nileGUIDE
ALL YOU NEED TO PLAN YOUR PERFECT TRIP

Daveybot

Best Luxury Hotels in Edinburgh

Edinburgh, 10 Days

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Guide Description

AUTHOR NOTE: Some occasions demand the very best, and high-end travelers know where to get it: in luxury hotels. And the decadent digs of Edinburgh do it up right. First-class amenities, swanky facilities, gracious staff, a massage or two: this is how to truly unwind, as long as you have the cash! Get away from it all and surrender to these professionals at pampering. You might not want to go home.

Image of The Witchery (bath) by The Travel Editor.

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Itinerary Overview

things to do
restaurants
hotels
nightlife

Day 1 - Edinburgh

Balmoral Hotel
The height of luxury

Day 2 - Edinburgh

The Witchery by the Castle
Located right next to the castle, the stunning Witchery offers romantic, sumptuous, theatrically decorated rooms with Gothic antiques and elaborate tapestries.

Day 3 - Edinburgh

Prestonfield House Hotel
17th century grandeur

Day 4 - Edinburgh

Edinburgh Residence
Five-star luxury suites in Victorian townhouse

Day 5 - Edinburgh

Glasshouse (The)
Hip n' happening 5-star hotel

Day 6 - Edinburgh

Tigerlily
Edinburgh's prettiest hotel

Day 7 - Edinburgh

Scotsman Hotel (The)
Luxury incorporated

Day 8 - Edinburgh

Sheraton Grand Hotel & Spa
Deluxe central hotel, featuring the tranquil One Spa.

Day 9 - Edinburgh

Barceló Carlton Highland
Multi-facility four-star

Day 10 - Edinburgh

Macdonald Roxburghe Hotel
Georgian luxury

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Day 1 - Edinburgh

QUICK NOTE

contact:
tel: 44 131 556 2414
fax: 44 131 557 3747
http://www.thebalmoralhotel.com

location:
1 Princes Street
Edinburgh EH2 2EQ

1 Balmoral Hotel

DESCRIPTION: The Balmoral Hotel was initially built in 1902, but has been completely refurbished by its new owners, Rocco Forte. The results are impressive, an excellent blend of Edwardian character with thoroughly modern amenities. Striking an imposing figure, it dominates the east end of Princes Street, affording superb views of the Castle, Gardens and Old Town and is handily situated beside Waverley Station.
This five-star luxury hotel might be out of most tourists' price range (it is usually the sleeping quarters of visiting celebrities like J.K. Rowling and Brittany Spears). But everyone is free to admire its lovely exterior, which boasts a large clock that is set two minutes fast to make sure passengers will be on time to catch their trains at the adjacent Waverly Station.
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Day 2 - Edinburgh

QUICK NOTE

contact:
tel: 0131/225-5613
fax: 0131/220-4392
http://www.thewitchery.com

location:
Castlehill, Royal Mile
Edinburgh EH1 2NF

1 The Witchery by the Castle

The Witchery

DESCRIPTION: Part of the famous Edinburgh restaurant, the overnight accommodations in the Witchery offer romantic, sumptuous, theatrically decorated rooms with Gothic antiques and elaborate tapestries, wall to wall decadence and and roll-top baths big enough for two! Each lavishly decorated suite (the Library, Vestry, Inner Sanctum, Old Rectory, Sempill, Guardroom or Armoury) has its own individual character, for example an oak four-poster bed in a red-velvet-lined bedroom. Celebrity guests have included Andrew Lloyd Webber, Michael Douglas and Catherine Zeta Jones, Simpsons cartoon creator Matt Groening, Danni Minogue and Jack Nicholson. Rates including continental breakfast, vat, newspapers and a complimentary bottle of Champagne from £325 per suite per night. These rooms are frequently booked months in advance.
Angus beef and lobster are the hallmark items of the hotel's famous restaurant menu, which boasts a comprehensive (and pricey) vintage wine list. A three course meal without wine typically will cost less than 50 British pounds.
Summer allows for idyllic al fresco dining in the downstairs Secret Garden. The food has won many coveted awards and deservingly so. To enjoy the Witchery experience for a knock-down price, ask for the light lunch or theatre supper menu.
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Day 3 - Edinburgh

QUICK NOTE

contact:
tel: 44 131 668 3346
fax: 44 131 668 3976
http://www.prestonfield.com

location:
PRIESTFIELD ROAD
Edinburgh EH16 5UT

1 Prestonfield House Hotel

DESCRIPTION: Built in 1687 as the grand baroque home of Edinburgh's Lord Provost, Prestonfield is now one of Edinburgh's most luxurious five-star hotels with 23 stylish rooms and suites. Opulence, theatre and luxury are combined in James Thomson's quirky and stylish reworking of this A-listed historic century mansion where minimalism is banished and maximalism rules. In addition to the dramatic bedrooms and sumptuous suites, there is his destination restaurant - Rhubarb - alongside a collection of stunning private dining rooms, salons and historic public rooms. Prestonfield, rising in Jacobean splendor amid 5.3 hectares (13 acres) of gardens, pastures, and woodlands below Arthur's Seat, has entertained such luminaries as Sean Connery and Minnie Driver. All guests should appreciate the traditional atmosphere and 1680s architecture as well as the peacocks and Highland cattle that strut and stroll across the grounds. The spacious bedrooms hide all modern conveniences behind velvet-lined walls: Bose sound systems, DVD players, and flatscreen plasma TVs. © NileGuide

