

TRAVEL

A literature-themed tour through the Midlands and Scotland



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As we travel north from London City, we take note of the handy methods that English cities use to identify their locations. Assuming the city is on a river, they simply append the name of the river to the city, e.g. Stratford-on-Avon, or on your favorite beer can, Newcastle-on-Tyne. Hence the expression, "Carrying coal to Newcastle", to signify an absolutely needless task since the Port of Newcastle is one of the world's leading centers for coal exports.

But now let us take a tour through Stratford-on-Avon, which is world renowned as the city of William Shakespeare's birth in 1564. The British government has constructed all sorts of buildings such as a replica of the Globe Theatre in London to commemorate Shakespeare's theatrical fame. Photographs of all the great political leaders are on display as they stop by to salute the Bard-



of-Avon. Indeed Stratford is a must for any of you former students who sat through the family mysteries of Hamlet, or the military tour-de-force

of Macbeth. In my own case just having visited Rome last month, seeing the well-preserved Roman Forum evoked memories of "Julius Caesar"

and its great funeral oration by Mark Anthony over the murdered Julius Caesar.

Continuing north, we cross the border between England

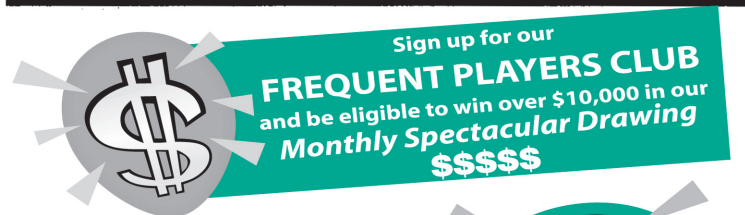
and Scotland to avail ourselves of the memorials to Scotland's great literary figures.

Do all of you gentle readers realize that on New Year's Eve, when you sing "Auld Lang Syne", you are paying tribute to the great Robert Burns, a self-taught Scottish farm boy whose simple ballads have touched the whole English speaking world.

Two more Scottish literary figures must be mentioned: Sir Walter Scott, famous for his novel "Ivanhoe" and my own personal favorite, Robert Louis Stevenson whose great novel "Treasure Island" thrilled me so much as a nine year old.

...And one further point of interest, Stevenson got the idea for "Treasure Island" from a visit to Catalina Island in the late 1800's. I will continue the theme of islands in my next column.

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A bagpiper in the Scottish Highlands

Courtesy photo

Traveling England and Scotland

Throughout its long history, it's been a green and pleasant land, a sceptred isle and a nation of shopkeepers. It's stood as a beacon of democracy and a bastion of ideological freedom, as well as a crucible of empire and a cradle of class oppression. Magna Carta, the King James Bible and the welfare state were all dreamt up here, but then again so were beer bellies, Bovril and Mr. Bean. It's a nation of tea-tipping eccentrics and train spotters, of dog lovers and footy fanatics, of punk rockers, gardeners, gnome collectors, celebrity wannabes, superstar chefs, free-wheeling city traders, pigeon fanciers, cricket bores and part-time Morris Dancers. To some it's Albion. To others it's Blighty. To many it's the most eccentric, extraordinary and downright incomprehensible place on earth. Welcome to England.

To journey through England is to journey through time (interspersed with several cups of tea) - from the ancient megaliths of Stonehenge to the space-age domes of the Eden Project in Cornwall. It's also a trip to the 21st-century: London is gearing up for the 2012 Olympics while cities like Manchester, Leeds and Newcastle revel in their heritage and confidently face the future, with industrial buildings revitalized as waterfront galleries or trendy apartments, flanked by tempting bars, shops, restaurants and some of the finest music venues on the planet. For visitors, the beauty of travel in England is the compact nature of the country. By spending less time going between places and more time in them, you can immerse yourself in the scenery, instead of just breezing through. Whether you're strolling the undulating hills of Oxfordshire, cycling in Norfolk,

surfing off Newquay or rock-climbing in the Peak District, England is perfect for activity and adventure. And with time on your side, you'll get closer to understanding local sensibilities: relaxing with the locals in a country pub, enjoying a music festival or watching a cricket match. As an old Scots saying has it, 'guid gear comes in sma' bouk' (good things come in small packages). And despite its small size, Scotland certainly has many treasures crammed into its compact territory. There's something for all tastes. For the history buff, few cities compare with Edinburgh and Glasgow; for the hungry, try haggis if you must but don't miss the Aberdeen Angus beef or smoked salmon from Dumfries & Galloway or, for the thirsty, the peerless malt whiskies of the Isle of Islay or Obanawait. There is wild mountain scenery of the Highlands & Northern Islands and cold, sparkling seas washing against the Outer Hebrides. Wildlife watchers will find otters, eagles, whales and dolphins, while hill walkers have almost 300 Munros to bag. There's turbulent history and fascinating genealogy, castles and country pubs, canoeing and caber-tossing, golfing and fishing and all-round good craic (lively conversation). Although an integral part of Great since 1707, Scotland has maintained a separate and distinct identity throughout the last 300 years. The return of a devolved Scottish parliament to Edinburgh in 1999 marked a growing confidence and sense of pride in the nation's achievements. **Money & Costs** The strength of the pound sterling makes Scotland an expensive destination for non-

Europeans. Food, accommodation and transport are all fairly pricey, and more so in Edinburgh, Glasgow and Aberdeen than in the rest of the country; the only real bargains are the many excellent museums and galleries that you can visit for free. A realistic daily budget for two people sharing a double room, staying in B&Bs and guesthouses and eating in midrange restaurants is around £40 to £50 per person per day. Backpackers using hostels and cooking their own meals can get by on £25 to £30 a day, not including transport. If you're travelling in your own car you'll probably average a further £12 to £20 per day on petrol and parking; car rental will add a minimum of £23 a day. If you're travelling as a family, be aware that many hotels and guesthouses have family rooms, usually with a double bed and one or two singles, plus a folding bed, which can save a fair bit of money. Most tourist attractions with admission fees also offer discounted family tickets - a major saving at places such as Edinburgh Castle, which charges £11 for one adult. Students, young people (under 26) and seniors (over 60) can get discounts on transport, and admission fees. The price of food and fuel rises quite steeply in remote parts of the Highlands and islands where delivery costs are higher. Petrol can cost 10% to 15% more in the Outer Hebrides than in the Central Lowlands. Surprisingly, Scotland is one of the most expensive places to buy Scotch whisky. If your travels will be taking you to mainland Europe, you'll find you can buy whisky there for about 60% of the price charged in Scottish shops.

TRAVEL



Ask
Trudy

Trudy Carrol
Travel Specialist

Why are the Greek Islands so popular?

Because they are so beautiful and different. The land and sea interface with its coves and the inlets are the most spectacular in the world. The water is crystal clear, and its beaches are covered with white sand or black sand. White washed villages are hanging on cliffs. Many of the islands have Greek and Roman ruins.

What is the best way to see the Greek Islands?

1) Travel by ferry from island to island. Spend a day or day and night, then on to the next island or islands. 2) By cruise ship. You will see four or five islands in 10 days. 3) Fly into Athens, then onto the islands, but you will miss the spectacular sightseeing that you see if you come in by ship.

What is the most visited island?

In my estimation, Corfu. The rich and famous thought so too! Then comes Rhodes, Santorini, and Mykonos. Each one of these islands is unique in its own landscape and beauty.



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