Edinburgh Travel Guide

Edinburgh: Scotland's Historic Capital

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Things to do in Edinburgh

Landmarks & Monuments

Edinburgh's skyline is dominated by historic landmarks that tell the story of Scotland's turbulent past. From the imposing castle perched on volcanic rock to elegant Georgian monuments, these icons define the city's character.



Must See Book Ahead

Edinburgh Castle

2-3 hours Book Ahead

Map

Dominating the city from Castle Rock, this **historic fortress** has witnessed over 1,000 years of Scottish history. Home to the *Crown Jewels of Scotland*, the Stone of Destiny, and the National War Museum, it offers breathtaking views across the city. The **One O'Clock Gun** fires daily except Sundays, Good Friday and Christmas Day, a tradition dating to 1861. Explore the Royal Palace, St. Margaret's Chapel (Edinburgh's oldest building from the 12th century), and the Great Hall with its impressive hammerbeam roof. Allow time to explore the fascinating military museums and prison vaults.



Top Pick Book Ahead

Palace of Holyroodhouse

2 hours Book Ahead

Map

The **official residence of the British monarch in Scotland**, this magnificent palace sits at the foot of the Royal Mile opposite Edinburgh Castle. Explore the *Historic Apartments* associated with Mary, Queen of Scots, including the chamber where her secretary David Rizzio was murdered in 1566. Tour the elegant State Apartments used for official entertaining, and visit the ruins of the 12th-century Holyrood Abbey. The palace is surrounded by beautiful gardens, and during summer, The King’s Gallery hosts changing exhibitions from the Royal Collection. Still used for state ceremonies and official entertaining.



Notable

Scott Monument

1 hour No Booking Needed

Map

This **Victorian Gothic masterpiece** is the world's largest monument to a writer. Standing 61 meters tall on Princes Street, it commemorates Sir Walter Scott, author of Ivanhoe and Rob Roy. Climb the narrow 287-step spiral staircase for *panoramic views* of the city, including Edinburgh Castle, Arthur's Seat, and the Firth of Forth. The monument features 64 character statues from Scott's novels carved into the architecture. The dark sandstone appearance comes from centuries of Edinburgh's coal smoke pollution.



Notable

National Monument

30 minutes No Booking Needed

Map

Perched atop Calton Hill, this **unfinished Parthenon replica** was intended as a memorial to Scottish soldiers who died in the Napoleonic Wars. Construction began in 1826 but stopped after funding ran out, earning it the nickname '*Edinburgh*'*s Disgrace*' or '*Scotland*'*s Folly*'. Despite being incomplete, it has become an iconic part of Edinburgh's skyline and offers spectacular sunset views. The monument perfectly represents Edinburgh's nickname as the **'Athens of the North'** and provides an excellent photo opportunity.

Tips for Landmarks & Monuments

- **Book Edinburgh Castle tickets online** in advance to skip queues, especially during summer and festival season
- Visit the castle early morning or late afternoon to avoid peak crowds
- Wear comfortable shoes – Edinburgh's historic sites involve cobblestones and stairs
- Check if Holyroodhouse is open – it closes when the Royal Family is in residence
- Calton Hill is best visited at sunset for spectacular golden-hour photography

Museums & Galleries

Edinburgh boasts world-class museums and galleries, many offering **free admission**. From national treasures to cutting-edge contemporary art, the city's collections span Scottish heritage, natural history, international art, and innovative science.



Must See

National Museum of Scotland

2-4 hours No Booking Needed

Map

This **outstanding free museum** combines Scottish history, world cultures, natural history, science, and technology under one roof. The iconic Victorian Grand Gallery features diverse collections from ancient Egypt to decorative arts. Explore *Scotland's Story* through galleries showcasing everything from prehistoric times to modern Scotland, including the famous **Dolly the Sheep** (first cloned mammal). Don't miss the rooftop terrace for incredible city views. Interactive exhibits and family-friendly displays make it engaging for all ages. The museum café and restaurant are excellent stops for refreshments.



Top Pick

Scottish National Gallery

2-3 hours No Booking Needed

Map

Located in a stunning neoclassical building on The Mound, this **free gallery** houses Scotland's premier art collection. Masterpieces span from the Renaissance to Post-Impressionism, including works by *Botticelli, Raphael, Titian, El Greco, Rembrandt, Vermeer, Turner, Monet, and Van Gogh*. The Scottish collection features iconic works by **Ramsay, Raeburn, and the Scottish Colourists**. The gallery's architecture is as impressive as its contents. Special exhibitions (ticketed) complement the permanent collection. The gallery restaurant offers elegant dining with castle views.



Notable

Scottish National Portrait Gallery

1-2 hours No Booking Needed

Map

This magnificent **Gothic Revival building** on Queen Street celebrates Scottish history through portraits of famous Scots. The stunning Great Hall with its elaborate murals and architecture is worth the visit alone. Collections feature everyone from *Mary Queen of Scots and Bonnie Prince Charlie* to modern icons like Billy Connolly and Sean Connery. Photography exhibitions showcase contemporary Scottish artists. The building's red sandstone exterior and ornate interior make it an architectural masterpiece. **Free admission** with special temporary exhibitions sometimes ticketed.



Notable

Camera Obscura and World of Illusions

1-2 hours Book Ahead

Map

Edinburgh's **oldest tourist attraction** (since 1835) offers five floors of interactive optical illusions, puzzles, and hands-on exhibits. The highlight is the Victorian Camera Obscura on the top floor – a giant pinhole camera projecting live moving images of Edinburgh onto a viewing table. Enjoy *mirror mazes, holograms, thermal imaging, and mind-bending illusions*. The rooftop terrace provides panoramic city views. Perfect for families and anyone who enjoys interactive experiences. Located at the top of the Royal Mile near the castle, making it an ideal stop during your Old Town exploration.



Optional

Museum of Edinburgh

1 hour No Booking Needed

Map

Housed in a charming 16th-century building on the Royal Mile, this **free museum** tells the story of Edinburgh from prehistoric times to the present. Highlights include the original *National Covenant* of 1638, the collar and bowl of **Greyfriars Bobby** (Edinburgh's famous loyal dog), and fascinating displays on Edinburgh's social history, including recreated period rooms. Collections cover everything from silver and glass to trade signs and shop fronts. The building itself, with its narrow staircases and historic architecture, adds to the authentic Edinburgh experience.

Tips for Museums & Galleries

- Most national museums and galleries offer **free admission** – perfect for budget travelers
- Visit museums on rainy days (frequent in Edinburgh) when outdoor sightseeing is less pleasant
- Book Camera Obscura tickets online to save money and guarantee entry during busy periods
- Many museums have excellent cafés – the National Museum's Tower Restaurant is particularly good
- Look out for special exhibitions and late-night openings throughout the year

Religious Sites

Edinburgh's religious architecture spans nearly a millennium, from medieval abbeys to grand Victorian churches. These sacred spaces showcase stunning Gothic and Romanesque architecture while telling stories of Scotland's complex religious history.



Must See

St Giles' Cathedral

45 minutes No Booking Needed

Map

The **High Kirk of Edinburgh** and spiritual heart of the Church of Scotland, St Giles' dominates the Royal Mile with its distinctive crown steeple. Founded in the 12th century, the current building showcases magnificent Gothic architecture with stunning *stained glass windows* by Pre-Raphaelite artists. The highlight is the ornate **Thistle Chapel**, headquarters of Scotland's chivalric Order of the Thistle, featuring intricate wood carvings. John Knox, leader of the Scottish Reformation, preached here. Free entry with donations welcome, though guided tours available for fee. Regular concerts and services add to the atmospheric experience.



Top Pick

Greyfriars Kirk

45 minutes No Booking Needed

Map

This 17th-century church is famous as the resting place of **Greyfriars Bobby**, the loyal Skye Terrier who guarded his master's grave for 14 years. The atmospheric kirkyard is one of Edinburgh's most historic graveyards, featuring *elaborate 17th-century monuments* and mortsafes (iron cages to prevent body-snatching). The National Covenant was signed here in 1638. The kirkyard inspired J.K. Rowling – many names on gravestones appear in Harry Potter (look for Thomas Riddell and McGonagall). Ghost tours frequent this supposedly haunted location. The church interior features beautiful stained glass and carved woodwork.



Top Pick Book Ahead

Rosslyn Chapel

1.5 hours (plus travel) Book Ahead

Map

Located 7 miles south of Edinburgh, this **15th-century chapel** gained worldwide fame from *The Da Vinci Code*. The interior is a masterpiece of medieval stone carving with mysterious symbolism that has inspired countless theories. The famous **Apprentice Pillar** features intricate carvings of exceptional beauty. Every surface is covered with detailed sculptures – angels, demons, green men, and Biblical scenes. The chapel's mysteries include possible Templar connections and unusual architectural symbolism. Audio guides explain the carvings and legends. The visitor center includes a café and interpretive exhibitions. Advance booking essential during peak season.

