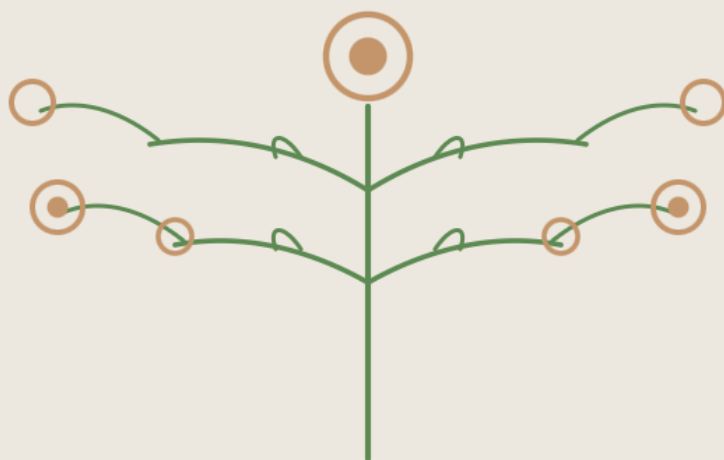




48 HOURS IN

Edinburgh

BLOOM WHERE YOU WANDER

Welcome to Edinburgh

Edinburgh rewards the solo traveller more generously than almost any city in Europe. Its geography is a gift: two dramatic hills, a medieval Old Town of closes and wynds, a Georgian New Town of extraordinary architectural restraint, and a port district that has quietly become one of Britain's finest food neighbourhoods. The city is built for unhurried exploration — the closes reward exactly the kind of purposeless wandering that is harder to justify with a companion, and the pub culture is one of the finest in Britain for a solo traveler who knows how to take a stool at the bar and let the evening take care of itself.

How to Use This Guide

Read through once before you land get the shape of both days in mind.

Day 1 follows the Old Town sequence castle to Holyrood eliminates backtracking.

Day 2 moves to the New Town and north Stockbridge, Leith, The Shore.

Give yourself permission to slow down Edinburgh is built for lingering.

Reserve a pub evening A proper Scottish pub is not optional — it is the point.

Essential Quick Facts

Currency Pound Sterling (£). Cards universally accepted. Contactless everywhere.

Transport Lothian Buses day ticket (£4.50) covers all city buses. Tram runs airport to York Place.

Weather Layers are non-negotiable. Edinburgh is cold, windy, and unpredictable year-round. Pack a waterproof regardless of forecast.

Time Zone GMT in winter, BST (UTC+1) in summer.

Emergency 999 for all emergencies. 101 for non-emergency police.

Tipping 10% in restaurants. Not expected in pubs when ordering at the bar — though a round-up is always appreciated.

Language English, with a Scottish accent that varies by neighbourhood. Glaswegian and Edinburgh are quite different. Ask locally if you need clarification.

Day One

Old Town · Edinburgh Castle · Royal Mile · Holyrood

Edinburgh rewards the solo traveller more generously than almost any city in Europe. The closes pull you somewhere unplanned. The bartender at the Bow Bar asks where you're from and wants the actual answer. The ramparts of the castle at opening, with the Firth of Forth visible to the north and the city below you in every direction, are a moment that arrives most completely when no one is asking if you're ready to move on. Begin there.

MORNING · 9:00 AM — 12:30 PM

9:00 AM

Edinburgh Castle

Edinburgh Castle has commanded its volcanic plug since at least the 12th century, and the view from the esplanade — across the Firth of Forth on a clear day — remains one of the great urban panoramas in Britain. The Crown Room holds the Honours of Scotland: the oldest surviving crown jewels in the British Isles. The Stone of Destiny, returned from Westminster in 1996, sits alongside them. Allow 90 minutes; arrive at opening to beat the tour groups that build from 10:30am. Book at edinburghcastle.scot. The One O'Clock Gun fires daily except Sundays — if you're on the ramparts when it goes off, it will stay with you.

THE SOLO MOMENT

Walk directly to the north ramparts first. On a clear morning you'll have them nearly to yourself — the Forth below, the city waking up, the whole of Edinburgh laid out without anyone asking where you want to go next. You will understand within ten minutes why you made this trip.

