

Bidin awa: City Breaks

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About the author

I have spoken the Doric dialect of Scots since I have been able to talk, however, I only began writing in Scots around four years ago. Initially, writing in Scots started out as a hobby for me. I have always been passionate about the importance of keeping Doric alive and writing in Scots provided me with a new way to blend such an interest with my love for writing. Initially, I volunteered as the Scots editor for my university's student newspaper. This led to me writing more and more non-fiction Scots pieces for other online platforms, and ultimately for The National newspaper for over two years.

My journey of learning to write in Scots has been one of trial and error. In particular, I have spent many hours contemplating the conflicting issue of staying true to my local dialect while also adhering to standardised spelling. Over the years, I have found that my most useful tools, when writing factual pieces in Scots, are online Scots dictionaries, the online Scots language community and my own voice! More often than not, reading a text out loud has proven helpful in ensuring that the tone, grammar and sentence structure are correct.

Taking part in this project matters to me because I want to help make it easier for others to turn their love for speaking Scots into one for writing Scots, without facing the same issues that I have along the way. The more people that can confidently write in Scots, the richer the Scots' discourse.

About the project

This Doric travel series includes eight parts, mostly discussing European city break destinations (with the exception of the final article which covers a potentially longer trip).

The project aims to provide an example of writing in Scots which is factual but also descriptive. It is accompanied by recordings of the text, so that, anyone wishing to do so, may compare the written language with its spoken form.

Valencia

Kintra: Spain

Siller: Euro

Kent for: Paella, fitba an sunny beaches

Fit tae dae

Thou it might anely be Spain's third lairgest city, Valencia daesnae lack in interestin activities tae keep ye occupied. Wi less commotion than Madrid an Barcelona, ye hae ruim tae muive around the city athoot it bein owercrowdit bi tourists. Unless ye gang durin festival time that is, fan aire's sic a thrang o tourists that maist locals forhoo their hametoon for a fortnicht. Valencia isnae jist aa about the sun, sea an sand either, it has sae muckle mair tae offer.

Lang ago, a river ran throu the city cawed the 'Túria'. It was kent for causin the city tae fluid, until the Great Fluid o Valencia in 1957. Sic damage was dane tae baith the Valencian fowk an their haudins that it was decidit tae divert the river sae tae nae langer endager the populatit city. Noo, the auld riverbed has been transformed intae a bonnie green space, stretchin mair than five an a hauf mile across the city centre, for aabdy tae mak the best o. Aa ye hiv tae dae tae get the maist o the Gairdens o Túria (Gardens of Túria) is gang for a daunder an tak it aa in. O course, if ye are aifter a thochtie mair taptoo, ye can aye rent oot bikes fae ony o the 275 Valenbisi staunds aa ootower the city (free for the first hauf an oor) or gang for a segway tour o the gairdens.

At the far end o the Gairdens o Túria, ye'll cam across ane o Valencia's maist impressive attractions - the City o Airts an Sciences (City of Arts and Sciences). Inwith it, ye can fin an opera hoose, an outdoor oceanographic park, an IMAX pictur hoose, a planetarium, a laserium, an open air airt museum, an open air nichtclub, gairdens an a three-fluir science museum built tae resemmlle the skeleton o a whale that is the biggest exhibition space in the kintra. Foo coud ye be scunnert wi aa that tae explore?

If the City o Airts an Sciences still isnae eneuch for ye, mak yer wey ower tae the auld toon – 'El Carmen'. Aire, ye'll fin the auld gates tae the city (twa muckle tours), the cathedral, an the city hall, along wi a wheen o dinkie wee bars, restaurants an shops that ye coud wander roon for wiks an still nae rin oot ae new anes tae saample. In December, the auld toon is far ye can fin Valencia's yule markets an attractions, includin even an ice rink for skeetin.

Finally, for the fitba fans, a trip tae Valencia FC's Mestalla stadium is nae tae be forgane. The club plays in 'La Liga' an ye can aften get yer hauns on game tickets for a price that is nae ower dear. Even if ye arnae big intae the game, it might be wirth gaun along jist tae experience the atmosphere. If the Valencians luv onythin then it's fitba an they will sing awa tae themsels even fan they're lossin. A new Mestalla stadium has been in the warks for a puckle o 'ear, but as the sale o the current stadium fell throu, the club daesnae hae eneuch siller tae feenish biggin it jist yet.

Fit tae ate an drink

Fan maist fowk think o Spanish maet, paella nae doot is ane o the first dishes tae spring tae mind. But, fit nae abdy nicht ken is that paella specifically cams fae Valencia. Luckily, aire's a wheen o places aa ower the city far ye can try the dish, made wi the same recipie that it wis made wi mair than a century syne. Traditionally, Valencian paella is made wi kinnen, chicken an deuk. But, if ye think ye are brave eneuch tae risk insultin the locals, ye can aften gang for a different variation o maet an vegetables.

