



8 OF THE Best ROYAL EXPERIENCES

Capitalise on royal wedding fever, says Laura French

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With the buzz mounting around the wedding of the year – Harry and Meghan will tie the knot at Windsor Castle in May, in case you’ve been asleep for the past few months – the world seems to have gone crazy for the British monarchy.

But for those who won’t be on the guest list, we’ve got the next best thing – the ultimate round-up of the best royal-related experiences in the UK.

Always wanted to learn polo in Windsor? There’s no time like the present. Want to climb aboard the Queen’s former yacht? Be our guest.

1 VISIT BALMORAL CASTLE AND ROYAL DEESIDE

It’s not just Harry who’ll be celebrating this year – his gran will have reason to raise a glass too, as she rings in her 65th anniversary since the coronation. Shearings has organised a range of royal-themed tours to mark the occasion, including an eight-day jaunt in Scotland exploring Royal Deeside, where the family spends its summers.

Visitors will be able to check out the grounds, gardens and exhibitions of their historic holiday home, Balmoral Castle, before moving on to Tomintoul, the highest village in the Highlands, and taking a trip on the heritage-rich Strathspey Railway.

Beyond that there’s plenty to explore with cycling, walking, wildlife-watching and more, all among glorious scenery – think

moors, rivers, crags, forests and the sweeping Grampian Mountains. There’s a reason this place is such a hit with the Queen and co.

Book it: Shearings’ eight-day Braemar and Royal Deeside trip starts at £444 including coach travel, seven nights’ accommodation and excursions. shearingsagent.com

2 TAKE A TRAIN TO CHATSWORTH HOUSE

Experiencing life on board a Belmond British Pullman train is regal enough with its exceptional food and heritage-rich, art deco carriages. Combine it with a visit to Chatsworth House, home of the Duke and Duchess of Devonshire and set among acres of rolling green countryside, and you have the ultimate royal-themed break.

Passengers will enjoy a three-course brunch served by liveried stewards as they whirl past film-set scenes before reaching Chatsworth and ending the day with a five-course, wine-paired dinner back on board. Worth recommending to those looking for something extra special.

Book it: The Belmond journey to Chatsworth House, departing London Victoria on April 18, starts at £441 per person including round-trip travel, a bellini welcome, brunch, champagne reception, dinner with half a bottle of wine and entry to Chatsworth House (with coach transfers). belmond.com

3 EXPLORE CLARENCE HOUSE

For Charles and Camilla fans, there’s only one thing for it – Clarence House at St James’s Palace, one of the last remaining aristocratic townhouses in London. First occupied by William IV, then the Duke of Clarence, it boasts an impressive art collection with rooms arranged much as they were when the Queen Mother occupied it.

Today visitors can tour its five ground-floor rooms, where their royal highnesses undertake official engagements, and combine it with afternoon tea and a stay at the four-star Cavendish Hotel on a package with Super Break.

Book it: A two-night package including a guided tour of Clarence House and B&B accommodation starts at £235, including afternoon tea. superbreak.com/agents

4 EXPLORE THE NORFOLK BROADS

Norfolk is a firm favourite with the royals, where the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge are said to do their Christmas shopping and where the family spends the festive period.

It’s at Sandringham House that the action takes place – and where the Queen gave her first televised Christmas message in 1957. Meghan Markle spent her first Christmas here in December, but you needn’t marry into the family to get your own sneak peek, with tours taking visitors around its rooms, museum,

gardens and church from March to October (bar a few days in July).

For clients wanting to combine it with other scenic stops on a heritage-filled getaway, suggest Great Rail Journeys’ Norwich & the Norfolk Broads trip, which pairs it with a cruise on the Norfolk Broads, rides on nostalgic steam trains and various other visits fit for a king – or queen, as the case may be.

Book it: The Norwich and the Norfolk Broads Waterways tour costs from £575 for five days, including four-star half-board accommodation, heritage rail excursions and travel in standard class. greatrail.com

5 FOLLOW IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF PRINCESS DIANA

Whether you’re an avid royalist or just an admirer of splendid architecture, Kensington Palace, home to Prince William and formerly Princess Diana, needs to be on your list. Ornate interiors, a rich history and the lavish Queen’s Apartments make it a must, and this year there’s another reason to visit thanks to the Diana: Her Fashion Story exhibition, which traces the evolution of the icon’s style with various items from her wardrobe.