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Day 4 - Edinburgh

QUICK NOTE

contact:
tel: 44 131 226 3380
fax: 44 131 226 3381
http://www.theedinburghresidence.com/,http://www.townhousecompany.com/theedinburghresidence/

location:
7 ROTHSAY TERRACE
Edinburgh EH3 7RY

1 Edinburgh Residence

DESCRIPTION: The Edinburgh Residence is one of the finest luxury hotels in Scotland. Grand staircases and classic wood paneling greet guests, while rooms have all the modern conveniences. This hotel is on the same level of its townhouse siblings -- the Bonham, the Howard, and Channings. Categorised as 'classic', 'grand' and 'townhouse', the 5-star suites are more like apartments, with magnificent proportions that really allow you to spread out and make yourself at home. In some, the sitting rooms are adjoining, and in others they are self-contained. Afternoon tea and drinks is available in the drawing room.
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Edinburgh Residence

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Day 5 - Edinburgh

QUICK NOTE

contact:
tel: 44 131 525 8200
fax: 44 131 525 8205
http://www.theetoncollection.com/content.aspx

location:
2 Greenside Place
Edinburgh EH1 3BN

1 Glasshouse (The)

DESCRIPTION: Voted by Conde Nast Traveller as one of the top 50 hottest hotels in the world, behind the façade of the 150 year old Lady Glenorchy church, you'll find the sleek and utterly modern Glasshouse.
The hotel offers beautiful views of the city - what better way to view Firth of Forth or Calton Hill than within the comforts of your own room! A better option would be a room with a terrace, where you can always go for a breath of fresh air. The various suites are named after Scotch whisky. There are various packages available - if you're on your honeymoon, stay in the 'Love is in the air' suite, which comes with a Sauna Jacuzzi-King Bed.
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Day 6 - Edinburgh

QUICK NOTE

contact:
tel: 44 131 225 5005
fax: +44 131 225 7046
http://www.tigerlilyedinburgh.co.uk/

location:
125 George Street
Edinburgh EH2 4JN

1 Tigerlily

DESCRIPTION: This is no ordinary bar, restaurant or boutique hotel; this is Tigerlily. Tigerlily is an award-winning, converted Georgian Townhouse in Edinburgh city centre. Guests experience an atmosphere of unabashed glamour and unparalleled luxury. This exclusive 4 star boutique hotel offers every comfort – like beds by the acre, sensuous fabrics and plasma screens. Tigerlily is perfect for business, pleasure and everything in between.
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Tigerlily

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Day 7 - Edinburgh

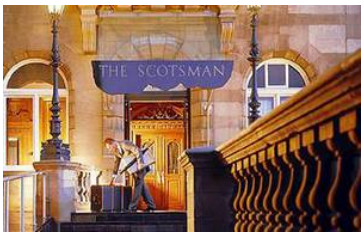
QUICK NOTE

contact:
tel: 44 131 556 5565
fax: 44 131 652 3652
http://www.thescotsmanhotel.co.uk/

location:
20 North Bridge
Edinburgh EH1 1YT

1 Scotsman Hotel (The)

DESCRIPTION: One of the most sophisticated hotels in Edinburgh, the Scotsman Hotel (a baronial mason) once housed the city's main newspaper - you guessed it - The Scotsman. The building has now been thoroughly modernized, although during renovation the staff were careful not to eradicate the stunning wooden paneled reception room that is now the bar and brasserie. The lower ground floor houses a state of the art gym. Rooms boast bathrooms with marble vanities, heated towel rails and separate baths and showers.   © NileGuide



Hotels.com

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Day 8 - Edinburgh

QUICK NOTE

contact:
tel: 44 131 229 9131
fax: 44 131 228 4510
http://www.starwoodhotels.com/sheraton/property/overview/index.html

location:
1 Festival Square
Edinburgh EH3 9SR

1 Sheraton Grand Hotel & Spa

DESCRIPTION: The Shertaon Hotel mixes modern and Scottish ambience for a stunning and sleek look, from the glass restaurant and opulent guest rooms to the sweeping staircases. Relax in the tranquil One Spa; enjoy afternoon tea and evening drinks in the Exchange Bar; feast on the Santini restaurant's delicious, contemporary take on classic Italian dishes and take in breathtaking views of Edinburgh Castle.
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Day 9 - Edinburgh

QUICK NOTE

contact:
tel: 44 131 472 3000
fax: 44 131 556 2691
http://www.barcelo-hotels.co.uk/hotels/scotland/barcelo-edinburgh-carlton-hotel

location:
North Bridge
Edinburgh EH1 1SD

1 Barceló Carlton Highland

DESCRIPTION: This Georgian four-star hotel is just 2 minutes away from Waverly Station. Situated on North Bridge overlooking the Royal Mile, it is just minutes away from Princes Street and the legendary Edinburgh Castle. The rooms have a hint of Scottish design, and you can pamper yourself in the hotel's beauty rooms.
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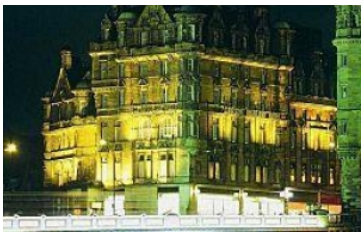

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Day 10 - Edinburgh

QUICK NOTE

contact:
tel: 0844 879 9063
fax: 44 131 240 5555
http://www.macdonaldhotels.co.uk/roxburghe/

location:
38 Charlotte Street
Edinburgh EH2 - 4HQ

1 Macdonald Roxburghe Hotel

DESCRIPTION: Overlooking the park on Charlotte Square, the award-winning Roxburghe hotel sits right in the heart of Edinburgh, around the corner from the many shops of Princes and George Street.
Built by renowned architect Robert Adam, the Roxburghe hotel provides traditional and luxurious 19th century-style accommodation. Each room has elegant period furniture and many include authentic Adams fireplaces. Be pampered in the luxury spa or dance the night away on one of Edinburgh's largest dance floors! © NileGuide

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Edinburgh Snapshot

Local Info

The city is basically split into two main districts — the Old Town and the New Town — with Princes Street Gardens separating them. The surrounding areas offer a wealth of places to visit.

