

2013 TOUR DESCRIPTIONS

WEDNESDAY, JULY 17, 2013

BILTMORE ESTATE TOUR

PRICE PER PERSON: \$96.00

8 A.M. - DEPART FROM HOTEL

9:30 A.M. - ARRIVE AT BILTMORE ESTATE

10 A.M. – 12 pm. - SELF GUIDED TOUR OF THE MAIN HOUSE (Visit the Gift Shops)

12 PM. – 12:30 - SELF GUIDED TOUR OF THE GARDENS

1 P.M. – 2 P.M. - LUNCH AT DEERPARK RESTAURANT

2:30 P.M. – 3:30 P.M. TOUR OF THE WINERY- SAMPLE THE VARIOUS WINES MADE ON SITE

3:30 P.M. - DEPART FOR HOTEL

4:30 P.M. – ARRIVE AT HOTEL

BILTMORE ESTATE is a large private estate and tourist attraction in Asheville, North Carolina. Biltmore House, the main house on the estate, is a Chateausque-styled mansion built by George Washington Vanderbilt II between 1889 and 1895 and is the largest privately-owned home in the United States at 178,926 square feet and featuring 250 rooms. Still owned by one of Vanderbilt's descendants, it stands today as one of the most prominent remaining examples of the Gilded Age, and of significant gardens in the *jardin a la francaise* and English Landscape garden styles in the United States. In 2007, it was ranked eighth in *America's Favorite Architecture* by the American Institute of Architects.

Vanderbilt, began to make regular visits with his mother, Maria Louisa Kissam Vanderbilt (1821-1896), (1821-1896), to the Asheville, North Carolina area. He loved the scenery and climate so much that he decided to create his own summer estate in the area, which he called his "little mountain escape," just as his older brothers and sisters had build opulent summer houses in places such as Newport, Rhode Island, and Hyde Park, New York.

ARCHITECTURE

Vanderbilt's idea was to replicate the working estates of Europe. He commissioned prominent New York architect Richard Morris Hunt, who had previously designed houses for various Vanderbilt family members, to design the house in the Chateausque style, using several Loire Valley French Renaissance architecture chateaux, including the Chateau de Blois, as models. The estate included its own village, today named Biltmore Village, and a church, today known as the Cathedral of All Souls.

LANDSCAPE

Wanting the best, Vanderbilt also employed landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted to design the grounds, with the immediate gardens in the *Garden a la francaise* style, beyond those in the English Landscape garden style. Beyond these were the natural woodlands and agricultural lands with the intentionally rustic three-mile approach road passing through. Gifford Pinchot and later Carl A. Schenck were hired to manage the forests, with Schenck establishing the first forestry education program in the U.S., the Biltmore Forest School, on the estate grounds in 1898. Intending that the estate could be self-supporting, Vanderbilt set up scientific forestry programs, poultry farms, cattle farms, hog farms and a dairy. His wife, Edith Stuyvesant Vanderbilt, also enthusiastically supported agricultural reform and promoted the establishment of a state agricultural fair. In 1901, to help provide local employment, Vanderbilts started Biltmore Industries, which made furniture modeled after the furnishing of the estate.

The Vanderbilts invited family and friends from across the country to the opulent estate. Notable guests to the estate over the years have included author Edith Wharton, novelist Henry James, H.R.H. The Prince of Wales, and Presidents McKinley, T. Roosevelt, and Wilson.

Vanderbilt paid little attention to the family business or his own investments, and it is believed that the construction and upkeep of Biltmore depleted much of his inheritance. After Vanderbilt died in 1914 of complications from an emergency appendectomy, his widow, Edith Vanderbilt, completed the sale of 85,000 of the original 125,000 acres to the federal government. This was to carry out her husband's wish that the land remain unaltered, and that property became the nucleus of the Pisgah National Forest.

TOURIST ATTRACTION

In an attempt to bolster the estate's financial situation during the Depression, Vanderbilt's only child, Cornelia Stuyvesant Vanderbilt, and her husband, John Amherst Cecil, opened Biltmore House to the public in March 1930. Family members continued to live there until 1956, when it was permanently opened to the public as a house museum. Visitors can view the 70,000-gallon (265,000-litre and 265-cubic meter) indoor swimming pool, bowling alley, early 20th century exercise equipment, two-story library, and other rooms filled with artworks, furniture and 19th-century novelties such as elevators, forced-air heating, centrally controlled clocks, fire alarms and an intercom system. The estate remains a major tourist attraction in Western North Carolina and has almost 1 million visitors each year.