping was carried out by the Herbert family in preparation for the visit of Britain's Queen Victoria in 1861

Overnight: **Killarney** (Breakfast)

Day 9: Saturday 8th June

Depart Killarney this morning and travel east to County Cork for a visit to Blarney Castle. Kiss the Blarney Stone and receive the "gift of the gab". Situated high on the battlements of the famed Blarney Castle you shall have to bend over backwards to kiss the stone!

There will also be the opportunity to explore the gardens. Blarney Castle Gardens are one of the most visited in Ireland. The 60 acres are a joy to explore. Visit the prehistoric Fern Garden, a deadly Poison Garden, and the magical Rock Close with its ancient Yew trees and druidic stones.

Continue for a tour of the **Jameson Whiskey Distillery** in Midleton, bringing the stories of Jameson's rich heritage to life. On the tour you will be guided around some of the key buildings, including the warehouses and the distillery. The tour finishes with an opportunity to do a guided comparative tasting of three famous whiskeys, one being Jameson. Lunch will be in the historic market town of Midleton (not included).

Continue this afternoon to **Lismore Castle Gardens**. The historic gardens of Lismore Castle are essentially two distinct gardens. Both are set within the castle walls and comprised of 7 acres with spectacular views of the Castle and surrounding countryside.

The lower garden was mostly created in the 19th century for the 6th Duke of Devonshire, Sir Joseph Paxton's patron. Meandering paths lead you through this informal setting of trees and shrubs and on to open lawns. The stately yew avenue in the heart of the garden is much older than the garden itself. From the spring flowering magnolias and rhododendrons through to the later flowering shrubs and borders there is always something in bloom.

Continue to your hotel in Thurles

Overnight: **Thurles** (Breakfast, Dinner)

Day 10: Sunday 9th June

Depart hotel this morning and travel to Kilkenny for a visit to Kilkenny Castle. Few buildings in Ireland can boast a longer history of continuous occupation than Kilkenny Castle. Founded soon after the Norman conquest of Ireland, the Castle has been rebuilt, extended and adapted to suit changing circumstances and uses over a period of 800 years.

Today, Kilkenny Castle is largely a Victorian re-modelling of the thirteenth century defensive Castle. Each year, hundreds of thousands of visitors come to see this grand country house and

walk through its fifty acres of rolling parkland with mature trees and an abundance of wildlife. Other features include a formal terraced rose garden, woodlands and a man-made lake, which were added in the nineteenth century.

Depart Kilkenny for **Avoca Mill Village**. Built on the banks of the Avoca River from where it used to draw its power is the historic Avoca Mill. The original Mill dates from 1723 and is said to be Ireland's oldest working mill. Visitors are welcome to view the hand weaving process with a tour of the Mill.

Continue afterwards for a visit to **Powerscourt Estate** for the rest of the day, with lunch included. Situated in the heart of the mountains of Wicklow, Powerscourt is one of the most beautiful country estates in Ireland. The gardens stretch over 47 acres and offer visitors a sublime blend of formal gardens, sweeping terraces, statues and ornamental lakes, secret hollows and rambling walks.

Overnight: **Dublin** (Breakfast & Lunch)

Day 11: Monday 10th June

Start off with **June Blake's Garden**, a rare fusion of inspired design and painterly planting. Situated in West Wicklow, this 3-acre garden wraps itself around June's home, a handsome Victorian farm-steward's cottage. The cottage is surrounded by a huddle of austere beautiful, granite-stone farm buildings, one of which, the Cow House, has recently been the subject of an award-winning, modern architectural conversion.

Continue to **Hunting Brook Gardens**, situated in the foothills of the Wicklow mountains. Hunting Brook garden is the boldly idiosyncratic creation of Jimi Blake, the noted Irish horticulturist, teacher, and plantsman who first came to prominence during the 1990s as the head gardener of the historic Airfield Gardens in Dundrum, Co Dublin.

