Practical Information

This section covers all the pre-travel basics to help you plan your trip - and how to get around once you’ve arrived. This is where to find out what paperwork you’ll need, what to do about currency, food, avoiding cultural faux pas, web access, public transport, car rental, what plug to use – everything you need to feel informed, confident and ready to travel.
Planning Your Visit

1 When to Go
Scotland is a year-round destination, with continuous natural attractions, events and festivals. But outside the busy summer season, many sights, such as historic houses, either close or operate erratic opening hours. Surprisingly, the weather rarely causes disruptions to transport, but it is unpredictable even at the best of times.

2 Scotland’s Weather
A maritime position ensures Scotland’s highly variable weather pattern. The east is drier than the west, but rain can occur throughout the year, and heavy snowfalls are possible in winter – seldom lasting longer than a few days, except in the hills. Average summer temperatures are 15–22°C (59–72°F); average winter temperatures 1–7°C (34–45°F).

3 For How Long?
It may look small on the map, but that can be deceptive. Though only 275 miles (440 km) long, Scotland is endowed with 6,200 miles (10,000 km) of coastline and has 787 major islands. So… allow as long as you can spare.

4 Immigration Laws
As with the rest of the UK, a valid passport is required to be shown on entry. Visitors from the European Union (EU), United States and Canada, Australia and New Zealand do not require visas, nor inoculations. Other nationals should check current regulations.

5 Opening Hours
Most shops are open 9am–5:30pm Mon–Sat. City shops usually have one late-night shopping (often until 8pm Thu) and many are now open Sun, too. Town shops often close 1pm Sat and may take an afternoon off during the week.

6 High Seasons and Holidays
What defines the “high season” (when demand and prices are at their highest) varies, but generally there are three key periods: Hogmanay (New Year), Easter and Jul–Aug. The main holidays in Scotland are 1–2 Jan, Good Friday (end Mar–early Apr), first and last Mon in May, first Mon in Aug, and 25–26 Dec.

7 Electricity and Sockets
Voltage is 220/240v 50Hz. Most places use three square-pin sockets with 3-, 5- or 13-amp fuses. Buy an adaptor at your departure airport, but check the voltage requirements of your appliances first. Most hotel bathrooms have two-pronged sockets for shavers.

8 Books and Maps
For some background reading try Magnus Magnusson’s Scotland – The Story of a Nation, June Skinner Sawyers’ The Road North, and Alastair Scott’s humorous travels, Native Stranger. For guidance on the ground, many maps of Scotland are produced, some showing tourist attractions. These are useful, but the best maps for walkers are the Ordnance Survey Landranger (1:50,000) and Explorer (1:25,000) series. They are widely available throughout Scotland and are essential for any serious walking.

9 What to Pack
An umbrella, warm clothes (even heavier ones for winter) and a waterproof jacket or coat. The older, established restaurants may require men to wear a jacket and tie, but this is becoming less prevalent. Also, check out the Getting Around Scotland section for special tickets that must be purchased before you enter the UK.

10 Smoking
Although smoking is banned in many public places, such as cinemas and theatres, some restaurants still have smoking sections. Cigarettes maintain a strong hold over a large section of Scotland’s population, and pubs remain cherished dens for smokers. In city bars, expect to contend with a thick nicotine fog.

Sources of Information

1 Visit Scotland
Visit Scotland is the renamed Scottish Tourist Board. It promotes Scotland as a visitor destination, provides good general information, publishes brochures and has a website – an excellent place to start planning your trip.

2 Visit Britain
Visit Britain operates information offices in many cities around the world. Check their internet site or the British Embassy in your capital city.

3 Regional Tourist Information
Scotland has no shortage of regional tourist information offices. Most regions have several main offices open all year round, as well as smaller offices open during the summer months. These are listed throughout this guide.

4 Historic Scotland
Many of Scotland’s oldest buildings are under the custodianship of this organization. If you intend visiting several it may be cheaper to become a member or buy a 3-day Scottish Explorer ticket.

5 National Trust for Scotland
This is the other large organization that cares for Scotland’s exceptional buildings – mainly stately homes and castles. By buying a 3-, 7- or 14-day Discovery Ticket (individual or family), you are allowed entry to as many NTS properties as you can visit in the time.

