

TRAVELOGUE

V I S I T I N G
SCOTLAND

September 18th this year was dubbed "D-Day for the Union" by The Times. British newspapers called it a "day of destiny" in dramatic front pages streaked with blue, white and red as Scotland voted on whether to split



BUT the Scots rejected independence in a referendum that left the centuries-old United Kingdom intact but headed for a major shake-up that will give more autonomy to both Scotland and England. I was quite lucky to have been in Scotland to visit my nephew last a month before this political upheaval.

My husband, son and I reached Edinburgh on an East Coast train from London. The train ride was amazing with lush green agricultural fields on both sides. The landscape is a made up of mountains and plains in a wave like pattern. We got down at Haymarket Station just by our hotel. My nephew received us from the station and we had a warm family reunion. Haymarket is a nice area with several boutique hotels. From the Haymarket Hotel it's a straight walk to the center point of Edinburgh hence we quickly freshened up and started discovering the new city scenario.

Edinburgh is a city that just begs to be explored. From the vaults and winds that riddle the old town to the picturesque urban villages Stockbridge and Cramond, it's filled with quirky nooks that tempt you to walk just that little bit further. And every corner turned reveals sudden views and unexpected vistas - green sunlit hills, a glimpse of rust-red crags, a blue flash of distant sea. Edinburgh's castle has played many roles over many centuries. It has been a residence for Scotland's monarchs, a prison for her enemies, a repository for her treasures — but it has always been a military stronghold. To this day, the army has a military and ceremonial

presence here.

Built on steep volcanic rock, the castle is naturally well defended. Although it was captured and recaptured several times during the Wars of Independence with England, and greatly damaged during the 16th-century Lang Siege, it still retains important structures from its medieval past. Next to the Portcullis Gate is a steep flight of 70 steps, aptly named the Lang Stairs. This was the main way up to the summit in medieval times. The stairs once passed beneath the lofty Constable's Tower, which was destroyed in the Lang Siege; the curved wall on the right as you climb up may have formed part of that tower. A plaque high up on the wall commemorates the successful assault on the castle by Sir Thomas Randolph, Earl of Moray in 1314.

We also visited several museums, including the National War Museum which was founded in 1748. A gunpowder magazine capable of holding more than a thousand barrels was built on the sloping rock behind the Governor's House. It was soon joined by two ordnance storehouses, two-story warehouses for cannon, small arms and other equipment. The magazine was demolished in 1897, but the ordnance storehouses were retained and converted for use as a military hospital. A mortuary was also built in Back Well Yard.

The National Gallery of Scotland and Royal Scottish Academy is located on the Mound, a hump of earth that divides the valley of Princes Street Gardens (and which also forms a land bridge

between the Old and New Towns). This complex of Victorian exhibition halls is home to the National Galleries of Scotland's collection of art. It includes Renaissance, Impressionist and key Scottish art. The National Gallery building, designed in 1850 by architect William Playfair (1790–1857), is today connected internally to the Royal Scottish Academy building, also by Playfair in 1825. They are classic examples of the Victorian love affair with classical architecture.

George Street and New Town is the central street of Edinburgh's New Town devised during the reign of George III and constructed between 1766 and 1840. However this district is still older than the formation of the United States and is now a World Heritage Site. During our visit to the heart of old town Edinburgh, we found many lavish restaurants, cafés, old pubs and also trendy, floating quick take away food corners.

We were very lucky to get opportunity to enjoy the festive city. Last August the city was full of various festivals. Edinburgh is the world's leading festival city, with 12 major annual festivals bringing talents from more than a third of the world's countries to this city's streets and stages.

Dating back to 1947, the Edinburgh International Festival was established after World War II to create "a flowering of the human spirit" in the Scottish capital and the same year the Edinburgh Festival Fringe, International Film Festival and many others were also started. As these festivals grew into world leading celebrations, international

excellence in art, culture and science became a permanent and inescapable part of Edinburgh's identity.

We also visited the Edinburgh International Book Festival. The festival experience was quite exquisite. The programme offers over 750 events featuring the greatest writers and thinkers in the world. From rising stars of fiction to Nobel Prize winners, it's a place where audiences and authors gather to share ideas, have thought-provoking discussions, be entertained, informed, enthralled and challenged. There is also a highly regarded programme of events for children and young adults featuring the finest writers and illustrators for young people.

The National Museum of Scotland is a must visit attraction packed full of interesting collections that tell you the story of Scotland, its land, its people and culture. Some exhibits are millions of years old, others less than a decade.

At the end of our trip, we began exploring the breathtaking city on foot, from random street corners to steep Peak Mountain. And we could not have asked for a more fitting end!

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