

Five places in Edinburgh to change your view of the city...

For years I have been discovering Edinburgh through the eyes of a local, with the lens of a tourist.

This city, my home, is bustling with attractions from the historic, the quirky, and downright mind-blowing.

It's not an easy task to limit Edinburgh to only 5 'must see' attractions. Therefore, this list is brought to you with care, attention and an emphasis on areas that highlight the turbulent history and mystery of this iconic capital city.

1. The Real Mary King's Close



We'll start this tour of Edinburgh by debunking an old myth: there is no "underground city" in Edinburgh. But there are "underground" elements. Mary King's Close, along with Alan's, Pearson's and Stewart's Close's are underneath the old Royal Exchange which is now the City Chambers. But, before construction of the Royal Exchange in 1753, these streets were open to the sky and home to hundreds of citizens.

Visit The Real Mary King's Close for a tour of life in Edinburgh before political turmoil, a horrifying disease, the Scottish Enlightenment and an architectural boom changed the Old Town, and Edinburgh, forever.

The guided tours last one hour and you will be taken down onto the hidden streets by a character from Edinburgh's murky past. Entertainment level alone, there is something for everyone at The Real Mary King's Close as you explore streets and buildings that have not seen sunlight in some 250 years. Be

warned, you'll never see Edinburgh the same way again.

2. St Giles Cathedral



A beautiful crown on the Royal Mile: St Giles Cathedral has been a local worshipping site since 1124 – that's 893 years.

Often overlooked by locals, tourists flood the cathedral often. However, a few unaware spectators may walk away without noticing the significance of this grand church.

St Giles is not a cathedral – no bishop lives here – in fact it is the High Kirk of Scotland, and Scotland's bloodthirsty history with religion, independence, and freedom of speech have clashed with this cathedral at the centre.

The cathedral was refurbished by William Chambers (the man who saved Greyfriars Bobby's life), after centuries of religious reform had left the cathedral bare, walled into segments and all historical artwork destroyed.

Just as you enter the cathedral, you'll see a small stool. This is a monument to a local lady, Jenny Geddes, who in 1637 launched the stool at a minister who preached from the English *Common Booke of Prayer* in defiance to the King. This act rippled; causing the War of the Three Kingdoms, civil war, bloodshed, Oliver Cromwell and...the Covenanters.

3. The Covenanters Prison at Greyfriars Kirk

One year after Jenny's stool is thrown, Scottish protestants create the *National Covenant* a document outlining independence from the King's preferred version of that faith, episcopalian. Those who signed the document were called the Covenanters, but sadly they met an untidy end.

☒ Greyfriars is famous for a loyal Skye Terrier: but a drastic and ghastly part of the city's history lurks in the south-east section. There you will find the Covenanters Prison, where some 400 Covenanters were tortured inside a blueprint for what modern Europeans would come to know as a concentration camp.

Run by the King's advocate, George 'Bluidy' McKenzie, the Covenanter's prison is a must see for those who want to truly understand the lives of Scottish people during a period of time we Scots call 'The Killing Times'.

George McKenzie however, is now buried overlooking the very camp he created. An egotistical and violent man. But, at night time the MacKenzie poltergeist will strike, scratching, strangling, burning and biting members of the public. Be careful where you tread.

4. **Gilmerton Cove**

Outside of the city walls, a strange place lurks beneath Drum Street, in the suburb of Gilmerton. An ancient network of seemingly man-made caves may shed light on some ancient mysteries.

Gilmerton Cove is the most mysterious place in the City. It is associated with Witchcraft, Druids, The Knights Templar, The Stone Masons, Mary Queen of Scots, The Hellfire Club and of course, the Holy Grail.

Any mysterious group, event or myth has its roots in Gilmerton Cove. A large part of the Cove network is blocked by rubble, if anyone removed the rubble the street above would cave in.

Therefore researchers from St Andrew's and Edinburgh University's Geophysics departments began scanning the road above Gilmerton Cove with ground penetrating radar. The result, another chamber buried somewhere near an ancient

sealed passageway.

So what's in that hidden chamber? A nearby chapel may be able to help us out.

5. Rosslyn Chapel

Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code* may have financially saved this well known site. But, Rosslyn Chapel has mysteries that far surpass the fictional world of hollywood.

Firstly, Rosslyn Chapel is absolutely stunning. It's located seven miles south of The City of Edinburgh and despite it's mysterious claims it is well worth a visit for the purely magical decorations and mason work inside. It's open all year round so visitors coming to Edinburgh always have a chance to see this stunning marvel.

Rosslyn Chapel was built in 1446. Much like St Giles, it has suffered a turbulent past. But, it's said that a large chamber beneath the chapel flagstones is the final resting place of the Knights Templar, and their Holy Grail.

Temple, a town just South of Rosslyn, was where the Knights Templar settled after persecution in Europe. So, did they leave the Holy Grail there? And what does it have to do with Gilmerton Cove?

The story goes that the blocked passageway from Gilmerton Cove would take people to Rosslyn Chapel, where the Templar Knights now rest with their religious artefact.

Now, geographically, this is a difficult myth to swallow. However, Rosslyn Chapel holds many more. Indeed there is a large hidden chamber below the Chapel. And, on the back pillars where angels play various instruments, the patterns there actually create musical notes.

One Last Thing:

As you walk along the streets of the Old Town go down those closes, wander into hidden shops and bars. Wander up and down the streets that trail off into unknown places and discover Edinburgh your way. This now beautiful Scottish city was once a deprived and desperate place to live. But, all those who lived here add value to the stories, the mysteries and the history of this amazing place. An ancestry I am proud to call my own.

I hope you find Edinburgh to be as an amazing place as I do. If you would like more information on the weird and wonderful places to see in Edinburgh, visit edinburghunderground.com

