

Chapter 2

ENGLAND, SCOTLAND, AND WALES

2



Edinburgh

Edinburgh is “a city so beautiful it breaks the heart again and again,” as Alexander McCall Smith once wrote. One of the world’s stateliest cities and proudest capitals, it is—like Rome—built on seven hills, making it a striking backdrop for the ancient pageant of history. In a skyline of sheer drama, Edinburgh Castle looks out over the city, frowning down on Princes Street’s glamour and glitz.

The city’s Old Town, which bears a great symbolic weight as the “heart of Scotland’s capital,” is a boon for lovers of atmosphere and history. This is where you’ll find the Royal Mile, which stretches from Edinburgh Castle down to the Palace of Holyroodhouse, and Grassmarket, one of the city’s more picturesque areas filled with cute cafés, lively bars and restaurants, and streets brimming with history. In contrast, if you appreciate the unique architectural heritage of the city’s Enlightenment, then the New Town’s for you. You can take the word “new” with a pinch of salt; its foundation predates the United States *Declaration of Independence*.

As well as this rich past, Edinburgh’s famous festivals, excellent museums and galleries, and the modernist Scottish Parliament, are all reminders that Edinburgh has its feet firmly in the 21st century.

Nearly everywhere in Edinburgh (the *burgh* is always pronounced *burra* in Scotland) are spectacular buildings, whose Doric, Ionic, and Corinthian pillars add touches of neoclassical grandeur to the largely Presbyterian backdrop. Large gardens are a strong feature of central Edinburgh, while Arthur’s Seat, a craggy peak of bright green-and-yellow furze, rears up behind the spires of the Old Town. Even as Edinburgh moves through the 21st century, its tall guardian castle remains the focal point of the city and its venerable history.

Modern Edinburgh has become a cultural capital, staging the Edinburgh International Festival and the Festival Fringe in every possible venue each August. The stunning National Museum of Scotland complements the city’s wealth of galleries and artsy hangouts. Add Edinburgh’s growing reputation for food and nightlife and you have one of the world’s most beguiling cities.

Royal Mile



Scotland’s Most Famous Thoroughfare

History plays out before your eyes along the Royal Mile, a succession of storied streets. It begins below Edinburgh Castle on Castlehill, which is where alleged witches were burned at the stake in the 16th century. Just beyond Tolbooth Kirk—the 240-foot-high Gothic spire is the city’s tallest—begins Lawnmarket, once the site of a produce market and today home to historic Gladstone’s Land and the Writers’ Museum. In the 1770s this area was frequented by the infamous Deacon Brodie, pillar of society by day and murderer by night—the likely inspiration for Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. Now begins the High Street, lined with impressive buildings. Beyond the dominating High Kirk of St. Giles (look for the heart mosaic set in cobbles outside) lies the Mercat Cross, an old mercantile center where

royal proclamations were—and are still—read. Pass the Tron Kirk and you reach Canongate, known for its church graveyard and tolbooth. The Palace of Holyroodhouse marks the end of the Mile.

Don’t Miss

Step inside the Royal Mile’s High Kirk of St. Giles to see the elaborate Chapel of the Order of the Thistle. Look out for the belligerent national motto “*nemo me impune lacessit*” (“No one provokes me with impunity”) and the carved wooden angel playing bagpipes.

Getting Here and Around

The Royal Mile is best reached and explored by foot. Avoid the uphill walk from the New Town by taking a bus to George IV Bridge or North Bridge.

Grassmarket



Historic Marketplace and Hub of Activity

One of the most picturesque and popular areas of the city, Grassmarket's cobbled and winding streets are filled with cute cafés, lively bars and restaurants, and an exciting mix of mostly independent fashion and home stores. They're also brimming with history. Grassmarket dates to the 14th century, when it was an agricultural marketplace, but it is best known for its grisly history as the site of public executions in the 1600s and 1700s. Sections of the Old Town wall, Flodden Wall, can be viewed from the Vennel steps, along with some of the best views of Edinburgh Castle you'll find in the city.

