

Walk through history on city's Royal Mile



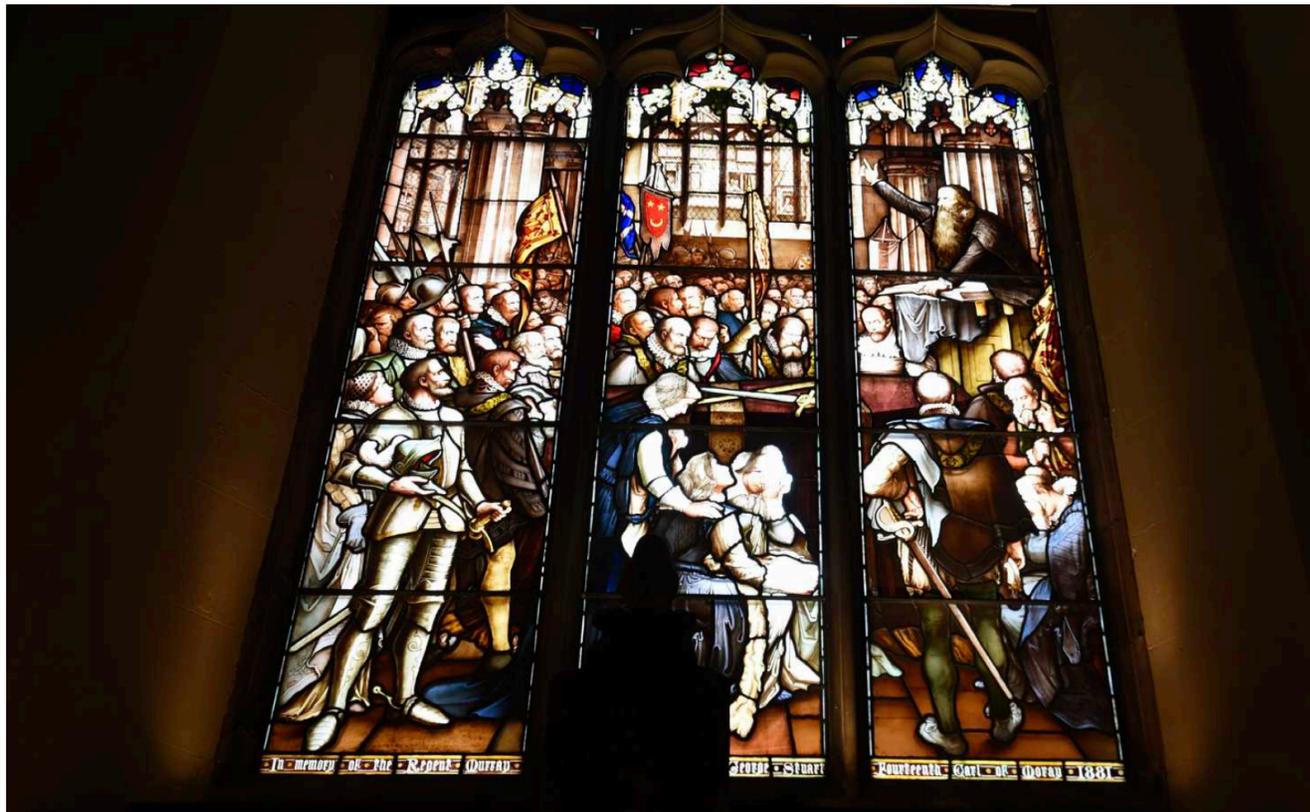
Rick Steves

There's no better introduction to Edinburgh — the historical, cultural and political capital of Scotland — than a walk straight down the spine of the old town. Stretching from a hill-topping castle to a queen's palace, this ramble is appropriately called the Royal Mile. Despite being crammed with tourists, it's one of Europe's best sight-seeing walks.

I begin my stroll on the bluff where Edinburgh was born 1,300 years ago, and where a castle now stands. Over the centuries, this mighty fortress was home to many of Scotland's kings and queens. Today, it's well worth touring to see the old buildings, stunning views and crown jewels.

As Edinburgh grew, it spilled downhill along the sloping ridge that became the Royal Mile. Back in the 1600s, this was the city's main street, bustling with breweries, printing presses and banks. With tens of thousands of citizens squeezed into the narrow confines of the old town, there was nowhere to go but up. So builders lined the street with multistory residences called tenements — some 10 stories and higher. My next stop, Gladstone's Land — a restored merchant's house with costumed guides and an almost-lived-in, furnished interior — helps me picture those days.

