

Cringletie House Scotland

By Ann Litt



Built in 1666, recent renovations have resulted in one of the most accessible country-house hotels to be found in the world-renowned Scottish Borders.



In the adapted bathroom there is a large roll-in shower with grab bars, a wall-mounted adjustable shower seat, and a low sink, as well as an emergency pull cord”



Scotland is a country known for gorgeous scenery—castles and abbey ruins, ancient history, and wonderful country-house hotels. One that really stands out as being very special is Cringletie House, located near Peebles, in the beautiful Scottish Borders, where you're very much in the countryside but only about 20 miles from the capital city of Edinburgh.

Cringletie House is owned by Johanna and Jacob van Houdt, who bought the property several years ago and spent a great deal of time and money totally refurbishing it into the grand hotel that it now is. In the process they decided to make the entire property totally wheelchair accessible; no small feat for a historic building that originally dates back to 1666, although it was completely rebuilt in 1861. The hotel is a great example of traditional Scottish Baronial architecture, with round towers along the top, log-burning fireplaces in all of the public rooms, and a 400 year-old walled garden among the delights to be discovered outside on the 28-acre grounds.

The hotel has a very warm atmosphere, as well. It's all about comfort, relaxation, and personal touches. It feels like "coming home," if home is a beautiful Scottish mansion in a won-

derful setting. Each of its 12 bedrooms, plus one suite, are very romantic, individually decorated in traditional Scottish colors with views of the grounds and the hills that lie beyond.

All of the bedrooms have wall-mounted flat screen televisions and high-speed Internet access, and mineral water and bowls of fresh fruit are provided in each room. Guests have a choice of the bedding they are most comfortable with, from traditional feather duvets and pillows to non-allergenic blankets or pillows. Every detail has been thought of. The bathrooms all have robes hanging for your use, as well as slippers and a full range of luxurious Molton Brown toiletries, sold in the finest stores all over the world, and with delicious scents.

In addition, when the house was renovated, a designer with knowledge of what was required to furnish an excellent room for disabled guests was called in, and a large and beautiful ground-floor room and bathroom was designed specifically for guests in wheelchairs. In addition, there is accessible parking located very close to the ramp into the main building, and a chair lift that's very easy to operate to take you up the few steps from the outer into an inner hall. There is also an elevator to the first and second floors, where the restaurant, library, residents' lounge, and some of the bedrooms are located.

The accessible bedroom has an extra-wide, electronically operated entrance door with hardwood floors for easy movement of a wheelchair. There are adjustable beds, and even a low-level wheelchair charger outlet for use with power chairs. In the adapted bathroom there is a large roll-in shower with grab bars,

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The Traquair Room—honoring the Stuarts of Traquair—was renovated with accessibility in mind, with spacious expanses that are easy for guests in wheelchairs to navigate, and a bathroom to match (see photos on pages 20, 24).



a wall-mounted adjustable shower seat, and a low sink, as well as other grab bars and an emergency pull cord.

For those guests with a hearing impairment—and after consulting with the Scottish Deaf Association—technical equipment was installed in the bedrooms so that guests can feel safe in their beds at night. There are flashing lights that connect to a fire-alarm bell, and vibrating pillow alarms for enhanced safety. There is also an induction loop at the reception desk and in the public restaurant and lounge.

The hotel is located in a beautiful setting, with gardens set in acres of lawns and woods with grazing sheep, and behind the house is found a walled garden with a yew hedge some four centuries old, and which some people claim is the oldest one in Scotland! Upon further exploration there is a waterfall, woodland walks,

outdoor sculptures, and even a special lawn for croquet. For those who appreciate really good food—and who among us doesn't?—dining at Cringletie House is a very special experience.

You start each morning with a traditional full Scottish breakfast, which is a beautiful way to begin your day. At mid-morning perhaps a coffee and some rich Scottish shortbread to hold off hunger pangs, or you can wait and enjoy a traditional afternoon tea; a feast for the eyes and taste buds alike. My favorite parts of this tradition are the home-baked scones with cream and jam, but there are also cakes and little tea sandwiches as well. Dinner is served in the elegant Sutherland Room, where you can either choose from the a la carte menu or try the seven-course tasting menu that changes with the seasons. Finally, just so you don't miss a meal, the

staff will prepare a wonderful picnic hamper if you know you'll be away from the hotel for the day. They can pack anything from sandwiches and fruit to a gourmet picnic with lobster, strawberries, chocolates, and chilled champagne. Just give them 24 hours notice and you will have a lunch long worth remembering.

