

## Travel Scotland Special

# Discover great things Glasgow has to offer

LIKE the best of cosmopolitan cities, Glasgow is full of talent. In all fields there are native Glaswegians who stayed, those that have returned to the city and incomers that have recognised the city as an ideal place to plant their creativity.

Consequently there are a myriad of things to do and explore. The grand Victorian architecture, the great histories and traditions and the artistes of all genres create an infectious vibrancy.

It's hard to know where to start, but on this trip it was with food – kicking the weekend off with a traditional Scottish meal at Stravaigin in the west end of the city. In archetypal Scot style and, despite being a vegetarian meal, it was rib sticking, a starter of thick, filling mushroom and celeriac soup and a main of sticky polenta with mushroom and gorgonzola and spinach could have been a little lighter but were enjoyable all the same.

Sufficiently filled, a trip to The Stand Comedy Club was in the offing. It was a regular Friday night where the club puts

on three quality acts plus an open spot – all ably hosted by the warm presence of local fella Raymond Mearns. Tonight, ironically, our headliner was Manchester's very own resident Geordie, Sarah Millican.

After a rather sensible couple of drinks in the bar of the Park Inn hotel it was to be, as a full day beckoned the following morning. After a hearty breakfast in the hotel, first up was a visit to the Gallery of Modern Art situated amid the hustle and bustle of the city centre.

The gallery opened in 1996 to showcase the contemporary collection and there's plenty to see; when we visited Bridget Riley's op art sat alongside exuberant work by Scot Alan Davie. There's plenty to explore further up in the neo classical building, not least admiring the structure itself, be sure to check out the statue of the Duke of Wellington out front – usually found sporting a traffic cone on his head.

Lunch was spent at another stylish Scottish eatery, Cranachan in the posh shopping arcade Princes Square,

named after the traditional Scot dessert of raspberries, cream and oatmeal, which of course had to be sampled following a lovely aubergine open sandwich.

The afternoon saw a mooch about the shops, of which there are plenty to choose from – all the usual high street and designer places. But Glasgow being a hotbed of creative talent it holds some unique delights. Che Camille is the bright idea of New Yorker Camille Lorigo and sells the work of specially chosen designers in a boho loft space. Plus you can actually see the designers at work as their workshop is adjacent. The vibrancy was added to as they were getting ready for a fashion show, so the buzz was palpable.

Hosting a more tranquil air was Deryck Walker's studio/shop where he meets clients and creates delightfully simple menswear designs, often using traditional, quality materials. Swatches of Harris Tweed cover his table and his beautiful creations hang around the room.

After a quick rest it was off out again to the Red Onion restaurant to aptly sample a delicious red onion and goat's cheese tart. The restaurant is run by John Quigley, a native who learnt his craft in London's West End and went on to cook for Guns n Roses on tour.

After a brief drink at the decadent Hummingbird bar it was off to King Tut's Wah Wah Hut, the legendary Glaswegian music venue, which was celebrating its 20th anniversary. It's a lovely, intimate venue not unlike our own Roadhouse and an ideal place to catch up and coming Southampton alt rockers Band of Skulls.

With Glasgow seemingly barely touched, all too soon it was time to catch the train and have a bit of a snooze to recuperate from a packed weekend.

Marissa Burgess

### FACTFILE

Park Inn [glasgow.parkinn.co.uk](http://glasgow.parkinn.co.uk)  
Stravaigin [stravaigin.co.uk](http://stravaigin.co.uk)  
See Glasgow [seeglasgow.com](http://seeglasgow.com)  
Visit Scotland [visitscotland.com](http://visitscotland.com)  
The Stand Comedy Club [thestand.co.uk](http://thestand.co.uk)  
Glasgow Gallery of Modern Art [glasgowmuseums.com](http://glasgowmuseums.com)  
Cranachan [cranachancafe.co.uk](http://cranachancafe.co.uk)  
Che Camille [checamille.com](http://checamille.com)  
Deryck Walker [deryckwalker.net](http://deryckwalker.net)  
Hummingbird 0845 166 60397  
King Tut's [kingtuts.co.uk](http://kingtuts.co.uk)



>>> **FACING THE FUTURE** Glasgow Gallery of Modern Art showcases the best of contemporary art

# Enjoy the highlights of Highlands

Neil Sowerby learns about witchcraft and a pop legend while on a visit to Dornoch in Scotland

**O**N the blasted heath it's the witching hour... well, it feels like it. The chill off the Dornoch Firth seeps into my very marrow as I imagine wraiths flitting over the beach groynes in pursuit of my immortal soul.

Nothing a good malt and a dinner menu to salivate over wouldn't cure, but I just had to have this pre-prandial constitutional first.

It was what the Scots call a brow evening. Muddy fool, me.

Dornoch is teeming with history but two events stick out – the last execution of a witch in Scotland (1727) and Madonna christening her son, Rocco (2000), in its tiny but exquisite cathedral. The town's charming Historylinks Museum commemorates both events.

The north east coast settlement bore the media scrum that descended on it for the advent of Madonna just before Christmas nine years ago. The Christening was a public event after the high security exclusivity of the pop legend's wedding to Guy Ritchie in Skibo Castle.

Convicted witch Janet Horne's hideous end – stripped, tarred, feathered and burnt alive in a barrel – was played out in front of a different kind of baying mob.