11:00 AM

The Royal Mile & Old Town Closes

The Royal Mile descends from Castle Esplanade to the Palace of Holyroodhouse in a single dramatic kilometre, lined with the closes and wynds of Edinburgh's medieval city. The closes — narrow lanes cutting off the main street — are where the real Old Town lives. Explore Brodie's Close, Anchor Close, and the Vennel steps cut into the castle rock. Victoria Street, curving south from the Lawnmarket, is Edinburgh's most photographed street and largely free of its worst crowds before noon. The Real Mary King's Close beneath the street requires a ticket and is worth booking at realmarykingsclose.com.

THE SOLO MOMENT

The closes reward exactly the kind of purposeless wandering that is harder to justify with a companion. Duck into whichever one pulls you. Advocate's Close frames the Balmoral clock tower in a composition that no one else is standing in at exactly your angle. There is no one waiting. This is the correct way to explore the Old Town.

AFTERNOON · 12:30 PM — 7:00 PM

12:30 PM

Lunch — Grassmarket & the Bar Seat

The Grassmarket — a square at the base of the Castle crag, reached via the Vennel steps from the Lawnmarket — offers Edinburgh's best lunch variety without tourist-trap pricing. The Grain Store on Victoria Street is consistently excellent for Scottish produce and intelligent cooking. Walk the Vennel steps first: they offer the finest free view of the castle walls at close range, are easily missed, and are never crowded. The bar seat applies here as everywhere: The Grain Store holds counter stools and the daily special is the correct order.

THE SOLO MOMENT

The bar seat at The Grain Store at lunch is the finest solo midday seat off the Royal Mile. Tell them you're eating alone and you'd like the counter. Order the soup and whatever looks most Scottish. The cooking is serious and the view onto Victoria Street is one of Edinburgh's finest.

2:00 PM

Palace of Holyroodhouse & Holyrood Park

The Palace of Holyroodhouse is the official Scottish residence of the monarch and the counterpoint to Edinburgh Castle at the foot of the Royal Mile. The State Apartments tell the story of Mary Queen of Scots with unusual directness — her private chambers, where her secretary Rizzio was murdered in 1566, are among the most atmospheric rooms in any British royal palace. Allow 75 minutes. Behind the palace, Holyrood Park is 260 hectares of volcanic landscape within the city — Arthur's Seat rises to 251 metres and takes 45 minutes to climb.

THE SOLO MOMENT

Arthur's Seat is best climbed from the Dunsapie Loch approach on the eastern flank — a gentler gradient with extraordinary views at the top. A solo climb on a clear afternoon, the city below, the Firth of Forth visible, the Highlands on the horizon — this is one of the finest things available to a solo traveler in Edinburgh. Wear layers; it is significantly colder at the summit.

4:30 PM

Rest & the Elephant House

Build 90 minutes into Day 1. The Old Town is relentlessly hilly and you will have walked 8–10 kilometres. The Elephant House on George IV Bridge — the café where J.K. Rowling wrote parts of the early Harry Potter novels — has a back room with a direct view of the castle. It is reliably atmospheric, not overpriced, and entirely appropriate for a solo traveler with a notebook and an hour to spare.

EVENING · 7:00 PM — LATE

7:00 PM

Old Town Pubs & Dinner

Edinburgh's pub culture is one of the finest in Britain for the solo traveler. The Bow Bar on West Bow is the definitive Old Town pub: no music, no machines, extraordinary real ale and whisky selection, knowledgeable bar staff who will answer questions about what's on without making you feel interrogated. The Jolly Judge in James Court Close is the cosiest pub in the city — low ceilings, open fire, completely without pretension. For dinner: Wedgwood on the Canongate uses Scottish produce with genuine intelligence and holds bar seats for walk-ins.

THE SOLO MOMENT

The bar at the Bow Bar on a weeknight evening: order a pint of whatever they recommend, take a stool, and let the pub do its work. Edinburgh pub culture is not hostile to solo drinkers — it is one of the few places in Britain where sitting alone at the bar with a good beer is simply what you do. Two hours here costs less than £12 and is the most specifically Edinburgh evening available to you.

"The closes pull you somewhere unplanned. The bartender asks where you're from and wants the actual answer. This is what Edinburgh gives the solo traveler."