Anither Valencian delicacy is horchata, spellt 'orxata' in the Valencian leid. The milky drink made oot o chufa nuts has a unique taste – like a stramash o sweet an spicy wi creamy thrown in for guid measure. In the auld toon, ye can taste horchata in mony an auld-farrant horchateria. Ye can accompany it wi a 'farton', a lang, sweet kyn o loaf that ye can dip intae yer drink if ye sae please.

Festivals

Gin yer nae ower fussed aboot avoidin the boorach o veesitors, ye coud ettle tae veesit Valencia fan ane o its festivals is gaun on. The biggest ane – 'Las Fallas' fas in Mairch ivery 'ear. 'Las Fallas' is a twa wik lang fest fan ivery neibourhuid maks a grand widden display that is then burnt doon in a bondie on the last nicht. Ivery nicht, ivery neibourhuid hauds a street pairty far ye can dance the nicht awa an anely hiv tae pey a euro or twa for a dram. Dinna let that mak ye think that ye can hae a lie in thou! Ivery mornin, aire is mairchin bands that gang up an doon ilka street in the city tae wauken aabdy up an get the pairty staired fae aicht o'clock! Then, ivery day, at twa in the aifterneen, ye can heid tae the main toon square far they hae a firewark an firecracker display in the daytime! It's cried the 'Mascletà'. The fascination wi fire daesnae stap at that thou. Arguably, the maist spectacular pairt o 'Las Fallas' is the display o squibs that get mair an mair impressive ivery nicht uptae the the 17th o Mairch, kent in the Valencian leid as 'La Nit del Foc' (The Night of Fire). The Gairdens o Túria are aye fu o fowk yon nicht, but it is gey wirth tholin the crouds tae see the squibs licht up the sky ower the palm trees.

Geneva

Kintra: Switzerland

Siller: Swiss Franc

Kent for: Banks an watches

Fit tae dae

Even aifter bidin aire for a puckle o month, it wad likely be a sair fecht tae run oot o things tae dae in Geneva. There is somethin for jist aboot aabdy in the lairgest city in French spikkin Switzerland. Geneva is sae muckle mair than a borin business trip.

It wad be gypit tae veesit Geneva an nae set een on 'Lake Geneva' (kent as 'Lac Léman' in French), seein as the city is built around it. Geneva's main watter relatit landmairk is the 'Jet d'Eau Fountain' fit is exactly as the name suggests – a muckle fountain that shots a constant jet o watter 140m in the air. The 'Jet d'Eau' wis originally biggit, in 1886, tae release pressure fae a nearby hydraulic plant, but it suin became seen as a symbol o strenth, an the city-fowk decidit it coud bide an be pit richt in the centre o the loch. Nae muckle wunner fan it pumps oot 500 litres o watter a second at 200km/h! Veesitors can wak richt up tae the fountain on a fitpath, thou ye nicht get skoosht bi a wee bit o steuch!

The fun that 'Lac Léman' has tae offer daesnae stap at the 'Jet d'Eau' thou. Aabeit Switzerland is a landlockit kintra, ye can still enjey a day at the beach at Geneva's 'Baby-Plage'. Sae-cried for jist bein peerie-wee, the 'Baby-Plage' is a bonnie, pristinely kept, escape richt in the centre o the city. For bairns, aire's swings tae keep them amused an plenty o trees gien shade fae the sun tae keep them safe. For the adults, aire's aften trucks sellin refreshments o different kynes.

For the best views o 'Lac Léman', a trip up 'Mont Salève' is fair reccomendit. Tae reach the mountain ye hiv tae cross ower the border intae France. This can be dane bi car or bi takin a bus fae the city centre. It isnae far at aa fae Geneva intae France, an the locals regularly cross the border for a hantle o reasons. Jist dinna forget yer passport! Ance ye get tae Mont Salève, fit is also kent as the 'Balcony of Geneva', ye hae twa options. Ye can either hike up the hail wey, or ye can tak a cable car up maist o the wey an then climb the rest yersel. Either wey, the views o Geneva an the loch fae the tap will be wirth it!

Fan in Geneva, ye shoud try nae tae miss oot the 'Palais des Nations', ane o the fower major worldwide offices o the United Nations. Veesitors can tak a tour o the Palais des Nations an lairn aboot the history o the buildin along the wey. Jist ootside, ye can see the 39 fit high 'Broken Chair' widden sculpture, intendit tae serve as a reminder o the consequences o land mines an cluster bombs tae politicians an aa ithers fa veesit the city. Anither stunnin sicht is the UN's 'Alley of the Flags'. Comprised o 195 flags in total, the 'Alley of the Flags' is made up bi 193 flags o UN member states an twa flags o UN observer states.

Another speciality o Geneva's is its museums. For lovers o science, a veesit tae CERN ('The European Organisation for Nuclear Research') is a must. Ye can gang on a wakin tour o the centre (inside an oot) that lasts about twa oors as weel as haein an explore o their permanent exhibitions 'Microcosm' an 'Universe of Particles' as weel as ony ither exhibitions that they hae gaun on at the time o yer veesit.