6 Activity Holidays
Scotland is a breath of fresh air for the outdoor person. Skiing, cycling, riding, walking, sailing and watersports all have specialist organizations promoting their sports and providing advice on how visitors can enjoy them.

7 Taste of Scotland.com
For epicureans, Taste of Scotland is an organization that samples all kinds of places and lists those of a good or high standard, though its listing is not comprehensive.
The ToS also publicizes food festivals, events and farmers’ markets.

8 Bird and Wildlife Organizations
The Scottish Wildlife Trust operates several sanctuaries equipped with hides, and Scottish Natural Heritage manages sites of environmental interest and special habitats. The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds also has reserves across Scotland.

9 Car Breakdown Services
Although there are several smaller breakdown services, the main two are the AA (Automobile Association) and the RAC (Royal Automobile Club). Rental cars usually include free breakdown cover.

10 Local Sources
In Britain, visitor attractions are posted on brown road signs with white letters. Also check village notice boards and local newspapers for forthcoming events.

Getting to Scotland

1 International Airports and Connections
Scotland has four international airports: Edinburgh, 7 miles from city centre (coaches every 8–20 mins, taxis approx £15); Glasgow, 8 miles from city centre (coaches every 15–30 mins, taxis approx £15); Prestwick, 30 miles from Glasgow city centre (trains every 30 mins, coaches every hour, taxi approx £45); Aberdeen, 7 miles from city centre (coaches at peak times, taxis approx £12.50).

2 By Air from North America
Air Canada, Continental and American Airlines fly direct to Scotland. Other transatlantic airlines fly to London, where connecting flights are plentiful.

3 By Air from Europe
Direct flights into Scotland operate from many European cities, including Amsterdam, Copenhagen, Brussels, Frankfurt, Paris, Madrid and Dublin.

4 By Air from within the UK
Eight airlines provide regular services from cities in the UK. By far the greatest frequency of flights is out of London Heathrow and Gatwick. However, airlines other than British Airways and bmi usually depart from Stansted, Luton or London City Airport.

5 By Ferry
A new superfast ferry from Zeebrugge to Rosyth (Edinburgh) sails daily and takes 16 hrs. There are summer services from Iceland and Norway to Lerwick, and several companies provide year-round daily links to Scotland from Belfast.

6 By Train
Eurostar is the high-speed passenger rail service operating from European cities to London. From here there are frequent trains to Edinburgh (4 hrs) and Glasgow (5 hrs).

7 By Coach
Day and night services operate out of London and other major UK cities. Reliable and much cheaper than trains (some fantastic deals if you plan ahead), but journeys are longer and comfort more restricted.

8 Coach and Rail Termini
Edinburgh and Glasgow’s principal train stations are Waverley and Central respectively. Both are in the middle of town. Edinburgh’s main coach station is on St Andrew’s Square in the New Town; Glasgow’s is opposite the Royal Concert Hall at the east end of Sauchiehall St.

9 By Car
The M6, A68 and, partially coastal, A1 are the main road routes into Scotland, the latter two for Edinburgh, the former for Glasgow. No border controls, just a “Welcome to Scotland” sign.

10 Internet Bargains
Many airlines and transport companies now undercut their agents by selling cheaper tickets directly through their websites. If you can plan well ahead and be flexible about dates, you get the best deals, but last-minute bargains are also possible.

Getting Around Scotland

1 By Air
Scotland has an excellent internal air network connecting regional airports and the islands with the main airports of Aberdeen, Edinburgh, Glasgow and Inverness. British Regional Airlines offer a Highland Rover Pass: five flights within the Highlands. Buy it at least 7 days before you arrive in the UK; contact British Airways for details.

2 By Train
Britrail offers several types of rover ticket, all of which must be bought before you get to the UK. Scotrail issue several rover tickets for sale in the UK, some of which allow access to ferries as well.

3 By Bus
Many local bus services operate but Scottish Citylink is the largest provider, serving over 200 towns and cities. City buses don’t give change and their Day Tickets are cheaper after 9.30am.

