



## Great Estates & Gardens of England Plus! The Chelsea Flower Show!

May 14 -23, 2026



Bring a sun hat (and maybe your wellies) for a vibrant garden adventure with Joseph Abken, director of the **Bellevue Botanical Garden Society**, and expert English horticulturists to experience the ultimate garden lover's adventure to the famous **Chelsea Flower Show** with Earthbound Expeditions! In addition to the legendary Chelsea Flower Show, you'll visit Royal Tunbridge Wells in the south of England, historic Oxford and the picturesque Cotswolds. Your garden adventure begins with four leisurely days discovering the historic city of Oxford, its famous university and the charming villages and gardens of the Cotswolds. Enjoy insider access to many of England's most famous gardens, make visits to multiple private gardens and stroll the grounds of Blenheim Palace: birthplace and former home of Winston Churchill. In Kent County, you'll discover the lush, historic gardens of Sissinghurst and Great Dixter and visit the childhood home of Anne Boleyn, wife of Henry VIII. *Space is limited.*

### **TRIP AT A GLANCE**

4 Nights Oxford, England's oldest university town  
3 Nights Royal Tunbridge Wells, Kent  
2 Nights London







## GARDEN HIGHLIGHTS

Tickets to the Chelsea Flower Show ♦ Insider access to private gardens ♦ The charming Cotswolds ♦ Churchill's Chartwell House and Gardens ♦ Great Dixter Gardens ♦ Sissinghurst Gardens ♦ Pashley Manor ♦ Blenheim Palace, birthplace and former home of Winston Churchill ♦ Oxford Botanical Gardens ♦ Hidcote Manor Garden ♦ Kiftsgate Gardens ♦ The charming English countryside ♦ Hever Castle, for home of Anne Boleyn ♦ A wonderful group of like-minded garden and history lovers!

## IT'S INCLUDED!

- Hosted by Joseph Abken and Katherine Wankelman Bellevue Botanical Garden Society
- With English garden experts and guides
- Fully guided by an expert Earthbound Expeditions program manager
- Nine nights of four-star hotel accommodation
- All breakfasts plus ten additional multi-course meals
- Transport by private air-conditioned motor coach
- Admission and activities as listed in your custom garden itinerary
- Guided tours (where available) of all gardens by head gardener, gardener, or owner
- Gratuities for your driver and guide

## TRIP FACTS

10 Days/9 Nights (*land*)

\$6,895 per person, double occupancy

\$1,950 single supplement (*waived if you are willing to share & a roommate is found*)

The tour begins in Oxford on May 14, 2026 at 6:00 pm

Tour ends in London on May 23, 2026



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EXPEDITIONS**

Earthbound Expeditions Inc.

P.O. Box 11305, Bainbridge Island, WA 98110 USA

Tel: 206.842.9775

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## *Your Custom Garden Adventure Begins!*

B = Breakfast / L = Lunch / D= Dinner

### **DAY 0: Depart the USA for England**

Remember, you'll need to depart the US no later than today. If you have the time, you may wish to arrive a few days early and catch a play at Shakespeare's Globe Theatre or visit London's great museums before meeting the group in Oxford.

**Travel advice:** *We highly recommend booking flights in/out of Heathrow airport. It is much closer to both London and Oxford than Gatwick airport.*

### **DAY 1: Thursday, May 14 - Your Custom Garden Journey Begins in Oxford!**

Welcome to the United Kingdom! Transfer by train, taxi or airport shuttle to your centrally located, four-star hotel in the heart of Oxford. Take time to relax and freshen up before meeting your guide, fellow travelers and hosts, Joseph Abken and Katherine Wankelman of the Bellevue Botanical Garden Society, for an evening outing to a local pub for a welcome dinner. *Sleep in Oxford (D)*

### **DAY 2: Friday, May 15 - Discover Oxford**

This morning, we enjoy a student-led tour of the historic campus of The University of Oxford, or simply "Oxford." It has no known date of foundation, but there is evidence of teaching here as far back as 1096, making it the oldest university in the English-speaking world and the world's second oldest university in continuous operation. It grew rapidly from 1167 when Henry II banned English students from attending the University of Paris. After disputes between students and Oxford townsfolk in 1209, some academics fled northeast to Cambridge where they established the University of Cambridge. The two "ancient universities" are frequently jointly referred to as "Oxbridge." Lovers of literature will enjoy seeing the colleges and pubs frequented by C.S. Lewis, JRR Tolkien and Lewis Carroll.



