

The Culture Vulture shares her tips on enjoying the Fringe on a budget

So, to me, August means one thing – Festival month.

I used to be Head of Press at both Assembly and the Gilded Balloon, so I know a thing or two about ‘how to work the Festival’.

I also look forward to August every year and admit to spending a small fortune, but I’ve spent the last year, putting aside money each month so I can enjoy the Fringe like a tourist.

Yes, the Fringe can be expensive but there are lots of ways to enjoy everything Edinburgh has to offer at low cost or for free. There’s no excuse not to get out there and experience just how wonderful Edinburgh in August can be.

Get your steps in!

I used to advise visitors to the city to invest in a Ridacard bus pass but now Lothian buses are ‘TapTapCap’, you can get the cheapest adult daily and weekly fare, without the hassle of buying a separate card. The maximum cap is £5 a day. However, if you will be using the bus every day, it might make sense to buy a 1-week Advance Purchase Ridacard for just £22. But that can soon mount up and to be honest, during the Fringe, it’s quicker to get your walking shoes on. So, leave the high heels at home, put on the trainers, and get your

steps in. You'll be amazed how many you get in during the month.

Take advantage of the previews

The Fringe doesn't officially start until Friday, 4 August but many shows will offer discounted previews from as early as Wednesday, 2 August. Check out [the Fringe website](#) for more details.

And on Monday 7 and Tuesday 8 August many of the shows are 2 for 1.

Loiter with intent

If you hang around some of the big venues on preview days, you might even score yourself some freebies. Many promoters and acts are keen to get 'bums on seats' particularly for the early performances, and can often be found offering free tickets to people lucky enough to be in the right place at the right time. A good place to hang out for these is in the beer gardens at Underbelly, Assembly Gardens or the Gilded Balloon at Teviot.

More free shows – Various promoters run free events, including the original [PBH's Free Fringe](#). While you can technically pay nothing, they do ask you to pay what you can afford. These artists have to eat and pay for their accommodation too, so be generous if you can, especially if you've enjoyed it.

Take in a couple of shows for the price of one ticket

The big venues, Assembly, Gilded Balloon, Underbelly, and the Pleasance run a Gala launch of their top shows each year at the beginning of the Fringe. They normally feature highlights from their biggest and best productions so it's a good way to see lots of shows for the price of one ticket. In the case of the [Assembly's Gala Launch](#), they are celebrating their 40th anniversary, which is hard to believe. The ticket costs £17.50, which for a 2-hour show is a steal.

Other ways to catch lots of acts for the price of one ticket are some of the benefit shows. [Underbelly's Big Brain-Tumour Benefit](#), which takes place on 15 August is a stupendous evening of comedy to help in the treatment of or finding a cure for brain tumours. All box office income goes straight to the Brain Tumour Charity, and Underbelly matches this amount as a donation to the charity, doubling the amount that they can raise on the night. Last year's line-up included John Bishop, Phil Wang and Maisie Adam.

UNDERBELLY'S

BIG BRAIN TUMOUR BENEFIT

1. And yet more free shows

Hang around the historic Royal Mile and Mound precinct, which are transformed into huge street performance playgrounds where hundreds of world-class street artists mix with thousands of festivalgoers, creating the most vibrant and visible event of Edinburgh's summer.

The performances are free to watch – although you might be asked to donate.

Among the performance areas, in every nook and cranny, you'll find someone exchanging a skill for a donation: portrait

artists, caricaturists, hair braiders, face painters, palmists and more.

1. Get value from your licence fee!

BBC at the Edinburgh Festivals is back at Dynamic Earth, their new home from Monday, 7 August until Sunday, 20 August. You do need a ticket to enter the events and you may have missed out on the ballot, which ended on 23 July, but hang around this venue and you will often find they have some returns or more tickets available for the day. Just ask at the information desk.

1. Join the Friends of the Fringe

If you are a culture vulture and intend on seeing lots of shows, become a [Friend of the Fringe](#). From £49 (or £39 DD) it'll entitle you to lots of benefits, including 2-for-1 tickets, a priority telephone booking line, and lots more. So, find a friend and share the cost. You'll reap the rewards in no time.

1. Picture this!

This is one thing I never miss. From 5-26 August 2023 (Monday to Saturday), see the world's best photojournalism for free at The Scottish Parliament, at the only venue in the UK to host this exhibition. There's no need to book – the exhibition is free to view in the Main Hall during opening hours.

And if art and photography is your thing, other photo exhibitions include Steve Ullathorne's Annual Photo Fest at the Gilded Balloon at Teviot and don't forget, the Edinburgh Art Festival, which takes place from 11-27 August 2023.

1. It's not all about comedy

There's so much more to do, from walking tours to exhibitions. If you're a fan of Harry Potter, try [the Potter Trail](#), a walking tour of Edinburgh. If history is more your thing, [Free Royal Mile Tours](#) offers a historical walking tour around Edinburgh's world-famous Old Town, and if you want to release your inner dancing diva, join in with [Guru Dudu's Silent Disco Walking Tours](#). From £12, you are guaranteed spontaneous flash mobs through the streets of Edinburgh, interpretative dance around local landmarks, group singing, and lots of fun interaction with onlookers, which will have your cheeks hurting from laughing so much.

And finally, if you find the Fringe brochure so overwhelming and can't decide what to see, you can always consult my spreadsheet. I've been producing a spreadsheet for circa 15 years for friends and family, in the hope that they will take a chance on seeing at least one show.

The circa 175 shows I have picked (whittled down from 3,013) are compiled as a result of my own research, based on companies who I know produce good work, emails from PRs selling me their show, shows I have reviewed in previous years (and given 3+ stars too) or because the show has a catchy title or an intriguing description.

I can't vouch that I have seen all the shows, so, therefore, take no responsibility if you go and see something based on my recommendations and don't like it. I've tried to include a cross-section of shows and events, many of them free, or pay what you can afford, or are part of the PBH Free Fringe (where if you go and see a show, and like it, please give a donation.)

So, go take a chance yourself. That's what the Fringe is all about, taking a punt on something – after all, enjoyment is very subjective. That's what makes us all different! Have a

great August.

And if you go and see something that you see recommended on my spreadsheet, please do drop me a message on Facebook to let me know whether or not you enjoyed it.

My Fringe spreadsheet can be found here: <https://rb.gy/jh6wf>



Kerry Teakle – the Culture Vulture – if you see her then do say hello! PHOTO ©2023 The Edinburgh Reporter



[L-R] Cris Pelope, Claudia Cawthorne and Martha Haskins launch the Edinburgh Festival Fringe 2023 Programme. Photograph by Peter Dibdin