

Afternoon tea: Stockwood Craft Museum and Gardens

Overnight - Luton



DAY 4 - Luton to Old Warden (21m/34km)

MORNING - Wrest Park Gardens (Silsoe)

→ From Luton, take the A6 north (for about 10 miles) to the village of Silsoe. Follow the signs to Wrest Park Gardens.

Wrest Park Gardens (Silsoe) - Wrest Park belonged to the Grey Family from the Middle Ages until the early 12th C. Today it is noted for over 90 acres (36 hectares) of wonderful gardens, laid out by Henry Grey, Duke of Kent, from 1706-1740 - and then modified twenty years later by his granddaughter, Jemima, Marchioness Grey.

Wander amongst the follies at Wrest Park Gardens



Three distinct styles of garden design can be seen, the early 18th C. woodland garden; the natural style of gardening made popular by Lancelot "Capability" Brown; and the more formal flower gardens in the French style. Charming buildings and ornaments, such as the Orangery, Bath House, Archer Pavilion and Bowling Green House. There are also canals, lakes and an intricate parterre with a marble fountain and statues. The present house was built in the 1830's, and was inspired by an 18th C. French chateaux. It is now an agricultural research centre.

Morning coffee: Wrest Park Gardens

→ Return to the A6, and head north to the roundabout with the A507 (on the outskirts of Clophill). Turn right and follow this for 3 miles to the next roundabout. Here you turn left onto the A600. Almost immediately you come to another roundabout, where you turn right onto the B658 towards Biggleswade. 4 miles later, turn left along an unclassified road to the village of Old Warden (and the Swiss Garden).



Lunch: Old Warden

AFTERNOON - Swiss Garden (Old Warden)

At the start of the 18th C. wealthy London tradesman, Sir Samuel Ongley, bought the estate of Old Warden in Bedfordshire. His family was to remain here for nearly 200 years - being elevated to the peerage in 1776.

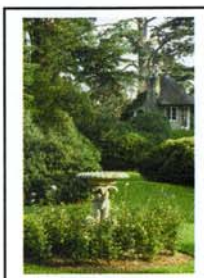
In the early 19th C. the 3rd Lord Ongley recreated the village into the popular "Swiss" look of the day, converting old estate cottages and building new ones with thatched roofs, latticed porches and neo-gothic windows.

At the north end of the village is The 'Swiss Garden'. Mystery surrounds its construction in the 1820's. Local legend says that Robert (who was a bachelor) had it built for his Swiss mistress who caught a cold, and died after sheltering from a storm.

It is a garden of contrived vistas leading the eye to several attractive architectural features. Tiny folly buildings, ornamental ponds, little bridges, grotto and many fine specimens of trees and shrubs.

Afternoon tea: The Swiss Garden

The Swiss Garden



----- END OF TOUR -----



You may like to continue the tour for a further day or two. From Old Warden, you can head east to the city of Cambridge - where there are some other excellent gardens to visit in the surrounding area.

Anglesey Abbey, Gardens and Lode Mill (nr. Cambridge) - superb 100 acre garden and arboretum. Hyacinths, herbaceous borders, dahlia garden, winter walk and snowdrops.

Audley End House and Gardens (Saffron Walden) - palatial Jacobean house. Formal parterre, lake and organic Victorian kitchen garden.

Cambridge University Botanic Garden (Cambridge) - second only in importance to Kew in London (some 80,000 plant species). Rock, winter and dry gardens. Glasshouses, systematic beds and fine trees.

Bloomin' Beautiful Discovery Tour B

For further information on this tour (including opening times of attractions listed), please contact the East of England Tourist Board on +44 (0)870 225 4800, or visit

www.visiteastofengland.com



Explore the secret gardens of the East, and enjoy the spectacular colours and delicate fragrances of some of England's finest gardens. From the floral displays of Southend-on-Sea, to the home of the English rose at St. Albans, the former country retreat of 'Darling Daisy'. Discover alpine blooms, an 18th C. grotto and snowdrops.