LATE NIGHT

LATE

Sandy Bell's & the Late Bars

Sandy Bell's on Forrest Road is the finest traditional music pub in Edinburgh. Live folk and traditional music every night from around 9pm, no cover charge, no tourist performance — this is where the musicians play for each other. Arrive early for a seat near the session. Order a pint at the bar and listen. The Bow Bar closes at midnight; the late bars on Cowgate run until 3am. The Last Drop on the Grassmarket — named for the public executions that took place in the square — is a good pub with a dark sense of humour and excellent beer.

Day Two

New Town · National Gallery · Stockbridge · Leith

The second day moves north and outward. The New Town was built to answer the Old Town's chaos with Enlightenment order, and it remains the finest example of Georgian urban planning in the world. Day 2 moves from that ordered beauty north to Stockbridge, then east to Leith — Edinburgh's port neighbourhood, now one of the best places to eat in Britain. Dinner at Fishers Bistro is the ending the day deserves.

MORNING · 9:30 AM — 1:00 PM

9:30 AM

New Town Walk — Charlotte Square to Calton Hill

The New Town is best approached as a walking circuit. Begin at Charlotte Square — Robert Adam's masterwork, considered the finest example of Georgian domestic architecture in the world — and walk east along George Street to St Andrew Square. Then climb Calton Hill for the view that puts the whole city in context: the castle on its crag to the west, Arthur's Seat to the south, the Firth of Forth stretching north. The hill is a 10-minute walk from Princes Street and the view is free. The National Monument — Scotland's unfinished Parthenon — at sunset on a clear evening is one of the great city views in Europe.

THE SOLO MOMENT

Calton Hill at 10:00 am on a clear day, alone with the whole city below you: this is the view that makes sense of Edinburgh. The castle to the west, Arthur's Seat to the south, the Forth to the north. Ten minutes from Princes Street and entirely free. Allow more time than you think you need.

10:30 AM

Scottish National Gallery

The Scottish National Gallery on The Mound is free and houses one of the finest collections of European painting in Britain: the Rembrandt self-portrait, Velázquez, Titian, Raphael, and an exceptional room of Scottish Colourists. The Impressionist gallery — Monet, Degas, Van Gogh — is smaller than London but better hung. Allow 75 focused minutes. The Scottish Colourists room — Cadell, Peploe, Hunter, Fergusson — is the best argument for Scottish painting's place in 20th-century European art. Do not miss it.

THE SOLO MOMENT

The gallery is free and rarely crowded before 11am. A solo visit here has a particular quality: the Rembrandt self-portrait in a quiet room, the Colourists in the light from the north-facing windows, no one to negotiate departure with. The basement café is excellent for a mid-morning coffee before you begin.

AFTERNOON · 1:00 PM — 7:00 PM

1:00 PM

Stockbridge Lunch

Stockbridge — 15 minutes walk north of the New Town — is Edinburgh's most pleasant residential neighbourhood and one of its best for lunch. The Scran & Scallie on Comely Bank Avenue — Tom Kitchin's gastropub — is the finest casual lunch in this part of the city. The counter seats face the kitchen. Herbie's deli on William Street is Edinburgh's best cheese and charcuterie shop — assemble a picnic and take it to the Water of Leith Walkway, which runs from Stockbridge all the way to Leith, largely car-free, along the river.

THE SOLO MOMENT

The Water of Leith Walkway from Stockbridge to Leith is one of the finest solo afternoon walks in Edinburgh: 2.5 miles of car-free riverside path, the city visible above you on both sides, the water below. Buy a picnic from Herbie's, find a bench somewhere between Stockbridge and Dean Village, and eat it at your own pace. This is not in the guidebooks.

3:00 PM

Leith & The Shore

Leith was Edinburgh's port before it was absorbed into the city in 1920, and it has retained a character entirely distinct from the New Town above it. The Shore — the historic dockside street along the Water of Leith — is the centre of what has become one of Britain's most concentrated restaurant neighbourhoods. The Royal Yacht Britannia is moored at Ocean Terminal, a 10-minute walk from The Shore: the Queen's private quarters, preserved exactly as they were on the final voyage in 1997, are one of the most unexpectedly moving museum experiences in Edinburgh.