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*“Remember gentlemen, it's not just France we are fighting for, it's  
Champagne!”*

Sir Winston Churchill

Our tour also includes the **University of Oxford Botanic Garden**. Founded in 1621 with a mission to promote learning and glorify nature, many people and plants have been involved in the history of the garden. The educational and conservational missions are continued to this day. You can visit the herbaceous borders, glasshouses or simply relax in the oldest botanic garden in Britain. *Sleep in Oxford (B, L)*



**DAY 3: Saturday, May 16 - Sir Winston Churchill:**

**Blenheim Palace:** This morning we set out to discover Sir Winston Churchill's life at **Blenheim Palace**. We'll explore the newly reinvigorated, permanent Churchill exhibition, visit the Memorial Garden and walk in Churchill's Footsteps.

Blenheim is the English landscape garden at its most monumental, an appropriate setting for the magnificent palace. The grounds were originally designed in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century, then later renovated by famed English landscape architect Lancelot Brown, better known as “Capability Brown,” who swept away all traces of the earlier formality, replacing it with his signature landscape park. He also installed the lake and cascade.

In the afternoon, we continue on to **Rousham Gardens**. Rousham provides a complete contrast in scale and atmosphere, and is disarmingly uncommercial. The garden was designed by William Kent in 1738 for Sir Robert Dormer, and since that time it has remained miraculously unaltered and in the same family. We'll return to Oxford in the late afternoon. *Sleep in Oxford (B, L)*



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*“It is a golden maxim to cultivate the garden for the nose,  
and the eyes will take care of themselves.”*

Robert Louis Stevenson

**DAY 4: Sunday, May 17 - The Cotswolds, Hidcote, and Kiftsgate Gardens**

Today, we'll discover two of the most beautiful gardens in the Cotswolds: **Hidcote Manor and Gardens** and the **gardens of Kiftsgate**.

Hidcote Manor and Gardens is one of the most influential and famous of all English gardens. Hidcote was created in the 1930s by an American, Lawrence Johnston. Johnston employed his skills as a designer and a horticulturalist to make a superbly dramatic garden of outdoor rooms, each with a theme or particular season of interest. The garden is packed with wonderful plantings and visual surprises.

You'll have free time to explore the gardens and enjoy an independent lunch before heading to Kiftsgate. Heather Muir created the garden at Kiftsgate, which up until 1920 had consisted of a paved formal garden in front of the portico, with fields and wooded banks beyond. Muir was helped and inspired by her lifelong friend Lawrence Johnston of Hidcote Manor. She decided that the garden would develop organically, rather than planning everything on paper. This has given the garden a distinctly feminine feel, almost in direct contrast to the more masculine lines being employed by Johnston at Hidcote. Her gentle touch is being continued by her granddaughter Anne Chambers, the present owner.

We make our way back to Oxford via the beautiful town of Chipping Campden in the Cotswolds. Campden is one of the most charming destinations in the UK. Enjoy a bit of time here before arriving back in Oxford. *Sleep in Oxford (B, D)*



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### **DAY 5: Monday, May 18 - RHS Garden Wisley and Hever Castle**

Our journey today continues as we depart Oxford for Royal Tunbridge Wells. En route, we'll visit the oldest and most horticulturally diverse **RHS Garden, Wisley**. The Royal Horticultural Society was given Wisley in 1903. From the start, the garden acquired a reputation for its collections of lilies, gentians, Japanese irises, primulas, and water plants.

