

THE SCOTSMAN

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Studying in Bristo Square, also a popular haunt for skateboarders, with Teviot Row House behind.
Picture: David Moir

In a class of its own


ANNA SMYTH

WHAT IS IT LIKE?

There are around 22,000 students at Edinburgh's universities and a lot of them will look surprisingly well-heeled for teenagers in their first term away from home. This is mainly because it's quite an expensive city in which to study, so it naturally attracts smart, middle-class types - some of whom are here because they didn't make the cut for Oxbridge.

Those who come to the University of Edinburgh insist it is worth it. The most popular student residential areas - Marchmont, Newington and Bruntsfield - cost individuals around £260 a month to rent, but they are among the classiest and most vibrant zones in the city centre, and all within walking distance of the university itself. Your pied-à-terre will also buy you proximity to a host of cultural attractions befitting a capital city. .

The University of Edinburgh has certainly earned its popular status. The sports union is one of the biggest in the country and offers everything from orienteering, karate and hot air ballooning to the staples of hockey, rugby and cricket. An extinct volcano behind the main student residence - Pollock Halls - also provides ample space for walking and running, and the Students' Association offers more than 200 special-interest societies to keep you out of trouble.



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EATING OUT

Cheap eats

Bristo Square is the main watering hole for the University of Edinburgh student, and there are numerous places in which you can grab a quick bite for relatively little cash - around £2 for a sandwich and 90p for a coffee. Many students in George Square (the arts campus) go for lunch under the Potterow Dome, recently refurbished, which serves sandwiches, smoothies, coffee, burgers and beer during the day. Just next door is the gothic Teviot Union, which boasts the Mezzanine, a stately hall dining-room-cum-canteen, very popular with students looking for a cheap meal between lectures. If it's a leisurely, coffee-fuelled study session you're aiming for, try out the Forrest Cafe, an excellent volunteer-staffed outfit selling Fairtrade food and drink, where you can sink into a sofa and pore over your books for hours. Branches of Starbucks, Pret A Manger and Costa Coffee can be found at numerous spots around town. For something beyond coffee and sandwiches during the day, try the Mosque Kitchen on Bristo Square, serving large bowls of Pakistani curry - meat and vegetarian - and rice for around £3. Delightfully cheap, delicious and nourishing. Open from 11am till 7pm.

Late-night munchies

Depending on your tastes, there are loads of late-night eateries where you can go to soak up the booze. The Cappadocia kebab shop on Forrest Road is renowned among student drinkers for its doners. Palmyra on Nicolson Street, a fantastic Syrian falafel shop, has developed something of a cult following (thanks in no small part to Sammy, its eternally cheerful waiter), as has Zoga Delicious Falafel across the road.

Vegetarian

Try Susie's Wholefood Diner on Nicolson Street, popular with those looking for a good hot plate at under £6, whereas Kalpna (St Patrick's Square) proves just how good Indian

vegetarian food can be. Monster Mash on Forrest Row is great for vegetarians who like their stodge. David Bann, a stylish, upmarket vegetarian restaurant on St Mary's Street is so popular with veggies and non-veggies alike that it pays to book well in advance, especially for weekend dinners. It's not exactly cheap, though, which brings us to...

Parental treats

If your parents are in town and offering to feed you, try the homely comfort of Namaste just off Bristo Square, or the Tower restaurant at the Scottish Museum on Chambers Street. If they're being very indulgent or think you're looking seriously undernourished, get them to fill you up at The Witchery on the Royal Mile, Valvona & Crolla on Elm Row, La Garrigue on Jeffrey Street, Centotre on George Street, or Hadrian's Brasserie at the Balmoral Hotel. Afternoon tea at the Cally (Caledonian Hilton Hotel) at the western end of Princes Street is another Edinburgh treat worth having at least once a term, especially if you have an adoring rich grandparent offering to take you out.

PUBS AND NIGHTLIFE

The drinking scene starts with the Association bars - of which there are four - Teviot Row House, Potterow, Pleasance and Kings Buildings House. Teviot Row House is the oldest purpose-built students' union in the world (built in 1890), and has recently been refurbished with a rooftop bar. Clubwise, Potterow's ever-popular Saturday "cheese" nights mean long queues and a mixed-bag crowd, while Pleasance and Teviot aim for a more discerning customer, hosting comedy and live music respectively.

