

Castles Near Edinburgh

A practical field guide to ten fortresses, tower houses and ruins within easy reach of the capital

Edinburgh is one of the easiest bases in Scotland for a castle-focused trip. Begin with the capital's two great strongholds, then follow the coast, the Lothian countryside or the shores of the Firth of Forth.

Ten places to explore

- | | | | |
|----|------------------|----|--------------------|
| 01 | Edinburgh Castle | 02 | Craigmillar Castle |
| 03 | Lauriston Castle | 04 | Roslin Castle |
| 05 | Crichton Castle | 06 | Blackness Castle |
| 07 | Dirleton Castle | 08 | Tantallon Castle |
| 09 | Hailes Castle | 10 | Midhope Castle |

PLANNING TIP

Use the route page to combine nearby sites. Always confirm current opening, access and ticketing arrangements before travelling.

Suggested castle routes

BEST WITHOUT A CAR

01 City and close-in castles

- Edinburgh Castle
- Craigmillar Castle
- Lauriston Castle

A flexible half-day or full-day plan using walking and city buses. Give Edinburgh Castle its own generous time slot.

ALLOW Half day or full day

BEST TRANSPORT Walk and city bus

BEST SCENIC DAY TRIP

02 East Lothian coast

- Dirleton Castle
- Tantallon Castle
- Hailes Castle

A strong full-day route mixing formal gardens, coastal cliffs and a quiet riverside ruin. Start early and check seasonal access.

ALLOW Full day

BEST TRANSPORT Car recommended

BEST FOR SCREEN LOCATIONS

03 Forth and Outlander

- Midhope Castle
- Blackness Castle
- South Queensferry stop

Pair the Outlander setting at Midhope with the dramatic Forth shoreline at Blackness, then pause at South Queensferry for bridge views.

ALLOW Half day

BEST TRANSPORT Car recommended

BEST QUIETER ROUTE

04 Midlothian ruins

- Roslin Castle
- Rosslyn Chapel stop
- Crichton Castle

Combine Roslin Glen and the chapel area with Crichton Castle. This route rewards slower travel and a walk through the landscape.

ALLOW Half day to full day

BEST TRANSPORT Car easiest

Start early

Popular sites can become busy. An early start also leaves more time for walks and photography.

Check access

Opening days, ticketing and estate access can change. Treat this guide as a planning companion.

Leave space

Two major castles are often enough for one day. Weather and roads can slow journeys.

01

Edinburgh Castle

The nation's fortress on the rock

Castle Rock, Edinburgh city centre

Scotland's most recognisable stronghold sits on the plug of an extinct volcano, towering over the city it has guarded for more than nine centuries. Over that time the castle has served as a royal residence, a military fortress, an arsenal and a prison, and it has been besieged more often than any other place in Britain.

Inside the walls you will find the Honours of Scotland – the crown, sceptre and sword of state – alongside the Stone of Destiny, the tiny twelfth-century St Margaret's Chapel and the Great Hall with its hammerbeam roof. It was in the royal apartments here that Mary Queen of Scots gave birth to the future James VI, the king who would go on to unite the crowns of Scotland and England.

The castle is still a working army base, and every August the esplanade hosts the Royal Edinburgh Military Tattoo. Arrive early: this is the busiest paid visitor attraction in Scotland.

DON'T MISS

The Honours of Scotland and the One O'Clock Gun.

