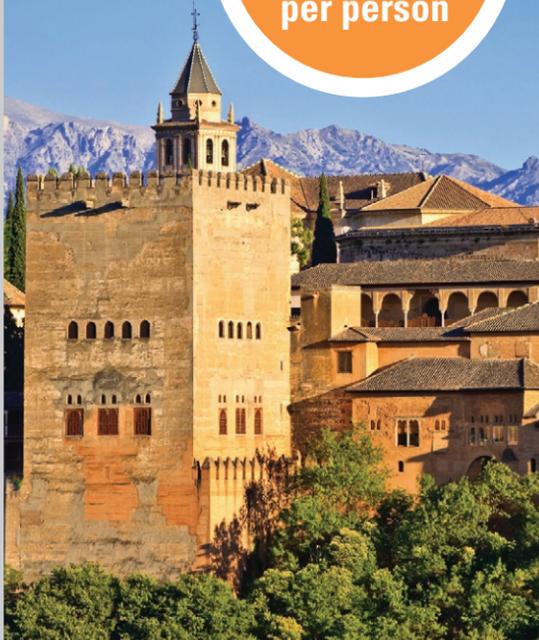


## Classical Spain

### Seville, Cordoba & Granada

SELECTED DEPARTURES  
APRIL TO OCTOBER 2014

6  
nights from  
€759<sup>†</sup>  
per person



Andalucia is one of the most beautiful corners of Europe, where the excesses of modern life do not seem to have taken root and travellers are welcomed as honoured guests. Immortalised by the writings of Ernest Hemingway and beloved by Orson Welles, it is the Spain of Carmen, Figaro and Flamenco. Rich with the legacies of the Moors and Romans, its charm and serenity will captivate you.

#### Fully escorted price includes:

- Return scheduled flights from Dublin or Belfast International
- Six nights bed and breakfast at excellent quality three and four-star hotels, staying in Seville, Granada and Mijas
- Experience unspoiled Andalucia, perhaps the most Spanish region in the country
- Guided tour of Seville
- Guided tour of the stunning Alhambra in Granada
- Visit to Cordoba home to the Mezquita - one of the finest mosques ever built
- Visit to Ronda - one of the most spectacularly situated cities in Spain
- Services of an experienced tour manager

<sup>†</sup>From price based on April 5, 2014 from Belfast International

## Classical Italy

### Florence, Siena, Assisi & Rome

SELECTED DEPARTURES  
MAY TO OCTOBER 2014

7  
nights from  
€959<sup>†</sup>  
per person



Italy is home to a number of fascinating historical cities and this tour takes in four of the best. You will visit the gem that is Renaissance Florence, Siena - famous for its Piazza del Campo, Assisi and unmissable Rome - home to the Vatican City. With these cities and the Tuscan countryside never too far away, this really is an unbeatable destination for a tour.

#### Fully escorted price includes:

- Return scheduled flights from Dublin
- Seven nights accommodation at excellent quality four-star hotels, including breakfast and four evening meals
- Guided tour of historic Rome and explore 2,000 years of history
- Guided tour of Siena, one of Europe's finest medieval cities
- Guided tour of Florence, pearl of the Renaissance
- Reserved, timed visit to the Uffizi, one of the world's finest art galleries
- Visit to Assisi, birthplace of St. Francis
- Discover Tuscany's stunning countryside
- Escorted by an experienced tour manager

<sup>†</sup>From price based on October 26, 2014 from Dublin

# Dr Mark Dooley



## MORAL MATTERS

# Trees are our link to nature, cherish them

**T**HE wood pigeons are back. As dawn broke on our back garden, I noticed two of them perched high upon a tree. I opened the window to hear their sweet song, a gentle chorus which could well be that of an owl.

For us, the wood pigeon is a symbol of spring, a sign the earth will very soon reveal its splendour. Until last week, our trees played host to a family of robins. Throughout the winter, those little creatures served to remind us that even when seemingly asleep, nature still performs her magic.

Once the robins depart, the wood pigeons move in. Soon, they shall be joined by the spectacular blue tits, birds of such beauty it is impossible to believe they evolved by chance. A vibrant mix of blue, green, yellow and white, this bird is proof that art is a pale imitation of life. Listening to the wood pigeons and observing the blue tits makes for a perfect summer evening. Mozart evokes in sound the majesty of such an experience in his sublime Clarinet Concerto.

What the composer grasped is that nature is itself a symphony, a harmonious combination of colours and sounds which renews our sense of wonder. If our garden resounds to such a symphony, it is thanks to our trees. Without them, my boys would never experience the miracle of the blue tit or the soothing song of a mother wood pigeon. They would never witness the astonishing vision of a robin redbreast calling to Heaven from the tip of a snow-drenched branch. Like all trees, ours root us firmly to the soil. They are a symbol of our settlement and our belief in belonging. They represent our attachment to this place we call home, one we are happy to share with 'the birds of the air'. What's more, trees are a natural calendar. Not only do they signify the seasons through their physical changes, but trees also tell us much about the history of the places where they stand.

They serve as a living link to absent generations, those who first claimed the soil as their own. If trees feature prominently in the writings of J.R.R. Tolkien and A.A. Milne, it is because both men understood that trees provide our last defence against ecological catastrophe. One of the great lessons of Tolkien's *The Lord Of The Rings* is that where there are no trees there are only machines. And when there are only machines, we sever our roots to the real.

As Milne reminds us in the charming adventures of Winnie-the-Pooh,

trees directly link us to the creatures who inhabit them. They enable us to engage with nature and, thus, to reconnect with the earth. As a source of shade, food and clean air the tree is a guardian of those gifts without which we cannot flourish.

If we plant a tree to mark the opening of a building, it is because we want that structure to endure. As long as the tree stands, so too, we hope, will the building. And as the years pass, and the tree matures, it will announce to future generations that our hopes have been fulfilled.

If I grew up to the tune of *Tie A Yellow Ribbon Round The Ole Oak Tree*, it was because the oak has always stood as a symbol of stability and solidarity. It is a monument to our refusal to yield to decay and a sign to prodigal wayfarers that they are welcome home. But now, many of Ireland's oak, larch, beech and chestnut trees are succumbing to what is known as sudden oak death disease.

**T**HE source of the disease is the organism *Phytophthora ramorum*. It travels in mists, air currents and may also be spread on footwear, wheels and on animals' paws. So rampant is the infection that Coillte has already confirmed that 20 forestry sites across 100 hectares are due to be felled.

The grim reality is that sudden oak death could potentially wipe out some of our best-loved tree species. That is why we should all support National Tree Week, which will be launched by the Tree Council of Ireland next Sunday at the Powerscourt Estate in Co. Wicklow. The event will feature guided walks of the great trees in Powerscourt with head gardener Michael Byrne, including a visit to Ireland's tallest tree standing at over 61 metres. It is no exaggeration to say that trees are an integral feature of our social and cultural condition. In so many ways, they bind us to the world, to wildlife and to our collective past. They link us to nature, neighbours and our ancestors.

All of which is to say that without trees, we cannot be truly be at home in this world. I can only hope the prevalence of sudden oak death forces us to cherish those we have while we still have them. Even better, why not mark National Tree Week by planting a few more.

Yes, the wood pigeons have returned. I don't know where they went for the winter, but I am so glad they found their way home. For now our gaze is back where it should be: on those branches which remind us that this is our home too.

—mark.dooley@dailymail.ie—



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