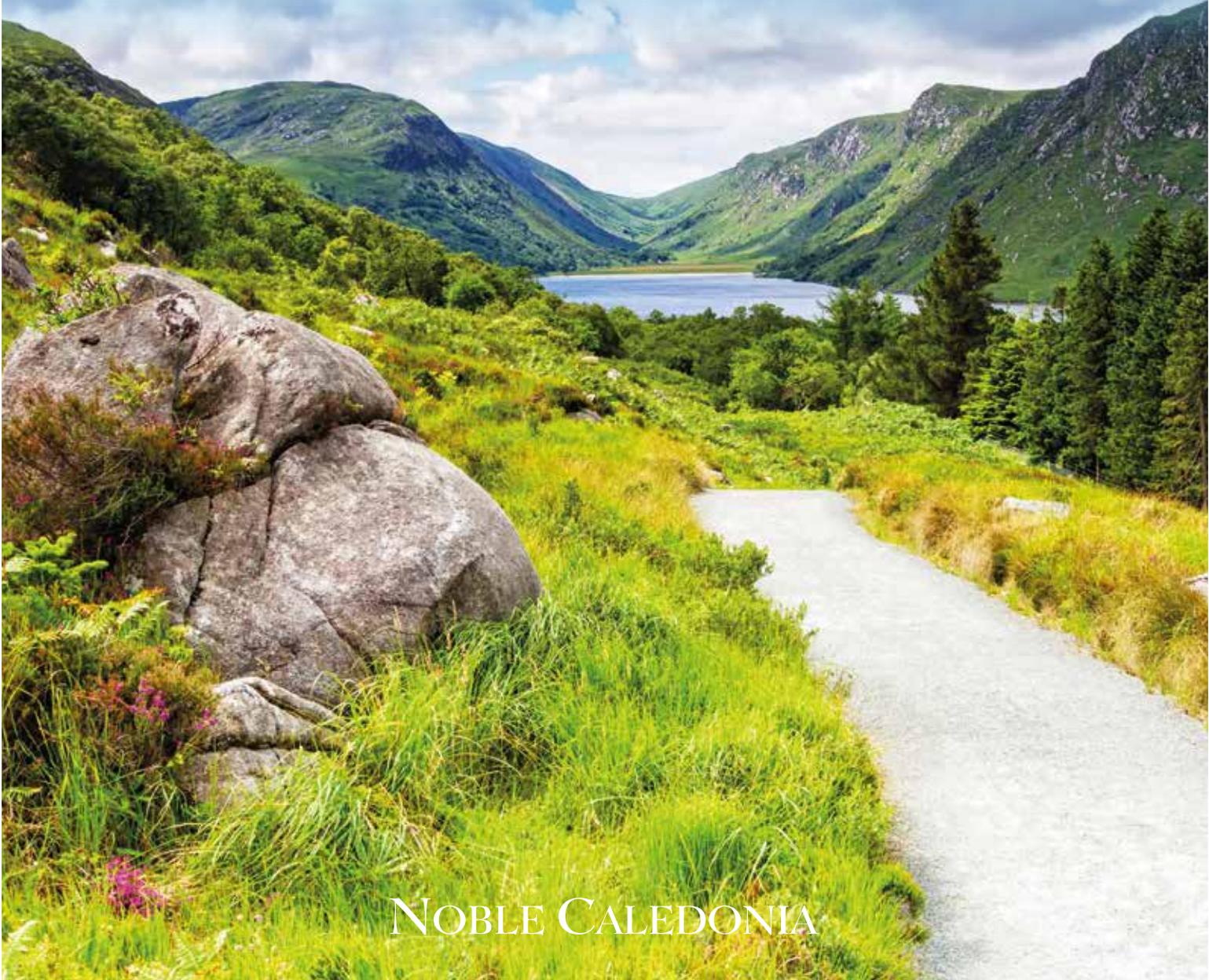


# THE LANDSCAPES & GARDENS OF DONEGAL

A six day exploration of North West Ireland  
with Gareth Austin & Chantal Cookson

11<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> June 2023

NOBLE CALEDONIA





Rugged Coastline of the dramatic 'Wild Atlantic Way'

## An Introduction by Andrew Cochrane, Noble Caledonia Founder & Director



“ Ireland has a special place in my heart and for the past 40 years I have been exploring its length and breadth, but only recently have my travels taken me to the far north western corner to County Donegal. It is about as far as it is possible to travel from our home in Ireland's South East. It's an omission that has been corrected by two recent visits and not a little sadness that it took me so long to discover this mesmerising corner of Ireland. Constantly changing light, an extraordinarily beautiful coastline, mountain streams and, for me best of all, some spectacularly sited and idiosyncratic gardens. Remote and unspoiled, it's a land of myths and legends, famous for its writers and musicians. The much heralded 'Wild Atlantic Way' begins here as it navigates around rugged mountain-backed peninsulas and for many, the stunning scenery, unquestionably Ireland's finest, is reason enough to visit Donegal.

