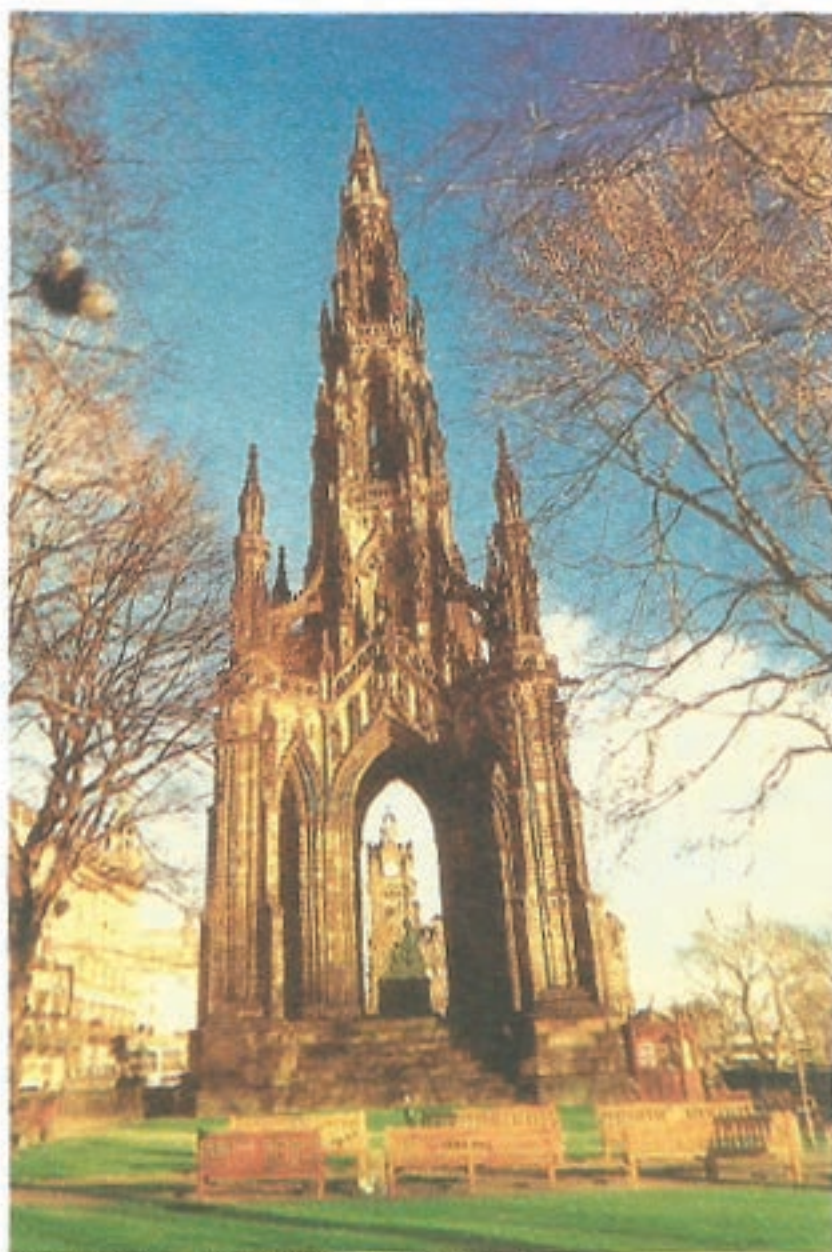


# KILT TRIP



The high life — The 200 ft Scott Monument

**Gitanjali Prasad** drinks in the sights, sounds and spirits of Scotland and comes away wanting more.

Edinburgh is to cities what the bagpipes are to music. It is different! The city hits you with all the force of its famous winds. The scenery is spectacular, the past is fascinating and the future is happening right before your eyes. We arrive at Edinburgh in the early afternoon. Just enough time my host suggests for a visit to Arthur's seat. We drive down from Edinburgh airport to Arthur's seat at the other end of town. As the street dips

you catch a glimpse of deep, blue sea of the Firth of Forth, then as you drive uphill, the sea disappears from view. Mountains and sea, both together, right in the heart of a busy metropolis.

And then we are there, at Arthur's Seat staring at what must be Edinburgh's most prominent landmark. This majestic extinct volcano rising 823 feet juts out with careless abandon. There is no satisfactory explanation as to why it bears the name of a British king. It has been suggested that 'Arthur's Seat' has been derived from Ard-na-Said or height of arrows, harking back to the days when this may have been an ideal location from which to hunt! The story goes that if you climb up Arthur's seat, you will definitely return to Edinburgh. It is hardly surprising then, that most visitors like to give it a shot.

On the way back from Arthur's Seat, the mind is sufficiently acclimatized to the extravagant natural beauty of Scotland to take in the architecture. It is as if we have stepped into a child's book of fairytales. Soot-stained houses, that are a sign of antiquity that look like castles line both sides of the street. Attempts to clean the soot were thought to weaken the buildings and so abandoned. This is a capital city of a brand new country that is old in history. Everywhere, there is this juxtaposition of the old and the new. Not far from the ancient castle of Holyrood, one sees the new Parliament building. Scotland has just become a republic and so right now nationalistic feelings run high. Yet not so high that the people can't be objective about the past. On a Guide Friday bus tour of the city, where one takes in the sights from the top deck of an open air bus, the guide takes a perverse pleasure in pointing out the dark side of the almost picture postcard pretty sights that we see.

"You see this beautiful Princes Park?" the guide asks. "This was a lake where women were killed as witches in the past. They believed that if you were innocent you drowned, and if you were guilty you floated, in which case you were put to death. You died either way!" We are also informed that Edinburgh acquired its reputation as