Starting point: Southend-on-Sea (Essex)

Duration: Four days **Mileage:** 114 miles/183 kilometres

Route of tour:

- Day 1: Southend-on-Sea - The Royal Horticultural Society's Garden 'Hyde Hall' (Rettondon) - The Gardens of Easton Lodge (Little Easton) - Bishop's Stortford (overnight)
- Day 2: Bishop's Stortford - Much Hadham - Ware - Hatfield House - St. Albans (overnight)
- Day 3: St. Albans - Benington Lordship Gardens (Stevenage) - Stockwood Park Museum - Luton (overnight)
- Day 4: Luton - Wrest Park Gardens (Silsoe) - The Swiss Garden (Old Warden)



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Discovery Tour B

Bloomin' Beautiful

DAY 1 - Southend-on-Sea to Bishop's Stortford (50m/80km)

MORNING - Southend-on-Sea

Start the day in this popular seaside town, which has seven miles of seafront, alongside award-winning gardens and parks. Southend is also noted for its range of seaside attractions and entertainment, including the longest pier in the world, an excellent shopping centre, and an annual series of major events. *Market - Thurs.*

Tourist Information Centre - 19 High Street
+44 (0)1702 215620.

The gardens and parks at Southend are renowned for their superb floral displays. All of them are continually maintained to the highest standard, leading to many awards - including the Chelsea Flower Show and the Anglia in Bloom competition. *Chalkwell Park* has colourful bedding displays, ornamental, rose and courtyard gardens. Whilst *Priory Park* has a walled garden with herbaceous borders, climbing roses and shrubs. *Prittlewell Square* has formal ornamental gardens with a central pond and fountain.



Southend

Morning coffee and lunch: Southend-on-Sea

AFTERNOON - The Royal Horticultural Society's Garden 'Hyde Hall' (Rettondon) and The Gardens of Easton Lodge (Little Easton)

→ Leave Southend-on-Sea on the A127 towards Basildon. After 7 miles, turn right onto the A130 towards Chelmsford. 5 miles later, you reach the village of Rettondon. Follow the signs to The Royal Horticultural Society's Garden 'Hyde Hall'.



The Royal Horticultural Society's Garden 'Hyde Hall' (Rettendon) - this landscaped, hill-top garden was created over a thirty-year period by Dr and Mrs R. H. M. Robinson. The aims of Hyde Hall are to demonstrate how, by skilful planting and aftercare, a wonderful diverse garden can be nurtured in a difficult and challenging site. The garden was given to the RHS in 1993, and covers 28 acres (11 hectares). Rose/woodland gardens, spring bulbs, herbaceous borders, ornamental ponds with lilies, dry garden and the national collection of Viburnum.

Hyde Hall Garden



→ Return to the A130, and head to Chelmsford. After passing under the busy A12, the road becomes the A1114. Follow this through the town, then take the A1060 towards Bishop's Stortford. After 8 miles you reach the village of Leaden Roding, turn right here onto the B184 to Great Dunmow.

Essex Fruit - the rich sandy soils and climate of the East of England (this is reputedly the driest place in Britain) help make Essex one of the great fruit-growing areas. Here you will find orchards growing all types of succulent fruits, some used to create equally famous jams. Look out for pick-your-own farms.

→ After 6 miles you pass the A120 into town of Great Dunmow. Remain on the B184 towards Thaxted. After about a mile, turn left onto an unclassified road to Little Easton.

The Gardens of Easton Lodge (Little Easton) - in 1865, when she was three years old, Frances Evelyn Maynard inherited Easton Lodge, together with its estates and a personal income of millions at today's values. She married at the age of twenty one, and became the Countess of Warwick ('Darling Daisy').



Darling Daisy

At Easton, she devised a series of spectacular gardens, and entertained many guests. Her liaison with the Prince of Wales (a frequent visitor), was the scandal of the day. But when the Countess died in 1938, times had changed - she had been short of money, and much of the estate had been sold.

Further pieces were destroyed during the Second World War - with the construction of an airfield. Then in 1950, the formal gardens were abandoned, and nature took over. In 1971, Brian and Diana Creasey purchased the old west wing of the house, and began to recreate the gardens. Today visitors can enjoy around 20 acres (8 hectares), with pergolas, pavilions and terraced flower beds. Restoration work is ongoing in the Italian and Japanese gardens.