Tips for Religious Sites

- Most churches welcome visitors but ask for **modest dress** and respectful behavior
- Check service times – churches may be closed or restricted during worship
- Photography policies vary – always ask before taking photos inside churches
- Greyfriars Kirkyard closes at dusk – visit during daylight hours
- Book Rosslyn Chapel tickets online well in advance, especially in summer

Ancient & Historical Sites

Beyond the famous castle, Edinburgh preserves layers of history from prehistoric hillforts to medieval underground streets. These sites reveal the city's evolution from ancient settlement to modern capital.



Top Pick Book Ahead

The Real Mary King's Close

1 hour Book Ahead

Map

Descend beneath the Royal Mile into **perfectly preserved 17th-century streets** frozen in time. This warren of underground closes (alleyways) and houses was sealed when the Royal Exchange was built above them in 1753. Guided tours led by costumed characters reveal fascinating stories of plague, poverty, and everyday life in *Old Edinburgh*. Explore authentic rooms where families lived in cramped conditions. The most famous resident is **'Annie'**, a ghost child said to haunt the close. Tours last one hour and bring history vividly to life. Booking essential, especially during festivals. Temperature is cool underground – bring a jacket.



Notable

Edinburgh Vaults

1 hour Book Ahead

Map

Hidden beneath South Bridge are the atmospheric **18th-century vaults** – a series of chambers originally used as workshops and storage. When the area became too damp, the vaults descended into slum housing for Edinburgh's poorest citizens and became associated with criminal activity. Today, multiple tour companies offer guided experiences exploring these historic spaces. The vaults are reportedly among *Scotland's most haunted locations*. Tours range from historical to ghost-hunting experiences. Various operators offer different perspectives, from family-friendly to genuinely spooky evening tours. The stone chambers create an eerie atmosphere that brings Edinburgh's dark history to life.



Optional

Craigmillar Castle

1-1.5 hours No Booking Needed

Map

This remarkably **well-preserved medieval castle** sits 3 miles southeast of the city center, offering a more authentic and less crowded alternative to Edinburgh Castle. Dating from the 14th century, it features intact defensive walls, a massive tower house, and atmospheric ruins. *Mary, Queen of Scots* fled here after the murder of her secretary Rizzio, and the plot to murder her husband Lord Darnley may have been hatched here. Explore multiple levels, enjoy panoramic views from the battlements, and walk through gardens and courtyards. Entry is ticketed (check Historic Environment Scotland). The peaceful setting contrasts with its dramatic history.

Tips for Ancient & Historical Sites

- **Underground tours book quickly** – reserve several days ahead during busy periods
- Underground sites can be claustrophobic and involve stairs – consider accessibility needs
- Ghost tours aren't suitable for young children – check age recommendations
- Craigmillar Castle is off the tourist trail – take a bus or taxi to reach it
- Some historical sites have uneven surfaces and low lighting – wear appropriate footwear

Squares & Streets

Edinburgh's streets and squares showcase the city's dual personality – the medieval Old Town with its atmospheric closes contrasting with the Georgian elegance of the New Town. These public spaces are living history lessons.



Must See

Royal Mile

2-3 hours No Booking Needed

Map

Edinburgh's most famous street stretches **one Scottish mile** (1.8 km) from Edinburgh Castle downhill to Holyroodhouse Palace. This historic thoroughfare actually comprises four connected streets: *Castlehill, Lawnmarket, High Street, and Canongate*. Lined with medieval tenements, historic closes, shops, pubs, and restaurants, it pulses with street performers, bagpipers, and tourists. Key sights include **St Giles' Cathedral, Parliament Square, John Knox House**, and numerous museums. Explore the narrow closes leading off the main street to discover hidden courtyards and atmospheric corners. The Royal Mile epitomizes Edinburgh's medieval character with shops selling tartans, whisky, and Scottish souvenirs.



Top Pick

Princes Street

1-2 hours No Booking Needed

Map

Edinburgh's premier shopping street forms the boundary between Old Town and New Town, offering **unparalleled views of Edinburgh Castle** across Princes Street Gardens. The north side features major retailers and department stores, while the south side remains open, preserving the castle vista. Key landmarks include the *Scott Monument, National Gallery, and Balmoral Hotel* with its iconic clock tower (traditionally kept 3 minutes fast so people don't miss trains). The street bustles with activity year-round, hosting the Christmas market in winter and serving as the heart of Hogmanay (New Year) celebrations. Traffic-free sections make for pleasant strolling.



Notable

Grassmarket

1 hour No Booking Needed

Map

This historic marketplace at the foot of Castle Rock has been a **trading center since 1477**. Once a site for public executions, the Grassmarket is now a vibrant area filled with *independent shops, traditional pubs, boutique hotels, and restaurants*. The cobbled square hosts markets and events throughout the year. Colorful building facades create a photogenic setting, especially when lit at night. The area mixes tourist attractions with authentic local life – catch live music in traditional pubs or browse vintage shops. Castle views from the square are spectacular, particularly from pub beer gardens on summer evenings.



Notable

Victoria Street

30-45 minutes No Booking Needed

Map

This **curved, colorful street** connecting Grassmarket to George IV Bridge is one of Edinburgh's most photographed locations. The distinctive architecture features shops built on multiple levels with independent boutiques, cafés, and specialist stores. The vibrant painted facades supposedly inspired *Diagon Alley* in Harry Potter. Browse unique gifts, vintage clothing, cheese shops, and Scottish crafts. The street's curve and changing levels create perfect photo opportunities. **No vehicles** on the main section make it pleasant for exploring. Less crowded early morning or evening. Connected to Cockburn Street, another picturesque shopping area.

Tips for Squares & Streets

- Walk the Royal Mile downhill from castle to palace for easier going
- Explore the **closes and wynds** (alleys) leading off major streets for hidden gems
- Princes Street shops open standard hours (9am-6pm), with Sunday hours often shorter
- Grassmarket and Victoria Street are best visited late morning through evening
- Wear comfortable walking shoes – Edinburgh's historic streets are cobbled and hilly

Neighborhoods & Districts

Edinburgh's diverse neighborhoods each have distinct personalities, from the medieval charm of Old Town to Georgian elegance in New Town, bohemian Stockbridge, and trendy Leith. Exploring these areas reveals the authentic character of Scotland's capital.



Must See

Old Town

Half day to full day No Booking Needed

Map

The **UNESCO World Heritage heart of Edinburgh**, Old Town is a medieval marvel of narrow closes, towering tenements, and atmospheric streets. Centered on the Royal Mile, this labyrinthine area features buildings reaching up to 14 stories – medieval *skyscrapers* built when the city was confined within defensive walls. Discover **hidden courtyards, underground vaults, historic pubs**, and centuries-old buildings. The area buzzes with street performers, bagpipers, ghost tours, and traditional shops. Experience authentic Scottish atmosphere in historic pubs like The World's End or Deacon Brodie's Tavern. Old Town embodies Edinburgh's nickname '*Auld Reekie*' (Old Smoky) with its dark stone and mysterious atmosphere.



Top Pick

New Town

Half day No Booking Needed

Map

Built in the 18th and 19th centuries, Edinburgh's **New Town is a masterpiece of Georgian urban planning** and another UNESCO World Heritage site. Wide streets, elegant squares, and symmetrical terraces showcase neoclassical architecture at its finest. *George Street, Queen Street, and Princes Street* form the main arteries, with beautiful squares like Charlotte Square and St Andrew Square anchoring the area. Home to upscale shops, fine dining restaurants, cocktail bars, and professional offices. Visit the **Georgian House** museum to see how wealthy families lived. The area contrasts dramatically with medieval Old Town across Princes Street Gardens.



Notable

Stockbridge

2-3 hours No Booking Needed

Map

This charming **bohemian neighborhood** along the Water of Leith offers a village-like atmosphere within the city. Known for independent shops, artisan bakeries, delis, vintage boutiques, and cozy cafés. The *Sunday farmers' market* is excellent for local produce and street food. Stockbridge features elegant Georgian and Victorian architecture, leafy streets, and a creative community feel. The **Royal Botanic Garden** borders the area. Browse antique shops on St Stephen Street, enjoy brunches at trendy cafés, or walk along the peaceful Water of Leith Walkway. Popular with locals seeking authentic Edinburgh atmosphere away from tourist crowds.