THE SOLO MOMENT

The Royal Yacht Britannia rewards a solo visit more than most museums. The audio tour takes you through the engine room, the officers' quarters, the State Dining Room, the Queen's sitting room — and the cumulative effect of the preserved details, the objects, the sense of a very specific life lived here, arrives most completely in silence. Book at royalyachtbritannia.co.uk.

EVENING · 7:00 PM — LATE

7:00 PM

Dinner in Leith

Fishers Bistro on The Shore has been serving exceptional Scottish seafood since 1991 and rarely requires advance booking midweek. The bar seats are available and the correct choice for a solo dinner: the langoustines when in season, the hake, whatever the kitchen is most proud of that evening. The Kitchin on Commercial Quay holds a Michelin star — book months ahead for a table, weeks ahead for the bar seat, which runs the full tasting menu and is the finest solo dining experience in Edinburgh.

Where to Eat

Edinburgh's best restaurants hold bar seats and counters that take walk-ins. You will eat at the bar, next to the action, and you will eat better for it. The pub culture is one of Britain's finest for solo drinkers. Prices per person, excluding drinks.

BREAKFAST & COFFEE

Cairngorm Coffee £4-8

Melville Place. Edinburgh's finest independent roaster — minimal, precise, excellent espresso. The kind of place where the barista knows what they're doing and doesn't need to tell you about it. Counter seating.

The Pantry £8-16

Stockbridge. Weekend brunch institution where queues form early and the brisket hash has earned its reputation. Go on a weekday to walk straight in. Counter seating available; the stool by the window is the correct choice.

Söderberg £5-12

Quartermile. Scandinavian bakery and the Edinburgh standard against which all cinnamon buns are judged. Communal tables, good coffee, and the particular quiet of a Tuesday morning in a room that gets the light right.

LUNCH

The Grain Store £16-26

Victoria Street. Scottish produce, intelligent cooking. Best lunch off the Royal Mile. Counter seats available and preferred — watch the kitchen from your stool and order the daily special.

Scran & Scallie £14-24

Comely Bank Avenue, Stockbridge. Tom Kitchen's gastropub. The beef dripping chips alone justify the trip. Walk-in counter available. The most serious casual cooking in the New Town neighbourhood.

Herbie's Deli £6-12

William Street. Edinburgh's finest cheese and charcuterie counter. Assemble your own lunch and take it to the Water of Leith Walkway. The correct solo afternoon format.

DINNER & THE BAR SEAT

Fishers Bistro £28-45

The Shore, Leith. Edinburgh's finest seafood restaurant for 30 years. Walk-in bar available midweek. The langoustines when in season. Ask the bartender what the kitchen is proud of tonight.

Wedgwood £30-48

Canongate. Scottish produce, foraged ingredients, the best mid-range dinner on the Royal Mile. Bar seats available. The tasting menu is worth the investment on a final evening.

The Kitchen £65-95

Commercial Quay, Leith. Tom Kitchen's Michelin-starred flagship. Book months ahead for a table.

Navigating Edinburgh

Edinburgh is a walking city above all else. The Old Town and New Town are best explored entirely on foot — the hills are the point. For longer distances, Lothian Buses and the tram are reliable, frequent, and cheap. A day ticket is £4.50. Avoid driving in Edinburgh entirely.

BUSES & TRAM

Lothian Buses Day Ticket (£4.50)

Unlimited travel on all city buses from first to last journey. Buy from the driver or through the Lothian Buses app. Covers Leith, Stockbridge, and the airport bus.

Bus 35

Old Town to Leith Shore. The direct route to the restaurant neighbourhood. 20 minutes from the Royal Mile.

Bus 24

City centre to Stockbridge. 10 minutes from Princes Street.

Edinburgh Tram

Edinburgh Airport to York Place (top of Leith Walk) via Haymarket and Princes Street. 35 minutes, £8.50. For airport arrivals only — the bus network is more useful within the city.

Water of Leith Walkway

Car-free path from Stockbridge to Leith docks. 2.5 miles. The finest route between the two neighbourhoods and better than any bus.

