

The Best of Edinburgh & Glasgow

Given the contrasting reputations of Edinburgh and Glasgow, any traveler who hasn't examined a map of Scotland might be forgiven for thinking that they are separated by hundreds of miles. In fact, Scotland's two primary cities are only about 72km (45 miles) apart, but almost everyone who visits them will be struck by their differences.

And although there is a good deal of competition (and some envy, too) between the two cities—like The Beatles' Lennon and McCartney—they are strongest as a pair, each bringing value to the partnership.

Both cities contribute mightily—and equally—to the cultural vibrancy of the nation. With this in mind, the country would do well to improve the public transportation links between the two cities, especially in the wee small hours.

To the east, the capital, Edinburgh, has an almost fairy-tale setting, with its imposing castle high on one hill. Built on ancient volcanoes and first established because of its secure and defensible position, it has become a crossroads. Practically everyone who comes to Scotland today spends some time in Edinburgh. And its midsummer international Festival is one of the biggest in the world. Edinburgh is the second most popular tourist destination in Great Britain following London, and it's not hard to see why. Compact and tidy, it is more of a big town than a small city.

In the west, Glasgow, on the other hand, is not a place that anyone might call precious. In comparison to Edinburgh, Glasgow was settled much earlier because it was an ideal place to ford the River Clyde, which later gained a reputation for shipbuilding and industry. Today Glasgow resembles nothing but a modern city. It has overcome its 20th-century associations with grime, grit, and gangsters—and now it is arguably more vibrant than Edinburgh, with a vigorous indigenous music and art scene. Without a picturesque castle or twee palace, it exemplifies urban Scotland: historic, dynamic, increasingly cosmopolitan, and attuned to the world. In 1990, it was named European Culture Capital and in 1999, U.K. City of Architecture and Design.

Edinburgh and Glasgow have a lot to offer individually, and taken as a duo, they are more impressive still. Both cities are among Europe's most dynamic centers. Edinburgh is the seat of Scottish royalty and government, and urban Glasgow boasts lively culture and Victorian splendor.

1 Frommer's Favorite Edinburgh & Glasgow Experiences

- **Visiting a Pub:** In Edinburgh, there are a good number of more traditional pubs, many of which serve hand-pulled, cask-conditioned ales made in Scotland and England. Glasgow's scene is more modern, with several so-called "style" bars as well as the more traditional pubs. As the

evening wanes and you've established common ground with the locals, you'll realize you're having one of your most authentic Scottish experiences. We list our favorite pubs in chapters 10 and 18.

• **Experiencing Edinburgh's Famous Festival:**

The Edinburgh Festival has become one of world's most prestigious annual cultural events. In fact, it encompasses several "festivals" at once. While the International Festival is primarily devoted to classical music and dance, it's the Fringe that really draws people. There are hundreds of stages with music, drama, comedians, and other entertainers. Plus book, film, and jazz festivals take place between the end of July and the first of September. If you're planning to sample the many offerings, make your hotel and flight reservations early. See p. 96.

• **Savoring the Cuisine:**

No, we're not joking. Fresh fish and seafood harvested from Scotland's icy lochs and seas is world-class. Then there is lamb and Aberdeen Angus beef. If you think the food in Scotland is rotten, you've not been there in some time. Scotland, like Britain as a whole, has made leaps and bounds in improving the reputation of its cuisine. We review some of the best restaurants in chapters 6 and 14.

• **Enjoying Art in Galleries & Museums:**

Edinburgh is the home to the Scottish National Gallery, and the country's collection ranges from Renaissance painting to pop art sculptures. Glasgow has one of the best municipally owned collections of art in the U.K. and possibly Europe. The crowning glory for many critics is the Burrell Collection, which was bequeathed to the city by an industrialist, but the now restored Kelvingrove is the soul of the city's collection. For

the rundown on galleries and museums in both cities, see chapters 7 and 15.

• **Playing Golf:**

Yes, most people think of St. Andrews, Gleneagles, Troon, or Turnberry. But both Edinburgh and Glasgow have fine courses. The birthplace of the sport's rules is Edinburgh. While the historic Leith Links are no longer playable, the short course Bruntsfield Links, closer to the city center, can be played—and all you need is a ball, pitching wedge, and putter.

• **Strolling in Parks or Gardens:**

In the capital, you have the option of the Meadows, the splendid Royal Botanic Gardens, Holyrood Park, Arthur's Seat, or Calton Hill. Glasgow (which many believe means "Dear Green Place") has a host of options from Glasgow Green along the River Clyde to Kelvingrove Park in the salubrious West End. See chapters 7 and 15.

• **Shopping:**

Glasgow has become the second biggest retail playground in Britain after London. And, as no self-respecting city likes to be upstaged, Edinburgh is giving chase. There is a combination of posh department stores, such as Harvey Nichols; old favorites, such as the House of Fraser or Jenners; and plenty of trendy designer shops. For more details on shopping, see chapters 9 and 17.

