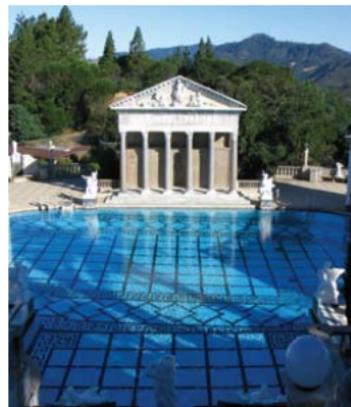
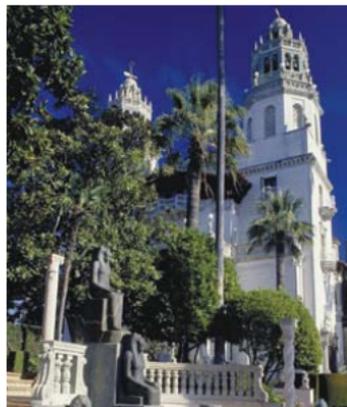


HISTORY

BY LAURA HOXWORTH

**More Than a Landmark:** Hearst Castle's Tribute to Opulence

A wide expanse of clear blue water stretches more than 100 feet in front of you, shimmering in the sun. Around the pool's edges, smooth marble colonnades frame mountain views and 17th-century Italian sculptures. And that's just the Neptune Pool. The indoor Roman Pool features floor-to-ceiling mosaic tiles, flanked by eight marble statues of gods and goddesses.

At Hearst Castle, just when you think you've found the height of extravagance, you'll find something that tops it. Originally owned by publishing tycoon William Randolph Hearst, the sprawling estate took him and famed architect Julia Morgan almost three decades to build, from 1919 to 1947. Today it's one of the top attractions on California's Central Coast.

As you stroll through a handful of the estate's 165 rooms, you'll spot artistic treasures such as Neptune brandishing a triton in a 17th-century piece by French artist Simon Vouet. This painting is one of hundreds scattered throughout the estate, remnants of Hearst's passion for art.

But don't be fooled: Despite the artifacts, the castle is anything but stuffy. In its 1930s heyday, lavish parties entertained elite guests. From Charlie Chaplin to Winston Churchill to Hearst's famous mistress, Marion Davies, anyone who was anyone sipped champagne at Hearst Castle.

Outside, seaside vistas and orange trees await you in the ever-blooming gardens, where the soft chirping of birds and colorful bursts of tulips and poppies counter the opulence of the Mediterranean Revival architecture. Note the absence of skyscrapers and smog — halfway between LA and San Francisco, the castle is isolated on a tranquil patch of undeveloped countryside.

Stretched across 127 acres, Hearst Castle is simply impossible to cover in one visit — good thing there are six tours. Plan ahead for The Evening Tour. Held at Christmas, it's the only one that shows the castle at night. Plus, docents in period dress give you an enchanting look at Hearst Castle as it was in the gilded era. For more information, visit hearstcastle.org.



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