

CASTLES OF SCOTLAND

Scotland is a land of castles. There are mighty fortresses on rocky crags, strong towers and fortified houses, as well as fine mansions in the 'Scots Baronial' style. A wealth of castle architecture can be enjoyed – as well as tales of drama, dark deeds and romance within their ancient walls!

The oldest fortresses

The earliest fortresses were wooden constructions – long vanished – built on top of piled-up mounds or 'mottes'. However, on the island of Wyre, Orkney, there is a small rectangular tower enclosed by a ditch. A Norseman called Kolbein Hruga built it around 1145. Cubbie Roo's Castle, as it is known today, is probably the earliest stone castle in Scotland. Castle Sween, south-west of Lochgilphead in Argyll, is the oldest mainland stone castle.

With the Scottish nation's warlike story, its earliest castles have been battered by siege-engines and cannon, altered, rebuilt and, in some cases, even vanished entirely. A good example of how the old fortresses evolved over the centuries can be seen at Urquhart Castle in the Great Glen, with its distinctive ruined fortifications overlooking Loch Ness.

Another time-worn setting is that of Kildrummy Castle in north-east Scotland. Its atmospheric ruins once housed the occupying forces of King Edward of England during the Wars of Independence in the early 14th century. Of similar age, Caerlaverock Castle has stood guard over the Solway Firth since the late 13th century. Inevitably, its position close to the Border meant in its time it was besieged both by the English (1356-7) and the Scots (1312) when it sustained much damage.

The Guardians of Scotland

Ancient mottes and ruinous castle sites are just part of the sheer variety of castle visiting options. Some of these very old sites, partly because of their strategic importance, have been continuously occupied for centuries. Edinburgh and Stirling Castles, for example, have been at the centre of Scotland's story.

Edinburgh Castle stands as a symbol of Scotland. It was at the castle in 1566 that Mary, Queen of Scots gave birth to her son, who became King James VI of Scotland and I of England following the Union of the Crowns in 1603. The Scottish Regalia, the 'crown jewels' of Scotland are displayed in the Castle today. Stirling Castle was one of the most strategically important castles in Scotland, controlling the main routes between Highland and Lowland. Not surprising, it looks down upon some of the most famous battlefields in Scotland's history.

Stately homes

When more peaceable times came to Scotland, some of the old fortified places were gradually rebuilt and extended with a degree of luxury. There are numerous examples here, including some of the best-known and most spectacular castles in Scotland, including the magnificent Scone Palace, ancient crowning place of Scottish monarchy and the home of the Earls of Mansfield. Equally historic, and also within easy reach of Perth, Blair Castle is the seat of the Dukes of Atholl, who hold the unique Scottish honour of being permitted to own a private army!

Atmosphere, spectacle and romance

For sheer atmosphere, visit Tantallon Castle, near Edinburgh, where its old red sandstone curtain wall has guarded a sea-edged headland for centuries. You'll find the same austere and thrillingly menacing(!) atmosphere at Dunnottar Castle near Stonehaven. Zeffirelli's *Hamlet* (starring Mel Gibson) even used it as a backdrop. And nobody could look into the bottle dungeon of St Andrews Castle without a twinge of fear. (No-one ever escaped from it.) However, Scotland also does romantic castles very well. Mary, Queen of Scots escaped from Lochleven Castle only because a pageboy took pity on her, while the settings of Eilean Donan Castle in the Highlands, and Kilchurn Castle near Oban are definitely romantic in their loch-and-mountain settings.

Castles on film

If a few of Scotland's castles look a little familiar – that's because they turn up on film from time to time. Doune Castle was the backdrop to the famous scene in *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* involving a giant wooden rabbit. Drummond Castle Gardens became the home for the villainous Duke of Montrose in *Rob Roy*, while the romantic Eilean Donan Castle was also a backdrop in *Highlander* and more recently in the James Bond movie *The World Is Not Enough*.

