



## THIS WEEK'S DESTINATIONS

### 1 FAROE ISLANDS

The wonders of the Faroe Islands, where the weather decides all

### 2 EDINBURGH

For capital residents, Melville Castle combines class with convenience

### 3 ITALY

Spend a weekend in Turin, the Italian city where history meets style

### PLUS BARGAIN BREAKS



San Lorenzo church, Turin

PHOTOGRAPHS: ALAMY



Fishing boats in Klaksvik harbour

# The Land of Maybe

With its self-reliant people, natural beauty and stunning cuisine, the Faroe Islands entrance **Simone Abram**

I'm sure I can hear the sound of the sea below, and feel a gentle onshore breeze whispering up through the mist enveloping us, but Stan is adamant. "No, that's just a mountain stream," he says, "the cliffs are round to the right, and the lighthouse is a little further on." But I'm not taking any chances: walking on a few paces I see the land fall away abruptly through the mist into the sea far below. "That's definitely a cliff," I call out, turning

to see Stan already running away. For a man who's afraid of cliffs, searching for a lighthouse in the mist may not be the wisest idea, but at almost 300m above sea level, the red and white Kallur lighthouse on the Faroe island of Kalsoy is renowned for its spectacular views – or so the islanders say.

With up to 200 days of rain and mist a year, it's not entirely in jest that they call this the Land of Maybe – everything depends on the weather.

I'd heard from Norwegian friends about the Faroes' ever-changing light and spectacular cliffs and fjords, so I was excited to see for myself what lies behind news headlines of fishing disputes and football matches. The 18 Faroe Islands form an autonomous region of Denmark, halfway between

Norway and Iceland in the North Atlantic, with their own parliament and language. While they use Danish currency, they are not members of the EU, which for me meant I could buy local wool and aquavit duty free.

The Faroes are home to about 48,500 people, although one island, Stora Dimun, has just one solitary family – and a schoolteacher who visits when weather permits. Perhaps surprisingly, the Faroese population is growing, and young people who travel to Copenhagen to study often return within a few years, bringing the latest in design hotels, fine food and fashion – and exporting textiles such as that famous star-patterned Sarah Lund jumper the other way, to Copenhagen and beyond.

At the small town of Klaksvik, tucked astride the long harbour

on the northern island of Borðoy, it's just a short walk up the hill to the tiny shed that serves as the helipad station, equipped with a coffee percolator and tiny box of surprisingly tasty liquorice-topped macarons.

This must be the cheapest helicopter ride in the world, just ten pounds to swing from Klaksvik down the fjord past Borðoy's dramatic cliffs to the lush green island of Svinoy. Waiting there is my guide, Marius á Geilini, who cuts a fine figure with his woolly blond hair and his rugged hand-knitted Faroese jumper in the natural russet browns and creams of the hardy sheep who roam the hills.

Marius's collie, Taf, is busy rounding up a stubborn ram intent on striking out along Svinoy's only road, while Marius leans on the intricately carved tall walking stick made by his grandfather, and gently talks me into the rhythms of the island.

"The currents here mean that nothing rots," Marius explains, showing me one of the family's well-preserved drying huts that nestles into the grassy hillside. Its gable of massive rocks and walls of timber slats are spaced just far enough apart to ensure a constant breeze through the lamb that hangs here through the winter months.

"It's our natural refrigerator," says Marius. Back at Marius's house, his mother Edna has prepared a feast of Faroese delights. She has set out three types of dried lamb plus lamb sausage, tenderloin wrapped with herbs, and boiled lamb, all served on traditional barley bread, and a fascinating fish soup, a rich concoction of cod, tomatoes, peaches and cream – a veritable Faroes fish melba. An irresistible dessert includes the ubiquitous island rhubarb, topped by a crunchy sponge.

