

Scotland 2012

We spend a few days in Scotland, mostly in Edinburgh with one day in Glasgow. We had a very comfortable train ride over to Waverley Station in Edinburgh. Keeb and I had seen the latest James Bond movie "Skyfall" before leaving London and he hated it so much he decided to watch "Moonraker" to remind him of what a good James Bond movie looked like. Keeb whiled away the five-hour train ride on his Netbook with 007 and I was deep into the Morganville Vampire series, a bit of a departure from my previous book, "Anna Karenina". Public transport in the UK has enabled me to read a lot of books that I might not have got around to reading. I would never have considered reading "Anna" at home.

On our first full day there we went to the "Dynamic Earth" exhibition which brings geology to life and we enjoyed the exhibits of a glacier and volcano. This was geared to children, but anyone could learn a lot from them. I especially liked that when we viewed a 3-D film that odours and mist were piped into the space. With all that 3-D action right in my face and the scent and sudden coolness, it was an immersive experience the way "The Feelies" were described in "A Clockwork Orange". Little did we know, we were experiencing a precursor to 4D cinema that would become so widespread in years to come.

As we strolled along, we headed for the Scottish National Gallery and were treated to a bag piper playing the theme to Star Wars on the bridge near the gallery. At the gallery we saw a painting by Velázquez called "Old Woman Cooking Eggs" which combines my interests in art and food.

The next day we went to "Deep Sea World" in Queensferry. Getting there was interesting as we walked under the startling looking Forth Bridge, an updated version of a bridge that was there since 1897. It looked like it was inspired by a sea serpent. Still, I suppose it's fitting that there was a Deep Sea World under it. They had the longest shark tunnel in the world and, in my mind, smallest seal exhibit - two seals and most of the time we only saw one of them. But, we always enjoy aquaria wherever we go. I was particularly impressed by the golden arrow tree frogs. Apparently, they were so poisonous, Native Americans would rub their arrowheads on them.

We made a brief visit to Edinburgh Castle. When we were buying tickets, the ticket seller said very gruffly "the castle closes in a few minutes – are you happy with that?" Customer service is variable at the castle because I overheard the other ticket seller advising the people next to us on which attractions they should go to first to make the most of the short time they had. Keeb and I went to see that big stone used in coronations.

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We also toured the "Real Mary King's Close. As our hotel was just off the Royal Mile, all we needed to do was to walk a couple of minutes along the cobble stoned road and we arrived at the tiny entrance. My Irish friend Lesley had suggested this tour to me, and we found it a unique experience. The rooms buried under the Royal Mile were from the 17th century and have been preserved, making them a spooky backdrop for the stories of the plague and ghosts that the guide shared as we were taken through these catacombs. One of the rooms had a large pile of toys and the guide said a Japanese psychic visited the room and felt overwhelming sadness. When she was about to leave, she felt a tug on her leg and saw the ghost of a girl who said her name was Annie and she had nothing to play with, so the psychic went up to the Royal Mile and bought a doll and took it back down. She then said the room felt happier. So, after the tour I was treated to Keeb announcing on coming out of the bathroom that he felt a tug on his leg – it might be Annie. Touring Scotland with a sceptic... Awkward.

After that tour we took the train to Glasgow. When we got there, we decided to tour the GOMA – Gallery of Modern Art . These places are always entertaining with Keeb along as he has a talent for sniffing out the most absurd installations. This time it was two films being shown simultaneously on screens that faced each other called "Disorient". One was a haberdashery of Chinese items and the other showed workers making sneakers and the soundtrack was a narration of Marco Polo's descriptions of what he referred to as the Orient. It was very interesting but hard to take in with the two screens going. One could sit on the bean bags between the screens but we already had an experience like that at the Whitney museum in New York and Keeb fell sound asleep and snored during the video clip so we decided not to risk it.

After the museum we took the Glaswegian hop-on hop-off bus tour. The narrator was entertaining. He announced early that "Braveheart" was balderdash and listed off the reasons for his assessment: the character played by Mel Gibson in life was six and half feet, he was actually a Lowlander, and they did not paint their faces in that time. Having not seen the film I could not nod sagely but I was amused by the guide's vehemence. When he finished running down "Braveheart", he then added "...And do not get me started on Liam Neeson in Rob Roy"! The most interesting thing I saw on the bus tour was a bridge that, according to Keeb, looked like it was inspired by a Möbius strip. While the official name was Finnieston's Bridge we understood Glaswegians called it "The Squinty Bridge". Far more descriptive, really. Since the bus was moving along at a clip, I could not get any photos, but it can be googled under, yes, squinty bridge.

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Food

We were not especially adventurous in Edinburgh and ate at "The Real Rajput's", the American pub "Filling Station" and our old faithful, Wagamama. I do love haggis but since my cholesterol is so high, I was looking for vegetarian haggis and (shocker) did not find it on menus in Edinburgh or Glasgow.

Shows

We saw one play in Scotland, Agatha Christie's "The Mousetrap". I enjoyed this old-fashioned mystery but Keeb was not as impressed. The star of the play was Thomas Howes. His character was killed off in the second season of Downton Abbey. He played William Mason, an idealistic footman in that series. Here he played a police detective, and it was fun seeing him do an entirely different role.

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