The Old Town: This is the largely medieval heart of Edinburgh in which most of its important historical monuments can be found, including Edinburgh Castle, Holyroodhouse Palace(the Royal Scottish residence) and St Giles' Cathedral.

The Royal Mile is the historical artery of the Old Town, linking together Edinburgh's two royal strongholds: Edinburgh Castle and the Holyroodhouse Palace. Running the length of four streets — Castlehill, Lawnmarket, High Street and Canongate – it's a vibrant, buzzing location. This is especially so during the Edinburgh Festival, when the Old Town is filled with street performers and people thrusting flyers into the hands of passers-by, all in the hope of drumming up larger audiences for their shows. It's also something of a tourist trap and, as a result, souvenir shops have sprung up in droves. However, the vitality and historical significance of this part of town make it an essential stop on any visitor's checklist.

The Cowgate and Grassmarket areas are towards the southern end of the Old Town. This bustling area is filled with clubs, pubs, music venues and second-hand clothes shops. It's a pretty cool place in which to be seen and for the locals it's their first port of call on a night out. When the sun shines the Grassmarket has the feel of a continental town; relaxedal fresco coffee drinking, little traffic and authentic, colorful shop-fronts make this one of Europe's premier haunts.

Princes Street Gardens: These gardens fill the valley between Old Town and New Town, with Princes Street itself lining the northern side. During the Christmas and New Year period there is an ice-rink set up here under the gaze of a crystallised Edinburgh Castle. There is a decidedly festive atmosphere in the park at this time with stalls selling Christmas trees and seasonal ornaments. During the summer months the park acts as a Mecca for visitors in search of panoramic views of the city; for tourists who wish to climb the Scott Monument; for workers lunching in the open; for children who want to play a round of mini-golf; and for just about anybody who needs to relax. In Princes Street Gardens you never escape the atmospheric sound of the bagpipes, though you can escape the hustle and bustle of Princes Street itself.

The Mound is bang in the middle of Princes Street Gardens. It is called The Mound because it is, quite literally, the mound of earth that was left over from dredging the Loch at the foot of the castle. It's the site of the Royal Scottish Academy and the National Gallery of Scotland. In the summer it attracts many festival performers and craft stalls.

The New Town: Whilst the Old Town marks the historical part of the city, the New Town is more a celebration of business, order and classical Georgian architecture. This is the terrain of the shops, offices and banks, which are laid out in gridded streets that emanate precision and symmetry.

George Street is the centrepiece of the New Town. It is an up-and-coming area and now boasts high quality shops and restaurants including Browns, Space NK Apothecary, Jones and many others. Flanked by Queen Street and Princes Street, which run in parallel, it is a wide and elegant street with impressive squares at both ends. At the western end lies Charlotte Square, designed by Robert Adam in 1791 and home of St George's church(now West Register House). The other end finds St Andrew Square — home of the Melville Monument and the Royal Bank of Scotland. It also marks the financial area of the New Town.

Princes Street, just below George Street, is the main shopping area of Edinburgh and the most famous part of the New Town. A very busy spot, its views of the Edinburgh Castle and proximity to Princes Street Gardens happily make up for the crowds of shoppers. The most impressive building is General Register House, at the northeastern end of the street. Also at this end is Waverley market, just next to the station. This shopping centre is a popular venue for performers during the Festival. Whilst Princes Street offers shoppers department stores and high street chains, Rose Street, just behind it, is an attractive pedestrian area with small shops and cafes.

Stockbridge& Dean are in the western part of the New Town, and are known for being bohemian and less structured. Funky, trendy little shops and boutiques sit alongside various eating-places and bars. Places like Randolph Crescent and Moray Place give the area a more curvaceous look with classical Georgian fronts. Dean Village is an attractive old milling community, whilst Stockbridge is a great place to browse through antique and ethnic shops.

Calton: At the east of the city, this hill is a popular spot for watching the Festival fireworks. The views of Edinburgh Castle and Arthur's Seat are wonderful and if you like, you can climb the Nelson Monument to increase the panorama. The Royal City Observatory and Old Royal High School are situated in this area.

Holyrood Park and Arthur's Seat: This area is just behind the Holyroodhouse Palace. Known as Arthur's Seat(from the gaelic"ard-Na-Said" — meaning"height of arms"), this extinct volcano — it hasn't erupted in 350 million years — towers over of Holyrood Park. Originally a hunting ground, the public can now stroll through the park's 650 acres and walk over lava flows to get a great view of the city. There are also many swans and ducks to feed in St. Mary's loch. The best way to climb is from the east by Dunsapie Loch.

Duddingston: Located at the northeast end of Dunsapie Loch, this area is tranquil with a village feel.

Bruntsfield, Marchmont and Morningside: These southern suburbs offer large open spaces such as The Meadows and Bruntsfield Links. It is also the site of the medieval Burgh Muir(town heath) — used to isolate dying victims of plagues and for training armies. Marchmont is a popular student area.

Leith: A docklands area, Leith feels quite separate from the rest of the city- people here often prefer to say they're from Leith rather than from Edinburgh. It has its own financial centre, waterway(the water of Leith) and shopping/eating areas. A source of inspiration for Irvine Welsh's"Trainspotting", it is today the scene of a thriving café society. Leith Links, the park where the rules of golf were originally formulated, is a lovely place to stroll. The

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sport has been prohibited on this ground, however, since 1907.
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History

The huge rock upon which Edinburgh Castle now stands is a natural stronghold, and warring Celtic tribes would use it as such during the first centuries of the first millennium. King Edwin of Northumbria is thought to have built the castle here in the 7th century and the settlement's name was anglicised to Edinburgh. In 1018 King Malcolm II defeated the Northumbrians and Edinburgh Castle became Scottish.

