
Scotland / Edinburgh

Edinburgh a city of 630.000 inhabitants was named after King Edwin, who in the 7th century was the first to build a castle on the rock (Edwin's Burgh). The city, beautifully situated on seven hills, is the administrative, economic and cultural heart of Scotland. It has both the charm of a small town and the grandeur of a European capital.

The center of Edinburgh is divided in two by the railway and Princes Street gardens which used to be Nor' Loch (loch is the Scottish word for lake) and before that a hunting forest for the kings. with on one side the Medieval Old Town, with castles and museums, and on the other the 19th century New Town with beautifully designed houses and shops.

Apart from its magnificent architecture Edinburgh also has a lot of parks. There are the beautiful Princes Street Gardens right in the very heart of town and not very far away you will find the gorgeous Royal Botanic Gardens. To the South-West of the town you will find the Pentland hills and to the east Holyrood Park with Salisbury Crags and Arthurs Seat.

Telephone and time difference

Access code to USA 010: USA direct 0800-89-0011 (a special AT&T service). To phone England/Scotland: 44; Time difference (Eastern Daylight) plus 5 hours.

Climate

Daily temperatures average in the 60s F (about 16°C) in summer and hover around 40°F (6°C) in December, January and February (be prepared for surprises, though). Winter is somewhat wetter than summer. The mainly South-Westerly winds cause mild winters and variable summers. An umbrella is a useful thing to pack. Near the coast, mornings can be foggy, but the mist usually disappears before noon.

Museums and Sights

The Old Town is the area around the castle to the south of Princes Street and offers most sights. The Royal Mile stretches from the castle on the hill to Holyrood Palace in the valley. Along the way it is known by different names, (Castle Hill, Lawn Market, High Street, Cannongate and Abbey Strand) though it is all regarded as the Royal Mile. Edinburgh Castle dates from the 7th century, though most of what you see today dates from the Middle Ages. The oldest complete building in the Castle is Queen Margaret's chapel which dates from the 12th century. In the vaults the oldest cannon in Europe, Mons Meg, can be seen. From the Half Moon battery a cannon is fired daily and one o'clock pm.

Holyrood Palace on the other side of the Royal Mile is The Royal Palace in which the son of Mary Queen of Scots was born. He became James VI of Scotland and later, upon the death of Elizabeth, James I of England uniting the two kingdoms. The Scottish Crown jewels are in this castle, they are the oldest in Europe. Along the Royal Mile you will find the Castle Esplanade where the tattoo is held every August; the Scotch Whisky Heritage Center, a museum and shop; the Camera Obscura; the Assembly Hall; Parliament House; the City Chambers; the Wax Museum and several old churches and beautifully restored town houses.

Theatre and Nightlife

A city like Edinburgh has a lot to offer its visitors. Especially in August when the Edinburgh festival is in progress and the streets are full of "fringe" actors trying to arouse interest in their productions. But during the rest of the year as well the city offers all sorts of possibilities. Edinburgh is small enough to walk around the center and explore things for yourself. The booklet "What's on in Edinburgh" offers all sorts of information.

Some suggestions: The Kings Theatre (2 Leven Street) offers musicals, plays and cabaret. Closing times for pubs are quite relaxed in Scotland but many still close at eleven (they are, however, usually open all though the day) Try: The Beehive (Grassmarket) or the Jolly Judge, (James Court near the Royal Mile). For nightclubs try: Madhatters, (126 High Street),Coaster Complex, (3 West Tollcross), or the Disco Buster Browns (25 Market Street).

Shopping

Shops are generally open from 9 am to 5.30 pm daily except Sundays. Large department stores and some other shops open on a specific night of the week, depending on the area. The most interesting shopping areas can be found in the New Town. The main shopping street is Princes Street which is unusual in only having shops on one side of the road, the other side is a park. In this street you will find the Department store "Jennings". Another shopping street is George street which connects St. Andrew Square with Charlotte Square this street is often referred to as the "Golden Mile". At the Grassmarket in the Old Town you will find many small antique shops and restaurants.

Excursions

Linlithgow: a town of 6000 inhabitants situated on Loch Linlithgow. The palace used to be a favorite with the Scottish Kings and often the Scottish parliament met here. Linlithgow was also very important as a market place and center of trade.

East High street crosses the center of town and boasts a beautiful fountain; The Cross. Another fountain can be found in the Palace. The palace is open daily and is of great historical interest being the birthplace of James V of Scotland and his daughter Mary, queen of Scots.

Falkirk: Falkirk in Roman times was one of a number of fortresses built by Agricola. The fortresses were connected by Antonines wall. Parts of the Fortress can still be seen in Rough castle (near Camelon) and parts of the wall are still standing in Callendar Park. Falkirk has a museum dedicated to its history. In Callender Park there is a huge house built in the style of a French chateaux and dating from the 16th century. Mary Queen of Scots spent a lot of her childhood there. It is now a beautiful museum.

Dunfermline: Dunfermline now a town of some 53,000 inhabitants used to be capital of Scotland and many famous kings were born here. Among them James I in 1394 and Charles I in 1600. Many kings lie buried in the Benedictine Abbey dating from the 11th century. Dunfermline Abbey and church are well worth visiting. Underneath the Abbey remains have been found of two even older churches a Celtic and a Roman one.

St. Margarets Street near the Abbey leads to Andrew Carnegies birthplace. This is now a Museum. Andrew Carnegie (who lived from 1835 to 1919 and emigrated to the USA) gave large amounts of money to charity. To Dunfermline he gave Pittencrieff Park, a library and a concert-hall. He opened over 3000 libraries all over the world. He is most famous nowadays for contributions to Carnegie Hall/New York and the Peace Palace/the Hague.