

A LUXURY TRAVEL BLOG

FOR THOSE WHO ENJOY THE FINER THINGS IN LIFE

6 spectacular places to stay in Scotland

By Joy Davidson on Aug 29, 2013

Scotland's immense beauty is reason alone to visit, never mind extras like whisky trails, world-class golfing, the fairy pools of Skye, or actual castles in the sky. Luxury accommodations are as varied as the country's landscape, with properties to match your preference whether you lean toward urban hotels, rural hunting lodges, tiny inns, or private cottages. Each of these six stunning spots exude movie-location atmosphere, refined comforts, and dazzle with their own unique personalities.

21212 Hotel & Restaurant, Edinburgh

In this consummate restaurant with rooms you'll find four richly appointed bedrooms and a lavish drawing room on the upper floors of a restored Georgian townhouse just a stone's throw from Edinburgh's designer boutiques. Set back against private green space, the house is perched on a quiet residential terrace that the owners stumbled upon while on the way to view a nearby property. It was love at first sight, so they announced to their realtor: "this is where we want to be!" Not long afterward, the property that is now 21212 came to market — a testament to every predictive axiom from "ask and you shall receive" to "be careful what you wish for".



Each bedroom is plush and well thought out, with smartly upholstered sitting areas, peaceful garden views, and vast, sybaritic bath chambers in some. Lovely as these are, the spotlight really belongs on Michelin star chef Paul Kitching's restaurant—to my mind the finest eatery in Edinburgh, and possibly all of Scotland. Though some locals call the menu "quirky," more adventurous and experienced gastronomes will find it brilliant, creative, and perfectly executed. Consider yourself fortunate if your bed is but a few flights of stairs due north, because after five decadently scrumptious courses and their lively wine accompaniments, you won't want to have to make your way much further.

My grades for the hotel:

Public rooms: A

Guest rooms: A

Breakfast: B+ (Simple yet tasty cooked dishes; variety is reserved for lunch and dinner menu.)

Cuisine: A+

Service: B

Tech: B

The Balmoral Hotel, Edinburgh

Just a short walk from 21212 is this grand, award winning hotel, ideally located near key Edinburgh attractions, and stunning in its own right. The Balmoral has its own Michelin starred eatery, Number One, in addition to Hadrian's Brasserie and a new whisky bar that boasts over 400 unique quaffs. (Try Bowman's 15 year, dark. Truly ambrosia.)



There is a very good reason that hotelier Rocco Forte's Balmoral appears on nearly every respected listing of top hotels in the UK and Europe. In addition to its warm, inviting spaces, recently refurbished by Forte's sister, Olga Polizzi, the hotel does what luxury properties of this stature do best: take care of their guests.

In my experience, what separates a true 5 Star property from others is not the lack of any quirks or problems, but the speed and graciousness with which problems are handled. At the beautiful Balmoral, I was checked into a large king room (sporting sitting area and separate workspace), but was soon dismayed to find that the Wifi didn't extend with any credible speed to that corner of the hotel. Uh-oh. After the hotel's IT guru tried valiantly but unsuccessfully to address the problem via a booster hub, I was moved to an even more magnificent suite where the Wifi reception was rolling along at 13mbps (according to my iPad's speed-test app). But once I booted up my laptop . . . poof! Nada! To say that the hotel's IT manager bent over backwards to locate the source of the computer trouble is to understate the time and effort expended on my behalf. By day two in the hotel, the mystery glitch was solved and my Macbook Pro was zooming along at 35mbps! Having struggled with tech issues throughout my time in Scotland, in part due to the country's nascent broadband infrastructure and in part due to who-knows-what, I was impressed with the Balmoral's diligent and unrelenting attention to my connectivity issue.

In addition to kudos for service, the beautiful Balmoral also amasses plus points for yummy beds, the silkiest of bedding, spacious baths, fabulous Ren toiletries, soothing décor with a touch of whimsy, excellent dining and drinking options, and a full service spa and indoor pool. Speaking of which, if there is one serious flaw here at all, it would be the location and ambient temperature of the fitness studio, which is unsuitably warm, with no easy fix in sight. Luckily, the local branch of TheGymGroup.com is just across the street. For a mere 5 quid (\$7.50USD) one can pump iron to hot music and use topnotch equipment in an environment that's uber cool, in every sense of the word. In fact, if you're a fitness buff, I'd consider the proximity of The Gym to be an advantage when staying at the Balmoral, rather than quibble over their stuffy workout facility. I think that's called making lemonade out of lemons, but it's worth doing when a hotel is otherwise such a swanky, serene, and guest-centered sanctuary.

My grades for the hotel:

Public rooms: A (except for gym – see above)

Guest rooms: A

Breakfast: A-

Cuisine: A-

Service: A

Tech: A in some areas; D in a small section of the hotel. If speed matters, be sure to discuss room placement at booking.

One Royal Circus, Edinburgh

It's rare for me to either stay at or recommend a traditional B&B. However, every once in a while I do both.



If the Balmoral exudes luxury with a capital L, One Royal Circus is what I would call “luxury lite”. Yet, the inn is so stylish and visually striking that it merits inclusion here. If you like grand winding staircases, vast spacious lounges, massive floor-to-ceiling windows overlooking private gardens, delicate architectural detailing, and the feeling of being a guest in an awesome home, you will love this spot. Top restaurants are nearby, and you’re within easy walking distance of the fashionable Stockbridge neighborhood with its seductive, make-foodies-happy Saturday Market.

