

## Royal Getaway

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By Bekah Wright

This summer, before he'd even arrived, buzz was circulating about where Prince George would spend vacations. If he follows in the footsteps of his father and uncle – Princes William and Harry – he'll be spending time at Scotland's Balmoral Castle. Though the royal nursery isn't taking reservations for other toddlers, there are equally regal accommodations that are, and with a similar moniker to boot -- The Balmoral Hotel in Edinburgh.



The luxury, five-star Rocco Forte Hotel is located beside Waverly Station on Princes Street in the heart of Edinburgh. One hundred and eleven year's old, the hotel is a striking fixture on the city's skyline, its iconic clock tower always set three minutes fast so travelers don't miss their trains.

Bellmen at the entrance are dressed in traditional garb, a nod to The Balmoral's history. Cross the threshold and transport to another time comes via traditional endeavors like afternoon tea being served in Palm Court and guests warming chilled hands around a fire in the drawing room.

As for accommodations, The Balmoral's 188 rooms/suites were updated in 2012 with modern and opulent trappings befitting the bevy of notable guests who've slumbered there, ranging from the Queen Mother and Paul McCartney to The Rolling Stones and Oprah Winfrey.

Suite windows inspire venturing into town with views encompassing everything from Edinburgh Castle to the National Gallery. Indeed, it should come as no surprise that J.K. Rowling found plenty of creative fodder when penning the Harry Potter novels under The Balmoral's roof.

Paying homage to another project inspired by the Scottish landscape is The Balmoral's "Mythical Family Affair" package, based on the Disney Pixar animated film *Brave*. When checking in, young guests receive teddy bears and a copy of the book *The Art of Brave* featuring Merida's, the heroine of the film, life in 10<sup>th</sup>-century Scotland.

Discovering Merida's Scotland is easy to do with the "Mythical Family Affair Package." Day trips and itineraries to the Highlands can be tailored for families seeking out a *Brave* experience. There's plenty of exploring to be done in town, as well. Visiting Edinburgh Castle is a snap with the package's fast-track access. Here, young guests can be spotted, plastic swords in hand, defending the medieval fortress from within its walls. Glimpses at history come by way of exhibits that include the Crown Jewels and The Stone of Destiny.

Afterwards, time can be spent roaming the cobblestone streets of the Royal Mile and Edinburgh's Old Town. Along the route, street performers delight with live music and tartan shops invite shoppers to search out their familial roots. Inside the nearby National Museum of Scotland are ancient artifacts, among them, 12<sup>th</sup> century chess pieces like those that "come to life" in *Brave*.

Also in the area is The Real Mary King's Close, a hidden, underground city, unchanged since its 17<sup>th</sup> century inception. (\*Note: Not advised for children under age five, afraid of the dark, who might want to use the restroom or leave the hour-long tour early.)

Not to miss on the walk back to The Balmoral is Edinburgh's Museum of Childhood. The museum not only offers insight into growing up in Scotland over the ages, but interactive areas including a puppet theatre, games and dress-up area.

Back at the hotel, there are myriad activities awaiting young and old. The Balmoral Spa, an ESPA facility, has treatments just right for feet aching after days of sightseeing. More relaxing can be found in the sauna and steam rooms. The indoor, 15-metre swimming pool is just right for workouts, as are the gymnasium and exercise studio.

After working up a hunger, families can head to Hadrian's for a bite to eat. Peeking into the Balmoral Bar and Michelin-starred *number one* fine dining restaurant will inspire parents to make reservations for a romantic night for two (the concierge can arrange for a babysitter). Then, of course, there's room service. Just right for kids is a menu geared specifically for them.

Post dinner is the perfect time for children to check out amenities The Balmoral has set out for them. Mini-bathrobes, slippers and bath accessories lure for bubble baths. More relaxing comes with family time over board or Wii games supplied by the hotel. Then, there are books and DVDs that are ideal lead-ups to slumber.

When bedtime calls, kids can stay in the room/suite with their parents or an interconnecting room, depending on the package purchased. Cribs and extra beds are available upon request. What kids will dream about at night? Perhaps a fiery-haired lass from the 10<sup>th</sup> century, valiantly trekking across the Highlands with her bow and arrow.

*The Balmoral's A Mythical Family Affair package starts from £480 for two adults and two children. The hotel's standard Family Affair package starts from £364, based on two adults and two children in two Executive rooms, including continental breakfast. Children under three eat free, children aged four to 12 get a 50% discount on food and beverage. Prices are subject to change. For more information visit [www.thebalmoralhotel.com](http://www.thebalmoralhotel.com), call +011 44 131 556 2414 or email [reservations.balmoral@roccofortehotels.com](mailto:reservations.balmoral@roccofortehotels.com)*

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