

# COOL britannia

ALL THAT WAS PAST IS CERTAINLY GROOVY AGAIN AS ULTRA CONTEMPORARY FASHION, ARCHITECTURE AND PHILOSOPHY MELD WITH CHIC OLD-WORLD LONDON AND EDINBURGH, WRITES SARAH BLINCO.

BY THE TIME I finally headed across to the other side of the world – to “the country of Shakespeare, Churchill, the Beatles, Sean Connery, Harry Potter, David Beckham’s right foot... David Beckham’s left foot come to that...” the land of *Love, Actually* – I was excited but unsure what to expect. Our amazing adventure was set before us – Stirling and Edinburgh (Scotland), and the mother of it all, London. It was, actually, love at first sight.

Checking in at the Corus Hotel Hyde Park, which I found after extensive research on [expedia.com.au](http://expedia.com.au), we were pleased to discover the rooms were great value for money and were situated directly over the road from Hyde Park and literally two minutes’ walk from a Tube station (crucial for getting everywhere in London). I spared no time getting back on the Tube after dropping my bags at the hotel. There was somewhere else I needed to be...

About 10 minutes later I stumbled out into shopping heaven, braving the crowds on Oxford Street, allegedly one of the busiest precincts in Europe. I was surrounded by big red buses, tall old buildings, streets lined with alluring promotional art and shops – huge, exciting, expensive but fabulous.

Trusty Tube map in hand, we ventured over the Millennium Bridge and past the divine St Paul’s Cathedral as the cold evening fell. We also visited the extraordinary Tate Modern Gallery, which is seven levels high and boasts a stunning lounge bar at the top. Here, the epitome of swanky metropolis living is sipping Champagne overlooking the Thames by night surrounded by the beautiful people of London. Being that entry is free, it’s a definite must-see.

Our London Tube adventures were extensive, as we literally ticked off a personal must-see list by station – Notting Hill (Notting Hill Gate); the expansive new Westfield London (Shepherd’s Bush); Piccadilly Circus for more shopping and cheap

theatre tickets; London Bridge for Shakespeare’s Globe, City Hall, London Bridge, and Tower Bridge and London Dungeon. Scoot over to the fabulous, famous and affordable Camden Markets (Camden Town) then to trendy Soho off Leicester Square for a night out. Ask at one of the major tube stations for an economical London travel “hop on, hop off” or Oyster Pass.

In London, the super contemporary flourishes alongside structures and roads dating back hundreds of years, with some pavements even laid during Roman times. Experience even more of this old-world charm by venturing outside London into the surrounding regions of Oxford, historical villages of The Cotswolds and the simply stunning town of Stratford-upon-Avon – all a series of manageable day trips.

Once warring enemies, now England and Scotland reside peacefully side by side in the United Kingdom, and I’d certainly recommend a peek at the old town of Stirling – easily accessible by road, train or cheap flight from London (check out [www.easyjet.com](http://www.easyjet.com) or [www.ryanair.com](http://www.ryanair.com)). Steeped in tradition, Stirling is spectacular. Made famous to most of us through the movie *Braveheart*, here you can walk the halls of old Stirling Castle dating back to the 1100s, gaze over the valleys where many critical battles were fought and view the William Wallace monument in the distance. Back in the medieval town, hit one of the brand-new luxe bars and enjoy a pint by the fireplace while warming up for another adventure.

Our final stop was the delightful capital city of Scotland, Edinburgh. This captivating city offers new and old attractions. Wander along Princes Street lined with designer stores, eateries and markets, overshadowed by beautiful homes and indeed Edinburgh Castle itself perched high on a hill above the city. When you’re all shopped out, begin the uphill climb along The Royal Mile where the old town emerges. The Old Town

has preserved its medieval plan and many Reformation-era buildings, closed at the end by the castle. It’s classically beautiful, like taking a trip back in time, and there are even underground tours where you can visit areas of the city that were shut down to keep those with the plague in.

What little I saw of the United Kingdom certainly demonstrated to me why so many friends and family say this destination offers the ultimate in “cool”. Cool culture, history, people, plus weather (obviously), and I can’t wait to see more of this part of the world.



One of Edinburgh’s bars

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