At a glance

REGION

Edinburgh and the Lothians

FROM EDINBURGH

City centre – walk from the Royal Mile

BUILT

12th century onwards; rebuilt many times

CONDITION

Complete and fully roofed in part

ACCESS

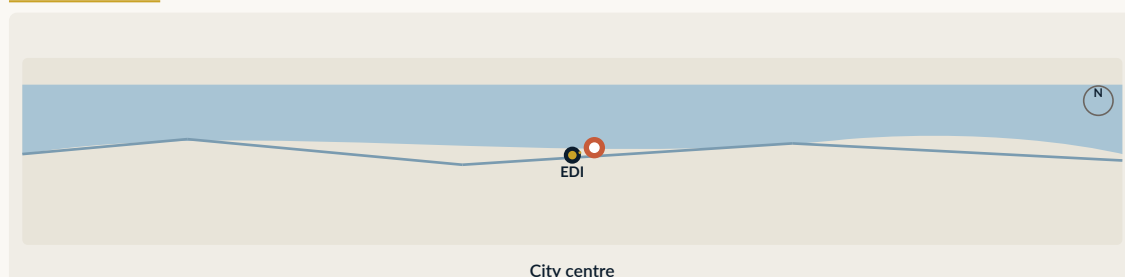
Ticketed; book ahead

SUGGESTED VISIT

2–3 hours



LOCATION



Scan for full entry

edinburgh/

02

Craigmillar Castle

Edinburgh's other castle

Craigmillar, about 3 miles (5 km) south-east of the city centre

Craigmillar is often called Edinburgh's other castle, and it is one of the best-preserved medieval castles in Scotland. The tall L-plan tower house was raised by the Preston family in the late fourteenth century, then wrapped in a curtain wall and outer courtyards as the family's wealth and ambitions grew.

Mary Queen of Scots came here in 1566 to recover her health, and the castle has given its name to the notorious Bond of Craigmillar – the agreement among her nobles that led to the murder of her husband, Lord Darnley. You can still climb to the battlements and look back over the city to the castle on its rock.

The atmospheric ruins have become a favourite with film crews, appearing in *Outlander* and *Outlaw King*. Because it sits away from the tourist trail, you can often have the place almost to yourself.

DON'T MISS

Rooftop views back towards Edinburgh Castle.

At a glance

REGION

Edinburgh and the Lothians

FROM EDINBURGH

About 3 miles (5 km) – city bus

BUILT

Late 14th century; extended into the 16th

FAMILY

Preston family; later the Gilmours

ACCESS

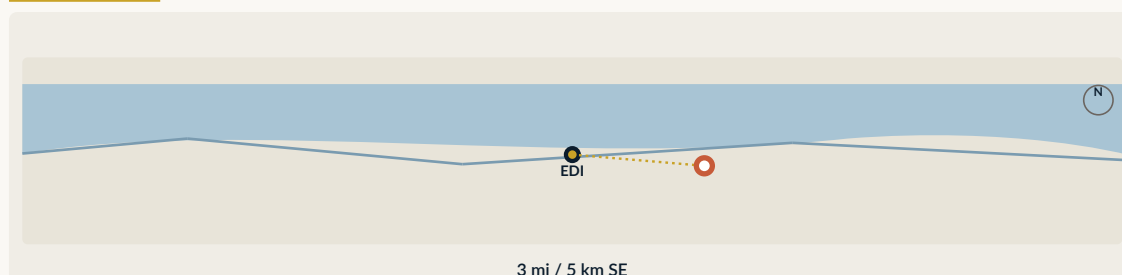
Ticketed; check current arrangements

SUGGESTED VISIT

60–90 minutes



LOCATION



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craigmillar-castle/

03

Lauriston Castle

An Edwardian time capsule by the sea

Cramond, north-west Edinburgh, about 4 miles (6 km) from the centre

Lauriston began life as a sixteenth-century tower house and was enlarged in the nineteenth century into a comfortable country villa, complete with Jacobean-revival turrets and bay windows looking out over the Firth of Forth.

What makes it unusual is the interior. The last owners, William Robert Reid and his wife Margaret, furnished the house as a showcase of fine period craftsmanship and left it to the nation on the condition that nothing be changed. The result is one of the most complete Edwardian interiors in Scotland, seen on guided tours.

The grounds are free to wander and are a genuine local favourite: lawns running down towards the water, mature woodland, and the Edinburgh and Kyoto Friendship Garden, a Japanese garden marking the two cities' twinning.

DON'T MISS

The Japanese friendship garden and Forth views.

