

Edinburgh to Brussels for lunch anyone?

✘ You may think that you have to be a super-millionaire with your own private jet to be able to go so far just for lunch. But actually it is perfectly feasible using scheduled flights, and the good thing is that the Brazilian Embraer jet which BMI use on their Regional routes looks (and feels) a bit like a big private jet anyway.

bmi Regional have been flying the route from Edinburgh to Brussels for 10 years, and to celebrate this anniversary they invited The Reporter and a handful of other Edinburgh journalists to join them for lunch in Brussels. Having got over the fact that the invitation arrived on April 1st, and determined that it was actually a real request, it all became rather exciting. We were whisked off in the 49-seater jet from Edinburgh by Captain David Nicholson and his crew, who were also waiting for us on our return to Brussels airport to bring us back to Auld Reekie.

Yes, we were fast tracked through to the BMI lounge at either end, and yes we were seated at the front of the plane, but speaking with some of the other passengers further back, it seemed that the Belgian golfers heading home after conquering the Old Course and Carnoustie on Friday morning, were having just as pleasant an experience as we were. The in-flight service provided solely by the hard-working Laura Douglas was very polished during the short flight.

✘ And, of course, The Reporter also used the free wifi in the lounge to update a couple of stories and pick up some emails before the flights.

Brussels is just under three times the size of Edinburgh in population terms and served by trams within the city as ✘

well as the Brussels Metro, an underground train system. And while we are in the grip of election fever here in Scotland, the Belgians have just completed a year with no official government at all, following the deadlock in any agreement to form a new one.

☒ We were taken for lunch to the Rouge Tomato restaurant.

This is what they say about themselves:-“The Rouge Tomato cuisine adheres to the principles of the SPE nutritional charter. developed by chefs and dieticians, the SPE charter is an innovative approach to nutrition applied to restaurants validated by an independent scientific committee.” This all sounds rather scientific, but it has to be said that the execution of the tasting menu by Californian chef, Alex Joseph, accompanied by his Aberdeen-born pastry chef, was faultless. Each little course was a revelation, using local produce such as the Ostend grey prawns and the wonderfully green asparagus for the veggies among us.

☒

Horse mackerel with
Japanese mushrooms

A very crisp and cold Sancerre complemented the meal which was delicious and served in delightful surroundings. In summer this restaurant has a large outdoor seating area which would be lovely to go back to on a summer day.

Accompanied by the man at the helm of BMI Regional, ☒ Director of Operations, Paul Alcock, it became clear that this is a small company within a company where everyone knows everyone else. Paul certainly knew everyone and had time for a quick word with the crew on the plane as well as ground staff. He was also spotted having a good look around the lounge in Edinburgh to ensure nothing was out of place. Alcock works from the BMI Regional headquarters in Aberdeen where all the BMI planes are maintained, although he and his family live

near East Midlands airport.

Doing some pre-trip research we were delighted to see that BMI have a really innovative website where their Twitter feed (and you know how big we are on Twitter!) shows up all the tweets about Edinburgh on the Fast Facts page about the city. If you are a real Twitter geek then it is actually worth tweeting something about Edinburgh and then going to [their page](#) to see it! Also if you are big on Flickr then you will see that the BMI site has a backdrop of various Flickr photos, which is a really nice touch.

After lunch there was just time for a quick taxi to the Grand Place for some chocolate buying and a quick look at the Manneken Pis, before we were again whisked back by minibus to the airport.

Of course not everyone goes to Brussels just for the day. Scotland has six MEPs who have to travel regularly to Brussels to attend the [European Parliament](#). We asked a couple of them to comment on their own thoughts about travelling to and from Brussels.

✘ Alyn Smith MEP told us:-“BMI keeps Scotland’s MEPs moving and has maintained its good service despite increasing pressure on cost-saving and rising fuel costs. Without its Edinburgh-Brussels service our weekly commute would be a nightmare. Brussels is the beating heart of Europe and has so much to offer tourists aside from chocolate! I hope this route continues to grow in popularity and Scots take advantage of it.”

Catherine Stihler MEP said:-“Direct flights between ✘ Edinburgh and Brussels has undoubtedly opened up European travel for many Scottish travellers. Brussels is highly regarded as a cultural and political centre of Europe. Similar to our own Edinburgh it is a thriving, diverse city, which is steeped in history and I highly recommend it as a

holiday spot, and I am sure many people from Belgium take full advantage of the direct flights to attend our famous Festival in August”.

A very nice way to spend a Friday – and you could perhaps take advantage of [BMIFriday](#) on 29 April when there are some cheap deals to be had to many other UK and European destinations as well.

bmi Regional operates an all-jet fleet of modern Embraer 135 and 145 aircraft and operates to Aberdeen; Brussels; Copenhagen; East Midlands; Edinburgh; Esbjerg; Glasgow; Groningen; Leeds Bradford; Lyon; Manchester; Norwich and Zurich.

And before too many of you environmentalists attack us for the wanton use of carbon emissions just for one lunch, could we balance it, even just a little, by pointing you in the direction of our [food recycling article](#) which we posted earlier in the week? Oh and The Reporter travelled by Airlink...to and from the airport!