Though much of the Royal Mile is now a touristic mall filled with tartans, shortbread and Scottish kitsch, it's still packed with history. Exploring back alleys and side lanes, it's easy to imagine Edinburgh in the 17th and 18th centuries, when visitors scurried through these alleyways, buying and selling goods



A dramatic stained-glass window at St. Giles' Cathedral depicts John Knox in the middle of one of his many fiery sermons. CAMERON HEWITT

and popping into taverns.

Everywhere I turn, the Royal Mile is littered with symbols of Scottish pride — from a statue of philosopher David Hume, one of the towering figures of the Scottish Enlightenment of the mid-1700s, to its very own Church of Scotland, embodied by St. Giles' Cathedral. Filled with monuments, plaques and stained-glass windows dedicated to great Scots and historical moments, St. Giles' serves as a kind of Scottish Westminster Abbey.

St. Giles' was also the home church of John Knox, whose fiery sermons helped turn once-Catholic Edinburgh into a bastion of Protestantism. Knox's influence was huge. His insistence that every person should be able to read the word of God first-

hand helped give Scotland an educational system 300 years ahead of the rest of Europe. A dramatic stained-glass window shows the commotion that surrounded Knox when he preached. With his hand on the holy book, Knox seems to conduct divine electricity to the Scottish faithful packing the church.

Just down the road from St. Giles' is the John Knox House. Knox probably never actually lived here, but preservationists labeled the building "Knox's house" to save it from a wrecking ball in the mid-1800s. It features atmospheric rooms, period furniture, exhibits on printing — an essential tool for early reformers — and good information on Knox and his intellectual sparring partner, Mary, Queen

of Scots. I like to imagine the Protestant firebrand Knox and devout Catholic Mary sitting face-to-face in sparse rooms like these, discussing their spiritual lives and molding the course of Scotland's religious future.

A little farther down the street is an enjoyable stop: Cadenhead's Whisky Shop. Whisky is high on the experience list of most visitors to Scotland. While there are plenty of distillery tours, a visit to a fine whisky shop like Cadenhead's offers a chance to gain an education and buy a small bottle filled directly from the cask of your choice.

Founded in 1842, Cadenhead's prides itself on bottling pure whisky without watering it down or adding cosmetic coloring. Popping in,

I'm shown a shelf of aged wooden casks. The shop owner explains: "A single-cask whisky is like a football team where all the players come from the same town." Sipping this whisky with an expert, I see why Scots call this drink "a very good friend."

Fortified, I continue down the Royal Mile. Finally, after centuries of history, I've reached modern times: the Scottish parliament building. After 300 years of being ruled from London, the Scots regained their own parliament in 1999 and a few years later built this striking, eco-friendly home for it. The soaring building, mixing wild angles and bold lines, seems to surge right out of the earth like Arthur's Seat, the craggy summit visible in the distance.

My last stop is the Palace of Holyroodhouse, one of King Charles III's official residences and the home of Scottish royalty, including James IV and Mary, Queen of Scots. The Scottish monarchs also kept a home at the top end of the Mile, but they preferred the cushier Holyroodhouse to the blustery castle on the rock.

I've soaked up plenty of Scottish history on my walk. But no Royal Mile walk is complete without dropping by a pub — and there's no shortage of them — where a bit of live music and more whisky await.

Rick Steves (www.ricksteves.com) writes European travel guidebooks and hosts travel shows on public television and public radio. Email him at rick@ricksteves.com and follow his blog on Facebook.

CELEBRITY TRAVEL

Romeo feels like mermaid in water

By **Jae-Ha Kim**
Tribune Content Agency

For Abbey Romeo, having her life featured on the Netflix reality show "Love on the Spectrum" was a way to show viewers that autistic people are not that different from individuals who are neurotypical. Smart and charming, Romeo said that travel has helped her reflect on who she is.

"From all my recent trips, I have learned that there is always going to be noises I don't like or triggers around me," said Romeo, 27. "But I have to learn to ignore them and use my strategies. Sometimes on vacation, I need to remember that I need alone time to listen to music, so I can feel regulated and not overwhelmed."

This interview with Romeo has been edited for clarity and length.

Q: Where are some of the places that you filmed "Love on the Spectrum"?

A: We got to film season two in Maasai Mara (Kenya). That was a trip of a lifetime with my amazing boyfriend, David. I got to see lionesses with (their) cubs in their natural habitat.

Q: What about a recent trip?

A: I just got back from a trip to Beaches Turks & Caicos with my mom and brother. I got to meet the "Sesame Street" characters. They were all so nice to me. I also got to swim with sea creatures and do the waterslides. It made me feel like a real-life



"Love on the Spectrum" star Abbey Romeo said that visiting Italy is on her travel bucket list. BEACHES RESORTS

mermaid.

Q: Do you have any upcoming trips planned for 2026?