If you enjoy exploring gardens, Donegal will not disappoint. Our tour includes some of the best; an intriguing mix of historic, baronial to small and often eccentric but all blending into a sublime landscape. It will be a journey of headlands, promontories and towering sea-cliff peninsulas and across glens, rivers and lush green hills often instilling a sense of other-worldliness. For all this, remote Donegal has yet to be inundated by tourism, fortunately it does not fit easily into the standard requirements of large tour organisers and that is why for me it is so very special.

For our base we have chosen the delightful Rathmullan House which captures the spirit of Donegal. Sitting on the shore of Lough Swilly, it has the best of both worlds, lovely gardens and a long sandy beach, perfect for an after-dinner stroll. We have taken all of the hotel's 30 rooms for the duration of our tour and each one offers great style and comfort with a unique feel that only a privately owned and run hotel can successfully manage. ”



Japanese anemones in Salthill Gardens



Lough Eske



The walled garden at Glenveagh Castle

## YOUR HOSTS

### Gareth Austin – Guest Speaker



Gareth is a passionate plantsman and lecturer based in Donegal. He is a graduate of the SRUC and the University of Glasgow where he studied Horticulture and Organic Agriculture. Gareth can be heard weekly on BBC Northern Ireland where he has been a resident 'Voice of Gardening' for nearly 10 years. Gareth spends most of his time lecturing in Horticulture in regional colleges and is an expert on Ulster Scots walled gardens and grounds. Originally from Edinburgh, Gareth has a particular interest in the gardens of William & Robert Adams and has travelled extensively throughout Ireland and Scotland visiting countless gardens and parks. In addition to all the above, Gareth runs an Organic Bio-intensive Market Garden and is the largest grower in the area of MicroGreens.

### Chantal Cookson – Tour Leader



Chantal was born in Suffolk very near the sea and now lives in Northumberland where her husband farms. Chantal has been associated with Noble Caledonia since the company was founded in 1991 and has led tours, be it cruising or land, all

over the world. Chantal's initial experience of cruising in British waters was in 1991 when Noble Caledonia undertook its first cruise around the British Isles, which was a groundbreaking voyage and led to a very successful and popular concept. Though her main job for over 25 years was working for Sotheby's, she is now a Travel and Fine Art Consultant intertwining in her busy life still working periodically as part of the Noble Caledonia field staff team. Chantal is a Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society

## The Itinerary

### Day 1 London to Belfast, Northern Ireland.

Fly by scheduled flight. On arrival transfer to Rathmullan in County Donegal where we check in to Rathmullan House for our five night stay. Meet this evening for drinks and a welcome dinner.

**Day 2 Cluain na dTor & Glenveagh.** After a leisurely breakfast, drive across the county to the sub-tropical garden of Cluain na dTor. Over 20 years in the making, this inspirational and boldly experimental garden is a great example of how tropical and precious plants can adapt to such northerly climes. Surrounded by wildflower



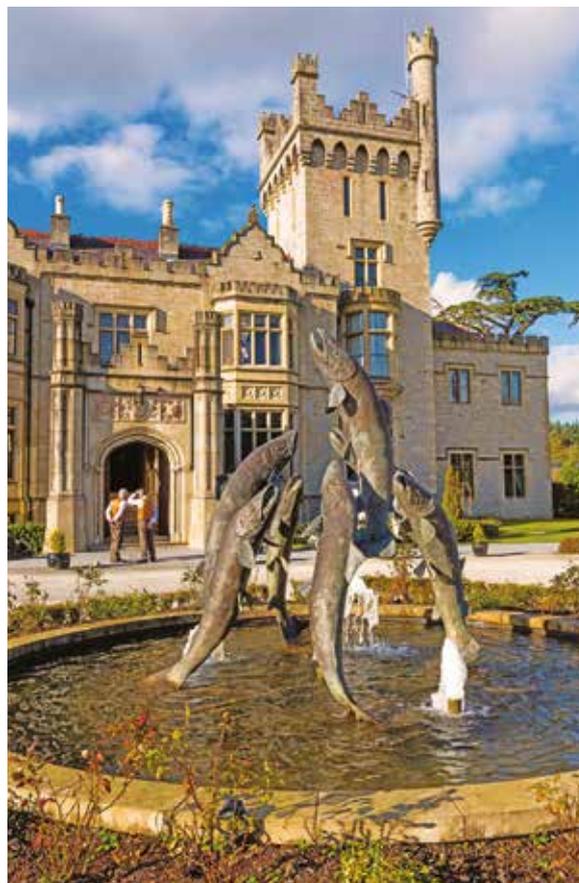
Fanad Lighthouse and the dramatic Fanad Peninsula



