

Gardens to visit on the Wild Atlantic Way and Ireland's Ancient East

If you're exploring the Wild Atlantic Way or Ireland's Ancient East, travel writer Yvonne Gordon picks out some of the best gardens along the way.

Wild Atlantic Way

With 2,500km of coastline, the Wild Atlantic Way has some of Ireland's most spectacular scenery. This is where the land meets the Atlantic Ocean, creating dramatic cliffs, rocky headlands, beaches, coves and bays. The Wild Atlantic Way is the world's longest defined coastal touring route and it starts in Co. Cork, and ends in the Inishowen Peninsula in Co. Donegal, passing through nine counties on the way.

As well as all the natural and historic sites all along the route, there are lots of activities for visitors and garden visits are a big feature of the Wild Atlantic Way, with many of the gardens having stunning waterside settings with Atlantic views and mountain backdrops, and some with microclimates allowing exotic species to flourish.

Starting in Cork, drop into Fota House, Arboretum and Gardens which has an extensive collection of rare trees and



Derrynane House and Gardens, Co. Kerry

shrubs on 11 acres (garden tours are available). The gardens include a fernery, pleasure gardens, a rose garden and a summer house. There are all types of gardens too at Blarney Castle, from the bog garden and poison garden to a fern garden and herbaceous border, with displays of colour in the different seasons.

In West Cork, there is an abundance of beautiful gardens, such as Rosewood Gardens at Lough Hyne in Baltimore. The gardens are set on four acres, with woodlands, a pond, greenhouse and kitchen garden, and are just one mile from Lough Hyne nature reserve. Inis Beg Gardens in nearby Baltimore is a



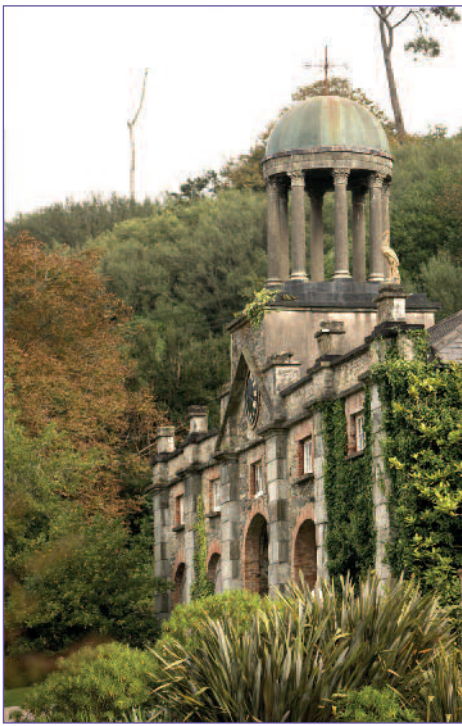
Kells Bay Garden, Co. Kerry



Blarney Castle, Co. Cork



Garnish Island, Co. Cork



Bantry House, Co. Cork

97-acre estate with restored walled gardens, specially planted woodlands and winding shoreline trails, plus bird hides and four kilometres of tracks.

Heading west to Bantry, the magnificent gardens at 18th-century Bantry House are laid out in Italian style over seven terraces with a parterre and a monumental staircase (you can also tour the house). One of the highlights of the Bantry area is Garnish Island in Bantry Bay accessed by ferry from Glengarriff pier, at the foot of the Beara Peninsula. Garnish has a unique microclimate and the island is home to many rare and exotic species, Italian gardens and a Martello tower.

Also in Glengarriff, the Ewe Gardens, Glengarriff is a wild garden set on a hill with waterfalls, bridges and a unique combination of art, history and creativity. There are four themed gardens plus interactive sculptures. Derreen Gardens in Lauragh on the Beara Peninsula has more than 60 acres of garden with twelve kilometres of paths winding through the woodland. The garden, which is a haven for wildlife and a habitat for deer, hares and squirrels, also has some rare and exotic plants that were brought back from the



Muckross House, Co. Kerry

collection of plants on 2.5 acres, including plants usually found in tropical environments, grown in glasshouses. Collections include Asian, Australasian, South American and Mediterranean plants. At