Don't Miss

Cobbled Victoria Street is thought to be the inspiration for Diagon Alley from the Harry Potter series, while nearby Greyfriars Kirkyard is where

you'll find the grave of John Gray. It is said that his dog (the famed Greyfriars Bobby) guarded the grave for 14 years and is now buried nearby.

Best Pubs

Grassmarket was once the site of the city's gallows, and two excellent Grassmarket pubs have names that reference the local hangings: The Last Drop and Maggie Dickson's. The latter references a woman who was hanged and proclaimed dead, but shortly before burial sprang back to life. She lived for another 40 years with the nickname Half-Hangit Maggie.

✉ Grassmarket, Edinburgh 🌐 www.edinburgh.org

Getting Here

Grassmarket is best reached by foot; it's a short, steep walk down from Edinburgh Castle and the Royal Mile, or a flatter walk from Princes Street Gardens and the New Town.

New Town



A Masterpiece of Urban Planning

It was not until the Scottish Enlightenment, a civilizing time of expansion in the 1700s, that the city's elite decided to break away from the Royal Mile's craggy slope and narrow closes to create a new neighborhood. This was to be the New Town, an area of elegant squares, classical facades, wide streets, and a harmonious geometric symmetry unusual in Britain. Princes Street, with its open vista facing the castle, is the southernmost of the New Town's thoroughfares, with Queen Street to the north and George Street as the axis, punctuated by St. Andrew and Charlotte squares. Today, the neoclassical buildings are home to a host of upmarket hotels, restaurants, and designer shops and all three national galleries. Take a stroll through beautiful Princes Street Gardens, home to the Scottish National Gallery, a functioning floral clock, and the

Scott Monument, which looks like a snapped-off Gothic church spire.

Don't Miss

With its stunning vistas of the city, Calton Hill is a perfect setting for picnicking and watching festival fireworks. The hill is also home to a number of impressive monuments, including the Parthenon-like National Monument (also known as "Scotland's Disgrace," as it was never finished), the 100-foot-high Nelson Monument (topped with a "time ball" that's dropped at 1pm every day) and the City Observatory (which hosts regular contemporary art exhibitions).

Getting Here and Around

Princes Street is served by regular buses and trams from every corner of the city. It's a short (uphill) walk to the Royal Mile and the rest of the Old Town.

✉ New Town, Edinburgh 🌐 edinburgh.org

The Water of Leith



The Lifeblood of Edinburgh

The Water of Leith, Edinburgh's main river, rises in the Pentland Hills, skirts the edges of the city center, then heads out to Leith, where it flows into the Firth of Forth. For a scenic stroll, you can join the waterside walkway at the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, then follow it through pretty Dean Village—a charming assortment of old mill buildings, stone bridges, and lush greenery—to the arty neighborhood of Stockbridge. Continue to the Royal Botanic Garden, founded in 1670 as a physic garden and now home to 70 acres of rare and beautiful plants, before emerging at The Shore in Leith, just a short walk from the Royal Yacht *Britannia*. The whole route takes about 90 minutes at a leisurely pace—and with all the tree-lined paths, pretty stone bridges, colorful wild-flowers, and stunning birdlife (including herons, kingfishers, and

buzzards) to see, you should definitely walk at a leisurely pace.

Don't Miss

During your walk, keep an eye out for Antony Gormley's evocative "6 Times" artwork, a series of life-size human sculptures dotted along the river.

Getting Here and Around

The Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art (the starting point for this walk) can be reached by free shuttle bus from the Scottish National Gallery on Princes Street. The Shore in Leith (the end point) is served by regular buses and trams from the city center.

Best Restaurants

Some of Scotland's most renowned chefs have made Leith their home. Treat yourself to a decadent tasting-menu meal at the likes of Restaurant Martin Wishart and The Little Chartroom.