Notable

Leith

Half day No Booking Needed

Map

Once Edinburgh's **historic port district**, Leith has transformed into the city's coolest neighborhood. The waterfront features the *Royal Yacht Britannia*, Michelin-starred restaurants (The Kitchin, Restaurant Martin Wishart), hip cocktail bars, and converted warehouses now housing galleries and creative businesses. Shore area offers seafood restaurants with harbor views. Leith Walk connects to city center via a 2-mile stretch filled with international restaurants and independent shops. The area maintains gritty authenticity while embracing gentrification – street art, markets, and diverse communities create vibrant energy. Visit the **Leith Market** on Saturdays for food, crafts, and vintage goods.



Optional

Dean Village

1 hour No Booking Needed

Map

This **picturesque former milling community** sits in a valley along the Water of Leith, just 10 minutes' walk from Princes Street yet feeling worlds away. Historic mill buildings, stone bridges, and charming cottages create a storybook setting. The area dates back 800 years when it served as the city's grain-milling center. Today it's a peaceful residential enclave perfect for *romantic walks and photography*. Follow the Water of Leith Walkway through the village, crossing historic bridges and passing waterfalls. The Well Court housing development features striking architecture. Incredibly atmospheric, especially in autumn or winter. No shops or restaurants – purely a scenic walking destination.

Tips for Neighborhoods & Districts

- Each neighborhood deserves leisurely exploration – don't rush through them
- **Stockbridge Sunday Market** runs 10am-5pm – arrive early for best selection
- Leith is a 30-minute walk from city center or quick bus/tram ride
- Dean Village is best combined with a longer Water of Leith Walkway walk
- New Town architecture tours reveal fascinating historical details – consider a guided walk

Parks & Gardens

Despite its urban density, Edinburgh offers spectacular green spaces from the wild volcanic landscapes of Arthur's Seat to manicured botanical gardens and peaceful waterside walks. These natural areas provide respite and recreation with stunning views.



Must See

Arthur's Seat

2-3 hours No Booking Needed

Map

This **dormant volcano rising 251 meters** in Holyrood Park offers the most spectacular views in Edinburgh. The extinct volcano last erupted 350 million years ago and now provides hiking trails suitable for various fitness levels. The main summit route takes 45-60 minutes with moderate difficulty. Panoramic views encompass the entire city, Firth of Forth, Pentland Hills, and on clear days, the Highlands. The park features *dramatic cliffs, lochs, ruins of ancient hill forts*, and diverse wildlife. Multiple paths allow circular routes. Particularly stunning at sunrise or sunset. Free access year-round, but can be windy and cold even in summer – bring layers and sturdy shoes.



Top Pick

Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh

2-3 hours No Booking Needed

Map

One of the world's finest botanic gardens, this **70-acre oasis** showcases over 13,000 plant species from around the globe. Founded in 1670, it's One of the UK's oldest botanic gardens. Highlights include the magnificent *Victorian glasshouses* (Temperate Palm House, tropical biomes), stunning **Rock Garden**, Chinese Hillside, and Arboretum with rare trees. The Queen Mother's Memorial Garden and Scottish Heath Garden celebrate native plants. Incredible views across the city to Edinburgh Castle from the landscaped terraces. **Free admission** to outdoor gardens; glasshouses require tickets. Perfect for peaceful walks, photography, picnics, or simply enjoying nature. Gateway Restaurant offers meals with garden views.



Top Pick

Princes Street Gardens

1 hour No Booking Needed

Map

These **beautifully maintained public gardens** occupy the valley between Old Town and New Town, created when the Nor' Loch was drained in the 1820s. Split into East and West sections, the gardens provide 38 acres of lawns, flowerbeds, and mature trees with *spectacular castle views*. Key features include the **Ross Fountain, Floral Clock** (oldest in the world, planted annually since 1903), numerous monuments, and bandstand hosting summer concerts. The gardens host Edinburgh's *Christmas market and Hogmanay celebrations*. Perfect for picnics, sunbathing, or relaxing between sightseeing. Accessible from multiple entrances along Princes Street.



Top Pick

Calton Hill

1 hour No Booking Needed

Map

Rising 100 meters above the city, this easily accessible hill offers **360-degree panoramic views** of Edinburgh's skyline, Arthur's Seat, and the Firth of Forth. The summit features iconic monuments including the *National Monument, Nelson Monument, Dugald Stewart Monument*, and City Observatory. The eclectic collection of neoclassical structures reinforces Edinburgh's nickname as the '**Athens of the North**'. Climb Nelson Monument (171 steps) for even higher views. Sunset and sunrise are magical times to visit – popular with photographers. The hill becomes the focal point during **Beltane Fire Festival** (April 30) celebrating Celtic traditions. Free access, easy climb from Regent Road or steeper stairs from Waterloo Place.



Notable

Water of Leith Walkway

1-4 hours depending on section No Booking Needed

Map

This **12.5-mile traffic-free path** follows Edinburgh's main river from Balerno to Leith, passing through remarkably varied landscapes. The walkway connects neighborhoods, parks, and historic sites while showcasing urban wildlife including herons, kingfishers, and otters. Popular sections include *Dean Village to Stockbridge* (picturesque mills and bridges), and **Stockbridge to Leith** (galleries and cafés). The path combines natural beauty with industrial heritage – former mills, waterfalls, and Victorian engineering works line the route. Well-maintained and mostly flat, suitable for walking or cycling. Access points throughout the city allow short or long walks. Particularly beautiful in autumn. Free visitor center at Balerno.

Tips for Parks & Gardens

- **Arthur's Seat can be dangerous in ice or high winds** – check conditions before climbing
- Start Arthur's Seat climbs early morning or late afternoon to avoid crowds and heat
- Royal Botanic Garden glasshouses close 30 minutes before the garden closes
- Princes Street Gardens can be crowded during festivals – visit early for peaceful experience
- Wear proper hiking shoes for Arthur's Seat – trails can be steep and rocky

Tours & Activities

Edinburgh offers diverse activities beyond sightseeing – from whisky tastings and ghost tours to literary walks and traditional ceilidh dancing. These experiences provide deeper insight into Scottish culture and Edinburgh's unique character.



Top Pick Book Ahead

Edinburgh Ghost Tours

1-1.5 hours Book Ahead

Edinburgh's reputation as **'Europe's most haunted city'** supports numerous ghost tour operators exploring the Old Town's dark history. Tours visit atmospheric locations including *underground vaults, Greyfriars Kirkyard, haunted closes*, and sites of executions, plagues, and murders. Popular operators include **Mercat Tours, City of the Dead Tours**, and The Real Mary King's Close. Tours range from theatrical family-friendly experiences to genuinely spooky adult tours. Evening tours provide maximum atmosphere. Guides blend historical facts with supernatural legends and local folklore. Some tours access restricted underground areas. Book ahead especially during summer and October. Dress warmly – underground areas stay cool year-round.



Top Pick Book Ahead

Royal Yacht Britannia

2 hours Book Ahead

The British Royal Family's former floating palace is now **permanently moored at Leith**. This 412-foot yacht served Queen Elizabeth II from 1953-1997, traveling over one million miles. Self-guided audio tours explore five decks including the *State Apartments, Royal Bedrooms, Crew Quarters, Engine Room*, and Bridge. The yacht combines royal luxury with surprising simplicity – see the Queen's modest bedroom and learn about life aboard. Highlights include the **State Dining Room** where the Queen entertained world leaders, and the gleaming Engine Room. The visitor center features a Royal Gift exhibition. Tea room serves afternoon tea. Evening tours available. Advance booking recommended, especially summer.



Notable

Scotch Whisky Experience

1-2 hours Book Ahead

Located at the top of the Royal Mile, this **immersive whisky attraction** offers comprehensive introductions to Scotland's national drink. The interactive tour includes a *barrel ride through whisky production*, tutored tastings exploring regional differences, and access to the world's largest Scotch whisky collection (3,384 bottles in the Claive Vidiz Collection). Expert guides explain the **Five Regions of Scotch** and maturation processes. Tour levels range from basic introductions to premium masterclasses with rare whiskies. The Amber Restaurant serves modern Scottish cuisine with whisky pairings. Extensive shop stocks whiskies unavailable elsewhere. Perfect introduction before visiting distilleries. Book online for discounts and guaranteed entry.