Essentially the town took its starting point from the Edinburgh Castle, and developed down the slope of Castle Rock. In 1128 an abbey was founded at Holyrood, at the foot of the rock, and what's now called the"Canongate" took its name from the presence of its canons who founded a separate burgh there.

Since the 9th century there has been a church on the site where St Giles' Cathedral now stands, but little is known about it until the building founded by Alexander I in 1120.

The developing route — from the Edinburgh Castle, along Lawn Market& High Street(past St Giles' Cathedral), to Canongate became known as the"Royal Mile".

A brief spell under the English and some ferocious power struggles marked the 14th and 15th centuries. During this time, Edinburgh received a royal charter from Robert the Bruce and in 1498 Holyroodhouse Palace was built at the site of the Abbey. At this time Edinburgh was beginning to benefit from the trade and export of wool. Meanwhile, the"Old Town" was developing — creating the Grassmarket and Cowgate.

After a hefty defeat by the English, at the battle of Flodden in 1513, the people of Edinburgh began work on the Flodden Wall in a desperate attempt to defend themselves against possible invasion. Completed in 1560, it marked Edinburgh's boundary for the next 200 years.

Also in 1560 Protestantism was declared as Scotland's official religion. Two factions were now set against each other. They are best represented here by the two leaders who personified them in Scotland: John Knox, zealous Protestant reformer, and Mary Queen of Scots, pro-French Catholic.

Espionage and bloodshed suffused every level of Edinburgh society, most famously in an incident when Queen Mary could only watch in horror as her favourite and(alleged) lover, David Rizzio, was murdered by a group of noblemen in Holyroodhouse Palace under the orders of her husband, Lord Darnley. Their son became King James VI of Scotland in 1567, when he was 13 months old. In 1582 Edinburgh University was established, and 1603 saw the accession of James VI of Scotland to the English throne.

In 1633 Edinburgh officially became the capital of Scotland. Then, in 1707 the Act of Union joined Scotland to England and the Scottish parliament was dissolved.

By the 18th century it was decided to branch out of the city's original("Flodden") walls — a"new town" was to be built. Scottish architect James Craig developed a simple grid design based around three parallel streets: Princes Street, George Street and Queen Street. This plan, and the beautiful Georgian architecture of which it is comprised, are still in place today.

The Victorian era was another time of expansion. Middle-class suburbs such as Marchmont and Morningside were born. The Edinburgh and Leith railway line was built in 1831, linking the port and industrial center with the capital city, and the Edinburgh and Glasgow line followed in 1842.

Many people associate modern Edinburgh with the Edinburgh International Festival, which has been keeping the city at the center of the international arts scene since 1947.

More recently still, the re-introduction of the Scottish parliament, three centuries after it was dissolved by the Act of Union, has meant a return of Scottish government to Edinburgh.
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Hotel Insights

Edinburgh is such a popular city, the first piece of advice about accommodation is this — book in advance! This is particularly important around New Year(Hogmanay) and the Festival in August, when the city gets very crowded. The bulk of the hotels are in the New Town, but there are many other places to stay in the Old Town and on the outskirts of the city.

The main axis of New Town is Princes Street and unsurprisingly, there are many deluxe hotels here. At opposite ends of the street, The Balmoral and The Caledonian Hilton Edinburgh are both beautifully placed for the shops and the city centre. Fractionally lower down the price scale is Ramada Jarvis Mount Royal, also on Princes Street.

On George Street, set back from the bustle of Princes Street, George Inter-Continental Edinburgh offers deluxe accommodation in a slightly quieter location. The Roxburghe has Charlotte Square as its prestigious address.

Moving out of the center of New Town, accommodation is a mix of the deluxe and the inexpensive. To the north, the smart Albany Hotel enjoys a large business clientele, whilst Drummond House caters for the traveler on a budget. Towards the east, King James is a luxury location. Princes Street is still easily accessible from this area.

The West End is a smart and convenient location with a class of hotel to match. The Bonham and Channings are two of the most popular.

The North/South bridge that links New Town and Old Town is the site of two excellent hotels: the Paramount Carlton Hotel Edinburgh and the Bank Hotel. Although a relatively busy road, this area is very central, with both New Town and Old Town within walking distance. Waverley station is just around the corner from North Bridge.

The Cowgate, in Old Town, is a great place for backpackers to stay. Conveniently situated just below the bridges and the Royal Mile, it is a central location with a youth-culture flavour. Edinburgh Backpackers Hostel and Edinburgh Central Youth Hostel can both be found in this pub paradise.

The outskirts of Edinburgh can be an appealing choice for travelers who want to escape the noise of the city and stay near the airport. Barnton Thistle and Swallow Royal Scot are very comfortable options.

Leith is the perfect place for visitors who want shops and restaurants on their

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doorstep, but would rather not stay in Edinburgh itself. The city is about twenty minutes walk away and there are plenty of buses. Malmaison offers reasonably priced, comfortable accommodation here.
©

Restaurants Insights

Dining and drinking in Edinburgh are fun and tasty pursuits. All manner of eateries and watering holes lurk around every corner. From traditional haggis haunts to romantic Italian restaurants, whisky-stained pubs to trendy bars — there is something to suit most cravings.

