

Oh, the Places You'll Go!

Managing Editor Paige Worthy's Garden Getaway Tour to Scotland and England was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to experience the gardens of the UK with a group of unforgettable fellow travelers and garden enthusiasts.

By Paige Worthy

Back in May, I had an amazing opportunity to travel with a group of gardening enthusiasts to the United Kingdom, where we explored the gardens of Scotland and England. We also went to the Chelsea Flower Show on the Royal Horticultural Society's member day, which offered enough inspiration for a feature of its own (look back to the July issue for that!).

The schedule was packed during our nine-day trip: We visited the Edinburgh Botanic Gardens, Alnwick Garden, Explorers: the Scottish Plant Hunters Garden, RHS Wisley, the Chelsea Flower Show (which I covered in the July issue), Beth Chatto, Great Dixter House & Gardens and the National Trust's Sissinghurst Garden.

Want to see more from Paige's Garden Getaway tour? Visit our Flickr at www.flickr.com/lgr-and-gpn.



Writing about every garden on this tour would take up...far more space than I have here. But here are a few of my favorite memories:

Alnwick Garden. Our visit to Alnwick started with a private talk from Ian August, who's been in the garden's employ since its inception and is now garden liaison director. We found out the garden is big on education and community. Children are welcome in all areas of the garden and even invited to play in the water features. A sprawling lawn for picnicking overlooked a massive fountain that sprayed water every few minutes. The kids went wild.

Also at Alnwick, there's a "poison garden" that houses rare and dangerous plants — as well as cannabis and coca plants behind bars — and is home to the garden's drug awareness activities. Specialists often lead school groups around, and families tour together, too.

For more information, visit www.alnwickgarden.com.



Kids and families were a focal point at Alnwick Garden, where summery weather brought people out in droves.



Alnwick Garden's emphasis on education spilled over into our group; a longtime employee took time to explain the garden's history and future to us before we started our tour of the grounds.



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Our Tour Manager

Chris Robson was our tour manager through ACIS, the overall company that ran our tour. Trained in languages and theatre, he was a natural leader for our excursions, despite the fact that he had no gardening experience. He knew all about the areas we were traveling through, knew many of our coach drivers and offered all sorts of local secrets.

He taught us how to distinguish among the local accents in each area we visited. We learned some hilarious British idioms and slang. The female constituent aboard the bus let out a collective squeal of delight every time Chris said something particularly British, like his wonderful pronunciation of the word "banana": buh-NAWHHH-nuh.

On the coaches and during our tours, we never strayed from our schedule, never had a problem with our reservations. He was a flawless tour manager — everything was taken care of. And when we weren't on a schedule, he emboldened us to strike out on our own, shop in the supermarkets and visit local department stores instead of sticking to the heavily beaten tourist path.



RHS Wisley. Bleary-eyed from our early-morning travel from Edinburgh to London, we went straight from Heathrow to this garden, which is operated by the Royal Horticulture Society. The garden's sprawling grounds were also pretty busy with fancy older ladies, young mothers with children in their "prams" and a group of Catholic schoolchildren working on art projects and learning about the different parts of the garden.

We ate lunch in a cafe that sourced many of its ingredients locally and also got some of its herbs directly from the gardens. After we ate, a few of us scrambled back to the glasshouse, which includes three linked climate zones (dry temperate, moist temperate and tropical) and houses a huge collection of orchids as well as coleus plants.

Visit rhs.org.uk/gardens/wisley.

Great Dixter. On our last day of the tour, we visited Great Dixter House and Gardens. Located in Sussex, the gardens were home to Christopher Lloyd, one of Britain's most famous gardeners. He perfected his craft within the labyrinthine hedge walls of Great Dixter and pioneered the concept of the mixed border, which American gardeners are now no stranger to.

A four-year veteran of Great Dixter led us around, telling us about Lloyd's vision. He didn't like the buttoned-up standards of English gardening and challenged them in every bed — as well as in a giant tile mosaic of two Dachshunds. It was a nice break from all the formal gardens we'd visited.

For more information, visit www.greatdixter.co.uk.



Beautiful varieties drew garden visitors of all ages to Wisley, including schoolchildren who were working on art projects.

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Great Dixter, where famous gardener Christopher Lloyd perfected his craft, was bursting with spring blooms. A seasoned garden employee showed us around and highlighted Lloyd's philosophies.

The People

Attendees on this trip were an amazing blend of different age groups, backgrounds and gardening levels, which made for a rich experience.

There were Master Gardeners. There was a lesbian couple. There were husbands just along for the ride. There was a man with a GPS unit who teaches celestial navigation. There were photographers with enough gear to fill a seat next to them. There were two lovely older women who had been friends for life. There was one couple who had just celebrated their 50th anniversary. There was a mother traveling with her two daughters, one of whom was celebrating a year free from breast cancer. The man who organized our trip has traveled the world with young performers.

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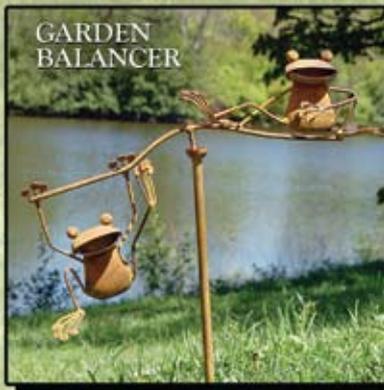


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from the ROAD

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Visit www.gardengetawaytours.com for an idea of the journeys on offer for 2011, then get in touch with Vanessa Dinning at plantvan@gmail.com to get it on the calendar.



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