Vatican Gardens Tours

by James Werning, Demand Media

The Vatican Gardens offer cool relief to hot and weary travelers.

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The Vatican and its gardens date to the 13th century, although the buildings and grounds were redesigned in Renaissance times. The original gardens began simply with a fruit orchard, which was expanded upon by subsequent generations. The original purpose was to create a place of peace, beauty and contemplation for religious clerics, and today the Vatican Gardens offer those same rewards to weary travelers who seek to rest in the shade of its leafy trees and cool stone walls.

Visiting the Vatican Gardens

The only way to see the Vatican Gardens is by guided tour led by Vatican staff. The tour lasts about two hours, with about 20 people per tour. It is primarily a historical tour, taking participants through a 2,000-year history of the Catholic Church and its Vatican gardens. Admission into the Vatican Museum is included in the Vatican Gardens Tour ticket price. Tours are available Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday.

Garden Overview

The Vatican Gardens cover 57 acres, more than half of the area encompassed by Vatican City. They are bordered by St. Peter's Basilica and the Vatican Museums on the East, and by medieval stone walls on the other sides. The current garden plan was laid out by Donato Bramante in the 1500s at the same time he rebuilt St. Peter's Basilica. Some of the garden buildings predate the gardens, standing since the 9th Century. Other features added through the years include fountains, sculptures, devotional grottoes, and meandering pathways.

Plant Life

The Vatican Gardens are perhaps more highly regarded for their historical and religious significance than for their plants, but the plants are indeed luxurious. A splendid assortment of evergreen trees grace the gardens, including cedar, pine, cypress, boxwood, palm, olive, magnolias and ivy. Many flowers can be seen in season, as can succulents like cactus, agave, jade and aloe. There is a small grove of horse chestnut trees and an olive tree that was given by the nation of Israel as an emblem of peace and goodwill.

While You are There

St. Peter's Basilica is a later Renaissance architectural wonder that should be included in your tour of the gardens. The pope makes his regular public appearance in St. Peter's Square, adjoining the basilica, every Wednesday between 10 and 11 a.m. Visitors have the option of climbing up to the dome or down into the Vatican Grottoes to visit the Tomb of St. Peter and the Necropolis tombs. The Vatican Museums, including the Sistine Chapel, hold some of the most priceless works of art on Earth.

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About the Author

James Werning has authored books and numerous articles published on various websites. His scripts have aired for over 15 years on radio stations across the United States and Canada. He has a master's degree in communications from the University of Edinburgh, Scotland.

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