Dried lamb also features on the tasting menu of Koks restaurant (that's 'chefs' in Faroese) back in the capital, Torshavn, as an opaque wafer reduced from lamb stock that melts on the tongue in an intense burst of flavour. Michelin reviewers will not travel to such a tiny destination, so young chefs Poul Andrias Ziska and Áki Herálvsson can concentrate on producing



Grass roofs on farmhouses in Kirkjubøur help the community blend into the landscape

succulent new dishes from local produce.

When they're not in the kitchen, they are out scouring the hills and beaches for wild angelica to chop over slow-roasted beetroot, or a particular Faroese feathery black seaweed that dries to a distinctly trufflish flavour served over tiny scallops in a bowl of sea-smoothed pebbles. After a few courses, each paired with its own wine, the sleek dining room becomes so relaxed that various other diners amble over to say hello and make chummy conversation, Nordic coolness giving way to warmth and a welcoming curiosity.

After a full evening of enjoying New Nordic Cuisine, the mist wasn't going to stop me walking it off the next day. Over the island of Streymoy, the low cloud isn't so dense that you would miss a lighthouse, and the path is easy to follow. On the way down into the village of Kirkjubøur, Faroese curly-horned sheep pose heroically in front of turf-roofed houses tucked romantically into the curtain of cliffs.

The Faroes may not be in the EU, but EU rules still apply to trade with Europe. On his farm at Kirkjubøur, Jóannes Patursson keeps sheep and a few Highland cattle, but he can export none without an expensive veterinary certificate. There doesn't seem to be any shortage of local customers for his produce, however, with visitors coming to the historic farmhouse for dinners and parties, including dignitaries such as a Danish Minister for trade and industry. The day she came, it rained so hard she couldn't get out of the car, and had to drive around the village again and run in beneath an umbrella. "It must have been a message," Jóannes tells me wryly.

Jóannes has put on his Faroese Sunday suit – black woollen breeches and embroidered black waistcoat – to show me around his 12th-century timber house.

It was brought over piece by piece from Norway for the Faroese bishop and is one of the oldest inhabited wooden houses in the world. It is still the Patursson family home, and the central hall is open to visitors in the summer.

Old whaling spears lean against the walls, and a closer look at the stone busts on the wall reveal the head of Sverre, the young priest born in 1151 who grew up here, was ordained and then left the islands to claim the throne of Norway. King Sverre's Swedish queen bore daughters, so it was the son from

## Mist wasn't going to stop me walking off my meal

his first marriage to a Faroese wife who inherited his crown when he died. "So we claim it was the Faroese people who ruled the kingdom of Norway," Jóannes tells me, surveying his own kingdom of intricately carved wood and stone. The ruined cathedral next door stands as a reminder of how central these islands were in the Viking world. On a map of Europe, The Faroes might look like tiny specks in the sea, but at close range they reveal their glories – even through a luminous North Atlantic mist.

*Flights from Stansted to Vagar with Atlantic Airways (www.atlantic.fo) start from £210 return, twice a week from early June to late August. Inntravel (01654 617001, www.inntravel.co.uk) offer self-guided two-centre walking tours. Koks offer fine dining at Hotel Føroyar Torshavn (www.koks.fo/en) from around £65 per head. To visit the farm at Kirkjubøur contact www.facebook.com/roykstovan; see www.visitfaroeislands.com for more.*



# Marvellous

On the outskirts of Edinburgh, Melville Castle offers a magical escape from city living, finds **Colin Leslie**

**S**itting in a car grumbling about the traffic gridlock on Sheriffhall roundabout one minute, marvelling at the majesty of Melville Castle the next. It's true what they say, some castles really do have magical properties.

Taking a trip to a location on the periphery of the city where you live, work and spend way too much of your time can stir arguments

about whether visiting somewhere so close to home can truly qualify as a "break". But booking a stay at Melville Castle – now a 32-bedroom hotel – made us feel like we could have been happily holidaying hundreds of miles away rather than a hop, skip and jump from Edinburgh.

