

Great Country Houses & Gardens of Northern Ireland September 13 to 19, 2026

Tour arrangements by Lani Summerville & Mark Donnelly



Ballywalter Park – Where we will stay for two-nights

Inspired by the architecture of Inigo Jones, who was the first to establish the Palladian style in 17th century England, followed by Lord Burlington, William Kent, Colen Campbell and other early 18th century English architects, Ireland at the same time developed its own dramatic Palladian movement starting with the new façade for the country house.

Over the past years a bright new political and economic era has been ushered into Northern Ireland and the glorious country houses of the province are an architecturally classical heritage to be discovered. This exclusive tour will include a one night stay in Belfast, a two-night stay at the privately owned Ballywalter Park, an Italianate Palazzo built in 1846 and now the family home of Lord Dunleath, along with a three-night stay at the privately owned Crom Castle and conclude in Dublin.

The tour is led by Lani Summerville of Classical Excursions, who has organized eight previous tours to Northern Ireland, along with Mark Donnelly, who is a noted expert on Irish decorative arts and antiques.

Overview of our days:

September 13th, Sunday – Belfast: Arrival to Belfast and overnight in hotel, afternoon visit to the Titanic Museum.

September 14th, Monday to September 16th, Wednesday: Two-night stay at **Ballywalter Park** on the coast of the Irish Sea.

September 16th, Wednesday to June 19th, Saturday: Three-night stay at **Crom Castle**.

September 19th, Saturday: Drive south into the Republic of Ireland, and end in Dublin for late afternoon departures or independent stay in Dublin.

All meals are included in the itinerary.

Itinerary as of June 2026 and subject to updating by Classical Excursions

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TOUR HIGHLIGHTS



Mount Stewart, Newtownards, County Down: Originally built in 1804 and later extended, the first architect was George Dance, the teacher of Sir John Soane. Filled with magnificent antiques, the Regency-styled house contains 22 chairs used at the Congress of Vienna (1815) and given to Mt. Stewart's owner, Lord Castlereagh, British Foreign Secretary and member of the Londonderry family. Mt. Stewart's gardens cover 80 acres and are considered the most complete in Ireland, thriving in the area's subtropical microclimate. Overlooking Strangford Lough is the exquisite small banqueting pavilion inspired by the Temple of the Winds in Athens. Our visit includes drinks with **Lady Rose Lauritzen in her private apartments** at Mount Stewart with a private tour of her personal gardens.

Florence Court, Enniskillen, Co. Fermanagh: An important Irish Georgian mansion, it was named after Lady Florence Cole, the wife of Sir John Cole, the owner who probably had built around 1730 the finally proportioned center block of the house. A later generation in the 1760s added flanking arcaded wings with end pavilions. The vigorous treatment of the exterior is repeated in the interior. Lavish Rococo plaster decoration is featured which was painstakingly restored after a fire in 1955. The Venetian Room, staircase and dining room have the most elaborate plasterwork. The house is filled with 18th-century Irish furniture.



Castle Coole, Enniskillen, Co. Fermanagh: Considered the finest Neo-classical country house in Ireland, it nearly bankrupted its owner, Armar Lowry-Corry, Earl of Belmore, in his attempt in the 1790s to outdo his brother-in-law and neighbor, the Earl of Enniskillen, at Florence Court. The quality of the Portland stone masonry is exceptional, with the design on all four sides of equal perfection. It continues inside, with harmonious unity and balance in the joinery and plasterwork. The final plans were executed by the English architect, James Wyatt. The plasterer was Joseph Rose, who had been hired by Robert Adam to work at Syon House and Harewood House in England. Another glory of Castle Coole is that almost all of the Regency furniture is original and still in place. Our tour is hosted by Lord Belmore who will show us the original Wyatt drawings from his personal collection.



A two-night stay at the privately owned **Ballywalter Park**, hosted by Lord Dunleath. Built in 1846 for Andrew Mullholland (whose son became the first Lord Dunleath) and designed by the prominent Belfast architect, Sir Charles Lanyon, the house is the best-preserved example of the Italianate palazzo style in Ireland.



Seaforde Demesne (Demesne = land attached to a manor) has been in the Forde family for over 400 years. **Private lunch and tour** of the house with Lady Anthea Forde. We will explore the **Seaforde Gardens** and the **Tropical Butterfly House**. Seaforde contains rare specimen trees and plants from around the world and a maze.



A private tour at **Barons Court**, hosted by His Grace, Duke of Abercorn. The house was started in 1779 by the architect George Steuart (who also designed Attingham Hall in Shropshire 1783). Later architects involved in redesigning and completing Barons Court were John Soane and Richard and William Morrison. The result was a powerful seven-bay house with a rotunda located in the heart of the building. The main pediment contains the family coat of arms. The interiors range from the classical coffered rotunda encircled by a ring of Ionic columns to a typical Morrisonian library redecorated by the prominent English decorator, David Hicks.



A three-night stay at **Crom Castle**, hosted by the Earl of Erne.



Lunch and tour of the privately owned **Killyreagh house & gardens** with the owners Lord and Lady Anthony Hamilton, brother to the Duke of Abercorn.



Visit to the private 18th century **Finnebrogue House**, it has been meticulously restored by the owner Noel Lamb.



Clandeboye Estate, home of the late Marchioness of Dufferin and Ava. The property contains wooded gardens, formal gardens, walled garden, lawns and a lake. The estate was first settled in 1674 and the house dates to 1801-04.



The tour is lead by **Lani Summerville**, Founder and Director of Classical Excursions. She has organized trips to Northern Ireland since 2008.

Also contributing to our trip is **Mark Donnelly**. Mark is founder of Mark Donnelly Fine Art, located in Northern Ireland. He specializes in the valuation of antiques and works of art, providing assistance to private home-owners, art collectors and institutions with appraisals for acquisitions, sales, and divisions of fine art collections. Having completed an M.A. at Trinity College Dublin and at Sotheby's, Mark began his career in South Africa working for an independent appraisal company, before launching his own business in 1985. He returned to Ireland in 1992 and has continued his work from his base in Co. Down. Mark has collaborated with Classical Excursions on tours to the UK, Scotland and Ireland since 2010.

Please contact the Office of Classical Excursions to register
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Updated as of June 2026 | Itinerary subject to change without notice.