Five Northern Ireland heritage venues to explore on



St Macartan’s The Forth Chapel. Credit: European Heritage Open Days Credit: European Heritage Open Days

We’ve put together a list of five unmissable tours taking place during the European Heritage Open Days on 10–11 September – get out and explore your local heritage.

For 25 years, European Heritage Open Days have been celebrating architecture, history and culture across Northern Ireland. With over 200 venues to visit this year on **Saturday 10 and Sunday 11 September**, there is something for everyone.

We’ve picked out five fascinating tours taking place at National Lottery funded sites across the weekend – book your tickets now!

1. St Macartan’s The Forth Chapel, Augher

Enjoy a guided tour of this beautiful Church in the heart of the Clogher Valley, built between 1838–1846 and famous for its Clarke Studio stained glass windows. One window is dedicated to Reverend John Hughes, a native of the parish and the First Archbishop of New York who influenced the construction of Saint Patrick's Cathedral on Fifth Avenue. Another is for local poet Rose Kavanagh, an influential figure during the Irish Literary Revival.

National Lottery support of £123,539 is helping to complete essential repairs to the bellcote and west wing, develop a heritage trail and boost wildlife in the grounds.

Book a place for Saturday 10 September, 3pm – 4.30pm and discover its fascinating history.

2. Belfast Lough Nature Reserve



Belfast's Window on Wildlife. Credit: RSPB NI / Brian Morrison

Experience the sights and sounds of nature during an over two-mile guided walk of Belfast Lough with RSPB NI. Take in the migratory birdlife on the mudflats of Holywood Banks and discover bird, insect and plant species benefiting from habitat conservation at Harbour Meadows.

Final stop is the lagoon and indoor observatory at Belfast's Window on Wildlife, which opened to the public in 2015 thanks in part to a grant from The National Lottery Heritage Fund. You may see black-tailed godwits, oystercatchers, redshanks and curlews as they begin to gather for autumn – staff and volunteers are on hand to help with binoculars and bird identification.

Secure your free place for a tour on Saturday and Sunday's morning sessions (10.30am – 12pm) or Saturday's afternoon session (2pm – 3.30pm).

3. Historical walking tour of North Belfast



St Anne's Cathedral. Credit: Tourism Northern Ireland.

Great Place North Belfast's popular walking tour uncovers the unique heritage of a one-mile stretch of inner north Belfast.

Starting at St Anne's Cathedral and finishing at St Malachy's College, it will tell the hidden histories behind buildings and places along Donegall Street, Clifton Street, Crumlin and Antrim Roads. The Great Place North Belfast project was made possible with a grant from The National Lottery Heritage fund.

Limited places are available for the 11am tour on Saturday 10 September.

4. Castlewellan Arboretum and Annesley Garden



Castlewellan. Credit:George Munday / Tourism Ireland

On Saturday and Sunday at 2pm, join a guided walk at the Arboretum and Garden at Castlewellan Historic Demesne. Since the 1750s, it has been home to one of the most significant collections of trees and shrubs in Ireland, featuring a number of ‘champion trees’ recorded as the largest or tallest of their kind.

It’s part of a £2.69million project to improve access to nature and engage the community and visitors with the park’s rich heritage. Thanks to National Lottery players, Newry and Mourne District Council is restoring the arboretum and walled garden and rejuvenating the park’s Grange and Courtyard areas.

5. Belfast City Cemetery



Credit: Belfast City Cemetery

There's not one but two specialist tours happening on Sunday 11 September at Belfast City Cemetery!

Tom Hartley's ninety minute tour at 12.30pm will visit the graves of Belfast's 19th century leading industrialists connected with shipbuilding and linen production. He will explain the social history of the city and the hardships faced by the ordinary people of Victorian Belfast, and highlight the campaigners who tried to improve their social conditions and education.

Ana Copeland's tours at 2pm and 3.30pm will explore the cultural meaning of the symbols found in the cemetery's headstones and monuments, such as the Celtic cross and angel figures.

Opened in 1869, Belfast City Cemetery is one of the oldest public cemeteries in Belfast and is of immense heritage value. The cemetery will soon be opening a new visitor centre and unveiling a restored fountain and central steps thanks to a £1.85m heritage project.

See the full list of events

Visit Discover NI for a full range of events and activities right across Northern Ireland for European Heritage Open Days.

Please note that whilst all events are free, some require pre-booking.

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