Hunting Brook is one of Ireland's largest private collections of plants. Surrounding the home are many examples of the colorful and theatrically beautiful, large-scale planting combinations for which Jimi has become so well known. These fill Hunting Brook's sunny beds and steep banks and tumble down along the edges of its curling pathways.

Continue to Monkstown for a lunch on your own.

Finish the day with a visit to **Helen Dillon's Garden**. After 45 years in her Ranalegh show garden, the celebrated gardener started from scratch at nearly 80, in a walled garden that's now open to the public. Her small garden on a quiet lane is hidden from the street and surrounded by gray granite walls built in the 1800s when the property served as an orchard. (subject to availability as Helen is quite elderly)

Overnight: **Dublin** (Breakfast)

Day 12: Tuesday 11th June

Start the day with a visit to **National Botanic Gardens of Ireland** at Glasnevin, an oasis of calm and beauty. A premier scientific institution, the gardens also contain the National Herbarium and several historic wrought iron glasshouses.

The National Botanic Gardens are noted for a fine plant collection holding over 15,000 plant species and cultivars from a variety of habitats from all around the world.

We end our tour at the fabulous **Irish National Stud and Japanese Gardens** which represents the beating heart of Ireland's thoroughbred horse industry. It is the home of equine royalty, immaculately bred stallions who can be seen and admired alongside protective mares.

The Japanese Gardens, created between the years 1906 and 1910, were laid out by Japanese craftsman Tassa Eida and his son Minoru. The gardens trace the passage of a soul from birth to death and beyond, at the same time providing a meeting place for the cultures of East and West.

Farewell Dinner

Overnight: **Dublin** (Breakfast & Dinner)

Day 13: Wednesday 12th June

Depart for airport (Breakfast)

Based on the following hotels:

- *Trinity City Hotel, Dublin (1 night)*
- *Europa Hotel, Belfast, (2 nights)*
- *Mill Park Hotel, Donegal (1 night)*
- *The Hardiman Hotel, Galway (2 nights)*
- *Killarney International Hotel, Killarney (2 nights)*
- *Anner Hotel, Thurles (1 night)*
- *Buswells Hotel, Dublin (3 nights)*

Cost Includes

- 12 x nights' hotel accommodation (3-4 star)
- Breakfast daily at hotel, 4 Lunches, 1 Tea & 4 Dinners
- Coach services for the itinerary as specified
- Entrances to gardens and attractions as mentioned in itinerary
- Dublin guided tour
- Burren guided tour
- Jamieson Whisky Distillery Tour
- Services of English speaking tour manager throughout
- Local taxes and service charges for included services
- Portage 1 piece of luggage per person

Not Included

- Air fares
- Personal Expenses
- Gratuities to guides and accompanying staff
- Optional food and drink Galway tour
- Meals not listed
- Travel Insurance (highly recommended)

Terms & Conditions & Other Information

Tour Registration: By submitting your form for this tour, you confirm that you have read and accept all Terms & Conditions.

Payments: Tour deposits and payments may be made by Visa/Master Card. Credit card payments are subject to a 3% processing fee. Payments may also be paid through TransferWise online. A \$50 contribution each to the Federated Garden Clubs of MD and Horticultural Society of MD, both tax exempt charitable organizations, are included in the price. Your contribution may be tax deductible.

Tour Organizer: A past Director of Federated Garden Clubs of MD, Claire Jones has planned garden trips to England, Wales, Portugal, and Scotland, and is an avid garden traveler with a library of over 100,000 images of gardens around the world. A photographer, landscape designer, and garden blogger at TheGardenDiaries, Claire loves to travel anywhere there are gardens and interesting sights. Contact Claire at jonesb1@comcast.net or 443-927-6285.

Tour Company

The travel company providing this tour is Pathfinders / STITA Tours of Cheltenham, UK. Claire Jones acts only as your contact with Pathfinders / STITA.

Additional Information

Please contact Claire Jones at jonesb1@comcast.net or 443-927-6285 with any questions regarding this tour. This tour was scheduled to coincide with the Bloom Festival in Dublin, which is the largest flower show event in Ireland. You can come early to Dublin and attend the show.

