

Summer in Edinburgh: What can I do?

Many students stay in Edinburgh over the summer break – why wouldn't you? – but what do they do all day? Student Ambassador Tess has some suggestions.

Find yourself in Edinburgh for the summer? Have no fear! It's not uncommon for students to stay up in Edinburgh as the sun starts to peek through all the clouds around May. However, you may be a bit stuck or unsure of what you can fill your days with. Here are a few suggestions of what you could do over the summer in Edinburgh and Scotland in general.

Road trip to the Highlands or Bus Tours



Tobermory on the island of Mull.

Road trips are a fun way of exploring the different national parks and the Highlands in Scotland, especially if you're interested in hiking and camping. There are loads of campsites and affordable hostels along the way. You can also customise your trip to hit all the major spots, like Loch Ness, Loch Lomond, the Isle of Mull, the Isle of Skye and the Cairngorms. You could even drive up as far as John O'Groats, which is the northernmost point of the British Isles. If you're not super sure about where you should go, there are pre-planned routes like the West Coast 500. The possibilities are endless; all you really need is a good group of friends, a few experienced drivers and a map!

If you're not super comfortable with driving or you don't have a designated driver friend, there is also the option of hopping on a bus tour. There are loads that take you to places like Skye, or to the crannog on Loch Tay, or to a number of other locations across Scotland. These tend to be cheaper than a road trip, as you don't need to hire a vehicle, however your schedule isn't as flexible. These are great for day trips and weekend breaks, which may be better suited for people with summer internships or jobs.

Beaches

I know it seems a bit surreal to suggest going to beach in Scotland, but you'd be surprised with how beautiful and sunny Scottish beaches can be. I suggest checking out places like North Berwick, which is a quick train or bus rides away, or even going to Portobello beach here in Edinburgh. The water can be a bit cold but when the sun's out, it's actually a great way to get some vitamin D. There are loads of nice waterside restaurants as well as decent fish and chips shops to get a takeaway. If it's a particularly sunny day, I suggest you jump on the bus or your bike and get down to Portobello via Arthur's Seat!

Bookstores

This one seems a little bit weird, but if you're like me and really love the smell of new books, there are loads of bookstores to check out in Edinburgh. Places like Topping and Co. in Leith are multiple stories with a vast number of titles to peruse; you can even get a cup of tea and read a book at Topping! Other great bookstores include Portobello Bookstore (you could hit the books and the beach in the same day), Lighthouse Books, Armchair Books, Golden Hare Books and Tills Bookstore. They often have really interesting editions of books, as well as some signed copies! Edinburgh was the world's first UNESCO City of Literature so you're sure to find a bookshop to your taste.

The Seven Hills of Edinburgh

It's no secret that Edinburgh has often tried to model itself after Classical models. Calton Hill, which hosts the National Monument of Scotland – sometimes called 'Scotland's Folly' or 'Edinburgh's Disgrace' – is a prime example of how many of its inhabitants deemed the city as the 'Athens of the North'. This is not where the Classical resonances end. The Seven Hills of Edinburgh draw parallels with the Seven Hills of Rome



ed by William Playfair the National Monument of Scotland was
ed to be another Parthenon to commemorate Scottish soldiers killed
Napoleonic wars but construction was halted in 1829 due to lack of

and are a fantastic way of getting to know the city. Many
people do all seven in one day, but I think there's no shame
in spacing it out if you're not a keen hiker. If you do want
to try it out, the hills are: Calton Hill, Castle Rock,
Corstorphine Hill, Craiglockhart Hill, Blackford Hill,
Arthur's Seat and Braid Hill. There are loads of guides to
follow; make sure you bring ample water supplies and lots of
snacks! I speak from experience.

Museums

On top of the National Museum of Scotland, which is the home
of the first cloned sheep, there are a number of museums
littered across Edinburgh. If you're interested in music and
musical history, you could check out St Cecilia's Hall. Run by
the University's Centre for Research Collections, this museum

has a wide array of interesting instruments in their exhibits. For any fans of Zelda, there are a large number of ocarinas you can admire. Other interesting museums to check out are the National Portrait Gallery at Princes Street, Surgeons Hall, the Museum of Edinburgh, the Writer's Museum and the Scottish National Gallery.