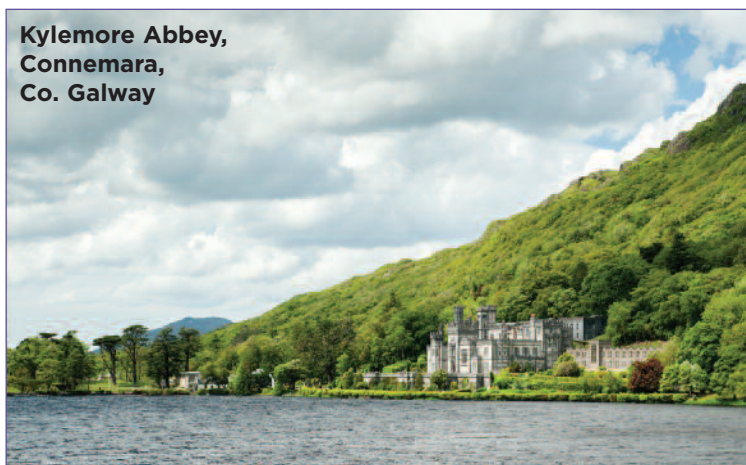
Himalayas. There is an abundance of birdlife on the shore. Also on the Beara Peninsula, the Mill Cove Sculpture Garden near Castletownbere is run by artist John Brennan and has four acres of gardens with 50 sculptures, all overlooking the sea.

On the Ring of Kerry, drop into Kells Bay Gardens, which has 17 acres of subtropical plants, a walled garden, primeval forest, river walk and cliff walk with dramatic views of Dingle Bay. Near Milltown, you'll find the lovely Dhu Varren Garden which has a diverse

Derrynane House, the ancestral home of Daniel O'Connell, you can explore plantations, garden walks, ornamental gardens and a summer house on the 300-acre estate.

Further north on The Wild Atlantic Way in Co. Clare, Vandeleur Walled Garden covers just over two acres, surrounded by stone walls. The demesne also has walking trails with access to adjacent woodland covering 160 hectares. In Connemara, Co. Galway, a popular walled garden is the six-acre Victorian walled garden at Kylemore Abbey which

is well worth a visit for its stunning setting — the magnificent garden was built between 1867 and 1871. At the foot of the Slieve Aughty Mountains in south-east Galway is Woodville Walled Garden, which dates back to the 18th-century and has a 1.5 acre walled garden which has been restored, a



Kylemore Abbey, Connemara, Co. Galway

museum, stables and a dovecote which is home to a family of doves.

Mount Falcon in Co. Mayo is set on a 100-acre estate with everything from fishing to archery and a recent addition is a kitchen garden, where the chef grows unusual vegetables and herbs for use in the restaurant. At the Orchard Cottage in Muine, a one-acre cottage-style garden is set in a sheltered spot near Clew Bay with plenty of rare plants plus a pond, orchard, bamboos and climbers. They also serve coffee and homemade cake.



Fota House, Co. Cork

There are plenty more magnificent gardens to be found along or near the Wild Atlantic Way, which ends in Inishowen in Donegal. No visit to Donegal is complete without a visit to Glenveagh, Ireland's largest national park, which has lakes, forest and mountains plus a beautiful castle. As well as the park itself, there are two main gardens at the castle — the Pleasure Garden and Walled Garden, and the gardens have rich and diverse planting. The estate is well known for its rhododendrons and azaleas as well as exotic species of plants from around the world.

Ireland's Ancient East

Ireland's newest tourist trail, Ireland's Ancient East takes visitors through 5,000 years of history, tapping into the rich cultural heritage on the east and midlands of Ireland, from ancient passage graves, wells and round towers to castles, stately homes and abbeys. Many of these beautiful ancient settings either have magnificent grounds to explore or are near stunning gardens.

**Altamont House,
Co. Carlow**



Gardens with its 19 hectares and landscaped gardens, and Mount Usher Gardens in Ashford need no introduction. The gardens at Mount Usher were first planted in 1868 and have 5,000 species of plants and shrubs from all over the world, as well as a garden café.

Less well known might be the secret garden at Corke Lodge in Bray, which has a woodland setting with specimen trees dating back to 1810. Or take the family to Greenan Farm Museums and Maze which has a full-sized Celtic hedge maze and a great nature walk which passes farm animals such as hens, pigs, ducks, sheep and horses. Wicklow is also home to the National Botanic Gardens in Kilmacurragh, a 52-acre historic garden with everything from wild flower meadows and herbaceous borders to new and exotic species.