The city center offers many tastes and tipples and the Old Town is a great place to sup and pub. For a European flavour try The Grain Store, just off the Royal Mile, whose rather unpromising name belies the tasty Scottish/French fare served. Ciao Roma is just one example of the decent regional Italian eateries the city has to offer. To sample the native delicacies, try the haggis and tatties at the Doric Wine Bar& Bistro. For a contemporary dining experience of the highest quality, take the transparent lift inside The Museum of Scotland to The Tower Restaurant and Terrace. Pub-lovers should prop up the Bow Bar, just below Edinburgh Castle, and vegetarians should check out Bann UK. Fed up with whisky? Try vodka of all flavours imaginable at Bar Kohl.

Cowgate and Grassmarket are very popular drinking haunts. Try Bannerman's for a traditional pub atmosphere or wander down Candlemaker Row and check out Greyfriars Bobby. Driving? Maison Hector is great for non-alcoholic beverages.

Towards Holyrood Park, there are some good eateries near the Edinburgh Festival Theatre. Those with the Mexican munchies should try Mother's, whilst Ayatthaya serves great Thai food. At the Canongate end, the Holyrood Tavern's cozy atmosphere will help you nurse your pint.

On the other side of Princes Street Gardens, New Town has many treats worth sampling. Diningà la française is particularly satisfying here; the Café St Honoré offers excellent brasserie fare, whilst Pompadour is perfect for expensive French cuisine. For a continental luncheon La Cuisine d'Odile has a very good menu. Not to be outdone, the Italians and Spaniards are also well represented in New Town. Try La Rusticana or the Patio Restaurant for a taste of pasta/pizza paradise, or Tapas Tree for some great Hispanic nibbles. Kids in tow? Check out old favorite the Hard Rock Cafe, then drop the smalls home and relax with a late-night cocktail at Po Na Na.

Further out of town is the dockland area of Leith, a must for seafood seekers. All along the quays, fish restaurants can be found offering menus that are fresh from the ocean. If you're going to try any of them, make sure it's the charming Fishers Bistro at number one. Set back from the water, the Raj Restaurant's curries will put fire in your belly, but if you prefer lighter delicacies, the French seafood dishes at The Vintner's Rooms are wonderful. For an aperitif or one-for-the-road, Bar Java is a great start or finish to any night.
©

Nightlife Insights

The Edinburgh Festival is, without doubt, the highlight of the capital's entertainment calendar. This summer extravaganza centers on two festivals that run concurrently — The Edinburgh International Festival and The Fringe Festival, both of which focus on the performing arts. The former invites touring professionals from all over the world, whilst the latter welcomes new talent and crowds of students and wannabees.

Up-and-coming comics frequent The Pleasance, whose outdoor bar is open late into the night, and the Gilded Balloon. The comedy is one of the best things at the Festival and a must on the stand-up circuit — you are very likely to see acts that will later appear on TV. Amateur theatrical and dance productions are often of a very high standard, although one of the joys of the Fringe is being the only member of the audience at an obscure, incomprehensible play.

Edinburgh goes crazy during the Festival; it's packed with street-performers, tourists, talent scouts and hangers-on. As there are so many productions on, you are never short of entertainment. If you are at all interested in the performing arts, the Edinburgh Festival should not be left off your summer schedule.

The Edinburgh Military Tattoo also takes place in the summer — during the month of August. The Tattoo is one of the world's finest military displays, attended by over 200,000 people. It's a splendid mix of pomp, pageantry, music, ceremony, entertainment and drama — all set against the stunning backdrop of Edinburgh Castle.

Hogmanay is a ticket-only(ish) affair for New Year celebrations. The festivities stretch over days and cover all forms of entertainment — a programme is available near the end of the year.

Art galleries are everywhere in Edinburgh. From architecture and design, to oils and watercolour, a plethora of disciplines can be found on show. For fine art, the National Portrait Gallery and the National Gallery of Scotland are the must-sees. But it is the contemporary art scene that is particularly exciting in the capital. Formerly thought of as Glasgow's exclusive terrain, Edinburgh now frequently displays fresh Scottish talent and cutting-edge art: the Fruitmarket Gallery is the best for this, whilst the nearby City Art Centre and Collective Gallery are also worth a look. Contemporary crafts can be found at the Scottish Gallery and Nexus Galleries.

Cinema is a popular diversion in Edinburgh. As capital city of the nation that produced Sean Connery, Ewan McGregor and Robert Carlyle, Edinburgh has a fittingly fine selection of cinemas. Lothian Road, behind the castle, offers both types of flicks — Filmhouse Cinema for art-house, and ABC Film Centre for general release. For that multiplex experience there is an Odeon on the other side of town.

Music, Dance and Opera are all on tap to entertain you in this city. You can listen to The Scottish Chamber Orchestra at Queen's Hall, rock at The Venue and indie at the Liquid Room. The best place to experience classical music, ballet or opera, however, has to be the Edinburgh Festival Theatre. There are many venues — from tiny darkened dive to classical theatre — you'll find them all in Edinburgh.

Museums have a fine reputation here and they've got much to be proud of. Educational excitement for kids and grown-ups can be found all-over, but especially in the Old Town. The Museum of Scotland is a must-see, full of ancient and modern exhibits. A visit to the capital is clearly incomplete without a visit to Edinburgh Castle and the Holyroodhouse Palace — the fun and fascination doesn't stop

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there. The Royal Mile holds many treats, including Gladstone's Land and the John Knox House Museum and it would be a sin for any good whiskey-drinking soul to miss the Scotch Whisky Heritage Centre. To the south of the city center, the Royal City Observatory is a more space-age experience.