I'd been to Melville Castle in the past as a wedding guest and had fond, if rather faded, memories of

## BARGAIN BREAKS The best deals

### STAR GAZING ON COLL

Coll and The Cosmos is a new stargazing weekend break, from 18-20 October, which makes the most of the dark skies of this Inner Hebrides island. Alongside various lectures, using binoculars, telescopes and a digital indoor planetarium, visitors can take a journey through the solar system. The two-day course, running over Saturday and Sunday, plus two nights' accommodation at Coll Bunkhouse, costs £90. Meals and transport are extra. Call 01879 230217 or see [www.collbunkhouse.co.uk](http://www.collbunkhouse.co.uk)

### GREECE IS THE WORD

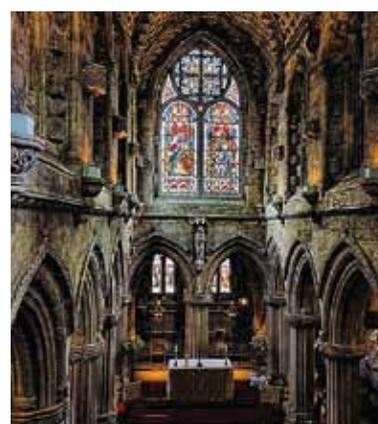
EasyJet Holidays is offering seven nights at Crete's four star Saradari Hotel, Hersonissos, on a B&B basis from £293pp, based on two sharing, including flights from Edinburgh on 7 October. Call 0843 104 1000 or see [www.easyjet.com/holidays](http://www.easyjet.com/holidays)

### WALKING TALL

Visit Ilington Country House Hotel on 3 October for a two-night Nordic walking break around Dartmoor. The trip includes accommodation, meals, including a packed lunch, and two Nordic walks led by an instructor. From £250pp based on two sharing a room. Call 01364 661452 or see [www.ilington.co.uk](http://www.ilington.co.uk)



Clockwise from main: the exterior of Melville Castle; the brasserie restaurant; a four-poster in a bedroom; nearby attraction Rosslyn Chapel



# Melville

the place. Returning to the grand pile, complete with turrets – easy to find from the Edinburgh bypass – swiftly refreshed my memories of what is a hidden, historic treasure. I say hidden because even by car, a long winding driveway flanked by woodland heightens the anticipation of what lies ahead. I say historic, because this used to be Mary, Queen of Scots' old stomping ground.

Mary was by no means the only monarch to reside or spend quality time at the Melville estate in its rich history, but her connection can be palpably traced back to the 1560s. On one of her visits, her close companion David Rizzio planted a

tree as a token of his love for her – a Spanish chestnut which survives near the stable block – while Mary herself responded by planting a row of trees along the drive which are also alive and swaying in the breeze today.

As history shows, both Mary and Rizzio met with grisly ends, but the Melville estate has evolved and flourished in those 450-plus years. The handsome castle that dominates the landscape today was not around in Mary's day, it was subsequently designed by the renowned architect William Playfair in 1791. It had many ups and downs before it was painstakingly restored and revived

by the Hay family, who continue to be responsible for its success and preservation to this day.

We were given the warmest of welcomes and shown to a comfortable and spacious room, framed by a four-poster bed, and gazing out at the tranquillity and beauty of the grounds, it was impossible to fathom that the chaos of the city bypass was anywhere near this haven.

The brasserie restaurant and cellar bar at Melville Castle had a pleasant, relaxed air about it, and after ordering from an impressively varied menu we were served meals rich in local produce. We found the staff attentive, friendly and the all-round cheery atmosphere made it an easy place to unwind. While the hotel has a luxury feel to it, there is no unnecessary snobbery, and guests are allowed to have fun and to be themselves. The owners have also

succeeded in modernising certain aspects of the hotel without eroding any of its historic character.

Our room had all mod cons and offered a soothing view of the Midlothian countryside that begins where Edinburgh ends.