Notable

Edinburgh Literary Pub Tour

2 hours Book Ahead

This award-winning theatrical tour combines **Edinburgh's literary heritage with pub culture**. Professional actors portray historical and fictional characters while guiding guests through atmospheric Old Town pubs. Learn about *Robert Burns, Sir Walter Scott, Robert Louis Stevenson, J.K. Rowling*, and other writers connected to Edinburgh. The tour blends education with entertainment – recitations, debates between characters, and fascinating anecdotes about Scottish literature. Stops include several traditional pubs (drinks optional but recommended). Tours run year-round with additional performances during August festivals. Booking essential. Meet outside Beehive Inn on Grassmarket. Approximately 2 miles of walking with pub stops. Witty, informative, and uniquely Edinburgh.



Optional

Traditional Scottish Ceilidh

2-3 hours Book Ahead

Experience authentic **Scottish social dancing** with live traditional music. Ceilidhs (pronounced 'kay-lee') are welcoming events where a caller explains each dance before the music starts – no experience necessary. Popular venues include *Ghillie Dhu, The Caves*, and various hotels offering dinner-and-ceilidh packages. Dances include Strip the Willow, Gay Gordons, and Dashing White Sergeant. Live bands play fiddles, accordions, and pipes. Some events cater to tourists while others attract locals – both are fun. Evening events often include whisky tastings or Scottish meals. Wear comfortable shoes and prepare to dance energetically. Booking required for most organized ceilidhs. Some pubs host impromptu sessions.

Tips for Tours & Activities

- Book popular tours and attractions **several days in advance** during summer (June-August) and festival season (August)
- Many ghost tours are theatrical – don't expect genuine paranormal experiences
- Whisky tastings aren't suitable for children – check age requirements
- Literary pub tour assumes reasonable walking ability – 2 miles over 2 hours
- Ceilidhs are active – wear comfortable, breathable clothing and supportive shoes

Day Trips & Excursions

Edinburgh's central location makes it an ideal base for exploring Scotland's diverse landscapes and historic sites. Day trips range from nearby coastal towns to dramatic Highlands scenery, historic castles, and whisky distilleries.



Must See Book Ahead

Stirling Castle & The Trossachs

Full day Book Ahead

Map

Stirling Castle, 40 miles northwest of Edinburgh, rivals Edinburgh Castle in historical significance. This magnificent Renaissance palace sits atop volcanic rock with commanding views over battlefields including *Bannockburn* (1314) where Robert the Bruce defeated the English. Restored Great Hall and Royal Palace showcase extraordinary craftsmanship. The castle's strategic location controlled routes between Lowlands and Highlands. Nearby attractions include the **Wallace Monument** commemorating William Wallace (Braveheart) and the scenic *Trossachs National Park* with Loch Lomond. Tour operators offer day trips combining castle with Highland scenery. Allow full day. Alternatively, take train to Stirling (50 minutes) and explore independently.



Top Pick

St Andrews

Full day No Booking Needed

Map

This charming medieval university town, 50 miles northeast of Edinburgh, is the '**Home of Golf**' and home to Scotland's oldest university (founded 1413). The *Old Course* is golf's most famous links – book tee times months ahead or walk the coastal path for free views. Explore atmospheric **St Andrews Cathedral ruins**, climb St Rule's Tower for panoramic views, and visit the medieval castle with its sinister bottle dungeon. The university campus features historic buildings where Prince William and Kate Middleton studied. Excellent restaurants, traditional pubs, and three beaches make it a delightful destination. Reachable by bus (2 hours) or train via Leuchars. Consider full day visit.



Top Pick Book Ahead

Highland Day Tour

Full day (10-12 hours) Book Ahead

Map

Experience Scotland's dramatic landscapes on a **Highland day tour from Edinburgh**. Popular routes visit *Loch Lomond, Glencoe* (Scotland's most scenic glen with film locations from James Bond and Harry Potter), and highland towns like Fort William or Pitlochry. Tours showcase mountain scenery, lochs, whisky distilleries, and possibly wildlife like red deer and highland cattle. Some include **Glenfinnan Viaduct** (famous from Harry Potter) or stops at distilleries for tastings. Long days (10-12 hours) with substantial coach travel, but the scenery is breathtaking. Multiple operators offer tours with different routes and group sizes. Small-group tours provide more flexibility and stops than large coaches.



Notable

Scottish Borders & Melrose Abbey

Full day No Booking Needed

Map

The **Scottish Borders region** south of Edinburgh offers rolling hills, historic abbeys, and literary connections. *Melrose Abbey* is the finest Border abbey ruin with Gothic architecture and the legendary burial place of Robert the Bruce's heart. Nearby **Abbotsford House** was home to Sir Walter Scott – tour his extraordinary library and collections. The area features scenic landscapes, charming towns like Peebles, and peaceful countryside. Visit **Traquair House**, Scotland's oldest inhabited house with secret priest holes and ancient brewery. Multiple tour companies offer day trips, or rent a car for flexibility. Ideal for those seeking quieter, rural Scotland. Full day recommended to appreciate multiple sites.



Notable

North Berwick & Coastal East Lothian

Half to full day No Booking Needed

Map

Just 30 minutes from Edinburgh by train, **North Berwick** is a charming Victorian seaside town with sandy beaches, clifftop walks, and wildlife. Take a boat trip to the *Bass Rock*, home to the world's largest colony of northern gannets – spectacular birdwatching. Visit the atmospheric ruins of **Tantallon Castle** perched on clifftops, and climb **North Berwick Law**, a volcanic hill with 360-degree views. The *Scottish Seabird Centre* offers interactive exhibits and live wildlife cameras. Enjoy fish and chips, browse independent shops, or relax on beaches. Nearby **Dirleton Castle** features stunning gardens. Perfect half-day or full-day trip. Easily accessible by public transport.

Tips for Day Trips & Excursions

- Book **organized day tours in advance** – popular tours sell out, especially summer weekends
- Consider small-group tours over large coaches for more personal experiences and flexibility
- Train travel is viable for St Andrews, Stirling, and North Berwick – more flexible than tours
- Highland tours involve long coach journeys – bring snacks, water, and entertainment
- Weather in Scotland changes quickly – bring waterproof layers even on sunny days

Food & Dining

Real, highly-rated Restaurants in Edinburgh, sourced from Google Places (rating above 4★).



eòrna restaurant★★★★★ 5 (168)

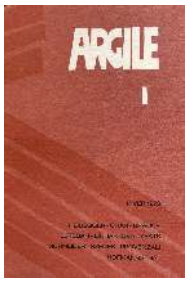
1-2 hours

Map

eòrna restaurant is a highly-rated restaurant in Edinburgh, rated 5★ from 168 reviews. Located at 68 Hamilton Pl, Edinburgh EH3 5AZ, UK.

Opening Hours

- Monday: Closed
- Tuesday: 6:50 – 11:30 PM
- Wednesday: 6:50 – 11:30 PM
- Thursday: 6:50 – 11:30 PM
- Friday: 6:50 – 11:30 PM
- Saturday: 6:50 – 11:30 PM
- Sunday: Closed



Argile★★★★★ 5 (78)

1-2 hours

Map

Argile is a highly-rated restaurant in Edinburgh, rated 5★ from 78 reviews. Located at 21 Argyle Pl, Edinburgh EH9 1JJ, UK.



Under The Table★★★★★ 4.9 (1,020)

1-2 hours

Map

Under The Table is a highly-rated restaurant in Edinburgh, rated 4.9★ from 1020 reviews. Located at 3A1, Dundas St, Edinburgh EH3 6QG, UK.

Opening Hours

- Monday: Closed
- Tuesday: 12:00 – 2:00 PM, 6:00 – 9:00 PM
- Wednesday: 12:00 – 2:00 PM, 6:00 – 9:00 PM
- Thursday: 12:00 – 2:00 PM, 6:00 – 9:00 PM
- Friday: 12:00 – 2:00 PM, 6:00 – 9:00 PM
- Saturday: 12:00 – 2:00 PM, 6:00 – 9:00 PM
- Sunday: 12:00 – 3:00 PM



The Table★★★★★ 4.8 (183)

1-2 hours

Map

The Table is a highly-rated restaurant in Edinburgh, rated 4.8★ from 183 reviews. Located at 3A Dundas St, Edinburgh EH3 6QG, UK.

Opening Hours

- Monday: Closed
- Tuesday: Closed
- Wednesday: 7:00 PM – 12:00 AM
- Thursday: 7:00 PM – 12:00 AM
- Friday: 7:00 PM – 12:00 AM
- Saturday: 7:00 PM – 12:00 AM
- Sunday: Closed



Makars Mash Bar★★★★★ 4.8 (10,365)

1-2 hours

Map

Makars Mash Bar is a highly-rated restaurant in Edinburgh, rated 4.8★ from 10365 reviews. Located at 9-12 Bank St, Edinburgh EH1 2LN, UK.