A short drive from Cringletie House is Edinburgh, which is a wonderful city to explore. It really is the best of both worlds, as one can be in the city enjoying the sights and visitor attractions in half an hour or so, but at the end of the day you return to this peaceful hotel in the middle of one of the most beautiful parts of Scotland. As for getting around you can either pick up a rental car at the airport on your arrival or, if you prefer, the hotel can arrange reasonably priced accessible transfers directly to the property if you don't wish to drive yourself. This needs to be prearranged at the time of booking.

If you decide to visit Edinburgh for the day, the first thing you'll notice when you get there is the famous Edinburgh Castle, perched high and overlooking the city center. The castle is the fortified birthplace of the city, and there are various museums with displays inside that will help you gain a better understanding of Scottish history. Not every part of the castle is wheelchair accessible, but there is good access around a number of major sights inside, including the Great Hall, the National War Museum of Scotland, the Scots Dragoon Guards Museum, and the Crown Room, as well as a restaurant and shop. The Crown Jewels exhibition is accessible for some visitors with mobility issues, depending on their choice of transport (*see Web site to contact with ques-*

Scottish Sites

Cringletie House
www.cringletie.com

Edinburgh Castle
www.edinburghcastle.gov.uk

National Museums of Scotland
www.nms.ac.uk

Edinburgh: Official Tourist Board & Guide to the city
www.edinburgh.org

Undiscovered Britain & Ireland (accessible travel specialists)
www.undiscoveredbritain.com

Luxury Scotland (area hotel source)
www.luxuryscotland.co.uk

tions in advance). There is a ramp from Crown Square over the four steps into the Great Hall. In addition, manual wheelchairs are available from the castle but steep, cobbled roadways can make the uphill trek somewhat difficult, although power chairs should have no problem. There are also accessible bathrooms available,

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and a courtesy vehicle is available to take visitors from the Esplanade to Crown Square.

A visit to the National Museum of Scotland is highly recommended. It is entirely accessible and well worth seeing. Admission is free, and there is accessible parking as well. A stroll on the Royal Mile is a must-see, and it is composed of four streets—Castle Hill, Lawnmarket, High Street, and Canongate—which give you a glimpse into the past. You can do this tour with a self-guided map, and I suggest you start at the top with Edinburgh Castle and work your way downhill, ending up at the Palace at Holyroodhouse, one of the residences of the royal family when the Queen visits Scotland, with the other being Balmoral Castle. All along the Royal Mile are a variety of shops and cafes in case you need a break from all the history.

The Princess Street Gardens are one of the loveliest parts of

Edinburgh during the spring and summer months, when they are abloom with gorgeous flowers right in the heart of the city. You'll find the gardens on one side of Princess St., with some of the best shopping in Edinburgh to be found on the other. For more local sightseeing, and only 10 miles away from Cringletie House, is Rosslyn Chapel, which is famous for its beautiful carvings and an aura of mystery. It was featured in the book *The Da Vinci Code*, and in the film by the same name. Nearby is the very Scottish town of Peebles, which enjoys a most attractive setting among the hills on the banks of the River Tweed. Local places of interest include Neidpath Castle, Peebles Crosskirk, and Traquair House, which is the oldest inhabited house in Scotland and has played host to 27 monarchs. If you want to drive a bit further afield, the exciting city of Glasgow is an easy day trip, as is Stirling, with its magnificent castle and historical importance in Scottish history.

Cringletie House is a wonderful place to spend a week exploring the gorgeous Scottish countryside and nearby cities, then coming back each evening to the ultimate in comfort, local cuisine, and the most welcoming and caring staff you're likely to encounter, wherever your path should lead you. ☞

The staff and owners of Cringletie House welcome guests with physical disabilities with open arms, at right, while the bathroom in the Tranquair Room was designed for accessibility, with a roll-in shower, multiple grab bars, and a beautiful view out the window.



photos: Cringletie House