

# ESCAPE TO GLENEAGLES

By Caroline Phillips




If there's a smart place to take a hound, Gleneagles is it. It hit the headlines in 2005 when it hosted the G8 summit, despite the leaders being minus their pooches. But recently, it has been becoming famous for its excellent hospitality for the four-legged. There's a rigorous vetting (excuse the pun) procedure prior to my arrival with Poppy, my Boxer. On most counts, she probably shouldn't be allowed to stay. Show her a fluffy, small, white dog and she thinks: canapé. Oh, and she farts a lot with no compunction about doing so in five-star hotels. And, let's face it, this all makes me feel nervous.


Any dog wishing to stay at Gleneagles can only be up to the equivalent size of a Labrador. (It's a no-go if Poppy opts to wear a pair of Jimmy Chews). The dogument — the hotel's dog reservation form — goes on to explain that they 'reserve the right to move noisy or disruptive dogs to The Kennels, with additional costs.' But Poppy is a performer. Boxers are clowns. She likes howling at the moon. Oh, and at the television, the radio, and voices outside the bedroom. I can feel it in my (whisper the word) bones: barking-mad Poppy barking madly and being dragged ignominiously off to the doghouse with additional costs. (There's already a room charge of £100 per dog, maximum two hounds per room).

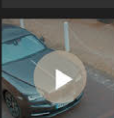


My anxiety rating is as high as a Boxer jumping up to lick someone's face as we motor up the drive to Gleneagles. The owner of another hotel (the Palace, Gstaad, since you ask), told me once how they'd had to turf a bedroom for one of their guests who didn't want to take her dog out to do its business in the cold. There will obviously be no need for that sort of thing at Gleneagles. It's a sparkingly bright day and the hotel (which opened in 1924) is set midst an 850-acre estate in Perthshire, just where the Highlands and the palette of green, brown and gold begin. It was built originally to offer country leisure pursuits to Caledonian Railway travellers: a kind of railway resort cum grand hotel. Now it's more a (somewhat dour externally) palace in a very pretty location midst bracken and yellow gorse, daffodils and hills. There's a vintage Rolls Royce in fern grove in front of the hotel. So gorgeous and so old. I think until

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vintage Rolls-Royce in fern green in front of the hotel. So gorgeous and so old, I think, until I clock that it's my age.

Things continue badly. The lady at the reception desk tells me that we've got a meeting shortly with the hotel's puppy, and I start wondering whether it's a little, fluffy, white canapé. Then I ask if Poppy can accompany us for a quick late lunch, and I'm told she may. So we go with trepidation and Poppy into the American Bar, which is styled like an iconic 1920s bar. It's not that Poppy does a whoopsie on the carpet or anything. It's just that she's not a guide dog. And it turns out that only helpful dogs like that are actually allowed in there.



So we go and sit instead in the reception area of the lobby and we eat the best pea soup (thick, and sprinkled with crumbs, pea shoots and crispy pancetta), the lightest crab cakes and three different types of salmon smoked respectively with whisky, gin and mulberry, each slice better than the last. And Poppy looks at me with those mournful eyes until I sneak her a bread roll and tell her and my human friend that I think the interior vibe is comfy Arts Deco meets corporate and that it's lovely. And that the service is excellent: friendly, unstuffy and attentive.

The Gleneagles staff has a marketing mantra — they keep saying that it's a 'playground.' It turns out that it's a countryside estate that encompasses a 5-star hotel, three champ golf courses, Andrew Fairlie's 2-star Michelin eaterie, and seven places to eat. Plus an ooh-ah Espa spa (with a blissful signature treatment, The Source, which involves massage, hot poultices, oats and local honey) and heated poolside recliners, a tropical fruit scented shower, and crystal and eucalyptus steam room. There's also a club with a swimming pool that's as hot as a bath. And golf, tennis, riding, off-road driving, cycling, archery (with recurve bows), fishing (with ghillies in trout lochs), shooting, falconry and gun-dog classes.



