

# Wisley – A great day out!

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Roger Wheeler visits one of Englands finest horticultural attractions.



**It's a new year, no one has any money and its mid-winter,** but we still need an occasional break. Some years ago we got an allotment, there's a lot to discover about growing veg so, hoping to learn something we joined *The Royal Horticultural Society*. Included in the membership is free entry to lots of gardens and estates throughout the country. I had heard of their main site at Wisley in Surrey but had never been. I thought that it was just a glorified garden centre, I was so wrong.

This beautiful 240 acre garden is worth a visit at any time, even if you don't particularly like gardens. It was founded in 1878 and after Kew Gardens it is the most visited garden in the country. It attracts nearly one million visitors a year and even if the huge car park appears to be full you can wander around the grounds without seeing any crowds.



The garden lies between Cobham and Ripley in Surrey, off the main London to Portsmouth road (A3) south of Junction 10 of the M25. Follow the brown tourist flower signs on the A3 and M25 to RHS Garden. Car parking is free. They charge £10.75 to non members, which may seem steep but once you're in you quickly realise that its good value, you can easily spend a day there. There are several restaurants from fine dining to a very simple 'Honest Sausage' cafe and cute little coffee shops serving great sandwiches and cakes. We were there in late September and expected not to see much, wrong again, the gardens were full of flowers and fascinating plants and an amazing collection of apple trees in full fruit, we tried a few. There are lakes and a huge glass house, the whole place is just a big surprise.





The glasshouse has desert, tropical and temperate climates, they even have model gardens, each the size of a standard back garden, demonstrating what you can do even with a small patch. They have a vegetable garden, a rock garden and alpine meadow, a wild garden, a walled garden, there is a canal with water lilies and an arboretum. The various areas are all quite interesting and on a decent day many people take picnics.

We have been to Kew Gardens and Wakehurst Place – they are also great for days out and we even went to the Chelsea Flower Show for the first time this year. Now that really is just a huge garden centre and if it rains as it did when we were there it really isn't a lot of fun.

South East England is packed with country houses with glorious gardens and if that's your thing then you can spend many a happy day just looking. At Wisley though you can actually learn something about your garden and the plants in it, they have a lot of gardeners who are very happy to chat and offer advice. Of course there is a big shop and plant centre to relieve you of any spare cash you have and in fact they are both really quite reasonable and certainly worth a look.

Wisley is said to be one of the great gardens of the world, not having been to that many I wouldn't like to comment but it is certainly a great day out.