

# The Royal Yacht Britannia



The city is full of historical sites, and Student Ambassador Francesca visits one of the most popular.

Edinburgh is home to a wealth of tourist attractions, such as Edinburgh Castle, Holyrood Palace, the National Museum and National Galleries, Dynamic Earth, Camera Obscura and the Scotch Whisky Experience. There's something for all tastes and interests but the Royal Yacht Britannia is easily the best. Tucked away at Ocean Terminal, 15 minutes from the city centre, it's also one of Edinburgh's best-kept secrets. The Royal Yacht, which you might know from Netflix's 'The Crown', was the Queen's home-away-home for over forty years. It was launched from Clydebank in 1953 and sailed over a million miles before being decommissioned in 1997.

Britannia carried the Royal Family across the world on numerous tours and state visits, and has hosted glittering receptions for world leaders, including Winston Churchill, Margaret Thatcher Nelson Mandela and Ronald Reagan. It was also used for family holidays off the coast of Scotland and several Royal couples have honeymooned aboard, most famously Prince Charles and Princess Diana in 1981. Recently, it was the dramatic setting for Zara's wedding reception to Mike Tindall. The Royal Yacht today is a beautifully maintained vessel and presented with its original furnishings.



The Royal Apartments (from top left): the sitting room, the Queen's bedroom, the state dining room and the sun deck.

Except for maintenance hatches and the like, you can roam freely around the entire ship. The Royal Apartments, including the bedrooms, offices and sitting rooms, are where the Royal Family lived. There's certainly a very 50s décor feel to these rooms, which are more functional than plush. There's also a beautiful sun deck (once equipped with a water slide !), complete with a tea room serving delicious cakes and snacks.

A few levels below are the sailors' quarters and social spaces. Yachtsmen on Britannia were known as 'Yotties'. These spaces are probably some of the most interesting parts of the ship. Tiered according to rank, sleeping quarters range from private cabins to bunking shelves (!) and while the officers' dining room is nicely furnished with trinkets from the ship's travels, the general mess hall looks more like a school canteen. What surprised me was the mini-pubs on board, where yotties and officers could grab a pint and settle down for games or entertainment. There's also a fudge shop on this level, where you can try some truly bizarre flavours.



The Junior Officers' pub onboard.

The lowest levels of the ship have been turned into more of a museum-like exhibition. The engine room has been opened up to showcase the original machinery, while the racing yacht, Bloodhound, has also been put on display. This yacht has raced at the Cowes Week Regatta and has been sailed by Prince Philip, Prince Charles and Princess Anne.

Britannia is an exceptional tourist attraction, steeped in history. She is an excellent example of heritage and conservation work in the sector. Visiting Britannia offers a glimpse of life at sea and a flashback into a bygone age. The Royal Yacht is also a remarkable symbol of British cultural diplomacy in the twentieth century and 'soft power'. I've visited Britannia four times since coming to Edinburgh, and really can't recommend it enough for showing family and friends around the city, or an afternoon away from the Library.