

Visiting Buckingham Palace: Your Ultimate Guide to the Royal Residence

In episode 150 of UK Travel Planner podcast, we explore Buckingham palace

Tracy: In

Tracy: In episode 150 of the UK Travel Planner podcast, we explore Buckingham palace, covering ticket options, tour experiences and essential tips to help you plan your visit to London's most iconic royal residence.

intro: Welcome to the UK Travel Planning podcast. Your host is the founder of the UK travel planning website, Tracy Collins. In this podcast, Tracey shares destination guides, travel tips and, itinerary ideas, as well as interviews with a variety of guests who share their knowledge and experience of UK travel to help you plan your perfect UK vacation. Join us as we explore the UK from cosmopolitan cities to quaint villages, from historic castles to beautiful islands, and from the picturesque countryside to seaside towns.

Tracy: Hello and welcome to another episode of the UK Travel Planning Podcast. I'm Doug and today I'm turning the tables and interviewing Tracy about a truly royal visiting Buckingham Palace. So you visited the world famous palace on a small group tour two years ago and I've researched and written a guide for the London Travel Planning website, so it seemed a perfect topic to share with our listeners. Are you ready to share your palace knowledge?

Tracy: I am, I am. I'm actually quite excited to talk about basically one of the most famous palaces in the world and such an iconic site in London. yes. And I was very, very lucky a couple of years ago, to do a small group tour in April, which I will talk a little bit more about later in this episode.

Buckingham palace is the official London residence of the UK monarch

Tracy: So let's start with the basics. What is Buckingham palace and what makes it so special? And can you share a few fun facts as well?

Tracy: I can do. Right, so Buckingham palace is the official London residence of the UK monarch, which of course at the moment is Queen Elizabeth II. Yeah. So, but it, it just isn't just the UK monarch residence, it's a symbol of British heritage. and a few things people might not know about it is that it was built in 1703 for the Duke of Buckingham and it became a royal residence in 1761. So the first monarch to actually live there officially was Queen Victoria when she moved in in 1837. Now today it has over 750 rooms. Can you imagine that? So you're not gonna, there's no way you'll be able to see all of those and we're not allowed to see all those anyway. but it has, apparently has 78 bathrooms. Just imagine cleaning all of that. And it's even got its own post office and postcode and a cinema and lots of other fantastic rooms in there. Really, it's amazing. Now, interestingly, the royal family doesn't actually Own it. So it's held. No, they don't own it. Yeah, it's held in trust by the Crown Estate now, which is as far as I understand it. Basically it manages it and it pays any profits into the treasury for the benefit of the nation. So I guess that kind of means that we all own it.

Tracy: I. I guess so. Which bit do I own?

Tracy: I don't know, I'm not sure. Probably one of the bathrooms. Okay, so, one tip, if you are visiting Buckingham palace and we actually get asked about this quite a lot is to check out the flag. Flag lying on top of the roof of Buckingham palace itself.

Tracy: Okay.

Tracy: As this will tell you if the King is home or not. So the Royal standard. If you see the Royal Standard, it means. Means that they're in. He's in. And if you see the Union Jack, it means that they're not right now. And often people get this mixed up. If you see the Union Jack and assuming that the King's at home is not, it's a Royal standard that will tell you that he's at home. Now I'm, I, I'm not going to describe what they look like, but what I will do is that I'll put a picture of both of those, the Union Jack, just in case you don't know what it looks like. And they're all standard, which probably most people don't know what it looks like. That was in this podcast. I didn't know until a few years ago what it actually looked like.

Tracy: Oh, that's really helpful.

Tracy: Yeah. So I'll put that in the show notes so you can check that out if you're not sure.

Tracy: Okay. And it's not open all year, is it? Don't think.

Tracy: No, it isn't. It isn't.

Tracy: So when can people visit and what kinds of tickets are available?

