



Jardin Georges Delaselle, Ile de Batz

The idea of paradise has long held a powerful grip on the imagination – across millennia and across cultures – from the Book of Genesis to the Bounty bar, you might say. So much so, that wherever there’s an unusually verdant patch of green anywhere, we’re tempted to draw a heavenly analogy. Cricket fans among you may know that there’s a ground in Calcutta called Eden Gardens. I’ve never been there, but I *have* drunk iced coffee at The Paradise Cafe near Mount Olympus.

Paradise is a word that has also been used of the Jardin Exotique on the Ile de Batz, and, dare I say, with probably greater justification than with the Indian test arena (where I imagine, given the unforgiving sun in those parts, shades of brown are more common than shades of green). But you never know. I never expected the Jardin Georges Delaselle (to give it its proper name) here on Batz would look quite so exotic, with palm trees swaying in the breeze and bananas with ripening fruits nestling in their crowns. But what’s the story behind this spectacular place?

The gardens were the brainchild of Monsieur Georges Delaselle, a Parisian who made his fortune in insurance. He visited this island in 1897, and decided that he’d create his paradise right here. His aim was to collect plants from all four corners of the exotic world: from Asia, Africa, Australia and America. Sailors to these parts were given instructions to bring back plants from these far-flung places.

How does it manage to be so tropical? We’ve just arrived here on the ferry from Roscoff, and even in July, the winds can be chill. Although warmed by the Gulf Stream, it’s worth remembering that the island shares the same latitude as Newfoundland in the west and Vladivostock in the east. The first thing Georges Delaselle did was to create a windbreak by hollowing out the places where he wanted to locate his more tender plants. (And incidentally, it was while digging that he unearthed a Bronze Age necropolis. Is it too fanciful to imagine that this necropolis was in use at the same time as The Garden of Eden story was being written down for the first time?) It is in these sandy oases that you’ll find the kind of plants that are usually found in much more southerly climes – from around the Tropics of Cancer and Capricorn.

But it isn’t just Georges Delaselle, the original creator of the gardens, that we must thank for this exotic splendour. By the 1970’s and 80’s, the gardens had suffered from many years of neglect, and it wasn’t until 1987 that a team of volunteers began to restore the site to its former (and present) glory. So, if you’ve not yet visited Tahiti or the Seychelles, and don’t fancy waiting until that unlikely lottery win, take a trip to the Jardin Georges Delaselle

instead. If the sun is shining, as it is today, you could easily convince yourself that you have just been magically transported to the tropical island of your dreams.