



Castles & Coastlines... Magic Awaits

By Angela Ash

When dreaming of your vacation, do you imagine distant lands, with rugged coastlines, romantic castles, and markets like you haven't imagined?

Well, those lands are not quite so "distant". A visit to England or Scotland is a lot easier than one might think, and with the proper itinerary, it can be the trip that changes your life.

There are numerous websites to assist with activities and various things to do, but let's just cover the basics, and you can fill in the blanks with your particular tastes and interests.

First of all, I think we can agree that the most important decision when planning a vacation is where to stay. If you have ever thought about splurging on accommodations, do it in the United Kingdom.

The smaller, boutique and luxury hotels are definitely the way to feel pampered.

I also can not stress the following:

when in London, it is a must to stay near a tube station, and in Edinburgh, you can never go wrong near a Lothian bus stop.

While Edinburgh has an extremely compact city centre, it definitely helps after hours of sightseeing to hop on a bus back to the hotel.

**And I can not say enough about London's Underground.
You can literally get anywhere in mere minutes, and the trip to your destination is an experience in itself!**



The Howard Hotel
www.thehoward.com
34 Great King Street
5 Star Georgian Hotel
In City Centre
Member of the Small Luxury Hotels of the World
Extremely private
Several dining options



The Milestone Hotel
www.milestonehotel.com
1Kensington Court
Intimate Boutique Hotel
Overlooking Kensington Palace
Minutes from Hyde Park
Member of the Leading Small Hotels of the World
Delectable dining
This is one of my FAVORITE hotels!



Now, while many museums and attractions in London and Edinburgh are free of charge, some of the premium attractions can get a little pricy, and who can leave London without paying a visit to the Tower, or exit the cobblestone streets of Edinburgh without entering the Edinburgh Dungeon? The no-brainer way to save time and money is to purchase the London and Edinburgh Passes. Pay one price and visit all

sorts of places! You get a free guide book, which not only tells about the attractions, but also assists with directions and which places are close to one another.

This REALLY helps when you are like me and are attempting to fit 3 days' worth of sightseeing into one afternoon!

(And believe me, it CAN be done!)

Oh, and I saved the best for last.

Haha... this is great.

You actually get to skip the lines.

Yes, you read this correctly.

Anyone who has traveled overseas is aware that you can spend an entire summer's afternoon waiting in line to enter just ONE attraction.

With the pass, you can go to a special line, often referred to as "fast track".

Who's a rock star?



The London Pass

www.londonpass.com

Free entry to over 55 attractions

Special offers and discounts

Transportation Offer Available

From just 12 pounds per day

See everything from the London Zoo to St. Paul's Cathedral

I would NEVER visit London without this little darling in my pocket!



The Edinburgh Pass

www.edinburghpass.com

Free access to over 30 attractions

Special offers and discounts

Transportation

3 day pass for only 45 pounds

Don't miss Dynamic Earth or Camera Obscura

Also included are several walking tours, including the Mercat Vault tour, which was my absolute favorite!



Now, while England now feels like my second home, and I could easily navigate to other close cities for day trips, sometimes it just feels good to let someone else do all of the work. Day trips on a coach can be so relaxing! Merely sit and watch the scenery, rather than look about in terror, hoping you didn't miss your turn off.

Coach trips can also be a great value.

I would advise to ALWAYS consider this when planning a trip out of your "base" city. Sometimes when you include admission charges, plus train tickets or a rental car and fuel charges, you can come out just about the same, but without the expert guide that is

included in the tour.

My best days in England have been on coach tours, and my tour to Loch Ness was one of my favorite to date.

The possibilities are endless.



Evan Evans Tours

www.evanevans.co.uk

Since 1933... the oldest in London

Offer all sorts of tours, including Windsor, Stonehenge, Bath, Oxford, Stratford upon Avon, Canterbury and Dover

I took trip #24 to Oxford, Stratford upon Avon and the Cotswolds. Seeing the birthplace of Shakespeare was magical, and I could just envision Harry Potter climbing the staircase in Christ Church Cathedral.

Our tour guide was AWESOME!

She allowed me to duck into Alice's Sweet Shop (the place where Lewis Carroll would watch Alice buy candy) when it was not even on the itinerary.



Anderson Tours

www.andersontoursco.uk

An excellent value

Offer the usual tours from and inside of London, but also offer day trips to places such as Wales and the Isle of Wight

I took the trip to Stonehenge and Bath, and I was not disappointed. I have visited Stonehenge before, but our guide made it seem like a brand new experience.

And what can I say about Bath?

Pure perfection!



Scotline Tours

www.scotlinetours.co.uk

Office on the Royal Mile

Offer tours including everything from Loch Ness to Roslyn Chapel

This is the best tour for “time schedules” ever! We stopped several times for food and restroom breaks, which can be very important on long journeys.

I took the Loch Ness Adventure, and while I didn’t get a peek at Nessie, the scenery was absolutely breathtaking.

Oh, and please do not forget to try a deep fried Mars bar! I had one in Edinburgh at this lovely little fish and chip shop on the Royal Mile a few steps away from Holyrood Palace. I just can’t describe it.

It was amazing!



I am by no means a professional in the field of travel. I am just an average person like you, who may feel the need to board airplanes and cross large bodies of water a bit more than the regular girl. While planning a trip may feel overwhelming, it doesn't have to be a hectic experience. I always advise talking to a professional travel agent!