



*Eden's immense greenhouses, the garden's defining image, inspired by bubbles*

UK • EUROPE

## The Eden Project

WHERE *Bodelva, near St Austell, Cornwall* WHEN *May–early July to enjoy the biomes and the outdoor gardens before the summer crowds* SIZE *12 hectares (30 acres)*

Flowers bloom, bananas grow and a waterfall plummets beneath gigantic domes: this is a garden of the future. A true triumph of innovation, the Eden Project celebrates the importance of plants to the planet and inspires everyone to reconnect with nature.

From the moment you set eyes on Eden's eight spaceship-like domes, you know you have arrived somewhere very special. While strolling beneath its palm trees, it's hard to believe that until 1995 this land was a working china clay pit – a vast hollow devoid of soil. Somehow, Tim Smit spotted its potential to breathe life into his vision: to awaken our awareness of the fragility of the earth, the importance of biodiversity and the need for sustainable living to ensure a better future. Its size, scale and symbolic value made it the ideal place in which to create a "shop window" for the planet, where the world's most important plants are showcased.

The process of transforming the site began a year later, with Tim and his team overcoming all manner of obstacles with great imagination. The nutrient-deficient pit was laced with composted greenery, creating a rich soil that could feed a variety of plant life. The absence of a natural water source inspired an underground

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### Tim Smit

Born in Holland in 1954, Tim Smit started his career in the music industry as a composer and producer. In 1987, he moved to Cornwall where, together with his friend, the builder John Nelson, he discovered and restored the Lost Gardens of Heligan. The Eden Project began as a dream, and in 2012 he was knighted for his work.

drainage system that would collect rainwater for irrigation. When the Eden Project opened to the public in 2001, the site was unrecognizable. The scarred land glinted with giant transparent domes, within which flourished trees and plants from the earth's major "biomes", or life zones. It was, indeed, a garden of Eden. →

## FRUITS OF THE EARTH

Joined by the grass-roofed Link building, each four-domed biome is a world unto its own. The first, the Rainforest Biome, is a steamy paradise of tropical plants that grow in jungles. Built on the sunny, south-facing side of the pit, it is perfectly positioned to absorb thermal energy and, with temperatures inside reaching 35°C (95°F), is the place to be on a cold Cornish day. On the treetop walkway, the Weather Maker exhibit invites visitors to journey through clouds and shelter from tropical rain, to learn how rainforests cool the planet. This may be the biggest biome, but a piece of rainforest of the same magnitude is destroyed every 16 seconds – a telling reminder of the scale of the effort required to save it.

The Mediterranean Biome is no less inspiring, where the familiar mingles with the lesser-known. Oranges, cotton and aloe grow, responsible for feeding, healing and clothing us. Another section here devoted to the vegetation of Western Australia contains a grass tree (*Xanthorrhoea sp*): a species so resilient it thrives in the nutrient-poor soil of the outback, and responds to wildfires by bursting into flower. Everywhere dazzles with sheer diversity, reminding us that plants are our life force.

## OUTDOOR INSPIRATION

Surrounding the biomes are glorious and extensive outdoor gardens. Seasonal borders, displays of crops like tea bushes (*Camellia sinensis*) and plants from the world's temperate lands have made the sterile slopes of the former china clay pit burst with colour. Among the 3,000 varieties growing outside are wildflowers such as poppies, cornflowers and ox-eye

daisies, which feed vital pollinators like bees and butterflies. Indeed, Robert Bradford's *Bombus the Giant Bee* sculpture, sitting amid these flower beds, is testament to the huge impact such small insects have on providing us with food.

## SUSTAINABLE INITIATIVE

If anything is at the heart of the Eden Project's mission, it's sustainability. It leads by example, down to the smallest detail: leftovers from the kitchen are used to make compost to feed its plants, and are even turned into electricity.

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## Building Biomes

The double-layered steel biomes were adapted to fit the clay pit's shape before being anchored to the ground. The transparent covering is very light and allows ultraviolet light to penetrate, so the plants inside can thrive.

Alternatives to palm oil make up an exhibit in the Rainforest Biome, and recycled rainwater is used to irrigate plants, feed a waterfall and even flush on-site loos. At every turn, Eden inspires visitors to reflect on their own lifestyles and the changes they can make to benefit the planet.

Like the earth, Eden is ever-evolving. Drilling has already begun on a geothermal plant at the site, which will use thermal energy from the underlying granite to heat and power Eden. Smit also has plans to create new Edens across the world, turning this innovative Cornish garden into a global movement for sustainable living.



Clockwise from left  
Tim Shaw's Rites of Dionysus sculpture, the Mediterranean Biome

A gardener at work in the outdoor gardens

Citrus fruits flourishing