



150 GARDENS

**YOU NEED
TO VISIT BEFORE
YOU DIE**

Lannoo

Introduction

By Stefanie Waldek

As someone who spends much of my time looking up at the stars, wondering about the mysteries of space, it's funny that I should write a book dedicated to something so intimately bound to Earth: gardens. But if I were to boil my interest in the cosmos down, it's simply that I am enthralled by exploration, both physical and intellectual. That's why I became a journalist—to discover and to share. And that's also why I write about travel, both on Earth and beyond. For me, gardens are the perfect microcosms for exploration here at home, and they're something that can be enjoyed by all kinds of people, all over the world.

I love nothing more than wandering garden paths and being delighted by what I see around every turn. But I'm also amazed by how gardens can transport you anywhere on the planet—and even back in time—through their meticulous designs, magnificent structures, and magical collections. In some gardens, you can trace the paths walked by royalty, philosophers, explorers, and scientists. In others, you can experience gardening as a cultural art form. And in others still, you can simply take in the natural beauty that makes our planet unique. There are countless reasons to spend time in a garden, and each is perfectly valid.

In *150 Gardens You Need to Visit Before You Die*, I've shared a vast range of gardens, from immense botanical institutions with thousands of specimens, to smaller plots for quiet meditations, to museums that combine both artworks and plantings. I hope these brief introductions inspire you to plan a visit or two, whether in your hometown or on your global travels, so that you can enjoy the sights, smells, sounds, and stories of the world's best gardens.

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01

ASWAN BOTANICAL GARDEN

El Nabatat Island, Aswan, Egypt

TO VISIT
BEFORE YOU DIE
BECAUSE

The setting of this botanical garden is highly unusual: an island in the middle of the Nile River.

Standing on the bank of the Nile in Aswan, you'll see Elephantine Island and its many archaeological sites, hotels, and restaurants. But hidden behind it is the less-visited El Nabatat Island, and you'd be remiss not to book a quick ride aboard a felucca to visit it. The island was formerly known as Kitchener's Island for its 19th-century owner, Lord Horatio Kitchener, a British army officer who was gifted it for his services to the Crown. An ardent lover of plants, Kitchener imported flora from around the world to his 17-acre island, laying the foundation for what has since become the Aswan Botanical Gardens. Stroll down the palm-lined paths of this lush oasis, then stop for some tea in the garden's café.







02 ABURI BOTANICAL GARDENS

Aburi, Ghana

TO VISIT
BEFORE YOU DIE
BECAUSE

This century-old garden is a respite from the bustle of Accra, the capital of Ghana.

On weekends, Accra's residents make the 45-minute trip into the nearby hills to escape the cacophony and the heat of the city, many ending up at the Aburi Botanical Gardens for a leisurely afternoon. Though by no means the most extensive botanical garden in the world, Aburi offers a range of atmospheres to cater to all sorts of visitors—sometimes it's filled with ebullient picnicking families, sometimes it's enveloped in moody mist. The garden was founded by the British in 1890 as a sanatorium before it transitioned into a botanical garden helmed by Mr. William Crowther of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew. Today, highlights include an allée of towering palms, a strangler fig, a “tree of life” with artistic carvings, and, quite unusually, an old helicopter often used by children as a playground.



03

SIR SEEWOSAGUR RAMGOOLAM BOTANICAL GARDEN

Royal Road, Pamplemousses, Mauritius

TO VISIT
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BECAUSE

The Giant Water Lily Pond looks like it belongs in Jurassic Park.

In 1767, French botanist Pierre Poivre (1719–1786) founded a botanical garden in Mauritius, now called the Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam Botanical Garden after the country's first prime minister (though it's sometimes referred to as the Pamplemousses Botanical Garden). Poivre was tasked with acclimating non-native crops to the island, but he brought in non-native flowers, too. The garden's signature feature, its Giant Water Lily Pond, was developed by its second director, Jean-Nicolas Céré (1775–1810), while its 80-species-strong palm collection was initiated by James Duncan, who took up post as director in 1849. Fun fact: Mauritius has only one endemic mammal, the *Pteropus niger* bat, otherwise known as the Mauritian flying fox, which can be spotted in the garden's treetops.



04 ANIMA GARDEN

Douar Sbiti, Route d'Ourika, Marrakech, Morocco

TO VISIT
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BECAUSE

This art-filled garden in the shadow of the Atlas Mountains is a sensory delight.

If you tire of the crowds in Marrakech, take a 45-mile drive into the Ourika Valley to visit the eccentric Anima Garden, opened in 2016 by Austrian multimedia artist André Heller (b. 1947). The nearly 5-acre grounds are filled with bright and playful sculptures by international artists interwoven between palm trees, cacti, and bamboo. Walk down one path, and you might find a replica of *The Thinker* by Auguste Rodin (1840–1917). Stroll down another—there's a stele by Keith Haring (1958–1990). Turn a few corners and you might happen upon a tree covered in African masks. It's an eclectic collection, which makes your discoveries as you meander through the garden all the more delightful. And if the works and the flora aren't enough, they're both set against the impressive backdrop of the snow-capped Atlas Mountains.



05 LA MAMOUNIA

Avenue Bab Jdid, Marrakech 40040, Morocco

TO VISIT
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“This is a wonderful place,” Sir Winston Churchill said of La Mamounia.

In the 18th century, Alaouite Sultan Mohammed Ben Abdallah (c. 1710–1790) gifted a 32-acre orchard to his son for his wedding. The prince transformed it into a lavish garden for entertaining, and that spirit has been carried through to the current day—the grounds now belong to one of the most famous hotels in Marrakech. Built in 1922 in a combination of Moroccan and Art Deco styles, La Mamounia has welcomed legendary guests, from Winston Churchill (1874–1965), to Charlie Chaplin (1889–1977), to Yves Saint-Laurent (1936–2008) and Pierre Bergé (1930–2017), who would go on to design their own sumptuous garden in the city, Jardin Majorelle. The gardens of La Mamounia are filled with palm trees, cacti, bougainvilleas, delphiniums, and even 700-year-old olive trees, which together create a sensational landscape.



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