Opening Hours

- Monday: 12:00 – 8:00 PM
- Tuesday: 12:00 – 8:00 PM
- Wednesday: 12:00 – 8:00 PM
- Thursday: 12:00 – 8:00 PM
- Friday: 12:00 – 9:00 PM
- Saturday: 12:00 – 9:00 PM
- Sunday: 12:00 – 7:30 PM



Dishoom Edinburgh★★★★★ 4.8 (21,119)

1-2 hours

Map

Dishoom Edinburgh is a highly-rated restaurant in Edinburgh, rated 4.8★ from 21119 reviews. Located at 3a St Andrew Sq, Edinburgh EH2 2BD, UK.

Opening Hours

- Monday: 8:00 AM – 11:00 PM
- Tuesday: 8:00 AM – 11:00 PM
- Wednesday: 8:00 AM – 11:00 PM
- Thursday: 8:00 AM – 12:00 AM
- Friday: 8:00 AM – 12:00 AM
- Saturday: 8:00 AM – 12:00 AM
- Sunday: 8:00 AM – 11:00 PM



LYLA Restaurant & Rooms★★★★★ 4.8 (471)

1-2 hours

Map

LYLA Restaurant & Rooms is a highly-rated restaurant in Edinburgh, rated 4.8★ from 471 reviews. Located at 3 Royal Terrace, Edinburgh EH7 5AB, UK.

Opening Hours

- Monday: Closed
- Tuesday: Closed
- Wednesday: 6:30 – 7:30 PM
- Thursday: 6:30 – 7:30 PM
- Friday: 12:30 – 1:00 PM, 6:30 – 7:30 PM
- Saturday: 12:30 – 1:00 PM, 6:30 – 7:30 PM
- Sunday: 12:30 – 1:00 PM, 6:30 – 7:30 PM



Society Bar & Kitchen★★★★★ 4.8 (6,707)

1-2 hours

Map

Society Bar & Kitchen is a highly-rated restaurant in Edinburgh, rated 4.8★ from 6707 reviews. Located at 1 Waterloo Pl, Edinburgh EH1 3BG, UK.

Opening Hours

- Monday: 8:00 AM – 9:30 PM
- Tuesday: 8:00 AM – 9:30 PM
- Wednesday: 8:00 AM – 9:30 PM
- Thursday: 8:00 AM – 9:30 PM
- Friday: 8:00 AM – 9:30 PM
- Saturday: 8:00 AM – 9:30 PM
- Sunday: 8:00 AM – 9:30 PM



Heron★★★★★ 4.8 (465)

1-2 hours

Map

Heron is a highly-rated restaurant in Edinburgh, rated 4.8★ from 465 reviews. Located at 87, 91A Henderson St, Leith, Edinburgh EH6 6ED, UK.

Opening Hours

- Monday: Closed
- Tuesday: Closed
- Wednesday: 5:30 – 9:00 PM
- Thursday: 5:30 – 9:00 PM
- Friday: 5:30 – 9:00 PM
- Saturday: 12:00 – 2:00 PM, 5:30 – 9:00 PM
- Sunday: 12:00 – 2:00 PM, 5:30 – 9:00 PM



The Tollhouse★★★★★ 4.8 (406)

1-2 hours

Map

The Tollhouse is a highly-rated restaurant in Edinburgh, rated 4.8★ from 406 reviews. Located at 50 Brandon Terrace, Edinburgh EH3 5BX, UK.

Opening Hours

- Monday: 12:00 – 11:00 PM
- Tuesday: 12:00 – 11:00 PM
- Wednesday: 12:00 – 11:00 PM
- Thursday: 12:00 – 11:00 PM
- Friday: 12:00 – 11:00 PM
- Saturday: 12:00 – 11:00 PM
- Sunday: 12:00 – 11:00 PM



The Kitchin★★★★★ 4.7 (2,450)

1-2 hours

Map

The Kitchin is a highly-rated restaurant in Edinburgh, rated 4.7★ from 2450 reviews. Located at 78, Leith, Edinburgh EH6 6LX, UK.

Opening Hours

- Monday: Closed
- Tuesday: 12:00 – 2:30 PM, 6:00 – 10:00 PM
- Wednesday: 12:00 – 2:30 PM, 6:00 – 10:00 PM
- Thursday: 12:00 – 2:30 PM, 6:00 – 10:00 PM
- Friday: 12:00 – 2:30 PM, 6:00 – 10:00 PM
- Saturday: 12:00 – 2:30 PM, 6:00 – 10:00 PM
- Sunday: Closed



Avery Restaurant★★★★★ 4.7 (138)

1-2 hours

Map

Avery Restaurant is a highly-rated restaurant in Edinburgh, rated 4.7★ from 138 reviews. Located at 54 St Stephen St, Edinburgh EH3 5AL, UK.

Opening Hours

- Monday: Closed
- Tuesday: 5:00 – 8:30 PM
- Wednesday: 5:00 – 8:30 PM
- Thursday: 5:00 – 8:30 PM
- Friday: 5:00 – 8:30 PM
- Saturday: 12:00 – 8:30 PM
- Sunday: 12:00 – 8:30 PM



Little Capo★★★★★ 4.7 (466)

1-2 hours

Map

Little Capo is a highly-rated restaurant in Edinburgh, rated 4.7★ from 466 reviews. Located at 18 Howe St, Edinburgh EH3 6TG, UK.

Opening Hours

- Monday: 12:00 – 9:30 PM
- Tuesday: 12:00 – 9:30 PM
- Wednesday: 12:00 – 9:30 PM
- Thursday: 12:00 – 9:30 PM
- Friday: 12:00 – 9:30 PM
- Saturday: 12:00 – 9:30 PM
- Sunday: 12:00 – 9:30 PM



The Dome★★★★★ 4.6 (10,246)

1-2 hours

Map

The Dome is a highly-rated restaurant in Edinburgh, rated 4.6★ from 10246 reviews. Located at 14 George St, Edinburgh EH2 2PF, UK.

Opening Hours

- Monday: 10:00 AM – 12:00 AM
- Tuesday: 10:00 AM – 12:00 AM
- Wednesday: 10:00 AM – 12:00 AM
- Thursday: 10:00 AM – 12:00 AM
- Friday: 10:00 AM – 12:00 AM
- Saturday: 10:00 AM – 12:00 AM
- Sunday: 10:00 AM – 12:00 AM



The Spence★★★★★ 4.6 (590)

1-2 hours

Map

The Spence is a highly-rated restaurant in Edinburgh, rated 4.6★ from 590 reviews. Located at 39 St Andrew Sq, Edinburgh EH2 2AD, UK.

Opening Hours

- Monday: 7:00 AM – 9:30 PM
- Tuesday: 7:00 AM – 9:30 PM
- Wednesday: 7:00 AM – 9:30 PM
- Thursday: 7:00 AM – 10:00 PM
- Friday: 7:00 AM – 10:00 PM
- Saturday: 8:00 AM – 10:00 PM
- Sunday: 8:00 AM – 9:30 PM

Practical Information

Seasonal Guide to Edinburgh

Summer (June-August): Peak tourist season with *warmest weather* (15-20°C/59-68°F) and longest daylight hours (sunrise 4:30am, sunset 10pm). The **Edinburgh Festival Fringe** in August transforms the city into the world's largest arts festival with thousands of performances. Accommodation prices peak and booking is essential. Expect crowds at major attractions but incredible atmosphere.

Spring (March-May): Increasingly popular with *mild weather* (8-15°C/46-59°F), blooming gardens, and fewer crowds than summer. Cherry blossoms in Meadows Park and Royal Botanic Garden are spectacular. Easter weekend is busy. Good balance of pleasant weather and manageable tourist numbers.

Autumn (September-November): Excellent time to visit with *comfortable temperatures* (10-16°C/50-61°F), beautiful fall colors in parks, and fewer tourists after September. September still busy with late festivals. October offers atmospheric misty days perfect for exploring haunted sites. November is quiet with shorter days but lower prices.

Winter (December-February): Cold (2-7°C/36-45°F) with short daylight hours (sunrise 8:30am, sunset 3:45pm) but magical atmosphere. **Edinburgh Christmas Market** and **Hogmanay** (New Year celebrations) are world-famous. Snow possible but not guaranteed. Lowest prices and smallest crowds January-February. Indoor attractions ideal. Dress warmly in layers.

Best Overall: May-June or September offer optimal weather, manageable crowds, and reasonable prices. August is unmissable if you love festivals but book early and expect premium prices.

Getting Around Edinburgh

Walking: The compact city center is highly walkable. Old Town to New Town takes 15-20 minutes. The Royal Mile is 1 mile downhill from castle to palace. Wear comfortable shoes for cobblestones and hills. Most major attractions within 30-minute walk of each other.

