

As much as we love cities, we also love escaping to the countryside when overseas. My cousin lives a few hours north of Edinburgh on a farm, so that was the perfect way to get a rural experience and be spoilt with some amazing Scottish hospitality.

The original plan had been to do this entire trip on public transport, but the trains north were really expensive and it didn't sound like they were that reliable over the Christmas break. So we hired a car instead, and Jo kindly dropped us at the pick up point. We are finding the UK more bureaucratic than any other country, and the rental car experience was no different. The booking confirmation made no mention of needing a passport to rent the car, but that was the case. We've rented cars all over the world with just a driver's licence and a credit card, but that wasn't enough here. We've opened bank accounts with scans of our passport, but that wasn't enough here. Fortunately Andy had taken his passport, I'd left the others at Jo's place as I thought they would be safer there. Nothing we tried would convince this company to add me on as a driver without a paper passport. The most annoying thing was they kept saying it was the law that all non-EEC foreign drivers had to carry their passport at all times when driving in the UK. We knew that was a load of rubbish, and no matter how much I googled there was absolutely nothing to back that up. In the end we had two options - drive back to get my passport or just have Andy drive. We went for the latter rather than waste another hour. On the bright side, the car was pretty nice and we were soon on our way across the new Forth Bridge. The locals are very proud of their bridges and the new one is actually pretty impressive.



New Forth Road Bridge

The advantage of going by car was we could explore a little on the way. I'd found a neat ruined castle on the route north and was hoping for a nice day to see it. We left Edinburgh in drizzle but it cleared really quickly. We stopped in a wee village called St Cyrus for a typical Scottish lunch. Baked potatoes, toasties and sausage rolls. Not what we think of as sausage roll though - a Scottish roll (think bap) with a square patty made of sausage meat.



Dunottar Castle was just up the road, in a really impressive setting. We didn't bother paying to go in as the best views were from the outside. There were lots of walking tracks to various viewpoints, so it was the perfect place to get some fresh air and exercise mid-journey. The UK is pretty obsessed with health and safety but not around this castle, some of the cliff paths were too scary for us! From there it was straight to the farm, arriving just as it was getting dark. It was lovely to see Malcolm and Marilynne again, and to take Andy to meet them for the first time. We also got to meet Sarah, the eldest of their three daughters, who was home for Christmas.



Dunottar Castle



Crazy Cliff Paths

The farmhouse kitchen is one of the cosiest places I have ever been. The Aga is permanently on, keeping it super warm and meaning that hot food can be produced in a few minutes.

Marilynne is an amazing cook and we were treated to delicious food all weekend. The evening was spent eating, talking and laughing in front of an open fire, a perfect place to catch up after 6 years. Last time we visited there were two tiny kittens who had just been born. This time we met Pebble (one of the kittens all grown up) and Rubble, who was Pebble's kitten (but already about twice her size!).



Sunset at the farm



The legendary Aga



Pebble and Molly