Tracy: Okay, so this is what my research has taught me. So the State Rooms are ah, open from July to September every year. but I'm going to say at this point it is essential to book tickets in advance. So if you leave it until July or August or September and turn up in London trying to get a ticket to get into Buckingham palace, probably no chance. Now there's a standard entrance ticket which will get you into the State Rooms and the gardens. it's self guided with a free audio guide. There are also some exclusive small group tours like the State Rooms and Garden Highlights tour and the East Wing and State Rooms Tour for something longer. The Royal day out tour is four and a half hours and Includes the King's Gallery, the Royal Muse, Highly recommend and Estate Rooms. Now, during other months of the year, the palace opens on selected dates for small guided tours. And that's how I managed to visit in April 2023. So I subscribed by the Royal Collection Trust

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Tracy: to their emails, and I will put a link to that website in the show notes. And they sent me an email alerting me that there was going to be small group tours available. So I will say it's not cheap. I think it cost me over 90 pound. But, I booked it and actually I absolutely loved it. The guide that we had was amazing. I think there was probably only maybe 14 or 15 of us on the tour. and it was just. It was the first time I'd ever been inside Buckingham palace and I loved it. I would also would say I did the Royal Muse the day after that and actually our guide, who take this around Buckingham palace, she recognised my handbag, actually. She recognised my bag because she admired it on the turn. She was like, oh, remember you from the church? In fact, it probably wasn't the day after. It was probably about 10 days after, actually. because I did the Royal

Moves separately and, So lovely. Really, really interesting. It really. And it, it was so good having a guide because she knew so much. She works for Buckingham palace and she's one of their guards, so she knew a lot about it. So we'll just say that that was really, really good and I thoroughly enjoyed it. But, there are something. Well, things happen.

Tracy: I was gonna say, I remember you talking about and raving about those, those tours you had there.

Tracy: Yeah.

Tracy: And particularly somebody who remembered your handbag as well.

Tracy: Yeah, it was funny.

You actually enter through the iconic front gates and walk across the forecourt

Tracy: So I remember you saying, there's something new also for 2025.

Tracy: Yeah, I know. And this is so exciting and I really want to visit. I mean, we are going to be in the UK in September, but I haven't booked tickets yet because we're still planning what we're going to do. But if I do get the chance, I'd love to, because now if you. You actually enter through the iconic front gates and walk across the forecourt, just like the Royal family man.

Tracy: So you can wave.

Tracy: So you can wave. But obviously I'm not sure they walk across it or they get kind of taking a Rolls Royce across it, to be honest. You can, you can walk across a. Go through. Can you imagine going through those gates in. And then walking across the forecourt and.

Tracy: Into Buckingham, where so many have trolled. I mean, It's.

Tracy: I know. I think it's really exciting and something that I really want to do.

Tracy: Definitely.

So once you're inside, what are some of the highlights people can expect

So once you're inside, what are some of the highlights people can expect to see?

Tracy: Right. Well, it's really interesting because for me, I just. I don't know, it took my breath away in some ways because a lot of it were things that I, I had recognised, obviously, because, most of my. Well, all of my life, Queen Elizabeth was my queen. So I. I kind of recognise so much of those, of the rooms and so much that I saw during the tour. So you'll see the State Room and that's really the star attraction and that's what it's used for official events and it's full of art and, you know, ornate furnishings, really beautiful and you will recognise it. you'll see the throne room, you know, with King Tower of and Queen cruel as coronation chairs. Now what. Well, I'll say to you, when I

went in 2023, it was. It was great because was literally about two weeks before the actual coronation, two or three weeks before the coronation. And they actually had a room set up like a replica inside of Westminster Abbey, like a stage. And apparently the, at that point King and Queen to be. They were practising the ceremony for the coronation. So we got to see that. It was absolutely fantastic. yeah, so. So I love that you'll also get to see the white drawing room and the picture gallery and you'll see masterpieces like that. I think these are actually own the royal family. Rembrandt, T shirt. There's just paintings like some world's M. Like priceless paintings, you know, lining the. This picture gallery, you'll, see the grand staircase, which really is a showstopper. And in summer I didn't do it because I obviously visited April and there's something I really want to do. in summer you get to visit the palace garden with 39 acres of landscape garden. It's got lake, rose garden and even a tennis court. And, this, honestly is something that I really want to do. And if you have visited Buckingham palace and you're going, or you're going this year and you're going to see the gardens, let me know because I really want to know what they're like. I've heard they're beautiful.