Haunted or just plain spooky?

Scotland certainly has its share of spooky tales associated with castles. What are we to make of the apparently ghostly presence in Skaill House on Orkney? Or the story of the billeted troops who collectively fled (in their bare feet!) out of Delgatie Castle in Grampian. How did Glamis Castle in Angus acquire its reputation as one of the most haunted castle in Scotland? There's a ghostly piper at Culzean Castle, a large yellow monkey at Drumlanrig (they say) and a card game with the Devil himself at the House of the Binns. From a white lady in Falkland Palace to a green lady in Fyvie Castle – best to keep your eyes open – you never quite know what you might see!

Scotland's Castle Trail

One way of seeing some of the very finest castle architecture in Scotland is to follow Scotland's Castle Trail, in Grampian. Standing aside from some of the more turbulent episodes in Scotland's warlike story, many fine old fortresses survived in this area. Besides, the north-east corner had its own particular castle-building traditions, so that today, impressive places like Craigievar stand much as their masons built them – unique survivors from a 'golden age' of castle building.

www.aberdeen-grampian.com/scottish-castles.htm

Visiting a castle

The National Trust for Scotland and Historic Scotland care for a huge range of castle properties in Scotland, from scanty ruins to magnificent stately homes. Consider one of their special tickets if intending to visit several places.

Historic Scotland offer an Explorer Pass which gives worthwhile entry-fee reductions. The pass is valid for either 3 out of 5 days, 7 out of 14 days or 10 out of 30 days and offers savings on admission costs to 75 of Scotland's top attractions. For more information and costs please visit their website www.historic-scotland.gov.uk

Similarly, The National Trust for Scotland offer a Discovery Ticket which gives admission to The National Trust for Scotland's attractions, valid for 3, 7 or 14 days. Prices start from £16 for a 3-day adult pass. For more information and costs please visit their website www.nts.org.uk

Stay in a castle – or get married in one

And if you want to experience the ambience of a castle, then there are several places where you can stay as a guest, from ancient seats to grand mansions in the 'Scots Baronial' style: www.visitscotland.com/accommodation/castle And if staying in a castle is romantic, then actually getting married in a castle is, well, unforgettable. There are plenty of places available – either castles which are now hotels or those castles and stately homes, still in private ownership, which offer their facilities for weddings. Remember, too, that both the National Trust for Scotland and Historic Scotland have plenty of expertise in staging weddings and are well worth considering. Full information on www.visitscotland.com/scottishwedding

SOUTH OF SCOTLAND

Ayton Castle

Abbotsford House
www.scottsabbotsford.co.uk
 ★★★★★ Historic House

Brodick Castle, Gardens & Country Park (NTS)
www.nts.org.uk
 ★★★★★ Castle

Caerlaverock Castle (HS)
www.historic-scotland.gov.uk
 ★★★★★ Castle

Culzean Castle & Country Park (NTS)
www.culzeanexperience.org
 ★★★★★ Visitor Attraction

Drumlanrig Castle & the Queensberry Estate
www.drumlanrig.com
 ★★★★★ Castle

Floors Castle & Gardens
www.floorscastle.com
 ★★★★★ Visitor Attraction

Lochranza Castle (HS)
www.historic-scotland.gov.uk

EDINBURGH AND LOTHIAN

Blackness Castle (HS)
www.historic-scotland.gov.uk
 ★★★★★ Castle

Craigmillar Castle (HS)
www.historic-scotland.gov.uk
 ★★★★★ Castle

Crichton Castle (HS)
www.historic-scotland.gov.uk
 ★★★★★ Castle

Dalmeny House
www.dalmeny.co.uk

Dirleton Castle (HS)
www.historic-scotland.gov.uk
 ★★★★★ Castle

Edinburgh Castle (HS)
www.historic-scotland.gov.uk
 ★★★★★ Castle

Palace of Holyroodhouse
www.royalcollection.org.uk

GREATER GLASGOW AND CLYDE VALLEY

Bothwell Castle (HS)
www.historic-scotland.gov.uk
 ★★★★★ Castle

Chatelherault Country Park
www.southlanarkshire.gov.uk
 ★★★★★ Visitor Attraction

Craignethan Castle (HS)
www.historic-scotland.gov.uk
 ★★★★★ Castle

Manderston
www.manderston.co.uk

Mary, Queen of Scots' Visitor Centre
www.scotborders.gov.uk/museums
 ★★★★★ Visitor Attraction

