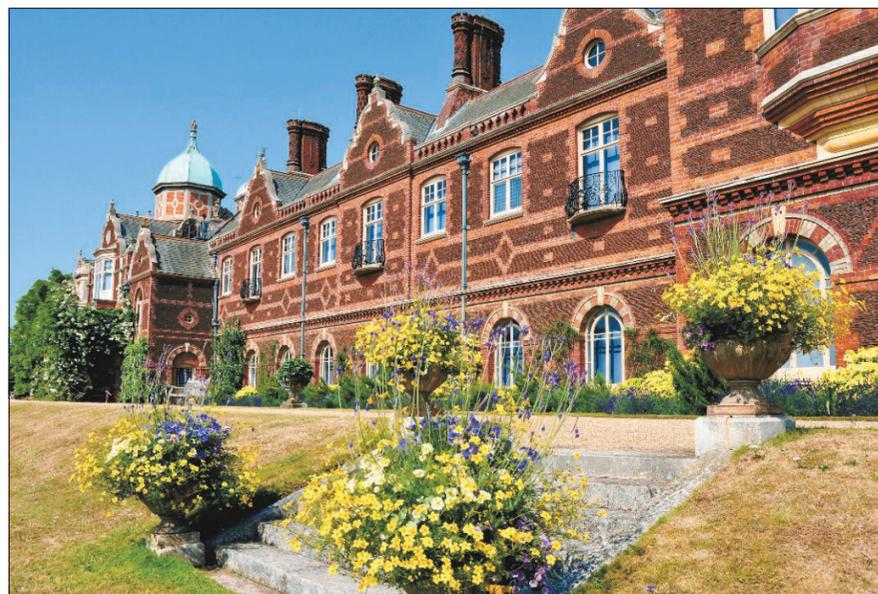




Royal digs

PHOTOS COURTESY OF KATHERINE RODEGHIER



The royal estate of Sandringham, in Norfolk north of London, covers 20,000 acres, including 60 acres of gardens perfect for a stroll. The royal family spends the winter, and especially Christmas, at Sandringham. From Easter through October, the royals depart and the house is open for public tours.

Royal residences

Sandringham is about 115 miles north of London. Admission costs about \$21; open April 19 through Nov. 2 except July 26 through Aug. 1, 2014. There's a restaurant at the visitor center; the Stables Tearoom near the museum, sandringhamestate.co.uk.

Kensington Palace is in West London. Admission to the museum, open daily, costs about \$24. The Palace Café is on the ground floor and the Orangery restaurant is in the gardens, hrp.org.uk.

Osborne is on the Isle of Wight off the southern coast of England and reached by ferry or Europe's only hovercraft. Day trips can be booked through hovertravel.com. Admission to the estate, open year-round with reduced days during

winter, costs about \$22. The Terrace restaurant and Orangery overlook the garden, www.english-heritage.org.uk/daysout/properties/osborne.

Hotels

Sample hotel rates are for two persons, double occupancy, in early May.

Royal Garden Hotel, 2-24 Kensington High Street, London. Next to Kensington Palace and Gardens, from about \$400, royalgardenhotel.co.uk.

The Royal, Ventnor, Isle of Wight. Classic family-run British hotel built in 1832, from about \$295, royalhoteliow.co.uk.

Details

For tourist information, see visitengland.com.

Visit where England's newest heir to the throne may spend the holidays

By Katherine Rodeghier

Daily Herald Correspondent

Where will baby Prince George be on Dec. 25? Most likely at his great-grandparents' country estate. Or perhaps with Wills and Kate in their palace apartment in London. Or maybe mum and dad will take Georgie to the Isle of Wight to see where his fifth great-grandparents celebrated the Yuletide with their nine children.

No matter. You can visit each of them, just not when the royals are around.

Christmas traditions at Sandringham

On Christmas Eve, Britain's royal family traditionally gathers in the White Drawing Room at Sandringham for tea. The Queen often decorates the tree herself in this house on her country estate in Norfolk. Her children, grandchildren — and perhaps this year her new great-grandchild — gather around, the adults sipping their Earl Grey before exchanging practical, inexpensive gifts. After church and lunch the next day, the Queen gives her annual Christmas Day address to the nation and then the family often goes for a walk through the estate's 60 acres of gardens, perhaps with a few corgis along.

