



SCOTLAND OFF THE BEATEN TRACK

ABERDEEN • 1 DAY ITINERARY

Copyright © November 2024 Scotland Off the Beaten Track
Cover photo Castlegate, Aberdeen city centre



GENERAL INTRO

Welcome to Aberdeen – Granite City capital of the North East. Famous for its oil and energy industry, Scotland's third largest settlement might not sound like a promising tourist destination. But strike it off the list at your peril. Even if the city centre isn't conventionally attractive, there's a wide variety of indoor and outdoor sights to explore here, in addition to a wonderful and underrated beach. As for all the granite architecture: sunshine reflects off the grey buildings to complete the city's other name: "the silver city with the golden sands". This is one of the sunniest parts of the country, so blue skies are more common than you might think; just wrap up warm if the wind's coming off the North Sea.

ITINERARY INTRO

This itinerary focuses on the historic and cultural attractions in the city centre before heading for the coast. Aberdeen's excellent gardens and the northern suburb of Old Aberdeen are conspicuously absent; these are the obvious places to aim for if you can spare a second day.

SCHEDULE

- 1 Aberdeen Maritime Museum
- 2 The Tolbooth Museum
- 3 Provost Skene's House
- 4 Aberdeen Art Gallery
- 🍷 Lunch • somewhere on Belmont / Union Street
- 5 Footdee
- 6 Aberdeen Beach

💡 NEED TO KNOW

Mode of travel • Foot (+ bus?). The morning's sights are close together. After lunch, Footdee and the beach are a mile distant – you may wish to take a bus.

You need • Comfortable shoes, and suitable clothing for Scotland's changeable climate!

Budget • All attractions are free (donations accepted); £10-20 for lunch in a central cafe / restaurant.

Start / finish • Aberdeen railway station (Guild Street exit), AB11 6LX. Trains call here from all points north and south, and there is an adjacent bus station.

Suggested start / finish time • 9.45am / 5pm (schedule may require adjustment on Sundays)

🔑 KEY

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



Union Street



Marischal College



Seagulls are part of any visit to the city!

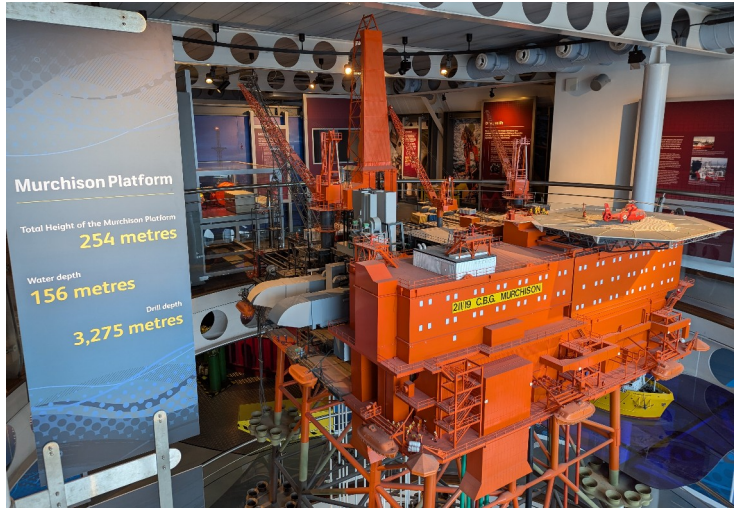
SCOTLAND OFF THE BEATEN TRACK – THE HONEST ONLINE GUIDE

There isn't space here to include everything Scotland has to offer. For further inspiration, browse my free online travel guide to Scotland at sobt.co.uk, covering over 2,200 places throughout the country. With hundreds of walking routes, the most famous highlights and hidden gems, there's something for everyone!

5 min walk • The railway station is attached to an excellent shopping mall, but save your purchases for another time and leave by the Guild Street exit. Cross the road and turn right along the busy thoroughfare; tower blocks are soon replaced on the right by the city harbour. As the dual carriageway begins to curve left, turn left onto cobbled Shiprow, with the Maritime Museum prominent ahead.

1 ABERDEEN MARITIME MUSEUM ★★★★★

Free attraction (donations welcome) • (10am) The city's seagoing history is comprehensively covered here, from shipbuilding to whaling, fishing and the oil, gas and energy industry – including a large-scale replica of a North Sea oil platform. Displays are divided over four floors and two adjacent buildings: a modern, glass-fronted construction and a 16th century stone one (the second oldest house in the city) which once belonged to Provost John Ross. 📍 Allow 1 hour. Times: aberdeencity.gov.uk



Aberdeen Maritime Museum

5 min walk • Turn left out of the museum, continuing uphill to meet the main Union Street / Castle Street axis. The imposing building directly ahead houses the next attraction.

