

Robert Burns itinerary

Whether you're coming up for a Burns Supper in 'Edina! Scotia's darling seat!' or just want to walk in the footsteps of Scotland's most famous poet or 'bard', Robert Burns certainly made his mark on Edinburgh's streets. This itinerary will help you trace his comings and goings, deeds and misdeeds, in this literary city.

The Ayrshire ploughman may have been used to more humble lodgings than that offered by the **George Hotel**, but the George has literary credentials that make it a perfectly acceptable option for this trip. The hotel was originally several large townhouses owned by Edinburgh's wealthy families, including the Ferriers. James Ferrier, an eminent lawyer, liked to entertain writers and invited Burns to stay. Burns' letters and poems indicate that he was more interested in James' eldest daughter than James himself. Although she was already married, Burns made his feelings known in 'To Miss Ferrier':

Jove's tunefu' dochters three times three
Made Homer deep their debtor;
But, gien the body half an e'e,
Nine Ferriers wad done better!

Last day my mind was in a bog,
Down George's Street I stoited;
A creeping cauld prosaic fog
My very sense doited.

Do what I dought to set her free,
My saul lay in the mire;
Ye turned a neuk—I saw your e'e—
She took the wing like fire!

Your first stop should be the Burns Monument on **Calton Hill**. If you head for Princes Street and walk towards the East End until you get to Waterloo Place, you'll be able to see the Governor's House at the top of Calton Hill. Take a stroll up the leaf-shaded steps to the summit and enjoy the spectacular view across the city. You might also be tempted to clamber up the unfinished National Monument or 'Scotland's Disgrace' which also makes for a great photo opportunity. Heading down the other side of the hill you will come to the rather grand **Burns Monument** just off Regent Road.

Modelled on classical Greek architecture, it demonstrates Edinburgh's efforts to style itself as the enlightened 'Athens of the North'. Burns attended salons in the homes of the wealthy Edinburgh elite and impressed them with his eloquent poems. However, stereotyped as a 'heaven-taught ploughmen' his convivial relationship with Edinburgh literary circles did not last. This monument originally held a statue of Burns holding a daisy and reciting his poem 'To a mountain daisy' but this has since been moved to the **National Portrait Gallery** on Queen Street. The garden around the monument is planted with Burns' favourite flowers.

If you head back down Regent Road to Princes Street, you can catch the 16 or 22 to Leith, where Burns was known to have dallied. On Bernard Street, there is a statue of Burns which was sculpted

by DW Stevenson and erected by the Leith Burns Club in 1898. The sides of the statue's pedestal are decorated with engravings of scenes from Burns' poems, including "The Cottar's Saturday Night", and "Scotch Drink".

Leith only became part of Edinburgh in 1920 and the port town was in fact the birthplace of Burns' illegitimate child by Anne Park. Elizabeth Park was born in 1791, following an affair after Burns met Anne when she was working as a barmaid in Dumfries. Only nine days later, Burns' wife Jean Armour presented him with a son but agreed to take in Elizabeth. Burns wrote "The Gowden Locks of Anna", or "Yestreen, I had a pint of wine" about Anne, which he considered his best love song. Very little is known about Anne after the birth of their daughter. One story is that she died in childbirth, another is that she went into domestic service in Leith or Edinburgh.

If you continue onto the **Shore**, you can walk along the pier at the Water of Leith which Burns also mentions in 'My bony Mary'. Let's assume that Mary was bonnie rather than bony and that Burns was toasting her before taking an imagined voyage:

Go fetch to me a pint o' wine,
And fill it in a silver tassie;
That I may drink, before I go,
A service to my bonie lassie:
The boat rocks at the Pier o' Lieth,
Fu' loud the wind blows frae the Ferry,
The ship rides by the Berwick-law,
And I maun leave my bony Mary.

You will be spoilt for choice for lunch options in Leith, Michelin-starred chefs Martin Wishart and Tom Kitchin both have restaurants in Leith, on the Shore and Commercial Street respectively. If the budget won't quite stretch to Scottish lobster and pheasant, Leith has a great range of affordable and enticing options, from a Mad Hatter's Tea Party at the Roseleaf to sophisticated and hearty fayre at the Kings Wark, including haggis!

Once you are filled to the gunnels with the 'Great chieftain o' the pudding-race', or its vegetarian cousin if you prefer, pick up the bus back to town for a Burns-filled afternoon.

From Princes Street, take North Bridge to the Royal Mile and turn left towards Canongate. Outside **Canongate Kirkyard** is a statue of Burns' literary hero and 'by far my elder brother in the muse', Robert Fergusson. Fergusson wrote in Scots about the ordinary people of Edinburgh and his egalitarian attitude was to greatly influence Burns. When Burns discovered that Fergusson lay in an unmarked grave, Burns, not a wealthy man himself, purchased the headstone which you can see in the kirkyard today.

Buried in the graveyard is another Edinburgh citizen who was of great interest to Burns, his darling Clarinda. Agnes McLehose and Burns exchanged many letters under the pseudonyms Clarinda and Sylvander, although theirs seems to have been an intellectual relationship with Burns offering advice on Clarinda's own verses. Not so in the case of Jenny Clow, Clarinda's maid, who had an illegitimate son by Burns. One of Burns' most famous poems, 'Ae fond kiss', is dedicated to Clarinda and her iconic silhouette, with tumbling curls and lace ribbons, mark her resting place.

After that, head back onto the Mile and in the direction of Edinburgh Castle. First stop off at **St Giles' Cathedral** with its splendid stained glass window dedicated to Burns. Divided into three segments, the window represents Burns' farming background, his intellectual life and his contribution to Scottish culture, depicted as a blazing sunflower. Once you've been dazzled by the jewel-like blues, greens, reds and yellows of the window, you might want to explore the aisles as there are more memorials to writers including Robert Louis Stevenson and Margaret Oliphant.

Back on the Mile, continue up to **Lady Stair's Close**, above the entrance is a plaque marking Burns' first stay in Edinburgh in 1786 when it was Baxter's Place. His landlady, Mrs Carfrae, was none too impressed with the poet's behaviour, complaining of "gandygoing with their filthy fellows, drinking the best of wines, and singing abominable songs".

In the courtyard of the close is the **Writers' Museum** and **Makars' Court**, this is a monument to Scotland's writers, including Burns, with quotation-engraved paving stones. In the museum you can find the stool Burns sat on while proofing his poems at William Smellie's printing house, his writing desk from his home in Dumfries, as well as letters, portraits and poems, including a manuscript for 'Scots wha hae' with his corrections.

If you take the steps down from Makars' Court, you'll find two restaurants on the Mound, Porto & Fi and the Whiski Rooms. At the Whiski Rooms you can sample some (more) haggis or local fish and steak and each course comes with a recommended whisky which should certainly get the night off to a rousing start. There's also live Scottish music from time to time but if you want to get your ceilidh on, go to the Ghillie Dhu for drams, jigs and reels. In other words, head to this venue for a spirited finale and a final nightcap (or three). It's what the Bard would want you to do!