Mellerstain House
www.mellerstain.com
 ★★★★★ Historic House

Neidpath Castle
www.visittweeddale.com/what_to_do/neidpath_castle.php

Paxton House
www.paxtonhouse.co.uk
 ★★★★★ Historic House

Thirlestane Castle
www.thirlestanecastle.co.uk
 ★★★★★ Historic House

Threave Castle (HS)
www.historic-scotland.gov.uk
 ★★★★★ Historic House

Traquair House
www.traquair.co.uk
 ★★★★★ Historic House

Hopetoun House
www.hopetounhouse.com
 ★★★★★ Historic House

Lauriston Castle
www.cac.org.uk
 ★★★★★ Visitor Attraction

Lennoxlove House
www.lennoxlove.com
 ★★★★★ Historic House

Linlithgow Palace (HS)
www.historic-scotland.gov.uk
 ★★★★★ Historic Attraction

Tantallon Castle (HS)
www.historic-scotland.gov.uk
 ★★★★★ Castle

House of the Binns (NTS)
www.nts.org.uk
 ★★★★★ Historic House

Newark Castle (HS)
www.historic-scotland.gov.uk
 ★★★★★ Castle

Pollok House (NTS)
www.nts.org.uk
 ★★★★★ Historic House

WEST HIGHLANDS AND ISLANDS, LOCH LOMOND, STIRLING AND TROSSACHS

Castle Campbell (HS)
www.historic-scotland.gov.uk
 ★★★★★ Castle

Callendar House
www.falkirk.gov.uk
 ★★★★★ Historic House

Doune Castle (HS)
www.historic-scotland.gov.uk
 ★★★ Castle

Duart Castle
www.duartcastle.com
 ★★★★★ Castle

Dumbarton Castle (HS)
www.historic-scotland.gov.uk
 ★★★★★ Castle

Dunstaffnage Castle (HS)
www.historic-scotland.gov.uk
 ★★★★★ Historic Attraction

The Hill House (NTS)
www.nts.org.uk
 ★★★★★ Historic House

Inveraray Castle
www.inveraray-castle.com
 ★★★★★ Castle

Kilchurn Castle (HS)
www.historic-scotland.gov.uk

Mount Stuart
www.mountstuart.com
 ★★★★★ Visitor Attraction

Stirling Castle (HS)
www.historic-scotland.gov.uk
 ★★★★★ Castle

Torosay Castle and Gardens
www.torosay.com
 ★★★ Garden

PERTSHIRE, ANGUS & DUNDEE AND THE KINGDOM OF FIFE

Aberdour Castle (HS)
www.historic-scotland.gov.uk
 ★★★★★ Castle

Blair Castle
www.blair-castle.co.uk
 ★★★★★ Castle

Castle Menzies
www.menzies.org

Culross Palace (NTS)
www.nts.org.uk
 ★★★ Historic House

Drummond Castle Gardens
www.drummondcastlegardens.co.uk
 ★★★★★ Garden

Dunfermline Abbey and Palace (HS)
www.historic-scotland.gov.uk
 ★★★★★ Historic Attraction

Falkland Palace, Garden and Old Burgh (NTS)
www.nts.org.uk
 ★★★★★ Historic Attraction