Another museum that micht be o interest tae onybody fa is interested in history, medical science or jist humanitarianism is Geneva's 'Red Cross and Red Crescent Museum'. Ye can spend the day aire takin in the photaes, collections that they hae on show (fit include objects that are evidence o the maist important pynts in the development o the Red Cross organisation), as weel as mair than 10,000 promotional posters fae the late 1800s richt up tae the day.

Fit tae ate an drink

As far as maet gangs, Geneva is the place tae spyle yersel. Cheese is likely gaun tae be high up yer list o fuid tae try in Switzerland, an luckily ye'll hae plenty o chyce. If yer atein oot, try a cheese fondue (a share-sized pot o het meltit cheese wi loaf for dippin) an/or a raclette (vegetables clartit in cheese on a wee grill). Baith cheese dishes are Swiss specialities. Aften, they will be served wi a Swiss, dry fite wine.

It isnae jist the cheese dishes that tak centre stage in Geneva thou, the cheese on its ain is jist as important. Gruyère is up aire as a Swiss favourite, an originally cams fae nae far fae Geneva. Them fa are really keen tae ken mair can actually gang an veesit 'La Maison du Gruyère' (about an oor an a hauf awa fae the city) far ye can watch the cheese bein productit an veesit a cheesy interactive exhibition meant tae appeal tae the five senses. If ye canna get tae a 'fromagerie' or jist dinna hae the time, jist get yersel tae ony supermercat an enjoy a variety o cheese we coud only dream o here in Scotland.

It wadnae be a trip tae Switzerland athoot haein a taste o some Swiss chocolate. The likes o Lindt, Toblerone an Nestlé aa cam fae aire. It micht be a guid idea tae stock up on sic brands if ye are intae them, but fan in Geneva ye micht also want tae try oot the smaaer, aften faimly-run, chocolatiers sic as Favarger, Du Rhône, Auer an Teuscher.

Festivals

Nae strictly in Geneva, but jist across the loch at Montreaux, aire is an annual jazz festival. Montreaux, said tae be the place that inspired Deep Purple's sang 'Smoke on the Water', sees about 250,000 fowk attend the festival in July ilka 'ear. Singers that hiv performed aire ower the 'ears include Aretha Franklin, Marvin Gaye, David Bowie, Prince an Elton John.

Dublin

Kintra: Ireland

Siller: Euro

Kent for: Freenly fowk an guid craic

Fit tae dae

Wi Ireland bein sae close that we nicht hae a brig suin eneuch, Dublin is the the perfect chyce for a lang wikend awa.

The first place in Dublin that ye jist hiv tae see is Trinity College. Trinity College is the anely campus o the 'University of Dublin', Ireland's auldest an maist prestigious varsity, establisht in the late 1500s. The ancient varsity's grunds are stunnin, especially in the spring fan the blossom is oot. It is wirth gaun jist for a wak aroon, ye dinna even hiv tae gang inside tae mak it wirth gaun. Jist outside the varsity biggin is a bronze globe statue caad the 'Sphere Within Sphere'. It was giftit tae the varsity bi its creator, Arnaldo Pomodoro. The twa spheres represent the complexity o the earth an Christianity. Inside, veesitors can pey tae view the 'Book of Kells' in the 'Long Room', Trinity College's iconic leebrary. Be warned thou, ye will mair than likely hiv tae queue for a guid while tae get, in wi it bein ane o Dublin's maist popular attractions.

A five mentie wak awa is 'Ha'penny Bridge', the first fitbrig tae mak it possible for pedestrians tae cross ower the Liffey river, fit separates the twa sides o the city. The brig, sae kent for the price o the toll that ye uised tae hae tae pey tae cross ower, was constructit in 1816. It was the anely pedestrian brig tae connect baith sides o the river in Dublin until the 'Millenium Bridge' was opened in 1999. Arguably, some o the best kent views o the city are the anes o, an leukin oot fae the brig. A wak along the Liffey an ower the 'Ha'penny Bridge' is a must fan in Dublin.

Ireland is kent for its vast mythology an folklore. If this interests ye, the 'Leprechaun Museum' deserves a veesit. Dinna be pit aff by the name, that nicht suggest that it is cheesy an cliché. At the museum, ye will lairn aa kynes o tales aboot leprechauns, but ye'll also get tae ken mair aboot fairies, banshees, an kelpies. The giant's ruim is a braw place tae tak picturs far ye leuk like a tiny wee leprechaun in comparison wi the giant's furniture! The 'Leprechaun Museum' absolutely isnae jist for bairns, but is fun for big an little anes alike.

If yer in the muid for a bit o shoppin, or even a bit o music, heid ower tae Grafton Street. The street, kent as ane o Ireland's busiest, is ane o the dearest in the warld. Anely 12 streets worldwide are dearer fan it cams doon tae the price o rent per square metre. For souvenirs, it's the place. For a keek intae Penneys (Ireland's version o Primark), it's the place. It's also the place tae listen tae buskers fa nicht jist be the next best thing. Airtists sic as Bono, Hozier, Kodaline an the Script hiv even busked aire tae raise money for charity.