Nightclubs are easy to find in Edinburgh. Clubbers will not be disappointed with the wide choice — indie fans, rock chicks, laid-back lounge lizards and hard-core house fanatics can all shake their stuff here. Cowgate is a popular clubber's haunt, with the Attic, La Belle Angele and Wilkie House offering something for everyone. Not far from here is the rockin' Rocking Horse. Live music at the Liquid Room and gay cabaret at CC Blooms offer twists on the classic club-scene.

Theatre really comes alive during August and the Festival, but happily, the Edinburgh boards are also walked during the rest of the year. Behind Edinburgh Castle, the Royal Lyceum Theatre offers mainstream and avant-garde performances, whilst the Traverse Theatre is a real treat for contemporary writing.
©

Things to Do Insights

TOUR 1: Edinburgh's New Town

This tour takes you around Edinburgh's New Town. Designed by James Craig, the area is a tribute to the Georgian age and architectural elegance. To enable its construction, the North Bridge was erected 1763-1772 and the Nor' Loch was drained. Now a park, the latter will feature towards the end of the tour, when you need a rest! But first we'll go to the heart of New Town and the'big 3' — Princes Street, George Street and Queen Street.

This tour begins on Queen Street, the most northern of the three. This street is extremely well preserved and offers excellent views towards Fife. Start at the western end of Queen Street and walk along Queen Street Gardens, which form the street's northern edge, towards Charlotte Square. Designed by Robert Adam in 1791, this was, at the time, the most fashionable place to live in the city. Named after George III's wife Queen Charlotte, the square is home to West Register House, housed in the church of St George. With an attractive exterior, which is simpler than originally intended due to limited funds, it is certainly worth a peek. The exhibitions here change fairly frequently, so pick up a leaflet about current shows. Next, check out Edinburgh's most prestigious address, the Georgian House, on the northern side of the square. No.6 is the official home of Scotland's Secretary of State, whilst No.7 is open to the public. Step inside and see what it probably looked like under its first owner — the head of the Lamont clan.

Once you've tasted Georgian upper class life, turn into Young Street and see where the ordinary people lived. This narrow street perfectly illustrates the ordered design of New Town. At the end of Young Street, turn right onto George Street, the axis of the three main streets. This is Edinburgh's financial center so banks are a common feature. Wander along here and turn right down Frederick Street, then take the first left into Rose Street. This runs parallel to George Street and is a pedestrian haven of attractive cafés and small shops. Stop here for a bite to eat and watch the passers-by. After lunch, follow this street to its end and turn left into St Andrew Square, at the eastern end of George Street.

Standing 41 meters tall in the middle of the square is the Melville Monument, a statue of Lord Melville, an 18th century politician. The square is also home to the Royal Bank of Scotland's HQ. This former mansion was built for Sir Laurence Dundas on the site originally intended for the church. Note the private lawn — a rare sight in New Town. Have a look at the 19th century domed Telling Room inside. Next-door is the former British Linen Bank.

Now turn into West Register Street and walk past Café Royal Oyster Bar. Pop inside this fashionable oyster bar if you fancy a drink/snack or just to catch a glimpse of the murals. Head south past General Register House, noting, along the way, the statue of the Duke of Wellington. Look east towards Calton Hill and the Nelson Monument.

You should now find yourself at the eastern end of Princes Street, the busiest street of New Town and a shopper's paradise. On the left you have North Bridge, which leads up to the Royal Mile and Old Town. Also in this area are Waverley Station and Waverley Market. Wander down Princes Street and use this opportunity to indulge in a spot of retail therapy. Don't miss Jenners — the oldest privately owned department store in the world! If the bustle of the street seems unappealing, step down into Princes Street Gardens and stroll westwards.

Next stop is The Mound. Home of the National Gallery of Scotland and the Royal Scottish Academy, both designed by William Playfair, this is culture time! Choose the one that most appeals or if you don't fancy an exhibition, simply admire the 19th century architecture. Note the statue of Queen Victoria that crowns the Royal Scottish Academy. It was moved up there on the orders of the Queen herself, who thought she looked too chubby close-up!

If your shopping craving is not yet sated, wander down the rest of Princes Street before returning to the Princes Street Gardens, the final point on this tour. Rest your weary legs here and treat yourself to an ice-cream in the garden cafe. This spot is an excellent place to appreciate Edinburgh's uneven terrain. Look up to Edinburgh Castle on its rocky crag, and then right to New Town and the places you've just seen. Savour this sight of wonderful contrasts — unlike any other city in Britain.

TOUR 2: Calton Hill to Castlehill- A Tour of Edinburgh's Monumental Views

As you may have guessed from the title, this tour involves a fair amount of uphill and downhill, so make sure you wear comfy shoes. Edinburgh's uneven landscape is one of its most beautiful and unusual aspects; the heights of Calton Hill and Castlehill contrast with the depths of Cowgate to give the city a roller-coaster feel. Designed to give you a flavour of this, the tour does involve plenty of walking but don't worry, it's not all hard work — shops and coffee-stops are a very important part of the route.

The tour starts north-east of Princes Street, at Edinburgh Playhouse Theatre in Greenside Place. This theatre usually shows popular touring musicals and with three thousand seats, it used to be the largest cinema in the city. Pop in and pick up a copy of their programme. Wander past the theatre into Blenheim Place, where a path will take you up some steps to Calton Hill and the highest point(in altitude!) of the tour.

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At one hundred metres(333 feet) high, this volcanic hill offers fantastic views over Edinburgh. Since you can see Arthur's Seat, Edinburgh Castle, Holyroodhouse Palace, Princes Street and the New Town, it is in many ways the best place from which to view the city. Nothing is left out, so make sure you bring your camera to capture the panorama. The Hill offers much more than just wonderful views, however — on this outcrop there are several interesting buildings, dating from around the time of the Napoleonic wars.