Tracy: That's wonderful. You're making me want to go.

When should people go to Buckingham palace and how do they get there

Right, let's talk logistics. When should people go and how do they get there?

Tracy: Right now the palace is open daily in July and August, but it closes on Tuesdays and Wednesdays in September, so the hours do vary slightly, but it opens at 9:30am and the last admission is either 4:30 or 5:30 depending on the month. So you'll have to

check. You'll know when you book your train, your ticket. getting there is easy. The nearest tube is Green park, which is around about a six minute walk away. There are other nearby stations including Victoria, St. Joseph park and Hyde Park Corner. You, can also catch buses or coach to Victoria Coach Station or even take an Uberboat to Westminster Pier. And then it's about 20 minute walk away, to get to Buckingham palace that way. So it's not hard to get to.

Tracy: No, it's not. You got, you can come in from each direction as well.

Tracy: I'm also just gonna throw in there as well if you actually go on the London Eye and. Oh, I know it's not such a controversial thing. Don't do the London. I do the London Eye. I said if you want to do the London, I do it. personally, I like it. You get a view of booking in Paris on a clear all the way to. All the way from the London Eye, which I think is really cool.

Tracy: Oh, that's a useful little tip.

Tracy: Yeah.

So any key tips for listeners to help them make the most of their visitors

Tracy: So any key tips for listeners to help them make the most of their visitors?

Tracy: Right, definitely. I'm going to say this three

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Tracy: times. Book in advance. Book in advance. Book in advance.

Tracy: Right, so book in advance, possibly.

Tracy: Yeah, yeah, absolutely. Now, today we are recording this episode. It's the 26th of March. Right. And some tours are already unfortunately sold out on the Royal Collection Trust website. So, you know, it, it's crazy, but they are already, already already booked up. So yeah, just make sure that you, if you want to do it, that you check. There are a couple of tests still available so I would, I would get that done. So arrive on time because entry is timed and late comers won't be admitted.

Tracy: So that's particularly important as well, isn't it? So know how you're going to get there and it's important that you do arrive on time.

Tracy: Yeah. Make sure that you plan from wherever you are before whatever you do it. In fact, I'll just plan your day around that if that's what you're going to be doing and that's what I've done. So visit other things in the area, which we will talk about in a second. because you, you know, if you're late, you're not going to get in.

Tracy: So don't underestimate the size of London. If you're coming in from outside London, you know, we'll take a bit of time to get there.

Tracy: Yeah, yeah, absolutely. expect security checks. They're not just going to let you walk in with everything. So you, you know, it's like the airport, you can't take any large bags in. So either leave left luggage at Victoria Station if you've got suitcases. We have

an article about where you can leave luggage in London. so that's your best bet. So if you've got large bags with you, don't. And you know something, I've seen this in places. I remember going to the Coliseum in Rome a few years ago and seeing people take. Trying to take suitcases in Coliseum. Seriously, M Guys, don't take, don't try and take suitcases into Buckingham Palace. They won't let you in. one thing that really disappointed me, but I can understand this, is that you can, you're not, you're not allowed to take any photos or videos inside Buckingham Palace. I understand why, but it's like you really want to, but you're not allowed to. you can take photos in the gardens. apparently wear comfortable shoes because you're going to be doing a lot of walking and a lot of going up and down stairs as well. From what I remember as well. Going up and down, I remember the staircase and stuff. So make sure that you've got comfortable shoes on. I always say that all the time anyway. Yeah. Now a bonus tip. If you book your ticket directly from the official palace website, you can convert it into a one year pass for a free return visit. Just make sure that you sign it, print your name on your ticket before you leave and make sure to get a member of staff to stamp and validate it. I did do that when I was there in April, but never got a chance to go back again in that yet. But also you can do. I'm also going to throw that and you can do this at Windsor Castle as well. if so, just need to put your name on it, sign it and then make sure that they stamp it so it's validated so you can return in 12 months.