Home of 'Darling Daisy' - The Gardens of Easton Lodge



Afternoon tea: The Gardens of Easton Lodge

→ Retrace your steps back to Great Dunmow, where you join the A120 to Bishop's Stortford.

Overnight - Bishop's Stortford

DAY 2 - Bishop's Stortford to St. Albans (27m/43km)



MORNING - Much Hadham and Ware

→ Take the B1004 to Much Hadham.

Much Hadham - this picturesque village has probably the grandest High Street in Hertfordshire, with 16th/17th C. cottages and Georgian houses. For over 800 years, it was the country seat of the Bishops of London. Visit The Forge Museum with its Victorian cottage garden

→ Remain on the B1004 to the town of Ware.

Ware - pretty little town set on the River Lea, and once a major centre for malting. Old coaching inns and 18th C. riverside gazebos. The unusual Scott's Grotto was built in the 1760's, and extends some 67 feet (20 metres) into a hillside. It is decorated with flints, shells and fossils. Grottoes (or artificial caves) were once fashionable garden features in the 18th C. **Market** - Tues.

Take a trip underground at Ware



Morning coffee and lunch: Ware

AFTERNOON - Hatfield House

→ From Ware, take the A119 to Hertford. Here you join the A414 west to the town of Hatfield. Follow the signs to Hatfield House.

Hatfield House - magnificent Jacobean house, home of the 7th Marquess and Marchioness of Salisbury. It was built between 1607-1611 by Robert Cecil, 1st Earl of Salisbury and Chief Minister to King James I. Famous paintings, furniture, tapestries and armour. Possessions of Elizabeth I, who spent her childhood at the adjacent 15th C. Old Palace.

The outstanding gardens represent over 30 years of recreation by the current Dowager Marchioness of Salisbury - in the 17th C. style influenced by John Tradescant the Elder (the great plant collector). Lake, herb, knot, parterre and wilderness gardens.

Afternoon tea: Hatfield House



17th C. style gardens at Hatfield House

→ Leave Hatfield on the A1057 to St. Albans.

Overnight - St. Albans



DAY 3 - St. Albans to Luton (16m/26km)

MORNING - St. Albans and Benington Lordship Gardens (Stevenage)

St. Albans - an historic city shaped by 2,000 years of history. Named after St. Alban, Britain's first Christian martyr, the city is built by the site of Verulamium, the third largest Roman town in Britain. Start the day with a stroll through Verulamium Park. **Market** - Wed, Sat. **Tourist Information Centre** - Town Hall, Market Place +44 (0)1727 864511.

Morning coffee: St. Albans



Beside the lake in Verulamium Park

→ Leave St. Albans on the A1057 to Hatfield, then join the A1(M) north to junction 7. Turn right onto the A602 - then head east along the unclassified roads to the village of Benington.

Benington Lordship Gardens (Stevenage) - romantic old garden - on the site of a Norman castle. Queen Anne manor-house with Edwardian verandah. Magnificent folly. Overlooks lakes and parkland. Vegetable, rose, rock/water garden and spectacular borders. Contemporary sculpture. Particular features are the snowdrops and herbaceous borders.

Benington Lordship Gardens



Lunch: Stevenage

AFTERNOON - Stockwood Park Museum (Luton)

→ Retrace your steps back to A1(M), and head south to junction 4. Take the B653 (via Wheathampstead) to Luton. Follow the signs to the Stockwood Park Museum.



Stockwood Park Museum



Stockwood Park Museum (Luton) - these beautifully recreated period gardens trace nine centuries of English gardening history. They are situated in what were originally the walled and pleasure gardens of Stockwood House. Visitors start at the Medieval Garden (12th/13th C.) planted with herbs grown for both medicinal and practical uses. Next is the Knot Garden (16th C.) laid out with dwarf hedges, to recreate the intricate patterns used in lace making. The Italian Garden (late 17th C.) is centred around a wellhead. While the Victorian Garden (late 19th C.) is at a time when the great plant collectors travelled the world in search of rare species. Also intriguing Ian Hamilton-Finlay Sculpture Garden.