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Life in a Medieval Castle

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You've probably seen castles in movies. Their walls are very tall. Flags fly from their towers.

Many castles were built in Europe during medieval times, from about 1100 to about 1550. Castles were the homes of a lord, his family, and his servants. Some of the lord's soldiers, called knights, might have lived there, too.

People built castles during medieval times for a few reasons. One was that there were no police to keep them safe. Another was to show how rich they were.

A castle's high walls allowed guards to see for miles. Many castles were also surrounded by a ditch of water called a moat. To get into the castle, visitors had to cross the moat on a bridge. The bridge was lowered to let people in and raised to keep them out of the castle.

There were few windows in a castle's high stone walls. That was to keep out enemies, but also to keep out the weather. Windows had no glass, only wooden shutters to keep out the wind and rain.

Castles were cold and damp. The heat came only from fireplaces. Light came from the sun or from torches. Tapestries, or large rugs, were hung on the walls to keep heat inside. Animals skins were used as rugs.

Most medieval castles had a room called the Great Hall. Feasts and meetings were held there. Large castles might also have had ponds, gardens, and stables for horses. Usually, the cows, sheep, and pigs were kept outside the castle.

As many as 100-150 people were needed to run a large castle, including cooks, maids, and gardeners. Some castles were like towns because so many people lived inside.

Today, you can see ruined castles in many countries in Europe. If you look carefully, you can probably imagine a king and queen feasting in the Great Hall.

Image of Neuschwanstein Castle in Bavaria, Germany. Released into public domain because the photo was taken before 1923.

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