



SCOTLAND OFF THE BEATEN TRACK

EDINBURGH • 1 DAY ITINERARY

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Cover photo John Knox House, Royal Mile



GENERAL INTRO

Edinburgh is Scotland's capital city and a global icon. The list of world-famous attractions is impressive: Edinburgh Castle, the joint World Heritage Sites of the Old and New Towns, Edinburgh Zoo, The Royal Mile, Arthur's Seat... and the list goes on. Nowhere else in Scotland comes close to its breathtaking architecture, and there's a depth of history here that larger Glasgow can only dream of. And Edinburgh's striking cityscape seems in perfect harmony with the spectacular natural landscape. Extinct volcanoes make up a number of the city's legendary seven hills, including rocky Arthur's Seat.

The city does feel like it's owned by tourists at times - particularly during summer. Despite all this, exploring the so-called Athens of the North is always a hugely rewarding experience.

ITINERARY INTRO

If you only have a single day in the city then you'll want to use your time wisely. Our itinerary introduces some of the capital's key highlights, mainly focusing on the historic Old Town and Royal Mile, and surely sowing the seeds for a longer return visit.

SCHEDULE

- 1 West Bow
- 2 Edinburgh Castle £
- 3 St Giles' Cathedral
- 🍽️ Lunch • somewhere on the Royal Mile
- 4 Palace of Holyroodhouse £ or 4 Walk: Arthur's Seat
- 5 Calton Hill

💡 NEED TO KNOW

Mode of travel • **Foot.** Edinburgh is a hilly city, so a decent level of fitness is required for this itinerary.

You need • Grippy footwear if taking the optional hike up Arthur's Seat. Suitable clothing for Scotland's changeable climate!

Budget • £40 per adult for Edinburgh Castle & Holyrood Palace; £10-20 for lunch in a central cafe / restaurant.

Start / finish • Edinburgh Waverley Station (Market Street exit), EH1 1BB. Trains call here from right across Scotland and the rest of the UK. Nearby Princes Street has a tram stop and numerous bus routes.

Suggested start / finish time • 9am / 5.30pm

🔑 KEY

- ★★★★★ unmissable
- ★★★★ one of the best
- ★★★ very interesting
- ★★ interesting
- ★ minor site



Edinburgh Castle



National Monument of Scotland, Calton Hill

SCOTLAND OFF THE BEATEN TRACK – THE HONEST ONLINE GUIDE

There isn't space here to include everything Scotland has to offer. For further inspiration, browse our free online travel guide to Scotland at sobt.co.uk, covering over 2,100 places throughout the country. With hundreds of walking routes, the most famous highlights and hidden gems, there's something for everyone!

10 min walk • Leave the railway station by the Market Street exit. Look out for the alleyway named Fleshmarket Close (site of a former meat market) on the opposite side of the road. Head up the steep stairs – if you haven't fully woken up yet, this will do the trick! Emerge at Cockburn Street and turn left up the cobbles to reach the junction with the Royal Mile / High Street, at the heart of the Old Town. There are enough attractions on this street alone to fill several days. Turn right, and follow the street uphill to a roundabout, backed by the imposing spire of Tolbooth Kirk. Take the first exit onto the narrow Upper Bow, which ends at railings overlooking West Bow.

1 WEST BOW

Photo stop • (9.15am) This double-decker street is one of Edinburgh's most-photographed spots, adorned with colourful arcades and open-air dining. Sometimes said to be the inspiration for Diagon Alley in the *Harry Potter* books, it certainly does have an air of magic about it, and author J.K. Rowling was resident in the city while she wrote the first part of the series.



West Bow

5 min walk • Turn right along the upper level of West Bow, squeezing past the tables of several restaurants. The balcony becomes an unpromising-looking alley; continue to keep right, ascending steps to join Johnston Terrace. Head left, then take the first right up yet another staircase (sorry). There's a good photo opportunity for Edinburgh Castle here. At the top, turn left to enter the castle's Esplanade.



Edinburgh Castle

5 min walk • From the castle esplanade, walk back down the Royal Mile / Lawnmarket (get your gift shop fix here!). The Royal Mile has been a busy thoroughfare for centuries, connecting Edinburgh Castle at the top of the hill with the Palace of Holyroodhouse at the bottom. The lower half once formed the separate burgh of Canongate, with a fortified gate at the boundary.