4 Coach and Mini-Bus Tours
Plenty of companies offer tours of various durations and standards of accommodation. Two renowned minibus-and-hostel tour companies are Rabbie’s Trail Burners and MacBackpackers.

5 Ferries
Caledonian MacBrayne is the largest ferry company and works the majority of west coast routes, but smaller companies also run ferries to and around Scotland’s 130 inhabited islands.

6 Car
Roads vary from single tracks to motorways and are generally of a high standard. There are no tolls except on the Forth, Tay, Erskine and Skye bridges. The Highway
Taxis
Taxis are regulated and legally obliged to display a licence number. City taxis should be metered but in remote areas unmetered cars operate – ask for the fare before you get in.

Cycling
There are some great long distance and city cycle networks. Unfortunately, provisions for bike transport on trains is dire – book well in advance to reserve some of the limited space.

On Foot
With over a dozen major walking routes and thousands of marked footpaths, Scotland is a great place for the foot traveller. Scotland’s access laws are much more lenient than England’s, and walkers who do not cause damage or interfere with privacy or estate activities are generally allowed to wander the land freely.

Passing Places
Single-track roads have passing places to allow faster traffic behind you to overtake, and to allow two cars travelling in opposite directions to get past each other. When two cars meet between passing places, the car nearest to it should reverse and (keeping to the left) pull into, or stop opposite, the passing place.

Things to Avoid

Traffic Snarls
Congestion around Edinburgh, Glasgow and the Forth Road Bridge is becoming a daily occurrence. Into-city queues build up from 7:30 to 8am and out-of-city from 4.30 to 6pm. If you can, avoid these areas during the rush hours. Radio Scotland (810 MW/92–94 FM) issues frequent road reports at peak periods.

Football Match Crowds
Not a serious problem for visitors as football is not a summer sport and fans are usually well behaved. However, they can be boisterous and noisy, and cause traffic congestion.

Midges
These minute flies, which come in clouds and cause itching bites, are the curse of the west coast. They love warm, windless evenings and boggy terrain. From the end of May to mid-Sep they can pop up to ruin an al fresco evening. Dozens of repellents are available, but the wonder cure has yet to appear. Midge nets are essential for campers.

Early Closings
In remoter parts of Scotland and particularly on the islands, the volume of trade does not justify long opening hours, so it’s easy to be caught out. Don’t assume that shops or restaurants will be open late. And in the Western Isles in particular, Sunday is still predominantly a day of rest (see Sabbatarianism).

“Sorry, it’s fully booked …”
Accommodation in Edinburgh for the August festivals gets booked up months in advance. This is the most extreme case but you should reserve beds and tickets for main events in advance of any festival in Scotland, and also car space on ferries during peak periods.

Unexpected Weather
Scotland’s northern latitude and unpredictable weather pattern mean that conditions can alter rapidly. Winter weather in the hills can be particularly severe and apt to change with very little warning. Avoid getting caught out by taking sufficient clothes for the worst the season could throw at you, and listen to weather forecasts, which are updated regularly on radio stations.

The Stalking Season
The controlled cull of Scotland’s over-population of red deer is an essential aspect of estate and countryside management, besides being an important source of income. The main “Stalking Season”, as it’s called, runs from mid-August to 20 October. During this period, or wherever signs are posted, walkers are requested to seek permission from estate owners before they take to the hills.

Car Break-ins and Lost Possessions
Although theft from cars is not common, it does occur. To reduce the risk, avoid leaving valuables on display when you leave your car. If you lose anything, contact the nearest police station to see if it has been handed in – it does happen!

Traffic Accidents
If you come to Scotland from a country that drives on the right, confusion over the direction in which to look for on-coming traffic can easily catch you out. Use pedestrian crossings wherever possible, and, if driving, take particular care when rejoicing a road after a break and when approaching road junctions, especially roundabouts.

Calling a Thistle a Rose
The Scots are somewhat touchy on the subject of national pride, and for good reason (see Moments in History). Take care not to refer to Britain as “England” or – even worse – to Scotland as “England”. The latter is a guaranteed conversation-stopper.

Health and Security

Emergencies
For any emergency, there’s just one number to dial: 999. This covers police, ambulance, fire brigade, coastguard and mountain rescue. You will receive immediate attention and be asked which service you require.