Far tae ate an (maistly) drink

Bidin wi the theme o music, it's likely that fan in Dublin ye will want tae soak up the atmosphere o a live band in a waterin hole. Course, the place tae dae this is the Temple Bar area. Aire's a reason why it is ayeweys heavin; sic an ambience is unique tae the district. Aire's nithin else like it in the world. It's a great place tae fin somewey tae ate anaa, wi a wide selection o fuid cultures tae explore. For a dram or twa, or even jist tae tak some pictures, ye canna miss the staundoot (due tae it bein pentit bricht reid) Temple Bar. Nae mair than a haunfae o drinks is reccommended thou, unless yer feelin flush that is. In 2019, the manager o ae pub in Temple Bar had tae defend his reasonin for chairgin €18 for a pint o Guinness.

If ye want tae drink yer mirkie stout an get a lairnin experience at the same time, for less than fit pubs in Temple Bar chairge for a pint, gang tae the 'Guinness Storehouse'. Aire, ye will get tae ken about the ingredients that gang intae the drink, as weel as the brand's history an cultur. Ye can even pey tae get yer ain face on the foam tap o yer pint!

For the whisky luvvers, Dublin has plenty o distilleries tae tour. The Jameson Distillery tour has been rated a traiveller's favourite an has even won multiple awards, delcarin it the world's leadin distillery tour. The Jameson Distillery offers veesitors a chyce o daein a whisky tastin, a whisky cocktail makin lesson an a cask draw experience. Ye'll niver be drouthy in Dublin, that's for shuir!

Porto

Kintra: Portugal

Siller: Euro

Kent for: The sweet wine that shares it's name

Fit tae ate an drink

Normally, ye wad excpet these traivel pieces tae begin wi fit tae dae in sic a place an then muive on tae maet an drink. But, the delicacies that Porto hiv tae offer are jist ower excitin for them nae tae be spoken aboot first. If ye were tae gang tae Porto an spend the hale time jist atein an drinkin, naebody coud blame ye.

Getting the obvious oot o the wey, ye canna nae gang tae Porto athoot hain a taste o the port. The sweet, rich dram isnae productit richt in the city itsel, but cams fae the 'Upper Douro Valley', in the same region but aboot saxty mile awa. The Duoro river, fit uised tae see aa port transported doon it bi 'rabelo' boaties daes rin throu the city thou. The Gaia district, on the sooth side o the river is far ye can fin maist o Porto's port hooses. The port hooses are far mony Scots, Inglis an Irish faimlies fa productit the drink wad bide in the early days o the port trade. Examples o Scots faimlies fa's port hooses ye can gang an veesit include that o the Grahams an the Cockburns. Thou, ye can anely drink in the port hooses throu the day. If it's an aifter-oors tipple that ye are aifter, ye'll hae tae check oot some o Porto's freendly local bars. The traditional anes, far ye maistly see the locals, micht nae be onythin special tae leuk at, but aire is far ye can fin cadgy bar staff offerin ye hearty maet an drink for even mair cantie prices.

If ye are gaun tae be saumplin a guid wheen o the local alcoholic delicacies, ye'll need tae line yer belly wi somethin richt. Luckily, the Portuguese hiv jist the thing, an it is cried a 'francesinha'. The francesinha is a sandwich like ye hiv niver seen ane afore. In atween twa slices o loaf they stuff ham, twa kynes o sausage an steak, afore they clart it aa in meltit cheese an then pour a spiced tamata an beer sauce aa ower the tap. Mair aften than nae, it will cam wi a poke o chips jist tae mak shuir ye are fair fu. A francesinha is a richt treat.

Fit tae dae

Ance yer belly is fu, aire is plenty o weys tae burn aff aa o them calories. Mony o Porto's kirks are stottin maisterpieces o fite an blue ceramic tile – a style cried 'Azulejo'. 'Igreja do Carmo', 'Capela das Almas' an 'Igreja de Santo Ildefonso' are jist a puckle o examples. Ye can wak aboot the city an discover them for yersel, or pey for a guided tour o Porto's bonnie kirks. Either wey, the Azulejo kirks are somethin that ony veesitor tae the city has tae see, religious or nae. For yet anither bonnie buildin, heid tae the 'Palácio de Bolsa'. The palace, built in the 1800s is a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Ance ye hiv hane eneuch o bonnie buildins, awa an tak a keek at the 'Dom Luís I' brig that connects the twa sides o the Duoro river. The brig, biggit oot o iron in the 1800s, is kent tae

be a landmark o the city. For crackin views ower Porto an beyond ye can climb it an cross the river bi fit.

Aifter ye hiv seen the hail city on fit, ye coud then tak ti the air. For €5 per person, tak the Gaia cable car tae get some mair incredible views o the port district. Ye micht even want tae dae it twice – ance throu the day an ance at nicht tae see the city (an the ‘Dom Luís I’ brig) aa lichtit up.