The Fringe

Last, but certainly not least, is the Edinburgh Fringe Festival. This is just one of several festivals which take place in Edinburgh during the summer but it's been the birthplace of productions like *Fleabag* and the musical *Six*. It's a fantastic way to spend your summer immersed in the arts during August and consists of both paid and free shows. It is an 'unjuried' festival, which means there is no selection committee when it comes to what productions run during the month, which makes for some very interesting performances. These are often not limited to just black box spaces and theatres, there are over three hundred performance spaces and many outdoor pieces as well. On top of the huge variety of shows put on every day, the food stalls are unbelievably good! The Fringe is definitely the highlight of a summer in Edinburgh.

No matter what you choose – and there's plenty of choice – your summer in Edinburgh is sure to fly by!

Considering graduate study?

After four years of study, why would you want to do more? One of our Student Ambassadors, Alfie, has some thoughts.

An undergraduate degree at university is a significant commitment. Time, money, not to mention a lot of concerted effort to complete whilst juggling a variety of other elements of life. So, when considering the option to go into another degree after undergraduate, it's natural to be nervous. The prospect of another year – or even longer – of study with all the accompanying costs and issues attached can be a frightening consideration for anyone. So why do it?

It is, of course, worth noting that academic study is not for everyone. If you've got a real knack for academic work and a passion for a specific research topic or want a job in an industry that requires a specific postgraduate qualification, it may be a good choice for you. Having a suitable research direction in mind will likely be important when looking at programmes and for research programmes such as an MRes or MPhil it will be integral to the application process. For taught courses, such as an MSc or an MA, a focus on skills development and personal qualities will take a precedent. Knowing how to market yourself, be it for your passions or your skills, is a key element to any application.

A graduate degree is a fantastic opportunity and can give you the chance to develop new skills for the workplace, academic or otherwise, but it's worth remembering that it will come with additional responsibilities. The workload for a postgraduate degree is significantly higher than the average year of an undergraduate degree, and there are often more complicated matters regarding funding. Loans and scholarships are available, but the former can be costly in the long term and the latter are never guaranteed when you begin your application. Don't let this dissuade you if you're particularly passionate about a certain topic, just bear in mind that there are more funding processes to apply to, and this kind of research is worth doing at an earlier stage.

The graduate application process itself can be tough. Between rejections, cancelled courses and funding issues, it can feel

hard to bounce back. Personally, I found that losing out on my desired graduate course to cancellation was a very hard moment, but I was able to find an alternative that I'm happy with as it allows me to pursue a personal research project. This was all made easier due to my research into graduate schemes starting early in the year, around the summer before classes start. It's around this time that graduate degrees will have requirements updated for the new term, and it's from here that you can make the best of time off from university to begin your search for graduate study options in honest.

So graduate study is a great opportunity for the right candidate that offers a bridge into professional development or further academic growth, and is a very viable choice following an undergraduate course. Just don't feel like it's either a guarantee or a necessity.

If you are considering postgraduate study the School of History, Classics and Archaeology offers scholarships for Masters and Phd programmes – more information

Approaching the dissertation

Dissertation. A big word, and often a scary one. Alfie, a Student Ambassador, looks at ways to make it slightly less intimidating.

Perhaps the culmination of your time at university and exceptional (circumstances notwithstanding), also the longest piece of academic writing you will have created to date. Sounds like a lot – and let's not mince words, it is a big task and not one to be taken lightly. However, with the right preparation, forethought, and enthusiasm, it is as enjoyable a project as any other. It should represent the sum of your

passions and interests that you have cultivated over your time studying, or perhaps afford you a chance to further explore areas you have not yet had the chance to investigate. Simply put, it is a fantastic opportunity to hit your stride as an aspiring academic, or to cap off your university experience.

When it comes to the dissertation, it is never too early to start planning. I'm not suggesting that you should be coming out of your first year lectures and taking an abundance of notes on potential topics and sources to use, rather if something grabs you early on, maybe it could be something worth considering for the future. If a particular topic, method, or concept catches your eye, take notes! Remember it for later, and by the time that third year rolls around and the question is being asked, you'll have some ideas for what you've got planned.

It is worth bearing in mind that third year is an optimal time to start your planning, especially over the summer break. At this point in your studies you will have likely covered a great deal of content and – hopefully – will have found something you enjoy writing about. If this is the case, take notes from any courses you have around the subject area and try to explore them. Consolidate reading lists, discuss material with suitable academics, and read around the subject if you have time. Naturally, this isn't something that you need to have done by the first day of fourth year, but it's something worth preparing if you have the time to spare. In addition, try to identify an appropriate member of academic staff to act as your dissertation supervisor – someone who is ideally familiar with the topic, so that you can discuss ideas accordingly.

