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SCOTLAND

Eat, drink and be Mary

11 ways to live it up in Edinburgh

By SHANNON MELNYK
Special Contributor

Make like the Queen of Scots and live large in Edinburgh, Scotland. Here are 11 ways to get a good taste of the culture in and around the Scottish capital.

Shannon Melnyk is a freelance writer in Vancouver.



Visit Scotland

Edinburgh Castle is featured on the Mary Queen of Scots Trail. It's the most popular tourist spot in the city. Behind is Arthur's Seat.

Queen for a day

Follow the path of passion, love and betrayal on the Mary Queen of Scots Trail. What better way to discover Edinburgh than to explore where the most intriguing Scottish monarch lived, hid and died? Her death, in 1567, was ordered by Queen Elizabeth I. The trail is your ticket to castles, ruins and the Scottish National Portrait Gallery.

edinburgh.org



Visit Scotland

In addition to tastings of single-malt whiskys, the Scotch Whisky Experience also features a barrel ride.

Down the wee hatch

If you're lacking time to visit the Lowlands, the Highlands, Speyside and Islay whisky-producing regions of Scotland, The Scotch Whisky Experience on the Royal Mile will render you an expert. Stop in and brush up on its color, body, nose, palate and finish. Opt for the Gold Tour — the biggest bang for your pound, with five single-malt tastings.

354 Castlehill, the Royal Mile, Edinburgh. scotchwhiskyexperience.co.uk

Panda-monium

Whether you're a modern or traditional sort, a visit to the Edinburgh Zoo will have you rooting for the arranged marriage of Yang Guang and Tian Tian, two giant pandas on loan from China. Send the big galoots your warmest wishes that romance will blossom and an heir to the declining species will be born on Scottish soil.



Getty Images

Yang Guang prowls his habitat at the Edinburgh Zoo. He and a female, Tian Tian, are on loan from China.

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Eric Risberg/The Associated Press

Escaping with your honey can be as down-to-earth or as decadent as you make it in California's wine country. A terrace at Auberge du Soleil resort qualifies as both.

WINE COUNTRY

A Valentine's toast

Head to the source — California's Napa Valley — for a romantic holiday

FROM WIRE REPORTS

NAPA, Calif. — You like chocolate. You like warm baths. But are you ready for a milk chocolate bath for two?

That's just one of the options available in California wine country, where escaping with your honey can be as down-to-earth or as decadent as you make it.

Want to sip sparkling wine on a terrace with a view? Stage your own Cinderella story on the ramparts of a fairy tale castle? Maybe you fancy taking a spin around the salsa floor.

With Valentine's Day around the corner, here's a rundown of seven things to do for two in the Napa Valley, with price tags ranging from

OK-if-you're-broke to go-for-broke.

Taste the good life

There are a number of tasting rooms in downtown Napa, including Back Room Wines, where the lineup

See **SWEET** Page 5K

Soak in Scottish culture in Edinburgh

Continued from Page 1K

Festival feast

Festival-crazy Edinburgh can't get enough of a good thing. The international festival scene is rollicking from spring right through winter, with world-renowned celebrations of culture, theater, music and dance. The Edinburgh Festival Fringe sizzles in August, as do the famous Edinburgh International, Book and Mela festivals. Plan your trip carefully and you can take in two or more.

edinburghfestivals.co.uk



Visit Scotland

Festival season cranks up in August. Here a street performer totters on a unicycle during the Edinburgh Festival Fringe.

In search of Camelot

Follow any of the paths from historic Holyrood Park and ascend the extinct volcano, Arthur's Seat. At 822 feet, it's the city's highest climb, with panoramic views of Edinburgh. Show up on May Day to see for yourself if women are still bathing their faces in dew.

High act to follow

Ever wonder what it would be like to star in your own *Mission: Impossible*? Tackle the spine-tingling Aerial Assault at the Edinburgh International Climbing Arena, the world's largest indoor climbing center. After a mountainous ascent, the series of challenges kicks off with the harrowing equivalent of stepping off a five-story building. No option now but to stay the course on a series of a ropes and ladders, all while letting it all hang out 100 feet above the ground.

South Platt Hill, Newbridge, Edinburgh. eica-ratho.com

Rogue ride

Make off like a thief and steal the best views via mountain bike an hour out of Edinburgh along Rob Roy Way in Trossachs National Park. The scenic woodland glen, home to the Scottish Robin Hood's stomping grounds, boasts emerald peaks and valleys. You needn't share Roy's dauntless heart, however; Trossachs' cycling trails offer a variety of routes for both the leisurely and uphill-hungry bikers.

visitscotland.com



Shannon Melnyk/Special Contributor

Looking for inspiration? J.K. Rowling found it at The Elephant House.

Cuppa inspiration

Coffee or tea among the literati is an everyday affair at The Elephant House. Nosh and sip in the backroom overlooking Edinburgh castle, where J.K. Rowling wrote part of the inaugural *Harry Potter* book. Also spied sipping? Novelists Ian Rankin and Alexander McCall-Smith.

21 George IV Bridge, Edinburgh; elephanthouse.biz



Visit Scotland

Down a modern cocktail amid a swank, 19th-century vibe at The Voodoo Rooms.

Glam pit

1860s opulence sets the stage at The Voodoo Rooms. Semicircular booths are drenched in black and gold, and the long bar is covered in studded black leather. Its five rooms and three bars are a swanky setting for live music, gastro-pub fare and cocktails such as the decadent Tip of the Hat: a blend of Tanqueray 10 Gin, hot ginger syrup and absinthe diluted with fennel tea ice cubes.

19a W. Register St., Edinburgh. thevoodoorooms.com



Shannon Melnyk/Special Contributor

Venture along the Hidden and Haunted Tour and visit this crypt in Edinburgh's most famous cemetery.

Scaredy kilts

Good footwear and steady nerves are required to explore the eerie parts of the Old Town. Take a Hidden and Haunted Tour and brace yourself for Edinburgh's most disturbing history in the Blair Street Vaults. Gruesome murderers and lost souls are your companions, with a cloaked guide leading you by candlelight.

www.mercattours.com

Nouvelle cow-sine

If Tim Burton donned a chef's hat, you'd end up with a whimsical Michelin-star menu not unlike Paul Kitching's splashy merry-go-round known as 21212. For starters, there's a mystery milk poured out of what looks like grandma's decorative cow jug into paper thimbles. A symphony of potions, foams and a delectable array of entrees follows.

3 Royal Terrace, Edinburgh. 21212restaurant.co.uk



Visit Scotland

The award-winning 21212 serves up a taste of whimsical, adventurous cuisine.

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