At a glance

REGION

Edinburgh and the Lothians

FROM EDINBURGH

About 4 miles (6 km) – bus or coastal walk

BUILT

1590s tower; remodelled from 1827

FAMILY

Napier family; later the Reids

ACCESS

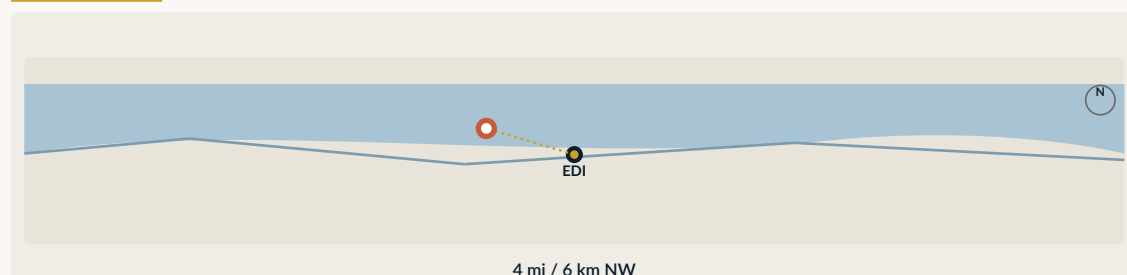
Grounds free; house by guided tour

SUGGESTED VISIT

1–2 hours



LOCATION



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lauriston-castle/

04

Roslin Castle

A ruin in the glen beside the famous chapel

Roslin, Midlothian, about 7 miles (11 km) south of Edinburgh

Roslin Castle stands on a rocky promontory high above the North Esk, reached across a narrow bridge that spans the gorge below. The setting, deep in the wooded Roslin Glen, is as memorable as the building itself.

This was the seat of the St Clair family, the same dynasty that built the extravagantly carved Rosslyn Chapel a short walk away. Work began in the 1390s, and the castle was burned and battered repeatedly – by English raids in the 1540s and later by Cromwell's troops – which is why so much of it is now ruin.

The surviving east range was restored, and part of the castle is now let as self-catering holiday accommodation, so it is possible to sleep inside. Combine the visit with the chapel and a walk along the river.

DON'T MISS

The bridge across the gorge, and Rosslyn Chapel next door.

At a glance

REGION

Edinburgh and the Lothians

FROM EDINBURGH

About 7 miles (11 km) – regular bus to Roslin

BUILT

From the 1390s

FAMILY

St Clair (Sinclair) family

ACCESS

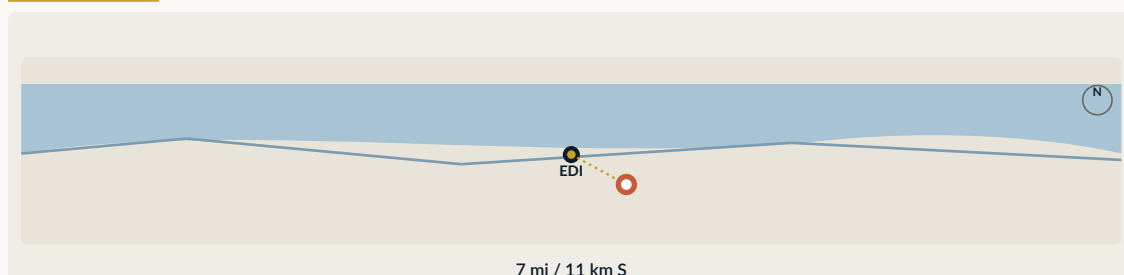
Exterior and glen freely accessible

SUGGESTED VISIT

60–90 minutes



LOCATION



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roslin/

05

Crichton Castle

A Renaissance surprise in the Midlothian hills

Near Pathhead, Midlothian, about 12 miles (20 km) south-east of Edinburgh

From the outside Crichton looks like any other Scottish ruin standing in a quiet field. Step into the courtyard, however, and the north range reveals an extraordinary façade of diamond-faceted stonework and an arcaded walkway – Italian Renaissance design of a kind found almost nowhere else in Scotland.

It was added by Francis Stewart, 5th Earl of Bothwell, after travels on the continent. The earlier tower was built by the Crichton family, who rose to become Chancellors of Scotland, and the estate later passed to the Hepburn Earls of Bothwell.

Mary Queen of Scots attended wedding celebrations here in 1562. Today you reach the castle down a farm track and across a field, and the walk in – with the ruin appearing above the valley of the Tyne Water – is part of the pleasure.

DON'T MISS

The diamond-faceted Renaissance courtyard range.