🌐 www.waterofleith.org.uk

Edinburgh Festival Fringe



The World's Greatest Celebration of Arts and Culture

With tens of thousands of performances held in hundreds of venues across Edinburgh over three weeks every August, the Edinburgh Festival Fringe is the largest arts festival in the world. Established in 1947 as an open and unvetted complement to the Edinburgh International Festival, it was formalized in 1958. Performers, both established and up-and-coming, take to mostly pop-up and nontraditional spaces repurposed for the month of August to showcase theater, music, comedy, puppetry, cabaret, and everything in between. Fire eaters, jugglers, string quartets, stand-up comedians, and magicians all throng into High Street and Princes Street for this uninhibited explosion of creativity. Many events are free; others cost less than £20. It's possible to arrange your own entertainment program from early morning to after

midnight. The festival app will help you plan your calendar, but hotels are both expensive and booked up months in advance, so plan your trip as far in advance as possible and consider staying outside the city center.

Don't Miss

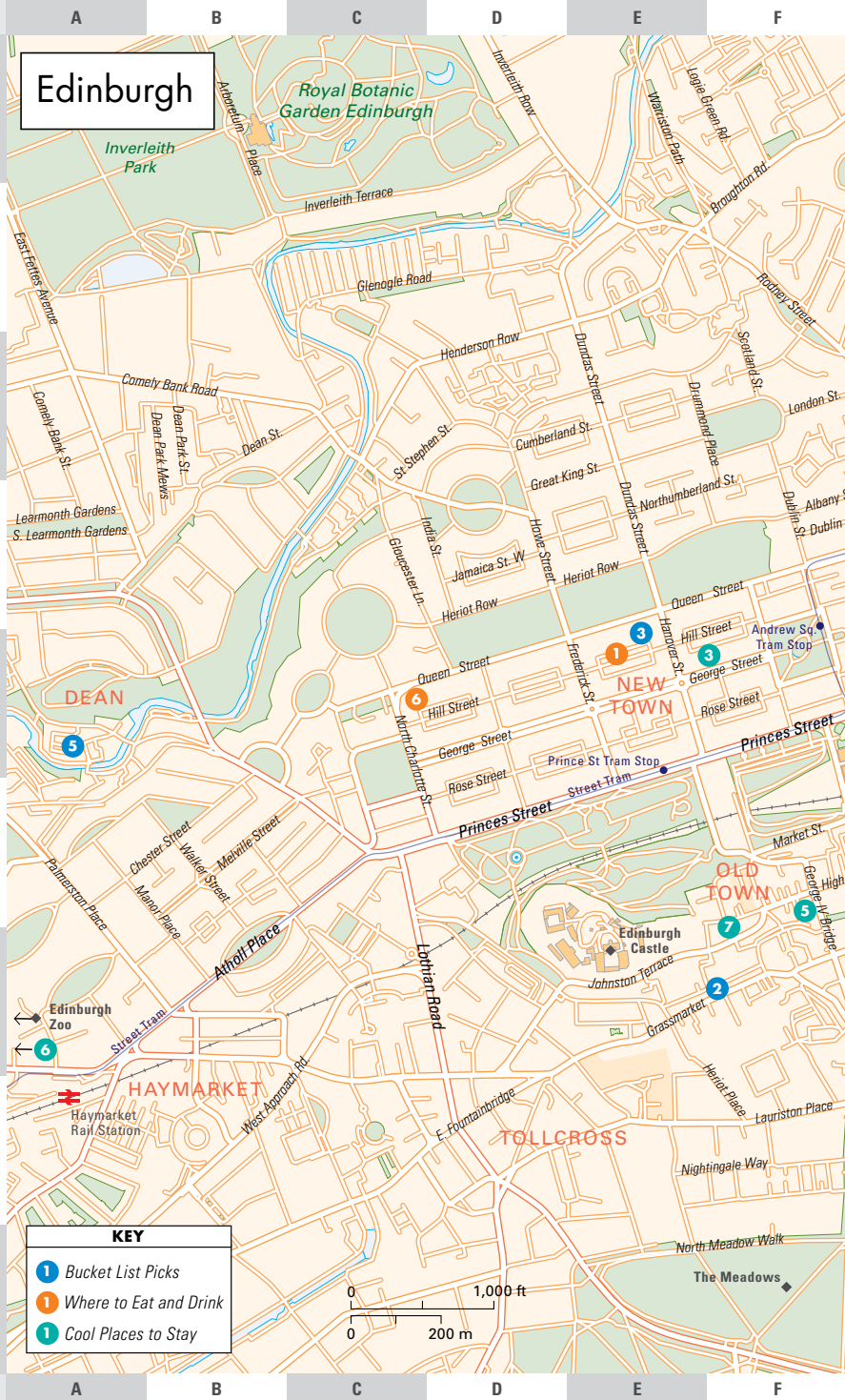
The city also hosts the Edinburgh International Festival (world-class classical music, theatre, and opera), the Edinburgh International Book Festival (attracting major international authors), the Edinburgh Art Festival (a free celebration of visual arts), and the Royal Edinburgh Military Tattoo (a bombastic display of military marching bands and motorcyclists).

