

A right royal trip, fit for a queen

By [Allison Foat](#)

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2016 is a very festive time to be in Great Britain, it's Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II's 90th year and with her second official birthday approaching on 11 June, the next few weeks are a particularly good time to do a royal-themed trip to that part of the world.

Windsor, where I was fortunate to be when the Queen turned 90 on 21 April, is a great place to begin a monarchy-inspired vacation. The castle has been a royal residence for almost 1000 years and taking a tour to see it in all its splendour is a must. The town itself is so pretty and is right now in the midst of a spectacular annual event - the Royal Windsor Horse Show - happening this very weekend, ending on Sunday, 15 May. It's a highly entertaining equestrian event that attracts people of all ages. Aside from matters horsey, Windsor offers plenty to do right throughout the year, for kids too.



Windsor: the Coldstream Guard

In London, an hour away by bus, there are the traditional tourist sights that never fail to thrill, like the age-old tradition of The Changing Of The Guard at Buckingham Palace. I'd never seen it and when I first heard, then saw, the palace guard striding smartly in their red-and-black finery from the direction of St. James Park, I waved and shouted out 'yayyyyy' spontaneously, like a two-year-old.

Tales of a gruesome history

If you feel like taking in some beautiful art, walk around the corner from the palace to The Queen's Gallery, where two wonderful exhibitions – the Scottish Artists and Maria Merian's Butterflies - are both running until October. For a complete change of scenery, The Tower Of London drips with tales of a gruesome history, raven superstitions and there are actual Beefeaters strolling about happy to pose for selfies. The tower is a stunning historical landmark, circa 1066. The Crown Jewels in the Jewel Tower are spectacular, and the largest diamond in the world, discovered in Pretoria (viva SA!) in 1905, is magnificently poised on top of the royal sceptre – the Great Star of Africa.



Big Ben

A visit to Fortnum and Mason on Piccadilly is an event in itself, with six floors of everything you could wish for. Why not take home one of Her Majesty's favourite things (look for the Royal Warrant on products she has endorsed), like the Highgrove Organic Clotted Cream Biscuit Tin, shortbread that is reputed to melt in your mouth, like none other. Children can amuse themselves and build their very own sundaes in F&M's in-house ice cream parlour while their parents work the plastic. I was very drawn to the Launer handbags, Ghurka luggage range and Floris perfumes, but for obvious exchange-rate constraints, settled for a divine F&M shopper. All that retail therapy is bound to make one ravenous, so take tea at The Rubens at the Palace in Westminster where the special Royal Afternoon Tea Experience will delight. A sumptuous three-tiered offering awaits of sweet and savoury pastries and delicate finger sandwiches, Lanson champagne and an array of loose-leafed teas, including another iconic SA brand: Rooibos.



Afternoon Tea at The Rubens Hotel

Ballet or opera

Before dinner, a Dubonnet and gin cocktail is essential as it's Her Majesty's favourite tipple. Enjoy one in the Leopard Bar at the Rubens and afterwards, book a table for an early dinner at The Ten Room in the plush Hotel Café Royal on Regent Street. Perhaps a ballet or opera performance afterwards at the Royal Opera House in Covent Garden would be the perfect end to a fabulous evening.

On The Queen's second 'official' birthday on Saturday, 11 June, the spectacular annual Trooping Of The Colour procession will head down The Mall before The Queen appears to inspect her troops. This is pageantry, pomp and ceremony at its finest. Also exciting is the 41-gun salute in Green Park scheduled for the same day.

And don't forget that this year also marks the 400th anniversary of Shakespeare's death, so a visit to the bard's birthplace in Stratford-upon-Avon is a fine idea - or catch one of his plays on the boards at The Globe in Bankside.

If you have time and want to venture further in the realm, get yourself to Edinburgh, a stunning city. It's the Year of Innovation, Architecture and Design in Scotland and the buildings are rich in history, with Romanesque, to Baronial and Renaissance influences and not forgetting the very modern Parliament Buildings at the end of The Royal Mile, designed by Spaniard Enric Miralles. Holyrood House, one Her Majesty's residences where she can be found during Royal Week (aka Holyrood Week) at the end of June into early July is so impressive. The Abbey ruin is wonderful and the palace gardens are divine. If you're feeling energetic, take a walk up Arthur's Seat Hill in Holyrood Park for the stunning views overlooking the city from its summit.



Edinburgh

Castles

If castles are your thing, you'll be in your element in this part of the world – there's also Edinburgh Castle, which dominates the capital's skyline, and, of course, Balmoral, about a two-hour drive from Edinburgh. Access to certain parts of it is limited, so a visit there will be a short one. If you plan to head there, make a day of it and visit the Crathie Kirk chapel where the Royal Family worships, and the Royal Lochnagar whisky distillery. Now there's a drink that will set fire to your veins, the national drink of the Scots and seemingly everyone's favourite tippie - excepting me, but that's not to say I can't

appreciate it. I learnt a lot about the much-loved liquor from the tour we did and also at the Scotch Whisky Experience in Edinburgh itself. You must see the vast collection of whisky bottles- curated originally by Claive Vidiz from Sao Paulo - everything from the easily accessible to the very rare and all in-between.



Holyrood House, Edinburgh

So if you're up for a trip to Great Britain, these are a few options to make your adventure a truly memorable one, in this most auspicious royal celebratory year. Long Live the Queen!

www.visitbritain.com for all tourism info.

Accommodation in London: *The Rubens at the Palace*

Accommodation in Edinburgh: *The G&V on the Royal Mile*

Accommodation in Aberdeen: *Meldrum House*

Scotch Whiskey Experience: www.scotchwhiskeyexperience.co.uk

Royal Lochnagar Distillery: www.discovering-distilleries.com

www.thisisedinburgh.com

My trip to England and Scotland was courtesy of VisitBritain

Images by Allison Foat

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