

Edinburgh's Mile's better

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An old cobbled street with a castle at one end and a palace at the other; it sounds almost magical. But chances are, if you live in Edinburgh, the Royal Mile isn't somewhere you go very often. It's somewhere to take snap-happy relatives to see the sights and pick up a tartan tea towel. But besides the shortbread, ghost tours and bargain kilts, there's a Royal Mile worth discovering, whether you're a tourist or not.

With many of the buildings on the High Street dating back to the 12th Century, this is one of Edinburgh's oldest areas. Formed when the whole of Scotland was covered by an ice sheet (visitors might argue it still is) the flow of the glacier ran from west to east - dropping rubble and earth in its wake. A place in the history books is certain, but Andy Landsburgh, Director of Edinburgh Festival Rentals says there's more to the Royal Mile than relics.

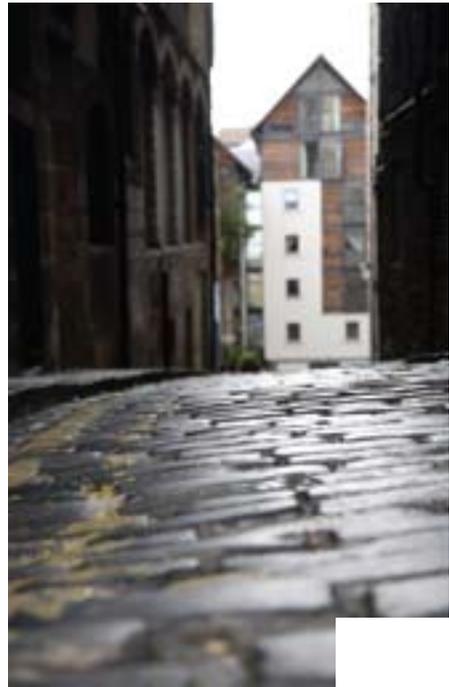
Property

"You either love it or hate it," laughs Andy. "But it's definitely one of the most impressive addresses in the city." Andy's expertise is with holiday and short term rental properties as well as property management and he regularly advises potential buyers. So what sort of person rents a property here and do you need a Royal budget to afford it? Not according to Andy, "it's not unheard of to get a property around the £200,000 mark. And rental is more affordable than people might think. We've a 2 bedroom flat which goes for around £750 per month - in property terms that's comparable to areas like Bruntsfield. But Andy urges caution: "it would be easy to think that buying and renting out to tourists is easy money. But there are pitfalls, it needs to be marketed well, your website needs to be effective and you need to know what will work best for each market."

Andy says there's no 'typical' resident. "From street performers, to Americans in search of their roots who want a postcode next to the castle, we get all sorts. Perhaps surprisingly, we also rent to young professionals who simply love the idea of a cool, city centre location."



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Shops

If a packet of fudge isn't high on your shopping list, international designers at Chi or the likes of Vivienne Westwood at Corniche on Jeffrey Street show there's more to the Mile. For a twist on the traditional, Ness, a few steps from the castle, uses natural fabrics to create unusual clothing and accessories. Further along at the Canongate, contemporary jeweller Palenque offers hand crafted trinkets with not a Saltire kilt pin in sight. But if you've secretly always fancied something skimpy in red, the mini dresses in John Morrison Kiltmakers will certainly put the 'tart' into tartan.

From Toby jugs and sewing boxes, to a 19th century urn, Castle Antiques is far from tourist tat, or if it's New Age you're interested in, Crystal Clear's tarot reading might reveal your future. Keeping things in the present, International Newsagents opposite St Giles Cathedral boasts a huge selection of papers. Le Monde and The New York Times are available daily, for reading or just for posing. "There's a really eclectic array of shops here, even a Christmas shop open all year round," says Andy. If you're getting stressed out even thinking that far ahead, The Wholeworks on Jackson's Close offers Acupuncture, Indian head massage and Chinese herbal medicine.

Eating out

"The Witchery is probably the most famous restaurant here and it's ideal if you're feeling flush, but it's also worth checking out some of the lesser known eateries, many of which are tucked away down little 'wynds' or 'closes' off the main thoroughfare," says Andy. The café at the Fruitmarket Gallery, just off the Royal Mile on Jeffrey Street, is a well kept secret with some of the best cakes in town. French and fabulously rustic, Café Marlayne, down Old Fishmarket Close, is a real find, as are the cocktails at Itchycoo within the Radisson Hotel. Amber at The Scotch Whisky Experience serves Scottish produce and with over 280 whiskies on offer their experts will help you find a favourite. Another hidden gem is David Bann on St Mary Street; vegetarian but irresistible to even the most hard-core carnivore, it's worth a detour.

Amenities/things to do

So you've seen the castle every day on your way to work, but have you had a look inside? Worth the price of a ticket even for the view – why let tourists have all the fun. St Giles Cathedral is free to walk around and a short tour is perfect on a rainy lunch break. For the young at heart, the Museum of Childhood is also free and great fun, as is the Storytelling Centre. "There's so much going on here and it's all right on the doorstep. The only disadvantage is grocery shopping - it's easier to pick up a Scottish sword than a pint of semi-skimmed!" Andy jokes. ☺