

## SCOTTISH TRAVEL NEWS



## ▲ CAPITAL INVESTMENT

The low-cost airline Norwegian is launching a series of new transatlantic flights, offering direct low-cost travel from the Scottish capital to the US for the first time from just £69, one way. Starting in June, Edinburgh will have flights to Stewart International, New York (90 minutes from Manhattan), Providence, Rhode Island (easy access to greater Boston) and Hartford, Connecticut. Book now at [norwegian.com/uk](http://norwegian.com/uk).

## CASTLE IN THE AIR

To celebrate the release of the live-action adaptation of Disney's *Beauty and the Beast* featuring Emma Watson and Dan Stevens, HomeAway®, the market-leading holiday rentals company, is giving one winner, plus 20 guests, the chance to stay in an enchanting HomeAway castle in Scotland. The winning party will have the entire beautiful Duns Castle with its 1,200 acres to themselves. Enter the #HomeAwayCastle contest at [HomeAway.co.uk/Disney](http://HomeAway.co.uk/Disney) until March 31.



## ▲ SHIP AHOY

Hebrides Cruises, a small-ship wildlife cruising specialist based in Oban, is blending the adventure of spotting the rarest wildlife of the Hebrides with the luxury of a floating guest house. En suite cabins, gourmet food, sofas, sun loungers and even a hot tub on deck are just some of the luxury facilities on board Proud Seahorse, its new mini-cruise vessel. With only 10 guests on board, looked after by four crew including a specialist wildlife guide, the inaugural six-night cruise departs on May 13 bound for Skye at an introductory price of £1,900 per person, a saving of £200. See [hebridescruises.co.uk](http://hebridescruises.co.uk).

I have never been the recipient of a surprise trip from my husband of 33 years.

That's not a complaint. It wouldn't be easy for the old chap anyway, given that travelling is my job and the diary is booked well ahead. And, truth be told, I can't think of anything worse than not knowing whether to pack for Marrakech or Malmo — or having no say as to where I go.

However, according to the new Expedia-owned venture Surprise Trips, I'm in the minority. Its latest offering goes like this: pick the date and length of your trip (two to four nights), give an idea of budget, and then turn up at your chosen Scottish airport with hand luggage.

You get two hours' notice, so if like me you live a substantial drive from the airport, you'll set off without knowing where you're heading.

All you know in advance is that you'll be in mainland Europe; the flights will be at "reasonable times", not more than three-and-a-half hours long; and that it'll be a city break in a minimum three-star hotel. You are also allowed to "deselect" three destinations, as it would be a downer to be taken somewhere you've zero desire to see, or have just visited.

It has 77 destinations in total, although Paris and Barcelona are excluded because "so many people have already been there". (Yes, but isn't that for a reason? There's just so much to see and do.)

This concept is not for me, but for those whom it might suit, I will point out that at £687.40 for two nights for two, I didn't consider it to be especially great value.

Anyway, I cheated. Not only did I insist on knowing in advance that it was Amsterdam (tick), but I got to know the hotel (Ibis Centre Stopera), and then decided that I didn't fancy the building work going on next door, or the two single beds (apparently it can't specify and takes the cheapest option when booking). By then, I was for bailing.

That said, I still went, and I did visit the Ibis hotel while there, which confirmed I'd made the right decision to stay at the wonderful Pulitzer Hotel Amsterdam — one of the most stylish, eclectic hotels in the city, in a perfect location on Prinsengracht.

Each room is individualistic and beautifully indulgent, with thoughtful gifts, such as a puncture kit in case you use one of its free bikes — way better than chocolates.

The hotel comprises 25 restored 17th- and 18th-century houses, and its "shabby chic" restaurant is



Tall distinctive waterside buildings evoke the city's 17th-century golden age; modern-day tourists can see the sights from the comfort of a canal boat

# Take a journey into the unknown

A mystery European trip isn't everyone's idea of fun so Scottish travel editor **Katie Wood** was relieved to land in the vibrant city of Amsterdam



The city is famed for its museums but is also home to quirky shops and eateries; Leidseplein, left, is a popular shopping area; a dozen daily markets offer for sale everything from fruit to flowers



worth a visit, even if you are not staying there.

With its own 1909 classic canal boat for guest cruises, and indoor courtyard gardens, it's just what you'd expect

from a hotel that was the pet project of Peter Pulitzer, the grandson of the founder of the Pulitzer Prize.

Anyway, I was happy to be in one of my favourite cities. At every turn the glorious architecture is a reminder of its golden age in the 17th century, yet modernity is right in your face.

This multifaceted city has some of the best quirky shops, bars and restaurants in the world. About 180 nationalities rub shoulders here, and pretty

much everyone speaks indecently good English.

Invariably, art lovers are spoilt for choice with, among many other galleries, the excellent Rijksmuseum, which holds the world's finest collection of Dutch masters; equally don't miss the Rembrandt House Museum.

It's almost a cliché to see Anne Frank Huis, but still do it. Brave the crowds but ensure you book ahead online at [annefrank.org](http://annefrank.org).

I was less fussed about the Amsterdam Museum, which lacks logic in its chronological layout and leaves one puzzled.