Adjacent to the castle, a large marquee pavilion provides an idyllic setting for any wedding or function, and the expansive grounds they sit in are perfect for a stroll. For the adventurous, the hotel also offers to facilitate pursuits such as clay pigeon shooting, golf, horse riding and falconry, but we didn't have to spread our wings too far on this occasion.

Whether you are from Edinburgh or further afield, the castle is a wonderful base for local attractions such as Edinburgh Butterfly and Insect World, country walks and parks in the Dalkeith area, and the beautiful Rosslyn Chapel.

Try as I may, words don't really do Melville Castle justice, but any picture of this king among castles certainly does.

*From Edinburgh City Bypass at Sheriffhall roundabout take the A7 towards Galashiels. At the next roundabout turn left onto Gilmerton Road (B6392 towards Jedburgh). The entrance gates to Melville Castle are 200 metres ahead on the right-hand side. Classic bedrooms range from between £129 and £159 per night B&B, but check website for offers; [www.melvillecastle.com](http://www.melvillecastle.com)*

## 48 HOURS IN Turin

**FRIDAY, 7PM** In fashion-conscious Turin, you need an edgy place to stay. The Hotel Boston is just steps from the station and rooms are pure designer. A double room costs from around €70 per night (Via Massena 70; tel: 0039 011 500 539, [www.bostontorino.it](http://www.bostontorino.it))

**8PM** Call a cab to Del Cambio (Piazza Carignano 2; tel: 0039 011 546 690, [www.delcambio.it](http://www.delcambio.it)) and sit down for a romantic dinner fit for Casanova himself (he used to dine here). Founded in 1757, this is the daddy of Torinese dining with antipasti to die for and a blood-red wine list. Budget at least €50 a head.

**SATURDAY, 9AM** (or earlier if you can bear it) Rummage through the Balon flea market, in the streets around Borgo Dora, behind Piazza della Repubblica.

**10AM** Visit Turin Cathedral. You won't be able to see the original Turin Shroud until 2025, when the next showing is due, but you can see a replica and the chapel in which the original is kept.

**11AM** Explore the gilded halls of the Palazzo Reale and the magnificently lethal weaponry on display at the Armeria Reale.

**1PM** Lunch in the sun at Caffè Vittorio Veneto (on Piazza Vittorio Veneto) won't break the bank (€10 a head). Fab open sandwiches, roast vegetables and more.

**3PM** Go window shopping. The Turinese love cuts and fabrics that they think are

quintessentially Inglese but couldn't be more Italian. Check out Sir Wilson on Piazza Carlo Felice for tweeds and tartans in startling colours.

**7:30PM** Dressed to the nines, head for the Teatro Regio Torino and a night at the opera ([www.teatroregio.torino.it](http://www.teatroregio.torino.it); tickets from €25-€200).

**SUNDAY, 11AM** Take the transparent lift to the top of the Mole Antonelliana. Completed in 1897, the 550ft steel and glass tower is a triumph of 19th-century engineering.

**12:30PM** Eat a lazy lunch at Sotto la Mole (Via Montebello, 9; tel: 390118179398, [sottolamole.eu](http://sottolamole.eu)),

The Basilica di Superga, below



which serves antipasti and lovely regional dishes. Expect to pay €30-€50 each.

**3PM** Ride the Sassi-Superga tramway to the Baroque Basilica di Superga, more than 2,112ft above sea level, for a great view of the city.

**6PM** Head for the station and your train back to Milan.

**ROBIN GAULDIE**

*For around £82 one way, Easyjet ([www.easyjet.com](http://www.easyjet.com)) flies from Edinburgh to Milan, which is an hour from Turin by train ([www.italiarail.com/frecciarossa](http://www.italiarail.com/frecciarossa)); the 48-hour Torino Card includes travel on the TurismoBus and admission to the Royal Palaces and museums.*