

Botanics bosses aiming to break 100,000 visitor barrier

Organisers of the Christmas light show at the Royal Botanic Garden in Edinburgh hope to break through the 100,000 visitors barrier this year with thousands already flocking to see the display on the 72-acre site.

This is one of 11 outdoor illuminated trails staged across the UK by a leading events promoter and over 90 per cent of the lights used are LED.

The show is on until December 30 and money from ticket sales goes towards vital research world-wide.

Raoul Curtis-Machin, director of horticulture and visitor experience at the Royal Botanic Garden, said that this year's trail was inspired by all things botanical, acknowledging the conservation work undertaken by the garden around the world.

He added: "it is our vision to build a positive future for plants, people and the planet."

One of the first displays seen by visitors is the crocus lawn, one-metre-high crocuses which are bursting with colour. Another popular display is Light a Wish where suspended lights celebrate the moment when dandelion seeds disperse.

White Roses caught the eye when we visited, 2,000 illuminated

roses by the Rock Garden and East Gate.

An annual favourite is The Cathedral with its 35,000 bulbs and this exhibit always provides a stopping point for visitors.

So does the fun, animated light show which is projected onto the stone walls of Inverleith House. Once again, this is inspired by plants and holly and ivy plus mistletoe feature, surprise, surprise.

You can't miss the Rainbow Hedge, a 165-metre beech hedge which is awash with the colours of the rainbow.

Of course, as this is a family-orientated event, there is Santa Claus. It was pouring with rain the night we visited so he held a red umbrella to provide shelter while delivering his ho, ho, ho message from a grotto near the exit.

The heavens opened throughout our visit, this is Scotland in December remember and the weather is trying, but, thankfully, we had brollies and sturdy walking boots as well as waterproof clothing in the boot.

We enjoyed the experience despite the elements and the 5,250 steps we took during the tour topped up our daily total.

Curtis-Machin revealed that a colossal effort goes into staging the annual event and he said: "it happens in just over a week. The guys come in and everything gets unravelled and all the light displays go up. It is an amazing operation.

"We believe this event now kick-starts Christmas for many people in Scotland and we have visits from all over the country. The garden gets a totally different audience for this event, people come and get wowed by it, share their pictures and others want to come."

So, how are the displays created? Curtis-Machin said: "We are a fantastically serious botanical garden and artists come in to create these phenomenal displays. They will take a crocus

and transform it into a winter wonderland.

“The pampas grass this year look amazing as they waft in the wind and creativity and botanical genius (by the artists) creates the mix.”

He confirmed that money from the event is ploughed into research and the director said: “We are working in 47 different countries. We are helping countries build their capacity and there is a very serious message around what we do as far as bio-diversity goes on the planet.

“The displays are beautiful things to look at and this enables people to enjoy something at Christmas. Their money is going to a great cause.”

Curtis-Machin added that he hoped people who enjoy the light show will come back to the garden at other times of the year and he said: “We have a fantastic, ever-changing, garden to come and visit.”

Organisers hope to break 100,000 barrier this year and he said: “In 2019 we just about made it and we are hoping to get that 100,000 broken and build on that for next year.

“It is a family event, it is a safe space in the middle of the city and you are entering a winter wonderland. You don’t have the distraction of cars and beeping horns.

“We are only a ten minute bus trip from the centre of town, a 20 minute walk, and there are lots of places to eat and drink around the Botanic Gardens so we are a nice place to visit. It is a magical experience. ”

For the record, there are off-peak tickets and there are slots to prevent overcrowding. For ticket prices and times visit www.rbge.org.uk/christmas and for other details visit <https://mychristmastrails.co.uk/>