• **Discovering Ancient Edinburgh:**

Just take a stroll off one of the many narrow lanes from the Royal Mile in the city's Old Town to get a sense of what ancient Edinburgh was like. Although not as well preserved as some continental examples of medieval Europe, it is not too bad. In addition to exploring on your own, walking tours will help to heighten the experience. See chapter 7.

- **Admiring Victorian Glasgow:** Glasgow's city fathers contemplated tearing down its Victorian-built heritage after World War II. It was perceived as old fashioned and not projecting the progressive image that they wanted. Thank goodness, someone talked some sense into them. Though

a lot of buildings have been (and continue to be knocked down), much remains to indicate that the Victorian builders were to the U.K. what ancient Romans were to Italy: masters of the craft. For walking tours that highlight Glasgow's best architecture, see chapter 16.

2 Best Castle & Palace

- **Edinburgh Castle:** It is a landmark that symbolizes this city in the way that the Eiffel Tower represents Paris or the Empire State Building exemplifies Manhattan. Begun around A.D. 1000 at the highest point of a narrow ridge, it is a natural fortress, with only one easy approach. The castle has witnessed some of the bloodiest and most treacherous events in Scottish history. Today it is home to the crown jewels and the famous stone of Scone on which ancient Scottish royalty was crowned. See p. 84.

- **Palace of Holyroodhouse:** At the opposite end of Edinburgh's Royal Mile from the Castle, Holyrood has housed an assortment of monarchs involved in traumatic events. Highlights of the palace are the oldest surviving section, King James Tower, where Mary Queen of Scots lived on the second floor. The building's present form largely dates from the late 1600s, when it was rebuilt in a dignified neo-Palladian style, and the pile remains an official residence for British royalty. See p. 88.

3 Best Cathedral & Churches

- **Glasgow Cathedral:** In the 7th century, St. Mungo (or St. Kentigern) is believed to have built a wooden structure here, intending it as his headquarters and eventual tomb. It burned down, but a stone cathedral was begun in the 1300s. This is mainland Scotland's only complete medieval cathedral, the finest example of its type. In the 1600s, the Protestant reformers stripped it of anything hinting at Roman Catholic idolatry, although Mungo still apparently rests here. See p. 193.
- **St. Giles:** In Edinburgh's Old Town, the auld kirk of St. Giles was perhaps a victim of over-enthusiastic Victorian

renovation, but it is still an imposing piece of ecclesiastical architecture. Here is where John Knox, Scotland's Martin Luther, preached his sermons on the Reformation. See p. 86.

- **St. Vincent Street Church:** Access is limited as the Free Church of Scotland is still using this kirk in Glasgow, but the landmark is a beautiful example of the work of Alexander "Greek" Thomson, Glasgow's largely unknown genius of the Victorian era. The clock tower is decorated in all manner of exotic yet sympathetic Egyptian, Assyrian, and even Indian-looking motifs and designs. See p. 194.

4 Best Galleries & Museums

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- **National Gallery of Scotland:** This is not one gallery but rather a set of museums. The flagship, on the Mound in the middle of the Princes Street Gardens, offers a small but choice collection that includes works by such great and diverse artists as Velázquez and Cézanne, plus Scottish master works. Other branches include the Gallery of Modern Art and the associated Dean near the Water of Leith, as well as the National Portrait Gallery on Queen Street. See p. 90 and 91.
- **Museum of Scotland:** In 1998, the collections of the Royal Museum of Scotland and the National Museum of Antiquities were united into a coherent whole. Here you'll find practically everything you ever wanted to know about Scotland from prehistory to the Industrial Age, from Pictish artifacts to a milk bottle carried by Sean Connery when he was a milkman. See p. 89.

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- **Burrell Collection:** The contents of this collection were accumulated

through the exclusive efforts of one Sir William Burrell (1861–1958), who basically spent his fortune on collecting art and artifacts—then ensured it all went to the city of Glasgow. Now on display in a postmodern building on Glasgow's Pollok Country Park, it's one of Scotland's most admired museums, with a strong focus on medieval art, 19th-century French paintings, and Chinese ceramics. See p. 196.

- **Hunterian Art Gallery:** This museum owns much of the artistic estate of James McNeill Whistler, as well as housing a re-creation of the home of Scotland's most famous architect and designer, Charles Rennie Mackintosh. On display are grand oils by Whistler, Reubens, and Rembrandt as well as one of the country's best collections of 19th-century Scottish paintings. See p. 195.
- **Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum:** Reopened in 2006, this diverse collection of art and antiquaries is in the second most visited gallery and museum in the U.K. outside of London. See p. 195.

