

The Best of Edinburgh & Glasgow

Given the contrasting reputations of Edinburgh and Glasgow, any travelers who haven'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 is planning to improve the public transportation links between the two cities, expanding the frequency of trains in the evening and contemplating running them past midnight.

To the east, Edinburgh offers a famous and almost fairy-tale like setting, with an imposing castle high on one of many hills. Built on ancient volcanoes and first established because of its secure and defensible position, the capital of Scotland 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. Glasgow was settled earlier than its cross-country rival 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; in 1999, U.K. City of Architecture and Design; and in 2014 it will host the Commonwealth Games.

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 traditional British pubs, many of which serve hand-pulled, cask-conditioned ales made in Scotland and England. Glasgow's scene is overall more modern, with several so-called

“style” bars. As the evening wanes and you’ve established common ground with the locals (easier done in Glasgow than Edinburgh), you’ll realize you’re having one of your most authentic Scottish experiences. I list my favorite pubs in chapters 11 and 19.

- **Experiencing Edinburgh’s Famous Festival:**

The Edinburgh Festival is one of Europe’s (if not the world’s) most prestigious annual cultural events. In fact, it encompasses several “festivals” at once. The International Festival is primarily devoted to classical music and dance, while the so-called Fringe hosts the most acts and draws the largest audiences to hundreds of stages with music, drama, comedians, and other entertainers. Furthermore a huge international book festival occurs simultaneously, while smaller jazz and TV festivals compete at the edges. If you’re planning to visit Edinburgh in August, make your hotel reservations early. See p. 100.

- **Savoring the Cuisine:**

No, I’m not joking. Fresh fish and seafood harvested from Scotland’s icy lochs and seas are world-class. Then there are lamb and Aberdeen Angus beef. If you believe the food in Scotland is rotten, you’ve not been there in some time. It has made leaps and bounds in improving the reputation of its cuisine. I review some of the best restaurants in chapters 7 and 15.

- **Enjoying Art Galleries & Museums:**

Edinburgh is the home to the National Galleries of Scotland, and the country’s collection (held in five different buildings) ranges from Renaissance painting to pop art. Meanwhile, Glasgow has one of the best municipal holdings of art in Europe. The crowning glory for many critics is the Burrell Collection, a host of art and artifacts bequeathed to the city by an industrialist, but the Victorian Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum has the soul of the city’s collection. For the lowdown on galleries and

museums in both cities, see chapters 8 and 16.

- **Playing Golf:**

Sure, most people think only of St. Andrews, which frequently hosts the Open in Britain. But both Edinburgh and Glasgow (and the regions nearby) have fine courses. The birthplace of the sport’s rules is Edinburgh, and its historic short course, Bruntsfield Links, can be played during summer for free—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 splendid Royal Botanic Gardens, Holyrood Park, and Arthur’s Seat, the Meadows, 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 8 and 16.

- **Shopping:**

Glasgow has become the second biggest shopping playground in Britain after London. And, as no self-respecting city likes to be upstaged when it comes to retail therapy, 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 10 and 18.

- **Exploring Ancient Edinburgh:**

Take a wander down one of the many narrow lanes off the Royal Mile in the city’s Old Town to begin to get a sense of what Medieval Edinburgh was like. In addition to exploring on your own, my walking tours should help to heighten the experience. See chapter 9.

- **Admiring Victorian Glasgow:**

Glasgow actually contemplated tearing down its Victorian-built heritage after World War II. It was perceived as old fashioned. Thank goodness it didn’t happen. Though a lot of buildings have

been knocked down, the Victorian builders were to the U.K. what ancient Romans were to Italy: masters at the

craft. For walking tours that highlight Glasgow's best architecture, see chapter 17.

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 rocky, narrow ridge, it is a natural fortress. The castle has been the locus of many historic events and battles. It remains an active military barracks, as well as tourist attraction with the crown jewels and the famous stone of Scone on which ancient Scottish royalty was coronated. See p. 85.
- **Palace of Holyroodhouse:** At the opposite end of Edinburgh's Royal Mile from the Castle, Holyroodhouse is the historic and current Royal residence. "Rood" means "cross," and abbey ruins adjacent to the mansion date to 1128. The building's present form largely dates from the late 1600s, when it was rebuilt in a dignified neo-Palladian style, but the best bits are in the oldest wing, where Mary, Queen of Scots stayed. See p. 91.

