

The Embra and Glesca trips

All the information you need for civilised days out in Edinburgh and Glasgow visiting the best pubs and trying some of the best beer in each city, plus a little bit of culture as well. Based on our gentlemen's excursions to Edinburgh in March 2013 and Glasgow in June 2013. Ask any participant for the full storyhere is a boring description of each trip, followed by some practicalities for others planning something similar.

The Edinburgh Trip

Off the train from Durham just before noon, out of the Market Street exit from Waverley station, cross the road and up Fleshmarket Close stairs to the Halfway House.....about 30 seconds from platform to bar. Fine range of mainly Scottish beers, so small that you are bound to getting chatting to someone, and usually a mixture of locals and tourists.

From there we climbed the stairs to the Royal Mile, a few hundred yards towards the Castle, along George IV Bridge to Forrest Road and into Sandy Bells. Famous for its folk sessions any night of the week.....at lunchtimes just a good pub, with good beer.

Then the cultural bit....a walk round the corner into Chambers Street and the National Museum of Scotland, recently expanded and remodelled. Highlights for us were Dolly the Sheep, the chance to drive and crash an F1 racing car and try on an astronaut suit, the building itself, and a visit to the roof – cold, wet and windy but good views over the city.

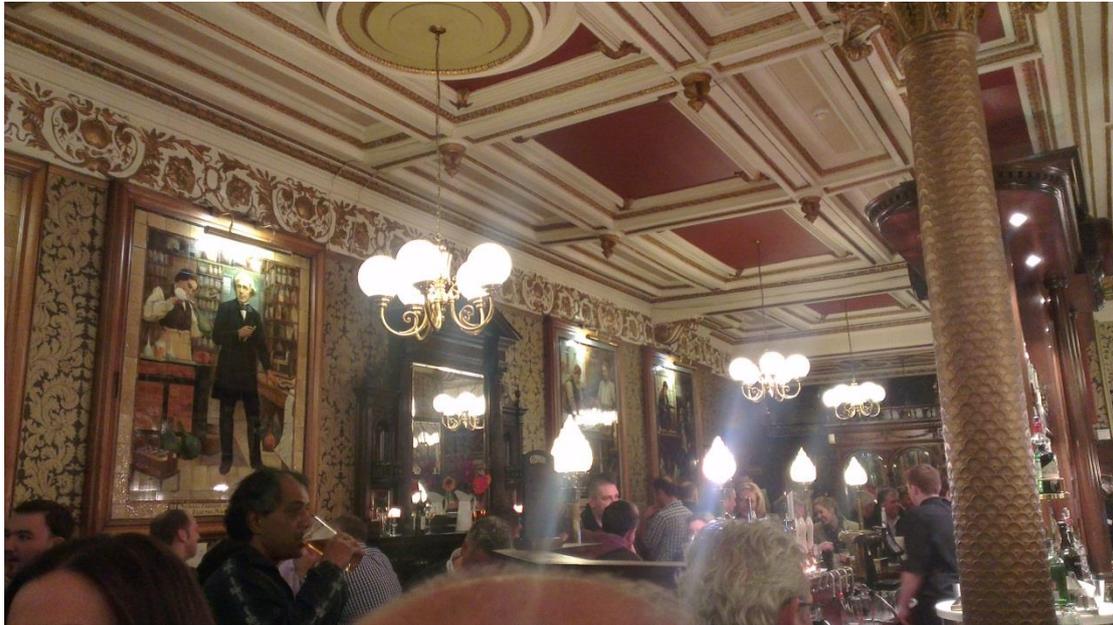


Then on the 35 bus from directly outside, via Tollcross to Angle Park Terrace and the Diggers, discovering that in Edinburgh as elsewhere some of the solid old districts are now full of new and expensive flats, retail parks and the like. Officially known as the Athletic Arms but next to Dalry Cemetery, hence the name. Famous in its heyday for the sheer amount of McEwans 80 /- that was poured down peoples necks on match days (or any day). Fine example of a corner tenement pub, good beer, good pies. And a TV crew looking for a Hearts supporter to interview (and the only one was the barman).

Bus back into town, off at the West End and into Mathers Bar for more beer and pies. Nice.

Then on to the Oxford Bar, a basic friendly boozier, now famous as being the pub where Inspector Rebus drank.

Along Rose Street which was the Edinburgh equivalent of the Bigg Market in its heyday, and full of tourists on a pub crawl. Most of the pubs are nothing special with one exception, the Abbotsford, where the bar staff can match beer and whisky. A pint of Stewarts No3 and a smoky Islay malt worked a treat.



Final port of call is the Café Royal (above). If it is your first visit walk in and go wow....not your typical pub décor. The beer (and the food) is pretty good as well. And from there it's a two minute walk (or a one minute run), down Waverley Steps (now the Waverley escalator) and on to the last train.

I haven't said much about the beer. We had a variety, some of which I can't remember....all well kept. Was impressed by Stewarts, a local brewery that have recreated an 80/- just like McEwans, and the No3 is a good copy of Youngers.

Info – getting there

We chose a Friday for the trip. A good day – it avoids the hordes of people doing much the same thing as you at the weekend, while the daytime pubs are more likely to have enough customers in to be interesting, unlike say a Tuesday when you may be the only one there.

