



Photos: Courtesy The Biltmore Company

Left: The Biltmore's roofline mimics the ridges of the surrounding Blue Ridge Mountains.

Below: Fans of the hit PBS series can visit Mrs. Patmore's kitchen at *Downton Abbey: The Exhibition*.

THE ABBEY IN ASHEVILLE

The world of *Downton Abbey* arrives at the city's historic Biltmore estate museum

STORY: Amanda Morris

For fans of the hit PBS show *Downton Abbey*, the Biltmore estate in Asheville, North Carolina, is an ideal U.S. destination to view an authentic example of the upstairs/downstairs life portrayed in the series. A three-and-a-half-hour drive from Atlanta, this National Historic Landmark reveals the decadence of the Gilded Age elite along with a glimpse into the life of the hard-working staff who served them.

The Biltmore is now even more enticing as it hosts *Downton Abbey: The Exhibition*, premiering Nov. 8. The grand estate is the perfect setting for

the interactive exhibition given the many parallels between the real-life Biltmore and fictional *Downton Abbey*.

The exhibit features never-before-seen multimedia presentations, costumes, artifacts and sets from the show.

Just as the on-screen Crawleys placed great importance on maintaining and preserving their estate for future generations, so did the real-life Vanderbilts. Today, the Biltmore is owned by the fourth and fifth generations of the Vanderbilt family. It was the vision of George Vanderbilt, grandson to the shipping and railroad tycoon, Cornelius Vanderbilt. Through his extensive European travels, George gained not only a cache of

art treasures, but also the concept for his 8,000-acre estate, modeling it after centuries-old English estates much like the one used as the Crawleys' home in the show.

More than 40 costumes from *Downton Abbey* are on display at the Biltmore through next April.



To fully immerse yourself into the world of *Downton Abbey*, stay at the four-star Inn on Biltmore Estate. Here, you'll experience a level of service comparable to that of being a guest of the Vanderbilts—or the Crawleys. From the Inn, stroll to Antler Hill Village for dinner and to check out the part of the exhibit featuring more than 40 of the show's costumes, including those worn by Maggie Smith, Michelle Dockery and Hugh Bonneville.

After breakfast at the Inn the next day, take the shuttle to the Biltmore house. When the French chateau-inspired mansion comes into view, notice how the roofline mimics the surrounding mountain ridges. As you tour the house, examine the decorative ceilings in many of the rooms. In the salon, for example, the ceiling is draped with wool brocade tenting inspired by the Asian and Moorish decorating styles. While there, also keep an eye out for the ivory chess set originally owned by Napoleon Bonaparte.

Next, head downstairs to the service areas. *Downton* fans will enjoy seeing the servant's dining room, where, unlike in the show, you would never see the house-

keeper (like Mrs. Hughes) eating with a kitchen maid (like Daisy). There was a strict hierarchy, and the upper and lower servants rarely socialized with each other.

Upon leaving the house, take the shuttle to Amherst at Deerpark, where the majority of the exhibit is held. Here, you'll have a chance to interact with your favorites from the show in the Great Hall of Characters. Holograms, life-size imagery and video add to the multimedia exhibit. Artifacts and multiple sets from the series, including Mrs. Patmore's kitchen, Mary's bedroom, Mr. Carson's pantry and the Crawleys' dining room, bring the show to life.

Finish your day back at the Inn with a drink at the lobby bar. Take your beverage onto the terrace and enjoy the view of the site that inspired George Vanderbilt to buy this land and build America's largest home. The Crawleys would approve. ■

Downton Abbey: The Exhibition runs Nov. 8, 2019, through Apr. 7, 2020, and is included in the purchase of a daytime admission or Christmas Evenings ticket. For more information, visit biltmore.com.