You won't see them. Only the estate's Country Park is open to visitors year-round, but from Easter through October, when the family resides elsewhere, you can tour the



Queen Victoria and Prince Albert often escaped with their nine children for some quality family time at Osborne House on the Isle of Wight.

house, the museum and gardens.

Sandringham has been the home of four generations of British sovereigns, dating back to Queen Victoria and Prince Albert's son, the future Edward VII, who moved in with his bride in 1863. Albert thought his eldest boy "needed a grand country estate to become a real country gentleman," says Helen Walch, Sandringham's public enterprises manager. They also wanted "to keep him out of London and trouble," she says. "He was a bit of a goer."

Two new houses were built on the grounds. One of them, Park House, was leased to Lord Fermoy, grandfather of Lady Diana Spencer, who grew up there and played with the royal children. Prince Charles' future bride really was the girl next door.

A self-guided tour of the main house includes the Saloon, where chair seats are covered in needlepoint done by Queen Mary, and the dining room with a mahogany table that extends with nine leaves to seat 22. Each crystal glass on it is inscribed E II R, the Queen's cipher. Those Spanish tapestries on the walls were a gift from King Alfonso XII.

Outside in the gardens, the Woodland Walk follows the garden wall. On it you'll see memorial stones marking the passing of some of the Queen's favorite dogs.

The 1955 American Midget Racing Car Prince Charles played with as a boy is housed in the museum in the former stable houses. The collection of royal vehicles also includes a six horsepower 1900 Daimler Phaeton, the first car ever owned by a British monarch.

Feminine flair at Kensington Palace

Some of England's most charismatic royals have lived in London's Kensington Palace, including Queen Victoria, Princess Margaret and Diana, Princess of Wales. After Diana's

travel

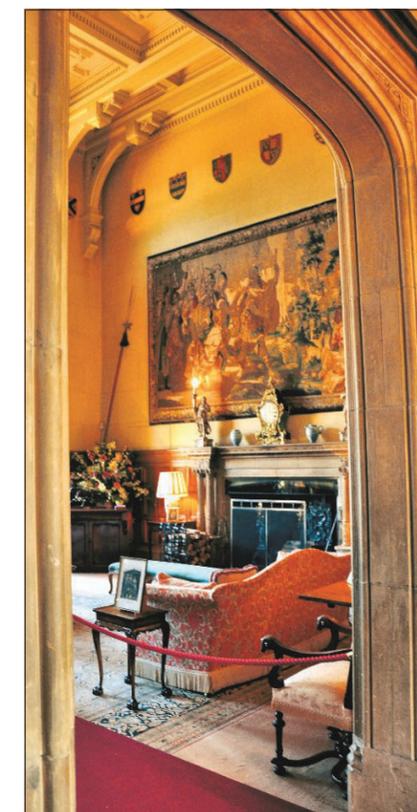
death in 1997, the gold gates on the south side of the palace grounds were adorned with floral tributes to her. In the days that followed, every piece of railing became covered with flowers stretching like a carpet into the public Kensington Gardens.

Prince William, Kate Middleton and baby Prince George took up residence this fall in a newly renovated 20-room apartment. You probably won't see them totting in their Christmas tree, however. Though the palace has been a royal home since 1689, today it's divided into two parts. The private wing, where the royals live, is strictly off limits, but the historic state apartments are open to the public as a museum.

In "Victoria Revealed," one of four exhibits, you'll walk through the room where Britain's longest-reigning monarch may have been born, but certainly lived as a child. Just hours after Queen Victoria learned she'd become monarch at age 18, she met with the Privy Council in the Red Saloon, impressing the cabinet ministers and advisers with her imposing presence, though she stood less than 5 feet tall. Her tiny wedding dress is among the 150 items on display.

Dresses are the focus of a temporary exhibit, "Fashion Rules," running at least through 2014. The 21 couture dresses showcased belonged to Queen Elizabeth II, the Queen's extrovert sister, Princess Margaret, and celebrity former daughter-in-law, Princess Diana. They reveal how fashions changed from the 1950s to the 1990s as wardrobes bent to fashion rules and the women adapted them to the rules of dress for royal functions.