Lothian Buses: Comprehensive bus network covering the entire city. *Single tickets and day passes* (check Lothian Buses for current fares) (buy on Lothian app or exact change on bus – no change given). Key routes: #35 from city to Leith, #41 to Port of Edinburgh (Britannia), Airlink 100 is the express airport service; check Lothian Buses for other current routes. Buses frequent and reliable. Real-time information at stops and on app.

Edinburgh Trams: Modern tram system The tram route runs between Edinburgh Airport and Newhaven. The airport-to-city-centre tram journey takes about 30 minutes, with a fare to check on the Edinburgh Trams site. Trams run every 7-10 minutes, 5am-midnight. Convenient for airport transfers and west Edinburgh.

Taxis & Ride-Sharing: Black cabs are metered and reliable. Uber and Bolt operate citywide. Cross-city journeys cost much less than airport rides. Taxis can use bus lanes, making them faster during peak hours. Ranks at Waverley Station, airports, and major hotels.

Cycling: Edinburgh's Just Eat bike-hire scheme ended in September 2021. (check the operator for prices). Edinburgh has growing cycle infrastructure but hills and cobblestones can challenge casual cyclists. National Cycle Network routes include flat canal paths and Water of Leith Walkway.

From the Airport: Edinburgh Airport is 8 miles west. Options include trams (35 min), Airlink 100 bus (30 min), taxis (25 min), or private transfers. Tram is most convenient for city center destinations.

Day Trip Transport: ScotRail trains serve Stirling (50 min), St Andrews via Leuchars (90 min), and North Berwick (30 min). Scottish Citylink buses reach destinations like Glasgow (1.25 hours) and Inverness. Consider rail passes for multiple journeys.

✈ Airport Transfer

Edinburgh Airport (EDI) to city center:

- **Edinburgh Trams:** Direct to St Andrew Square in the city centre in about 35 minutes, check the current fare
- **Airlink 100 runs to Waverley Bridge in around 30 minutes; an adult single is £6.**
- **Taxi:** Metered ride to the city centre in 20 to 25 minutes, at a fare that depends on traffic
- **Private Transfer:** Pre-booked door-to-door car service to the city centre in about 20 to 25 minutes, at a price to confirm when booking

Shopping in Edinburgh

What to Buy:

- *Cashmere & Wool:* Scottish cashmere is world-renowned. Visit **Johnstons of Elgin** on Princes Street or **Edinburgh Woollen Mill** for authentic quality. Prices range from £50 for scarves to £300+ for sweaters.
- *Tartan & Kilts:* Clan tartans available at specialist shops like **Geoffrey (Tailor) Kiltmakers** on High Street. Full kilt outfits expensive (£500+) but tartan scarves, ties, and accessories more affordable (£20-50).
- *Whisky:* **Cadenhead's Whisky Shop** (Canongate) offers rare single casks. **The Whisky Shop** (Princes Street) has extensive selection with expert advice. Miniatures make perfect gifts (£5-10). Full bottles £25-£200+.
- *Shortbread & Food:* **Shortbread House of Edinburgh** creates gourmet versions of Scottish classic. **Cranachan & Crowdie** (Grassmarket) offers artisan Scottish foods. Haggis, tablet (Scottish fudge), and oatcakes make authentic gifts.
- *Jewelry:* Scottish **Ortak** jewelry features Celtic designs in silver. **Sheila Fleet** creates contemporary Scottish-inspired pieces. Edinburgh Castle gift shop sells replica Crown Jewels pieces.
- *Books:* Edinburgh's literary heritage means excellent bookshops. **Blackwell's** on South Bridge is enormous. **Armchair Books** (West Port) specializes in used/rare books.

Shopping Districts:

Princes Street: Main shopping street with department stores (**Jenners Building** now House of Fraser) and high-street chains (M&S, H&M, Zara). **St James Quarter** (opened 2021) is Edinburgh's newest luxury shopping center.

George Street: Upscale boutiques, designer brands, and flagship stores in elegant Georgian buildings. Harvey Nichols anchors the west end. Mix of international luxury and Scottish specialists.

Victoria Street & Grassmarket: Independent boutiques, vintage shops, and specialist stores. **Mr Wood's Fossils**, **Fabhatrix** (unusual hats), and numerous gift shops. Most photogenic shopping area.

Royal Mile: Tourist-oriented shops selling tartans, whisky, and souvenirs. Quality varies – seek established names. **Edinburgh Old Town Weaving Company** demonstrates traditional weaving.

Stockbridge: Independent boutiques, antique shops on St Stephen Street, artisan goods, and design studios. Sunday market features local crafts, food, and vintage items.

Bargaining: Not customary in Scotland. Prices are fixed in shops, though markets may offer slight flexibility. Sales periods: January and July offer significant discounts (up to 50-70% off).

VAT Refund: Non-EU visitors can reclaim 20% VAT on purchases over £50 from participating retailers. Request tax-free forms, keep receipts, and validate at airport before departure.

Edinburgh's Festival Calendar

Edinburgh Festival Fringe (August): The world's largest arts festival transforms Edinburgh with *thousands of performances* across 300+ venues. Comedy, theatre, music, dance, and everything imaginable. Free shows and street performers alongside ticketed productions. Book accommodation months ahead. The city atmosphere is electric but extremely crowded.

Edinburgh International Festival (August): Running concurrently with Fringe, this is Scotland's premier arts festival featuring *world-class opera, classical music, theatre, and dance*. Performances at major venues including **Usher Hall** and **Festival Theatre**. More formal and upscale than Fringe. Tickets £10-£100+.

Royal Edinburgh Military Tattoo (August): Spectacular display of military bands, dancers, and performers against the backdrop of **Edinburgh Castle**. Nightly performances on the Castle Esplanade. Bagpipes, fireworks, and pageantry. Tickets sell out months in advance (£25-£85). Iconic Edinburgh experience.

Edinburgh International Book Festival (August): World's largest celebration of the written word with *author talks, workshops, and readings*. Features international bestsellers and emerging writers. In 2026, the Edinburgh International Book Festival is held primarily at Edinburgh Futures Institute. Many events free or under £15.

Hogmanay (December 31 - January 1): Edinburgh's legendary **New Year celebration** is one of the world's greatest street parties. Torchlight procession on December 30th, street party on December 31st (ticketed), and live concerts. *Ceilidh dancing, fireworks, and all-night celebrations*. Book accommodation year in advance. Some events free, street party £25-40.

Edinburgh Christmas (November-January): City center transforms with *Christmas markets, ice skating, fairground rides*, and festive lights. German market in Princes Street Gardens offers food, crafts, and mulled wine. Free to enter markets (rides/attractions separately priced). Ferris wheel provides spectacular views. Edinburgh Castle backdrop makes it exceptionally picturesque.

Edinburgh Science Festival (April): Two-week celebration of science and technology with *interactive exhibitions, workshops, and talks*. Family-friendly events throughout the city. Many free activities. Perfect for curious minds of all ages.

Beltane Fire Festival (April 30): Ancient Celtic festival celebrating summer's arrival with *dramatic fire performance on Calton Hill*. Hundreds of performers in costume, drumming, and spectacular fire displays. Pagan traditions reimagined as theatrical celebration. Tickets required (£15-25), not suitable for young children due to crowds and late night timing.

The 2026 Edinburgh International Film Festival ran 13–19 August: World's longest continuously running film festival showcases *international cinema, premieres, and retrospectives*. Screenings at Filmhouse and other venues. Mix of mainstream and art-house films. Individual screening tickets £8-15.

Scottish Traditional Boat Festival (June, Portsoy - day trip): Celebration of Scottish maritime heritage with historic boats, sailing races, and traditional music. Worth day trip if interested in maritime history.

Public Holidays: New Year's Day (Jan 1), January 2nd (Scotland only), Good Friday, Early May Bank Holiday, Spring Bank Holiday (late May), Summer Bank Holiday (early August), St Andrew's Day (November 30), Christmas Day, Boxing Day.

Many attractions closed December 25-26 and January 1-2.

Five Sample Day Itineraries

Day 1: Classic Edinburgh Highlights

Morning (9am-12pm): Start early at **Edinburgh Castle** (allow 2-3 hours). Book 9am entry to beat crowds. Explore Crown Jewels, Great Hall, and enjoy One O'Clock Gun. Exit and walk down *Castle Esplanade* to Royal Mile.

Lunch (12pm-1pm): Stop at **The Witchery by the Castle** for atmospheric lunch or grab sandwich at **Oink** (hog roast rolls).

