

Escape



Green days: (clockwise from main) Lost Gardens of Heligan; tea at Tregothnan; Tremenheere Sculpture Gardens; Eden Project

What's the attraction?

Cornwall's almost frost-free climate means that the county grows the UK's most exciting collection of plants from around the world, and the garden season extends well into the autumn. With the crowds out of the way, September is a great time to have them all to yourself. For more options see nationaltrust.org.uk, gardensofcornwall.com, or visitcornwall.com.

Small and special

Plenty of private houses in Cornwall open their gardens to visitors, and there's often something particularly specialist and eccentric about them. Bosvigo (01872 275774; bosvigo.com; admission £5) near Truro, is one of them: an English-style garden with herbaceous borders and a series of dazzling colour-themed garden "rooms" around a Georgian house. Open Wednesday to Friday until the end of September. Or, try Marsh Villa (01726 815920; marshvillagardens.co.uk; admission £4) near St Austell, with three acres of water and woodland gardens created on the former tidal creek where Daphne Du Maurier set *The House on the Strand*. Open Sunday to Wednesday until October.

Green giants

Cornwall's gardens come in all shapes and sizes, the biggest being Tregothnan (01872 520000; tregothnan.co.uk) near Truro. Run by the descendants of Earl Grey, it's the only place that grows tea in England. It is usually closed to the public except for a special charity weekend (20-21 April, 2013). However, individually booked private tours of its botanical gardens and working tea plantation are available from £25. Book through tregothnanshop.co.uk.

The huge and mysterious Lost Gardens of Heligan (01726 845100; heligan.com; £10) in Pentewan near St Austell are another world to lose yourself in. Their redevelopment, after falling into disrepair after the First World War, reinvigorated the Cornish garden scene and has made them one of the country's key botanical gardens. Open all year.

Who said that?

"We are not here simply to provide a historical perspective but to look backwards and forwards at the same time: both backwards to where our gardens and food came from and forwards to those issues that confront us now." - **Tim Smit**, on *The Lost Gardens of Heligan*

"More than in gardened Surrey, nature spills/A wealth of heather, kidney-vetch and squills/Over these long-defended Cornish hills." - **John Betjeman**, 'Cornish Cliffs'

"...Nothing that we had as children made as much difference, was quite so important to us, as our summer in Cornwall..." - **Virginia Woolf**, 'A Sketch of the Past'

GO WEST for great greenery

The summer crowds have gone, which means Cornish gardens are at their tranquil best. **Laura Dixon** steps outside



ROOMS WITH A GARDEN VIEW

For a chance to have the gardens all to yourself long after the last visitors have gone home, there are some special places to stay in the larger estates.

Trelowarren (01326 221224; trelowarren.com) on the Lizard Peninsula has 18 luxury estate cottages and converted barns as well as 1,000 acres to explore. Prices start at £195 for a midweek three-night break, self-catering in a two-bedroom cottage. The estate's gardens are lush and extensive plus you're close to Glendurgan and Trebah.

Near Bodmin Moor, Lanhydrock Estate's farm cottages (07737 034 522; lanhydrockfarmcottages.co.uk) sleep two-six and most have a private hot tub and/or sauna. They start from £250 per week, self-catering (sleeping four) and offer unparalleled access to the Lanhydrock Estate gardens, run by the National Trust, complete with topiary courtyard.

Hidden Valley Gardens (01208 873225; hiddenvalleygardens.co.uk) near Fowey have stashed two self-catering apartments in their four-acre gardens. Prices start at £145 for a long weekend, for two guests.

The most romantic place to stay in Cornwall's gardens is the Water Tower at Trellissick Gardens (0844 800 2070; nationaltrustcottages.co.uk), which looks like Rapunzel's tower and is surrounded by a private garden. From £257 for two nights self-catering, sleeping two, with free entry to Trellissick and Glendurgan gardens.



Insider information

"Caerhay Castle (01872 501310; caerhays.co.uk; entry £7.50; open Feb-June) is a secret gem - up behind it, there is the national camellia collection. The privately owned estates like Pencarrow, near Bodmin, aren't pristine like National Trust estates and are great for getting lost in."

Gary Long, Head Gardener at Trewithen (01726 883 647; trewithengardens.co.uk; admission £7.50. Open Mon-Sat March-September)



Best for families

Any family that has been to Cornwall for a holiday will know about the Eden Project (01726 811911; edenproject.com; online tickets from £19.95 per adult; children £8.05) in Bodelva, near St Austell. Family comes first here, with an indoor rainforest and plenty of ideas to turn children's fingers green, including a new zip line, storytelling, seed planting and festivals. Perfect for a rainy day - and it's open every day.

Glendurgan (01326 252020; nationaltrust.org.uk; admission £6.80) at Mawnan Smith, Falmouth, is another family-friendly garden. Its grand cherry laurel maze can keep the kids occupied for ages, before heading down to Durgan beach via giant rhubarb plants, tulip trees and a wildlife pond. Open Tues-Sat.

The secret one

Hidden Valley Garden (01208 873225; hiddenvalleygardens.co.uk; admission £3.50) at Treemill near Par, is a four-acre plantation in a quiet valley. This little paradise has been voted one of the best gardens in Cornwall by Visit Cornwall for the past two years and has great diversity, including a dedicated iris garden and Japanese area. There is also a nursery selling plants propagated from the garden onsite. It's only a short hop from the Eden Project and Heligan if you wanted to combine micro-scale tropical planting with its larger cousins. Open Thursday to Monday.



New this year

The newest garden to join the Cornish ranks is Tremenheere Sculpture Gardens (07974 996089; tremenheere.co.uk; admission £6.50) in Gulval, near Penzance, an ambitious and large valley garden with sub-tropical plants and views of St Michael's Mount that opened this summer. The art, from the likes of David Nash and James Turrell as well as Japanese artist Kishio Sugar, blends well with the dramatic environment and includes a Victorian underground water storage tank transformed into a projection space showing images of the natural world. Open daily until December.

By the sea

Plenty of Cornwall's gardens have sea views and shore access. Chyurno (01736 732153; admission £5) near Penzance overlooks Lamorna Cove, with a tiered waterside garden. Walk past Canary Island foxgloves and silver ferns to find a cream tea at the cove. Open Wednesday and Thursday afternoons only by arrangement. Down the road in Mawnan Smith, Trebah gardens (01326 252200; trebahgarden.co.uk; admission £8.50) has a bamboo maze as well as cascades and a South American plant collection, as well as a private beach, Polgwidden Cove.