First stop is the City Observatory, designed by Playfair in 1818 for his illustrious star-gazing uncle, John Playfair. The domed end houses The Edinburgh Experience, which will outline the city's history for you in a short 3D cinematic show. After this, admire the other end of the building- the Old Observatory — a rare example of James Craig's architecture. Walk over to the National Monument, the largest construction on the hill and a memorial to the Scots who died fighting in the Napoleonic wars. It was intended by Playfair to be a replica of the Parthenon but insufficient funds forced building to be cut short and only the west side of the Monument was completed. It's known affectionately locally as the'Folly'. Just next to this memorial stands another — the Nelson Monument. Climb to the top and watch the views expand even further. Past this there is yet another monument, this time to a philosophy professor at Edinburgh University — the Monument to Dugald Stewart. This was also created by Playfair.

Once you've admired the monuments and absorbed the views, wander down the hill along Waterloo Place, where you will see the Royal High School. Dating from 1829, this Grecian building was designed by former pupil Thomas Hamilton, who is also responsible for the Burns Monument(1830) opposite. This too was modeled on an Athenian temple. Just next to this structure lies the Calton Burial Ground. Here again stands a memorial, this time commemorating Scots who died in the American civil war and crowned with a statue of Abraham Lincoln. At the eastern edge of the cemetery, old castellations betray the former presence of Calton Jail, once the city's main prison. Further down the hill you pass St Andrews House, which dates from the 1930s.

You should now be at the eastern end of Princes Street. Turn left onto the large North Bridge, which connects New Town with Old Town. Walk along the Bridge until you get to the High Street section of the Royal Mile. On the corner is Hunter Square — pop into the Old Town Information Centre housed in the Tron Kirk. If your stomach is rumbling, don't worry — lunch is not far off. The City Cafe on Blair Street offers refreshments in a cool and trendy atmosphere. If this is not your scene, stay on High Street where there are many eateries to choose from.

Once fed and rested, it's time for some leisure! If you continue down Blair Street, you'll find yourself in Cowgate, a popular night-time haunt for pub and club lovers. Buried beneath South and George IV Bridges, it is one of the lower points of the city and the darkest, most atmospheric places on this tour! Follow Cowgate westwards until it becomes a more spacious area — Grassmarket. As you wander around this former market, imagine the public hangings and brutal murders that it once nurtured. Happily, nothing that sinister remains and the restaurants, shops and cafés lend it a pleasant, animated feel. Fans of retro and vintage clothes will love it here, for it is a haven of second-hand shops. Take your time to stroll around and stop for a coffee at one of the attractive cafés. If you fancy something a little stronger, pop in the White Hart Inn, a favorite watering-hole of Robert Burns.

Leave Grassmarket via Victoria Street where you can indulge in a tad more retail therapy. Winding up to George IV Bridge, this charming street is lined with many excellent shops. Once on the Bridge, turn left and head towards the Royal Mile, where this tour ends. Standing on the corner of Parliament Square, you can look north down Bank Street, towards the New Town, west towards Edinburgh Castle and east towards Holyroodhouse Palace. If you walk up the Mile it will be easier to see. In fact, if you fancy yet more views, try out the Camera Obscura on Castlehill. Once again you are on top of the city but this time south of Princes Street. Look east towards Calton Hill and see if you can pick out the different memorials!
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Travel Tips

Getting There

Air

A multi million dollar makeover and expansion has improved the facilities of the one terminal Edinburgh Airport(+44 131 333 1000/ http://www.baa.com/). Part of the upgrade focused on the addition of more duty free shopping and restaurant choices for international travelers. ATMs and currency exchanges are available in both the arrivals and departure areas. More than 30 airlines call on the airport including:

Aer Arann(+353 1 8141058/ http://www.aerarann.ie/) Aer Lingus(+1 800 474 7424/ http://www.aerlingus.com/) Air France(+1 800 237 2747/ http://www.airfrance.com/) Air Scotland(+1 44 141 222 2363/ http://www.air-scotland.com/) BMI(+44 1332 854854/ http://www.flybmi.com/) BMI Baby(+0890 710 081(France)/ http://www.bmibaby.com/) British Airways(+1 800 217 9297/ http://www.britishairways.com/) Easy Jet(+33 8 25 08 25 08/ http://www.easyjet.com/) FlyBe(+871 700 0535/ http://www.flybe.com/) Germanwings(+44 870 252 12 50/ http://www1.germanwings.com/) Iberworld Airlines(http://www.iberworld.com/) Jet 2(+44 207 1700737/ http://www.jet2.com/) Lufthansa(+1 800 803 5838/ http://cms.lufthansa.com/) My Travel(+870 238 7710/ http://www.mytravel.com/) Ryan Air(+353(0)1 249 7851/ http://www.ryanair.com/) Sky Europe(+421 2 4850 1111/ http://www.skyeurope.com/in.php/) Sterling.dk Airline(+457 033 3370/ http://www.sterlingticket.com/) Thomson Fly(+43 0192 89 598/ http://www.thomsonfly.com/)

From the Airport

Car Rental: Car hire companies, which have rental desks in the UK arrivals area on the ground floor of the terminal, are:

Alamo(+1 800 462 5266/ http://www.alamo.com/) Avis(+1 800 230 4898/ http://www.avis.com/) Europcar(+1 877 940 6900/ http://www.europcar.com/) Hertz(+1 800 654 3001/ http://www.hertz.com/)

Free shuttle buses whisk you to the pick up lot. The quickest way into the city center is the A8, which runs right past the airport. If you are heading west, catch the A8 to Glasgow or the M9 to Stirling.