For the real ale fan, Doctors on Forrest Road is very popular thanks to its Deuchars IPA and Courage Director's bitter staples, as well as guest ales like those from the Arran breweries. For cosy little drinking holes, seek out Dagda in George Square, Burlington Bertie's in Tollcross or Starbar in the New Town. Stockbridge is further afield, but it's another area with a lively drinking scene: try Hectors on Raeburn Place, Hamilton's on Hamilton Place or the Bailey on St Stephen Street.

Edinburgh has lost some of its bigger dance clubs in recent years, however, Cabaret Voltaire and the Bongo Club still fly the flag for underground dance music, reggae and soul. The first choice for indie fans remains Edinburgh College of Art's Wee Red Bar, complete with chic, artistically inclined clientèle.

If it's signed, big-name live bands you're after, you'll be in for a lot of trips to Glasgow (one hour by train). Edinburgh has its own, more intimate band scene, and does attract cool names. Amplifico and The Ruffness may be little known outside of the city, but they

are local heroes. Watch out for Edinburgh record company SL, promoting quality Edinburgh rock bands such as Ballboy. There is also a thriving acoustic and folk music scene, including gigs at the Antiquary on St Stephen's Street every Thursday night.

For those with a bigger budget who like to see and be seen, it is all about the Opal Lounge and Why Not? on George Street. These are affectionately known as Edinburgh's "Yah Bars", and are where the student rugby crowd will be found in their post-match debauchery. These spots are invariably noisy, extremely crowded, and not for shrinking violets. The dress code seems to favour shiny fabrics and strategically exposed flesh.

The gay scene is alive and kicking, and centred on the "pink triangle" between Broughton Street and the top of Leith Walk. Cafes along Broughton Street include the Blue Moon Cafe and Baroque, and for club nights try out Tackno - a monthly Sunday event at Club Mercado on Market Street where fancy dress gets cheap entry - and Joy, a fortnightly Saturday night at Ego on Picardy Place, with pumping house and a good bit of cheese.

FURTHER READING

The fortnightly listings magazine The List has details of Edinburgh's social and cultural scene between its pages: £2.95 at any city newsagent. The Scotsman's Saturday arts magazine, Critique, will keep you abreast of the exhibitions, plays, concerts, events, films and books that are worth catching, in Edinburgh and beyond.

SHOPS AND SERVICES

The 24-hour Co-ops on Marchmont Road and Nicolson Street are so revered among students in this city that they even have their own online fan clubs.

Clothing

Princes Street has two big branches of M&S for all your underwear needs, plus the usual fashion emporia - TopShop and TopMan, H&M, Dorothy Perkins, Mexx, Next, Gap and so on - stocking current trends at competitive prices, as do the nearby Princes Mall and St James Centre.

Other large shopping malls include the shiny Ocean Terminal in Leith, and the Gyle Shopping Centre, west of the city towards the airport, both accessible by bus from the city centre. For more original attire, students enjoy rummaging in the many charity shops on South Clerk Street, and specialised vintage clothing stores such as Armstrong's in

the Grassmarket and the Rusty Zip on Forrest Road.

Textbooks

Your first point of call for textbooks is Blackwell's on Nicolson Street, although some prefer the more personal feel of specialist bookshops such as Word Power on West Nicholson Street (politics) or Avizandum on Candlemaker Row (law books).

For discounted books, Oxfam on Nicolson Street is popular. Ditto Barnardo's Bookshop, which about 200 metres down the road. Also popular are online booksellers such as Amazon (discount available with NUS Extra card), and, for harder-to-trace publications, www.abebooks.co.uk.

Transport

- Buses: various student bus-passes are available from Lothian Buses, so pop into one of its "shops" on Hanover Street or Waverley Bridge to find the best deal to suit your needs. Students over 25 don't qualify.
- Train: a Young Person's Railcard is also a good idea for trips home or around Scotland. These cost £20 and get you a third off standard rail tickets.
- Black Cabs: City Cabs, 0131 228 1211; Central Taxis, 0131 229 2468 and Com Cabs on 0131 272 8072.
- Edinburgh City Car Club,
0131 466 8172.
- Edinburgh Bicycle Co-operative give cycling advice, routes and maps, www.edinburgh-bicycle.co.uk/routes.

Manage your cash and profit for life

IT'S easy to think that because you won't have much money during your student years, you don't need to think about finances. But often, the people who manage their cash most effectively are those who don't have much, so get into good habits now and you should be set for when your graduate salary rolls in.

AT PRESENT, new Scottish and (non-UK) EU students in Scotland do not have to pay their tuition fees up front: you apply to the Student Awards Agency for Scotland (SAAS), which pays them directly to the institution (up to a value of £1,200) on your behalf.