**Japanese Gardens,
National Stud,
Co. Kildare**

If you're visiting Newgrange or the Boyne Valley, don't miss the Battle of The Boyne Visitor Centre in Oldbridge House, Co. Meath where the gardens include a walled garden. Or drop into Lough Crew gardens in Oldcastle which has gardens dating from the 17th- to 19th-century, from landscape and pleasure gardens to lake and forest walks. The central six-acre area has a lime avenue, lawns and terraces, and a magnificent herbaceous border and physic border. Lough Crew also has guided walks and an adventure centre.

In Co. Wicklow, the 'Garden of Ireland', gems like Powerscourt House and



Mount Usher, Co. Wicklow

there's a lake, bog glen and Ice Age glen and there are many exotic tree specimens in the gardens.

In the sunny south-east, the John F. Kennedy Arboretum in New Ross has 4,500 types of trees and shrubs from all over the world, set over 623 acres. There are 200 forest plots, by continent, plus an ericaceous garden with 500 different rhododendrons. Mount Congreve in Count

Waterford is an 18th-century Georgian estate and mansion and the garden is set on 70 acres with more than three thousand trees and shrubs, thousands of rhododendrons, camellias, conifers, climbers and herbaceous plants, and a four-acre walled garden, café and garden shop.



**Iveagh Gardens,
Dublin**

decorated by Catherine Poer, Countess of Tyrone, in 1754, and a bridge built in 1205 for King John to cross the River Clodagh. A Sitka spruce planted on the estate in the 1830s is among the tallest trees in Ireland at 50 metres.

Tourin House and Gardens, Cappoquin, Co. Waterford is set on more than five acres on the banks of the river Blackwater and has carpets of snowdrops

and daffodils in spring, plus a huge collection of 100 different bearded iris flower which bloom during summer. At Woodstock Gardens, Inistioge, Co. Kilkenny the Victorian gardens have a collection of trees from all over the world, including many champions and one of the longest monkey puzzle avenues in Europe. Also at Woodstock is the noble fir walk which is more than a quarter mile in length, planted by William F. Tighe in 1878.

In neighbouring Co. Tipperary, drop into Dundrum Nurseries in Dundrum. Their Celtic Plantarium is currently under refurbishment, but the nursery and garden centre offers a wide range of good value plants. At Emo Court in Co. Laois, the 1790 country house designed by James Gandon is surrounded by 35 hectares of gardens dating to the 18th-century. The gardens contain many rare trees and shrubs, as well as Japanese maples, rhododendrons and azaleas. Clonaslee Gardens in Portlaoise, Co. Laois was established 15 years ago and is a rural garden developed around an old

**Malahide
Castle,
Co. Dublin**



Heywood Garden, Co. Laois



**Powerscourt Gardens,
Co. Wicklow**





Mount Congreve,
Co. Waterford

farmyard containing specimen trees and shrubs and a rich tapestry of herbaceous perennials. At Heywood Gardens, take a tour of the lakes, woodlands and magnificent formal gardens, a real gem designed by the famous architect Sir Edwin Lutyens who also designed the War Memorial Gardens in Dublin.

Whether you travel the Wild

Atlantic Way, or the Ancient East, this autumn and winter, there is a wonderful choice of gardens and parks to visit and enjoy — some are open seasonally but many are open year-round. Always check before you go, full details of all gardens open to the public are available on www.garden.ie ■

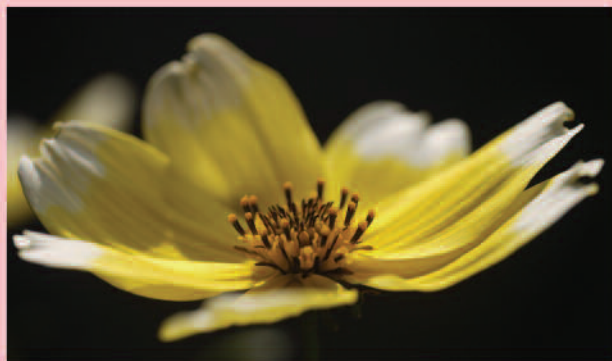
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