And what of our bedroom? To say that Gleneagles is big is an understatement. You need a SatNav to get to your room. It boasts 232 bedrooms, with both traditional and modern interiors. We're in a (ugly) modern extension in a special dog-friendly room overlooking the garden and with a sensible wooden floor near the door for wet paws. The interior is all very tasteful, pared down and homely.

The sheets must be a zillion thread count and the bed is so comfortable it can surely only be a ViSpring. There's an equally luxurious bed for Poppy: an Onyourbed: think of it as the ViSpring of the canine world. They've also given her a foam duvet, plastic floor mats, two bowls and a poop scoop set. When we leave the room, there's a sign hanging on the door, 'Be careful, dog in room.' (When we return after dinner, the bed has been turned down and the curtains drawn. A tribute to their staff, given the possible chien méchant in the room).



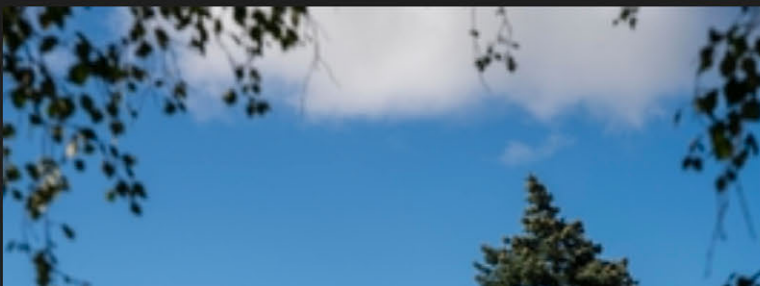
Next we have our meeting with Colin Farndon, director of leisure, and Henry, the hotel's puppy. My heart goes into my mouth when I note that he is small, white (well, golden) and fluffy. (Henry, not Colin.) He's a mini Lab. The sweetest puppy you ever did see. A sort of one-mouthful job for the Boxers of this world.

But it soon becomes clear that there's something about Colin and his calm demeanour, his I'm-the-head-of-the-pack vibe. And suddenly Poppy starts behaving as if she's been to finishing school. And that's when it all changes for me. Colin lets her off the leash. She plays hide and seek with Henry. She behaves like a four-pawed angel. Colin tells me that Henry is the therapy dog. Which means that he calms tricky customers. Ones like Poppy.



Colin explains how Gleneagles is a dream for people with Nature Defecit Disorder. (Yes, it's a thing.) He points out the kennels with its working dogs (unlike Poppy, who's probably signing on). It has a gun-dog school chokka with highly-trained Labs (not the usual supine and cake-eating kind). They also have state-of-the-art indoor heated kennels for dogs belonging to guests: each kennel kitted out with a king-size dog bed (I won't mention the V word again or it'll sound like product placement). Plus outdoors there are behaviour and gun-dog classes.

After dinner in the brasserie and a good night's kip, all too soon it's time to go. There are things to do nearby like Grouse tasting — tipping whisky not scoffing birds — and castle viewing, including Stirling Castle, Blair Atholl Estate and Castle, and Scone Palace. We beetle off after a very happy one-night stay. As we drive beside the fern, gorse and bracken, I gaze at the daffodils and the low cloud snuggling on the hilltop. I look back at the hotel standing majestically, as if preparing to take a selfie. My heart glows with pride. And it all gives me paws for thought. Yes, I think: yes, we did it. Poppy had her first sleepover. And she didn't howl, jump or bite. And she slept like a dog.





Room rates start from £390 per night based on two people sharing on a B&B basis. For more information, go to [www.gleneagles.com](http://www.gleneagles.com).

*Caroline Phillips is an award-winning freelance journalist who contributes to publications from Sunday and daily newspapers to glossy magazines and various luxury websites. To see more of her work, go to [www.carolinephillips.net](http://www.carolinephillips.net).*

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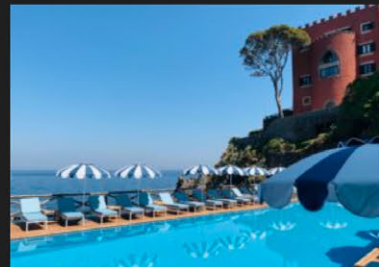
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