A: I will be going to New York City in the spring for a chef's gala with Autism Speaks. I hope I get to try yummy new foods there. We might also get the chance to go to Australia and see koala bears. I always wanted to go there. ... Good day, mate!

Q: What trip you took as a child that stands out?

A: I used to love going to Boston every year to visit my aunts and uncles. We went in the summertime, so it wasn't so cold. We would go swimming, camping and make s'mores.

Q: Do you prefer a food truck or fine dining?

A: I would prefer to eat at a fine dining restaurant because it's more fancy and it makes me feel like a princess in a castle. Usually on fancy menus, they have octopus or escargot, and I like eating bugs because it reminds me of ("The Lion King" characters) Timon and Pumbaa.

Q: Where are your favorite weekend getaways?

A: I like going to the San Diego Zoo Safari Park for the Roar & Snore (Safari) because there are lionesses. You can hear them roar in the middle of the night. Or I like going to waterparks like Hurricane Harbor and Soak City.

Q: Where would you like to go that you have never

been before?

A: One day, I really want to go to Italy because I want to eat spaghetti and meatballs and pizza there. I also want to go to see where "The Sound Of Music" was filmed. It was in Austria and so I will go there, too.

Q: When you go away, what are some of your must-have items?

A: I have to have my headphones in case there is a noise I don't like, like a screaming baby on an airplane. I like to have my journal with me so I can write down my thoughts when I'm feeling dysregulated. I also have to have my sunglasses because I recently noticed that I like wearing them on the plane and in airports because the lights bother me.

Q: What is your guilty pleasure when you're on the road?

A: I always play Candy Crush because the music is soothing and I feel so happy when I get to the next level.

Q: What is your best or worst vacation memory?

A: The worst vacation was my brother Ben's graduation from Purdue University in 2022. We had to drive all the way to Indiana because mom had a detached retina. The doctor told her she couldn't fly because she could have gone blind in one eye. So my cousin, Mary, drove us, but she also had a broken foot.

For more from the reporter, visit www.jaehakim.com.

TRAVEL TROUBLESHOOTER

Cruiser misbooks flight amid grief, gets runaround on refund

By **Christopher Elliott** | King Features Syndicate

I was on a 16-night cruise when my niece called to say that my brother was dying. I booked a flight home through Orbitz but accidentally chose the wrong airport. By the time I reached the correct airport, my Aer Lingus flight had left. I panicked and rebooked for the next day but missed precious days with my brother before he passed.

Since December, I've been trapped in a loop. Aer Lingus says that Orbitz must issue the refund, while Orbitz claims that Aer Lingus needs to approve it. I've sent my brother's death certificate five times, but Orbitz keeps asking for "clearer" copies or more documents. Aer Lingus finally told me that Orbitz must handle it, but Orbitz still won't do anything.

All I want is a final answer — or the \$715 refund — after five months of stress during my grief. What can I do?

— *Brenda Stopay, Northampton, Pennsylvania*

A: I'm so sorry about your brother. Orbitz should have coordinated with Aer Lingus to resolve your refund request promptly and compassionately.

While neither the airline nor the online travel agency is obligated to refund a nonrefundable ticket, it's common practice to issue a full refund when a passenger or a passenger's companion dies. When it comes to a passenger's relative, refunds are handled on a case-by-case basis. You booked your ticket after your brother fell ill — but before he died — and then you were a no-show for your flight, which is an even grayer area.

But it looks like both Orbitz and Aer Lingus suggested that you might qualify for a refund, so you were not wrong to expect some consideration after you showed your online agency and airline a death

certificate.

And you did show them a death certificate — five times! I'm not really sure why they didn't review it the first time you sent it and give you an answer. If I had to guess, I'd say that there's a customer service chatbot on the loose somewhere, ignoring completely valid claims like yours and making you wait months for an answer.

One more thing: Orbitz is supposed to be your travel agent and an advocate for you; it shouldn't have put you in a holding pattern. A good agent, whether it's electronic or human, will always help you get through a difficult situation like this.

Your case shows the importance of double- and triple-checking your flight itinerary. Your urgency was understandable, but at a time like this, you might have asked a friend or travel adviser to help you

with your reservation.

Always keep a paper trail, which you did meticulously, and escalate your case as soon as possible. I've published the executive contacts for Orbitz (owned by Expedia) on my consumer advocacy site, elliott.org.

I reached out to Orbitz on your behalf to find out about the status of your case. A few days later, Aer Lingus offered you a \$715 flight credit, which you accepted. "I certainly learned a lesson," you added.

By sharing your story, I hope you can help others avoid a painful and unnecessary wait for a refund.

Christopher Elliott is the chief advocacy officer of Elliott Advocacy, a nonprofit organization that helps consumers resolve their problems. Contact him at elliott.org/help or chris@elliott.org.