

Windsor Castle: A Travel Feature

by Cheryl Pendry, PassPorter Featured Columnist

When a castle's one of the official residences of the Queen of England and is the largest occupied castle in the world, it's bound to attract lots of visitors.

That's certainly the case with Windsor Castle, just an hour to the west of London and within easy reach of the capital by train, bus or car. It's been on the same site for nearly 1,000 years and the Round Tower of the castle dominates the landscape as you approach Windsor.

Originally built by William the Conqueror to guard the western approach to London, the outer walls of the castle remain in the same position as they did back in the 1070's, so he obviously got some good builders in to do the work!

Over the next few centuries, St. George's Chapel was added to the castle. One of the best examples of late medieval architecture, certainly in England and perhaps in Europe too, this should be on any visitor's list to see during a visit to Windsor. The architecture isn't the only draw here; it's also the final resting place to ten of England's kings, including Henry VIII, famous for his six wives. Indeed one of those wives, his beloved Jane Seymour is buried there with him. King George VI and his wife, the much loved Queen Mother, parents of the current Queen, are also buried in the chapel, along with Princess Margaret, the Queen's sister.

Other kings lying in the chapel include Charles I, who was on the throne at the outbreak of England's Civil War. He was eventually captured by Oliver Cromwell's Parliamentary forces, who wanted to get rid of the Royal family, and held at the castle before his trial and execution in London.

Fortunately, not all the events at St. George's Chapel are so grisly. It's still used for weekly church services and it's also been the site of many Royal weddings over the years, the most recent being that of Prince Edward and Sophie Rhys-Jones in 1999.

Today, the castle is just as well known for what happened in the early hours of 20 November 1992, when a major fire broke out after a curtain was ignited by a spotlight. Over the course of the next 15 hours, as the fire blazed, approximately one fifth of the castle area was destroyed. It took the next five years to restore the castle, but my goodness; it's a challenge now to see which parts were damaged. In fact, if they didn't

tell you which rooms were destroyed in the fire, I don't think anyone would be able to tell. Much of the amazing repair work at Windsor Castle was funded by opening Buckingham Palace to the public every year during the summer months; something that's continued to this day even though the bill for repairs at Windsor was paid off a decade ago.

For much of the year, visitors can walk around the State Apartments, where most of the Royal work takes place, including State visits by foreign heads of state, with the Presidents of France and South Africa among the recent visitors to the castle. If you're an art fan, you're in for a treat, with many paintings, sculptures, and armor from the Royal Collection on display.

One other thing you shouldn't miss is an unusual visitor attraction. A doll house may not sound that fascinating, but this is no ordinary doll house. This one belonged to Queen Mary and contains working lifts, running water, and electricity, and took 1,500 craftsmen three years to complete. There are frequently long lines to see this, but it's worth the wait and no wonder this is known as the most famous doll house in the world!

Something else you shouldn't miss if it happens to be taking place on a day when you visit is the Changing of the Guard at Windsor Castle. From April to July, it's held every day except Sundays, and throughout the rest of the year, it takes place on alternate days, weather permitting of course! Starting at 11:00 am, it's a colorful sight and we preferred the ceremony you see at Windsor to the Changing of the Guard in London, mainly because you can get a far better -- and closer -- view in the castle grounds. You can even get your photo taken next to one of the world famous guards, which makes for a great memory of your day at Windsor!

If it sounds like there's a lot to see at Windsor Castle, that's because there is. Allow at least a couple of hours for your visit and longer if you're visiting during the busy summer months, when the castle can get crowded and you may have to wait in line to visit the various different areas.

Entrance into Windsor Castle costs 14.20 pounds for adults, 12.70 pounds for students and seniors (age 60+) and 8 pounds for the under 17s. Under fives are admitted free of charge and family tickets are also available at 36.50 pounds for two adults and up to three children. If the State Apartments are closed during your visit, you can expect the admission prices to be almost half that amount.

Windsor Castle is open to the public all year round, with the exception

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of December 25 and 26 and selected dates when the Queen is in residence. St. George's Chapel is closed to the public on Sundays, when services are taking place. In addition, the State Rooms may be closed to the public on certain dates. To check on opening times and dates, visit the Royal Collection web site at <http://www.royalcollection.org.uk/>.

About The Author: Cheryl and husband Mark live in England and love to travel, particularly to America. They are in the process of visiting every Disney theme park around the world, having already been to Disneyland Resort Paris, Hong Kong Disneyland and both American Disney resorts. They are now planning for their trip to Japan in the spring to visit the Tokyo Disney Resort. [Click here to view more of Cheryl's articles!](#)

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