

“What’s so great about living in Edinburgh?”

Good question. Luckily, Tristan [MA (Hons) Ancient and Medieval History] can help answer that.



The fortress on top of Castle Rock includes the 12th c. St Margaret’s Chapel – the oldest building in the city.

In the 18th Century Edinburgh designated itself the ‘Athens of the North’, and wandering through the city centre it’s not hard to see why. Okay, after twenty-something years in the Scottish capital I’m admittedly a little biased. But what isn’t to love about studying a history degree in a city with a beautiful medieval Old Town, gardens set in an old loch and a castle built upon an extinct volcano?

A city that blends its rich history with its position as home of the largest arts festival in the world (yes, the world!) is something quite unique – there’s nothing like wandering down

the Royal Mile during the Edinburgh Festival Fringe in August. In fact, Edinburgh hosts a huge programme of events throughout the year: from the Book, Jazz and Blues, and Science Festivals, to the Royal Edinburgh Military Tattoo. If live arts aren't your thing – although there's plenty to indulge in across the city's many theatre venues – you'll certainly find something to pique your interest.

One of my favourite aspects of the city is its fantastic selection of museums and galleries, the largest of which is the National Museum of Scotland located just minutes from the School of History, Classics and Archaeology. Its collections include the recently opened Ancient Egyptian and East Asian galleries as well as an extensive wing dedicated to Scotland's past. However, because the city itself is so rich with history, just wandering down the Royal Mile is an adventure in itself. Each 'close' – the Scots word for an alleyway – tells a story, of its former occupants or use, the most infamous being the underground Mary King's Close (**definitely** worth a visit!). A former lecturer once told me to always look up at buildings when wandering through the Old Town as you'll be amazed at what you learn from inscriptions and plaques.



Even in the middle of the city centre, there are lots of places for a quieter walk, including along the Water of Leith in picturesque Dean Village.

What I particularly love about the city is the amount of green space. The public Princes Street gardens, situated between the New and Old towns, are always bustling, as are the gorgeous Royal Botanical Gardens. However, you'll find some more secluded spaces if you know where to look, including a hidden gem at the bottom of Dunbar's Close – I'll let you discover that one for yourself! You're also never too far from the countryside and there are lots of scenic walks a short bus or train journey away.

Between its incredible art and literary festivals, heritage sites and beautiful parks – and that's before we discuss everything that the university itself has to offer – Edinburgh is a pretty fantastic city. To be a history student here is something really special, and whilst it might not boast the monumental buildings of the Athenian acropolis, the 'Athens of

the North' isn't short of wonder.

Find more walks around Edinburgh at the Visit Scotland site.

You can see a map of green spaces within Edinburgh on the Edinburgh Outdoors website.

Wildlife Photographer of the Year

We have some impressive neighbours, including the National Museum of Scotland. Student Ambassador Carlotta visits an exhibition there.

Last week I visited the Wildlife Photographer of the Year exhibition at the National Museum of Scotland. The exhibition shows the hundred finalists and two overall winners of the Wildlife Photographer of the Year awards, run by the Natural History Museum in London. The exhibited works have been chosen from among 48,000 entries, taken by photographers from 92 different countries. The exhibition's location at the National Museum, a short 5-minute walk from the William Robertson Wing, made it a perfect study break, and the £6 student price made it even more appealing. The exhibition is presented in a darkened room, with the images illuminated, making their colours stand out, and the focus of the images even more striking for the observer. Alongside the photographs was a description of how they were captured, as well as information about the animals and environments portrayed. This gave the exhibition an important educational function, rather than just being visually impressive.

Many of the works also aimed to highlight conservation and

environmental issues affecting the animals and environments they captured. This was particularly true of one of the overall winners, 'Memorial to a Species' by Brent Stirton. Taken as part of an undercover investigation into the illegal trade in rhino horn, the photo shows a black rhino bull who had recently been shot and its horn cut off. The image was part of Brett's documentary series, several more photos from which were also shown at the exhibition, entitled 'Rhino Horn: The Ongoing Atrocity'. The series shows people on all sides of the story, from those involved in conservation efforts and taking care of injured rhino, to those fighting to overturn bans on rhino hunting, and those who use the rhino horn for medicinal purposes. The most striking image of this series was that of the world's last male northern white rhino and his armed guard, who keeps a 24-hour watch over the male rhino and his female companions. This sanctuary has recently featured in the news, following the tragic death of the last male, and thus the certain extinction of the species. The other winning image, 'The Good Life' by Daniël Nelson, depicting Caco, a 9-year-old gorilla in the Odzala- Kokoua National Park in the Republic of Congo, also had a conservation message. In the image description, the photographer said that he wished to raise awareness through the image of the endangered nature of such gorillas.

My favourite photographs as I walked through the exhibition were those which depicted interactions between animals, particularly parents and their offspring. I found that oftentimes these interactions revealed the similarities in facial expressions and body language between animals and humans. One of these was 'Bear Hug', by Ashleigh Scully, depicting a mother brown bear and her cub. In the image description was a comment from Scully herself, about how from her time observing these bears in the Yosemite national park she was struck by how much their actions mirrored those of humans.

One area of the exhibition that I was particularly impressed by was the Young Photographers section, exhibiting entries by photographers of 17 years old and under. This included works by photographers as young as 5. One of the winners, Daniël Nelson, was in fact only 16 when he took his winning image. While the adult photographers tended to have travelled for their shots, and known what they were looking for, the young photographers demonstrated a natural connection to their subject matter. Many of the young photographers' photos were of the nature that surrounded where they lived, and most of them had captured their photos on a whim.

The Wildlife Photographer of the Year exhibition is on at the National Museum of Scotland until the 29th April 2018, and I would heavily recommend it to anyone who is interested in animals and conservation, but also anyone who has an afternoon to spare. See some of the photos and find out more about the exhibition at the Wildlife Photographer of the Year website on the National Museums Scotland website.