Apart from being the residence of the sultans, their families and their servants, the palaces were the setting of many courtly celebrations, both public and private, and many of their buildings were designed to be striking locations for acts of protocol. Sabika Hill and its surroundings had a role in recreational activities and pursuits typical of the noble class, such as game hunting and falconry, which were practices in the Darro Valley, very near the Alhambra, and were idealized in hunting poetry and the paintings found in the Partal area. The Nasrids were very fond of equitation and some notable treatises were written on this art (such as those by Ibn Huday dedicated to Muhammad V). They also left behind pictorial representations, in the Partal and in the Sala de los Reyes (Hall of Kings). Apparently it was the Nasrids who devised the sport called “tabla”, in which galloping riders threw spears at a hanging wooden target. These sporting events may have taken place on the Esplanade de la Tabla, near Bab al-Gudur (Gate of the Seven Floors). The palatine city also had simulated tournaments, military reviews with the participation of the famed horses of Granada and also popular traditions, such as one that took place near the Generalife, in which wild bulls and cows were released, chased by dogs and then speared by riders.

In the Alhambra ostentatious celebrations marked the important religious holidays, such as the end of Ramadan, the Festival of the Sacrifice, the birthday of the Prophet, in addition to births, weddings, circumcisions and, of course, funerals. Many of these celebrations took place in the Main Mosque, built by Muhammad III in 1305, and they were often led by the sultan himself, as the imam of the community. One of them ended in tragedy: Yusuf I was stabbed to death in 1354, while finishing the last prayer at the end of Ramadan. The festivities marking circumcision were especially relevant and included the recitation of lengthy praise-filled qasidas, some verses of which were engraved later on the walls of the Alhambra: part of the poem on the Fountain of the Lions and almost all of the poem in the Room of Two Sisters come from the qasida of 147 verses that Ibn Zamrak recited during the circumcision of the prince `Abd Allah, the son of Muhammad V.
The Happy Garden (Palace of the Lions) was also the scene of two wedding banquets of Yusuf III, one when he married, in 1408, with Eleonor "the Stranger", daughter of the cadi Abu Yazíd Jálid of Christian origin, and another celebrated shortly after with the daughter of the commander Abu I-Sурur Mufarrich, to which were invited, "the nobles of al-Andalus" and delegations arrived from all over the country. Yusuf III also entertained in the palace of the Happy Garden the council of ulamas of Granada for safeguarding the State and religion.

Another festivity, very well-known among the Nasrids, was the one marking the birth of the Prophet (mawlid). Sometimes splendorous architectural works would be inaugurated at the time of the birthday celebration. This was the case of the Gate of Justice, built by Yusuf I in 1348, and the new Mexuar that Muhammad V built when he returned to power in 1362. Regarding the latter, Ibn al-Jatib left the most detailed description of any festivity ever celebrated in the Alhambra, in his Nufada III. That renowned mawlid of 1362 featured a wide array of gastronomic, religious, poetic and musical delights. In the renovated sections of the Mexuar, which included the private courtyard Patio de los Escribas, to the Tower of Victory (later called the Tower of Machuca) and the Mexuar Hall, a large tent was set up to accommodate the numerous guests. Everything was covered with fine rugs, fabrics and cushions and lighting came from glass and copper candelabras, larger ones in the courtyard, and candles and lamps everywhere. The reinstated sultan appeared in the company of members of his court and provoked much admiration with his grand appearance and because he wore a turban instead of a crown. After the communal prayer, the servants and most distinguished slaves arranged the guests in proper order: clan chiefs, sharifs (descendents of the Prophet), members of the Nasrid lineages, ulamas, Sufis and members of other mystic brotherhoods were all placed facing the sultan; behind them were "a few hundred tradesmen" (including some from the Orient and Tunisia), representatives of the other social classes and elegantly-dressed subjects of importance. The people crowded at the door trying to see, their voices reaching the king, who was sitting on his throne that had been placed on a three-tiered platform, almost a metre high, which had been put in the Council of State room (maylis al-`uqud) (Mexuar Hall) amidst lovely arches and the splendid central cupola.

With a ritual almost identical to the one used in North Africa, the sultan presided over the three prayers (sunset, night and pre-dawn), when the persons in attendance had done their ablutions. To begin, the name of Allah was invoked by reciters. Then official preachers offered sermons and religious chants were sung, accompanied by the sound of wooden flutes. Afterwards, with the guests seated
comfortably on tapestries and lovely cushions and with soft lighting provided by valuable lamps and candelabras, the tables were covered with exquisite tablecloths and dinner was served, while a series of well-known poets recited panegyrics in honour of the Prophet. They ate succulent lamb and fowl in different forms (roasted, fried, shredded, stuffed and flavoured with spices and honey) and, of course, sweets, such as flour mush and cakes, along with breads made with fine-ground flour. The servants and slaves were finely dressed, with brocade capes. They served the guests closest to the throne first, followed by the tradesmen and foreigners as a sign of the host's hospitality. After attending to the other social classes, the rest of the food was distributed among the lower classes, forgetting not even the sentries on duty in faraway posts. A water server dressed in brocade poured water from gilded copper pitchers. When it was time for dessert, trays of jams, nuts, cakes and apple preserves were brought. At dawn, breakfast was served as well.

The evening was enhanced by the spectacle provided by an ingenious wooden clock that the sultan had ordered to be placed in front of him that night. It was a mechanical clock, about 160 to 165 m. high, with a small niche on each of its twelve sides. In the upper part a candle burned. Every hour the flame burned a linen cord, which, when it broke, released a latch that in turn opened a door, behind which a little human figure could be seen. The figure was holding a piece of paper with a poem, which a servant took and handed to the reciter. This is how 12 poems honouring the sultan were recited. They had been written by Ibn al-Jatib, who was present at the ceremony, along with Ibn Jaldún and Ibn Zamrak.

At dawn, a group of Sufis chanted and danced the dhikr (invocation of the divine name), a catharsis for all those present. These Sufi rituals were also performed in the period of Yusuf I, who often had the brotherhood Banu Sidi Bona come up to the Alhambra to perform. The clan was originally from Valencia but had immigrated to Granada and lived in the Albaicín. Later Muhammad V would issue an edict to expel the brotherhood from the kingdom, because of the danger they posed to his government.

Although many of the halls in the Alhambra had both private and public functions, some were used specifically as maylis, a room for meetings, gatherings and celebrations (northern wing of the Generalife, the Mexuar Hall and the Hall of the Ship, perhaps also the rooms around the Court of the Lions and the actual qubbas). Other spots were used especially for appearances by the sovereign in audiences and to impart justice, such as the qubba of the Patio de Escrituras of the Mexuar and
most likely also the Comares façade. The Hall of Comares was the largest qubba for enthronement and receptions in the sultanate and in all of Al-Andalus. The throne of Yusuf I was in the central alcove, as the poem engraved there indicates, while the Hall of Two Sisters, the largest qubba of the Happy Garden (Palace of the Lions), next to the observation point Mirador de Lindaraja, held the “Caliphal throne” from which Muhammad V contemplated his city.