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When you crest a rolling hill in Scotland and first glimpse a castle shrouded in a swirling mist, your eyes quiver and your heart pounds like a war drum. From a distance the structure appears almost feeble, like an old king asleep in his throne. But once you approach the stone beast and stand next to the immense walls, then the castle become grandiose and barbaric, a glorious testament the Scotland's turbulent history and the reign of power it fortified throughout the sprawling countryside. Castles have long been associated with romance and excitement, and the giant green fields of Scotland are full of them.

From the Highlands to Dumfries and Galloway, they range from quixotic ruins from the 12th-century, to fine stately homes designed by great 18th-century architects, complete with opulent gardens and turrets reaching out of fairytales and into the skies. For king and commoner alike, the best way to experience the splendor of Scotland's castles is to be guided by a trusted travel agent. Travel agents know the secrets to getting you over the moat and past the guards. They also know a thing or two about organizing an incredible trip around this beautiful country for you to delve into the land, enjoy the best of Scotland and storm the castles of your choice.

Cawdor Castle is often stormed by fans of Shakespeare, for the mythic fortress is forever linked to the name Macbeth, even though the real Macbeth lived about 350 years before the first stone was arranged on these grounds. That does not mean, however, that the castle is any less impressive.

Located 12 miles east of Inverness in the eastern heart of the Highlands, Cawdor dates from the late 14th century and originally was built as a private fortress. Once you cross the drawbridge, you'll find a very intimate atmosphere full of antique furniture, fine portraits and tapestries, all arranged to please the Cawdor family still residing there today. The castle is fortunate to have three gardens, including the Walled Garden and its intricate holly maze. Don't worry if you get lost inside the maze, your travel agent can get you out, so keep their telephone number handy.



Craigievar Castle
Photo: Scottish Viewpoint



Edinburgh Castle
Photo: Scottish Viewpoint

Edinburgh Castle is the most visited monument in Scotland, and with good reason. Standing tall and parental high above the city of Edinburgh on a wide expanse of volcanic rock, the castle dominates the sprawling capital city beneath it. Battered, besieged, rebuilt and extended over the past 900 years, the castle endearingly became the preeminent icon of Scottish loyalty.

From the battlements of the castle you'll get a dazzling, panoramic view over the city, while inside the walls is a remarkable fortress packed with history. Uncover the Scottish Crown Jewels and the famous Stone of Destiny—an ordinary block of sandstone that was fought over for centuries. While viewing the Stone, remember to cover your ears around one o'clock, for that's when a cannon fires daily to provide the exact time for the city.

Far away from the city lights, Eilean Donan Castle in the middle of serene Loch Duich is one of the most photogenic of all Scottish castles and, when illuminated at night, is one of the most stunning images in the world. The first walls were erected originally between the 6th and 7th centuries, yet the current castle wasn't built until 1932. Legend has it that the owner had a dream about how the castle originally looked and spent 20 years rebuilding it. After he finished, plans were found which confirmed the accuracy of the owner's dream.

Stirling Castle in central Scotland is another that appears as if conceived from a dream. Overlooking two of the country's most historic battlefields, Stirling Bridge and Bannockburn, the castle's location rivals even Edinburgh Castle's for sheer magnificence as it sits high on volcanic rock, visible for many miles in every direction.

Historically significant and visibly astonishing, the castles of Scotland are landmarks of an incredible vacation just waiting to happen. How many can you see in one trip? That's a question your travel agent can easily answer. Travel agents can plan an unbeatable tour of Scotland, using their connections and experience to fulfill your grandest expectations.

Start planning your photographic attack on the castles of Scotland. The drawbridge is open.

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