After lunch, we are off to **Hever Castle**. Spanning more than 600 years, the history of Hever Castle is rich and varied. The castle was to become the childhood home of Anne Boleyn, King Henry VIII's second wife, who became Queen of England for just 1,000 days. Arrive at Royal Tunbridge Wells in the late evening. Dinner included upon arrival. *Sleep in Royal Tunbridge (B, L, D)*

### **DAY 6: Tuesday, May 19 - Gravetye Manor Gardens, Penshurst Place and Gardens**

The gardens at **Gravetye Manor** are a very special place and can be considered amongst the most influential in English gardening history. The manor became the home of the creative, innovative, and revolutionary gardener, William Robinson in 1884. Robinson spent his remarkable life as a professional gardener and botanist but made his fortune through writing about his experiences and ideas. His most notable works include *The English Flower Garden*, which is one of the best-selling horticultural books of all time, and the hugely influential title, *The Wild Garden*. Now under the guidance of Head Gardener Tom Coward, who worked for three years alongside Fergus Garrett at Great Dixter, the garden is undergoing a major restoration project in homage to Robinson's experimental style of garden. Enjoy a special lunch here before returning to Royal Tunbridge.

Next, we are off to **Penshurst Place and Gardens!** The awe-inspiring medieval Baron's Hall was completed in 1341 as a country retreat for the Lord Mayor of London. The Baron's Hall, crowned by an original 60' high chestnut beamed ceiling is an unmissable sight for visitors to the ancestral home of the Sidney family who have taken care of the estate since 1552. Explore this grand estate and the site's lovely gardens before heading back to Royal Tunbridge. *Sleep in Royal Tunbridge Wells (B, L)*



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“To plant a garden is to dream of tomorrow.”

### **DAY 7: Wednesday, May 20 - Great Dixter & Sissinghurst Gardens**

Today is a day of magnificent gardens. The Lloyd family developed Great Dixter early in the 20th century from an original design by Sir Edwin Lutyens. Today it is more famous for the plantings established by Christopher Lloyd documented in his many classic gardening books. The residence comprises a mid-15th-century hall house, typical of the Weald of Kent, to the south side of which a second, early 16th-century yeoman's house was grafted. Lutyens enjoyed using local materials and retained farm buildings like oast houses, cowsheds, barns and outbuildings. Around these he designed his garden, featuring a sunken garden, topiary and yew hedges. Christopher Lloyd managed Great Dixter from the 1950s and was noted for his innovative approach and introduction of concepts like the mixed border and meadow garden, and his replacement of the rose garden with schemes using less fashionable plants like cannas and dahlias. We will investigate his full range of planting schemes.

We next drive to Sissinghurst Castle Garden, one of England's greatest garden delights. Sissinghurst was the garden of poet and writer Vita Sackville-West and her husband Harold Nicolson, journalist, MP and diplomat, and is possibly the most influential of all 20<sup>th</sup> century gardens. Built around the remnants of an Elizabethan castle, of which the tower remains a central garden feature, the garden is divided into distinct spaces where a formality established by Nicolson is clothed by a romantic planting style pursued by Sackville-West. The garden retains its original charm and romance with such delights as its parterre, white garden, cottage garden, nut walk and orchard. We shall explore Sissinghurst's many hidden corners, sumptuous planting combinations and the view from the top of the tower, always a good starting point for those who wish to understand the garden's layout. *Sleep in Royal Tunbridge Wells (B, L, D)*



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### **DAY 8: Thursday, May 21 - Chartwell Manor House: Home to Winston Churchill**

Our journey today continues as we depart Royal Tunbridge Wells for London. En route, we'll stop at Chartwell House and Gardens.

Chartwell was Churchill's much beloved home in Kent and is now a preserved property by the National Trust. It is consistently one of their most visited sites. The house was purchased by Winston Churchill in 1922 and he used it as his main base during the '20s and '30s for writing, painting and entertaining. Enjoy the time to stroll through Winston's Rose and Walled gardens and explore the home which is filled with treasures, gifts and personal belongings.

