

Pete Irvine's Scotland the Best – new edition is out now

The 14th edition of Scotland the Best has been published for you to refer to before heading off on days out, either further afield or days spent in Edinburgh.

While the book itself has no images there are a couple on the front and back flyleaves which author, Pete Irvine, really likes.

He can probably claim better knowledge than most for the way tourism and hospitality works. He has compiled his comprehensive guide to what, in his opinion, is the best recommendation for every kind of hospitality experience in Scotland since 1997.

There are more than 2,000 recommendations for every type of holiday or weekend away with city strolls and wild swimming also included. But what is definitely not included are places he hasn't found yet, or places he simply cannot recommend. He begins editing the next edition working from the printed manuscript of the last book to bring it all up to date and says the process takes about two years as some places are seasonal, so he has to wait to pay them a visit. Naturally as soon as any new edition is published he receives many phone calls, emails and suggestions of places to go or even places which have meantime closed down.

He admits that he cannot go back to every single place for each edition of the book, but he certainly makes every effort

to check that all the entries remain current. This led to the discovery that “hardly anywhere answers the phone these days” mainly, he imagines, because they don’t have the staff. And often places have a mobile number which is not answered either. This led him in some cases to use Booking.com to secure an overnight stay when planning his trips. This time round he couldn’t even begin the new edition until the post Covid period had really kicked in.

He said that does invite friends to come along sometimes (nice to have someone to have dinner with) but it is tricky if the place they are visiting just does not make the cut. He laughed and said that if anybody thinks this guide is only a book containing places which offer him a free lunch or a complimentary overnight stay, then this myth can be firmly debunked.

Service charge

This is the first version of the book after the pandemic and it looks at what Irvine regards as a “fragile” hospitality landscape. For someone like him who knows many places all over the country the addition of an automatic service charge can be a little irritating. In a lot of places there is a choice but he said it has become increasingly common for it to be added automatically.

In Scotland however Pete commented that there is no culture of good, polite service as there is in the US, for example. And he regards service in London at present as generally “awful” with a lack of training in customer relations quite evident – even in more expensive restaurants.

He said: “I think that the smaller cafés have to think carefully about adding service to the bill. I think there is a feeling in places where it is just casual dining, or there’s not a whole fleet of waitresses or waiters, that actually it should be at our discretion.”

Hotel scene

Irvine set up Edinburgh's Hogmanay some thirty years ago now and points out that at that time hotels were largely empty and pubs closed around the end of the year. He suggest that Edinburgh is today one of the most attractive places to open a new hotel because of the year round occupancy rates. He said that the quietest time of the year is now completely different and rack rates are known to jump by a huge margin.

Irvine was born in Jedburgh in the Borders and educated at Hawick High School and Edinburgh University. He has been the creator and director of many of Scotland's major events and festivals including The Opening of the Scottish Parliament in 1999 and Edinburgh's Hogmanay from its inception in 1993 to 2017. He lives in Edinburgh's New Town. Peter was awarded an MBE for services to Scotland and an Honorary Doctorate from the Open University.

Peter said: "Compiling this edition was much more of an undertaking than any since the first, thirty years ago. Then and now it involved an odyssey of months on the road, always aiming to experience the fine places personally. After Covid receded it was clear that many businesses had to take a serious and creative look at how they were going to continue in a post-pandemic, post-Brexit world.

"However, it is a new world. Many places have recalibrated and are better than ever. The legendary creative entrepreneurism of the Scots has kicked in and I highly recommend seeking out new indie businesses on the southside of Glasgow, the roads to Leith, Dundee, Skye and Orkney and hitherto below-the-radar towns including Dunkeld, Kelso, Peebles and Kirkcudbright.

"Scotland the Best has sought out the artisan, innovative and unique, where individuals have taken the plunge and risk and set up their stall in a still uncertain marketplace. It has

been a challenge to keep track of the cornucopia of new bakers, coffee shops, tea rooms, diners and restaurants that have sprung up. ***Scotland the Best*** is not a comprehensive, list-of-options guide; it is highly selective. I firmly believe that some places are just better than others and deserve to be recognised and encouraged.”

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**Scot
land
the
Best**

**EXTENSIVELY
REVISED
AND
UPDATED**

PETER IRVINE