Writing the dissertation is a separate beast and surprisingly manageable if you like to break things down into sections. A dissertation will often have a literature review that examines contemporary academic thought on a topic and is not too dissimilar from discussions of readings done for seminars.

This is often a large portion of your dissertation, so be sure you're comfortable doing the reading to follow through. Other key chapters are your introduction where you'll outline your subject, structure, and points for consideration, and your discussion, where you can make a deep dive into the content, highlighting your own ideas and opinions, as supported by or in opposition to existing thought. Be sure to give ample time for the writing of all this, as it can seem quite demanding, but rest assured that you'll be able to intersperse this with meetings with your supervisor who can discuss your progress.

When it comes down to it, the dissertation is quite a big process, but one to (hopefully) be enjoyed. The freedom to pursue your own academic interests and supplement your own research with the aid of university professionals is a great opportunity to develop your own researching capability, perseverance, and self-motivation, all desirable and transferable skills for postgraduate study and beyond. While it is a big challenge, it is one that you're not undertaking alone, as all other undergraduates will be in the same boat as you. So don't worry, do your best, and remember to engage with the stuff you're passionate about – it's all plain sailing from there.

Boost your mood

It's November. It's cold, dark, and very, very grey. The weeks are filled with endless assignments, frustrating group projects, hours of staring at your laptop screen, and most likely a lot of reading. Asha, a final year History student, looks at how to improve your mood when it starts getting dark at 3pm.

Every year without fail, I fall into the same mid/end of semester slump. And this semester, when we are staying inside way more than before and there is less to look forward to, I definitely rely on a lot of ways to boost my mood. Sometimes I just have to resort to lying in my bed, but most of the time these work pretty well for me!

Talk to your friends and laugh

If you're struggling to keep your mood up during the semester, make sure you make time to talk and laugh with people who boost your mood. Try and avoid talking about deadlines or classes and take a bit of time to think about other things that make you smile. This could be playing a game, walking up one of Edinburgh's many hills, or just going for a coffee!

Go for walks in nature or change your surroundings

It's amazing how much getting out of your room and changing your surroundings can affect your mood. If you are stressed or anxious about deadlines, try taking a long walk and stretch your legs. Holyrood park is a great place to do this, and the beautiful views of the city can help clear your head. Just being surrounded by trees can really help me to feel a lot better. If you need a change of workspace try going to a café or a different library that you haven't been to before – this could help you get some new ideas and boost your mood.

Sometimes I find it really easy to get to the end of the day and realise that I've spent most of my day staring at a screen, whether that be my laptop or phone. Try and take a bit of time away from screens and giving your brain a rest.

Be kind to yourself and take a day off!

When I'm feeling really stressed and I am looking for small ways to boost my mood, treating myself to small things can really help. Taking a day off, or lighting a few candles, or buying yourself some cake can be the little mood booster that you need to regain the will to live.

Cook yourself a tasty and healthy meal

Cooking for yourself and looking after your body are really important parts of self-care and cooking a tasty meal for yourself after a hard day can really boost your mood. For me, this is a chance to have an hour away from my phone or laptop, and either spend some time in my thoughts, or even better, enjoy the company of your flatmates and cook for them! I find cooking really therapeutic, and even if you don't think you're very good at cooking, challenge yourself one day to cook something, it can really transform your mood!

Finally – ask for help!

Whether it's from friends, family, tutors or student support, there are loads of people out there willing to help you. If you're stressed about an assignment, do not hesitate to contact your tutor, and do not forget, it's their job to help you!



Find even more inspiration to keep your mental health and wellbeing healthy

'Let's Talk Mental Health and Wellbeing' runs 9-27 November with events and ideas to support mental and wellbeing. Find out more on the EUSA website, www.eusa.ed.ac.uk/letstalk

The University's Health and wellbeing pages are a great source of information and support, www.ed.ac.uk/students/health-wellbeing

Keep moving without leaving the room with live streamed exercise classes courtesy of the Sport & Exercise team, www.ed.ac.uk/students/health-wellbeing/live-streaming-exercise-classes