Getting Here and Around

The Fringe mostly takes place in the Old Town.

✉ Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society

🌐 www.edfringe.com



- Bucket List Picks** ▼
- 1 Edinburgh Festival Fringe..... G6
 - 2 Grassmarket..... F7
 - 3 New Town..... E5
 - 4 Royal Mile..... G6
 - 5 The Water of Leith..... A5
- Where to Eat and Drink** ▼
- 1 Dusit..... E5
 - 2 Fhior..... G3
 - 3 The Holyrood 9A..... H6
 - 4 The Little Chartroom..... I1
 - 5 Oink..... I5
 - 6 Panda & Sons..... C5
 - 7 Wedgwood the Restaurant..... H6
- Cool Places to Stay** ▼
- 1 Fingal..... I2
 - 2 The Glasshouse..... H4
 - 3 InterContinental Edinburgh The George..... F5
 - 4 Prestonfield House..... I9
 - 5 Radisson Collection Royal Mile Edinburgh..... F6
 - 6 The Roseate Edinburgh..... A7
 - 7 The Witchery by the Castle..... F6

When in Edinburgh

Arthur's Seat

VIEWPOINT | The high point of 640-acre Holyrood Park is this famously spectacular viewpoint. You'll have seen it before—countless photos have been snapped from this very spot. The “seat” in question is actually the 822-foot-high plateau of a small mountain. A ruined church—the 15th-century Chapel of St. Anthony—adds to its impossible picturesqueness. There are various starting points for the walk, but one of the most pleasant begins at the Scottish Parliament building. Cross the road from Parliament, skirt around the parking lot, cross a second road, and join the gently rising path to the left (rather than the steeper fork to the right, which is currently closed). At a moderate pace, this climb takes around 45 minutes up and 30 minutes down, and is easy so long as you're reasonably fit. Even if you aren't, there are plenty of places to stop for a rest and to admire the views along the way. A faster—though less beautiful—way to reach the summit is to drive to the small parking area at Dunsapie Loch, on Queen's Road, then follow the footpath up the hill; this walk takes about 20 minutes. ☒ *Queen's Dr., Old Town.*

Dynamic Earth

HISTORY MUSEUM | **FAMILY** | Using state-of-the-art technology, the 11 theme galleries at this interactive science museum educate and entertain as they explore the wonders of the planet, from polar regions to tropical rain forests. Geological history, from the big bang to the unknown future, is also examined, all topped off with an eye-popping, 360-degree planetarium experience. ☒ *Holyrood Rd., Old Town* ☎ 0131/550-7800 🌐 www.dynaminearth.co.uk 📞 £17.50 ☹ Closed Mon. and Tues. in Nov.–Feb.

★ Edinburgh Castle

CASTLE/PALACE | **FAMILY** | The crowning glory of the Scottish capital, Edinburgh

Castle is popular not only for its pivotal role in Scottish history, but also because of the spectacular views from its battlements: on a clear day the vistas stretch all the way to Fife. You'll need at least three hours to see everything it has to offer (even longer if you're a military history buff), though if you're in a rush, its main highlights can be squeezed into an hour and a half. You enter across the Esplanade, the huge forecourt built in the 18th century as a parade ground, then proceed to the curvy ramparts of the Half-Moon Battery, which give Edinburgh Castle its distinctive silhouette. Highlights include the tiny 11th-century St. Margaret's Chapel, the oldest part of the castle; the Crown Room, which contains the crown, scepter, and sword that once graced the Scottish monarch, as well as the Stone of Scone, where Scottish monarchs once sat to be crowned; and the famous 15th-century Belgian-made cannon Mons Meg. ☒ *Castle Esplanade and Castlehill, Old Town* ☎ 0131/225-9846 🌐 www.edinburghcastle.scot 📞 £18.