My grades for the B&B:

Public rooms: B+

Guest rooms: B+

Breakfast: B

Service: C (Staff is often not around – which can be good news or not so much, depending on your POV)

Tech: B

The Grange, Fort William

Fort William is a good-sized town as such things go in the Scottish Highlands, although it's not so much a destination onto itself as a way-station for those heading to nearby attractions — like the looming Ben Nevis, or the train to Hogwarts. (Yes, really.) So it's quite a surprise to find that this unremarkable town hides what is easily one of the most glamorous little B&Bs in all Scotland.



On a quiet street overlooking Loch Linnhe stands a regal Victorian home, decorated within an inch of its magnificently restored life by its owner, who isn't a professional interior designer, but probably should be. The public rooms and four guest bedrooms virtually blush with luscious linens and opulent fabrics; swoon with subtly coordinated backgrounds, and sing with pitch-perfect accessories in dramatic color bursts. Pristine bath chambers in glistening white-on-white décor beckon you to a deep soak and a long round of primping. Each suite comes complete with a darling woolly teddy bear of your very own, buttery shortbread cookies, and elegant fixings for tea and coffee. A lightening fast internet connection is an unexpected bonus, reflecting The Grange's unerring attention to the details of guest convenience. Morning brings a hearty breakfast with delicious homemade baked goods served in yet another strikingly beautiful room, and when dinnertime rolls around, the area's top eateries are just a 10-15 minute walk away.

My grades for the B&B:

Public rooms: A

Guest rooms: A

Breakfast: B+

Service: C+ (it's a B&B, afterall)

Tech: A

Number 10, Dunvegan, Isle of Skye

They say there is fairy magic on the Isle of Skye. When you visit Number 10, you'll come to believe it.



Artist Diana Mackie has designed and built the self-catering cottage of your dreams, sized as a romantic bolthole for two or an idyllic sanctuary for one. Mackie's creative fingerprint is on nearly every detail of the cathedral ceilinged interiors — right down to the soft leather sofas, smart wood furnishings, stained glass, and two story windows overlooking Loch Dunvegan's swirling waters. A big flat screen TV and DVD, under floor heating to supplement the wood stove (or vice versa), and a large, sumptuous bathroom with deep tub and separate shower complete a setting that is gracious, stylish and charming. A bountiful welcome package awaits your arrival, brimming with all the provisions you'll need for the first day or two. When you book, Diana will ask if you'd like to order breads or take-away dishes from the famous Jann's Bakery in Dunvegan — and, trust me, you do. Though the well-equipped kitchen at Number 10 will satisfy the most avid chef, Jann's spicy curries, mouth-watering stews, breads and desserts are divine no-fuss options. And should your palate demand an extreme epicurean fix, the world famous Three Chimneys restaurant is just a few miles down the road. Do watch out for the sheep that wander lazily across the path as you drive. You're in the far reaches of rolling farmland and windswept

lochs, with nothing between you, the elements, and the animals, except perhaps a sprinkling of fairy dust... and your sweet, luxe, never-want-to-leave cottage at Number 10.

My grades for the cottage:

Rooms: A

Service: B+ – As a self-catering property, service is not comparable to hotels, but the owner is especially gracious, available, and willing to assist guests in every way possible.

Tech: C – Internet in that part of Skye is exceedingly slow, but the router is in the cottage bedroom, so it helps to use an Ethernet cable with a laptop rather than Wifi if you can.

Little to no cell phone reception in the area, but a dedicated landline is on site.

Kinloch Lodge, Sleat, Isle of Skye

At the southern tip of Skye lies Kinloch Lodge. There is something inexpressibly compelling about this hotel, even though, when you deconstruct the details of the property, you might find fault. The bedrooms are a smidgen too scruffy, the antiques a bit too well used. As a 17th Century hunting lodge and ancestral home of the MacDonalld clan, some shabby chic is to be expected, but the wear is more pronounced than it ought to be — yet, inexplicably fails to detract from the charm of this haunting location. Maybe it's the Skye fairy dust swirling on the breeze, or perhaps it's simply that the whole is more than the sum of its parts at this atmospheric property.



Certain parts are indeed quite wonderful. The guest lounges are elegantly furnished with cushy sofas and wide armchairs, inviting you to curl up with a good read and a Scottish whisky on a blustery afternoon. If the wind howls outside over the anxious waters of Loch Hourn, you'll be snuggly content inside the dreamy lodge with a wood fire flickering in the open hearth.

Dining is country house haute, inspired by Lady Claire MacDonald's recipes and chef Marcello Tully's use of locally sourced ingredients, all accompanied by exemplary (if a bit pricey) wine and whisky selections. The staff is extraordinary and eager to make guests happy. Though not quite the loch-side lap of luxury I expected, I was nevertheless loath to leave Kinloch Lodge. In the end, that may be the highest of recommendations.

My grades for the hotel:

Public rooms: A-

Guest rooms: B-

Breakfast: B+

Cuisine: A-

Service: B+

Tech: C+ (Wifi unpredictable in some areas; spotty cell reception.)

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