

Meeting Barbara Smith of Johnnie Walker Princes Street

Barbara Smith is going to enjoy the best view in Edinburgh every day, looking down over Princes Street and up to one of her previous offices at Edinburgh Castle from the roof terrace at the top of the eight storey Johnnie Walker building.

Ms Smith is the Managing Director of Johnnie Walker Princes Street, in charge of the newest visitor experience in town. She has an extensive career all of which has led her to this latest role. Barbara has worked in the cultural, tourism and heritage sector, at one stage running Edinburgh Castle which she now has a clear view of from the bars at the top of the former Binns building. She began her working life by studying sports science, and managed Meadowbank Stadium for ten years. She then moved up the hill to the Castle, followed by a stint at Chester Zoo and then Edinburgh Zoo.

Appointed by Diageo just two years ago she admits that she still has lots to learn about whisky, but where better to do just that than in the employ of the company which claims its place as “global leader in beverage alcohol”.

Explaining that she knows the importance of the building to Edinburgh residents, having met friends at Binns' Clock many times, she is really proud of the refurbished clock which is

now showing the correct time and chiming the hours again. Parts of the original building roof have been amplified with the roof space now home to an area for food and drink with great views to the south and west.



Johnnie Walker Princes Street will open to the public on 6 September 2021. The press were given a short tour around the building on 2 September and we met Barbara Smith the Managing Director of Johnnie Walker Princes Street PHOTO ©2021 The Edinburgh Reporter

Barbara said: "I am from Midlothian and care passionately about Edinburgh and Scotland. For me I was inspired to apply for the role when I heard about this project and the opportunity, and the building chosen for it. When I knew what the role entailed I realised it was about more than just Johnnie Walker Princes Street.

"It is about the development of Scotch whisky tourism around Scotland, This £185 million investment is not only to develop whisky, it is going into the resurgence of tourism. We want to encourage and invite visitors to Edinburgh but then be able to

pass them out to the four corners of the country to find out more about whisky. Visitors will go from here to our distilleries at Glenkinchie, Clynelish, Cardhu and Caol Ila.

“I have had the opportunity to recruit individuals into a team, choosing the type of people who are passionate with the skills and talent that we need to really create the wow factor that we want to give our visitors. We had 5,500 applications from which we employed 150 people – the most talented individuals that I have ever worked with. I am proud that the team consists of 55% of females in the leadership team, 55% of non-UK nationals in the wider team with 23 languages among them. I could not be more proud of them.

“One of the things we wanted to make sure about the building was that it is accessible to everybody. We want the local community to feel that this is a hub that they can enjoy. Visitors can book either or both of the two rooftop bars separately from a visit to the other floors. I thought the view from the castle was the best view, but now from our rooftop I can say that this is the best view in Edinburgh.”

It was lovely to finally enjoy the view from the rooftop terrace at [@JWPrincesStreet](#) and have a chat with Barbara Smith who is in charge of the newest attraction in one of the city's favourite buildings about her job. pic.twitter.com/tLUGIEeBY6

– Edinburgh Reporter (@EdinReporter) [September 2, 2021](#)





The tour which visitors will take from the front door all the way up to the top floor uses stunning audio visual effects, (and a riveting live performance to describe the evolution of the business from its beginnings in Kilmarnock which we will leave you to experience for yourselves) which help to explain the story of whisky, taking guests through their own experience of flavour. With a simple questionnaire at the beginning of the tour visitors are then given a wristband to show their own preferences, whether tropical, fruity or spicy. This is a guide in choosing the drinks you might sample during the tour.

This is much more than a distillery tour, intended for anyone with even a little knowledge. But the advice from Les our guide was simply to leave any preconceived ideas behind, learn about the humble origins of John Walker and his grocer's shop, and enjoy the journey.

At the end of the tour, visitors will be invited to spend some time and some money in the shop which occupies the corner area

on the ground floor. Now rather than the beauty department of Frasers, you will find bottles of whisky of all types from regular prices up to £15,000 for one very special Scotch.

On one of the rails there are branded plastic macs – a must buy surely for anyone beginning their journey in Edinburgh and then heading off to the other Diageo distilleries. For as we now know – especially after our whistlestop tour of the new attraction – water is one of the key ingredients in whisky.

Johnnie Walker Princes Street will open its doors to the public at 1 pm on Monday 6 September. Tickets for tours start from £25 per person, including a 90-minute tour and three personalised Scotch whisky samples (all samples are provided with controlled measures and non-alcoholic alternatives are available to all guests).

To book and for more information visit www.johnniewalkerprincesstreet.com