WALKING DISTANCES

Edinburgh Castle → Palace of Holyroodhouse *18 minutes downhill*

Princes Street → Calton Hill *12 minutes*

New Town → Stockbridge *15 minutes downhill*

Waverley Station → Leith Shore *35 minutes (flat)*

Old Town → Grassmarket *5 minutes via the Vennel*

GETTING TO & FROM EDINBURGH

Edinburgh Airport is 8 miles from the city centre. The tram runs directly to York Place (top of Leith Walk) in 35 minutes for £8.50. Taxis cost approximately £25–35 and take 20–40 minutes depending on traffic. Waverley Station is the main rail terminus: East Coast Main Line to London King's Cross in 4.5 hours; ScotRail to Glasgow in 50 minutes.

Backup Plans

Edinburgh is one of the best cities in Europe for bad weather. Its great museums are free and excellent; its cafés are built for the long afternoon; its pubs are open. Rain does not close Edinburgh — it simply moves it indoors.

THE RAINY DAY PLAN

National Museum of Scotland free

Chambers Street. One of the finest national collections in Europe — Scottish history, natural history, design, technology. The Grand Gallery is among the most beautiful museum interiors in Britain. Allow a full morning. The solo traveler's ideal indoor day.

Scottish National Portrait Gallery free

Queen Street. Scotland's cultural history told through the faces of those who made it — Mary Queen of Scots, David Hume, Robert Burns, modern figures. The Victorian building alone is worth entering.

The Writers' Museum free

Lady Stair's Close, Royal Mile. Robert Burns, Sir Walter Scott, and Robert Louis Stevenson in a 17th-century merchant's house. Small, focused, and unexpectedly moving. Free and never crowded.

Camera Obscura £14

Castlehill. A live optical projection of the city from the rooftop, run since 1853. Five floors of optical illusions. Worth the modest entry on a poor-visibility day — and the rooftop view is one of the finest in the Old Town.

Real Mary King's Close £18

Royal Mile. The underground chambers beneath the street, occupied continuously since the 16th century. The most atmospheric paid attraction in the Old Town. Book online at realmarykingsclose.com.

QUEUE-BEATING STRATEGIES

- Edinburgh Castle: arrive at 9:30am. The queue is negligible before 10:15am.
- The Real Mary King's Close: book online. Walk-in tickets unavailable in peak season.
- Holyrood Palace: no queue before 10am. Avoid Friday afternoons — school groups.
- Britannia: book online and choose a weekday slot. Weekend afternoons are busiest.
- Restaurants: book all Leith dinner reservations at least 48 hours ahead.

Know Your Districts

Edinburgh is organised into distinct neighbourhoods, each with its own character. Here are the eight that matter most for your 48 hours.

Old Town MEDIEVAL HEART

The UNESCO-listed medieval core. Closes, wynds, the Castle, Holyrood. Steep, atmospheric, essential. The closes reward purposeless wandering more than any other part of Edinburgh.

New Town GEORGIAN MASTERPIECE

Europe's finest Georgian planned city. Charlotte Square, George Street, Princes Street. Best for walking, gallery-going, and understanding why Edinburgh became a centre of the Enlightenment.

Leith PORT & FOOD CAPITAL

Edinburgh's port neighbourhood, absorbed into the city in 1920 and still distinctly its own. The Shore is one of Britain's finest restaurant streets. The Royal Yacht Britannia. Unpretentious and increasingly essential.

Stockbridge VILLAGE WITHIN A CITY

The most pleasant residential neighbourhood. Independent shops, great café culture, Herbie's deli, the Sunday market, and the Water of Leith walkway. The ideal solo afternoon neighbourhood.

Grassmarket BOHEMIAN & HISTORIC

The square where public executions were held is now Edinburgh's most atmospheric pub district. The Last Drop, the Vennel steps, and the finest free view of the castle walls at close range.

Canongate LIVING ROYAL MILE

The lower section of the Royal Mile, between John Knox House and Holyrood. More local, less touristy than the upper Mile. The best stretch for independent restaurants and galleries.

Calton Hill THE VIEW THAT EXPLAINS EVERYTHING

The hill at the east end of Princes Street with the National Monument, the Nelson Monument, and the finest free panoramic view of the city. 10 minutes from the centre, never as crowded as it deserves to be.