Finally, Portugal is kent for bein a sunny kintra wi het wather, sae aathou ye wad mair likely pick Porto for a city break than a beach ane, ye micht want tae tak a tram fae the centre o the toon oot tae the city’s ‘Matosinhos’ beach. It isnae ower far tae gang if ye jist fancy takin an oor or sae tae stroll the sands but ye micht want tae pack a bag for a fu day o beach fun. Dinna fash if ye forget yer picnic thou. Jist aside the beach is Porto’s main fresh fuid mairket. In ‘Mercado Bom Sucesso’ ye can fin jist aboot onythin that ye’d like tae ate, or ye can try oot the fuidcourt far ye’ll fin a variety o international diets.

Reykjavík

Kintra: Iceland

Siller: Icelandic Króna

Kent for: Fire an ice

Fit tae dae

Jist a twa an a hauf oor flight awa fae Embra, Reykjavík is aften owerluikit bi traivellers. Mebbe acause it is caul, or mebbe jist acause fowk jist think it is affa oot o the wey. Thou mony fowk micht nae ettle tae spend time in Iceland, Reykjavík is a popular stap-ower fan fleein tae the Americas. If yer fleein throu onywye, ye'd be daft nae tae tak at least a day or twa tae see a bit o the land o fire an ice, if nae for tae veesit the 'Blue Lagoon' alane. Fooiver, if ye anely hae a day, or even jist a twa-three oors o layower, ye likely winna be able tae venture oot o the capital city. But, at is aricht. Luckily, aire is plenty in the city tae keep ye busy. An, thou Iceland is kent for bein affa dear, aire's a puckle o weys ye can pass the time aire athoot spendin a fortune.

Yer first stap shoud be the Hallgrímskirkja – the biggest kirk in Iceland at ower 74m high. Situatit at the tap o a hill, nae far fae the toon centre, the Hallgrímskirkja teuk ower 40 'ear tae build an was completit in the mid-1980s. Outside the kirk ye micht be able tae see a bonnie floor display, dependin on the season. Some tourists micht be daein some absurd leukin poses tae mak it leuk like they are touchin the tap o the kirk while takin photaes, a bit like they dae at the Tour o Pisa an the Eiffel Tour. If it is yer kyne o thing, ye can attend a service at the kirk. If nae, it has an observation tour, far ye can get stunnin get views o the city an the mountains roon about.

Reykjavík's ither main landmairk is the Harpa concert hall. The modern buildin, biggit oot o coloured gless can be fun richt at the coast, in an area cried the 'Reykjavík World Trade Centre'. The concert hall is the hame o baith the 'Icelandic Symphony Orchestra' an the 'Icelandic Opera'. If yer lucky, ye coud hae the chunce tae see a show fan yer aire. Aire is also the option for veesitors tae tour the Harpa an see bits o it that are usually aff limits tae the general public, file lairnin about the buildin's architecture at the same time. Ae fun fact is that the concert hall featured in an episode o the show 'Black Mirror' cried 'Crocodile'.

Richt next tae the Harpa, sittin on a pedestal comin oot o the watter, is jist ane o mony examples o Reykjavík's urban airt. 'The Musician' sculpture, depicts the Danish cellist Erling Blöndal Bengtsson. Ye can fin mony mair sculptures an airt installations across Iceland's capital, sic as the weel kent 'Sun voyager' steel sculpture. The sculpture, fit looks oot ower the watter nae far fae the Harpa, an is kent in Icelandic as "Solfarid", resembles a Viking ship. It is an ode tae the sun an is said tae symbolise licht an hope.

Murals an waa airt are popular in Iceland an brichten up mony o Reykjavík's streets. Maist o the murals tae be seen across the capital hiv been authorised collaborations atween 'Iceland Airwaves' (a music festival haud in Reykjavík ilka November) an 'Urban Nation' (a German

contemporar airt initiative). The twa groups hiv pit intae motion the 'Wall Poetry' project, far musicians wark wi street airtists. The designs o the murals are based aff o sangs, quotes, poems an beuks that hiv had an influence on the wark o the musicians takin pairt. A curn o local street airtists, sic as Sara Riel, an illustrator an graphic designer, hiv creatit murals independently aroon the city centre anaa. For a fun, free day in Reykjavík aa ye hiv tae dae is gang a street airt hunt.

Laistly, if ye are a beuk lover then Reykjavík is yer city. In 2011, it was gien the prestigious title o 'UNESCO City of Literature'. An, it is nae muckle wunner fan 1/10 Icelandic citizens publish their ain beuk in their lifetime. The kintra's influence on Toliken's tales isnae tae be snuffed at either. Wi this in mind, onybody fa likes tae read shoud hae a browse o at least a puckle o beukstores fan in Iceland. Reyjkavik has mony tae choose fae; fae the unorganised chaos o Bókin tae the immense Mál Og Menning. Maist o Reykjavík's beukstores, sic as IDA Zimsen, hae cosy cafés far ye can curl up in a baa an enjey yer new purchase wi a het drink if yer needin an escape fae the caul. Aire's a wheen o beuk festivals ootthrou the 'ear ina, sic as the 'Iceland International Festival of Children's Literature' fit is haud twice a 'ear, the "Reykjavik International Literary Festival' an the 'Reykjavík Reads Festival'.

