

The Palace of Versailles: Luxury Defined

by Cheryl Pendry, PassPorter Featured Columnist

There are many stunning palaces around the world, and we're lucky enough to live in Europe, which is home to probably the greatest selection of them, thanks to royal heritage in so many different countries.

One of the greatest names when it comes to royal palaces has to be the Chateau de Versailles, to the southwest of Paris. It became the center of power in France when King Louis XIV moved out there in 1682, and the French Royal family remained there until the French revolution in 1789 saw them forced to return to Paris.

That could have seen the end of the palace, but fortunately it was decreed that the chateau and its gardens would not be sold. Instead, the French Republic would look after it for the public, and following this decision, art works seized from various churches and other palaces were kept here, and so began its life as a museum and a tourist attraction. Today, it's used for visiting heads of state, as well as welcoming thousands of visitors each year.

The moment you arrive at Versailles, you realise just how popular an attraction this place is. There's a massive car and coach park in front of the palace, and later in the day, you'll see lots of both vehicles out there. As with many places, the best time of day to visit is first thing in the morning when crowds are lighter. We found buying tickets a bit confusing at first, until we spotted the ticket office off to the left-hand side of the entrance. Once you've purchased those it's through security and into the palace itself. The courtyard you enter gives the first glimpse of how the French royal family used to live, and standing there, taking in all the gold and detail on the palace, I could understand why their extravagance eventually led to rebellion in the country. Although absolutely breathtaking, I couldn't help but stand there and wonder what the money could have been spent on instead, as to build this place must have cost a small fortune.

You tour the palace itself with audio guides, and we found them to be perfect, giving us just enough information about each room we entered, allowing us time to appreciate every small detail, but not overburdening us with unnecessary facts. From the second you enter, just like the exterior, you find your jaw dropping to the floor, as you move from one room to the next. Gold is everywhere in every room, with portraits, some huge enough to take up entire walls, and statues on display.

Nearly every room you see is upstairs, and all were created for the then king and queen. I was fascinated to learn that there was a set of rooms dedicated to Roman gods and goddesses. The audio guides told us that this was the way of royalty, showing that they were linked to divinity. All of these rooms ended up with specific functions at royal parties, such as the Apollo Room, which was used as a concert or music room, while the Mars Room became a ballroom, and the Diane Drawing Room was turned into a billiard room.

The King's Private Apartments were a set of rooms for the private use of the king, and of course, they were amongst the most opulent that we saw. Only one room in the palace could eclipse these apartments, and of course that's the famous Hall of Mirrors, which is almost 240 feet long. The decadence in here is just amazing, with a total of 17 different mirrors, all of which mirror the arched windows opposite, which look out over the gardens of Versailles. Within each of those arches are even more mirrors. It's even more impressive when you realise that, in the 17th century, when this was constructed, mirrors were amongst the most expensive items in the world.

It really is sensory overload from the second you enter, and we spent ages, just taking the scene in. I think it's one of those places that, no matter how long you linger, you'll never actually see everything. It's certainly a highlight, and worth all the rave reviews that people give it. Over the years, it's been used for birthday and wedding celebrations, and was also the location for the signing of the Treaty of Versailles that put an end to World War I. Even today, it's still used for state occasions.

What did make me laugh is that you enter the Hall of Mirrors through the Room of War, and then ironically exit through the Room of Peace. It's nice the way these rooms counteract each other. From there, you head into the Queen's Apartments, and if I'm honest, I was more impressed by this set of rooms. They weren't as stunning, but they just seemed more appealing, perhaps because of the feminine touches in there. As we headed from there into the Guards' Room, we couldn't help but feel a pang of sympathy for the king and queen, when ordinary Parisians stormed the palace during the revolution. Apparently, word came to the guards of the unrest outside, and they deserted their posts, leaving the Royal Family to the mercy of the masses.

Versailles is a fascinating place to visit, and definitely amongst the top 10 palaces of the world. No trip to France, and Paris, would be complete without heading out to Versailles. However, the gardens are just as impressive as the interior of the palace, and in a future article, we'll be taking a look at those separately.

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There are various admission tickets available. The Passport gives you admission to all the palace tours, including the Trianon Palaces and Marie-Antoinette's Estate for €18, although this rises to €25 on days when the fountains perform to music or music is performed in the gardens. If you only want to see the main palace, that costs €15, while admission to the Trianon Palaces and Marie-Antoinette's Estate only is €10. During high season, from April 1 to October 30, the palace is open every day from 9:00 am to 6:30 pm, with the last admission at 6:00pm, while during the rest of the year, it closes an hour earlier. There are different admission hours for the other palaces and the grounds. For full details, visit <http://en.chateauversailles.fr/homepage>

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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