The beach at Rathmullan House and Lough Swilly



The Temple Garden, Greenfort



Lough Eske Castle

meadows, the garden also specialises in plants tolerant of seaside conditions. Later, drive to nearby Glenveagh Castle Gardens, surely the greatest garden of the county. After lunch we will explore the magical woodland gardens set in the starkly dramatic shadows of the Kinnaveagh, Dooish and Staghall Mountains. The original Victorian garden was first laid out in 1885 and then extensively developed in the 50s, 60s and 70s. The walled garden is a stunning affair as is the Tuscan garden, Italian terrace and the famous 67 steps. Before leaving we will enjoy a guided tour of the castle, idyllically positioned above the peaty waters of Lough Veagh and enjoy some tea in this sublime setting. Return to Rathmullan House in the late afternoon.

**Day 3 Salthill & Lough Eske.** This morning we drive south heading for Mount Charles and the charming Salthill Gardens. Located some 200 yards from the sea, this old walled garden has been gradually transformed by Elizabeth Temple into something very special. Independent of trends this delightful half hectare enclosure offers a feeling of privacy and mystery that is particular to old walled gardens. A short drive takes us to the shores of lovely Lough Eske where we visit Lough Eske Castle, an imposing Georgian House which is now a hotel, for lunch and time to explore the surrounding grounds and gardens. For those who would like to walk off lunch, there is a two kilometre Ard na Mona Woods walk which skirts the lough, taking in the Fairy Glen, giant redwoods and Castle O'Donnell, a Medieval tower house from where the 'Flight of the Earls' began in 1607 signalling the end of Gaelic rule in Ireland. Return to Rathmullan House for dinner.

**Day 4 St Columbs.** Today will be taken at a slower pace allowing for a morning at leisure at Rathmullan. Perhaps walk through the woods to the beach and later join the head gardener of Rathmullan House for a guided tour of the gardens. After a light lunch we will head for St Columbs House and garden. The Regency House and grounds were planted by the late Derek Hill and are a haven of artistic beauty. Here the house and garden merge, one being as important as the other. The extensive gardens with a collection of unusual trees and shrubs lead down to beautiful Lough Gartan and centre stage is the house. Echoes of Derek Hill abound, as the house is much as he left it with William Morris textiles, Islamic, Italian and Japanese art as well as more than 300 works by leading 20th century artists. Enjoy dinner at Rathmullan House followed by an evening at leisure.

**Day 5 Carrablagh & Greenfort.** Today features two lovely gardens and some of Donegal's most dramatic coastal scenery. Carrablagh is an outstanding example of a well-established mid-19th century country garden and is nestled in the eastern cliffs of the Fanad Peninsula where Lough Swilly meets the Atlantic. This is the most intimate, classic Irish Robinsonian garden and has a magical atmosphere, sheltering its botanical treasures in a series of pockets through the woods. After lunch we continue to explore the Fanad Peninsula calling into Greenfort, a historic garden with attractive walks and outstanding views over Lough Swilly and Inishowen. The day will also include some of Ireland's most spectacular coastal scenery and the dramatically sited Fanad Lighthouse. This evening we will enjoy a farewell dinner at Rathmullan House with some traditional Donegal music.

**Day 6 Belfast to London.** Check out after breakfast and return to Belfast Airport for your return scheduled flight.



Red Dahlia 'Firebird' in the garden of Glenveagh Castle

## PRICES PER PERSON

Based on double occupancy

Category	
Standard Double/Twin - Main House	£2295
Superior Double/Twin - Main House	£2495
Superior Double/Twin - Regency House	£2495
Single - Main House	£2295
Standard Sole Use - Main House	£2695

**PRICE INCLUDES:** Economy class scheduled air travel • Five nights hotel accommodation at Rathmullan House on a breakfast and dinner basis • Wine with dinner • Excursions as described including entrance fees • Lunch on days 2 to 5 • Afternoon tea on days 2 & 3 • Tour Leader • Guest Speaker.  
**Not Included:** Travel insurance.

**Flight Information:** Please note that our group flight is from London but it is possible to book independent flights from a number of regional airports that arrive in time to meet the group transfer. If you would prefer to travel from a regional airport, please speak to our reservations team for further information.