Glamis Castle
www.glamis-castle.co.uk
 ★★★★★ Castle

Huntingtower Castle (HS)
www.historic-scotland.gov.uk
 ★★★★★ Visitor Attraction

Kellie Castle (NTS)
www.nts.org.uk
 ★★★ Historic House

Loch Leven Castle (HS)
www.historic-scotland.gov.uk

Scone Palace
www.scone-palace.co.uk
 ★★★★★ Historic House

St Andrews Castle (HS)
www.historic-scotland.gov.uk
 ★★★★★ Historic Attraction

ABERDEEN AND GRAMPIAN

Step back in time through the last millennium of our country's heritage on Scotland's only Castle Trail. Aberdeenshire is unmatched in the richness of its surviving castles. Scotland's Castle Trail brings some of the most splendid examples of castellated architecture together on a clearly signposted tourist trail.
www.aberdeen-grampian.com/scottish-castles.htm

Ballindalloch Castle
www.ballindallochcastle.co.uk
 ★★★★★ Castle

Balmoral Castle
www.balmoralcastle.com
 ★★★★★ Visitor Attraction

Balvenie Castle (HS)
www.historic-scotland.gov.uk
 ★★★★★ Castle

Brodie Castle (NTS)
www.nts.org.uk
 ★★★★★ Castle

Castle Fraser (NTS)
www.nts.org.uk
 ★★★★★ Castle

Corgarff Castle (HS)
www.historic-scotland.gov.uk
 ★★★★★ Castle

Craigievar Castle (NTS)
www.nts.org.uk
 ★★★ Castle

Crathes Castle, Garden and Estate (NTS)
www.nts.org.uk
 ★★★★★ Visitor Attraction

Delgatie Castle
www.delgatiecastle.com
 ★★★★★ Castle

Duff House (HS)
www.duffhouse.org.uk
 ★★★★★ Visitor Attraction

Drum Castle, Garden and Estate (NTS)
www.nts.org.uk
 ★★★★★ Castle

Dunnottar Castle
www.duncheestates.co.uk
 ★★ Castle

Edzell Castle and Garden (HS)
www.historic-scotland.gov.uk
 ★★★★★ Castle

Fyvie Castle (NTS)
www.nts.org.uk
 ★★★★★ Castle

Haddo House (NTS)
www.nts.org.uk
 ★★★★★ Historic House

Huntly Castle (HS)
www.historic-scotland.gov.uk
 ★★★★★ Castle

Kildrummy Castle (HS)
www.historic-scotland.gov.uk
 ★★★★★ Castle

Leith Hall, Garden and Estate (NTS)
www.nts.org.uk
 ★★★★★ Historic House

Spynie Palace (HS)
www.historic-scotland.gov.uk
 ★★★★★ Historic Attraction

Tolquhon Castle (HS)
www.historic-scotland.gov.uk
 ★★★★★ Visitor Attraction

THE HIGHLANDS OF SCOTLAND

Armadale Castle Gardens and Museum of the Isles
www.clandonald.com
 ★★★★★ Visitor Attraction

Castle of Mey
www.castleofmey.org.uk
 ★★★★★ Castle

Cawdor Castle
www.cawdorcastle.com
 ★★★★★ Castle

Urquhart Castle (HS)
www.historic-scotland.gov.uk
 ★★★★★ Castle

Dunrobin Castle
www.castles.org/Chatelaine/DUNROBIN.HTM

Dunvegan Castle
www.dunvegancastle.com

Eilean Donan Castle
www.eileandonancastle.com
 ★★★★★ Castle

THE OUTER ISLANDS

Earl's Palace - Birsay (HS)
www.historic-scotland.gov.uk

Bishop's Palace and Earls Palace – Kirkwall (HS)
www.historic-scotland.gov.uk
 ★★★★★ Historic Attraction

Kisimul Castle (HS)
www.historic-scotland.gov.uk

Scalloway Castle (HS)
www.historic-scotland.gov.uk

Skaill House
www.skaillhouse.com
 ★★★★★ Visitor Attraction

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