Afternoon (1pm-5pm): Walk down Royal Mile, visiting **St Giles' Cathedral** (30 min), explore closes and wynds. Continue to **Palace of Holyroodhouse** (2 hours). If time permits, climb partway up *Arthur's Seat* for views.

Evening (5pm onwards): Return to Old Town via Royal Mile. Dinner in Grassmarket area. Evening ghost tour (8pm or 9pm) for atmospheric introduction to Edinburgh's dark history.

Day 2: Museums, New Town & Gardens

Morning (10am-12:30pm): Visit **National Museum of Scotland** (free admission). Focus on Scottish galleries and don't miss rooftop views. Coffee in museum café.

Lunch (12:30pm-1:30pm): Walk to **Grassmarket** for lunch at local pub or restaurant.

Afternoon (1:30pm-5pm): Stroll through **Princes Street Gardens** to Princes Street. Visit **Scottish National Gallery** (free, 90 minutes). Walk through Georgian *New Town* – George Street, Charlotte Square. Climb **Scott Monument** for panoramic views (287 steps).

Evening (5pm onwards): Explore **Rose Street** (parallel to Princes Street) for traditional pub crawl and dinner. Try **The Abbotsford Bar** (Victorian pub) or **Café Royal Circle Bar** (stunning Victorian interior).

Day 3: Arthur's Seat, Leith & Britannia

Morning (8am-11am): Early start to climb **Arthur's Seat** (2-3 hours round trip). Sunrise or early morning offers best light and fewer crowds. Return via *Holyrood Park*.

Lunch (11:30am-12:30pm): Brunch at **Holyrood 9A** (excellent burgers and craft beer) or quick bite near palace.

Afternoon (1pm-5pm): Bus or tram to **Leith**. Visit **Royal Yacht Britannia** (2 hours with audio tour). Explore Leith waterfront, *Shore area restaurants*, and independent shops. Visit **Leith Market** if Saturday.

Evening (5pm onwards): Dinner at one of Leith's excellent restaurants – **The Kitchin** (Michelin star, book months ahead), **Fishers Leith** (seafood), or **Mamma's American Pizza** (casual). Return to city center via scenic walk along *Water of Leith Walkway* if time and energy permit.

Day 4: Hidden Edinburgh & Local Neighborhoods

Morning (9am-12pm): Walk **Water of Leith Walkway** from *Dean Village* to **Stockbridge** (1 hour). Explore Stockbridge's independent shops, cafés, and visit **Royal Botanic Garden** (allow 90 minutes).

Lunch (12pm-1:30pm): Lunch in Stockbridge at **Scran & Scallie** (gastropub) or **Stockbridge Restaurant**. If Sunday, browse *Stockbridge Market*.

Afternoon (1:30pm-5pm): Bus to **Craigmillar Castle** (1.5 hours, free admission). Return to city. Visit **Greyfriars Kirkyard** and see *Greyfriars Bobby statue*. Explore **Victoria Street** and *Grassmarket* for photos and shopping.

Evening (5pm onwards): **Real Mary King's Close** tour (book 6pm or 7pm). Dinner on Royal Mile. Evening walk up **Calton Hill** for sunset views over the city.

Day 5: Day Trip & Whisky Experience

Morning/Afternoon (8am-4pm): Choose a day trip:

- **Option A:** Organized *Highland tour* to Glencoe/Loch Lomond (full day, 10-12 hours)
- **Option B:** Train to **Stirling**, visit castle and Wallace Monument (6-8 hours)
- **Option C:** Train to **St Andrews** for golf, university, and beaches (6-8 hours)
- **Option D:** Train to **North Berwick** for coast, castle, and seabirds (half day, return by 2pm)

Late Afternoon/Evening (5pm onwards): If half-day trip or returning early, visit **Scotch Whisky Experience** for tour and tasting (book 5pm slot). Alternatively, visit whisky shop for self-guided tasting experience.

Final Evening: Farewell dinner at special restaurant – **The Witchery** (romantic Gothic setting), **Timberyard** (modern Scottish), or **Ondine** (seafood). If budget allows, attend a **traditional ceilidh** or live Scottish music session at pub like **Sandy Bell's** or **Captain's Bar**.

Flexible Additions: Insert **Camera Obscura** (1-2 hours), **Scottish National Portrait Gallery** (1 hour), **Edinburgh Vaults tour** (1 hour), or **Rosslyn Chapel** (half day) based on interests and pace preference.

Best Instagram & Photography Locations

Victoria Street: Edinburgh's most photographed street with *colorful curved facades*. **Best time:** Early morning (7-8am) before crowds, or blue hour (dusk) with street lights. Shoot from top looking down the curve or from bottom looking up. Overcast days enhance colors without harsh shadows.

Calton Hill at Sunset: Panoramic city views with monuments as foreground elements. **Best time:** Golden hour (hour before sunset) and blue hour (30 minutes after sunset). Summer sunsets around 9:30-10pm provide dramatic light on castle and city. Tripod useful for low-light shots.

Edinburgh Castle from Princes Street Gardens: Classic castle view with gardens as foreground. **Best time:** Morning light (9-11am) illuminates castle front. Spring cherry blossoms or autumn colors add seasonal interest. Ross Fountain provides secondary subject. Wide-angle lens captures full scene.

Dean Village: Picturesque stone buildings and Water of Leith. **Best time:** Morning or late afternoon for soft light. Autumn offers golden leaves reflecting in water. Shoot from Well Court housing or bridges over river. Misty mornings create ethereal atmosphere.

The Vennel Steps: Stone steps climbing from Grassmarket toward castle – classic Edinburgh perspective. **Best time:** Blue hour (dusk) when castle is illuminated. Steps lead eye toward castle silhouette. Include cobblestones and gas lamps for authenticity. Can be icy in winter – use caution.

Circus Lane (Stockbridge): Cobbled mews lane with colorful doors and window boxes. **Best time:** Mid-morning (10-11am) when flowers catch sun. Spring through summer offers best blooms. Private residential area – be respectful and quiet.

Arthur's Seat Summit: 360-degree panoramas over Edinburgh, Firth of Forth, and surrounding landscape. **Best time:** Sunrise (dramatic light, fewer people) or late afternoon. Clear days show distant Highlands. Bring wide-angle lens for expansive views. Windy conditions – secure equipment.

Cockburn Street: Curved street connecting High Street to Waverley Station with *eclectic shop fronts* and castle views. **Best time:** Late afternoon when sun illuminates building facades. Include vintage shops and colorful signage. Less crowded than Victoria Street.

Scott Monument from Princes Street: Gothic spire against sky, especially dramatic with clouds. **Best time:** Any time in dramatic weather. Shoot from Princes Street Gardens for clean composition. Inside spiral staircase offers abstract architectural shots.

Greyfriars Kirkyard: Atmospheric graveyard with elaborate monuments and *autumn leaves*. **Best time:** Overcast days or morning mist create Gothic mood. Autumn color spectacular. Respect graves – no climbing on monuments. Bobby

statue outside church entrance popular but crowded.

Royal Mile at Night: Cobbled street, old buildings, and atmospheric street lights. **Best time:** Blue hour or full darkness. Wet cobblestones reflect lights beautifully – rain actually improves photos. Castle illuminated at night from 7am creates dramatic backdrop.

North Berwick Law (Day Trip): Volcanic hill summit with *panoramic coastal views*, Bass Rock, and Edinburgh skyline in distance. **Best time:** Clear days with good visibility. Afternoon light shows detail in landscape. Whale bone arch at summit distinctive.

Photography Tips:

- Edinburgh's **weather changes rapidly** – dramatic clouds create excellent photography conditions
- Cobblestone streets photograph better when wet – light rain enhances reflections
- Castle and monuments illuminated from dusk until midnight – excellent for night photography
- Summer offers extremely long daylight (sunset 10pm) – extended golden hour opportunities
- Winter's short days mean blue hour around 3:30-4pm – easier timing than summer's 10pm
- Respect private property and residents – many picturesque lanes are residential
- Popular spots like Victoria Street crowded 10am-6pm – arrive early or late

Electricity & Plug Information

Voltage: UK standard is *230V, 50Hz*. North American devices (110V) require voltage converter for high-wattage appliances (hair dryers, straighteners). Most modern electronics (phones, laptops, cameras) have built-in converters – check device specifications (look for "INPUT: 100-240V").

Plug Type: United Kingdom uses **Type G plugs** with three rectangular pins in triangular pattern. This is different from European (Type C/F), American (Type A/B), and most other world standards. You WILL need adapters.

Adapters vs Converters:

- *Travel Adapter:* Changes plug shape only. Sufficient for dual-voltage devices (100-240V). Available at airports, electronics shops, and online. Cost £5-15.
- *Voltage Converter:* Changes both voltage and plug shape. Necessary for 110V-only devices. Heavier and more expensive (£30-50). Consider if device doesn't support 230V.

