

The 10 best bookshops in Edinburgh

Edinburgh, Edinburgh, Edinburgh. The streets are teeming with hidden treasures that are as rich as the ideas that made our city known across the world.

For my money, it's always been the myriad and eclectic conflation of old and new bookshops in the oddest of places which make Edinburgh so special.

Fiction or non-fiction, it doesn't matter, there's more to browse than you can dream of. If you know where to look...

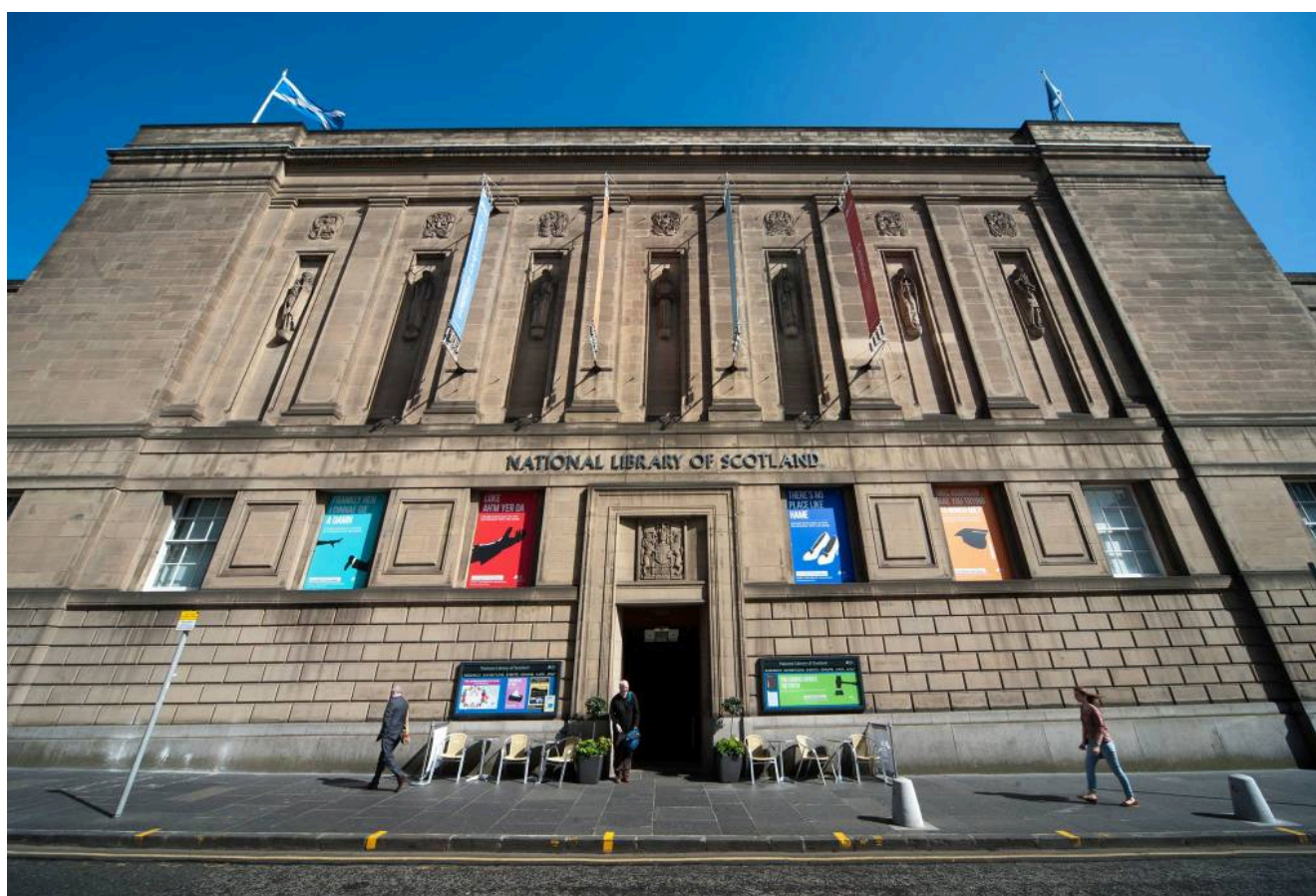


Image: National Library of Scotland

1. The National Library of Scotland

I'm cheating, but I won't be moved. Situated on George Bridge,

the NLS is not only architecturally stunning but home to the very essence of literature in Scotland. And it has a copy of most of it too.

Everything from its grand entrance to its immaculate reading rooms makes it a natural home for the studious; often unfairly ignoring its lovely cafe and wide-ranging selection of Scottish titles to buy. While not strictly speaking a bookshop, it has a small Scottish selection to buy from and we as having a variety of events and displays.

Whether you're in the mood for a blether in nice surroundings or have a project that needs a thrashing with fantastic resources, this is the place to go. It's easily one of the most wonderfully regal and welcoming atmospheres in the city.

[National Library of Scotland](#)

George IV Bridge, Edinburgh EH1 1EW, UK

2. Armchair Books

Located just off the Grassmarket, Armchair Books is stuffed from floor to ceiling with second-hand gems and vintage editions. With all the love in the world, it's messy, cluttered saturation is what makes it a great place to browse.

Something is always peaking out that's sure to grab your fancy and it has the rare distinction of being, just maybe, the only bookshop in the city that thrives from its disorganisation. A bookshop, through and through, and the perfect place to find the surprise you didn't know you wanted.

[Armchair Books](#)

72-74 West Port, Edinburgh EH1 2LE, UK

3. Edinburgh Books

This maze is tucked around the corner on West Port Street, and for connoisseurs of non-fiction, and history, in particular, it's the Louvre of unexpected finds.