Edinburgh Zoo

ZOO | **FAMILY** | Home to star attractions Tian Tian and Yang Guang, the United Kingdom's only two giant pandas, Edinburgh's Zoo hosts more than 1,000 animals over 80 acres. Don't miss the famous Penguin Parade, which takes place every afternoon (as long as the penguins are willing), or the ever-popular Koala Territory, where you can get up close to the zoo's five koalas—including Kalari, born in 2019. Discounted tickets are available online. ☒ *Royal Zoological Society of Scotland, 134 Corstorphine Rd., Corstorphine* ☎ 0131/334-9171 🌐 www.edinburghzoo.org.uk 📞 £21.95.

★ The Meadows

CITY PARK | **FAMILY** | Edinburgh's most popular green space, the Meadows is the first port of call for nearby workers, students, and families when the sun is out (or even when it isn't). You'll find people making the most of the grass here:

picnicking, barbecuing, playing soccer, throwing frisbees, and flying kites. More formal sports facilities include tennis courts, a small golf putting course, and the biggest kids' play area in Edinburgh. Come during one of the city's many cultural festivals and there's likely to be a show on, too. ☒ *Melville Dr., South Side* ☎ 0131/529-5151 🌐 www.themeadowsofedinburgh.co.uk.

★ National Museum of Scotland

HISTORY MUSEUM | **FAMILY** | This museum traces the country's fascinating story from the oldest fossils to the most recent popular culture, making it a must-see for first-time visitors to Scotland. Two of the most famous treasures are the Lewis Chessmen, a set of intricately carved 12th-century ivory chess pieces found on one of Scotland's Western Isles, and Dolly the sheep, the world's first cloned mammal and biggest ovine celebrity. A dramatic, cryptlike entrance gives way to the light-filled, birdcage wonders of the Victorian grand hall and the upper galleries. Other exhibition highlights include the hanging hippo and sea creatures of the Wildlife Panorama, beautiful Viking brooches, Pictish stones, and Queen Mary's *clarsach* (harp). Take the elevator to the lovely rooftop terrace for spectacular views of Edinburgh Castle and the city below. ☒ *Chambers St., Old Town* ☎ 0300/123-6789 🌐 www.nms.ac.uk.

★ Palace of Holyroodhouse

CASTLE/PALACE | Onetime haunt of Mary, Queen of Scots, the Palace of Holyroodhouse has a long history of gruesome murders, destructive fires, and power-hungry personalities. Today, it's King Charles III's official residence in Scotland. A doughty, impressive palace standing at the foot of the Royal Mile, it's built around a graceful, lawned central court at the end of Canongate. And when royals are not in residence, you can take a tour. There's plenty to see here, so make sure you have at least two hours

to tour the palace, gardens, and ruins of the 12th-century abbey; pick up the free audio guide for the full experience. The King James Tower is the oldest surviving section of the palace, containing Mary's rooms on the second floor and Lord Darnley's rooms below. The 150-foot-long Great Picture Gallery, on the north side, displays the portraits of 110 Scottish monarchs. ☒ *Canongate, Old Town* ☎ 0131/123-7306 🌐 www.rct.uk 📞 £18 ☹ Closed Tues. and Wed. Oct.–June 📅 Advance booking required.

Where to Eat and Drink

Dusit

\$\$ | **THAI** | Tucked down narrow Thistle Street, Dusit doesn't register on most travelers' radars, but it has been a local favorite since 2002. An authentic, contemporary Thai restaurant run by Bangkok-born Pom, the menu here delights with deliciously creamy curries, spicy stir-fries, and fragrant seafood specialties, all of which use a mix of fresh local produce and imported Thai vegetables. **Known for:** award-winning Thai food; local haunt; good value lunch menu. [3] *Average main: £17* ☒ *49A Thistle St., New Town* ☎ 0131/220-6846 🌐 www.dusit.co.uk.

