

48

Hours in Edinburgh

SOMETIMES CALLED THE 'ATHENS OF THE NORTH', EDINBURGH IS FULL OF HISTORY, BUT IT'S ALSO LOOKING FORWARD TO A BRIGHT FUTURE. HERE'S A WEEKEND GUIDE TO THIS EXCITING CITY

WORDS DAN SAVERY PICTURES GETTY

These are extraordinary times for Edinburgh. Back in the not-so-distant mid 1990s, the city was depicted as a gloomy urban sprawl, home to the disenchanted youth in the now classic 1996 film *Trainspotting*. But so much has changed since then. For a start, the Scottish capital now has its own Parliament, a booming property market, and plenty of activities to keep visitors amused for weeks on end. If you've only got a weekend, here's our guide to making the most of 48 hours in the Scottish capital.

FRIDAY

2pm

What better way to get to know the city than by uncovering a bit of history on Chambers Street? This is home to the National Museum of Scotland, which recently started work on a £46m transformation. There are more than 16 fascinating galleries to explore here, housing everything from ancient Egyptian treasures to a NASA space suit.



THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF SCOTLAND

4pm

Our Dynamic Earth is one of Scotland's most exhilarating visitor attractions. Located on Holyrood Road, it's a kind of hybrid of the Eden Project and the Natural History Museum, and is the only UK science centre dedicated to the story of planet earth. As climate change is high on the agenda, *Our Dynamic Earth* is a timely exhibition that takes you back 15,000 million years via erupting volcanoes, dinosaurs and polar extremes.

6pm

As the sun goes down, head to Holyrood Park and take a brisk walk up Arthur's Seat. Rising above the city to a height of 251 metres, Arthur's Seat is the main peak in the park, whose extraordinary natural landscape was formed by an extinct volcano system. The gentle climb is very popular and the summit provides stunning panoramic views across the city. If the weather's good, you'll be able to see the Ochil Hills beyond the Forth Road Bridge.

9pm

If all that time-travelling and hill-walking has made you hungry, then take an evening stroll to the Grassmarket area of the Old Town, where there's a wealth of great restaurants to sample. Here you can choose between a French bistro called Petit Paris, fine international dining at Howies or Indian cuisine at Khushis. Established in 1947, Khushis is an institution, with fabulous exotic décor and skilful chefs that flame-grill your tandoori chicken to order. No, it's not traditional haggis, tatties and neeps, but this is all about getting a taste of the modern, multicultural Edinburgh.

SATURDAY

9am

Begin the day with an early-morning visit to Edinburgh Castle. This is where the city began. It is thought that the site of Castle Rock was inhabited and probably fortified in prehistoric times. On a clear day, it is possible to see ships sailing on the Firth of Forth from here.

11am

At the top of the Royal Mile, visit the Scotch Whisky Experience. This attraction offers a unique insight into Scotch Whisky past and present. Amazingly, it's a family attraction and even has a Scotch Whisky barrel ride for kids – although parents may enjoy the visit more...

1pm

Need a drink and a bite to eat? Then do have tea at the Spoon Café on Blackfriars Street. With a range of fresh tasty salads and paninis, the staff serve everything but the greasy food the cafe's name suggests!

2pm

In the afternoon, take a trip to the new Scottish Parliament building, which was formally opened by the Queen in October 2004. Designed by Catalan architect Enric Miralles, the building cost more than £414m and was three years late. However, as the Act of Union merged the Kingdom of Scotland with the Kingdom of England in 1707, you could say that the Scots actually waited nearly 300 years for this building. After years of political struggle, Scotland was finally granted its own Parliament when devolution was introduced in 1999.



"On a clear day it is possible to see ships sailing on the Firth of Forth from the castle"

Where to stay



Ten Hill Place

Where: 10 Hill Place, Edinburgh
What: Owned by the Royal College of Surgeons, Ten Hill Place has now been transformed into a stylish 78-bedroom contemporary hotel. Rooms start from £87.
Contact: 0131 662 2080; www.tenhillplacehotel.com



Toftcombs House

Where: Peebles Road, near Biggar
What: A truly delightful country house for hire, only 26 miles from Edinburgh. Price starts from £1,650 for a three-night short break on a self-catering basis.
Contact: 01738 451 610; www.cottages-and-castles.co.uk