This is a non-smoking tour. No smoking is permitted on the coach, group activities, or meals. Each participant is required to fill out and sign the attached tour conditions within 30 days of acceptance.

Special Requests

Tour members are requested to inform us at the time of booking of any special medical, dietary, or other requests. We will do our best to accommodate all requests but cannot guarantee that such requests will be met.

Baggage

Porterage of one piece of luggage per person is included in the tour. As space is often limited, we strongly suggest that you limit luggage to one suitcase and one 'carry on' size bag..

Price

The tour is set at a minimum of 15 and maximum of 25 participants. Prices are in **Euros** with U.S. Estimates (May 2023) based on conversion rate of 1 Euro=\$.89; This fluctuates and goes up and down and .89 is historically low; Your price will be what is the going rate at the time you book your tour

Double Room (sharing):

Euro per person 5,205.00 US \$4,632.00

Single Room:

Euro 1100.00 US \$979.00 Additional

Travel Protection Insurance is highly recommended and is not provided under this agreement. Cancel for any Reason (CAFR) travel insurance should be considered – it was of great benefit for those that had non-refundable airfare for trips cancelled due to travel restrictions in 2020. Medical insurance coverage is also recommended; health insurance does not always extend to non-U.S. travel. Travel insurance may mitigate potential financial losses which may result from your withdrawal from a tour or its cancellation for unexpected reasons. Travel insurance may also provide for medical care and emergency evacuation coverage during your tour. Such coverage may add 5 to 10% to the cost of the tour, depending on your age, level of coverage and other factors. Some forms of coverage are time-sensitive and usually must be acquired at the time of any initial payment for the tour.

The travel company providing this tour is **Pathfinders/STITA Tours** of Cheltenham, UK (“Pathfinders”). The person organizing this tour is Claire Jones. She is not an agent or employee of Pathfinders; she acts only as your contact with Pathfinders. By placing your deposit for this tour, you agree that you have read and agree to these Terms and Conditions. You further agree that this is a release of any claim that you may have against Pathfinders, as well as Claire Jones, Claire Jones Landscapes LLC (collectively “Claire Jones”), and tour co-sponsor organizations (Horticultural Society of Maryland and Federated Garden Clubs of Maryland), arising out of this tour. By participating in this trip, participant acknowledges and provides consent that images from the trip may include those of participants and could be used for future trip promotion, shared on social media, shared by other tour participants, as well as other use.

TOUR PRICE: International tours are priced in the local currency (Euro) but invoiced in U.S. Dollars at the exchange rate in effect at the time of invoicing. Until full payment for the tour is received, your price for the tour in U.S. dollars is subject to currency fluctuation. You are invoiced for the full cost of the tour in one or more installments. Payments by credit card incur a 3% service charge.

No refunds will be granted for any accommodation, services or events which are not used, or which are canceled.

DEPOSIT: Tour reservations are processed in the order received. You will be notified if your reservation has been accepted. A deposit of \$200 is required to secure your reservation. It will be refunded to you when your tour commences, and it will be refunded to you if the minimum number of participants is not met. Also, it will be refunded to you if you cancel, and your spot is filled from a waiting list. In all other cases, your deposit is non-refundable.

CHANGES TO ITINERARY: Pathfinders and Claire Jones strive to operate according to their published itinerary. Unforeseen circumstances may require adjustments to that itinerary. We may make changes, without penalty, to the published itinerary, which are necessary for the comfort, convenience, and safety of tour participants.

CANCELLATIONS: Each tour will proceed if the minimum of 15 reservations has been met. If not met, the tour may be canceled. Should a tour move forward without filling to the minimum, there will be a price increase. You will be advised of the increase and may reconsider your application. **Please do not book any nonrefundable airfare until your tour has been confirmed.**

Tours may be canceled if natural disasters, pandemics, terrorism, or any other circumstance makes it unsafe for travel. Neither Pathfinders nor Claire Jones or the tour co-sponsors will be

responsible for refunds to you for a canceled tour. For that reason, you should consider purchasing travel or cancellation insurance.