Hospitals
All hospitals operate an Accident and Emergency department where you can receive treatment on a priority system. You can rely on attention for accidents and
emergencies at a hospital, but for any other ailment you should consult a doctor.

3 Doctors and Dentists
Doctors and dentists are listed in the Yellow Pages (phonebook), or you can consult a tourist information office. Doctors usually have certain consulting hours when people can come and wait to be seen. Dentists rarely have unfilled appointments, but will always try to fit in an emergency.

4 Medical Charges
Emergency medical care is free but additional treatment may incur charges. Doctors’ consultations are free for visitors whose home country has reciprocal health arrangements with the UK, but drugs must be paid for at a standard charge. Documentation will be required. Other visitors will be charged as private patients and must pay the full cost of any medication prescribed.

5 Chemists
Chemists (pharmacists) sell a wide range of medicines that are available without a prescription. In most cities at least one chemist stays open until midnight. If you depend on certain medication, it’s best to bring a supply with you. Ask your doctor to write out the generic name (rather than the brand name) to help locate its equivalent over here.

6 Water
Tap water is safe to drink in Scotland and so, thank goodness, is the water from hill burns (streams) – useful if you’re out walking all day. It might be rash to say that there is never any danger, so if in doubt check with locals. Scotland also has plenty of fine spring and mineral water in bottles.

7 Crime
Scotland is not a dangerous country, but assaults and muggings do take place in the larger towns and cities. Take the same precautions that you would in any city: avoid deserted and unlit places, use your intuition about entering less salubrious areas and don’t flaunt money, jewellery or other coveted valuables.

8 Pickpockets
Again, not common, but they are about. Be especially wary in crowds. Avoid keeping your wallet in a back (or any loose) pocket, and only carry about your day money. Keep a separate record of credit card numbers and the action to take if they go missing.

9 Road Reports
In addition to the information under Traffic Snarls (see Traffic Snarls), the AA operates a Road Watch scheme which lists all problems on the roads (calls cost 50p per minute). Call them if you’re worried about your route; especially useful if there’s the prospect of frost or snow.

10 Car Safety
The wearing of seat belts is compulsory for all car travellers (front and back), and the police can fine anyone not doing so. It is illegal to eat, drink or use a mobile phone while in control of a moving vehicle. Do not drive after drinking alcohol. The tolerated limit is low, and the penalty for exceeding it is severe.

Families, Groups & Special Needs

1 Family Discounts
Discount tickets for families are available on trains and buses, and for visiting properties under the care of the National Trust for Scotland and Historic Scotland. Ask at other visitor attractions – most will offer some discount.

2 Children-Friendly Accommodation
Not all guesthouses or B&Bs cater for children. It’s worth asking at tourist information offices for those that do, or asking proprietors when making reservations. Children-friendly establishments tend to have family rooms or advertise safe gardens or play areas.

3 Family Rooms
Regional accommodation guides will indicate if an establishment offers family rooms. Many hostels also offer family rooms, but these are usually limited and you should book well in advance.

4 Self-Catering
Aside from camping and hostelling, this is probably the cheapest family and group accommodation you can find. It does restrict you to one place for a week (usually the minimum rental period) but having a base from which to make trips can be just the ticket. Regional accommodation guides list self-catering cottages and caravans but there are also many independent letting agencies.

5 Disabled Access
Visit Scotland issues a fact sheet listing all establishments that cater for those with mobility difficulties. Visitor attractions vary in their provision for disabled access: modern sights tend to be good but historic buildings may not be suitable for wheelchairs – contact them in advance.

6 Capability Scotland
This is Scotland’s largest disability organization. It provides a national advice and information service and is extremely helpful. It can, for example, supply information on where and when Shopmobility facilities are available.

7 Holiday Care Service
Based in London, this is a national charity and the UK’s central source of holiday and travel information for disabled people and their carers.

8 RADAR
Another London-based organization, which provides general information for disabled travellers.

9 Seagull Trust
A small charity, with canal boats on the Forth (Edinburgh) and Caledonian (Inverness) canals specifically
Another flourishing area of innovative design. It seems that dozens of new and talented silversmiths set up shop each year. Orkney produces an astonishing array of quality jewellery. Some of the more popular traditional designs feature Celtic knotwork and other interwoven patterns, and make use of the Cairngorm, an orange semi-precious stone.

