In 1715 Margrave Georg Wilhelm built the Old Palace near the residential town of Bayreuth as the central feature of a court hermitage. In 1735, when Margrave Friedrich took over the government of the margraviate, he presented the Hermitage to his wife Wilhelmine. Fascinated by this unique complex, the margrave immediately began enlarging it, first adding new rooms to the Old Palace including a Music Room, a Japanese Cabinet and the Chinese Mirror Cabinet, in which he wrote her celebrated memoirs. Between 1743 and 1745 various buildings and fountains such as the Raniert Theatre and the Lower Grotto were built from 1749 to 1753. In the sections added by Wilhelmine to the existing gardens she introduced traditional baroque elements such as hedge gardens, pergolas and waterworks. Created in an era when there were no gardens of this type at all in Germany, the Hermitage is thus unique amongst the gardens of the 18th century.

The Lower Grotto is located at the lowest point in the garden. View of the Old Hermitage Palace with the fountain

Hermitage and Court Garden

The stage with the reconstructed stage set

Margravial Opera House

The opera house inaugurated in 1748 is one of the most impressive examples of Baroque architecture built to celebrate a special occasion. It was modelled on the greatest opera houses of the time in Vienna and Dresden. Its interior with tiers of loges made entirely of wood was designed by Giuseppe Galli Bibiena, the most important theatre architect of his day. The theatre was built at the instigation of Margravine Wilhelmine, a sister of Frederick the Great, who was herself an author, composer and the director of the court opera. The theatre was built for the time in passenger (similar with croquet) was included in the new complex. Built of the hill the palatial couple laid out avenues, hedge gardens, pergolas and parterres. Indian features of the geometric garden, the canal and three main avenues, have however remained. In 1990 the southern wing of the leaf was reconstructed.

Wilhelmine of Bayreuth in pilgrim costume, A. Pesne, c. 1750

The opera house may be closed temporarily due to event rehearsals. There are multimedia shows at fixed times (every 45 minutes).

Visitors are able to look round the opera house on their own afterwards until the next show.

There are municipal parking spaces for the disabled (Wölfelstraße, Münzgasse) and several car and bus parking facilities at the entrance to the park.
On first seeing the bizarre rock formations in the beech grove not far from Zwernitz Castle a guest of Margrave Friedrich is said to have exclaimed ‘C’est sans pareil!’ – ‘It has no equal!’. Between 1744 and 1748 the Oriental Building and the kitchen building opposite were constructed in this unusual natural setting from designs by the court architect Joseph St Pierre. These two buildings, which were used for festivities at the Bayreuth Court, are grouped around a sunken garden parterre, which was recreated in 1984 from a copper engraving made in 1748. The park bordering these buildings was decorated with very little alteration to the natural surroundings with a ruined theatre and numerous smaller buildings, most of them in an Eastern Asian style; these did not however survive beyond the 19th century. The ruined theatre which still exists today demonstrates the dependence of mankind’s creations on the factor of time and is a reminder that even classical works are subject to decay.

All castles are closed on 1 January, Shrove Tuesday, 24, 25 and 31 December.

INFORMATION