If the tour is canceled by the Tour Agent/Operator (STITA) due to circumstances beyond their control, including travel bans or health regulations, the amount of any refund is determined by the recoverable portion of your tour payments. (Pre-payments are made in advance to travel providers such as hotels and airlines. Refunds are at their discretion.) Travel insurance may insulate a participant from most of these penalties.

MEDICAL ISSUES: Tour participants must be physically and mentally fit, and able to participate and cooperate with other tour members and the tour escort. At times, this tour is moderately physically demanding, involving walking several miles over the day, boarding a bus, climbing stairs, handling their own luggage, traveling over cobblestones, and moving luggage. You acknowledge that you are fit to participate in this tour, and you do so at your own risk. Please read the tour itinerary carefully and contact the tour escort to find out if this tour is for you.

Participants in the tour are solely responsible for compliance with requisite inoculations, passports, paperwork, all other compliance issues with respect to all countries, states, regions, other, that are included in the tour. Participants are required to certify they have had Covid-19 vaccine(s) administered to them, with requisite lead time prior to trip departure as recommended by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC). Countries and locations outside the U.S. may have specific COVID and/or other health and/or health insurance requirements, subject to changes both prior to and during the trip.

RISKS & HAZARDS: You agree that you are willing to accept the risks and uncertainty involved in taking a trip such as this, including transportation, terrorism, war, theft, illness, acts of government, pandemics, forces of nature, animal misbehavior, and damage to person or property. Cancellation of a tour from such a risk is not refundable. You accept and assume full responsibility for any and all risks from this tour.

DISPUTES: Any dispute concerning this trip shall be resolved by binding arbitration, submitted to and decided under the rules and procedures promulgated by the American Arbitration Association, with each party paying an equal share of the costs of such arbitration. Any in-person hearing shall be held in the State of Maryland.

Best Of Ireland

May 31- June 12, 2024

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Travel Information Form

Personal Information	
Full Traveler name Must match passport	
E-mail	
Passport Issuing Authority	
Passport Number	

Date of Birth	
Passport Expiration Date	
Street address w/city, state, and zip	
Cell Number	
Emergency Contact Name & Phone Number	
Type of Room Requested	
If Double, provide name of roommate	
Cell and home phone number	
How Did You Hear About This Tour?	
<p>To Reserve a Space, a \$200 Deposit made out to Claire Jones is required, which will be refunded to you at the start of the trip. If you cancel, the deposit will be retained, unless another participant is found to take your place. Mail deposit to Claire Jones, 4 Bellclare Cir, Sparks, MD 21152</p> <p>Airfare is not included in the price of this tour. Each participant will need to make their own airline reservation to arrive in Dublin. If you want to arrive earlier and/or leave later, arrangements can be made with Pathfinders to stay extra nights or you may do this on your own. Please <i>Do Not</i> make your airline reservations until you are notified by email that the tour will proceed.</p> <p>Important Dates: 10% Due by January 15, 2024 to Pathfinders at 877-753-6386- Toll free number, +5 hours ahead of Eastern Standard Time. Final Payment Due by March 30, 2024 to Pathfinders at 877-753-6386. A website will be set up to make payments easier.</p>	

RELEASE AND HOLD HARMLESS

I agree to the Terms and Conditions set forth above. I assume all of the risks and accept sole responsibility for any injury, illness, damage, loss, claim, liability, or expense, of any kind, that I may incur in connection with this tour. I hereby release, discharge, and hold harmless Pathfinders, its employees, officers, and agents, Claire Jones and Claire Jones Landscapes LLC, as well as tour co-sponsors Horticultural Society of Maryland and Federated Garden Clubs of Maryland, from any and all claims, including claims of negligence, from any injury, damages or loss due to my participation in and travel to and from this tour.

Participant signature: _____

Print Name: _____

Date: _____