Where to Buy: Purchase adapters before arrival (cheaper) or at Edinburgh Airport, Boots pharmacy, Tesco/Sainsbury's supermarkets, or electronics stores. Hotels sometimes loan adapters but don't rely on availability.

Multi-Device Charging: UK plugs are bulky. Consider *universal travel adapter with multiple USB ports* to charge several devices from single outlet. Many hotel rooms have limited outlets.

Hotel Considerations: Modern hotels provide bedside USB ports, but older properties and B&Bs may have limited outlets. Reception can usually provide adapter loans. Bathrooms have shaver sockets (110V/230V) for electric razors only – not suitable for hair dryers.

Recommendation: Bring at least two Type G adapters (one for accommodation, one for day use). Check all device voltage compatibility before trip. For longer stays or multiple devices, invest in quality universal adapter with USB ports (£25-40).

Edinburgh Food Guide: Must-Try Dishes & Dining Tips

Traditional Scottish Dishes to Try:

- **Haggis, Neeps & Tatties:** Scotland's national dish – sheep's organ meat with oatmeal and spices served with *mashed turnips (neeps) and potatoes (tatties)*. Richer and tastier than it sounds. Try at **The Scots Kitchen** or any traditional pub. Also available as starter-sized haggis bon bons.

- **Cullen Skink:** Creamy smoked haddock soup with potatoes – comforting Scottish chowder. **The Scran & Scallie** serves excellent version.
- **Scotch Pie:** Small meat pie with hot water crust pastry. Grab from bakeries like **Greggs** or **Bells Bakery** for authentic cheap lunch (£1-2).
- **Fish & Chips:** Classic UK dish done excellently in Edinburgh. Try **The Tailend** (Leith) or **L'Alba d'Oro** (Henderson Street) – both award-winning chippies.
- **Cranachan:** Traditional Scottish dessert with *whipped cream, whisky, honey, raspberries, and toasted oats*. Light and delicious. Found on most Scottish restaurant menus.
- **Tablet:** Scottish fudge – sweeter and crumblier than English fudge. Buy from **Fudge Kitchen** on Royal Mile or specialist sweet shops.
- **Scottish Salmon:** World-renowned smoked or fresh salmon. **Fishers in Leith** and **Ondine** showcase local seafood.
- **Full Scottish Breakfast:** Like full English but includes *haggis, tattie scones, and Lorne (square) sausage*. Most B&Bs and hotels serve hearty versions. Keeps you full until dinner.

Restaurant Recommendations by Category:

Fine Dining:

- **The Kitchin (Leith):** Michelin-starred, "From Nature to Plate" philosophy. Tasting menus £95-140. Book 2-3 months ahead.
- **Restaurant Martin Wishart (Leith):** Michelin-starred French-influenced Scottish cuisine. Elegant setting. £125 tasting menu.
- **Timberyard (Old Town):** Seasonal Scottish ingredients, industrial-chic setting. Sharing plates and tasting menus £45-70.
- **The Witchery by the Castle:** Gothic theatrical setting near castle. Romantic and atmospheric. Mains £25-40.

Mid-Range & Traditional:

- **The Scran & Scallie (Stockbridge):** Gastropub by Michelin-starred chef. Excellent Scottish classics. Mains £15-25.
- **Howies (multiple locations):** Reliable Scottish bistro. Good value pre-theatre menus. Mains £12-20.
- **The Dogs (New Town):** Cozy bistro with Scottish comfort food. Mains £12-18.
- **Ondine (Old Town):** Premier seafood restaurant. Stunning oyster bar. Mains £20-35.

Casual & Budget:

- **Oink (Royal Mile):** Hog roast rolls – massive portions, £5-7. Queue indicates quality.
- **Mamma's American Pizza (Leith & Grassmarket):** American-style pizza, generous portions. £8-15.
- **Söderberg (multiple locations):** Swedish bakery-café. Excellent pastries, sandwiches, coffee. £5-10.
- **Mary's Milk Bar (Grassmarket):** Artisan ice cream. Unique flavors including whisky and tablet.

Traditional Pubs with Food:

- **The Sheep Heid Inn (Duddingston):** Edinburgh's oldest pub (1360). Traditional Scottish fare. Skittles alley.
- **The White Hart Inn (Grassmarket):** Historic pub, hearty portions. Haggis, neeps & tatties £10-12.
- **Deacon Brodie's Tavern (Royal Mile):** Named after real-life Jekyll/Hyde character. Good pub grub £10-15.

Dining Tips:

- **Reservations essential** for fine dining and popular mid-range restaurants, especially weekends and August
- Edinburgh has *excellent international cuisine* – Indian (Dishoom), Japanese (Harajuku Kitchen), Middle Eastern (Baba), Italian (Divino Enoteca)
- Pre-theatre menus (5-7pm) offer same quality at reduced prices – typically two courses £15-20
- Tipping: 10-15% in restaurants if service not included. Check bill – some add service automatically. Not required in pubs unless table service
- Lunch often better value than dinner – many restaurants offer lunch menus at half dinner prices
- Edinburgh's food scene is **seasonal** – game (venison, pheasant) in autumn/winter, seafood year-round, berries in summer

- Many restaurants offer *BYOB (bring your own bottle)* with corkage £5-10 – saves money on wine
- Vegetarian/vegan options widely available – even traditional restaurants accommodate dietary needs
- Michelin-starred restaurants require smart casual dress – jeans acceptable but avoid sportswear

Food Markets:

- **Stockbridge Sunday Market:** 10am-5pm Sundays. Excellent street food, produce, baked goods
- **Edinburgh Farmers' Market (Castle Terrace):** Saturdays 9am-2pm. Local producers, artisan foods
- **Leith Market:** Saturdays 10am-4pm. Food, crafts, vintage. Hip atmosphere

Tourist Passes

Edinburgh Pass

All-inclusive sightseeing pass providing **free entry to 50+ attractions** including Edinburgh Castle, Palace of Holyroodhouse, Royal Yacht Britannia, Edinburgh Zoo, and more. Includes *hop-on-hop-off bus tour* and guidebook. Available in 1, 2, 3, or 5-day versions. **Prices:** 1-day £69 adult, £44 child; 3-day £129 adult, £77 child. Best value if visiting expensive attractions (castle, palace, Britannia together worth £55+). Digital pass delivered instantly. Skip-the-line benefits at some attractions. Consider your itinerary – only worthwhile if visiting multiple paid attractions daily. *Does not include transport.*

edinburghpass.com

Royal Edinburgh Ticket

Combined ticket for **three royal attractions: Edinburgh Castle, Palace of Holyroodhouse, and Royal Yacht Britannia**. Saves approximately £8 compared to individual tickets. Valid for 48 hours from first attraction visit. **Price:** £64 adult, £32 child (under 17). Includes audio guides at all three sites. Excellent value if planning to visit all three landmarks – which most first-time visitors do. Available online or at any of the three attractions. Skip queues when bought online. Spread visits over two days to appreciate fully. These are Edinburgh's 'must-see' attractions, making this ticket sensible for most tourists.

www.rct.uk

Historic Scotland Explorer Pass

Grants access to **over 75 Historic Environment Scotland sites** across Scotland, including Edinburgh Castle, Stirling Castle, Urquhart Castle (Loch Ness), and many abbeys and historic buildings. The Explorer Pass is valid for 14 consecutive days. **Prices:** 3-day £48 adult, £29 child; For 1 April–31 October 2026, the 14-day pass is £48 adult and £29 child; winter prices differ. Edinburgh Castle online adult admission is £23.50, so pass pays for itself quickly. Ideal for visitors exploring beyond Edinburgh or interested in castles and historic sites. Digital pass available. *Worthwhile if visiting 3+ HES sites.* Scottish residents and UK under-5s free at HES sites without pass.

www.historicenvironment.scot

Lothian Buses Day Ticket & Ridacard

Day Ticket: The City DAY ticket is £6 adult and £3 child. Purchase on *Lothian Buses app* or with exact change on bus (no change given). Cheaper than 3+ single journeys (£2 each). **Ridacard:** Adult Ridacard costs £26.50 for one week or £80 for four weeks, or annual passes for extended stays. Covers city buses but NOT airport bus or trams. Combine with separate tram ticket if needed. Lothian Buses cover all city areas except far suburbs. *The City DAY family ticket is £13 for up to two adults and three children. Consider if making multiple bus trips daily or staying outside city center. Otherwise walk and use occasional buses/trams.*

www.lothianbuses.com