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The Saloon is the first room visitors enter when touring the house at Sandringham.

Visitors crowd around Diana's dresses showcasing 1980s fashions from shoulder pads to asymmetrical shapes and bright colors. For a visit to Saudi Arabia, she wore a bright red full-length gown with high neck and long sleeves, in keeping with the country's customs for female dress. More in keeping with her personality is a ballerina-length blue dance dress with dropped waist, purchased at auction by *People* magazine, and a midnight blue strapless evening gown that finishes in a theatrical fishtail skirt.

Evening gowns the Queen wore early in her reign show the style of the 1950s: nipped waists and full skirts. Often her dresses were pale in color, making her stand out in the crowd and in black and white photos. One worn at a banquet hosted by the president of Pakistan has a dramatic waterfall train in green and white, Pakistan's national colors. A silk dinner dress shows the transformation of style by 1970 through its linear silhouette, bold orange color and elongated sleeves that reached to the floor with slits so the queen could reach through to shake hands.

The royal rules were not as strict for Princess Margaret as they were for the monarch, so her dresses reflect the more liberal 1960s and '70s. There's a minidress and a party frock with plunging neckline and halter straps that was considered risqué. A caftan and turban in Indian sari silk she wore on the Caribbean island of Mustique in 1976 follows the trend toward ethnic clothing at the time.



Miniature motorcars used by children in the royal family are on display in the Long Gallery of the museum at Sandringham.



Kensington Palace, where William, Kate and baby Prince George live in London, was built in 1605 and has been in the royal family since 1689. Half of the palace is a museum open to the public.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF KATHERINE RODEGHIER

Victorian hideaway on the Isle of Wight

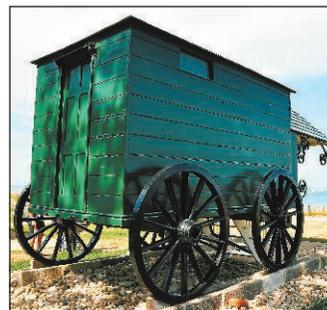
Christmas gatherings of the royal family must have been big affairs during Queen Victoria's reign, what with nine children in the house. Victoria and Prince Albert had three palaces in which to live, but the couple wanted a family home, quiet and private, where they could raise their children. The Queen remembered teenage holidays on the Isle of Wight so they bought Osborne estate there and built a grand house in Italianate style because its water view reminded Albert of Naples. After Victoria died, Edward VII gave Osborne to the state

since he already had Sandringham, and the estate is now open to the public as an English Heritage property.

The season on the Isle of Wight is summertime, but Victoria and Albert often lived there in the winters, too, with the children ice skating on the pond and making snowmen in the field. A Swiss cottage on the grounds was a playhouse for the children and a place where they learned to cook and keep house. In the summer, Albert gave each child a plot of land to raise flowers and vegetables.

At the beach, the children were taught to swim and Victoria took her first dip in the sea using an elaborate contraption called a bathing machine. To protect her modesty, she'd enter this wooden shed on iron wheels, change into her voluminous bathing costume and wait for the structure to be pushed on rails into the water before she emerged onto its curtained veranda and stepped down into the sea.

In the main house, you can tour the Council Room where Alexander Graham Bell introduced the Queen to his telephone, the Queen's Room where Victoria and Albert sat side by side at a double desk working on the affairs of state, and the Billiard Room, which could be curtained off from the Drawing Room so men



For modesty's sake, Queen Victoria used a bathing machine when she went swimming off Osborne beach. The contraption was pushed on rails into the water where she emerged in her bathing suit.

could sit down between their shots while technically out of the queen's presence.

After Albert died, the queen went into deep mourning, retreating to Osborne House

for months. Until her own death some 40 years later, she kept a portrait of Albert above his side of the bed next to a pouch containing his pocket watch and insisted on laying out his clothes each morning.

The morbid atmosphere doesn't carry over into the rest of the house. You can imagine children running through the hall, playing with their toys in the nursery and reciting their lessons to their father in their bedrooms. Paintings done by Victoria and Albert hang on the walls and most of the furniture is original, as are several objets d'art the couple exchanged as Christmas gifts.

• *Information for this article was gathered during a research trip sponsored by Visit England.*