Before Horne, it had been 20 years since anyone had stood trial for witchcraft in Scotland. Her crime? To have brought into the world a deformed daughter with hands and feet supposedly resembling hooves. Rumour had it, Mum magicked the lass into a pony to carry out the devil's work. Apparently unrepentant, most likely just muddled in her mind, Janet Horne was cruelly executed while her daughter escaped.

I literally stumbled upon her story on my walk. Dornoch's main thoroughfares are lined with attractive sandstone townhouses, but beyond bungalows straggle out towards the coast with its golf course and caravan sites.

Turning up my collar and turning back I stepped into an ugly bit of bog. Squelching out with trousers caked, I stared straight at the Witch's Stone (with helpful explanatory sign). The execution spot itself was just inside the last house's garden.

Was I happy to dry out in Dornoch Castle Hotel, our wonderfully welcome base opposite the cathedral. With a pint of cask ale from the Orkney Brewery and the company of the castle cat, Charlie, I stretched out on a leather sofa next to the bar's roaring fire, the historic resonances of which were not lost on me. It's that kind of decidedly undesigner, occasionally rough around the edges, lodging with a warm welcome from owners the Thompson family and well-sourced food that deserves greater recognition.

The Madonna moment coincided with Colin Thompson and his then business partners taking on the tenure of this centuries-old former bishop's palace. It gave a massive boost to a risky project.

Today the turreted hotel with its secluded garden is still a work in progress with expansion plans and strong eco credentials – a new carbon footprint-friendly biomass stove is Colin's pride and joy.

An hour and a bit north of Inverness on fast roads, Dornoch is a convenient stopping off point on the way to Orkney, while the spectacular north west coast is accessible via a wild single track overland route, but there is much to do and see in close proximity.

While we were there, Dornoch Cathedral hosted three nights of concerts by one of the planet's greatest harpists, Catrin Finch, courtesy of the enterprising Highlands cultural catalyst, [northhighlandconnections.com](http://northhighlandconnections.com). She was sublime.

I fell in love, too, with the Black Isle, off the A9 on the way up for less cultural reasons. The presence of one of the best pubs I have ever been to helped.

The Anderson in Fortrose is, Sunday apart, only open from 4pm onwards and is an offbeat



>>> **WARM AND WELCOMING** Dornoch Castle Hotel offers its guests a fine food and great beer



Aladdin's cave of outstanding real ale, wines and, naturally, whisky with the American owner's wife cooking up a storm using local game and wild mushrooms.

In nearby Rosemarkie we enjoyed the Groam House Museum, which explores all things Pictish based upon the ancient standing stones in the area. It's free but makes you want to donate. A stark contrast to the National Trust of Scotland £10-a-head, parking extra, multi-media showcase that is the Culloden Museum outside Inverness.

Not that Groam neglects the screen. We were enthralled by a

**LAVISHLY FURNISHED**  
Dunrobin Castle, the folie de grandeur of the Sutherland family, is reminiscent of a Loire Valley chateau

film about the 17th century Skye-born visionary, the Brahan Seer, whose gnomish predictions have proved startlingly true over succeeding centuries. Alas, he was adopted by the local Count and Countess of Seaforth. When, unable to prevaricate, he told the Countess that her absent husband was in the lap of another, she didn't believe him and, yes, out came the flaming tar barrel

for the Seer's farewell.

Across the Black Isle – not an isle just another awkward promontory, especially when the mile-saving ferry shuts for winter – lies unspoilt Cromarty.

This has to be my favourite town discovery of recent years. Once prosperous, it was saved from development by its very remoteness (the railway never came) and now is a lovely spot to ramble round. Only the oil rigs in the Firth hint which century you are in.

We whooshed past them during an exhilarating wildlife watching trip on a custom-built Ecoventures craft, which holds

only 12 passengers. Out on the choppy Moray Forth the dolphins came out en masse to frolic for us.

Back in Cromarty there's excellent seafood and pizzas from a wood-burning stove at Sutor Creek next door to the Ecoventures HQ, or you could visit the house and museum celebrating the township's most famous son, legendary geologist Hugh Miller.

Yes, you guessed it, neither Dornoch nor the Black Isle is big on nightlife!

North of Dornoch, along a temperate, flattish coast with fine beaches, the definite place to visit is Dunrobin Castle, rear-

ing up on a rare hill like some transplanted Loire Chateau.

With its 189 lavishly furnished rooms, it was the folie de grandeur of the Sutherland family, incomers who at one time owned 1.3 million acres and were the driving force behind the notorious Highland Clearances,

which forced crofters out of their homes to an uncertain future.

No wonder Scots have mixed feelings about this place and the statue to Sutherland 'the Benefactor' on a nearby height.

I'll stick to the log fire at more modest Dornoch Castle.

**FACTFILE**

**Dornoch Castle.** Superior doubles from £135 including full Scottish breakfast. Visit [dornochcastlehotel.com](http://dornochcastlehotel.com) for frequent special offers with dinner included. Or ring 01862 810216. Dolphin Watching in

Cromarty, £22 for a two-hour trip. Visit [ecoventures.co.uk](http://ecoventures.co.uk). A return flight from Manchester to Inverness with FlyBe costs around £195 per person. Car hire from Inverness Airport is essential.



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