Brussels

Kintra: Belgium

Siller: Euro

Kent for: Bein the HQ o the EU

Fit tae dae

Brussels nicht nae be the first city that springs tae mind fan pickin far tae gang on yer city break. Fooiver, 'at daesnae mak it ony less spectacular. Luvers o fuid, history an architecture will nae leave Belgium's capital disappynit.

The 'Grand Place', Brussels' main square, is nestlt awa in the city centre. Ance ye fin it, ye will realise jist foo immensely stunnin it is. Tourists can enjoy the style o the guild hooses, the 'City Hall' an the 'Maison du Roi' at the 'UNESCO World Heritage Site'. Aften, festivals an shows o licht an soond are haud at the 'Grand Place'. Twa times a 'ear the square is hame tae a colourfu an intricate flouer carpet that runs richt throu it.

A far mair peerie, but nae less iconic symbol o Belgium's capital city is 'Manneken-Pis', a smaa fountain in the shape o a loonie urinatin, nae mair than the height o twa rulers. Naebody really kens fa the bairn was, thou aire's plenty o theories. Initially, in the early 1600s, the statue o the wee lad was uised tae distribute drinkin watter. Fooiver, it was aifter survivin the 'Bombardment of Brussels', the maist devistatin event in the city's history, that he really staired tae get weel-kent. The fountain was replicatit in 1965, an the original pit intae the 'Brussels City Museum'. The replica still sits in the original spot, in a neuk, jist a puckle menties wak fae the 'Grand Place'. The city employs a body fas job it is tae dress the 'Manneken-Pis'. Praisently, the fountain's wardrobe has mair than a thousand rig-oots in it, giftit fae aa ower the warld.

It wad be near impossible tae spik aboot Brussels athoot mindin that it is far ye'll fin the heidquarters o the European Union an indeed the European parliament. Veeditors can lairn aa aboot the EU, its laws an foo the parliament warks, for free, on a 90 menit tour at the 'Parlamentarium'. Mind an tak yer ID thou, naebody is allowed tae enter the European Parliament buildin athoot showin a passport or ID caird. Onybody interestit in politics or current affairs wad be daft nae tae veesit fan in Brussels.

The 'Atomium' is a slichtly different attraction tae the historical an political landmairks discussed sae far. It is, as the name suggests, a representation o an atom. An iron crystal blawn up 165 billion times, tae be exact. Biggit for the first post-World War 2 World Expo, in 1958, the 'Atomium' continues tae be an affa popular tourist spot. It is an emblem o faith in the pouer o science. Veeditors can wak throu the tubes an spheres that mak up the structure, gien them views oot ower the city an beyond fae 92m abuin the grund. If ye fancy a treat, ye can even beuk a meal at 95m in the sky in the Atomium's restaurant.

Comic beuk fans will ken that Belgium is the the hame kintra o Tintin, the warld traiveller. The cartoon series, publisht fae 1929 tae 1976 was ane o the maist popular o the 20th century in Europe, an continues tae be a favourite o mony fowk the day. Opportunities tae see an lairn about Tintin are happily nae few an far atween in Brussels. If ye wad like tae save time or the scutter o findin Tintin relatit locations on yer ain, fit why nae tak a Tintin wakin tour? Places that inspired the comics can be fun aa ower the city, sic as the 'Hotel Metropole', 'Théâtre Des Galeries' an the 'Royal Palace of Brussels'. The 'Comics Art Museum' is the place tae gang if ye'd like tae see some Tintin artifacts or buy some souvenirs. For even mair shoppin, aire's the 'Tintin Shop'. Laistly, for some free Tintin fun, keep an ee oot for the murals scattered across the city.

Fit tae ate

Fitiver ye dae, dinna gang tae Brussels on a diet. Belgian maet consists o aa the fine, guilty pleasures that mak life delicious.

Mak sure, fan in Brussels tae get yer fu o chips or 'frites' as they get caad. It winna be haird considerin that aire's a chip shop on jist about ilka corner o the city. It is argued that 'french fries' arnae actaually French at aa, but are Belgian. The maist popular tappin in Belgium is mayonnaise, but ye winna be short o chyces fan it cams tae fit tae hae wi yer chips. Tae wash doon yer chips, ye micht like a beer. An, far better is aire tae saumple a belgian beer than Brussels?

Brussels is a paradise for fowk wi a sweet tuith. Foo coud ye gang tae Brussels an nae hae at least a Belgian waffle or ten?! Get yersel tae a waffle staund an stuff yer face wi the doughy, crispy guidness. Muckle like wi their chips, their waffles are aa about the tappins. Sugar? Fruit? Cream? Chocolate spread? Tak yer pick. 'The Waffle Factory', a belgian waffle chain, even has savory waffle options sic as maet, cheese an vegetables.

Belgian chocolate is kent for bein amang the best in the warld. It maks up a great pairt o the kintra's economy an traditional cultur. Locations sic as the 'Galerie de la Reine', a picturesque 19th century shoppin arcade an the Sablon district are the best places tae stairt yer chocolate tastin journey. Mind an stock up plenty tae tak hame wi ye an aa!