In the afternoon, we'll make our way to our charming, central London hotel. Tonight, we'll have dinner together out on the town. *Sleep in London (B, L, D)*

### **DAY 9: Friday, May 22 - The Chelsea Flower Show**

The **Chelsea Flower Show** is the gardening Mecca of Europe, where some of the greatest exponents of the art exhibit imaginative garden designs over an 11-acre site at the Royal Hospital in Chelsea. They create a wonderland for the public to explore, as the tranquil canvas of the hospital's lawns comes alive with a riot of color and form. Since its inception in 1913, the Chelsea Flower show has been at the forefront of horticultural development. Dozens of model gardens have always formed the prime attraction, reflecting the changing enthusiasm of designers. From the Japanese and topiary styles of the early days, to a major emphasis on rock gardens during the war years, to the paved backyards, cottage and wildflower gardens of the present day, the show continues a long tradition of pushing boundaries. You'll have plenty of time to wander at the show today.

Enjoy a farewell feast with your guide and travel companions today and toast to a wonderful adventure! *Sleep in London (B, D)*



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**DAY 10: Saturday, May 23 - Your Custom Garden Journey Concludes**

Your garden journey concludes this morning after breakfast. London is well connected by train, taxi and subway (tube) to Heathrow Airport. There are endless wonderful things to see in London, so consider staying on a few days if you have the time. Return home with a lifetime of happy memories of your garden adventure! (B)

*-Itinerary Subject to Change -*



*Reservations & Questions*

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## Meet Your Hosts!



Joseph Abken is a seasoned horticultural leader and garden advocate based in the Pacific Northwest. He currently serves as the Director of the Bellevue Botanical Garden Society, where he oversees programming, membership, and development for the garden's public engagement and educational initiatives. Prior to his role with the Bellevue Botanical Garden Society, he was the Executive Director of the Kruckeberg Botanic Garden in Shoreline, Washington, for over five years. During his tenure, he emphasized stewardship and daily engagement with the garden's ecosystem, fostering a deep connection with the natural

environment.

He is also an avid garden photographer, capturing the seasonal beauty of gardens and sharing his work through various platforms, including Instagram.

Through his leadership and personal engagement, Joseph Abken continues to contribute significantly to the horticultural community in the Pacific Northwest, promoting the appreciation and stewardship of botanical gardens.



Originally from Fort Collins, Colorado, and now based in Seattle, Katherine Wankelman is excited for this adventure! A graduate of Saint Mary's College in South Bend, Indiana, Katherine currently serves as the Membership and Donor Development Associate with the Bellevue Botanical Garden Society. Katherine's background is in nonprofit development and social work.

Katherine enjoys running, knitting (she's usually working on a new sweater), and discovering new hikes. She's thrilled to be one of your hosts on this journey and can't wait to share in the beauty, history,

and inspiration these gardens have to offer.

## Reservations & Questions

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# *Know Before You Go!*

**Reservations and Deposits:** A \$1,000 per person deposit is needed to confirm your space on this journey. You can make a credit card deposit online or by phone. Deposits are refundable, minus a \$250 per person cancellation fee, for 60 days from the processing date or 90 days prior to departure, whichever comes first. Deposits made 90 days prior to a trip departing are not refundable. Final payment is also non-refundable, which is why we strongly urge guests to purchase travel insurance.

**Not Included:** International airline tickets, alcoholic beverages, room service and gratuities for hotel staff, travel insurance, meals not listed in brochure, and any activities or items not listed in your itinerary.

**Physical Requirements:** It is the responsibility of each guest to be aware of their physical abilities or limitations and to be in sufficient good health to undertake the trip. [Click here](#) to read “Is an Earthbound trip right for you?” or call the Earthbound office for more details.

**Travel Insurance:** Earthbound Expeditions strongly encourages the purchase of travel insurance coverage. We include information on trip insurance in your deposit information.

**Events and Hosted Journeys:** If a planned event is cancelled for any reason, another event will be included in its place. This is not cause for refund. Events are subject to change. Also, if a host or special guest is unable to attend as planned, Earthbound Expeditions will do its utmost to find another host who has similar interests, talents, and expertise. The inability of a host to participate in a tour is not grounds for a full or partial refund.

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