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Taxi: A taxi rank is located outside the UK arrivals hall. A ride into town takes around 25 minutes and the price varies with destination although the fixed meter rate is at GBP1.90 per mile. You can pre-book through Skycab(+44 131 344 3344) or Radio Cabs(+44 131 225 9000).

Purple Parking(http://www.purpleparking.com/) offers airport parking for business and leisure travelers, as well as a'meet and greet' chauffeur service.

Shuttle bus: An Airlink 100 bus(+44 131 555 6363/ http://www.flybybus.com/) zips passengers from the airport to Waverly Bridge in the heart of Edinburgh just across from the rail station, with stops at Haymarket and Shandwick Place. Journey time is around 25 minutes. Buses depart every 10-15 minutes and every hour after midnight.

Bus

National Express(+08705 808080/ http://www.nationalexpress.com/) is the main long haul coach carrier linking Edinburgh with the major cities in England and with the European continent. CityLink buses(+08705 505050/ http://www.citylink.co.uk/) focus on routes throughout Scotland but offer scenic seasonal trips to and from Edinburgh to Blackpool, England along the west coast and to Belfast, Northern Ireland, via a Stena Line ferry. Coaches arrive and depart from the bus station located in St Andrew Square.

Car

The M8 from Glasgow in the west, the A1 from the east and south down the coast, and the M90 from the north are the major expressways entering Edinburgh. Each intersects the Bypass Road forming an arch around the city center.

Train

Arriving in Edinburgh by rail is relatively simple if you are traveling from cities in Scotland and England, and competing train companies keep the fares reasonable. If you are coming from the continent you will most likely transfer in London before heading north to the Highlands. Trains pull into either Waverley Station in the city center or Haymarket Station in the West End. Companies include:

Scot Rail(+0845 748 4950/ http://www.scotrail.co.uk/) GNER(+44 191 227 5959/ http://www.gner.co.uk/) Virgin Trains(+0870 789 1234/ http://www.virgintrains.co.uk/)

Water

Superfast Ferries(+0870 234 2211/ http://www.superfast.com/) sails daily between Edinburgh and Zeebrugge, Belgium. The journey arrives and departs from the Port of Rosyth(+44 1383 413366/ http://www.forthports.co.uk/), which is perched eight miles outside the city center.

Getting Around

Having a car in Edinburgh will cause you headaches unless it is parked in a legitimate spot until you decide to leave town and tour the highlands. Resident sticker parking is rampant and where you can park, especially close to any tourist attraction, costs a pretty penny, and meter readers are like flies on a hot day and fines are pricey. Plus, the general street set up was definitely an urban after thought.

Public Transport

First Group(+08708 72 7271/ http://www.firstgroup.com/) and Lothian(+44 131 554 4494/ http://www.lothianbuses.co.uk/) operate buses of the double decker variety to all points of the city. Fares generally average GBP1 for day service and GBP2 for after hours or night service. Lotian also offers numerous hop on/hop off bus tours(+44 131 556 2244) including an Edinburgh City Tour for GBP8.50. Most tours begin at Waverly Bridge.

Park& Ride(+44 845 606 4446) with locations throughout the city for bus connections

Bike/Walk

If you plan on pedaling around town be prepared: Edinburgh is hilly. Thus, a certain amount of conditioning is involved if you want to ride without walking. If this is not a problem the city is rather biker friendly, with a wealth of"greenway" routes, which are only open to bicycles, buses and taxis. Plus, the countryside is filled with splendid scenery and flatter roads. This historic city center is exceptionally walker friendly.
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Fun Facts

1. Random Fact: Edinburgh's nickname, Auld Reekie(Old Smoky), marks an era when the city's buildings and homes burnt a lot of coal and wood for heat and chimneys would emit columns of smoke into the air.

2. Geological Fact: The rock on whichEdinburgh Castle is built is the plug of an extinct volcano. Following glacial erosion it formed a crag and tail formation: The Castle Rock and theRoyal Mile respectively.

3. Interesting Fact: TheRoyal Mile is called this because it's a mile long street with two royal buildings on each end- Edinburgh Castle andHolyroodhouse Palace.

4. Paranormal Fact: Edinburgh is said to be one of the most haunted places in Europe because it is home to theMackenzie Poltergeist, the violent spirit of a 17th century murderer and torturer who hauntsGreyfriars Kirkyard.

5. Creepy Fact: The 19th century body snatchersBurke and Hare murdered some 15 people in the city to sell their cadavers to the medical college. Burke's death mask and a wallet made from his skin are on display in theSurgeons' Hall Museums.

6. Heartwarming Fact: One of the most photographed monuments in Edinburgh isGreyfriars Bobby, the statue of a 19th century Skye terrier who spent 14 years guarding his master's grave. Is sits at the corner of Candlemaker Row and the George IV Bridge.

7. Embarrassing Fact: Modeled on the Parthenon in Athens, the National Monument onCalton Hill is referred to as Edinburgh's Folly or Edinburgh's Shame because it was never completed due to a lack of funds.

8. Royal Fact: Tourists can view the mythical Stone of Destiny inEdinburgh Castle's Crown Room. It is still used for the crowning of English monarchs.

9. Mysterious Fact: In Edinburgh's Old Town lies theReal Mary King's Close, a long-forgotten underground series of streets that was built over as the city's population grew. It is now a commercial attraction.

10. Weird Fact: From 1477-1911, the Grassmarket was the site of one of Edinburgh's main horse and cattle markets. It was also the location of public executions.

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11. Celebrity Fact: J.K. Rowling penned the first novel in herHarry Potter series at theElephant House cafe on George IV Bridge.

12. Festive Fact: Every August thousands of tourists swarm the city for theEdinburgh Festival, which is composed of several different arts and cultural festivals.

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