2 THE TOLBOOTH MUSEUM ★★

Free attraction (donations welcome) • (11am) The Tolbooth Museum is one of Aberdeen's most overlooked attractions. Located right at the city centre, this former 17th and 18th century jail features crime and punishment displays, and highlights changing attitudes to the prison system over the centuries. The building's age means there are lots of steep and narrow staircases – ascending them all is something of a punishment in itself.

📍 Allow 30 mins. Times: aberdeencity.gov.uk

15 min walk • Turn left out of the museum. The main road bends left to become King Street, but it's worth continuing ahead to see Castlegate with its 17th century mercat cross – where new monarchs were announced – surrounded by fine granite buildings. Now retrace your steps, again passing The Tolbooth Museum. Take the next right onto Broad Street. On the right, the magnificent Marischal College was once part of the University of Aberdeen but now the city council HQ. It is the world's second largest granite building. Turn left at the midpoint of the building (opposite the Robert the Bruce statue), passing between modern offices.



The Tolbooth Museum

3 PROVOST SKENE'S HOUSE ★★★★★

Free attraction (donations welcome) • (11.45am) Aberdeen's oldest surviving townhouse is rather dwarfed by the new Marischal Square complex which has recently sprung up around it. Dating to 1545, it reopened in 2021 after major refurbishment and now houses displays about notable Aberdonians.

📍 Allow 40 mins. Times: aberdeencity.gov.uk

5 min walk • Leave the Marischal Square complex through an old stone arch at the opposite end to which you entered from. Turn right along Flourmill Lane, then left onto Schoolhill, passing between two parts of the Bon Accord shopping mall. The next grand building on the right is the entrance to Robert Gordon's College (private), with Aberdeen Art Gallery immediately beyond.



Provost Skene's House

4 ABERDEEN ART GALLERY ★★★★★

Free attraction (donations welcome) • (12.30pm) This neo-classical granite hulk has dominated the Schoolhill district since 1884 – and inside, it’s never looked better. The gallery reopened in November 2019 following a five year redevelopment project; we haven’t been in since the refurbishment, but have been told the job’s a good ‘un – the gallery also won the Scotland’s Best Building award in 2021. The 20+ different exhibition rooms showcase works spanning over 700 years, with plenty of contemporary pieces.

💡 Allow 1 hour+. Times: aberdeencity.gov.uk

LUNCH TIME

(1.30pm) Pick a spot on Belmont Street (leading away from the gallery) / Union Street (at the end of Belmont Street).



Aberdeen Art Gallery



Footdee

25 min walk (or bus alternative) • Facing Union Street from the end of Belmont Street, turn left along Union Street – once Aberdeen’s premier shopping thoroughfare – then right at the crossroads onto Market Street. Follow the road downhill, turning left at the next crossroads alongside the harbour you passed earlier. This time, keep right at all junctions, following Regent Quay / York Place / York Street all the way to Footdee at the very end. 💡 This is a long, rather dull walk through an industrial zone – alternatively, there are direct buses from Union Street to Footdee.

5 FOOTDEE ★★

Village • (3.30pm) The narrow spit of land between Aberdeen harbour and beach is filled by the cute fishing suburb of Footdee (or Fittie to use the local name), purpose-built in 1809 to rehouse local fishermen. Single-storey cottages and narrow alleyways look so different to central Aberdeen that they seem like a standalone village rather than a suburb, with well-kept gardens, sheds, open drains and a squat church hidden away at the centre.

💡 Allow 30 mins.

6 ABERDEEN BEACH ★★★★★

Walk • (4pm) Aberdeen’s superb sandy beach begins directly to the north of Footdee and stretches for two miles to the mouth of the river. Lined by a wide boulevard and with a retail park and a row of cafes in the central part, it’s a great place to spend a warm summer’s day in the company of what may well be Scotland’s most aggressive seagulls. The sands never get crowded, even at high tide, and things become quieter still as you head further out of town to the north. The only drawback: it’s a bit far from the city centre.

💡 Walk as far as you like – it’s approx. 15 mins to the leisure facilities at the central portion of the beach, or a further 30 mins to the quiet northern end at the River Don.

TIME’S UP!

20 min walk (or bus alternative) • Beach Boulevard meets the sea immediately beyond (north of) the amusement park / restaurants. Follow it inland, eventually reaching a large roundabout. Take the second exit onto Justice Street, which emerges at Castlegate. Union Street and the city centre lie beyond. 💡 Again, this walk lacks interest but there is a direct bus alternative from Links Road / Golf Road back to Union Street or Aberdeen railway station.



Aberdeen Beach