

Royal Greenhouses of Brussels

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Once a year, for three weeks, the most remarkable greenhouses in Europe open their doors to visitors from all over the world. The fairy-tale plant kingdom in Brussels is not only a botanical garden, it is also an architectural masterpiece of glass and metal, owned by the royal family of Belgium. Covering an area of 14,000 square metres, the Royal Greenhouses in the park of Laeken Castle in Brussels act as a tourist magnet in spring, when all the plants are in bloom.

The glass complex combines the pompous ambitions of the Belgian monarch Leopold II (1835–1909), expressed through the lavish architecture of the Art Nouveau style from the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and the diversity of exotic plants and flowers from near and distant countries.

The city of glass was designed and built by the architect Alphonse Balat between 1874 and 1895 on the orders of King Leopold II, who financed the monumental greenhouses in the park through theft and brutal crimes in Belgium's only colony at the time – the Congo.

The glass palace consists of several enormous pavilions, domes and long galleries, and the “iron church” (covered greenhouse) was originally intended to serve as a royal chapel, later becoming a main part of the complex system of greenhouses in Laeken.

Once in the oasis of the endless glass greenhouses, visitors can stroll along the narrow colourful passages, adorned with lush tropical and subtropical vegetation, some of which dates back to the time of King Leopold II.

Today, 60 gardeners take care annually of approximately 60,000 plant species that are planted there.

The most impressive part of the glass complex is the winter garden, called the rotunda. It has the shape of a cathedral, with a height of 26 metres and a dome diameter of 57 metres, and its top is adorned with a royal crown.

In 2018 the greenhouses will be open to botany enthusiasts between 21 April and 11 May, for an entrance fee of 2.5 euros.