



# Christmas at the Palace of Holyroodhouse



HRH The Queen doesn't spend Christmas at her Scottish Palace – which is a pity, because if she did she would no doubt enjoy all the stunning decorations created by **Hannah Belcher** and **Deborah Clarke** of the **Royal Collections Trust** staff to celebrate the season.

The Queen's loss is your gain, however, as the royal absence means that you can now walk at leisure around the beautifully garlanded rooms, sink into the sumptuous carpets – and maybe even pretend, just for a few hours, that your festive dining table will be laden with frosted fruits, your gallery garlanded with greenery and your throne room twinkling with tree lights. Don't have a throne room? Where *do* you wear your crown?

 The Palace's magnificent Great Stair is the first stage on the processional route through the State Apartments to the King's Bedchamber – so it has to look good. For the Christmas season it's been hung with foliage, beautiful white wreaths and lights.

In the Great Hall of the Palace, Robert The Bruce (looking  especially sardonic), Macbeth, Charles II and Mary, Queen of Scots gaze down upon a 15 foot high Christmas tree bedecked in white and silver; snowflakes dust the green branches. It all feels slightly Hogwarts – you half expect an ancient royal to start chatting. Garlands of white lights and green leaves adorn the two fireplaces. The Queen uses this impressive room for state banquets, receptions and investitures, but as she's only here in the summer no roaring fires will be endangering the royal fairy lights.

✘ Through the windows of the Great Hall take a peek at the courtyard. Anything look familiar? The central pedestal – currently dressed in holly – is topped by Victorian lamps. Even in summer they are reminiscent of Narnia; on this cold and wintry Edinburgh morning one expects to hear the bells of the Snow Queen’s sleigh at any moment.

From the Great Hall you can walk through closets and wardrobes (though sadly none leads to the land of Turkish Delight), ante-chambers, outer chambers and indeed all sorts of chambers; the King’s Bedchamber is perhaps particularly ✘ appealing with its surprisingly small four-poster State Bed and its decorated ceiling for the king to admire on waking from his royal slumbers. Windows on this side of the palace look out onto the gardens and the atmospheric ruins of Holyrood Abbey. There are drawing rooms aplenty too – a morning one *and* an evening one; each of their fireplaces is decorated in festive mode.

✘ All laid out for a splendid feast, the table in the Royal Dining Room is probably a far cry from most people’s Christmas set-up. No crackers for a start, nor anything like that *papier mâché* decoration your Auntie Joan made at evening classes in 1979.

Instead there are pieces from a silver service presented to George V and Queen Mary in 1935 to mark their Silver Jubilee, gorgeous displays of fruits – oranges, apples and grape – and arrangements of pomegranates and grapes, all frosted white. Recent menus are displayed; it’s good to know that the ✘ palace serves Fairtrade organic coffee, but I do wonder about the ‘heirloom tomatoes’ – HRH The Queen is famously and admirably anti-waste, but just how many times can one hand down a salad?

✘ The palace’s second Christmas tree is found in the Throne Room. Here we have dark wood walls and a scarlet carpet – even Paul van Somer’s portrait of James VI & I (above the

fireplace) is painted against a red background. The tree is displayed on a red-covered table, its baubles and tiny lights adding to the room's warmth. Red symbolises leadership, strength, courage and determination, so its predominance in a room used for state occasions is perhaps intentional.

On Saturday 17 December there'll be a special family event  day, ***The Magic of Christmas Past***. A storyteller will be in the Great Gallery to tell tales of glorious feasts – turkeys, gingerbread, delicious puddings and much more. Children will be able to have fun counting down the 12 days of Christmas in an interactive storytelling session, or making their own Christmas decoration. They can also dress up and have their faces festively painted by **Fantoosh Face Art** before enjoying some traditional Scottish music and dancing with **CeilidhKids**. If you can't make the date, there's still plenty for children to do every day – including a festive trail to follow and the chance to make a wish on the special **Wish Tree** in the Family Room

After all that excitement you'll be needing your mince pies, so head for the **Café at the Palace** – it's serving mulled wine too, and you can even book a special Christmas-themed lunch or afternoon tea. And if you're stuck for a present for someone special, how about an exclusive out-of-hours tour? Led by an expert guide, the tours offer a special behind-the-ropes experience of the Palace and include a  glass of champagne, a mince pie and a free guide book, plus 20% discount in the palace shop – solve another problem on your present list with a cuddly corgi dog (yes, we know a dog isn't just for Christmas... these ones don't need housetraining!)

You can see the tour dates and make a booking [here](#). Remember that with all Royal palaces you can get your ticket validated and then use it for a whole year without having to pay again. This is especially useful on Britannia where you can't get on to the cafe without paying an entrance fee.

So if you'd like to feel like a King or Queen for a few hours, take a trip down the Royal Mile to Holyroodhouse this December. Then go home and be grateful that, on top of all the other Christmas chores, you don't have to address the nation – even if you do have to peel your own sprouts.

