

# 10 historic houses and gardens to visit this spring

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With the Easter holidays upon us, we list just a few of the fantastic National Lottery funded historic houses and gardens this country has to offer.

If, like us, you're champing at the bit to make the most of the longer days and milder weather, then pack your picnic, and make your way round some of these beautiful British country houses – and don't forget your wellies!

## Knole

One of England's largest country houses, Knole in Kent has 600 years of fascinating heritage to explore among its vast maze of rooms. A [recently opened conservation studio](#) is allowing even more of the house's extensive collection to be displayed. The grounds are also home to a deer park, which is perfect for walking, cycling and spotting wildlife.

## Rainham Hall

This 18th-century South London house has only been fully open to the public since 2015. Over 50 different families have lived there, leaving a range of different legacies at the site. The building sits next to a three-acre community garden, where 1,000 snowdrops emerge in springtime.

## **Wardown House**

Reopening in April following a transformation made possible by National Lottery players, Wardown House and Gardens in Luton was built in the 1800s as a farmhouse and country residence before being opened to the public in 1904 and finally becoming home to the town's first ever museum. The house and gardens reveal Luton life through the ages, from a dairy and servants quarters to a games room and sixteen bedrooms.

## **Lews Castle/Museum nan Eilean**

Located in Stornoway, in Scotland's remote Outer Hebrides, Lews Castle [recently reopened as a Museum nan Eilean \(or The Islands Museum\)](#) thanks to National Lottery funding, after laying derelict for many years. The sprawling grounds were laid out in the 1850s, but they since gained an adventure playground, a woodland trail and wild flower meadows.

## **Oakham Castle**

Oakham is a shining example of Norman architecture in Britain. As well as exploring impressively preserved historic features, the castle hosts events for all ages, and incorporate costumes, quizzes and trails into the experience. A lovely outdoor setting makes it a great location for a picnic or treasure hunt too.

## **Chedworth Roman Villa**

Discovered by the Victorians over 150 years ago, the Chedworth Roman Villa houses the remains of one of the grandest Roman residences in Britain. Nestled in the tranquil Cotswolds, it's also a great outdoor experience, surrounded by wildlife and a woodland trail overlooking the historic villa.

## **Abbotsford House**

This fairytale castle in the Scottish borders was built by one of Scotland's most famous writers, Sir Walter Scott. It also sits in sprawling formal gardens, which boast beautifully manicured lawns and flowerbeds and even a Georgian glass house.

## **Hardy's Birthplace**

Nestled in the Dorset hills (known as 'Hardy Country'), Thomas Hardy's cottage is a pilgrimage for many poetry lovers. The cottage, built by the writer's grandfather from cob and thatch, saw the writing of many of his early poems, novels and short stories, all of which were inextricably linked to

the countryside of his home.

## **Dyffryn House**

Not only can you walk around the grade II listed Glamorgan mansion, but you can snuggle up and read a book on a sofa, or sit down and play the piano in a reception room. The 55 acres of gardens surrounding the house are a main attraction, with exquisite formal gardens, a glasshouse and even an apiary. It also houses its own unique breed of daffodils.

## **Croome Court**

Croome Court in Worcestershire boasts impressive architecture and history. The house and gardens were designed by the famous British landscape gardener Capability Brown, and thanks to National Lottery players, the National Trust have been able to open up the wide gardens, mansion and visitor centre to the public.