Balmoral Hotel

Where: 1 Princes Street
What: The Balmoral is one of the Leading Hotels of the World and offers 188 opulent suites and stylish rooms with views towards Edinburgh Castle and the Old Town. Rooms start from £305.
Contact: 0131 556 2414; www.thebalmoralhotel.com

FACT FILE

Airlink (shuttle bus from Edinburgh airport): www.flybybus.com
Edinburgh Festival Fringe: www.edfringe.com
Edinburgh International Festival: www.eif.co.uk
Highland tours: www.rabbies.com
Historic Scotland: www.historic-scotland.gov.uk
Khushis: www.khushis.com
National Museum of Scotland: www.nms.ac.uk
Our Dynamic Earth: www.dynamicearth.co.uk
Scotch Whisky Experience: www.scotchwhiskyexperience.co.uk
Scotland's National Tourism Organisation: www.visitscotland.com
Scottish Parliament: www.scottish.parliament.uk
The Edinburgh Dungeon: www.thedungeons.com
Ten Hill Place hotel: www.tenhillplace.com

3.30pm

Crossing the Waverley Bridge, you will find The Edinburgh Dungeon. The entry sign reads 'Abandon hope all ye who enter here' because this is a journey into Edinburgh's darkest depths. Here you can find out about the city's gruesome past including torture chambers, diseases, and clan wars, and you can even wander into a haunted labyrinth. Spooky stuff.

5pm

As the sun goes down, shop for souvenirs immediately down from the castle on the Royal Mile, a long cobbled street lined with tourist attractions, cafés and Scottish-themed shops. If you want to buy Celtic music, shortbread or tartan cloth, this is the place to get it. Tartan is synonymous with Scottish ancestry, and if you've got Scottish blood in your veins you might be able to find your family's pattern here.

7pm

You will have no doubt worked up quite an appetite by now, so head to The Witchery, a lavish restaurant set in a historic 16th-century building next to the Castle. Ewan McGregor, Michael Douglas and Jack Nicholson have all dined here. Yes, it's a little expensive. But if you really want to treat yourself, then this has to be the most atmospheric and spectacular dining destination in town.

9pm

In the evening, relax by watching a show at The Stand, one of Edinburgh's top comedy venues. All year round this club showcases the best local talent around. Prepare to laugh yourself silly.

"The Scott Monument is a soaring Gothic sign of Scottish pride – beneath you're sure to find a lone bagpiper playing *Amazing Grace*"



SUNDAY

9am

It's your last day in Edinburgh, so do some shopping on Princes Street. This is no ordinary high street. Each year, it is home to the Hogmanay party on New Year's Eve, and all of its shops are restricted to one side of the road so as not to obstruct the view of Edinburgh Castle. Placed on Princes Street Gardens, the Scott Monument is a soaring Gothic sign of Scottish pride – it has 287 steps to the top. Beneath the monument you can be sure to find a lone bagpiper playing *Amazing Grace* while clad in a kilt – whatever the weather!

11.30am

Explore the New Town – a UNESCO World Heritage Site and the most prestigious neighbourhood in Edinburgh. Despite its name, it was actually built between 1765 and 1850, and retains much of the original neo-classical architecture. Nearby, you can take a stroll beside the picturesque Water of Leith – a river that runs from the Pentland Hills into the heart of Edinburgh.

12.30pm

There's just about time to grab a bite to eat, so if you get peckish in this part of town, then try out the newly-opened Gusto on George Street, which serves excellent Italian food at reasonable prices.

2pm

Unfortunately your 48 hours in Edinburgh has come to a close, but there's so much more to see and do. As you make your way back home with your suitcase full of souvenirs, imagine what you could do on your next visit...



FLY Flybe has flights to Edinburgh from Belfast, Bergerac, Birmingham, Cardiff, Exeter, Jersey, Manchester, Newquay, Norwich, Rennes and Southampton

On your next visit...

- Take a stroll along the beaches of Portobello, just 20 minutes from the city centre.
- Visit the National Museum of Flight at East Fortune Airfield, which showcases a potted history of aviation from the Spitfire to Concorde. It is also home to Scotland's only airshow, which takes place on July 26th 2008.
- Edinburgh is a great base for exploring the rest of Scotland. Many Highland tours begin at Edinburgh Castle, and, if you have enough time, you could book yourself on a range of one-day trips including visits to Loch Ness, Glencoe, Stirling Castle and the 'bonnie banks' of Loch Lomond.