Fhior

\$\$\$\$ | **BRITISH** | Owner and chef Scott Smith, who previously ran the award-winning Norn, serves seasonal, Scandinavian-inspired fare here with rare Scottish ingredients, from beremeal (an ancient form of barley) bread to sea buckthorn. Choose from seven to 10 courses for dinner (£65 to £90), with menus arriving sealed in envelopes; you're encouraged to trust the chef and leave them unopened until after dessert. **Known for:** modernist decor; old-school Scottish dishes with a Scandinavian flair; multi-course menu options chosen by the chef. [3] *Average main: £35* ☒ *36 Broughton St., Edinburgh* ☎ 0131/477-5000 🌐 fhior.com ☹ Closed Mon.–Wed.

★ The Holyrood 9A

BARS | This warm, wood-paneled hipster hangout has a fine array of craft beers on tap, as well as an impressive whisky collection. It also serves some of Edinburgh's best gourmet burgers. ☎ 9A Holyrood Rd., Old Town ☎ 0131/556-5044 🌐 www.theholyrood.co.uk.

★ The Little Chartroom

\$\$\$ | **BRITISH** | For fine dining with a touch of theater, it's hard to beat this superb open-kitchen restaurant, where you can sit at the bar and watch the skilled chefs prepare and assemble each course. The à la carte menu is small—there's a choice of just three starters, three mains, and three desserts—but it's filled with innovative and exciting dishes, such as dressed crab with curry and smoked almonds or spatchcock partridge with haggis and celeriac. **Known for:** cozy kitchenside seating; small but varied menu; unique creations like sweetcorn custard. ☎ Average main: £30 ☎ 14 Bonnington Rd., Leith ☎ 0131/556-6600 🌐 www.thelittlechartroom.com ☺ Closed Mon.–Wed. No lunch Thurs. and Fri.

★ Oink

\$ | **BRITISH** | For a quick, cheap bite while wandering the Royal Mile, you can't beat Oink—possibly the best hog roast (pulled pork) in Edinburgh. Located on Canon-gate (there are two other outlets, but this one is the best), it was founded by two farmers in 2008, and their high-quality, hand-reared pork has proved a huge hit ever since. **Known for:** unbelievable pulled pork; great-value lunch; no options for vegetarians. ☎ Average main: £6 ☎ 82 Canongate, Old Town ☎ 07584/637416 🌐 www.oinkhogroast.co.uk.

★ Panda and Sons

BARS | The very definition of a hidden gem, this Prohibition-style speakeasy is cunningly tucked away behind a barbershop exterior. Venture inside and downstairs to discover a quirky bar serving some seriously refined cocktails. And yes, we're baffled by the fictional

bar-owning panda, too. ☎ 79 Queen St., New Town ☎ 0131/220-0443 🌐 www.pandaandsons.com.

★ Wedgwood the Restaurant

\$\$\$ | **MODERN BRITISH** | Rejecting the idea that fine dining should be a stuffy affair, owners Paul Wedgwood and Lisa Chan-non are in charge at this Royal Mile gem. Local produce and some unusual foraged fronds enliven the taste buds on menus that radically change with the seasons; expect deliciously quirky pairings like scallops in a cauliflower korma or roe deer with buttermilk. **Known for:** unfussy fine dining; delicious sticky toffee pud-ding; great value lunch deals. ☎ Average main: £25 ☎ 267 Canongate, Old Town ☎ 0131/558-8737 🌐 www.wedgwood-therestaurant.co.uk.

Cool Places to Stay

Fingal

\$\$\$ | **HOTEL** | For something complete-ly different, step aboard this floating boutique hotel, permanently moored near the Royal Yacht *Britannia* in Leith. **Pros:** out-of-the-ordinary luxury; close to Leith's best bars and restaurants; quiet and peaceful. **Cons:** no room service; dinner is underwhelming and overpriced; a little way out of the center. ☎ Rooms from: £300 ☎ Alexandra Dock, Leith ☎ 0131/357-5000 🌐 www.fingal.co.uk ➡ 23 rooms 🌧 Free Breakfast.