Highlights of Historic Edinburgh

Gladstone's Land, now run by the National Trust for Scotland, is a 17th-century merchant's house and worth a visit to get the impression of how confined living conditions were some 400 years ago on the Royal Mile. On the second floor, in the front room that Gladstone added, you can see the original facade with its classical friezes of columns and arches. Here, as well, is the sensitively restored timber ceiling. See p. 85. Across town, the **Georgian House** is in Charlotte Square, which was designed by the great Robert Adam. This town house is set out and decorated in the manner of the 18th century. See p. 91.

5 Best in Great Glasgow Architecture

- **Glasgow School of Art:** Architect Charles Rennie Mackintosh's global reputation rests in large part on his magnificent Glasgow School of Art, which is still in use. It's a highlight of the Mackintosh trail, which legions of his fans follow through the city every year. Nearby is his groundbreaking facade for the Willow Tea Rooms. See p. 194.
- **Holmwood House:** On the city's Southside, this villa is probably the best example of Alexander "Greek" Thomson's innovative style as applied to stately Victorian homes. Magnificently original, its restoration (which is ongoing) has revealed that the architect was concerned with almost every element of the house's design. See p. 196.

6 Best Accommodations

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- **Best Boutique Hotel:** In an upscale neighborhood, **The Bonham**, 35 Drumsheugh Gardens (☎ 0131/226-6050), offers some of the most alluring accommodations in a city filled with fine hotels. Alternatively, the same company offers **The Howard**, 34 Great King St. (☎ 0131/557-3500). See p. 63 and 55.
- **Best Traditional Hotel:** With a Michelin-star restaurant, doormen in kilts, and a romantic pile to rival any others, the **Balmoral**, 1 Princes St. (☎ 0131/556-2414), is legendary, and its location is smack in the heart of the capital. See p. 55.
- **Best Rooms near the Castle:** As its list of celebrity guests testifies, the **Witchery**, Castlehill (☎ 0131/225-5613), offers opulence and individuality in a manner not seen anywhere else in the Old Town. See p. 61.
- **Best Hotel in Leith:** At the port of Leith, **Malmaison**, 1 Tower Place (☎ 0131/555-6868), is about a 15-minute ride north of Edinburgh's center. Named after Joséphine's mansion outside Paris, it celebrates the Auld Alliance of France and Scotland and was created from a 1900s Victorian building. Malmaison once housed indigent seamen but today is an oasis of chic. See p. 65.

- **Best Hotel Health Spa:** Near the city's conference center, the **Sheraton Grand**, 1 Festival Sq. (☎ 0131/229-9131), has wonderful facilities in an adjoining building, highlighted by a roof-top indoor/outdoor pool. See p. 63.

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- **Best Boutique Hotel:** In a West End neighborhood filled with similar sandstone-fronted town houses, **One Devonshire Gardens**, 1 Devonshire Gardens (☎ 0141/339-2001), still stands out. It's a re-creation of a high-bourgeois, very proper Scottish home from the early 1900s, boasting antique furnishings and discreetly concealed modern comforts. See p. 169.
- **Best Hip Hotel:** With only some 18 rooms, the **Brunswick Hotel**, 106–108 Brunswick St. (☎ 0141/552-0001), exudes cool in the city's Merchant City. The design is modern and minimalist but with character and class. See p. 166.
- **Best in the Commercial Center:** Linked to the hotel with the same name in Edinburgh (see above), this **Malmaison**, 278 W. George St. (☎ 0141/572-1000), is in a building that dates from the 1800s. It welcomes visitors with Scottish hospitality and houses them with quite a bit of style. See p. 168.

- **Best Moderately Priced Hotel:** In the leafy West End, **The Town House**, Hughenden Terrace (☎ 0141/357-

0862), is a fine small hotel with charm, individual touches, and competitive rates. See p. 172.

7 Best Dining Bets

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- **Best Fine-Dining Restaurant:** With one of the city's precious Michelin stars and its most talented chef/owners, **Restaurant Martin Wishart**, 54 The Shore, Leith (☎ 0131/553-3557), is where the leading out-of-town chefs want to dine when they visit Edinburgh. See p. 78.
- **Best Cafe:** In the heart of Old Town, **Spoon**, 15 Blackfriars St. (☎ 0131/556-6922), forks out some the best salads and sandwiches in Edinburgh—and the freshly made soups are even better. See p. 77.
- **Best Vegetarian Restaurant:** Near the Royal Mile, **David Bann's Vegetarian Restaurant**, 56–58 St. Mary's St. (☎ 0131/556-5888), continually sets the highest standards for meat-free dining. See p. 75.
- **Best Modern Scottish Restaurant:** Owned by Andrew and Lisa Radford, **Atrium**, 10 Cambridge St. (☎ 0131/228-8882), offers dishes prepared with flair and imagination but without excessive amounts of fuss or overly fancy presentation. See p. 69.
- **Best Restaurant Views:** It's a dead heat between **Oloroso**, 33 Castle St. (☎ 0131/226-7614), and **Forth Floor**, Harvey Nichols, 30–34 St. Andrew Sq. (☎ 0131/524-8350). Both offer wonderful cooking of fresh Scottish produce to go with those scenic vistas. See p. 72 and 69.
- **Best on a Budget:** Nothing fancy, but the **Kebab Mahal**, 7 Nicolson Sq. (☎ 0131/667-5214) serves up good, hearty Indian food at budget prices. See p. 78.

