

Hampton Court: A Great Day Out At A Wonderful Palace With Magnificent Gardens

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Hampton Court has grown from humble beginnings in the 11th century to one of the finest palaces in the world. Over 800 years of history can be explored through this magnificent palace whose previous owners include Cardinal Wolsey, Henry VIII and Elizabeth I.

Hampton Court



The palace is located 11.7 miles (18.8 km) south west of Charing Cross and upstream of Central London on the River Thames and is only a half an hour train ride from Waterloo Station.

Visitors are offered an introductory exhibition, a guide through Tudor kitchens, a costume guide tour, and the opportunity to see the Queen's state apartments, the King's apartments and the Wolsey and Georgian rooms. One of the most impressive sights is the Great Hall, England's last and greatest medieval hall, decorated with sumptuous tapestries. Outside is the famous maze and the Privy garden restored to its 1702 glory. Refreshments can be found in either the coffee shop, a café, with delicious traditional home cooked British food, or by taking your own picnic.

The palace has not been lived in by the British royal family since the 18th century. It was originally built for Cardinal Wolsey, a favourite of King Henry VIII, circa 1514; in 1529, as Wolsey fell from favour, the palace was passed to the King, who enlarged it.



A stroll in the grounds



The following century, William III's massive rebuilding and expansion project intended to rival Versailles was begun. Work halted in 1694, leaving the palace in two distinct contrasting architectural styles, domestic Tudor and Baroque. While the palace's styles are an accident of fate, a unity exists due to the use of pink bricks and an, albeit

vague, symmetrical balancing of successive low wings.

The palace's Home Park is the site of the annual Hampton Court Palace Festival and Hampton Court Palace Flower Show. Along with St. James's Palace, it is one of only two surviving palaces out of the many owned by Henry VIII.

The palace houses many works of art and furnishings from the Royal Collection, mainly dating from the two principal periods of the palace's construction, the early Tudor (Renaissance) and late Stuart to Early Georgian period. The single most important works are Mantegna's Triumphs of Caesar housed in the Lower Orangery. The palace once housed the Raphael Cartoons now kept at the Victoria and Albert Museum.

Their former home, the Cartoon Gallery on the south side of the Fountain Court, was designed by Christopher Wren; copies painted in the 1690s by a minor artist, Henry Cooke, are now displayed in their place. Also on display are important collections of ceramics, including numerous pieces of blue and white porcelain collected by Queen Mary II, both Chinese imports and Delftware.



Ornate gate



Much of the original furniture from the late 17th and early 18th centuries, including tables by Jean Pelletier, "India back" walnut chairs by Thomas Roberts and clocks and a barometer by Thomas Tompion. Several state beds are still in their original positions, as is the Throne Canopy in the King's Privy Chamber. This room contains a crystal chandelier of

circa 1700, possibly the first such in the country.

The King's Guard Chamber contains a large quantity of arms: muskets, pistols, swords, daggers, and pieces of armour arranged on the walls in decorative patterns. Bills exist for payment to a John Harris dated 1699 for the arrangement, which is believed to be that which can still be seen today.

The grounds as they appear today were laid out in grand style in the late 17th century. There are no authentic remains of Henry VIII's gardens, merely a small knot garden, planted in 1924 which hints at the gardens' 16th century appearance. Today, the dominating feature of the grounds is the great landscaping scheme constructed for Sir Christopher Wren's intended new palace. From a water-bounded semicircular parterre, the length of the east front, three avenues radiate in crow's foot pattern. The central avenue containing not a walk or a drive, but the great canal, known as the Long Water, excavated during the reign of Charles II, in 1662. The design, radical at the time, is another immediately recognizable influence from Versailles, and was indeed laid out by pupils of André Le Nôtre, Louis XIV's landscape gardener.

Tudor kitchen



Ice skating at Hampton Court



On the south side of the palace is the Privy Garden bounded by semi-circular wrought iron gates by Jean Tijou. [42] This garden, originally William III's private garden, was replanted in 1992 with manicured hollies and yews along a geometric system of paths.[41]

A well known curiosity of the palace's grounds is Hampton Court Maze; planted sometime during the 1690s by George William III of Orange. [43] The

maze covers a third of an acre and contains half a mile of paths. It is possible that the current design replaced an earlier maze planted for Thomas Cardinal Wolsey. It was originally planted with hornbeam; it has been repaired latterly using many different types of hedge.

The palace, one of Britain's leading tourist attractions, is cared for by an independent charity, Historic Royal Palaces London and Henry Wise for which receives no funding from the Government or the Crown.