

EL ESCORIAL

Just over forty kilometres northwest of Madrid, nesting in the mountains at some 900m altitude you will find the small town of El Escorial, home of just over 15,000 inhabitants.



It was also the political centre of Spain under Felipe II, and the place where he decided to build a big basilica and monastery in 1557 to thank God after winning the battle of St Quintin. The complex also includes a library and a pantheon. El Escorial is an amazing example of Spanish renaissance architecture and much more than just a mausoleum for the monarchs, which is probably what it is most famous for.

The whole complex has an astonishing 2,673 windows 1,000 doors, and in the basilica there are 43 altars. The basilica contains two large tombs, one either side of the principal altar. One is for Felipe II, the founder of El Escorial, the other for his father Carlos I. They are accompanied by various relatives.

The crypt of the complex, El Panteón de los Reyes, comprises a circular chapel decorated with marble and golden bronze. This is where all the kings and queens from Carlos I onwards rest with the exception of Felipe V and Fernando VI, who were buried in other churches.

Other members of the royal family lie in the Pantheon de los Infantes.

The Royal Apartment is where Felipe lived when he stayed at the monastery. The king's chambers are quite modest quarters, and next to the bed there is a window overlooking the altar so that Felipe could follow the mass even when he was bed bound by gout.

The monastery is still functioning, and public access to this area is limited.

There are other buildings on the grounds, the most famous of which are la Casita del Príncipe and la Casita del Infante. La Casita del Príncipe was designed for the crown prince, Carlos IV to be, by the architect Juan de Villanueva, who is probably most famous for the Prado Museum in Madrid, with which the building does have certain similarities. La Casita del Infante was designed by the same architect in 1771 for Gabriel de Borbón, son of Carlos III. It is a small 'villa' with Italian style gardens and one of the best views of the monastery.

El Escorial is well worth a visit, and if you would like to go, please contact us here at the Trust offices and we will help you arrange your trip.

In edition 64 we will be visiting the Aquaduct of Segovia. See you there.