For me, this is a winter city. Throughout December and most of January, the Amsterdam Light Festival creates a magical world of light sculptures. More than 35 artworks from international artists are shipped in and, whether you're walking or on a canal cruise after nightfall,

the atmosphere is positively ethereal.

On the subject of nightfall, be aware that the street lighting — especially around the main canals — is low-key. Add the kamikaze cyclists, riding without a light and, worse, frequently dangling children off their handlebars, and all I can say is, be careful.

If you like quirky, the Tassen Museum is dedicated to handbags and purses; the Tulip Museum has some excellent gifts for gardeners; and it's fun to take a free ferry ride across the River IJ to visit the Eye, the museum of film.

The red-light district has sex for sale round the clock, though it mainly teems with voyeurs. When it comes to displaying your wares in the windows, it was very 2017 to find that silicone buttocks had overtaken silicone breasts — but then I live in Perthshire and am an imminent granny.

## The remains of the way

Twenty-one miles of Hadrian's Wall proved to be no barrier for **Julia Horton**

I'VE just lost the world-famous frontier between Scotland and England.

It's an embarrassing position to be in and potentially alarming if the latest push for independence turns ugly. You'd want to know which side of Hadrian's Wall you were on physically, regardless of your personal preferences politically.

Built to help quell rebellion by the wild, tribal Caledonians against Roman rule over ancient Britain, the historic barrier is symbolic of current political battles. Ordered by an empire-building leader keen to exert control over foreigners and trade, its origin also resonates with 21st-century global power struggles over the Atlantic.

Today, after centuries of

bloody fighting, the hordes still come. But now they mostly move from east to west, favouring high-tech moisture-wicking fabrics over armour, following hiking and biking trails. Or if, like me, they fail to spot where an official detour rejoins the main route, they may temporarily battle back and forth through thick mud trying to work out if they are north or south of the path.

Eventually I'm back on track and before long enjoy my first sight of the ancient wall itself, at Black Carts. While the route follows the 75-mile span of Emperor Hadrian's grand design from just outside Newcastle to the Solway Firth, much of the stonework has been lost over the years to opportunist builders or erosion.

Just as one man led the wall's construction, another helped to save what is left of it now for generations to come. Pioneering 19th-century archaeologist and landowner John Clayton dedicated much of his life to unearthing and protecting artefacts. Chesters Fort ([english-heritage.org.uk](http://english-heritage.org.uk)) is among several museum sites along the way displaying key finds, including the remains of a Roman bathhouse.

When the sun breaks through the grey, the views are spectacular, and while there are a few fairly steep slopes to climb up and down, the terrain is largely flat with grassy paths and the highest point is only just over 1,000ft (a third of a Munro). The signs are, detour aside, easy to follow.

After pausing to admire

a glorious sunset, I race towards the welcoming lights of the Twice Brewed Inn. Recent refurbishment has left it feeling

unexpectedly modern and spacious inside, despite its long history as a hostelry. It is said by some to be named after a request from 15th-century soldiers for the inn to brew its beer again as it wasn't strong enough, but I have no complaints about my ale or hearty burger and chips.

The next night at Brookside Villa brings the chance of a long soak in a bath and a wide array of drinks in the B&B's cosy lounge bar. Owners Denise and Gerry are keen hikers, too, and offer a service ferrying guests along the wall. If you prefer walking, Hadrian's Haul luggage transfer lets you stride along with a day pack instead of doing an unintentional impression of a footsore soldier by shouldering a hefty rucksack.

If re-enactments appeal, between April and September various events

are taking place along the wall; you can see some elite "Roman cavalymen" demonstrating their skills.

While Scotland's future in the United Kingdom remains unknown, walking this historic frontier offers a stunning — if not always straightforward — perspective on past and present.

### THE BRIEF

Julia Horton did a two-day Hadrian's Wall hike from Chollerford to Steel Rigg (12 miles) and on to Gilsland (nine miles). She was a guest of the Red Lion and Twice Brewed Inn ([redlionnewbrough.co.uk](http://redlionnewbrough.co.uk)), [twicebrewedinn.co.uk](http://twicebrewedinn.co.uk); rooms from about £40pppn), Brookside Villa B&B ([brooksidevilla.com](http://brooksidevilla.com)), rooms from £35pppn) and Northumberland tourist board. Luggage transfer was by Hadrian's Haul ([hadrianshaul.com](http://hadrianshaul.com)); walking guide from Contours Walking Holidays ([contours.co.uk](http://contours.co.uk)).

### THE BRIEF

**BOOK** [surprisetrips.co.uk](http://surprisetrips.co.uk)  
**WHAT TO DO** Amsterdam Tourist Board; [iamsterdam.com](http://iamsterdam.com). The City Card includes entry to many attractions, and use of public transport. Book and collect at the Central Tourist Office in Stationsplein. It costs €55 for 24 hours, €65 for 48 hours and €72 for 72 hours; [iamsterdam.com/citycard](http://iamsterdam.com/citycard)  
**HOTELS** Pulitzer Amsterdam is a member of the Preferred Hotels & Resorts LVX Collection; from £204 a night; [preferredhotels.com](http://preferredhotels.com)



The mostly flat terrain, with some steep slopes, offers hikers majestic views, such as this fort near Housesteads

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