At a glance

REGION

Edinburgh and the Lothians

FROM EDINBURGH

About 12 miles (20 km) – best by car

BUILT

Late 14th century; remodelled in the 1580s

FAMILY

Crichton family; later Hepburn Earls of Bothwell

ACCESS

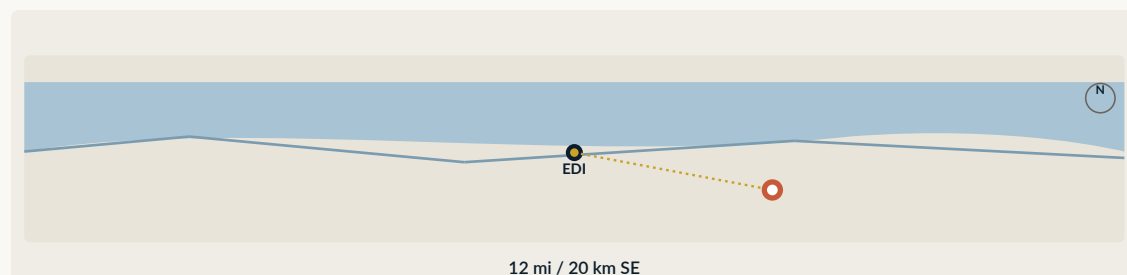
Seasonal opening; check ahead

SUGGESTED VISIT

45–60 minutes



LOCATION



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crichton-castle/

06

Blackness Castle

The ship that never sailed

Blackness, West Lothian, about 17 miles (28 km) west of Edinburgh

Blackness juts into the Firth of Forth on a rocky promontory, and its long, narrow, high-sided shape has earned it the nickname 'the ship that never sailed'. The towers at either end are still known as the stem and the stern.

Built in the 1440s by the powerful Crichton family, it soon became a royal fortress, then an artillery stronghold, a state prison and, in the nineteenth century, an ammunition depot. Few Scottish castles have been remodelled so many times for so many different kinds of warfare.

It is a superb place to feel the weather come in off the Forth, with views to the three Forth bridges. Screen fans will recognise it as Fort William, headquarters of Black Jack Randall, in *Outlander*.

DON'T MISS

Standing on the 'stern' tower with the Forth on three sides.

At a glance

REGION

Edinburgh and the Lothians

FROM EDINBURGH

About 17 miles (28 km) west, on the Forth shore

BUILT

1440s; heavily rebuilt in the 16th century

FAMILY

Crichton family; then the Crown

ACCESS

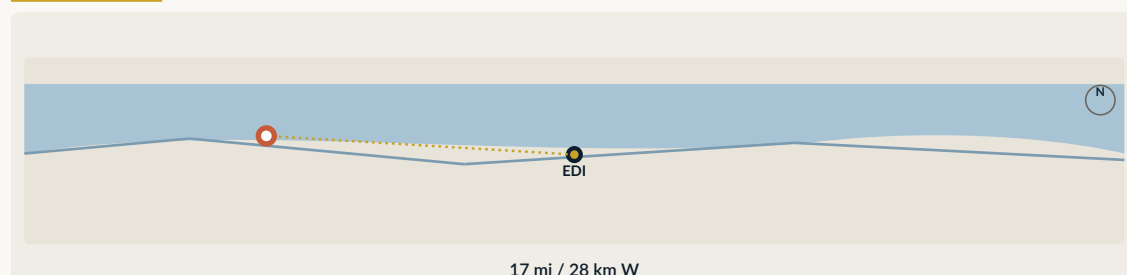
Ticketed; check current arrangements

SUGGESTED VISIT

60–90 minutes



LOCATION



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blackness-castle/

07

Dirleton Castle

A fortress with the finest gardens

Dirleton, East Lothian, about 19 miles (30 km) east of Edinburgh

Dirleton rises straight out of the rock on the edge of a picture-postcard village green. The oldest parts are thirteenth-century work by the Anglo-Norman de Vaux family, whose clustered towers still dominate the entrance front.

Later owners – the Halyburtons and then the Ruthvens – turned the fortress into a comfortable residence, adding a great hall and domestic ranges. The castle was slighted after a siege by Cromwell's forces in 1650 and never lived in again.

The gardens are the other reason to come. Parts of them are among the oldest in Britain, and the Arts and Crafts herbaceous border is one of the longest in the world. There is also a bee-boles wall and a Victorian doocot to find.

DON'T MISS

The record-breaking herbaceous border in full summer flower.