From Durham we took the the 1017 train arriving Edinburgh at 1203. We returned on the last train, the 2100 from Edinburgh, arriving Durham at about 2300. We had nearly nine hours in Edinburgh which is sufficient for this crawl. We used standard off peak returns (which gave us the option of returning when we wanted, currently £56.70 – earlier departures from Durham are more expensive at £77.50).Cheaper

advance fares are available but with no flexibility. Note that the last return train from Edinburgh is earlier on Saturday and Sunday.

Alternatively if you want to stay over Edinburgh has the full range of accommodation, though avoid the Festival period when everything is full priced and fully booked.

Getting Around

Easy. Walk...but it is hilly. Take the bus. A good, cheap and frequent network. Single fare £1.50 any distance, day ticket £3.50. Note that bus drivers cannot give change. Info, timetables and maps at www.lothianbuses.com The trip out and back to the Diggers is best done by bus. The tram from the City Centre via Haymarket to the Airport will arrive sometime in the 22nd century.

Other Options

Edinburgh has plenty of fine pubs and decent beer so there are plenty of other options, both in the city centre and inner suburbs. Check out the Good Beer Guide. The pubs in the Royal Mile and in Rose Street are mainly full of tourists. Try the Bow Bar, in West Bow, which could be visited on the way to or from Sandy Bells. The Guildford, next door to the Café Royal is another fine pub.

Eating

This wasn't a gourmet trip (not for food anyway) so we survived on hot pies (in the Diggers and Mathers). However, the food in the Halwayhouse, Sandy Bells and the Café Royal is worth a try, and there are plenty of restaurants around.

The food hall on the first floor of Jenners department store (accessible from Princes Street or Rose Street opposite the Abbotsford) has a selection of quality Scottish food (ie not deep fried and battered) to bring home – quality haggis, black pudding, cheeses, salmon etc.

The Glasgow Trip

From Queen Street station through the passage into Buchanan Street Subway station and four stops on the subway to Hillhead, then a its 2 minute walk to Tennents Bar. Like many of the other best pubs in Glasgow (and Edinburgh) it's a Victorian tenement corner pub, and its other claim to fame is as where the Gillon Hood partnership first began. Still the same eclectic mix of drinkers...but a much better range of beer than it used to have.

Then about 10 minutes walk down Byres Road to Partick Cross (or one stop on the subway to Kelvinhall) and the Three Judges. About 10 hand pumps, friendly and good boozer.

From there we wandered towards Mother Indias café, and stopped off at Brew Dog to see what it is like...since they have pubs all over the place. The beer is all craft keg...which seems like a pity to make a decent beer then killing it. I may be in old fart mode...but not my type of beer (though a thousand times better than John Smiths) or pub.

Late lunch in Mother Indias Café, one of the first places to introduce Indian tapas type meals, which give you a range to try. Excellent food, freshly spiced. Yumm. Best time to go as permanently busy in the evenings with queues at the door.



Back into the city centre by foot then bus and to Hope Street and the Pot Still. Famous for its range of whiskies, and the staff are very knowledgeable about them.....it also sells two or three real ales kept in good condition.

It starts to get vague about here...mainly because we tried the whisky....but we did have the chance for a pint in The Horseshoe which is an essential part of any Glasgow pub crawl. Gets mobbed and the TVs can be intrusive but the beer and service are good, and it's a cracking building. Then a final stagger back to Queen St Station.



Info – getting there

We chose to catch the 0820 from Durham so we would get in at a reasonable time, then back to Edinburgh on the 1715 to catch the 1830 from Edinburgh.

The extra distance and ticket restrictions make it more difficult to do in a day. The morning train is full price so we choose first class advance returns which worked out cheaper. Means you are restricted to a specific train – not a good idea when you're pissed and enjoying yourself, and not available on the last train from Edinburgh (presumably too many problems with pissed people enjoying themselves). On reflection

better to go later when the off peak fare is available and catch the last connection via Edinburgh. Or even better to stay over for a night.

Getting around

Pretty easy but it is hilly. Main distance travelled is between the city centre and the West End which is easiest by subway – an experience in itself – from Buchanan St station adjacent to Queen St. The nearest station to Central is St Enoch. If you want to see where you're going then either walk (its just about doable) or take the bus. Trickier and more expensive than Edinburgh – First plus other companies, fares vary and First do not give change. Subway single £1.40. First bus day ticket £4.

Some other options

For a bit of culture linked to this trip then try Kelvingrove Museum and Art Gallery. Well worth it and it is directly across the road from Mother Indias Café. The new Riverside museum, which has a transport focus, is also excellent – about ten minutes walk from either the Three Judges or Mother Indias. Its where I found the preserved frontage of a demolished pub that I used to drink in.

For relaxation Kelvingrove Park surrounds the Art Gallery and is very pleasant, and beyond that is Glasgow University.

There are plenty of other pubs in the Brew Dog/Mother Indias café area. Too long since I've visited them to recommend any in particular. Alternatively, leave Kelvingrove Park at the north end (Gibson Street), have a pint in the Doublet (Park Road) where the beer is always good and it is a two minute walk to Kelvinbridge subway. With a bit more time it would be possible to call in at either the Bon Accord

(North St), with a large range of beer or the State Bar (Holland St) on your way in from the west end to the city centre.

Eating.

Have a curry.

Plenty of places...see The List (the whats on guide to Glasgow and Edinburgh) for regular restaurant reviews. They produce an eating out guide to Glasgow and Edinburgh which looks pretty reliable.