

Travel Summary

My independent study of Edinburgh and Glasgow has been a remarkable one. On the one hand, I have been evaluating the two cities as an objective student, and on the other, as a new resident of Scotland. This experience has given me an excellent opportunity to fully assimilate into a new culture by wandering, observing, and analyzing. The city of Edinburgh – in its entirety, including peripheral suburbs – is comparable to the geographic area between West University and the University of Houston. The first initial shock was getting acquainted with life at a significantly reduced scale, in every sense, from travel distances to shopping locally. Walking both Edinburgh and Glasgow was an ideal way to learn about the structures of the cities as well as compare their scales. While Edinburgh is commonly thought to be a historic city and Glasgow a contemporary one, it is clear that both cities have a variety of architectural styles, both old and new. In my opinion, the cities differ most in terms of their size, density, and regard for the historic past. Edinburgh is an inland and originally fortified city, while the port city of Glasgow sits along the River Clyde, which cuts far into the land creating a deep and secure waterway.

Edinburgh, my current home, is small (compared to most places in Texas!), walkable, and incredibly dense. The 16th century old town, with its tenement buildings and dark closes, is a dramatic contrast to the 18th century new town, just to the north. While the two are fundamentally different – one an unplanned result of the industrial past, the other planned as an escape from the former – they coexist in an interdependent way. In between the old town and new town are the Princes Street Gardens, which seem to be the heart of the city. The massive Edinburgh Castle hovers over the gardens and always seems to be on watch. People flock to this nucleus and give the city an energy I have never witnessed before. As the city's planning suggests, Edinburgh's history is an essential part of its livelihood – from banking to the annual festivals. The architecture follows suit, where original buildings dominate the city, and new insertions are careful not to usurp the existing. Many of the contemporary renovations studied successfully integrate old and new, where the transitions from one to the other are a distinct point of interest. This celebration of Edinburgh's historic past, through architecture, makes it an exciting city where new and old gracefully meet. A well-established and undeniable history enables residents and tourists to speculate about its future prospects as an international city.

Glasgow, unlike Edinburgh, is a large city which lacks the consistent urban density necessary for creating a unified city. Glasgow seems more like Houston, as it is stretched with dense pockets and gaping holes (marked for 'redevelopment' on all maps) in the city fabric. As a newcomer arriving on foot, it is difficult to fully grasp the city initially. Some regions of the city (i.e. Glasgow Cathedral, Royal Infirmary, and Necropolis) are overflowing with history and tradition while others (along the banks of the River Clyde) look like a clean slate, where the industrial past (historically one of Scotland's most important ports) has been entirely erased, with the exception of 'Big Bertha', the iconic shipping crane which sits on the water's edge. Glasgow's high street, Buchanan Street, is a glamorous and generic shopping district which could be any place in Europe. Perhaps the weather – almost always raining – has influenced my perception of the city, but it is difficult to overlook all the new high rise structures

along the River Clyde which turn their backs on the city and compete with one another architecturally. There is some good news for the waterfront, however. A renewal project along the River Clyde is enlisting the aid of architects like Zaha Hadid to transform the forgotten banks into a cultural learning center where Glasgow's industrial past can be celebrated and perhaps even preserved. Just to the north of the renewal projects, Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Glasgow University offer large areas of green space where the city stretches out and gives locals a place to unwind, in the event that the sun makes an appearance. The Glasgow School of Art, just one of the many Macintosh buildings in the city, and The Lighthouse, Scotland's premier center for architecture and design, are significant architectural presences within the city. The fact that these institutions reside in Glasgow suggests that, like Houston, urban disorder is a catalyst which creates an exceptional playground/learning environment for students of architecture and design. Overall, the more cosmopolitan city of Glasgow is like many big cities in that it offers a little something for everyone.

A mere forty minute train ride separates these two distinctly different cities; a short enough commute to enjoy the best of both worlds. While my affinity for Edinburgh is clear, Glasgow's scale and variety will have me curiously returning for more over the next two years.