3 BEST CATHEDRALS & CHURCHES

- **Glasgow Cathedral:** In the 7th century, a Celtic religious pilgrim called St. Mungo (or St. Kentigern) is believed to have started a monastery on the site of Glasgow Cathedral, consecrated in the 1130s. This is mainland Scotland's only fully intact medieval cathedral, and while the Protestant reformation stripped it of Roman Catholic idolatry, St. Mungo apparently lies in the crypt. See p. 193.
- **St. Giles Cathedral:** 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. 89.
- **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

EDINBURGH

- **National Galleries of Scotland:** The country's art collection is held in a set of buildings, collectively known as the National Galleries. The flagship, in the Princes Street Gardens, offers a choice collection of works by artists such as Velázquez and Cézanne, plus Scottish master works. Other branches include the Gallery of Modern Art and the associated Dean Gallery near the Water of Leith, as well as the National Portrait

Highlights of Historic Edinburgh

Gladstone's Land, owned by the National Trust for Scotland, is a 17th-century merchant's house near Edinburgh Castle. Visit it to get an impression of just how cramped living conditions were—even for the rich—some 400 years ago. On the second floor, you can also see the original exterior facade with its classical friezes of columns and arches, as well as the painted timber ceiling. Across town, the **Georgian House** is on Charlotte Square, which was designed by the great Robert Adam around the time of the American Revolution. This town house is set out and decorated in the manner of the 18th century. See p. 94.

Gallery on Queen Street. See p. 92 and 94.

- **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, housed in an attractive modern building. See p. 92.

GLASGOW

- **Burrell Collection:** The contents of this gallery were accumulated by industrialist Sir William Burrell (1861–1958), who spent much of his fortune on collecting art and artifacts—then ensuring it all went to the city of Glasgow. Now on

display in a postmodern building in 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. 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.

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 used by students and is open for guided tours. It's a highlight of a Mackintosh heritage trail, which draws legions of fans to Glasgow. Nearby is another Mackintosh landmark, 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 mansions. 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.

EDINBURGH

- **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. See p. 67.
- **Best Traditional Hotel:** With a Michelin star-winning restaurant, doormen dressed in kilts, and romantic views to rival any other, the **Balmoral**, 1 Princes St. (☎ 0131/556-2414), is legendary and located in the heart of the capital. See p. 61.
- **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. 66.
- **Best Hotel in Leith:** About a 15-minute ride north of Edinburgh's center, **Malmaison**, 1 Tower Place (☎ 0131/468-5000), is an oasis of chic on the Leith waterfront. See p. 69.
- **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. 68.

GLASGOW

- **Best Boutique Hotel:** In the city's attractive West End, **Hotel du Vin**, 1 Devonshire Gardens (☎ 0141/339-2001), stands out, boasting antique furnishings and modern comforts. See p. 172.
- **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 Leith (see above), **Malmaison**, 278 W. George St. (☎ 0141/572-1000), houses guests with quite a bit of style. See p. 170.

7 BEST DINING BETS

EDINBURGH

- **Best Fine-Dining Restaurant:** With a precious Michelin star and the city's most talented chef/owner, **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. 82.
- **Best Cafe:** In the heart of Old Town, **Spoon**, 15 Blackfriars St. (☎ 0131/556-6922), forks out some the best soups, salads, and sandwiches in Edinburgh. See p. 80.
- **Best Vegetarian Restaurant:** Near the Royal Mile, **David Bann**, 56–58 St. Mary's St. (☎ 0131/556-5888), continually sets the highest standards for meat-free dining. See p. 79.
- **Best Modern Scottish Restaurant:** Above the Traverse Theatre, **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. 73.
- **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. 76 and 73.

- **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. 81.

GLASGOW

- **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 (☎ 0141/553-1249), in the Merchant City for its North Indian specialties and contemporary interior. See p. 180.
- **Best Bistro:** More of a bistro despite its name, **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. 180.
- **Best Cool Cafe:** Groovy but not pretentious, **Where the Monkey Sleeps**, 182 W. Regent St. (☎ 0141/226-3406), makes sandwiches that are as delicious as their names are ridiculous.
- **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. 184.

8 BEST BARS & PUBS

EDINBURGH

- **Best in New Town:** In a city famous for its pubs, the **Cafe Royal Circle Bar**, 17 W. Register St. (☎ 0131/556-1884), stands out, boasting lots of atmosphere and gas-light, frosted-glass Victorian-style design. See p. 133.
- **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. 133.
- **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 whiskey selection, too. See p. 134.
- **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. 135.

- **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. 131.

GLASGOW

- **Best in the Commercial Center:** With its long, horseshoe-shaped bar and central location, the **Horse Shoe**, 17 Drury St. between Renfield and W. Nile sts. (☎ 0141/229-5711), is a throwback to the days of so-called Palace Pubs in Scotland. See p. 235.
- **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. See p. 236.

- **Best in the West End:** The competition is furious and the selection is vast, but I'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. 236.
- **Best for Whiskey:** 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. 236.
- **Best for Rock Music:** It's a tossup between the near legendary **King Tut's Wah Wah Hut**, 272 St. Vincent St. (☎ 0141/221-5279), and **Nice 'n' Sleazy**, 421 Sauchiehall St. (☎ 0141/333-9637), and both draw the best in local indie band talent. See p. 234.