

Chasing WIZARDS

THERE IS MAGIC IN SCOTLAND, THE BIRTHPLACE OF HARRY POTTER, THAT GOES BEYOND THE FAMOUS BOY WIZARD

There's a man on a boat on a Scottish loch who's not pleased with Harry Potter. 'They told us the movies would bring crowds of people wanting to visit the locations,' Jim says as the little green steamer Sileas cuts through the still, silvered surface of Loch Shiel, 'but I haven't seen anything of them down here on the water.' He points to the end of the lake where the 21 arches of the Glenfinnan Viaduct curve

across the valley. They take the train from Fort William to the coast and back again and that's the nearest they get.'

We slide past the headland where digital magic had built the turrets and towers of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry and I try to picture Harry swooping on his broomstick over the loch, the Black Lake of the books. It's hard to imagine - the glory of the loch is that it is so untouched, the surrounding hills belonging to the eagles and the deer, and the waters to the salmon and, maybe, the three-humped monster some claim to have seen, known as Seilag.

At the head of the loch stands a tall column topped by a statue of a kilted Highlander commemorating the dead of Bonnie Prince Charlie's campaign in 1745 to claim Scotland from the English, the Jacobite Rising. The name has been given to the steam

train that takes Harry Potter fans over the famous viaduct.

The Jacobite train had been a thrilling sight that morning as I stood thigh-deep in wet heather on a nearby hillside. After a long wait I heard an unmistakable chuffing behind the hill and then there it was, the carriages maroon, the engine black, and above them a long trail of white steam following the curve of the track as it crossed the 110 year-old viaduct. It was

What fans should do is go to Edinburgh where it all began

easy this time to imagine Harry, Ron and Hermione in their school robes, feeling as excited as I was as they prepared to start a new year at Hogwarts.

Copyright issues mean there is no such thing as an official Harry Potter tour of Scotland, and with so many of the locations created in post-production by computers, there is not much to recognise

from the movies. What fans of J.K. Rowling's books should do, then, is go to Edinburgh where it all began.

Everyone now knows the story of how the impoverished author pushed her infant daughter around the city until the baby fell asleep, and then went to her favourite cafe to write in the warmth while her coffee went cold on the table. The cafe is there - it's called The Elephant House. The Birthplace of Harry Potter' is painted across the window, and you can buy T-shirts and caps with that slogan, but inside the main decorative theme is, no surprise, elephants.

The back room is large, light and comfortable, and while I was there, at the next table a woman with a toddler in a pushchair beside her was busily scribbling in a notebook, maybe hoping for some of the success to rub off. You wouldn't actually come here for the coffee, which was neither hot nor very good, but I didn't say so to the barista, who was happy to answer the question she must have heard a hundred times. 'There's no one table that

Rowling sat at. She came so often that she probably used them all.'

The view from the back room windows is across the narrow and quaintly-named Candlemaker Row into the Greyfriars kirkyard. The soot-streaked tombstones there may have given Rowling some ideas for the spookier parts of her books, but people come here because of another story, that of Greyfriars Bobby.

It was here that for 14 years the little Skye terrier called Bobby kept a vigil over the grave of his master, John Gray, leaving the churchyard only for his daily meal when the one o'clock gun boomed from the castle. He died in 1872, having been given the freedom of the city, and was himself buried in the churchyard. There is now a statue of the little dog just down the road from the Elephant House in the street called George IV Bridge.

It's about four blocks from here along cobbled streets and through tunnel-like alleyways to where the Balmoral Hotel stands under its iconic clock-tower on the corner

of Princes Street. For Rowling it must have been an unimaginable journey back in her Elephant House days, but it was here, in the opulent suite 552 on January 11, 2007, that she wrote the last sentence of the last *Harry Potter* book.

She signed an ornamental bust to that effect, but management is not interested in letting fans troop inside to view it. There is nothing, though, to stop anyone from

TO GO Cathay Pacific offers a daily one stop service from Auckland to London with connections to Glasgow and Edinburgh. Cathay Pacific offers special fares. Visit www.cathaypacific.co.nz for flights and airfares.

In Edinburgh, within sight of the Balmoral Hotel, is The Scotsman Hotel, which is quirky and comfortable - visit www.thescotsmanhotel.co.uk. At Loch Shiel, Glenfinnan House Hotel is a welcoming

Scottish country house with excellent kippers on the breakfast menu - visit www.glenfinnanhouse.com.

Explore the beauty of Loch Shiel with Loch Shiel Cruises at www.highlandcruises.co.uk. The Jacobite steam train runs between May and October from Fort William - for booking, visit www.steamtrain.info. The Elephant House is at 21 George IV Bridge in Edinburgh.

For more information, visit www.visitbritain.co.nz.

TRAVEL NEWS AND BARGAINS

DOUBTLESS BEAUTY

Beautiful scenery and incredible savings go hand in hand at Doubtless Bay Villas in New Zealand's far north. You can relax on your private outdoor patio and watch for pods of playful dolphins while enjoying your complimentary bottle of wine. Nearby are quiet seaside villages, ancient kauri giants and miles of deserted beach to explore. The Overnighter deal is down to \$199 a night, a saving of more than 55 per cent. Visit www.wotif.com/hotelW48992.

ISLAND LUXURY

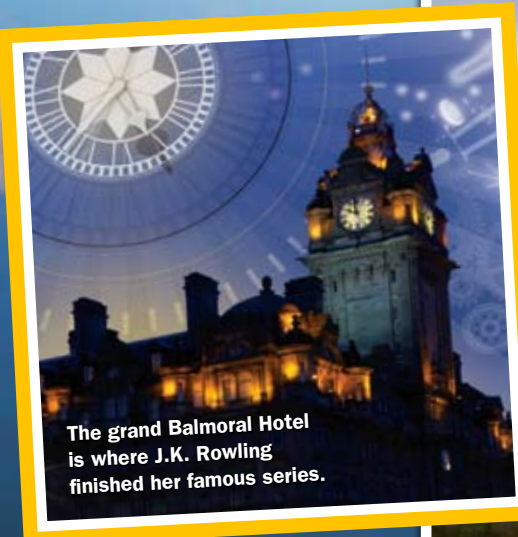
Hidden in the coastal forests of Vanuatu is Eratap Beach Resort, with three beaches, lagoon waterways and eight acres of tropical gardens to explore. Plus, it's only 20 minutes from downtown Port Vila. Packages to Vanuatu start at \$2199 per person share twin and include flights from Auckland, seven nights at Eratap Beach Resort in a one bedroom villa, daily full cooked and buffet breakfast and transfers. Book fast as sales end March 19, 2008. Visit www.houseoftravel.co.nz.

GET PAMPERED

The best way to relax is with a Pehua Pamper package at the wine village of Martinborough including two nights in a Lakeside Suite, a full body massage for two, complimentary bottle of wine and dinner at a local restaurant. This relaxing break from the hectic pace of life is priced at \$850 for two. Visit www.jasons.com/hotdeal.



Relive the Hogwarts Express journeys on the Jacobite steam train.



The grand Balmoral Hotel is where J.K. Rowling finished her famous series.



The Jacobite Rising is remembered with this statue.



Above: The cafe where Harry Potter was created.



Harry Potter author J.K. Rowling.

WORDS AND PICTURES: PAMELA WADE