9 Glass
Edinburgh Glass is famed for its glassware. The origins of the company stretch back almost four centuries to the 1600s when the Venitians introduced the skill in the Edinburgh area. They specialize in beautifully engraved goblets, whisky and wine decanters and drinking vessels.

10 Art Works
Galleries selling art can be found all over Scotland. Here are three in Scotland’s major cities: Edinburgh Printmakers deal in contemporary fine art printmaking. Stills (also Edinburgh) is a long-established gallery, and Street Level (Glasgow) specializes in “dynamic photographic culture”.

Banking and Communications

1 Currency
Britain’s currency is the pound sterling (£), divided into 100 pence (p). Scotland’s three banks each produce different-faced notes but these, along with Bank of England and Northern Ireland notes, are all legal tender throughout the UK. Scottish notes come in £1, £5, £10, £20, £50 and £100 denominations. Coins come as 1p, 2p, 5p, 10p, 20p, 50p, £1 and £2.

2 Changing Money
Banks tend to offer the best exchange rates and are open 9am–5pm Mon–Fri. In remote areas you may find a mobile bank parked and open for business. Bureaux de Change work longer hours in the main cities and at airports but their commission charges can be high.

3 ATMs
ATMs, or “holes-in-the-wall” as they are affectionately called, can be found widely throughout the country, even in the Highlands and islands. Also, most supermarkets offer a cashback service when you purchase provisions with a debit card carrying the Switch or Cirrus logo.

4 Credit Cards
Credit cards are widely accepted across Scotland but many small shops, cafés and most B&Bs deal only in cash or cheques in sterling. VISA and Master-card are the most commonly presented cards. Certain outlets also accept Diners Club and American Express.

5 Traveller’s Cheques
Traveller’s cheques are still the safest means of carrying money and, if in pounds sterling, you can use them directly to pay for goods and services. Check on commission charges when purchasing or cashing your cheques, as practices vary. Keep your receipts separate from the cheques as you will need them in the event of loss or theft.
Accommodation Tips

1. Hotels
   The highest standard of accommodation is to be found in hotels, but they vary greatly in facilities, quality and price. Cost generally reflects quality but you can find some great wee (small) hotels that cost little more than good B&Bs. VisitScotland produces a range of guides on all types of accommodation.

2. Guesthouses and B&Bs
   There is little to distinguish guesthouses and B&Bs. They both offer rooms in private homes with breakfast included, and you are expected to be absent during the day. They offer great opportunities for meeting locals.

3. Self-Catering
   Self-catering flats, cottages and caravans are the most cost-effective forms of accommodation for families and groups, aside from camping and hostels. Organizations such as Visit Scotland publish nationwide listings. See also the Where to Stay section for Glasgow and Edinburgh (see Edinburgh: Luxury Hotels).

4. Discounts for Longer Stays
   If you’re planning on staying longer than two nights in any one place, most hotels, guesthouses and B&Bs will give discounts, as well as offering special weekly rates.

5. Reservations
   Aside from the qualifications mentioned in Things to Avoid, you can generally tour Scotland without reservations unless you are intent on staying in a particular establishment. This also applies to Youth Hostels, which once had an open-door policy but now can be fully booked.

6. Look for Signs
   Tourist accommodation guides and those of other organizations work on the basis that proprietors pay to have their establishment inspected and listed. Many smaller hotels, guesthouses and B&Bs do not consider this worthwhile, so these guides are far from comprehensive. Look out for roadside signs and, if you’re stuck, ask a local.

7. Hostels
   The Scottish Youth Hostel Association (SYHA) operates many excellent hostels in Scotland and publishes a brochure listing them. Take your membership card and travel with a sheet (some require a sleeping bag). Recently, hundreds of independent hostels have sprung up, and they have their own website; no membership necessary.

8. Caravaning and Camping
   There’s no shortage of these either and they are usually of a high standard and beautifully located. Reduced facilities may be offered in remoter areas but the prices will be lower and the views probably even better.

