

Glasgow and Loch Lomond: Four Days of City Grandeur and Bonny Country



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Despite its working-class roots, whimsy can be found everywhere in Glasgow. Jane Mundy

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Coming into Glasgow from the airport in a downpour I ask my taxi driver the best time to visit. “Anytime. Glaswegians wear hoodies but not umbrellas, we don’t notice the rain,” says Billy Moore. “Soaked? Just suffer it and bring a spare pair of socks.” Typical Glaswegian no-nonsense attitude.

Weather aside, I’d signed up for two walking tours and soon discover that Glasgow is no longer a place that would look the same before and after a nuclear attack, as Billy Connolly (nicknamed the Big Yin, meaning The Big One) once said.

Walking around, you immediately see that this merchant city has shaken loose its gritty, heavy-drinking stereotype. And you can’t miss the comedian: He is 50 ft high in murals at three locations, and splendid street art decorates many buildings. Outside the Gallery of Modern Art is one of the most photographed landmarks in Glasgow: The Duke of Wellington wearing a traffic cone is a nod to the locals’ attitude toward authority, and like my cabbie, friendly. No wonder Glasgow has branded itself “People Make Glasgow.” Moore tells me that everyone gets along,

VIDEO

“except ‘o course yer Celtics and Rangers fans,” he says, laughing. Football rivalry is notorious here.

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3:31



Glasgow Cathedral as seen from the Necropolis.



Once a Police Box made famous by Doctor Who's TARDIS, now transformed into a coffee hut.



The old and new Cameron House in Loch Lomond sit side by side.



Pick your poison.



Towering over the city is the Necropolis, with Glasgow Cathedral, a medieval masterpiece, at its base. Clutching umbrellas, we climb to the top, past obelisks and monuments and the remains of two centuries of Glasgow's greats and godly.

The on-and-off bus tour is also a must as you'll miss some spots just traipsing around. I hop off at the splendid Kelvingrove Art Gallery and museum, with over 8,000 objects on display across 22 galleries and like many galleries and museums in Scotland, it's free.

Kelvingrove is conveniently located a few blocks from two of Glasgow's best restaurants in Finnieston, named by the Sunday Times in 2016 as the “UK's hippest place to live.”

“Scots gotta be a bit adventurous,” says Jimmie, another taxi driver. He isn't referring to deep-fried Mars Bars or the Tardis police booths with public phones selling hemp oil and coffee on street corners (Dr Who fans love them). Jimmie has eaten at Six by Nico. Every six weeks a new six-course tasting menu is served, each one themed on a place or memory. Diners are busy taking photos of every course and it must be the most visually documented restaurant in Scotland.

Next night I'm across the road at The Gannet—each dish elevating Scottish food to new heights. My gran never cooked black pudding like that and how can this taste be parsnip? From my table I see outside threesomes stop to peruse the menu: parents and university kid. The kids want to come in, but the parents shake their heads. Across the road

VANCOUVER WEATHER

10°C

Partly cloudy
Feels like 7°C



Wednesday

Thursday

Friday

Saturday

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is a laundromat packed with women folding what looks like a week's laundry. But the times, they are a changin'...

Eight of us have signed up for the Food Tour, six of whom are local cattle farmers. Fittingly our first stop is Alston Bar where the beef is dry-aged and over 100 gins are offered. Next up is Hutchesons for oysters and bubbly followed by haggis and beer and live music at Babbity Bowser—highly recommend them all.

Also worth mentioning is Singl-End Restaurant. Don't be put off by its location below street level. Its' bright and bustling and packed with locals. When the food arrives at a nearby table I overhear, "Your eyes are bigger than your belly," and we all laugh.

From Glasgow it's less than an hour on the high road to the bonny, bonny banks of Loch Lomond, and on its tranquil shores a baronial castle—Cameron House. My porter, kitted out in fine Harris tweeds, opens the door to my luxurious room with velvet chaise lounge, marbled bathroom, huge comfy bed and a view of the Loch.

There are excellent walks in the grounds and lochside, but the number one activity is sitting in front of a roaring fire wrapped in tartan blankets, whisky in hand, watching the great outdoors. Second is a champagne cruise aboard the hotel's Celtic Warrior. As the bagpipes and a nor-westerly blow, we pass castles, little islands with remote cottages, mountains and glens. Our guide imparts age-old tales of clansmen and the biggest island on the loch houses the oldest nudist colony in the UK. Those hearty Scots.

After tucking into exceptional Caledonian oysters and several kinds of smoked and cured salmon at the Cameron Grill, I nip into the magnificent Great Scots Bar for a night-cap. Their fine selection of single malts is overwhelming so I get a crash course in whisky tasting and history—one bottle is dated 1948— from Paul, the brilliant bartender. He pours a wee dram of Glengoyne that sat over 12 years in sherry caskets. If this is boozing for the gods, I'm a believer.

A short shuttle bus away is the Carrick Spa and an afternoon of indulgence: a fantastic back massage, swim in the lap pool, up to the rooftop terrace infinity pool followed by steam room and hydro pools that leave me invigorated and ready for another whisky tasting.

Keats wrote of Scotland in 1818, "I am more comfortable than I could have imagined in such a place...The people are all very kind." So true.

The writer was a guest of Visit Britain, which neither reviewed nor approved this article before publication.

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