

Sample: STATELY HOMES & GARDENS TOUR

4 days / 3 nights

Email jenny@britholidays.com for more information

England is blessed with palaces, castles and great country houses displaying unrivalled opulence and refinement. Treasure houses in every sense. And then there are gardens, gardens and more flower-filled gardens, formal and informal, large and small, planned and wild, all bursting into riots of color and overloading the senses with fragrant smells and sights.

We've chosen to show you a balanced selection, including some almost legendary, iconic places that are virtual shrines for the home and garden enthusiast, and others that might escape ones attention unless shown them.

And knowing that one's partners don't always share the enthusiasm, please note that other of our our mini-tours often run over the same four days allowing couples to follow their own interests in the company of other kindred souls!



'Early in August 2004 a friend and I took one of your tours. We are finally back home and I wanted to write and let you know what a great time we had. We were on the Homes and Gardens tour led by Polly Chapman. Polly did an excellent job of getting us to a variety of places and giving us enough time so we did not feel hurried. She kept things organized but not rigid, and she was always concerned about what we were interested in seeing rather than what was scheduled. She found out there was an outdoor performance of "Fiddler on the Roof" and took those of us who wanted to see it.

In addition to being very knowledgeable about English history, she has a talent for dealing with a diverse group of people. I had not realized the significance of your company name until we were on the tour. It was wonderful to be on small roads and pass through beautiful English villages.

Every so often we would get a glimpse of a large motorway, and I was really grateful that I was in a van with a few other people rather than on a large, impersonal tour using major highways. It really was a memorable experience.' - Susan Scrivner, Aug 2004

TENTATIVE ITINERARY

NIGHTSTOP

DAY ONE

RHS Wisley/ Polesden Lacy/ Clandon Park or Nymans

We start our tour discovering these magnificent gardens the Royal Society Gardens at Wisley. Here you can not only enjoy a garden with something for everyone but a well-stocked bookshop means you have no excuse for not taking home a few ideas for remodelling your own backyard!

Polesden Lacey represents the Regency period (1820s) in our historical panorama. Sumptuous? Certainly sumptuous enough to have attracted King George VI and wife Elizabeth (our beloved and much missed Queen Mother) to spend part of their honeymoon here. In addition to the magnificent interior, there's the lovely walled rose garden to walk through.

We've a choice of either Clandon Park or neighbouring Hatchlands Park to visit next (dependent on time) and you'll have an opportunity of deciding which depending on tour participants' interests. The former is a Palladian pile, acclaimed for its collection of porcelain and tapestries. The latter boasts wonderful Robert Adam interiors and the Cobbe collection of historic keyboard instruments including those owned and played by Bach, Mahler and Chopin.

Our alternative garden is Nymans. Tour participants can decide on the day. After all, it's your tour! Kent

DAY TWO

Chartwell / Knole / Scotney Castle & Quebec House

Does Winston Churchill home of Chartwell require an introduction? What makes it such a memorable visit is not only the view from the garden (that inspired his painting) but the fact that the interior is almost as he left it. You can almost smell the cigars!

Scotney Castle has been termed England's most romantic garden with Victorian terraces covered in a riot of coloured shrubs overlooking a 14th century moated castle.

Then to Knole. This is one of England great 'treasure houses'. Home of the Lords Sackville since 1603, the property has much to offer including Royal Stuart furnishings and a fine art collection of English masters. Knole was the birthplace of Vita Sackville-West (whose own garden creation we'll see tomorrow) and was used by Virginia Woolfe as the setting for her novel 'Orlando'. A visit here is like stepping back in time. Kent

DAY THREE

Ingham Mote / Penhurst Place / Hever Castle

Penhurst Place is another of our finest family-owned stately homes with a history stretching back six and a half centuries. Perhaps its most memorable feature is the 60-foot high, chestnut-beamed mediaeval hall. It doesn't take much imagination to see the feast of old being enjoyed here! In addition to the fine 'objects d'art', furnishings and paintings displayed inside, Penhurst has a lovely garden, uniquely divided into 'rooms' by yew hedges.

Then to Ingham Mote, deservedly one of the most popular small gardens in the region.

Hever Castle is the jewel we leave to climax our day. Hever is many people's idea of what a 'real' castle should look like, from its gateway and courtyard to its surrounding moat. It is the most fairy-tale like. Though dating back to 1270, and being the family home of one of Henry VIII's ill-fated wives (Anne Boleyn), it also has a relatively contemporary feel provided by the Astors who took over and restored the castle in the early part of last century.

With a 30-acre garden including a unique Italian garden filled with roses and statues, there's plenty to admire here. Kent



DAY FOUR

Sissinghurst/ Bodiam Castle /Battle Abbey/ Kipling's Batemans

We travel the short distance to the fabulous Sissinghurst Castle. Vita Sackville-West's world famous garden requires no introduction to garden enthusiasts. You'll have plenty of time to explore this intimate and intricate garden and to visit those parts of her home open to the public.

We've an opportunity of a slight change of pace and period for today's final visits. You'll have the choice of seeing the magnificently preserved 15th century Bodiam Castle and the historic Abbey connected with the famed 1066 Battle of Hastings. Our final visit of the tour will be to Rudyard Kipling's house, Batemans, where this incredible author penned many of his most memorable poems and stories such as the 'Jungle Book' and 'Pook of Pook's Hill'.

Our tour returns to London at approximately 6pm.