



DISCOVERING & ENJOYING

SPAIN
MADRID
REGION

—

THE ROYAL COLISEUM SAN LORENZO DE EL ESCORIAL



Visit the Royal Coliseum guided by Carlos III

*Discovering the Coliseum with emotion,
laughter and a lot of spectacle*

A street away from the Monastery of San Lorenzo de El Escorial we encounter the Royal Coliseum of Carlos III, Spain's oldest covered theatre still standing and the only court theatre still in use.

This dramatized visit, which is aimed at the whole family, is a tourist and cultural activity combining historical and architectural rigour with the magic of the stage.

The Madrid Region is currently offering a weekend programme of high artistic quality. Its goal is none other than an attempt to decentralize scenic activities. Teresa Berganza, María Pagés, Víctor Ullate, Carmen Maura, Susi Sánchez, Pedro Casablanc, Rocío Márquez or Eduardo Guerrero are some of the many artists who have delighted us with their shows in this architectural jewel.

An overview of the Royal Coliseum's history

It was in 1759 when Carlos III arrived in Spain. As a result of his experience as king of Naples and Sicily, he embarked on major social, urban, economic and artistic reforms. Of these last ones, and aware of the lack of scenic creativity in our country, he decided to commission the construction of three court theatres in the Royal Sites of Aranjuez, El Pardo and San Lorenzo de El Escorial.

Thus, in 1771 the French architect Jaime Marquet endowed San Lorenzo de El Escorial with an important scenic space, a benchmark in its time, displaying the considerable influence of the Italian theatres. It was given the name of Royal Coliseum of Carlos III and it was from this moment on that the Companies of the Royal Sites were created, which were charged with staging a wide-ranging repertoire in the court theatres.

The first reform took place twenty-one years later and was carried out by Juan de Villanueva, a representative figure of the era's architectural scene and the author of the urban planning for San Lorenzo de El Escorial and the *Casita de Arriba*, or the Infante's House, and the *Casita de Abajo*, or the Prince's House.

During the War of Independence, the theatre became an inn and a cobbler's for the French troops, activities which greatly deteriorated it. It was Fernando VII who gave the Coliseum its original image and artistic life back. With the Royal Site having been abandoned by the court, it began to be used as the Site's Theatre, with more popular spectacles and functions.

It flourished again in the early 20th century thanks to premiering works by Jacinto Benavente, the brothers Álvarez Quintero or Muñoz Seca, but the unleashing of the Spanish Civil War transformed it into a cinema, leading to its comprehensive abandonment and decay.

Today we can enjoy it thanks to the reconstruction undertaken by the Society for the Development and Reconstruction of the Royal Coliseum of Carlos III, which reopened it in 1979. Since 1985 it is the Madrid Region which has assumed responsibility for the theatre, having taken charge of its programming and maintenance. In 1995 it was listed as an Asset of Cultural Interest in the Category of Monument.

The theatre's architecture

The architect Jaime Marquet designed a theatre that followed the French and Neapolitan models of the second half of the 18th century, intending to integrate it into the urban context of San Lorenzo de El Escorial. The Coliseum's configuration is based on the new typology employed at the time of the so-called container and optic curve type, with a rectangular U-shaped floor plan and the stage at the back, on which the original 18th-century curtain structure was conceived.

The building's façade or exterior features a three-sided roof, with thick walls as the only structural support. The interior is directly accessed from a foyer and the boxes and gods in the upper part by two

large, perfectly proportioned and very beautiful staircases situated on either side of the theatre structure. The Royal Coliseum of Carlos III comprises two bays: the stage and a second one, which includes the foyer and a hall divided into stalls, balcony, boxes and the gods. Particularly noteworthy is the wonderful lamp presiding over the stalls, produced by the Royal Glass Factory of La Granja and which at the time was attached to the original 1771 hoist situated in the top part of the theatre.

We have before us a very harmonious space with seating capacity for 340 spectators.

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If you wish to take part in the dramatized visits to the Royal Coliseum of Carlos III, please contact the theatre on telephone number 918904411 or send an email to: teatro.coliseocarlos3@madrid.org

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