

## TRAVEL AND ADVENTURE

# Glasgow's Cinderella story

By John Blanchette



GLASGOW'S CHARM - Kelvingrove Museum in Glasgow, Scotland, is the most visited museum in Great Britain, outside of London. CNS Photo by John Blanchette.



PIPING HOT - The Museum of Piping in Glasgow, Scotland, and the Academy of Piping are next to each other. The academy has a student population of about 100. CNS Photo by John Blanchette.



GLASGOW UNIVERSITY - Daffodils add color to the view across the Glasgow University campus. CNS Photo by John Blanchette.



GOLF SCOTLAND - Scotland is where golf was invented and more than 500 courses dot the landscape. Two of the most expensive courses in Ayrshire are Troon and Turnberry; they cost about \$175 a round. CNS Photo by John Blanchette.

GLASGOW, Scotland - Although it is the largest and most commercially vibrant city in Scotland, until recently Glasgow was worn down, shabbily attired and considered the second sister to sophisticated Edinburgh.

But not any more. Cinderella is emerging figuratively and literally from years of grime and industrial pollution created by its shipyards and mills to take her rightful place at the ball. Its 19th century grandeur has been given a citywide scrubbing and there is a new exuberance in Great

## Britain's "Friendliest City."

Kelvingrove Museum has just opened after a three-year, \$48.8 million renovation that has cleaned up its dark, sooty walls and rearranged its art collection. We were given a sneak preview of the museum shortly before it opened and I was amazed by the number of people who were jealous of us. There is sincere love for the arts and culture in this city of commerce.

In 1999, Glaswegians voted Kelvingrove the city's favorite building; it is a great source of civic pride. It is the most visited museum in Britain, outside of London, and more than 1 million people are expected to revisit their favorite this year.

Named "The U.K.'s Coolest City" by National Geographic Traveler magazine and "One of the Top 10 Up and Coming Cities" by the Frommer Travel Guide, Glasgow is living up to its slogan, "Glasgow: Scotland With Style." It is the most fashionable and fun-loving city in Scotland and offers the best shopping, dining and night life.

In the spring, daffodils line the highways and parks in enormous profusions. When I asked about the infatuation with daffodils, I learned that the beautification is linked to charity: Money donated for the purchase of bulbs benefits cancer research.

One of the hotbeds of the industrial revolution, Glasgow's engines of commerce were driven by the discoveries of its scientists, including Lord Kelvin and James Watt, creator of the steam engine. The city soared to prominence from trade, ore smelting, manufacturing and shipbuilding. At the turn of the 20th century, 80 percent of the world's great liners and, unfortunately, most of the German naval fleet were built in the shipyards of Glasgow.

But decay set in, and by the early 20th century the dock areas and much of the lower city had become dangerous and unhealthy. That is why most of the

great homes are found on the hills of the city, climbing above the filth belching from its smokestacks.

Stretching its industrial muscle along the Clyde River, Glasgow's wealth was displayed in the many large and striking Victorian buildings that sprang up throughout the town. It was clearly the second city in the British Empire.

## **PLACES TO VISIT**

The best way to introduce yourself to Glasgow is on the CitySightseeing Tour Bus. The hour-and-a-quarter tour begins in the City Center at George Square, between the City Chambers and Merchants House, and costs \$13. By using it you can avoid the horrible traffic congestion that clogs the city and its surrounding highways during rush hour. The ticket is good for two days and you can get off and on at any of its 21 sightseeing stops.

Glasgow's Auchentoshan distillery is just 3 miles from the city center and offers daily tours and whisky tastings (\$25). But beware, scotch is taxed 60 percent and is cheaper to purchase in the U.S.

My favorite destination was the Museum of Piping, dedicated to the history of the bagpipe, and the Academy of Bagpiping, located next door. For \$25 an hour, you can learn the finer points of the instrument. At any one time there are 100 students living in the dormitories. If you're considering a bagpiping career, being properly outfitted can cost up to \$1,500, and a good set of pipes the same. It generally takes a couple of years to learn the instrument, and after putting out all that cash, there are limited career options outside Scotland, so you may need to relocate.

The Willow Tea Room was created by Charles Rennie Mackintosh, the father of modernism and Glasgow's most famous architect and designer, who is being celebrated with a yearlong festival. The rooms on the second, third and fourth floors

contain original furnishings.

This is where I first tasted haggis, the national dish of Scotland, served with "neeps and tatties" (turnips and mashed potato, \$10). It's a spicy concoction of boiled or fried oats, barley and sheep's innards that I found surprisingly good, a lot like shepherd's pie when mixed with the veggies. The Scots actually eat it on a regular basis.

Glasgow University is 555 years old and situated atop a hill looking over the city. It has a beautiful center quad framed by gray stone buildings and gorgeous views from the back gardens of Kelvingrove Museum and the Clyde River. Look for Ashton Lane, where many of the students live, eat and drink.

## **SIDE TRIPS**

South of Glasgow lies the rich rolling hills, fishing streams and lakes of Ayrshire, the home of Scotland's national poet, Robert Burns.

Scotland is also the home of golf and more than 500 courses dot the landscape. Two of the more expensive in Ayrshire are Troon and Turnberry (\$175 a round), hosts of the British Open.

President Eisenhower was a regular visitor to this golfing mecca and he was given the top floor of Culzean Castle by the government. It's open for public tours and features a seaside cafe.

One of the highlights of my trip was boating across the mouth of the Clyde to the scenic Isle of Bute. Cumbrae Voyages has a fleet of Zodiacs that can fly over the water at speeds of 60 mph. Dress warmly and hold on.

Visit the lovely town of Rothesay, rent a bike and peddle out to Mount Stuart, a spectacular Victorian Gothic palace (\$12 admission).

## **IF YOU GO**

Getting there: British Airways saved the day when we were leaving Los Angeles. Airport security had instituted a new baggage scanning system that wasn't working. With an hour to departure, the line for boarding was out the door. British Airways saw the problem and negotiated with security to open five more baggage screening devices, getting everyone to their plane in time. In addition, I was able to get an upgrade to business class, which features a flat bed that accommodated my 6-foot frame. It was one of the best long-distance flights I've ever had, arriving fully rested for my visit to Scotland.

Places to stay: For lists of housing options, restaurants, special events, guidebooks and brochures, contact, [www.toscotland.com](http://www.toscotland.com). Housing recommendations in Glasgow include Menzies (pool and saunas) and Mar Hall (converted 19th century Gothic mansion with a great bar), Piersland House in Troon and The Westin Turnberry Resort in Turnberry (celebrating its 100th anniversary this year, check out the spa).

The Scots have an expression for when one leaves on a journey: "Haste ye back." To this poetic land that brought us scotch, Robbie Burns, inventors, architects and bagpipes, I can only use the words of Arnold Schwarzenegger: I'll be back.

John Blanchette is a freelance travel writer.

© Copley News Service

Visit Copley News Service at [www.copleynews.com](http://www.copleynews.com).

[TOP](#)