

# Marianne North and the North Gallery, Kew

The Marianne North gallery is the only building on the Kew site to be entirely devoted to paintings. All the work of one woman – Marianne North, this collection shows the amazing travels of this determined woman.

## Who was Marianne North?

Marianne North was born in Hastings in 1830, the daughter of Frederick North MP. At an early age she revealed a talent for drawing and developed a fascination for travelling from her father. After her father's death in 1869 she devoted the remainder of her life to painting.

Miss North travelled widely, often enduring considerable discomfort, in order to paint flowers in their natural habitats. Although she received no formal training in drawing and painting, and was somewhat unconventional in her methods, her work achieved a high level of artistic competence. She painted quickly, often completing a picture in one day.

## Where did she travel to?

In 1871 she undertook the first of her many journeys, visiting the United States, Canada and Jamaica. She returned to England for a brief period before setting off for Brazil where she stayed for 8 months and completed over 100 paintings. In 1875 she crossed the American continent on her way to Japan, returning home in 1877 via Sarawak, Java



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and Sri Lanka. Six months later she travelled to India, where she stayed for 15 months and produced over 200 paintings.

## Why is her Gallery here?

After a successful exhibition of her paintings in a London gallery in 1879, Marianne conceived the idea of presenting them to the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew. She also generously offered to provide a suitable building in which to display them and asked her friend, the architectural historian James Fergusson to design the gallery in the style of a European dwelling in India which would offer rest to the weary visitor.

At the suggestion of Charles Darwin she then visited Australia and New Zealand. On her return she spent a year arranging the paintings in the gallery into geographical order. The Marianne North Gallery was then opened in June 1882.

## When did she finish painting?

Astonishingly, Miss North embarked on yet further journeys. Just two months after the opening she travelled to South Africa, where many more paintings were undertaken. In 1883, she was in the Seychelles and in 1884, despite ill health she was painting plants in Chile. These additional works were added to the Gallery, which today houses 832 of her oil paintings depicting over 900 species of plants.

Above: **Inside the Marianne North Gallery.**

Left: **Portrait of Marianne North**

Marianne North retired to Alderley, Gloucestershire, where she died on 30 August 1890. The centenary of her death was commemorated in the book Marianne North at Kew Gardens.

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Marianne North image gallery