9. Wild Camping
   Unless signposted to the contrary, wild camping is tolerated in quiet places where you do not infringe on anyone’s privacy. Always try and find the landowner to ask permission first.

10. Mountain Bothies
    The Mountain Bothy Association is a charity that looks after over 100 unlocked “bothies” (simple wooden, iron or stone huts). These are all in remote areas and usually have little more than a fireplace, table, seats and a sleeping platform – free but donations appreciated.

Glasgow: Mid-Range and Budget

1. The Brunswick
   A smart, copper-topped building in the buzzing Merchant City area. A modern-chic interior that’s not too formal, and a delightful penthouse apartment, which can sleep six – all can squeeze into the sauna, too.
   ➤ 106–108 Brunswick St • Map U3 • (0141) 552 0001 • ££

2. Cathedral House
   An impressively turreted Neo-Gothic red-brick house, formerly the administrative quarters for the nearby
Cathedral, which some rooms over-look. The restaurant serves rather good Scottish cuisine. Very atmospheric, aided by the presence of two live-in ghosts.

➤ 28–32 Cathedral Sq • Map V3 • (0141) 552 3519 • £££

3 Babbity Bowster
Named after an 18th-century wedding dance, this inn was built around 1790 and maintains a traditional style. The rooms sit above the popular and convivial bar and restaurant (see Babbity Bowster) and offer fittingly simple, yet comfortable lodgings.

➤ 16–18 Black-friars La • Map U3 • (0141) 552 5055 • £

4 Bewleys
Behind its curiously angular (and, frankly, gobsmackingly ugly) glass façade, Bewleys offers superb value for money. Very central location, and spacious rooms with pristine facilities and pretty good styling. All have TVs and modern points.

➤ 110 Bath St • Map T2 • (0141) 353 0800 • £

5 Merchant Lodge
The former home of Glasgow’s tobacco merchants, the house has been renovated to provide 40 individually styled rooms (so choose with care), all with shiny pine floors. Owned by the Glasgow Hotel Group, who also have the Townhouse Hotel, near Kelvingrove Park.

➤ 52 Virginia St • Map U3 • (0141) 552 2424 • ££

6 Novotel
While the Novotel is unlikely to feed the mind with recollections of a truly memorable stay, it does the job of providing simple, comfortable accommodation with inoffensive décor, and food and drink readily at hand in the pleasant bar/restaurant.

➤ 181 Pitt St • Map S2 • (0141) 222 2775 • £££

7 Willow Hotel
Renfrew Street is lined by small, B&B-type hotels, and the Willow, along with the Victorian House (see Merchant Lodge), are the best of them. All have a certain old-fashioned charm, but the Willow has a little more spruceness about it. Simply adorned rooms, and well located for a stroll down the hill into town.

➤ Renfrew St • Map S1 • (0141) 332 2332 • £

8 Ibis Hotel
Like its neighbour, Novotel, Ibis isn’t a prospect to get the heart racing, but it does provide even better value, achieved through an even tighter economy of scale in the bedrooms and, particularly, the bathrooms. Central location, and as a place to take a shower and curl up for the night, drifting off to late-night TV, it’s hard to beat for price.

➤ West Regent St • Map S2 • (0141) 225 6000 • £

9 Glasgow Backpackers Hostel
Superbly sited hostel, high up on the fringes of Kelvingrove Park. Small dorms for the most part, plus the odd twin room; separate bathrooms. The SYHA hostel is just a few doors along.

➤ 17 Park Terrace • Map V1 • (0141) 332 9099 • Closed in winter • No credit cards • £

10 Euro Hostel
Situated on the river front this place is a cross between a hostel and budget hotel, and is only a two minute walk from a variety of shops and restaurants. A range of en-suite accommodation is available, from single rooms to 14-bed dormitories with bunk beds all round.

