

# A DAY AT KEW GARDENS

*Chris Wheeler takes a stroll*

**K**ew Gardens Underground station is on the District Line, opened in 1869 and the only station on the underground network to have a pub integrated in it. You cross over the lines using the recently restored unique French concrete footbridge and walk to the Victoria Gate entrance to Kew Gardens. It was through these gates that Queen Victoria passed to attend the wedding she had arranged between Princess Mary of Cambridge and Francis, Duke of Teck, at St. Anne's Church Kew, which took place on 12 June 1866. Queen Victoria approved the naming of the gates in 1889.

Further down the road, at the southeastern tip of the Gardens, not far from the Pagoda, is the original entrance: the Lion Gate. It opened in 1845, and comprises the original single wrought-iron gate supported by two pillars of yellow London brick. Across the top is a tablet of Portland stone on which sits a carved lion, commissioned by George IV in 1821. It once adorned the roof of a gate lodge on Kew Green. Designed by Thomas Hardwicke, a pupil of Kew architect Sir William Chambers, it is made of Coade stone, a ceramic material that is highly resistant to pollution and weathering.

Kew Gardens was opened in 1759 and now comprises 300 acres of gardens and botanical glasshouses, and 40 listed buildings. The Gardens are home to the world's largest collection of 30,000 living plants and seven million preserved ones. In 1781 King George III extended the Gardens to include the "Dutch House", built in 1631, now called Kew Palace. Kew Gardens became The Royal Botanic Gardens in 1840. In 2017 it is expected to receive around 1.35 million visitors.

As you stroll along the Broad Walk the first impressive site you come to is the Temperate House, currently closed for restoration. Built in the 19th century, it is the largest Victorian glasshouse in existence. It took 40 years to complete. Next is the famous Palm House, completed in 1848, the first large scale structure using wrought iron. It is considered to be the world's most important surviving Victorian glass and iron building. Its panes of glass are all hand-blown.

Further along is the Princess of Wales Conservatory, Kew's largest conservatory, opened in 1987 with ten separately computer controlled climatic zones; and what a variety of plants and habitats it contains!

These days you can eat in the Pavilion Restaurant. The original timber-framed Tea House was burned down in February 1913 by two suffragettes during a series of arson attacks across London.

The famous Pagoda is a folly built 1761-62. It is the oldest surviving structure of the original gardens. Passing the Pagoda, you walk through trees along Cedar Vista, with the Japanese Gateway on your left, and then the delightful Queen Charlotte's Cottage, covered in creeper, which is surrounded by thousands of bluebells in Spring.

You arrive at the central Lake, next to which is the Sir Joseph Banks Building, opened in 1990, where the study of economic botany (plants with valuable uses) takes place. It is also a magnificent corporate hospitality venue.

A quick climb, and you walk around the new Treetop Walkway, opened in 2008. It is 60 feet above ground and takes you into the canopy of a woodland glade. Up here you can look out across the Gardens and see the gaps where hundreds of trees were lost in the Great Storm of 1987.



*Victoria Gates, from a 1908 postcard*



*Lion Gate (undated)*



*The Palm House*



*The Tea House, before and after Suffragette action*



*The Pagoda*

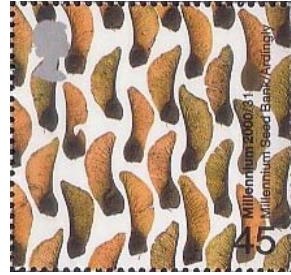


*Kew Palace*


In 1959 Kew Gardens had the tallest flagpole in Britain at 225 feet. Made from a single Douglas Fir, it was given by Canada to mark both the centenary of the Canadian Province of British Columbia and the bicentenary of Kew Gardens. The flagpole was removed in 2007 after damage by weather and woodpeckers.

Returning to the south east side of the Gardens you can see the formal gardens and statues in front of Kew Palace, influenced by the advice provided by ‘Capability’ Brown.

Looking to the future, Kew is becoming increasingly important in cultivating and preserving specimens. It works closely with the Millennium Seed Bank at Wakehurst Place in Sussex.



This is where the future is: preservation and regeneration. Its Mission statement is “to address man’s need to manage earth’s environment by increasing knowledge and a better understanding of the plant kingdom: the basis of life on earth”.

If you leave by Brentford Gate on the River Thames and walk down Ferry Lane to the southern end of Kew Bridge you will find the ferry that takes visitors across the river to the northern side and beyond. 



*Pier and Ferry*