

Our luggage has accumulated over the last few weeks, so we decided to make some space and post a parcel home. Andy got the job of dealing with the British Post Office just down the road. They wanted to charge him £85 for a 3.8kg parcel (large parcel rates). The alternative was to split it into two (small parcel rates) and the cost would be £18. It seems that NZ Post isn't alone in their illogical pricing structure. They suggested he went to a specialist mailing shop up the road as they would repackage and send - only trouble was it was closed when he got there. He returned about an hour later with parcel in hand.

Our plan for today was to visit North Berwick, a seaside resort about half an hour by train from Edinburgh. Trains were hourly. We just missed one, so grabbed a snack at the Christmas Markets then went back for the next train. It all looked very promising with the train due to leave in 10 minutes and marked as on time. By departure time the train was about two thirds full, but nothing happened. A couple of minutes later there was an announcement to say the train had been cancelled. The strangest thing was that no one reacted. They just all picked up their bags, got off the train and acted like it was a completely normal thing to happen. We still have no idea why it was cancelled, but decided to flag the North Berwick idea as another hour later would have left us with very little daylight. We were also slightly concerned that we could get stuck there if the trains back were cancelled.



Snack Time

Our next mission was to try and get a refund for our train fares. When we lived in the UK,

all the trains were run by British Rail. As much as people moaned about BR, it was all pretty straightforward. Now the tracks are owned by one (or more) companies and the trains run by several other companies. So it wasn't as straightforward as finding the ticket office. Our tickets were with Scotrail. There was an LNER ticket office nearby, so we asked them where to find the Scotrail ticket office. They directed us to "the other side of the concourse". We headed there and found a ticket office for all types of trains, but they only sold Scotrail tickets. They directed us to platform 13. When we got to platform 13, we could see the ticket office, but it was beyond a ticket barrier for different trains. We assumed there must be another way to get there, and asked the barrier attendant for directions. He asked what it was regarding and then opened the barrier to let us through. We thought we had taken ages to find the right place, but we were clearly ahead of the masses. The small queue soon turned into a major queue of people seeking refunds on North Berwick tickets. There were two windows open but only one processed refunds. The other lady kept asking if anyone wanted to buy tickets, but there were no takers. We are still puzzling over why you would put a ticket office beyond a barrier that requires a ticket to get through, but it gave us a good laugh. There was a constant stream of people being let through the barrier in both directions by barrier attendant, so it kept him occupied as well.



Ticket office behind the barrier that you need a ticket to get through!

After finally getting our refund, we needed to decide what to do for the rest of the afternoon. We had another wander on the Royal Mile and enjoyed some of the street performers. Crowds were definitely increasing as we got closer to Hogmanay. Then we walked down to Princes Street and into the New Town on the other side. The New Town isn't exactly new (mainly built late 1700s to mid 1800s) but it has lovely Georgian architecture. We came across one of the quirkier Hogmanay events - a silent disco. Here you are given headphones and select one of the pre-recorded music playlists to dance the night away to! We normally get the bus back to Jo's place, but decided we needed to walk it at least once. We had plenty of time, so it was a good chance to do it and check out some of the shops on the route as well.



Hogmanay is happening



Silent Disco

We had a nice long relax back at the Manor before our Hogmanay dinner at 8:30pm. Jim and Jean who live in the Manor penthouse hold an annual Hogmanay dinner. They had very kindly agreed to have four stray kiwis join them. The only people we knew were Jo and Anne, but they rest of the people were very kind and friendly. I think we were the only people not retired, but we had a lovely dinner and some interesting conversations. We don't normally mix with people who talk of boutique cruises to places like The Galápagos Islands and Antarctica!



Manor Hogmanay Party

We excused ourselves after dessert as we wanted to go join some of the celebrations in town. A quick Uber ride took us back to the same hill as last night. We had worked out that if we climbed a lot higher, we would have perfect views of the castle. We certainly weren't alone as we climbed up the Salisbury Craggs and claimed a cliff top viewpoint. We couldn't help wondering if anyone had ever fallen off the cliffs during Hogmanay celebrations, and it was a long way down.

The fireworks were even more impressive than last night and the setting over the castle was gorgeous. It was much windier though so there was a lot more smoke. It was an amazing experience to welcome 2019 with people from all around the world in such a famous place.