Oslo

Kintra: Norway

Siller: Norwegian Krone

Kent for: Vikings, fjords an snaa

Jist a hop, skip an a jump awa fae Scotland, or aboot an oor an a hauf on a plane if yer bein pernicketie, Norway's capital city micht nae be kent for bein ane o the cheapest places on earth (ye'll pey throu the nose for a pint), but dinna let 'at pit ye aff. It's a great place for onybody that wants tae lairn mair aboot the warld aroon them throu veesitin museums, an has plenty free attractions tae enjoy if yer feart o Norway's reputation for bein dear.

Museums

The Norwegians div luve their museums. Them leukin tae get their fu o history will likely niver get fed up in Oslo.

For tae see Norwegian airtist Munch's pentin 'The Scream', ye maun gang tae Oslo's 'Nasjonalgalleriet'. If ye jist canna get eneuch o Edvard Munch an the national gallery daesnae suffice, the 'Munchmuseet' is a museum dedicatit tae the airtist, wi even mair o his wark on show. If yer siccen a swatch o some sonsie airt but dinna want tae gie ower the siller, Oslo has a when o free galleries tae explore. 'Galleri Haaken', wi its mixtur o warks bi Norwegian an international airtists has free entry, an sae daes the contemporary galleries 'Kunstnerforbundet' an 'Galleri Heer'.

If ye are interestit in the WW2 era, the 'Norwegian Resistance Museum', locatit in an auld coastal fortress, tells the story o the pairt that Norwegians played in the war an foo the Germans occupied the Scandinavian kintra for five 'ear.

The 'Vikingskiphuset' or 'Viking Ship Museum' hauds even mair history lessons, this time ye'll hae tae cast yer mynd a wee bittie further back in time thou. It claims tae be the place far veesitors can see the warld's best preserved Viking ships up close. On show at the museum are three Viking ships, fit were aa uised oot at sea afore eventually bein uised for nordic buirial rituals.

Aire's mony mair museums in Oslo tae be discovered, but the last ane tae be mentionet in this airticle is the the 'Nobel Peace Center' or 'Nobels Fredssenter' in Norwegian. Here, ye can tak a guided tour or uise an audio guide tae lairn aboot foo tae earn a Nobel Peace Prize, ane o the five Nobel Prizes that despite bein establisht bi the Swedish inventor, Alfred Nobel, is owerseen in Norway. Ye can also get tae ken the stories o Nobel Peace Prize winners past an present an veesit an iverchyngin exhibition on different topical issues. On Fridays, a fite dove symbolisin peace is released at the centre, along wi the wik's guid news.

Free things tae dae

It has already been said that airt's a curn o free airt galleries in Oslo, but fit else is airt ye ask? Weel, muckle like museums, Oslo isnae lackin in bonnie parks . The 'Botanical Garden', 'Frognerparken' an 'Slottsparken' are aa totally free tae enter.

The first ane is exactly fit it says on the tin – a botanical gairden wi aroond 1800 different kynes o plants. Twa hooses, the 'Palm House' an the 'Victoria House' (baith opened in the late 1800s) are far ye can fin the exotic plants fae ither airts.

Seicontly, the 'Frognerparken' is hame tae the 'Vigeland Installation', a permanent collection o sculpturs bi Gustave Vigeland fae the 1920s, 30s an 40s. The 212 bronze an granite sculpturs that live in 'Frognerparken' are sae weel kent in Norway that the park is aften caad the 'Vigeland Park'. The maist popular anes include a wee loonie fa is fumin an a monolith fit is surroounded bi 36 ither statues in the shape o different humans tae represent the circle o life.

Finally, the 'Slottsparken', kent in Inglis as the 'Palace Park' maks up the grunds o the 'Royal Palace'. It was ane o the city's first public parks fan it opened in the 1840s. It is comprised o pasturs, ponds an widdies aplenty. Aa three mak the perfect chyce for a lazy dauder on a fine day. If these still arnae eneuch, Oslo has plenty mair green spaces tae keep yer leggies an yer mind happy.

Camin awa fae the parks, airt's some ither pairts o Oslo that ye can explore athoot spendin a poun (or a krone). These include some historical buildins o importance, sic as the the Norwegian Parliament, caad the 'Storting' an the 'Royal Palace', far King Harald V an Queen Sonja bide. At 1.30 ivery day ye can watch the chyngin o the gairds tae.

Yet anither free, cultural activity is tae hae a winner up the cantie 'Oslo Opera House'. Designed tae mirror Norway's natural beauty, the opera hoose offers a place for fowk tae climb up on tap o a ruif and then hae a seat. Veesitors are asked tae tak a file tae tak in the views. Tae ae side ye'll see the city, an tae the ither side is the fjords, an ahin ye, ye'll see hills an mountains. Ance ye've been on tap o the buildin, gang inside an get lost among the rare architecture designed bi aa different airtists. O course, if ye want tae see an opera or the ballet, ye'll hiv tae pey for a ticket. But, airt's plenty o weys tae enjoy the 'Oslo Opera House' athoot peyin for onythin.