Tracy: Oh, that's really interesting. Thank you for that.

Plan around Buckingham Palace when planning your London visit

What else is nearby the visitors might want to add to their day?

Tracy: Right. So obvious things do a changing of the guard, so that's a must. It usually takes place Monday, Wednesday, Friday and Sunday at 11am Again, we've got a guide to the changing of the guard on the website, so I'll put a link into that. There's also St. James's park and Green park and they're lovely for a stroll, picnic, I think St. James's park personally is my favourite one. And then of course you've got Westminster Abbey, Big Ben, Trafalgar Square, the National Gallery, Churchill War Rooms, they're all, they're all within a 15 to 20 minute walk. So that's what I'm saying. If you're planning a visit, if you're going to spend some time at Buckingham Palace, I would plan your day around it. So again, and we say this all the time, actually when you're planning your itinerary for London, it. Rather than bobbing across London all the time, stick to what's in that area. So depending on what day, obviously start with your booking for Buckingham palace because that's going to be your main thing. And then plan the rest of the day round it. I think that's the best bet. and look at what else you can go and see. But don't overpack your, your attitude.

Tracy: Oh, no, don't underestimate that. Walking.

Tracy: Yeah, absolutely.

Tracy: Yeah, that's really good.

What would be your one tip for someone visiting Buckingham palace for the first time

So what would be your one tip for someone visiting Buckingham palace for the first time?

Tracy: I kind of said it a few times already, but the main thing really is to book as early as possible. especially if you want one of the special tours. Plan your day around your time slot. Like I've said, wear comfortable shoes and take time to enjoy the gardens and let me know what it's like. You know, Buckingham palace is a magical place to experience British history and royal tradition. So, you know, enjoy it.

Tracy: Yeah, definitely. That's brilliant advice. So thank you for sharing all that. I know this will help so many listeners plan their visit.

Tracy: No, thanks. Look, it's always really good to do specific episodes of the podcast about visiting certain destinations around the UK and in London. So we also have guides, to visiting the Tower of London and Westminster Abbey as well on previous podcasts. So do take a listen to those if you're planning to visit any of those kind of iconic, must visit places in London. And also, also, I'm gonna say, I.

Tracy: Was just gonna say. So tell me what it's like to be on the other side of the mic.

Tracy: I was just about to say it's actually really nice for me to be interviewed rather than saying that I love interviewing people, I just prefer talking to somebody else rather than doing a solo episode. Just like talking so. Well. Yeah, I do like talking. Yeah. Yeah.

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Tracy: Okay. So that's it for this episode of the UK Travel Planning Podcast. Don't forget to subscribe, leave a review and check the show notes for helpful links. So any questions, just leave us a voice message via the Speak Pipe link in the show notes.

Tracy: Brilliant.

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Tracy: Well, I guess that just leaves us to stay until next week.

Tracy: Happy UK Travel Planning thank you.

Tracy: For tuning in to this week's episode of the UK Travel Planning Podcast. As always, show notes can be found [@uktravelplanning.com](mailto:uktravelplanning.com) if you've enjoyed the show, why not leave us feedback via text or a review on your favourite podcast app? We love to hear from you. And you never know, you may receive a shout out in a future episode. But as always, that just leaves me to say until next week. Happy UK Travel Planning.

00:15:31