

I never dreamed we would sleep so well on a North Sea ferry, but we all slept like logs. When we woke up we were following up the UK coast, it was exciting to be getting so close to Edinburgh. We headed to the main buffet restaurant with our breakfast vouchers, but got turned away and sent to a different buffet on the deck above. This was reserved for Commodore Class passengers and things were a lot calmer there than the main buffet! It was really weird to be treated like business class passengers when our fares had been such a bargain.

Soon after 9am we sailed into the Port of Tyne. Newcastle isn't exactly on the main tourist trail, and there were no iconic sights to view on arrival. We docked at the "International Ferry Terminal" and joined the queue to enter the UK. There were two queues, one for UK/EU passengers and one for everyone else. It was pretty satisfying to walk past the long queue for UK/EU and get straight through on the other queue.



Sailing into Newcastle



International Ferry Terminal!

We had a bit of time to kill between arriving in central Newcastle and catching our train to Edinburgh. Anna was keen to track down a Greggs bakery, and there was one opposite the station with a big enough seating area to accommodate us and our bags. It was a cheap and cheerful way to fill up our tummies and the kids got their meat pie fix. Not exactly memorable cuisine though!



Newcastle Station



Central Newcastle



Hanging out in Newcastle Station

We were booked on a Cross Country train. The online reviews were dire with an average of 1.3 stars out of 10, so expectations were not high. The journey was only 1.5 hours so as long as we got to Edinburgh that was all that really mattered. The train was almost on time, we got our allocated seats and arrived safely, so there were no complaints from us. About half an hour out of Newcastle we crossed the border into Scotland and ended our very brief visit to England.

Arriving in Edinburgh always feels like coming home. My first visit here was when I was 6, and there have been many visits since. We had been hoping for a white Christmas, although we knew the chances were slim. Looking at the weather forecast, there's no way we're getting a white one. But the next best thing is Scottish sunshine, and that's what we got today. The castle looked amazing in the winter sunshine as we rode in a black cab down Princes Street.

It was so exciting to see Jo again, even though we only saw here earlier in the year on her

last NZ trip. When we walked into her house, it really didn't feel like 6 years since we were there. Jo lives in an upmarket block of flats called Braid Manor. There are three flats on each floor, and Jo's floor is known as "The Mad Floor". There's Jo's place, Anne's place (she's a sprightly 97 year old) and Ivor and Marna's place. They are all great friends and it's a bit like a big happy family. When Jo has visitors, she often moves to Anne's flat to give them more space. So Jo is sleeping over the hallway and we have invaded her house. It's lovely to have a bit more space and a nice homely place to relax.



My favourite view from Jo's kitchen



I love this church near Jo's house



First Scottish Meal

The rest of the afternoon was pretty lazy, apart from a walk to the Waitrose supermarket. We love foreign supermarkets and a few yummy treats fell into the trolley. Andy was due to join us later in the evening after two flights from Berlin. He took the stressful route to Edinburgh, having to transit through Heathrow in the Christmas madness. His 2.5 hour connection time was barely enough with the immigration queues, but with lots of running he just caught his second flight. I'd booked the ferry to the UK because it was a novelty and a bargain, the bonus was it turned out to be a really stress free way to travel at Christmas. Andy finally arrived at the Manor late evening and it was fantastic to be back together again.