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- **Best Seafood Restaurant:** One of the consistently best restaurants in the entire city, **Gamba**, 225a W. George St. (☎ 0141/572-0899), specializes in superb seafood, showing off some of Scotland's best natural produce. See p. 181.
- **Best Indian Restaurant:** The competition is stiff, but the nod goes to **The Dhabba**, 44 Candleriggs (☎ 0141/221-1663), in the Merchant City for its North Indian specialties and contemporary interiors. See p. 179.
- **Best City Centre Fine-Dining Restaurant:** Newly opened in late 2005, **Michael Caines @ ABode** (☎ 0141/572-6011), is the one to watch in the commercial center with stylish and exceptional cooking. See p. 181.
- **Best Cafe:** Perhaps more of a bistro than cafe, **Café Gandolfi**, 64 Albion St. (☎ 0141/552-6813), offers straightforward and delicious dishes, whether a bowl of Cullen *skink* (smoked haddock chowder) or a sirloin steak sandwich. See p. 179.
- **Best in 'Burbs:** It may be the best in greater Glasgow: **The Wild Bergamot**, 1 Hillhead St., Milngavie (☎ 0141/956-6515), is tiny, but its reputation is increasingly large. See p. 185.
- **Best on a Budget:** A brief stroll from the shopping precincts of Sauchiehall Street, the **Wee Curry Shop**, 7 Buccleuch St. off Cambridge St. (☎ 0141/353-0777), is a tiny gem of a restaurant, serving freshly prepared Indian cuisine at bargain prices. See p. 183.

8 The Best Bars & Pubs

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- **Best in New Town:** In a city famous for its pubs, the **Café Royal Circle Bar**, 17 W. Register St. (☎ 0131/556-1884), stands out. This longtime favorite, boasting lots of atmosphere and Victorian trappings, attracts a sea of drinkers—locals as well as visitors. See p. 130.
- **Best in Stockbridge:** At the heart of the village of Stockbridge, **The Bailie Bar**, 2 St. Stephen St. (☎ 0131/225-4673), usually has plenty of banter between the regulars and the staff, and no music ever drowns out the conversation here. See p. 130.
- **Best in Old Town:** Just below the castle, the **Bow Bar**, 80 W. Bow (☎ 0131/226-7667), pours some of the best ales in town in a traditional and comfortable pub with a good whisky selection, too. See p. 131.
- **Best in Leith: The Shore**, 3–4 The Shore (☎ 0131/553-5080), fits seamlessly into the seaside port ambience, without resorting to a lot of the usual decorations of cork and netting. Excellent food, too. See p. 132.
- **Best for Folk Music:** It is a tossup between **Sandy Bell's**, 25 Forrest Rd. (☎ 0131/225-2751), and the **Royal Oak**, 1 Infirmary St. (☎ 0131/557-2967), when it comes to spontaneous Scottish folk and poetry. Try both if this is your bag. See p. 128.

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- **Best in the Commercial Center:** With its long, horseshoe-shaped bar and central location, the **Horse Shoe**, 17 Drury St. between Renfield & W. Nile sts. (☎ 0141/229-5711), is a throwback to the days of so-called Palace Pubs in Scotland. See p. 237.
- **Best in the Merchant City:** Unless you are looking for a style bar (of which there are plenty), the **Babbity Bowster**, 16 Blackfriars St. (☎ 0141/552-5055), is ideal for a drink and some conversation, although live folk music jams take over on Saturday afternoons. See p. 237.
- **Best in the West End:** The competition is furious and the selection is vast, but we'll give the nod to **Brel**, 39–43 Ashton Lane (☎ 0141/342-4966), for its combination of good ambience, excellent location, and decent Belgian-inspired grub. See p. 238.
- **Best for Whisky:** With a selection of single malts that numbers easily into the hundreds, the **Pot Still**, 154 Hope St. (☎ 0141/333-0980), is the place to go for a wee dram. See p. 237.
- **Best for Rock Music:** It is a tossup between the near legendary **King Tut's Wah-Wah Hut**, 272 St. Vincent St. (☎ 0141/221-5279), or **Nice 'n' Sleazy**, 421 Sauchiehall St. (☎ 0141/333-9637), and both draw the best in local indie band talent. See p. 235.