3 ST GILES' CATHEDRAL ★★★

Free attraction (donations welcome) • (12 noon) St Giles' lies in a strategic position on the Royal Mile. Parts of the building date to 1124 when it was a smallish church, but only traces survive. Despite repeated burnings by English invaders during the Middle Ages, the church grew in importance through the following centuries and was finally given Cathedral status early in the 17th century (although it's technically no longer one). The highlight has to be the Thistle Chapel; this intimate space belongs to the knights of the Order of the Thistle, appointed by The Queen, and is festooned with incredibly intricate ceiling stonework and wooden carvings. Any hint of a calm atmosphere can be lost when there are other tourists in all directions! ⌚ Allow 30 mins

2 EDINBURGH CASTLE ★★★★★

£ Paid-for attraction • (9.30am) Edinburgh Castle is Scotland's most popular paid-for attraction. Rising majestically above the city's Old and New Towns on an ancient volcanic outcrop, the castle commands the ultimate defensive location, with stunning views. Over its long history the castle has juggled several roles ranging from royal residence to military base, also changing hands several times during the Wars of Independence. The central, tiny St Margaret's Chapel dates to the 1100s but many of the castle's other buildings are much more recent; parts of the site are still used by the British Army. There's a huge amount to see indoors including the Great Hall, Scottish Crown Jewels and even the National War Museum, just about justifying the steep admission charge.

💡 Allow 2-3 hours. Book an early time slot in advance to avoid serious peak season crowds. Times & prices: edinburghcastle.scot



St Giles' Cathedral

🍽️ LUNCH TIME

(12.30pm) Pick an eatery on the Royal Mile.

15 min walk • From St Giles' Cathedral, continue downhill along the Royal Mile all the way to the end. If you have time, there are several museums on this street, many with free admission.

4 PALACE OF HOLYROODHOUSE ★★★★★

£ Paid-for attraction • (2pm) The Royal Mile abruptly comes to its lower end at the Palace of Holyroodhouse: the Queen's official Scottish residence. Ticket prices include an excellent audioguide, ruined 1128 Augustinian abbey (in the attractive palace grounds), and admission to the Queen's Gallery if you buy the joint ticket - the latter showcasing artwork from the Royal Collection. The palace boasts sumptuous state apartments and a grand Throne Room, graced over the years by an impressive roll of royal figures.

🕒 Allow 2 hours excluding Queen's Gallery. Times & prices: rct.uk/visit/palace-of-holyroodhouse



Palace of Holyroodhouse



Arthur's Seat

15 min walk • From the roundabout in front of the palace, head north (slight right) on Abbeyhill, almost immediately turning left onto Calton Road. After a short distance, head right through a stone arch into New Calton Burial Ground. Several famous Scots rest here; look out for the old watchtower built to deter body-snatchers. Exit at the top left corner, emerging on the wide Regent Road, and turn left. Pass a succession of grand buildings and monuments, culminating in the great hulk of St Andrew's House on the left. Just after, take the flight of stairs on the right, immediately turning right again to gain Calton Hill.

5 CALTON HILL ★★★★★

Free attraction • (5pm) Calton Hill affords the best views of Edinburgh's New Town – as opposed to the Old Town we explored earlier. This summit is sprinkled with an impressive array of monuments and buildings of its own, including the old City Observatory – now an art gallery and museum. If the natural high point of the hill isn't enough, you can pay to ascend a further 143 steps to the top of the telescope-shaped Nelson Monument for even better views.

🕒 Allow 20 mins to admire the views and monuments (not including entry to the observatory or tower).

As an alternative to the Palace of Holyroodhouse

4 ARTHUR'S SEAT ★★★★★

2-3 hour walk • (2pm) If you fancy something considerably more energetic than the Palace of Holyroodhouse, those with a good level of fitness can instead take a hike up Arthur's Seat. The 251-metre summit is the highest of the city's Seven Hills and dominates the skyline from both within and outwith the capital. The rocky summit and neighbouring Salisbury Crags are, like the hill on which Edinburgh Castle stands, the remains of an extinct volcano.

🕒 Grippy shoes required; not recommended in poor weather conditions. Map & photo guide at sobt.co.uk/walk-arthurs-seat (join route at Haggis Knowe).



Calton Hill

🕒 TIME'S UP!

10 min walk • From Calton Hill, return down the steps to Regent Road and turn right. Follow the road ahead back to Waverley Station. You'll arrive at the Princes Street entrance; this bustling boulevard is one of Edinburgh's main shopping streets, and forms part of the New Town which lies ahead and to the right.