

# Travel Guide

## 24 hours in Edinburgh

By Sharon Livingston

Edinburgh is famous for the annual Festival Fringe and the seat of Scottish Parliament, but what does it offer the visitor?

**I**t might be the capital of Scotland, the home of vibrant festivals and the seat of Scottish power, but there's something about the cold cobbles, the wind-battered stones and the towering castle that make Edinburgh still feel like a haunted fortress atop an enchanted mountain.

Tourists duck and dive under towering bridges, they tumble down treacherously steep steps and feel the wind whip their noses and cheeks

as if they were standing on the battlements.

Locals are fiercely protective of their city, as if they were guarding hidden treasure. But look hard enough, and you can find the city's secrets, its boutique shops, its achingly hip restaurants, its enchanting walks and cosiest whiskey joints.

### MUST STAY

To experience the authentic Edinburgh welcome, stay with a local family. **HomeStay.com** has over 40 hosts in Edinburgh offering Scottish hospitality and local knowledge. Prices range depending on the accommodation, but a night in an ensuite room in a large listed Georgian building 5 minute walk from Napier University costs

£40, or you can get a room with shared bathroom for £29 per night.

Alternatively, for a taste of heritage and luxury, try **The Scotsman Hotel**. This 5\* hotel is located at Edinburgh's historic North Bridge and was built in 1905 as baronial office of the Scotsman Newspaper. They have a spa and health club and free WiFi with room rates starting from £126 per night.

### MUST VISIT

Perched on an extinct volcano, Edinburgh Castle dominates the city's skyline and the 16th century building is Scotland's most popular tourist site. You'll have to book months in advance to see the famous Scottish Military Tattoo, and extravaganza of fireworks, pipes and dancing at the castle. But for a peek at the ordinary lives of citizens of Edinburgh, **Real Mary King's Close** is a hidden treat, just off the Royal Mile. Venture underground to a secret warren of hidden 17<sup>th</sup> century streets, led by a character from the period. See how residents suffered from the plague, wicked deals and murderous plots that took place in the shadowy close. The museum is a treat for children, fascinating for adults, and a warm and welcome respite if the Scottish heavens have opened.

## MUST BE SEEN AT

Edinburgh's hippest restaurants and bars are mostly in the New Town, close to Princes Street. But one exception is the swanky Ondine, an award-winning fish restaurant just a short skip from the Castle. The glass-fronted upstairs restaurant is perfect for people watching, while supping an Edinburgh Gin Daisy cocktail.

Fresh, local and zingy fish dishes change regularly, but might include Ondine smoked salmon with homemade cucumber pickle, silky fish soup with gruyere croutons, or a moist and smoky grilled sea-bass. Begin or end the evening next door at the fashionista-dominated G&V Royal Mile Hotel (formerly Hotel Missoni) for their signature draught Prosecco.

## MUST DRINK

Every bartender is an expert in Scotch whisky. If you fancy being one yourself, take the tour at The Scotch Whisky Experience, beginning with a virtual tour inside a whisky barrel, showing you how to amber liquid is distilled and matured. Later, you're given a sniff of the different flavours of the Scottish whisky producing regions, to help you decide whether to sample Lowland, Highland, Speyside or Islay dram. The museum also includes a fascinating display of the world's largest collection of whiskey.

## MUST SHOP

In the heart of the Old Town, Edinburgh's Grassmarket district has the city's best independent merchants, designers and artisans.



Wind your way down the Castle Wynd or Upper Bow steps and spend an hour browsing the delis and boutiques. Highlights include Demijohn's handmade spirits and liquors, Armstrong's Vintage clothes emporium for '50's ra-ra skirts, 60's minis and 70's prints, and the Old Town bookshop, for antique books, maps and prints.

## MUST EAT

The Witchery by the Castle, is a hotel with a fine restaurant on the Royal Mile right by the castle offers. Dine in pretty surroundings for a romantic dinner and if you decide to stay, you'll sleep in lush rooms with lots of velvet, tapestry walls and four poster beds.

Or try The Dome located in New Town. It's both a bar and a restaurant, and it's an established social hub for cocktails or coffee – so expect a buzz. Foodwise, there's a grill with its lovely domed ceiling, the club room – plush with wood-pannelled walls, mirrors and crystal chandeliers, and you can even have afternoon tea here.

## MUST CHILL OUT

One of the city's most up-and-coming districts, and home of the Royal Yacht Britannia is Leith, Edinburgh's port. On a sunny evening, young professionals and artists fill the quayside bars.

## MUST SEE THE VIEW

It's not for the faint-hearted, but a brisk stroll up dormant volcano Arthur's

Seat will put hairs on your chest. The mini-mountain stands in the middle of Holyrood Park and is said to have been the mythical location of King Arthur's palace, Camelot. It's a sweaty 40-minute hike to the top, and you'll find yourself shedding the scarves and cagoules you wore while strolling round the city, but the views of the city and the sea from the top of the mound are breathtaking.

## MUST WATCH

Edinburgh has a well-deserved reputation as one of the UK's hottest spots for culture, and does art, theatre, music and comedy well all year round, as well as during the Edinburgh Festival, which takes over the city throughout August. For highly-charged new writing and boundary-pushing theatre, at the Festival and all year round, the Traverse Theatre has played host to UK's finest new writers and directors, including Enda Walsh, David Eldridge, Simon Stephens and Rona Munro.

For a more raucous afternoon or evening, the Stand Comedy Club on York Place has seen the biggest egos in comedy squeeze onto its tiny stage, where audiences sit on rickety bar stools, or stand round the edges in order to see their idols or the next big thing, with prices ranging from £2 to £15 and usually four or more performers on a bill, and a free lunchtime show on Sundays.

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