



EDINBURGH: *behind the scenes*

When most people visit Edinburgh, they come for the world-renowned Christmas market or the Edinburgh Fringe Festival and hit all the hot spots: Edinburgh Castle, The Royal Mile, Grassmarket, Victoria Street and Arthur's Seat.

But it's now been a year since Edinburgh's pipers have delighted locals and tourists alike, a year without the Christmas market and the Fringe Festival. Like every other city in the world, upon

the descent of the coronavirus pandemic, Edinburgh went quiet. In that quietness (and because Edinburgh had the most perfect spring weather), I began to explore the city in a way I had always meant to but never made the time to do.

There is so much more to this city than what most travel blogs will tell you. And who knows what tourism will be like once we can easily travel again. Many people, myself included, will want to bypass the

more crowded areas and spend time finding the quiet, lesser known beauty that our destinations hold. For your next weekend trip to Edinburgh, here's what most of the travel blogs won't tell you:

The best Saturdays always start in Leith; this is where I live so I'm partial, but for very good reason. Between Leith Market, The Shore and The Pitt, is a food lover's dream come true.

Leith is a port town that sits at the very top of Edinburgh. It is a very social and multi-cultural community perhaps best known for the film *Trainspotting*. You can start your morning at the very popular Leith Market. I'd recommend getting there at 10.00 because the best food always sells out first, or if you prefer to sleep in, The Pitt, which opens at noon, is a street-food dream come true.

If you want a sit-down option, The Shore has an array of beloved cafés and restaurants that will have you feeling like you're stepping into a history book as you sip your latte and look out to a landscape that has been mostly untouched for centuries.

If you prefer to take your pastries to go, a 20-minute stroll along to Newhaven will take you into the ever quaint, once thriving fishing village. Complete with its own harbour, lighthouse and pier, you really could don a petticoat and pretend to be

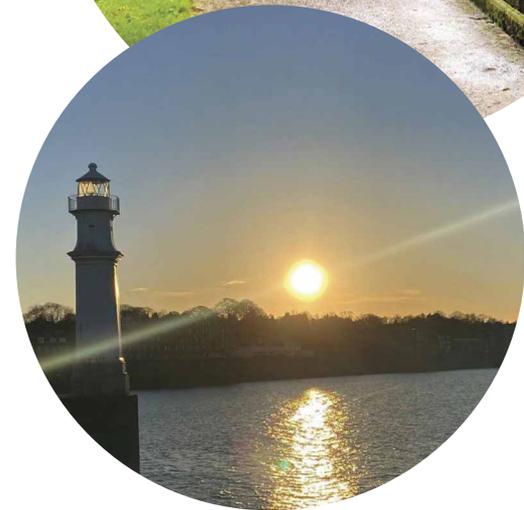
Royal Botanical Gardens © Nicole Nadler



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A leisurely walk down to Water of Leith will lead you past the gorgeous Greco-Roman St Bernard's Well. Once believed to have healing powers, this monument is just a short walk away from the also Instagram-popular Dean Village. This little hidden away village, popular with Harry Potter lovers, looks like something that belongs on the front of a postcard, especially on a sunny day. There are some lovely spaces by the water to sit and have your picnic, watch the clouds float by and enjoy an afternoon out of a story book.



La Barratine Victoria (top) and Leith Shore (above) © Nicole Nadler

St Bernard's Well (top) and New Haven Lighthouse © Nicole Nadler

back in the 19th century as so much of what you'll see is still untouched.

Another wander about a mile or so south and you'll come upon Edinburgh's Royal Botanic Garden, the UK's second oldest, which celebrated its 350th birthday in 2020. With more than 13,000 plant species and 70 acres, you could truly spend the entire day at the garden, but a few hours in the afternoon will do just fine. With a restaurant, cafe and coffee bar on the premises, it's a great place to get some lunch while enjoying nature.

The botanic garden closes at 17:00, which is the perfect time to get some drinks and eventually dinner. There is a ton of great options, but a personal favourite of mine is The Orchard Bar, which is right across the street from the garden. It's relaxed and informal, but the service is always friendly and the hearty Scottish food is always good. They also regularly host art exhibitions showcasing the work of local artists. A quick nip to the Tesco around the corner for a bottle of wine or two and on to Inverleith Park, which overlooks the Edinburgh City skyline, to (depending on the time of year) watch the sunset behind the castle.

If Saturdays are for Leith, Sundays are for Stockbridge. Stockbridge is a picturesque and colourful Georgian and Victorian neighbourhood. A whole day could be spent here but, if you're like me, a visit to La Barantine Victoria for a croissant and a chai is the best way to start and then on to the infamous row of highly-rated charity shops. There's also a variety of colourful cafes and restaurants if you're wanting a more formal brunch option, and you must spend some time in some of the speciality shops, especially the cheesemongers.

Stockbridge Market is historic, originally running from 1823 and 1906; today it is run by the same company that runs the Leith Market, with a lot of overlapping stalls. It's a perfect option for grabbing some food for a picnic lunch before heading on. If you're an Instagrammer, Circus Lane, one of Edinburgh's most popular photo spots, is just around the corner.

Even though Edinburgh doesn't do happy hour, "It's 5 o'clock somewhere" still very much applies. A short walk away lies the West End, a gorgeous part of the city centre that is often forgotten by tourists. One of my top options is Le Di-Vin, a French wine bar that is easily recogni-

sable by its Tudor-style architecture. While patrons usually go for the wine, many stay for the food choices as well, particularly the charcuterie options. A great way to end the weekend is a visit to the Filmhouse. It is Scotland's leading independent three-screen cinema that shows everything from commercial hits to little-known indie films and everything in between, many accompanied by Q&As and panel discussions.

Domestic and international travel feels so close I can nearly taste it. When we finally travel again and you make your way to Edinburgh, consider these hidden treasures in between visits to the usual Pinterest recommendations. Trust me, you won't regret it.