

Post



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Visiting the Biltmore Vanderbilt Built - April 24, 2024

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SUMMARY

Spent a full day at the Biltmore Estate seeing how the other .00001% lived during The Gilded Age. Quite, quite lavishly as it happens. The mansion was spectacular as was the Conservatory greenhouse and the azalea garden. The formal gardens did very little for me as I am not a fan of the color combinations they chose but I'm sure others loved them as well. Over 22,000 steps on the day - I was regretting my early morning 30-minute gym jog combined with all the walking required at The Biltmore! - Karen

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DETAIL

This morning we are good. We do go to the gym for a good workout. We feel virtuous as we clean up for our excitement of the day: The Biltmore. We're on this trip for gardens and The Biltmore is sure to have them. It's a short drive from where we're staying in Asheville to the Biltmore. But from the Drive Through tower at the entrance to the actual mansion, that's a different story.

Even though we're already on the Biltmore Estate, we're still miles from the actual 'house'. Back in the day the property was a respectable 125,000 acres. Now it's a measly 8,000. In all fairness most (all) of the difference is now a national forest.

The drive in is a one-way, gentle, meandering lane with grass, trees and flowers all around. We marvel at the dogwood and azaleas. We see rhododendrons that aren't out yet but have lots of blooms. Closer to the road the plants appear planned and intentional. Further back it looks more wild, but still tame, in a Disneyland kind of way.

We eventually do get to the parking, well, part of it. We're in Lot A (A1 to be specific) and there's also Lot's B, C, D, and E. Some have buses that take you to the mansion. We're close, so no bus, but is it still an eight minute walk, we're told, to the main house. Even the walk is delightful.

We end up at the top of a staircase, leading off in both directions, criss-crossing its way down to the level of the mansion. The view of the place is beautiful and intentional. All of these grounds were designed and the implementation was overseen by Frederick Law Olmsted, who also did New York's Central Park. He's got some street cred when it comes to doing landscape design.

We're very early for our 11 am tour of the mansion so we look for somewhere to have a bit of food for breakfast. On the plus side there are lots of places. On the minus side, they're all closed. They'll open around noon for lunch. There is a coffee shop that sells (according to the sign) coffee, tea, and hot chocolate. It says "Beverages". We do see someone with a small bag that suggests croissant, or some such thing. We ask and are told they got it at the coffee shop. "You just have to ask".

The coffee and cinnamon roll were just what we needed on a cool, sunny morning. Energized we head to the entrance, or maybe the gardens, given that we're still way early. They have a big clock showing which time-slot they're now allowing in. Ours is way off in the future. Somehow someone who works there happens to mention to us that they're not at all busy right now and are taking everyone. Sweet!!

Inside we get our hand-held "Press a number and listen to a narration". It's great. The path through the house is very well laid out. You're not going hither, thither and yon, you're on the path and the numbers are in sequential order. We're slack jawed looking at the opulent splendor and listening to what life was like for the builders, owners, and guests. Such a playground for the rich. There are Grandchildren of George Vanderbilt who downplay their wealth and explain "they're not maintaining the estate to make money" but rather, "they're making money to maintain the estate". They're doing it for us. Think of the children. I hope they couldn't hear my eyes rolling.

We see the dining room (monstrously large), the breakfast room, the library, the ballroom, etc. etc. The French Renaissance style castle has 250 rooms, including 35 bedrooms, 43 bathrooms, 65 fireplaces, but only one indoor pool. The view from the mansion is spectacular, all laid out by Frederick Law Olmsted. In the basement, much to Karen's delight, we got to see where and how they prepared all the meals for all of the guests. We saw the chilled rooms for storing vegetables, where they rotisserieed all the meats, and the two dumbwaiters (one electric, one manual) to ferry the courses upstairs to the awaiting diners. The narration stressed how seamless and effortless all of this was made to look for the lucky guests.

George Vanderbilt, maybe foreseeing the future, insisted that no one take any pictures of the guest rooms. He valued his guest's privacy. This has made it hard for those restoring the rooms to their original splendor.

Done with the house, er mansion, and exhausted, we head off to lunch. We have a reservation on the estate. It's not far, just a 10 minute drive. Yikes, and that's after an eight minute walk back to our car. At lunch the restaurant is empty and the hostesses is surprised to hear we think we have a lunch reservation for today, they're closed. We check and are chagrined to inform the young lady that our reservation is for tomorrow. Whoops! We were obviously confused by Open Table. Can you cancel our reservation. The fallback place is plenty nice.

Everywhere there are lots of blooms currently and more promised by all the waiting buds. After doing a wine tasting at the estate winery we drive back to the mansion and check out the gardens and greenhouses. Spectacular. Not always in color combinations we'd have chosen, but it takes all kinds, even those with bad taste.

Our watch tells us a couple of things. One, it's time to head back to our hotel, and two, we've done a lot of walking today. The car tells us that we're running on fumes. We need to get gas soon. We get a small pizza and salad from across the street and dine in our room with some of our yummy Costco wine. We're happy with our day and eventually head off to bed.

Photos



Even the drive in to the Biltmore Estate was dazzling.



We finally get a glimpse of the mansion. Who took this picture, you ask? Dave, from the hotel. We and they arrived around the same time. We've seen him a bunch. We have to stop meeting like this.



The "greeting area" for the mansion. Not bad. Love the glass ceiling!



Dining room with three? four? story fireplace. Cray cray.



View of the "back yard." Who needs Netflix?



The pool. Back then? No chlorine. The pool was filled and emptied for every use. Of course the men and women had to bathe separately.



The kitchen, well one of the many rooms of the kitchen. Pulling Karen away was a bit of a trick.



Four feet was the longest flowering string of the wisteria we saw.



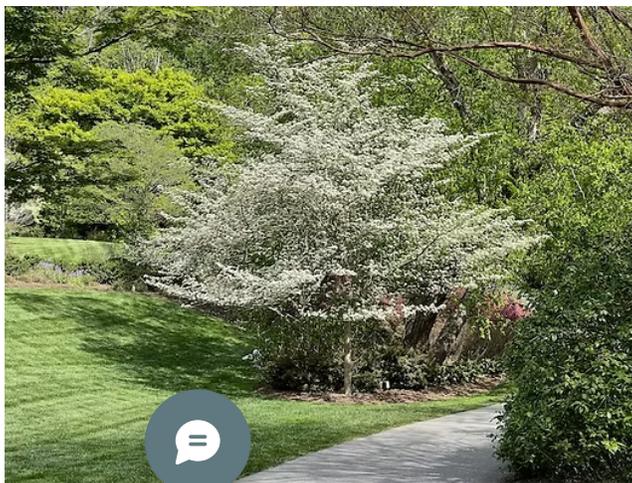
Oh, there's fish and chips on the menu?
I'll have the fish and chips.



FARNSNIENTE



There's (reportedly) a big Dale Chihuly exhibit here. We feel that he's following us. Everywhere we go there's a big Dale Chihuly exhibit.



Such beautiful dogwood here! But this ain't it. Trees and bushes with great masses of white blossoms? They got a million of 'em. This one? Winter King Hawthorne.



Irises and candlesticks in front of the conservatory.



The greenhouses have the most amazing, beautiful collection of flowering plants... plus these meat eaters that we're sure the Addams Family cultivated.



So many azaleas. The place is rotten with them.

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