

40 hours

Edinburgh

Auld Reekie has a dazzling array of attractions, but there are plenty of new ones to be found, writes Edinburgh local **Kirsten Henton**

The Scottish capital is far from being undiscovered, but for such an old favourite, it excels at reinventing itself. Over the past few years, Edinburgh has welcomed a slew of chic hotels and cool cafes, bars and restaurants, proving it's possible to offer style and substance in a city with cosmopolitan flair.

The main attractions – be it Edinburgh Castle, Holyrood Palace or the views from the Scott Monument or across Dean Village – continue to narrate the city's often turbulent, always fascinating, journey from the ancient to the modern. And with more rail services and flights available, Edinburgh is easier to get to than ever. ➤

ASK THE
expert



Emilie Lumineau
The Real Mary
King's Close

"The Old Town is filled with hidden vaults and underground streets, best seen on a guided tour. We are proud to share the stories of the people who lived and died on these now-hidden streets. Guests learn about the history and walk on the city's only preserved 7th-century street."

FROM FAR LEFT:
Victoria Street; 100 Princes Street;
The Balmoral Clock Tower;
National Museum of Scotland; Dean
Village; Edinburgh Castle;
Calton Hill; The Shore, Leith

PICTURES: VisitScotland/Kenny Lam;
Shutterstock/Eleni Gogos, minizen



DAY ONE

09.00: Start the day in the heart of the Old Town with a stroll up Victoria Street, whose cobbles and brightly coloured buildings have made it one of the most photographed in the city. Recommend visiting the independent shops after grabbing a freshly brewed coffee and patisserie at intimate La Barantine.

10.00: Discover the capital's tumultuous religious evolution inside Edinburgh's High Kirk, St Giles' Cathedral, which is celebrating its 900th anniversary. This grey giant represents Edinburgh's past and present, welcoming all under its roof to see a hotchpotch of architectural styles dating from the 12th to the 20th centuries. The decorative Thistle Chapel is unmissable.

11.30: A little further along the Royal Mile, only the brave should go beneath Edinburgh City Chambers to see what remains of the original Mary King's Close – its

ramshackle houses were partially demolished to make way for the City Chambers in the 18th century. Visitors can wander through the narrow streets, learning how the plague affected Edinburgh's families – and see if they can spot the ghosts said to haunt these passages.

13.00: A short stroll from the High Street will take clients to the popular viewpoint and Unesco-listed site of Calton Hill, an extinct volcano topped with a mishmash of monuments and an observatory. Next, it's a descent to laid-back Edinburgh Street Food, where a cacophony of neon lights and food stalls will see to lunch.

14.00: After a pit stop, clients can work it off on one of Edinburgh's longest streets, Leith Walk. Having evolved from a medieval footpath to a rather insalubrious thoroughfare, today the 1.2-mile stretch is a busy ribbon of independent shops that are perfect for picking up souvenirs. It leads from Edinburgh's East End to Scotland's leading port,

immortalised in countless songs and films such as *Sunshine on Leith* and *Trainspotting*. If walking is out of the question, a tram extension from Newhaven, following the Leith Walk, opened last year.

Argonaut Books is lined with beautifully covered tomes begging to be read, while nearby Pekoe Tea offers a refreshing stop before you arrive at The Shore, where the Water of Leith river spills into the Firth of Forth and the quaysides are lined with restaurants and historic warehouses. Visit on a Saturday (10am-4pm) to browse the stalls of Leith Market, which sells everything from handmade bread and dog treats to candles.

Stop at Coburg House for its gallery and shop, then enjoy a quick pint at Lost in Leith, which will have you pointing in the right direction for Ocean Terminal. Queen Elizabeth II's royal yacht *Britannia* is moored here – the ship is now part museum, part hotel and one of the UK's top attractions. Plus, there's the Leith Collective, an outlet selling gifts and art – well worth the detour.

17.30: If clients have a head for heights and a taste for whisky, suggest they stop at the world's tallest distillery for a 90-minute tour. Visitors to the nine-storey Port of Leith Distillery, which opened in late 2023, will enjoy an engaging, expert-led walk through the whisky distilling process, with the chance to fill up a miniature bottle to take home, as well as to taste younger spirits. The rooftop bar is an ideal spot for dessert, with small plates and sundowners accompanying epic views across the city and Fife.

19.30: There's no shortage of great-value pubs and restaurants serving Scottish produce in Leith, but for something a little special, look no further than the coolest kid on the waterfront, Heron. Lauded for its on-point tasting and à la carte menus, as well as its stylish and relaxed atmosphere, it's the place to taste creatively prepared plates of cold-water fish, homegrown fruit and veg plus cocktails infused with made-in-Scotland spirits.

DAY TWO

09.00: Those staying in the city centre can take a wander through fairytale-esque Dean Village towards the refined Stockbridge neighbourhood for breakfast at The Pantry, a local institution dishing up plates of good food, simply served. Hot filled rolls, fry-ups and brunch staples, such as waffles, will set diners up for the day's adventures.

10.30: Fresh from a £38 million refurb, the Scottish National Gallery reopened in autumn 2023 with 12 new galleries to house its expanding collection of Scottish art dating from 1800 to 1945. Art lovers should wander through its hallowed halls to see icons such as Sir Edwin Landseer's *The Monarch of the Glen* – a noble stag staring into the middle distance – and Sir Henry Raeburn's *The Skating Minister* in this oasis of creative and historic calm. Tea and scones are optional.

12.00: For a Mexican kick to spice up the day, suggest the bright

lights of Taco Libre for freshly made tortillas and mouth-tingling flavours. Squeezed into a corner of the West End, the best way is to start small and order as the plates empty, as portions are generous. The Baja fish tacos drizzled in chipotle mayo and salsa-laden veggie nachos will power you through the afternoon.

14.00: Hit the waves at Lost Shore Surf, a 25-minute drive from the city centre. Opening in October 2024, this state-of-the-art watery playground is set to be Europe's largest inland surfing destination. Book clients in for a lesson or a session to ride the tide of this exciting new hub, which will also feature a food market, spa, activity park and even options to

BOOK IT

Osprey Holidays offers three nights' B&B at 100 Princes Street from £998 per person, including flights from Gatwick on November 20 and 15kg luggage allowance. Tickets for The Real Mary King's Close cost £31. For a rail alternative, three nights' B&B in a standard room at the Voco Edinburgh – Royal Terrace costs from £377 per person, including train tickets from King's Cross on November 4. ospreyholidays.com

stay in one of its contemporary lodges or decked-out pods.

17.00: Another day, another chance to sample the capital's spirits at the new Edinburgh Gin Distillery experience. In a toast to the city's gin-making heritage, the expansive new site in the Old Town – due to open on November 29 – will offer tours, tastings and double measures of history and botanical insights.

19.30: For an elegant dinner, recommend The Palmerston, a brasserie with a daily-changing menu set in a former bank in the West End. It's the perfect place to savour Scotland on a plate, with a menu featuring seasonal, fully provenanced produce. **TW**

WHERE TO STAY

Edinburgh's accommodation offering has ramped up in recent years, with big-name openings such as the **Gleneagles Townhouse** (pictured) and the swish **W Edinburgh**, with its wraparound city views. The newest addition, **100 Princes Street**, part of The Red Carnation Hotel Collection, offers stays in a sumptuous revamp of the Royal Overseas League's headquarters. A place where period design meets kitschy boutique, this central townhouse is decorated with a selection of quirky artwork plus handcrafted furniture, tartan wallpaper and a jungle of plants. Each of the 30 rooms and suites has a bespoke design, while The Wallace bar serves up views of Edinburgh Castle.