In many respects, going to Edinburgh Books is about as comprehensive a visit to Edinburgh as any tour bus. It's packed with layers of books upon shelves upon piles of titles which offer surprises at every turn. It's helped nicely along by being a series of Penrose steps of four bumpy rooms which you can take days to saunter through. With its impressive collection of titles, beware the basement – it's a one way trip to a non-fiction section you'll inevitably be heaving bags up from...

[Edinburgh Books](#)

145-147 West Port, Edinburgh EH8 9DP, UK

4. Till's Bookshop

This is the student's Aladdin's den. What sets Till's apart is just how much is jammed into such a small space. It's also got the precious novelty of pop culture memorabilia and a burning hearth next to wide-ranging classics for those long winter nights.

It's very Meadows-esque, and the cosy smell of incense invites you into the living room you never knew you missed. You're unlikely to find a better range of used fiction and classics titles that are always ebbing and flowing, and regular visits are recommended for the fiction fans out there.

[Till's](#)

1 Hope Park Crescent, Edinburgh EH8 9NA, UK



5. Blackwell's

Kill me although you may, Waterstones at the West End is not what it once was. The closure of its sister branch on George Street with its oak-panelled walls and black shelves made the shop the natural home for serene browsing but it's now a bank.

The West End has been converted to a walk-in living website. A multi-floored magazine for the latest titles and is missing the rustic charm of its departed sibling.

A happy compromise, and hence my little cheat here, is Blackwell's. It's still the academic home for aspiring students or specialist and happens to be opposite Old College which just gives it a beautiful buzz of activity. If you have a choice between the two, come here – you get the best mix of the new and title variety that we all need.

Additionally, a cheeky pint in the Captain's Bar across the road may have influenced this pick...

[Blackwell's](#)

53-62 South Bridge, Edinburgh EH1 1YS, UK

6. Christian Aid Book Sale, St Andrew's and St George's West Church

This one is definitely cheating, but unapologetically so. I've got hundreds of books in my house, and I'm convinced half of them have come from my annual pilgrimage to the Christian Aid Book Sale at St Andrew's and St George's West Church.

Obviously, this isn't technically a bookshop but with the tens of thousands of books that are poured into the venue and sold on behalf of the charity, it may as well be a small book industry. If you're a lover of history and politics, then this is an absolute, absolute must visit. Old titles, old biographies and classic titles on *everything* are just sitting there waiting to be picked up.

An aficionado of all things Churchill, half of my collection came from here – diaries, collected speeches, volumes and titles no longer printed, all of it – picked up in a frenzied

rummage. The sale usually runs for a week in May, and be thankful. You'll be visiting more than once!

[St Andrew's and St George's West](#)

13-17 George St, Edinburgh EH2 2PA, UK



7. Golden Hare Books

An independent bookshop, Golden Hare Books stands out because it places book presentation at the heart of its shop design. Tucked away in Stockbridge, the shop is a tribute to the power of books to allure and invite you in. They say don't judge a book by its title, but...let's make an exception.

With clear displays and a passion for books as art in their own right, Golden Hare stands out as one of the few shops in the city that combines the commerciality of a high street bookshop with the intricacy, love and knowledge of an independent retailer. The best of both industries, you won't be disappointed and will definitely leave with something.

[Golden Hare Books](#)

Golden Hare Books, 68 St Stephen Street, Edinburgh, EH3 5AQ;

8. Forbidden Planet

For years I've loved pop culture, but only properly delved into reading my first comic – *The Dark Knight Returns* – in the last few months. Since then you'll find me browsing the shelves and poking in and out of comics as I get my head around an entire universe I've just fallen in love with.

While other shops in the town have a solid selection of comics and graphic novels, there's just something about this outlet on South Bridge that makes the whole experience more atmospheric. I don't feel that I'm indulging in an unusual hobby. No, no. This is where the professionals go, and it's a terrifically fun venue if you're looking to venture out of your field and discover something brand new.

Comics aren't just bad Ben Affleck movies and the tired Marvel movies. Oh, how wrong I was back then.

[Forbidden Planet](#)

40-41 Southbridge Street, Edinburgh EH1 1LL, UK

9. The Old Town Bookshop

This, for me, is the best shop on Victoria Street. The little second-hand bookshop sits around the corner from the National Library of Scotland and always feels like it's in the shadow of the castle, right at the heart of the city. On a summer's day, the streets are packed and loud, and it's wonderful to just step inside silence for a few moments and browse a terrific section of fiction. While the non-fiction section is smaller than in other bookshops, it stands out as always having a surprise or two and a great selection in the art and travel departments of which it specialises.

It's absolutely worth a visit, especially given its terrific location and if you need a breather from town.

[The Old Town Bookshop](#)

8 Victoria St, Edinburgh EH1 2HG, UK

10. McNaughtan's Bookshop & Gallery

There's always been something of a traditionalist in me, and it would be remiss not to mention McNaughton's Bookshop. Everything about this seller, located just at the top of Leith Walk, is Edinburgh at its finest and novel (excuse the pun). With its somewhat serious, dark green entrance, it might seem a bit formal. In fact, it's a beautiful home for rare, collectable and second-hand books which will make the collector's day.

While not as broad a selection as other second-hand retailers, McNaughtan's is the perfect spot to browse a selection of rarities and antiquities. It is also has a particularly impressive selection of Edinburgh maps, drawings and collector's items. A wonderful tribute to the city, as well as a must-see for any bibliophile.

[McNaughtan's Bookshop & Gallery](#)

3a-4a Haddington Pl, Edinburgh EH7 4AE, UK