

Palacio Real: Spanish Royal Palace in Madrid

by Cheryl Pendry, PassPorter Featured Columnist

Palaces are a major attraction at many cities around the world, with Buckingham Palace usually on the list for most visitors to London to see and Versailles holding a similar place for many who visit Paris. They're names that are well known, whereas the Palacio Real in Madrid isn't a name that I'd heard of before we visited the city. As such, I wasn't expecting much from the Spanish royal palace, but I was amazed at what we found there.

Perhaps it's the fact that the Palacio Real was actually based on the wonderfully sumptuous and occasionally over the top Chateau of Versailles. The palace was started by King Felipe V in the early part of the 18th century, and he wanted something that would remind him of Versailles, where he had grown up. It wasn't an easy build, as the first version was completely destroyed by fire in 1734, and it then took another 30 years for the second version to be finished.

It's an imposing building of a huge size. We approached it from the Plaza del Oriente and the building ran down the entire side of the road and up to the Catedral de la Almudena. It's probably similar in size to Buckingham Palace and, when we finally got to the visitor entrance of the palace, we were asked if we wanted to have a guided tour. As the next tour in English was literally about five minutes away, we quickly agreed and paid the extra. Entry into the palace is ordinarily €8/adults and the guided tour was only another €2 on top, which was excellent value.

I wasn't sure if it would be an audioguide, as is so often the case with visitor attractions these days, but no, it was a real-life guide, who spoke excellent English. The tour lasted around 50 minutes and took us through all the areas that are open to the public. You can tour them on your own with a standard audioguide, but we much preferred the approach we took.

You enter through the main square and that's the only area where you're allowed to take photos. Then you're into the palace itself and immediately heading up stairs to where the rooms you visit are located.

One of the first things we learned on the main staircase from our guide was that this royal palace is sadly no longer home to the Royal family. They lived here until 1931, when King Alfonso XIII was forced to abdicate

at the start of the Spanish Civil War. He fled into exile in France and, when the family returned, they instead made their home in a much more modest palace outside of the city. However, its royal connections remain just as strong as ever, with all state occasions held here. One of the highlights of the tour was seeing the Gala Dining Room, created by putting three different rooms together. It was made for a royal wedding back in 1879 and, today visiting heads of state are welcomed here. It can seat up to 140 people at dinner, and we had two seats pointed out to us, both slightly higher than all the others, which are reserved for the king and queen.

After visiting the dining room, where we were told the kings of old times used to dine, we were taken into two more rooms, one for lunch and one for breakfast. Surprisingly enough, it was the breakfast room that caught our attention. It might be used for the smallest meal of the day and it was a tiny room, but it was the contents of it that caught our eye. Called the Gaspirini Room, it was named after its Italian creator, and has a Chinese theme to it. It's decorated with flowers and fruit, all in a wonderful green colored marble, with a central chandelier the likes of which we'd never seen before. It was huge!

The Throne Room was another highlight, with its wonderful gold thrones and stunning bronze lions on either side of the thrones. These were created in Rome in 1651. Sadly, the thrones aren't used at all these days, although it is used for receptions a couple of times a year, but our guide made a point of telling us that the king and queen never sit down, they always stand to greet their guests.

Something you wouldn't expect to see in a royal palace is the Porcelain Room, which is decorated completely in porcelain, which came from the royal factory. Sadly that factory doesn't exist any longer today, but there is still a working tapestry factory from which the tapestries in the palace tend to come.

As well as the palace, there are two other areas that you can see through a self-guided tour, which are the Royal Pharmacy, which sadly we didn't have time to see, and the Royal Armoury, which was filled with armour, as the name suggests, and weapons. It reminded us both of the displays we've seen in the past in the Tower of London, although this collection is probably even larger.

The palace is located in a beautiful position in Madrid, on top of a hill, overlooking the west of the city below, and you get some stunning views from the square at the entrance to the palace. To the east of the palace are a set of beautifully landscaped gardens, called Campo del Moro. Once again, looking at those I couldn't help but think of the gardens at

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Versailles, and I'm sure that's no accident.

The royal palace is also home to a comprehensive shop, and a very tasty restaurant, which served up some wonderful pasta dishes.

All in all, we found our visit to the Palacio Real to be a real revelation. This royal palace truly ranks amongst the great palaces of the world, and is well worth a visit for anyone heading to Spain's capital city.

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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