

SCOTLAND

*Stunning scenery, world-famous whisky
and captivating cities*

By Dini Martinez

Scotland is well-known for its dramatic scenery of mountains and valleys, rolling hills, green fields and forests, thousands of kilometres of rugged coastline and, of course, its world-famous whisky. Moreover, golf was created here and Scotland has some of the best courses in the world and in the colder months, winter sports attract many tourists. However, throughout the year people from all over the world – descendants of the many Scots who emigrated during the hard years of the 18th and 19th centuries and who now number in their millions – come in search of their family history. And, of course, quite a few visitors go to Loch Ness hoping to catch a glimpse of the legendary Monster.

Stunning scenery

The Scots are famous storytellers, and you will soon discover that every castle, loch and glen has a legend attached to it. First and foremost, the famous Loch Ness Monster – which has been making regular headlines since 1933 – comes to mind. One school of thought is that the legendary Nessie could be an example of a long-surviving dinosaur – the plesiosaur.

The Scottish Highlands are a must for lovers of impressive mountains, rugged terrain, lochs, bagpipes and kilt-wearing Scotsmen. For centuries, the Scots have carved out a living in what can be a harsh and unforgiving land. There are low-level walks, accessible all year round, which promise truly humbling moments with nature. To name but a few: the area around the cathedral city of Dunkeld, where you will also find numerous warm bars and cosy

hotels; the area around Blair Castle – the ancestral home of the Clan Murray; or in the Cairngorms mountain range. It is also to the Cairngorms, as well as the Glencoe and Nevis Ranges, that ski and snowboard-laden visitors head when the snow arrives. In fact, Scotland's winter season has its very own charm, with crisp, frost-dusted landscapes, Christmas markets, boughs of holly and decorative tartan sashes.

No matter what the time of the year, another Scottish highlight is a round of golf. This does not have to be at St Andrews, for which bookings are required months in advance, as there are plenty of immaculately kept greens to keep any golfer happy. The low season – between November and March – is when prices will be at their lowest.

For somewhere totally free, Scotland is blessed with

a tremendous 6,158 miles of coastline for anything from a short stroll to a several-day-long hike along rugged cliffs, inlets, beaches and rocks. There are also a large number of islands and many rivers.

For the more adventurous, there is white-water rafting available, as well as some fantastic mountaineering, Land Rover safaris, mountain-biking, clay-pigeon shooting and abundant wildlife photography. Watch out for seals, stoats, golden eagles and – who knows? – maybe even Scotland's official animal, the unicorn! At the end of each high-octane, fresh-air-filled day there is always a welcoming pub serving good beer and even better whisky!

World-famous whisky

Speaking of good whisky, there are 115 working

distilleries in Scotland producing copious quantities of the world-famous national drink. Most are open on weekdays for tours and tastings. The Highlands is the largest region in Scotland – in both area and whisky production. Speyside in the east features the famous Whisky Trail, a beautiful 66-mile track along the River Spey; also renowned for salmon fishing. Even small islands such as Islay, one of the southernmost of the Inner Hebridean Islands off the west coast, produce their very own 'Scotch'.

The word 'whisky' is derived from uisge or uisce – the Gaelic word for water. To earn this title, the spirit must mature in oak casks in Scotland for at least three years. Over 20 million casks are stored in the country – almost four for every person living there. Whisky accounts for a quarter of the UK's food and drink exports, meaning a healthy £125 – or an

average of 38 bottles a second – according to the Scotch Whisky Association! Laid end-to-end, the 99 million cases of Scotch exported each year would cover the distance between Edinburgh and New York six times!

Whisky is made by the distillation of fermented grain and the first records of the process were found during archaeological excavations of ancient Babylon and Mesopotamia. The art of distillation had reached Scotland by no later than the 15th century, with the first written evidence of whisky production in the country appearing in an entry in the Exchequer Rolls for 1494. After the Act of Union in 1707 that united Scotland and England, taxes on whisky rose dramatically and with the English Malt Tax of 1725, most of Scotland's distillation was either shut down or forced underground. »



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 Left: Eilean Donan Castle,
 Scottish Highlands Below:
 Dunkeld Cathedral knave



«Distillers, operating out of homemade stills, took to distilling whisky at night when the darkness hid the smoke from the stills – hence the name ‘moonshine’. In 1823, the UK passed the Excise Act, legalising distillation for a fee, which basically stopped the large-scale production of Scottish moonshine.



Captivating culture and cities

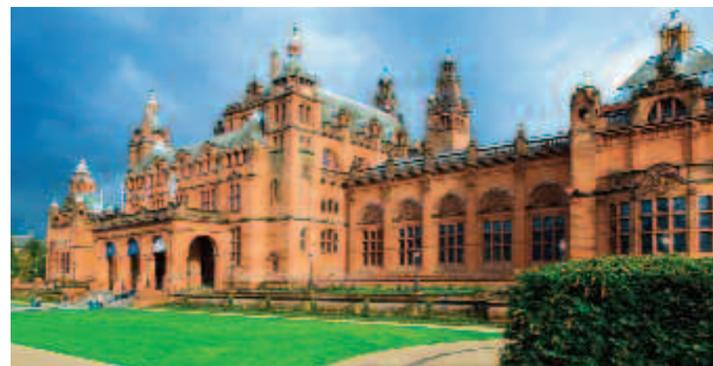
Generally, the Scots are fiercely proud of their culture – so avoid referring to them as ‘British’ or, even worst, ‘English’ – to avoid causing offence! Scotland has a great tradition of festivals, literature and achievement in the arts and since the ‘Scottish

Enlightenment’ that followed the Act of Union it has produced some of the greatest literary personalities, thinkers, writers and scientists in the world, including moral philosopher and political economist Adam Smith, television inventor John Baird and the man who discovered penicillin, Alexander Fleming. More recently, scientists in Aberdeen developed the MRI scanner and those in Edinburgh created Dolly the Sheep, the first cloned animal. Maybe not surprisingly, Scotland was the first country since Sparta in the days of classical Greece to implement a system of general public education.

There is also a thriving Scottish music scene and home-grown bands and musicians are much in evidence, particularly those originating from in and around Glasgow. This lively and friendly city is home to a fantastic music scene and a ‘must visit’ destination is ‘King Tut’s Wah Wah Hut’ where Oasis were spotted and signed their first record deal. Moreover, Scotland’s largest city also hosts some of the best entrance-free museums in Europe. To name just one, the Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum in the city’s West End features some famous exhibits and is surrounded by the beautiful Kelvingrove Park. Not to be outdone, the country’s capital – Edinburgh – has more listed buildings than anywhere else in the world.

While the sun may not always shine, the warm welcome and wonderful diversity of places,

landscapes and experiences mean that Scotland has much to offer to any visitor. Sometimes awe-inspiring and majestic, sometimes ramshackle and faded, proud and at the same time modest, and modern yet also ancient and eccentric but charming – few visitors leave Scotland unimpressed. 🇬🇧



Left: Whisky production in Speyside
 Above: Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum