



Gardens to savour for all seasons

The Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew is London's largest UNESCO World Heritage site.

Its collection of living plants, trees and shrubs, either 'growing out' or in the glasshouses and nurseries, comprise the largest and most diverse collection in the world.

A very short stroll from the botanical gardens, Kew itself has a delightful village feel with good pubs and coffee shops and a number of fine dining restaurants.

Getting here on the overground rail and tube networks is easy from central London, with a more leisurely riverboat service available during the summer months.

As such, it makes for a serenely memorable escape from the constant throb of the UK capital, particularly if one takes in the nearby Richmond Park.

Ashley Gibbins, Commissioning Editor
AllWays traveller





Rolling back the years and conjuring up the memories

By Ashley Gibbins

Ann and I had our first 'official' date at Kew Gardens, some twenty odd years ago.

Trying to impress this lovely young lady, and having persuaded her to play 'hooky' from work, I needed to make it special.

And so I whisked Ann to the Royal Botanical Gardens for the afternoon.

Strolling hand-in-hand through the gardens, in warm early autumn sunshine, made for a magical and memorable experience.

It also did the trick for we are still together.

And here we were back at Kew, and were soon asking why it took so long to get back here.

I had forgotten just how peacefully invigorating it is here - and how the World Heritage status bestowed upon the Gardens is so justified.

And though known more often than not as Kew Gardens, this shorthand title in no way does this place justice.

The Royal Botanical Gardens, Kew creates a perception of grandeur that is richly deserved – and why I will use its full name.

The numbers speak for themselves

The numbers come tumbling off the page as I read up on the Gardens in advance of our visit.

Founded in 1840, from an exotic garden that dated from 1759, the Kew collection includes over 30,000 different kinds of plants.

Its herbarium which is, needless to say, one of the world's largest, has over seven million preserved plant specimens.

The horticultural library here has some 750,000 volumes with the illustrations collection containing more than 175,000 prints and drawings of plants.

There are four Grade I listed buildings and another 36 with a Grade II listing.

And all within 132 hectares (326 acres) of landscaped woodland, gardens and parkland.

But mere statistics can only whet the appetite for what one finds at the Royal Botanical Gardens.

Those with real interest in arboriculture, floriculture or botany can 'dig' deep into the growing, planting and maintenance regime.

The Royal Botanical Gardens also provide a safe and peaceful haven for family picnics while offering exploring exploits for school groups on field study trips.

Then there are those who spend a couple of hours with a good book under the shade of an overhanging tree or shrub.

The Royal Botanical Gardens can also be enjoyed at any time of day and during any season.

It's therefore no wonder so many take advantage of the annual membership.

So whether there's frost or even snow on the ground or spring in the air; a lazy hazy day of summer or during the golden brown of autumn, the Royal Botanical Gardens at Kew will delight.



What to see and do at the Royal Botanical Gardens, Kew

The Arboretum



We arrived as the gates were opening on a gloriously sunny late spring morning and took a stroll (yes hand-in-hand) through the Arboretum.

14,000 trees

Covering over half of the Kew site it has over 14,000 trees of many thousands of varieties, including some 2000 of the finest specimens native to the British Isles and a large number of unusual spaces from across the world.

On the lake that layers much of the Arboretum area, signets, ducklings and goslings were happily paddling.

Kew Explorer

While the woodland areas are enticing for walkers, the *Kew Explorer* road train takes a circular route around the gardens for those who prefer.

A commentary is provided by the driver and there are several stops.

Free tours of the gardens are also conducted daily by volunteers.

Sackler Crossing



The Sackler Crossing bridge is made of granite and bronze and designed as a sweeping double curve of black granite.

The sides of the bridge are formed of bronze posts that give the impression, from certain views of forming a solid wall.

From others, and to those on the bridge, the posts separate to allow a view through them of the water beyond.

Treetop walkway



The treetop walkway was a little more crowded as it is a magnet for the junior school groups that were arriving.

At 18 metres high, it offers those wishing to take it, the chance to walk 200 metres through the tree canopy of lime, sweet chestnut and oak trees and to enjoy views of the gardens below.

The floor of the walkway is made from perforated metal and flexes as it is walked upon. The entire structure also sways in the wind.

The Plant Houses

The more exotic collections at the Royal Botanical Gardens are to be found in its plant houses.