Southside UNIVERSITY QUARTER

Home to the university, the Meadows, and the National Museum. Sandy Bell's folk pub and some of Edinburgh's most affordable and authentic restaurants. The real Edinburgh behind the tourist circuit.

What Nobody Tells You

The weather will change four times today

Edinburgh's weather is famously variable. Bring a waterproof, even in summer. The locals carry one at all times and are entirely unbothered by rain. The Old Town in the rain is still one of the finest walks in Europe.

The closes are the real city

The Royal Mile is a thoroughfare. The closes that cut off it — Brodie's, Fleshmarket, the Writers' Museum close — are where the 16th century survives intact. Go in. This is where Edinburgh actually is.

Sandy Bell's is free, every night

Scotland's finest traditional music pub runs a session every night from about 9pm. No cover charge. No tourist performance. Order a pint at the bar and listen. This is available to you for the price of a pint.

The haggis question is real

Haggis — sheep's offal with oatmeal and spices — is genuinely excellent when made well. Order it at a proper restaurant, not a tourist kiosk. Macsween's is the definitive brand. Any good Edinburgh restaurant serves it.

Arthur's Seat is closer than it looks

The extinct volcano visible from every part of the city takes 45 minutes to climb from the Holyrood Park entrance. The summit view on a clear day extends to the Highlands. Wear layers — it is significantly colder at the top.

The Fringe changes everything in August

The Edinburgh Festival Fringe in August is the largest arts festival in the world. The city transforms completely. If you can visit then, do. If you cannot, even the off-season carries a creative energy that most cities lack entirely.

Calton Hill at dusk is free

The National Monument — Scotland's unfinished Parthenon — at sunset on a clear evening is one of the great city views in Europe. It is a 10-minute walk from Princes Street, entirely free, and largely ignored by visitors. Go.

Edinburgh tap water is exceptional

Scottish water comes from Highland reservoirs and is among the finest drinking water in the world. The locals are quietly proud of this. Drink from the tap.

The Scotland Connection

Edinburgh Waverley station puts the whole of Scotland within reach. The Highland Main Line north; the East Coast Main Line south to London; the ScotRail network connecting you to Stirling, Perth, St Andrews, and the Borders. Your 48 hours here is a natural starting point for a wider journey.

DAY TRIPS FROM EDINBURGH

Stirling

40 minutes by train from Waverley. Stirling Castle rivals Edinburgh Castle for drama and surpasses it for intimacy — the queues are a fraction of Edinburgh's. The Wallace Monument above the city is visible from 30 miles. Return fare approximately £12–18.

St Andrews

90 minutes by train and bus (change at Leuchars). The home of golf, the oldest university in Scotland, and the ruins of Scotland's greatest cathedral. A compact, beautiful town that rewards three hours of aimless walking.

Glasgow

50 minutes on the frequent ScotRail express from Waverley to Glasgow Central. The Kelvingrove Art Gallery, the Burrell Collection, and a food scene that now rivals Edinburgh's. Different enough from Edinburgh to justify the short journey.

The Borders

The Borders Railway runs from Waverley to Tweedbank via the Scott Country. Melrose Abbey contains the heart of Robert the Bruce. The journey itself — through moorland and river valley — is worth the ticket.

Before You Leave — Final Checklist

- ☐ Screenshot Day 1 and Day 2 schedules for offline use
- ☐ Book Edinburgh Castle and Holyrood Palace tickets online
- ☐ Reserve dinner — Fishers Bistro, Wedgwood, or The Kitchen
- ☐ Book The Real Mary King's Close at realmarykingsclose.com if visiting
- ☐ Download Google Maps Edinburgh offline before you land
- ☐ Pack a waterproof and proper walking shoes — non-negotiable
- ☐ Check the Royal Yacht Britannia is not closed for events
- ☐ Download the Lothian Buses app for live times
- ☐ Check Holyrood Palace is not closed for royal residence

Edinburgh awaits.

You have the plan. You know the closes, the castle at opening, the bar seat at Fishers Bistro, and which hill the whole city makes sense from. All that remains is to go.

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Your interactive map is one scan away.
All locations from this guide, colour-coded by day, open on your phone.

goingsolo.life/maps/edinburgh

