

Scotland and Ireland trip (June24-July 12, 2005)

Part 1. Scotland

We flew to **Edinburgh** through Manchester. On the first day, we met our friends from London at the Edinburgh castle. This is a charming city, with its famous castle perched on the hill right at the center. It is the capital of Scotland and it is where the author of the Harry Potter is living. The city has a full range of ghostly stories and you can make a tour of the dungeons from the 18th centuries right along the Royal Mile. Here is a view of the city, with the Edinburg castle at the distance, taken from Authur Seat.



From the castle, you can look out at the sea—or the firth too.



The next day we rented a car and drove along the eastern coast to **St Andrews**. Along the way we passed many lovely small fishing villages. St Andrews is the birthplace of the golf game and the British Open was played there this year. It is also the seat of one of the oldest Universities in the world. The ruins of the St Andrews Cathedral and the campus are the major attractions. Here are examples of the ruins





The University has a layout typical of what you find in the Ivy league schools. They offered disciplines like meta physics and moral philosophy.



We then drove passing Dundee and spent the night in Perth. Perth is a lovely city, right along river Tay.



I got one of my best sunset shot there after dinner—at about 10pm.



The next day, we drove north passing the Cairngorms Mountains toward Inverness. We stopped at two historical towns Dunkeld and Pitlochry. Both are quite attractive and each takes only one to two hours to explore. Before settled down in Inverness, we visited Fort George—the monster military installation built by the English to prevent the rebellion by the Scots in the 18th century. Today, there is still bad feeling even though they are all members of the United Kingdom of the Great Britain.

Inverness is not that special. River Ness flows by the city and the River Walk is quite pleasant. We stayed here overnite. Our goal next morning is to look for Nessie at Loch Ness —may be we will get lucky. It was not to be the case. We woke up to find a beautiful sunny morning. Nessie is very shy and we are sure that it would hide in the deep trench of the Loch. Never mind. We got the best reflection of the cloud and the hill on the Loch Ness.



We also got to spend two beautiful hours at the Urquhart castle by Loch Ness. This castle is magical, even though it is a ruin. Wandering among the broken rooms by the Ness, and entertained by an amateur blowing the Scottish bagpipe is a real treat.



We then drove west on the scenic mountain road. First we stopped to see the Eilean Donan Castle. It is an ok castle and has been restored. It is famous because of its beautiful setting. Along this route, I also had my first experience of driving on the left-hand side of the road. That was not a major problem. The stick shift was not that difficult either. It is just when another car coming from the other side toward you, you have the tendency to move further to the left than is needed. In Scotland, there are not much room on the road for you to go beyond your narrow lane. Anyway, Eilean Donan Castle is indeed photogenic. Here is one:



The next leg was to drive on a single-track road to a small fishing village to spend the night in Plockton. It is beautiful in the evening with its well sheltered harbor.



The next morning we drove to the western island of Skye. It is not an island any more since they built a bridge connecting it to the mainland in 1995. This is a place where the British come for mountain climbing even though its highest peaks are only around 1000m. On the other hand, usually the rains, fogs and winds come and go. We were lucky, the sun was shining and the place is just beautiful. The mountain and the sea are entangled all over the places. This place has sheer cliff. It also has the Old Man of Storr, a monolith rising about 50 m straight up. The latter offers a hiking opportunity for a close-up look.



We spent overnite in a farm house. The next morning drove the length of the island to take the ferry to Mallig and went on to Fort William. This is the area where the Scots used to stage fighting against the English. With many mountains and deep vegetation, the clans have plenty of places to hide. Anyway, our main

goal is to see the Glencoe area. It did not disappoint us. The lakes (Loch), the valleys (Glen) and the mountains (Cnoc), deserve many days of exploration. We can only drive by and taking many photos. That is the only way that the memory can linger on. Look at the reflections from the calm waters and the lush green hills.



After driving through the Glencoe area, we visited the Stirling Castle. This one is even bigger than the one at Edinburgh. It commanded a great view 360 degrees. Before returning to Edinburgh we visited Linlithgow castle. This is where Mary Queen of Scots was born. It was her son James VI who later became James I of England and then Scotland, England and Wales combined to become UK. That

was 1603. Not all the Scots like the idea and many wars followed. Today, Scotland has their own parliament, currency and domestic laws. Here is piece of the remains of the palace and the beautiful swan living by the castle.



We spent the last day in Edinburgh again. It was a day where many organizations were staging a demonstration against the G-8 meeting that was to occur three days later near the city. For the tourist this is a nightmare since traffic control forces you to find new ways to get somewhere. Many museums and public buildings were also closed down for security reasons. So we just watch the peaceful demonstrations. We were thinking of joining the crowd. The route they took are the scenic routes of the city and we could identify with a good cause too. Here is a photo of crowds passing by the National Museum.



We then flew to Dublin by Ryan air. This is the SouthWest Airlines of Europe. It costs each of us about \$50 to get to Dublin from Edinburgh.

Practical Information:

Travel in Scotland is expensive. Figure that it would cost 30-40% more than in the US. The B&B typically costs about 45-50 British pounds including full breakfast. Car rental was quite high. For a full size car for four adults we paid about 220 pounds for a week. This is for stick shift. Automatic is about twice more expensive.

If you like big city, Edinburgh is one of the most beautiful cities I have visited. You can spend a few days there and then take some bus tours from there. That way you do not need to rent a car. If you like the real Scotland, then you need to go out and learn to drive on the left.

Scots are quite friendly and you can easily get into conversations with them.

A good web resource for Scotland is <http://www.undiscoveredscotland.co.uk/>