The Palm House



The grand facade of Palm house, built between 1844–1848, is one of the main features at Kew.

Step inside and the steamy environment gives visitors the chance to experience the humidity of a tropical rainforest and discover the plants that thrive in these conditions.

Davies Alpine House and Rock Garden



Rare and unusual plants are housed in this arch shaped glass house, designed to recreate the cool, dry, windy conditions that these plants favour.

At any one time the Alpine House displays some 200 of the 7,000 plus collection of Alpine plants.

Princess of Wales Conservatory



The most complex of Kew's public glasshouses contains ten different environments covering a range of tropical conditions and climatic zones.

Commemorating Princess Augusta, who founded the Gardens, it was opened by Diana, Princess of Wales, in July 1987.

The Hive



Standing at 17 metres tall in a wildflower meadow, *The Hive* is a multi-sensory experience designed to highlight the extraordinary life of bees.

Marianne North Gallery



Marianne North was a remarkable and talented Victorian artist with a great eye for botanical detail.

In this extraordinary gallery, you can see 833 of her paintings displayed in geographical order, which she hung herself after travelling around the world.

Shirley Sherwood Gallery

Kew holds one of the world's greatest collections of botanical art, with more than 200,000 items dating back to the days before photography could be used for the study of plants.

This gallery is the first to be dedicated to botanical art.

The Rose Garden

And finally there is the Rose garden, which is laid out according to plans dating from 1848, and has hundreds of rosebushes offering their subtle yet glorious scent and striking colour.



More information



www.kew.org



Kew the Movies and Kew the Music

As well as its year-round daily entrance, the Royal Botanical Gardens runs an annual series of special events, evening time picnic concerts, open air movies and Christmas at Kew

Kew Science Festival

The Science Festival (August) highlights the need to conserve the world's plant biodiversity.

In a marquee in front of the Kew Palace, visitors will find different activities run by Kew scientists, and can try out a number of experiments including extracting DNA from vegetables, analysing plant genomes and dissecting plants to find out how they work.

Kew Autumn Festival

(7 to 29 October 2017)

The Royal Botanic Gardens celebrates autumn with a festival showcasing the transient and reflective beauty of nature and our connection with the natural world.

Organic works of art by different artists are dotted around the Arboretum.

Theatre on Kew

During the summer there is an annual series of theatre productions for children 'of all ages' in the gardens.

Kew After Hours

Exclusive after hours events at *The Hive*, from bee tattoos to honey tasting.

Meet the experts

The chance to go behind the scenes on a guided walk, which features a different plant or fungus each month and gain an insight into the science and history of the plant and see where it grows in the Gardens.

Christmas at Kew

During the festive season, the Royal Botanic Gardens become a 'winter wonderland', with over one million twinkling lights along an illuminated trail around the gardens.

The trail begins with hundreds of illuminated globes winding through glittering trees hanging with silvery shards of light, snowflakes and stars.



At the lake there is an underwater display of glowing lights and there are installations throughout.

There is a Fire Garden forming a corridor of festive flames and rotating Christmas trees, and the Great Broad Walk Borders is lit with hundreds of shining petals and gigantic flower pots.



The Palm House has colourful criss-crossing laser beams, jumping jets of light and projections playing across a giant water screen.

Kew the music – and movies

Kew the Music is a festival of summer picnic concerts set within the grounds.

Guests are welcome to bring their own food and drink or to enjoy the open-air bars and tasty street food stalls.

The 2018 season takes place from 10 to 15 July 2018.

www.kewthemusic.org

Kew the Movies (August and September) brings the same picnic ambience as the concert series, when visitors can enjoy classic movies in the open air.

www.kew.org/wakehurst/whats-on

A snapshot of the Royal Botanical Gardens



AllWays traveller and the International Travel Writers Alliance



AllWays traveller is the consumer travel features 'arm' of the Alliance, providing independent travellers with views of the world from the professional travel journalists in the Alliance

www.allwaystraveller.com



The International Travel Writers Alliance is the world's largest association of professional travel journalists.

www.itwalliance.com



Ann Meador is a professional travel writer and photographer and Managing Editor of *AllWays traveller*



Ashley Gibbins is a professional travel writer and photographer and Managing Director of the International Travel Writers Alliance.