Newmarket Holidays will combine a tour round the home with a trip to Windsor, where clients will have time to explore the historic streets and visit the castle that will play host to the big event in May.



PICTURES: BJ STEWART: ROYAL COLLECTION TRUST/HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II; VISITENGLAND/DIANA JARVIS; MARC MILLAR PHOTOGRAPHY/THE BRIDAL PHOTOGRAPHER; PATRICK DEMARCHELIER

Book it: Newmarket's two-day Diana: Her Fashion Story by Coach trip costs from £129, with departures from March to September, including entry to Kensington Palace and the exhibition, a visit to Windsor, one night's B&B in a three-star hotel, coach travel and a tour manager. newmarketholidays.co.uk



Nothing says quintessentially British quite like afternoon tea, with its origins dating to 1840

The country isn't short on places to indulge, but for a historic experience, suggest Littlecote House Hotel, a Grade I-listed Tudor manor in Berkshire where King Henry VIII courted Jane Seymour. A string of kings and queens, including Elizabeth I, James I and Charles II, have stayed here since, and guests who opt for the Old House can stay in the original rooms – and visit one reputed to be haunted. For those after something a little more modern and ghost-free,

6 INDULGE IN A ROYAL AFTERNOON TEA
Nothing says quintessentially British quite like afternoon tea (pinkie finger pointing out, obviously) and with its origins dating back to 1840 – when the seventh Duchess of Bedford would request a tray of tea and cake to keep her going – it's royal through and through. Queen Victoria shortly caught on, and today Her Majesty takes tea at 4pm every day without fail, apparently.



ABOVE: Cliveden House

LEFT: Kensington Palace

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there's also a newer part.

Book it: Three nights cost from £283 per person for an April 20 departure, based on two adults sharing a standard room on a Simply Dine package, which includes buffet breakfasts and three-course dinners. warnerleisurehotels.co.uk

7 BOARD THE ROYAL YACHT BRITANNIA

If clients have already visited the royal houses, then step it up a notch with the former floating home of the royal family, which served them for 40 years and sailed more than a

million miles on state visits across the globe.

The last in a series of 83 royal yachts, with the first dating back to the 1660s, it was designed when King George VI was approaching his final days, and went on to host everyone from Sir Winston Churchill to Nelson Mandela. The yacht also served as a royal honeymoon venue and a frequent retreat during the family's annual Western Isles tour of Scotland, before it was decommissioned in 1997.

Named Scotland's best visitor attraction by VisitScotland for 12 consecutive years, it's now



LEFT: Afternoon tea at Littlecote House Hotel

docked in Edinburgh and offers enthusiasts the chance to explore its state apartments, royal bedrooms and onboard Rolls-Royce Phantom V, while learning more about the vessel's history.

Back-Roads Touring combines *Britannia* with visits to the University of St Andrews – where Wills met Kate – Edinburgh Castle, York Minster, Windsor Castle and the Albert Memorial on an eight-night royal-themed trip around the UK.

Book it: The nine-day Royal Tour of Britain 2018 costs from £2,799 including boutique accommodation, mini-coach transport, some meals, a driver, tour leader and entrance fees. backroadstouring.com

8 LEARN TO PLAY POLO AT CLIVEDEN HOUSE

Anyone who's anyone in the British monarchy – George I, Queen Victoria, Elizabeth II as a child princess – has stayed at Cliveden House in Windsor, built by the Duke of Buckingham as a symbol of his love for his mistress, the

Countess of Shrewsbury, in 1666.

Today, guests can imagine they're one of them with a host of royal-inspired experiences, including a day learning to play polo at the nearby 30-hectare, privately-owned Emsworth Polo Grounds. Participants will get lunch, refreshments, a bespoke player's shirt and plenty of riding experience while following in the footsteps of Waldorf Astor, who brought the sport to the house in the 19th century.

For those less keen on polo, there will be a Royal Garden Party on the day of the wedding, where guests will be able to watch the ceremony unfold with a toast before enjoying a barbecue and live jazz in the gardens. There's also a Regal Weekend package combining a champagne afternoon tea with dinner, spa treatments and a boat cruise. Guests can even bring their corgi for an extra £35 a head. **Book it:** Rooms at Cliveden House start at £425 per night, while the 'learn to play' polo experience costs from £499 per person. clivedenhouse.co.uk