➤ 318 Clyde St • Map S3 • (0141) 222 2828 • No credit cards • www.euro-hostels.co.uk • £

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➤ 318 Clyde St • Map S3 • (0141) 222 2828 • No credit cards • www.euro-hostels.co.uk • £
2
Places to Stay
Albany
Three Georgian houses in the New Town, joined to form a smartly decked-out hotel. The Albany’s restaurant, Haldanes, is one of the main draws, with a reputation for great Scottish fare.
➤ 39 Albany St • Map N1 • (0131) 556 0397 • www.albanyhoteledinburgh.co.uk • ££££

Apex City Hotel
Joining its sister hotel up the road at No. 31, with modern, simple and functional rooms, and a mix of business and family facilities (photocopying and secretarial services in the former case, cots and high chairs in the latter).
➤ 61 Grassmarket • Map M4 • (0131) 243 3456 • £££

Ardhasaig House, Isle of Harris
Set by one of the most picturesque roads in the isles, this 1904 house has been completely refurbished, while retaining certain period features. Light décor, simple furnishings, captivating views – a B&B of the highest calibre, with the option of dinner. A self-catering cottage is also available.
➤ Ardhasaig • Map C2 • (01859) 502066 • ££

Arthouse Hotel
Extravagant (almost) to the point of kitsch, this velvet-clad, gold-trimmed hotel is in the funky Philippe Starck mould. The rooms are spacious, with big beds and pillows you could nest in.
➤ 129 Bath St • Map S2 • (0141) 221 6789 • £££

Backpackers, Royal Mile
The smallest of the hostels, with room for 38 in simple, clean dormitories. Backpackers also has the Castle Rock hostel (0131 225 9666) if other branches are full.
➤ 105 High St • Map P3 • (0131) 557 6120 • £

Balfour Castle, Orkney
An extraordinary retreat, its hospitality overseen by the remarkable Zawadskis (see Balfour Castle, Orkney).
➤ Shapinsay • Map A5 • (01856) 711282 • www.balfourcastle.co.uk • £££

Balmoral
The most prestigious of Edinburgh’s old-school hotels, right in the heart of things on Princes St. Sports facilities and two great restaurants, Number One Princes Street and Hadrian’s brasserie.
Halibut & Herring
Scottish handmade soaps and all manner of colourful, squeezy and curvaceous bathroom accessories in aquatic hues. A useful stop for pleasant-smelling presents.
➤ Victoria St • Map N4

Hector Russell
Made-to-measure kilts and a gathering of the tartans. Also a branch on the High Street.
➤ Princes Street • Map M3

Iain Mellis
His cheeses are celebrated all around Scotland, and feature on many an Edinburgh menu, but the Victoria Street branch goes beyond matters dairy to embrace a panoply of culinary delicacies. Stock your hamper here.
➤ 30 Victoria Street • Map N4

International Newsagent
The place to go to keep abreast of all the foreign news/stories from back home. Good selection of foreign-language papers and magazines.
➤ 351 High Street • Map N3

Jenners
The oldest department store in the world, founded in the 1830s but occupying its present site since 1895. A miscellany of high quality goods and grand surrounds.
➤ 47 Princes St • Map N3

Printmakers’ Workshop
A range of limited edition works from contemporary print-makers at very reasonable prices
➤ 23 Union Street • Map P1

Tiso
Before heading for the hills, check out Tiso for all your outdoor activity paraphernalia: boots, tents, climbing ropes and compasses galore.
➤ 41 Commercial St, Leith • Smaller branch on Rose St • Map M3

Valvona & Crolla
The best delicatessen in Edinburgh. Trading since the 1930s, Valvona & Crolla offer a wonderful selection of wines, great bread and fine Italian sauces.

➤ 19 Elm Row • Map P1

West Port Books

One of a handful of independent bookshops just to the west of Grassmarket selling a mix of new and secondhand books. West Port’s selection focuses on the arts.

➤ West Port • Map M4

Whistles

One of several boutique fashion stores that have made George Street their home over the last few years. High fashion for women.

➤ 97 George St • Map M2
4
Places to Eat
63 Tay Street
This restaurant is the talk of the town. Award-winning young chef Jeremy Wares serves nouvelle cuisine in a clean, minimalist setting. It tastes and looks as if every ingredient has been hand-picked.
➤ 63 Tay St, Perth • Map E5 • (01738) 441451 • ££££

A Room in the Town
Friendly bistro in the heart of Edinburgh’s New town specializing in the best of modern Scottish cooking with a slight international influence. BYOB.
➤ 18 Howe St • Map L2 • (0131) 225 8204 • £

Airds Hotel
The Michelin star first stopped overhead in 1990, and this country hotel restaurant hasn’t looked back since (see Airds Hotel).
➤ Port Appin, Appin • Map E3 • (01631) 730236 • £££££

Airds Hotel
This fine country hotel has held a Michelin star since 1990. Seafood and game feature prominently but not exclusively, and Airds prides itself on the use of the freshest Highland foods, including Aberdeen Angus beef. They also do a wonderful poached-pear shortcake (see Airds Hotel).

