

Style City

Hosting the Commonwealth Games this month, Scotland's second city offers grand architecture, haute cuisine and superlative shopping

Text Helen Ochyra Photos Robin McKelvie



Everyone is talking about Glasgow – and for once, this is a good thing. For years, the city was down-at-heel, an ex-industrial wasteland known more for its social woes than for its tourist attractions. But for 2014, Glasgow is the place to be, sitting pretty at the top of ‘places to visit’ lists and a non-negotiable fixture in many travel itineraries, thanks to the summer’s Commonwealth Games.

In fact, ever since Glasgow took the title ‘European City of Culture’ (now ‘European Capital of Culture’) in 1990, this formerly much-maligned city has been on the up. The creative industries have blossomed, the music scene is thriving, and the shopping is second to none.

I spend my first morning in the city strolling and shopping along Ingram Street and through the Merchant City. Armani, Ralph Lauren, Replay and Liam Gallagher’s Pretty Green are all here, housed in the elegant blonde sandstone buildings that nod to the city’s successful industrial past. This area was once home

to tobacco lords and cotton kings; today it’s the haunt of Glasgow’s new wave of successful exporters – designers, artists and musicians.

I enjoy lunch at Gandolfi Fish on Albion Street (cafegandolfi.com/gandolfi-fish), where the almost exclusively Scottish menu includes the very best of the country’s bountiful larder, including Isle of Mull scallops and Orkney sirloin steak. Service is typically Glasgow – chatty, laidback and endlessly welcoming – and the wine list is perfectly targeted to match the menu. Try the Spy Valley New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc with the whole Scottish lobster for a real treat.

After lunch I check into my Glasgow home away from home: Fraser Suites in the heart of the Merchant City (fraserhospitality.com). These service apartments have not only spacious bedrooms but lounges and kitchenettes too, making them ideal for longer stays. I settle in immediately, but the pull of the comfy sofa and spacious bathtub cannot quite match the allure of the city that surrounds me. So I head back out to continue my exploration of Glasgow’s ‘Style Mile.’

Running from Ingram Street through Royal Exchange Square to Buchanan Street, there are fashionable names to slow my pace on every corner – Radley, LK Bennett, Reiss – and architecture to catch my eye at every turn. I find myself lingering in the Princes Square shopping mall before taking a stroll through George Square and up Buchanan Street. Close by, I find two buildings that nod to Glasgow’s history: the Royal Concert Hall, a symbol of Glasgow’s regeneration, having opened while the city enjoyed its City of Culture status in 1990, and the imposing City Chambers, built in the 1880s to reflect the stature and international importance of the city at that time.

This year, the host of the 2014 Commonwealth Games has a new reason to attract the world. Several new sports venues have been built, including the Sir Chris Hoy Velodrome, and the hotel scene is preparing for an influx of well-heeled visitors. One of the best-located hotels is the Crowne Plaza (ihg.com/crowneplaza) on the banks of the River Clyde. This large luxury hotel has just completed an extensive refurbishment and will be the



ideal base during the Games this July and August. But for my visit, it is the perfect location for a different reason – it’s just a few minutes’ walk from up-and-coming Finnieston.

This area just west of the city centre was once the destination of choice for dockworkers seeking unsavoury entertainment, but today it has been revitalised by an influx of designers and foodies attracted by the low rent and community feel.

I find myself at home immediately, strolling along ‘The Strip,’ also known as Argyle Street, poking into boutiques such as The Shop of Interest, purveyor of gifts and jewellery, and The Real Deal, an antiques shop that may have you booking excess baggage for your flight home.

After plenty of time on two feet, I take

a break at the Hidden Lane Tearoom (thehiddenlanetearoom.blogspot.com), which true to its name is tucked away on an alleyway populated with creative businesses. Here, over strong coffee and homemade cupcakes, I meet with designer Silvia Pellegrino, whose Chouchou Couture hoods combine Italian style with traditional Scottish tartans. I fall in love with a green and black tartan hood with a cream fur lining and have fun trying on plenty of different designs back at Silvia’s workshop, a few doors away.

Finnieston is the perfect destination for everything from morning coffee to late night cocktails. As night falls, I move on to The Finnieston (thefinniestonbar.com), said to have kick-started the revival of this area with its gin cocktails and fine selection of wines and champagnes. >>

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- 1 Street art promoting the Commonwealth Games
- 2 Inside the Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum
- 3 ‘The Strip,’ also known as Argyle Street
- 4 The cosy interior of one of Glasgow’s countless pubs
- 5 Street art outside the Gallery of Modern Art



- 1 Argyle Arcade, part of Glasgow's 'Style Mile'
- 2 Outside The Glasgow Royal Concert Hall
- 3 The People's Palace on Glasgow Green
- 4 Artifacts in the Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum
- 5 Bicycles from all eras at the Riverside Museum

I plump for a 'seafarer's cocktail' made with seaweed-infused fino sherry. It's the perfect accompaniment for a trio of West Kilbride oysters, an aperitif to my dinner just around the corner at Butchershop (butchershopglasgow.com).

Scotland may primarily be known for seafood, but it also produces some of the world's best beef – and this is what Butchershop specialises in. I settle in to a booth and start to narrow down the menu. Steak cuts from fillet and sirloin to T-bone and *côte de boeuf* line the meat-packed menu; for the hungry, there is the tomahawk, up to two kilograms in weight. All of Butchershop's meat is dry-aged and hung on the bone for several weeks to ensure the very best flavour. The attention the raw ingredients receive is obvious – my T-bone is one of the best steaks I have ever tasted.

Butchershop is directly opposite the Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum (glasgowlife.org.uk/museums/kelvingrove), my first destination the following morning. This is an excellent place to discover one of Glasgow's most famous and most proudly celebrated sons, Charles Rennie Mackintosh. Two rooms here are dedicated to his decorative work, with the



Glasgow Style Gallery being the world's largest permanent display of work by key names in the Glasgow Style movement. Having always loved Mackintosh's style, I spend a long time exploring this, and the more than 8,000 pieces of artwork the rest of the museum has to offer, ranging from Salvador Dali's *Christ of St John of the Cross* to the R. L. Scott bequest, once one of the world's finest private collections of European arms.

Back in Finnieston, I spend the rest of my morning exploring the Riverside Museum (glasgowlife.org.uk/museums/riverside), which opened in 2011. Here, the spacious, well-designed galleries display everything from cars, trams, and locomotives to a suspended 'velodrome' of bicycles from all eras. For anyone interested in travel and transport, it is truly fascinating.

I can't quite bear to leave, so I take a table at Crabshakk (crabshakk.com) and order the seafood platter. I feast on mussels, crab and succulent lobster – all prepared to perfection. Not for the first time in Glasgow, my expectations have been exceeded.

For further information on Glasgow, visit peoplemakeglasgow.com. ■

