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

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

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!