



Colclough Walled Garden



Kilmokea Country Manor and Gardens



Wexford Lavender Farm



Johnstown Castle Estate, Museum and Gardens

# PURPLE & GOLD

Yvonne Gordon looks at gardens and heritage sites to visit in the sunny southeast

Anyone hankering after some sunshine following the winter months and lockdown might like to explore the sunny southeast when travel restrictions ease. Ireland's sunniest spot gets more than seven hours of sunshine a day on average during the summer months, and it is filled with beautiful gardens as well as

interesting heritage spots to visit.

If you're keen to get outdoors and soak up some spring and summer colour while exploring, the Wexford garden trail is a good place to start, with gardens dating from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to more recent creations all coming into bloom from around now, offering

everything from short walks to full forest trails to get lost on for the day.

Start with a nature immersion and perhaps some 'forest bathing' at the John F Kennedy Arboretum near New Ross, which has more than 4,500 different types of trees and shrubs from all around the world, spread over 252 hectares. The arboretum is dedicated to the memory of U.S. president John F Kennedy whose grandfather was born in nearby Dunganstown and there are different forest plots and gardens, a lake and super views from Slieve Coillte.

Just a few minutes away from here is Kilmokea Country Manor and Gardens, where you can visit the gardens and tearooms when they re-open, or even check in to the house as a guest for a few days. Take a stroll around the gardens to admire the colours and don't be surprised if you

come across a wooden pirate ship tucked away down at the back. It might seem like an unusual feature among rose gardens, myrtle woods and bamboo walks — in reality, it's a cool play area for kids. However, delve a little deeper and you'll find another pirate connection — two real pirates who lived here are said to have been buried in the small graveyard in the late 1700s, and there's even a headstone with a skull and crossbone carved into the stone.

The seven acres of gardens here are full of surprises — there's a ying-yang garden, a rose quarter and in the woodland gardens, a trout lake and duck pond, with magnolias and camellias mixed in with candelabra primulas and rhododendrons.

The gardens have a variety of plants and flowers thanks to a previous owner's plant collecting trips in Southeast Asia and beyond. Younger visitors will like the Viking settlement and the fairy village, while fruit and vegetable patches supply the tearooms and the guest accommodation at the house which is an eighteenth-century Georgian stone rectory.

If talk of pirate ships whets your appetite for all things maritime, step on board the Dunbrody Famine Ship on the quay in New Ross, where you can learn about life on board during the Famine times — the ship is an exact replica of a ship from the 1840s and characters in costume will give a glimpse of the tough conditions experienced by emigrants during the period.

## TINTERN ABBEY

Further south on the Hook Peninsula, Tintern Abbey was founded in 1200 by William Marshall for the Cistercian Monks and it is full of history. Behind the abbey, Colclough Walled Garden is worth a visit to learn about restoration which started in 2010 to bring the garden back to its 1838 layout. There's a vegetable garden, fruit trees and five bridges crossing the river which runs the length of the garden.

Drive south for some coastal scenery and to take in the many beaches along the peninsula at Baginbun and Dollar Bay — there are fourteen beaches in total, before finishing your journey at



Wells House



John F Kennedy Arboretum near New Ross



Enniscorthy Castle

Hook lighthouse, the world's oldest working lighthouse which dates back more than 800 years.

A guided tour here will tell you about the medieval tower and the monks who first lived there, with a mix of storytelling and some clever audio-visual technology, while you can admire views of the sea and land at the tip of the peninsula from the balcony at the top of the lighthouse.

Another place which is full of history is Johnstown Castle Estate, Museum and Gardens, which has lots to see and do, plus kilometres of lake walks to explore.

The gardens date back to the mid-1800s and still retain some of this design, with hothouses, walled gardens and woodland gardens, plus a sunken garden with picnic area. There's also an agricultural museum which gives a fascinating insight into rural and farming life in Ireland in

times past and you can take a one-hour tour of the castle to get a sense of what life was like there in the nineteenth century.

## ENNISCORTHY CASTLE

At the heart of Wexford county, and much of its history, is Enniscorthy heritage town. Enniscorthy Castle itself was built in the twelfth century and was once home to the Norman knights. There is rare art in the basement, while the battlements at the top offer views of the town and nearby Vinegar Hill, which was the headquarters of the 1798 rebellion.

Take the family and explore the 450 acres of woodlands and gardens at Wells House and Gardens, with lots for younger visitors including an animal farm, fairy and Gruffalo walks and a playground. The terrace and lawns are ideal for a socially-distanced picnic.

Finally, for an immersion for all the senses with magnificent colours and scents, drop into Wexford Lavender Farm which has two acres full of thousands of lavender plants, which come into bloom from around late June until early September. Varieties include English lavenders 'Hidcote', 'Rosea' and 'Munstead' along with Dutch lavender 'Grosso'. ●

**Visitor information**  
Check websites for current opening times, updated details and prices — Kilmokea Country Manor and Gardens (kilmokea.com), John F Kennedy Arboretum (heritageireland.ie), Colclough Walled Garden (colcloughwalledgarden.com), Dunbrody Famine Ship Experience (dunbrody.com), Johnstown Castle Estate, Museum and Gardens (johnstowncastle.ie), Wexford Lavender farm (wexfordlavenderfarm.com), Enniscorthy Castle (enniscorthycastle.ie), Wells House and Gardens (wells.house.ie) and Hook Lighthouse (hookheritage.ie). For information on more gardens to visit, check out the Wexford Garden Trail (wexfordgardentrail.com) and learn more at Visit Wexford (visitwexford.ie).