The Loire Valley

Kintra: France

Siller: Euro

Kent for: Wine an castles

Fit tae dae

For traivellers, the Loire Valley is a wunnderland. Tae get richt roon the Loire Valley an see aathin ye want, ye micht need mair than a puckle o days (or months). As the 'UNESCO World Heritage Site' is pretty spread oot, ye micht want tae rent a car file yer aire. If drivin on the ither side o the road gies ye the fear, aire's ither options. Ilka 'ear, local an international veesitors embark on waks an bike rides along the river Loire, stappin aff at the toons an villages along the wey. Mony fowk will traivel tae France for the maet an wine alane, but aire's sae mukle mair tae dae than ate an drink. Some pynts o interest wirth swingin bi are as follaes:

Château de Chenonceau

The Loire Valley is hame tae near fifty beautifu castles. The 'Château de Chenonceau' is richt up aire on the list o ains tae veesit, acause it will remind ye o somethin oot o a fairytale storybeuk. An, that is nae coincidence. Chenonceau was ane o the castles that inspired Walt Disney fan he was creatin Cinderella's castle. Built in the 1500s, the castle actually spans ower the Cher (a burn that flows intae the Loire). Fit maks Chenonceau staun oot is its history o bein maistly ained bi weemen. In the 1700s, it was ained bi Louise Dupin, fa turned intae a literary salon far ye wad fin some o the maist weel-kent French philosophers o the 'Age of Enlightenment'. Chenonceau is wirth veesitin for the castle alane, but the gairdens are nae less impressive.

Château de Chambord

Anither castle wirth poppin in past, especially for Disney luvers, is the 'Château de Chambord'. It is the biggest castle in the Loire Valley wi ower 400 ruims an 77 stairs. Chambord was uised bi Walt Disney as inspiration for the Beast's castle in 'Beauty and the Beast'. The fruity liqueur, fit shares the same name was supposedly introductit tae King Louis XIV at the renaissance castle in the 1600s.

Amboise

The chairmin wee toon o Amboise is, ance again, like somethin oot o a storybeuk. The toon's historic centre still hauds ontae a medieval feel. Aire, ye can sit ootside o wee widden cafés an restaurants an jist soak it aa up. Owerleukin ye, will be the toon's royal château.

A five mentie wak awa is the 'Château de Clos Lucé' (aye, anither castle – they hiv got jist about 50 mind). Clos Lucé, wi its bonnie reid an fite brick, is the place far Leonardo da Vinci

bade for the last puckle o 'ears o his life. Noo, mony o the ruims are set up as they wad o been fan Leonardo lived an deet aire in the early 1500s, includin the anes he uised as his warkshops. As is the case wi maist French châteaux, the gairdens are jist as stottin as the buildin itsel. Ye can get lost in the green grunds aroon Clos Lucé, explorin da Vinci's projects as ye gang. If ye leuk haired eneuch, ye micht cam across a gallery fu o some o his warks.

If ye div decide tae drive an are needin somewey tae base yersel, Amboise is a common chyce.

Blois

As ane o the lairger toons in the Loire Valley, wi great transport links, Blois is often uised as a stairtin or feenishin pynt for them fa choose tae wak or bike their wey roon the area. For the same reason, it is popular amang them fa decide tae dae it bi car an aa.

Course, the 'Château Royal de Blois' is steepit in History, jist like the rest. Up on the hillside, it leuks ower the watter that rins throu the city. It was aire that, in 1492, Joan of Arc made her base durin the siege of Orléans, the first major French victory agin the Inglis durin the Hundred Year' War. The fowk o Blois are gey proud o this fact, an plaques an statues hiv been pit up tae mind on it. The castle was ance hame tae sivven French kings an ten queens. Fae April tae November the castle pits on a licht show ivery evenin, tellin the story o Blois.

Jist across fae the château is the 'Maison de la Magie', a magic museum dedicatit tae the memory o Robert Houdin. Ivery hauf an oor, sax golden dragon heids will poke oot o the buildin's windaes an pit on a wee show. The museum is the anely ane in Europe that also doubles as a permanent performin airts venue.

The stunnin 'Escalier Denis Paplin' or Denis Paplin stairs, in the toon centre, are a sicht nae tae be missed. Wi 120 steps, the stairs connect the upper an lower pairts o the toon. Fae the tap, ye can see for up tae sax miles roon aboot. But, it is actually fae the bottom o the steps that ye will get the best view. Eicht 'ear syne, the stairs, dedicatit tae an inventor fae Blois, staired tae be decoratit wi muckle, colourfu airt relatin tae current events at the time. Leukin up fae the bottom o the stairs in recent 'ears, veesitors hiv been able tae see a recreatit Mona Lisa (tae celebrate the 500th anniversary o Leonardo da Vinci's death in 2019), a funky spiral pattern (tae celebrate the 20th anniversary o the 'Maison de la Magie' in 2018) an ither colourfu pintins.