Although student maintenance grants have long been abolished, there are some Young Student Bursaries available for those with a parental/household income of less than £31,000. These are paid annually on a sliding scale up to the value of £2,455. Other than that, the only assistance you'll get is a student loan up to a possible value of £3,300: £1,300 non-income assessed, up to £2000 income-assessed. These are to be repaid after you've graduated and once you've started to earn more than £15,000 a year.

The deadline for support applications is 30 June 2007, but don't leave it until then to apply. The sooner you apply, the sooner you'll get your money - and if you leave it too late, you might not get your fees paid. You can apply online at www.student-support-saas.gov.uk.

There are some institutions or trusts which offer help to students who tick certain boxes. For example, someone might have left money specifically to help female students of astrophysics who come from Dingwall. Occasionally, universities also offer discounts, so to see if you're eligible for any extra help, check out www.studentmoney.org, which provides funding information as offered by higher education institutions, charities and other organ-isations.

Unfortunately, it's not all about getting free - or very cheap - money. Don't forget about the graduate endowment, a fixed amount most Scottish graduates have to pay in the April after they graduate. The figure for last year's new students was £2,216, and while the government doesn't call it a fee, nor a tax, essentially it's a non-negotiable lump sum you pay in "recognition of the higher education benefits" you have received. It's worth planning now to take account of the fact that you'll probably get a whopping bill after your degree.

A good student bank account is one of the few things you can sort out in advance, and you will be grateful later when you're swamped with orientation meetings and matriculation forms. The banks know you are potentially a lifelong client, and will tantalise you with irresistible offers. Free mobiles here, £500 cashback there, they are all great sweeteners, but be sure to choose yours on the criteria that matter - an interest-free, charge-free overdraft and good accessibility.

WHEN it comes to budgeting, do some research. Find out how much you will get in your

student loan, and plan for what your monthly outgoings will be. Phone your university and ask for the average cost of a month's rent in your city, and decide whether you will need to take a part-time job. Before you start at uni, visit your local bank branch. A student adviser will help you plan your living expenses and talk through credit cards and overdrafts. It is in your interest to do this before you get into financial trouble, so when you inevitably need a bit of help, they know you've got your head screwed on.

Paul Jeffreys, the head of student banking at RBS, says: "If you do a bit of financial planning in advance of getting to university, you will be in a much stronger position. Talk to your branch manager or a student adviser and ask their advice - it's what they're there for. Debt is a fact of life for students, but we can help you through the tough times if we know your situation."

USEFUL INFORMATION

TELEPHONE NUMBERS

- UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH 0131-650 1000
- EDINBURGH UNIVERSITY ADVICE PLACE 0131-650 9225.
- NIGHTLINE 0131-557 4444
- LOTHIAN & BORDERS POLICE HQ 0131-311 3131
- JACKSON HART PLUMBERS 0131-652 6020
- TIMPSON 24-HR LOCKSMITH 0800 0187 187

WEBSITES

www.list.co.uk

- www.S1play.com
- www.itchyedinburgh.co.uk

Related topic

- Top up fees and student finance
<http://news.scotsman.com/topics.cfm?tid=734>

This article: <http://news.scotsman.com/education.cfm?id=1302832006>

Last updated: 03-Sep-06 00:24 BST

Comments

1. Sed quis custodiet ipsos custodes, Peoples Republic of Grand Fenwick / 2:21am 4 Sep 2006

If the Glasgow Herald became the Herald to attract readers in the east - how about a bit of reciprocation to realise Edinburgh is not the only OK university in the country?

2. Musicmama, Fife / 8:14am 4 Sep 2006

This is first of a week long series advertised as "In a class of its own STARTING university can be daunting, but there is help at hand in the shape of our week-long series on what Scottish cities offer the new student."

3. Paul Voltaire / 10:25am 4 Sep 2006

The vegetarian restaurant section should have advised taking a gas mask to deal with the extreme flatulence present in such premises

4. Hazel, Scotland / 12:37pm 5 Sep 2006

Your article "in a class of it's own" by Anna Smyth in features on 4th Sept - very disappointed to see Henderson's not included in eating out Vegetarian we have been in Edinburgh since 1962 and offer ALL students 10% discount.

5. Mike, Stirling / 3:45pm 5 Sep 2006

Edinburgh is seen as a poor second for students in Scotland. Glasgow is by far first choice!

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