★ The Glasshouse

\$\$\$ | **HOTEL** | Glass walls extend from the 19th-century facade of a former church, foreshadowing the daring, modern interior of one of the city's original, and best, boutique hotels. **Pros:** truly stunning rooftop garden; very modern and stylish; near all the attractions. **Cons:** loud air-conditioning and toilet flushing; decor a little sterile for some; continental break-fast extra (hot breakfast even more). ☎ Rooms from: £265 ☎ 2 Greenside Pl., New Town ☎ 0131/525-8200 🌐 www.theglasshousehotel.co.uk ➡ 77 rooms 🌧 No Meals.

theglasshousehotel.co.uk ➡ 77 rooms 🌧 No Meals.

InterContinental Edinburgh The George

\$\$\$ | **HOTEL** | Built in 1775 for Edinburgh's elite, this row of five Georgian town houses in the heart of the New Town now hosts a luxury hotel. **Pros:** excellent central location; stylish and comfortable bedrooms; in-room treat boxes with chips and candy. **Cons:** regular wedding parties in reception area; floors in older rooms are on a slight slope; breakfast is expensive. ☎ Rooms from: £250 ☎ 19–21 George St., New Town ☎ 0131/225-1251 🌐 edinburgh.intercontinental.com ➡ 240 rooms 🌧 No Meals.

★ Prestonfield House

\$\$\$\$ | **HOTEL** | Baroque opulence reigns in this 1687 mansion, with rich velvet curtains, gold-framed portraits, and ala-baster-sculpted busts adorning the grand and eccentric public rooms, and equally plush decorations in the guest rooms. **Pros:** baroque grandeur; great restaurant; extensive grounds. **Cons:** underwhelm-ing showers in some rooms; brooding decor can look gloomy; bit pretentious for some. ☎ Rooms from: £375 ☎ Priest-field Rd., Prestonfield ☎ 0131/225-7800 🌐 www.prestonfield.com ➡ 23 rooms 🌧 Free Breakfast.

Radisson Collection Royal Mile Edinburgh

\$\$\$ | **HOTEL** | The bright primary colors, striking stenciled wallpapers, and bold, eclectic furnishings inside this trendy design hotel contrast with the Gothic surroundings of the Royal Mile—and yet, somehow, it works. **Pros:** perfect location in the heart of the city; bold and fashionable decor; complimentary gin-and-tonic on arrival. **Cons:** decor a little Austin Powers in places; expensive during high season; street noise can leak into rooms. ☎ Rooms from: £260 ☎ 1 George IV Bridge, Old Town ☎ 0131/220-6666 🌐 www.radissonhotels.com ➡ 136 rooms 🌧 Free Breakfast.

★ The Roseate Edinburgh

\$\$\$ | **HOTEL** | Set within two Victorian town houses that sit across the road from one another, with each offering a selection of beautifully appointed rooms and suites, this hotel is one of Edinburgh's most luxurious boutique options. **Pros:** beautifully decorated; excellent food and service; quiet residential area. **Cons:** no elevator (and stairs to climb); a 20-minute walk to Princes Street; some traffic noise from outside. ☎ Rooms from: £300 ☎ 4 W. Coates, Haymarket ☎ 0131/337-6169 🌐 www.roseatehotels.com ➡ 35 rooms 🌧 Free Breakfast.

The Witchery by the Castle

\$\$\$\$ | **HOTEL** | For a giant helping of Gothic romance, you can't beat the indulgent suites at this gorgeously appointed Cas-tlehill hotel. **Pros:** unique and truly roman-tic retreat; plush antique furnishings; atmospheric dining. **Cons:** extravagant decor not for everybody; food is good but not top shelf; very expensive. ☎ Rooms from: £695 ☎ 352 Castlehill, Old Town ☎ 0131/225-5613 🌐 www.thewitchery.com ➡ 9 suites 🌧 Free Breakfast.