An Tuireann
Swish, modern arts exhibition centre. Part of the draw is the delicious vegetarian meals and snacks served in the cafe.
➤ Struan Rd, Portree, Skye • Map D2 • (01478) 613306 • 10:30am–4:30pm Tue–Sat • £

Andrew Fairlie
Dine among Ionic pillars in a high-ceilinged room with blue-black walls and drapes of cream silk. The cuisine here is equally original, though the influence is markedly French. Try, for example, oak-smoked lobsters in lime sauce (see Andrew Fairlie).

Andrew Fairlie
French cuisine of the highest calibre served amid dreamy 1920s décor (see Andrew Fairlie).
➤ Gleneagles Hotel • Map F4 • (01764) 694267 • £££££

Applecross Inn
Spectacularly located beyond Britain’s highest mountain pass, this pub overlooks Skye. Local seafood is served, and there is music some evenings.
➤ Applecross, Wester Ross • Map E3 • (01520) 744262 • ££

Arbroath Smokies
Similar to kippers, but these are smoked haddock rather than herring.

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Archiestown Hotel
A Speyside hotel that’s popular with fishermen. Its bistro has earned a good reputation, and wild salmon is a regular speciality. Vegetarians should give advance notice.
➤ Main St, Archiestown, nr Craigellachie • Map D5 • (01340) 810218 • Closed for 2 weeks in Jan • £££

traveldk.com
Bars and Nightclubs
Bennet’s

Ever popular, its one-time ordinary pubness rapidly becoming exotic: big old mirrors, a mix of ages, drinks in pint pots and cheap lunches.

➤ 8 Leven St • Map L6

Bow Bar

Lush red and cream gloss paintwork envelops this modest room of a pub, where the sounds are provided by the jovial babble of conversation and clinking glasses.

➤ Victoria St • Map N4

Café Royal Circle Bar

Swirling ceilings, brass lamps and a convivial atmosphere of both young and old, at lunchtime enjoying simple seafood dishes from the kitchen of the Oyster Bar next door (see Café Royal Oyster Bar).

➤ Map N2

Deacon Brodie’s

Not especially remarkable by Edinburgh’s high standards, but if you’re on the Royal Mile (and you will be), it’s a pleasant stop-off for a pint. Another ornate ceiling to peruse, too.

➤ High St • Map N/P3

Dome Bar

A Corinthian-columned whale of a building, entered through a flight of steps flanked by nocturnal doormen. Ballooning chandeliers, palm plants and a choice of bars: the vast and theatrical circle bar or the plush and cushioned side bar, with its evocation of the 1930s.

➤ George St • Map M2

Indigo Yard

More intent on creating a vibe than simply serving drinks and food, Indigo Yard is good for lazy afternoons and carousing evenings.

➤ 7 Charlotte La • Map K3

Monboddo

Sharp-dressed slice of New York nightlife, set down amid the old-stone order of Edinburgh. Attached to the Point hotel (see Point).

➤ 34 Bread St • Map L5

Opal Lounge

Popular, chic dj bar, with a cozy backroom dining space. The low-lit rooms provide plenty of space for chatting, as well as shaking a leg.

➤ George St • Map M2
Rick’s Bar

Bar, restaurant and rooms, in fact (see Rick’s). Sleek design warmed by rich, earthy hues and quiet mood lighting.

➤ 55a Frederick St • Map M2
Scotland Travel Guide

Waverley Station
Edinburgh Dungeon
City Art Centre
Royal Mile
High Kirk of St. Giles
Royal Mile
National Library
Greyfriars Kirk
Royal Museum & Museum of Scotland
Edinburgh Festival Theatre
National Gallery
The Meadows
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