Exterior of Rathmullan House

## RATHMULLAN HOUSE

Rathmullan House captures the spirit of Donegal. Built as a grand Georgian holiday home it became a hotel in 1962 and is now run by Mark and Mary, the second generation of the Wheeler family. Sitting on the shore of Lough Swilly it has the best of both worlds, lovely gardens and a long sandy beach, perfect for an after-dinner stroll. For the duration of our tour we have taken all of the hotel's 30 rooms. You have the choice of staying in the main house or the Regency style wing. All offer great style and comfort, each having a unique feel that only a privately owned and run hotel can successfully manage.

The public rooms are a delight, ornate doorways, ceilings, marble fireplaces and period furniture exuding a peaceful Irish country house charm. And, then there is the food. Guests return year after year because of the excellent dining. Dinner is served in an elegant room with a tented ceiling studded with twinkling lights.

### Your Room

#### Standard Rooms

Each of the standard rooms radiates character and has its own distinctive décor. Hand picked antiques accumulated by the house over the past 250 years add a sense of the history of the house to each bedroom. Rooms vary in size with some being particularly spacious while others have scintillating views of the lough or gardens. Bathrooms have a bath or shower and an excellent night's sleep is a certainty in the luxurious double or twin beds.

#### Superior Rooms

With beguiling views of Lough Swilly or the gardens which change in appearance by the season, each of the superior rooms is spacious and luxurious in equal measure. In the new section of the house, the Main House, the rooms have a contemporary feel with balcony or patio and some even with their own electric fire. In the old section of the house, the Regency House, the grand superior rooms allow you to step back to the early 19th century and admire the original features, traditional décor and landscape around Rathmullan House which has remained much the same for generations.

#### Single Rooms

These rooms are lovingly finished in the atmospheric Georgian house and renowned for their period charm. The single bedrooms offer a small double bed and a private bathroom.



Superior Room



Standard Room



Single Room

## Your Dining

At the hotel's The Cook & Gardener Restaurant, the menu is updated regularly. What you can be sure of is that the seafood will be fresh, the vegetables will be local, and each dish will have that signature touch from the team of chefs. The Cook & Gardener is about more than just the setting, as the name suggests. When you dine here, you will see lamb from Pat Patton in Rathmullan, fish landed in Greencastle and vegetables straight from the walled garden on your menu. The restaurant is proud of its position in the heart of the small community and will continue to work with local suppliers wherever possible.

## Your Space

The main bar at Rathmullan House, Batt's Bar, derives its name from the family that occupied the house for over 100 years. The Batt family are still fondly remembered by many in Rathmullan and their portraits can be seen adorning the walls around the house. While the house has had many alterations, additions and extensions throughout the years, the lounges have remained true to their original design. With four main sitting rooms facing Lough Swilly, you may find yourself enjoying a pre-dinner drink in Batts Bar, admiring the colonial Indian décor in the Raja Room, engrossed in a novel in front of the library fire, or simply enjoying the peace and quiet in the adult only drawing room. The lounges are designed for comfort, ambience and above all relaxation, the only problem being that you may not want to leave.

With the inviting waters of Lough Swilly on the doorstep of Rathmullan House, a dip in the ocean is always an option and one of the most picturesque beaches in Donegal is at the bottom of the front lawn. It is often remarked that the two-mile golden sandy beach would not be out of place in any holiday brochure in the world. However, for guests who may not be quite willing to brave the Donegal elements, the 15-metre indoor swimming pool provides a much gentler opportunity to work on your backstroke. The heated swimming pool is open exclusively to guests at Rathmullan House.



Cook & Gardener Restaurant



Library



Indoor Pool



Drawing Room



Batt's Bar



The Tranquillity Garden



The Front Garden and Lough Swilly

## The Gardens

A stroll around the seven acres of gardens at Rathmullan House will leave you in little doubt as to the level of care and attention that has been put into their upkeep over the past 50 years. From the front door you can decide between a stroll to the bottom of the front lawn, a seat in the tranquillity garden listening to a soothing fountain, or a walk through the Walled Garden admiring the array of seasonal fruits, vegetables and flowers on show. The Georgian Walled Garden forms the centrepiece and has been lovingly restored by Bob Wheeler and his gardening team. As the name of the restaurant, 'The Cook & Gardener' suggests, wherever possible ingredients are used straight from the Walled Garden for the dinner menu. On any given day you are likely to bump into a chef or two in the garden, picking ingredients which you will find on your plate later that evening. At the bottom of the front lawn you will find Batts Walk which will lead you through the woods, along the beach finding all sorts of flora and fauna as you travel. The hotel is situated in an area of extraordinary natural scenery. The hard work that goes into the gardens at Rathmullan House is a testament to the gardening team led by Mr Wheeler and the results are there for all guests to enjoy.



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