At a glance

REGION

Edinburgh and the Lothians

FROM EDINBURGH

About 19 miles (30 km) east – car or train to Drem

BUILT

1240s onwards

FAMILY

de Vaux; Halyburton; then Ruthven

ACCESS

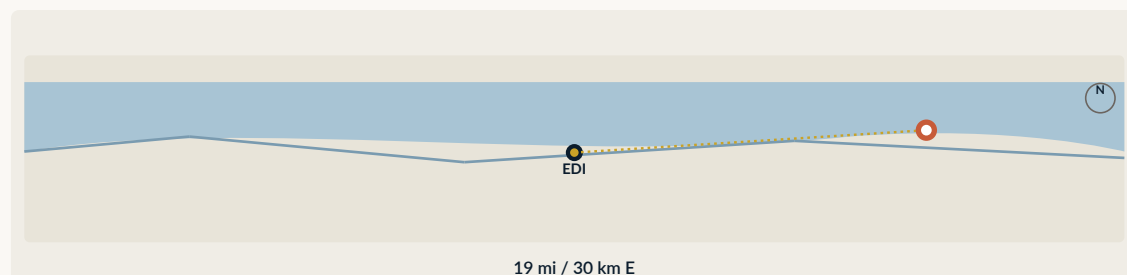
Ticketed; check current arrangements

SUGGESTED VISIT

60–90 minutes



LOCATION



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dirleton-castle/

08

Tantallon Castle

Red curtain walls above the sea

Near North Berwick, East Lothian, about 28 miles (45 km) east of Edinburgh

Tantallon is the most dramatic castle within reach of Edinburgh. A single enormous curtain wall of red sandstone, some fifteen metres high, cuts off a headland with sheer cliffs falling to the sea on the other three sides. Out in the water sits the white bulk of the Bass Rock, home to the world's largest colony of northern gannets.

It was built in the mid-fourteenth century by William Douglas, 1st Earl of Douglas, and became the stronghold of the Douglas Earls of Angus – the 'Red Douglasses'. Its walls shrugged off royal sieges in 1491 and 1528, and it took Cromwell's artillery twelve days of bombardment in 1651 to finally break them.

Allow time for the coastal path and the doocot in the field on the approach. On a windy day it is one of the most exhilarating places in Scotland.

DON'T MISS

The curtain wall silhouetted against the Bass Rock.

At a glance

REGION

Edinburgh and the Lothians

FROM EDINBURGH

About 28 miles (45 km) east, near North Berwick

BUILT

Mid-14th century

FAMILY

Douglas Earls of Angus

ACCESS

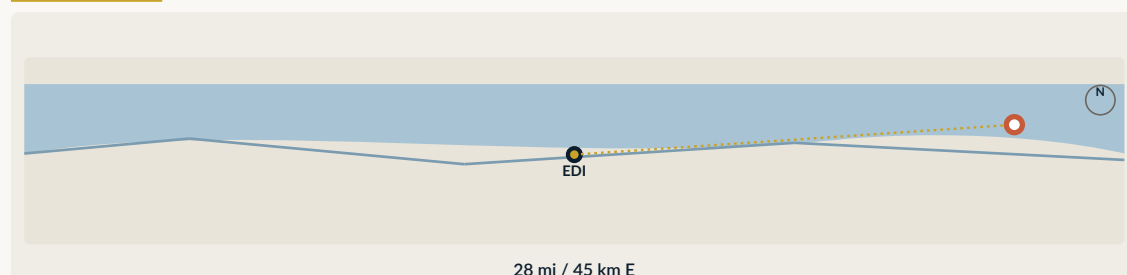
Ticketed; check current arrangements

SUGGESTED VISIT

60–90 minutes



LOCATION



Scan for full entry
tantallon-castle/

09

Hailes Castle

One of Scotland's oldest stone castles

Near East Linton, East Lothian, about 24 miles (39 km) east of Edinburgh

Hailes sits low and quiet on the bank of the River Tyne, screened by trees. Its oldest stonework was begun in the early thirteenth century, which makes it one of the earliest surviving stone castles anywhere in Scotland – older in parts than most of the great fortresses that followed.

For centuries it belonged to the Hepburn family, and it is bound up with the story of James Hepburn, 4th Earl of Bothwell, third husband of Mary Queen of Scots. The couple passed through Hailes in 1567 during the journey that ended in her captivity.

Two vaulted pit prisons survive beneath the ranges, and a short riverside path runs past the walls. The site is unstaffed and free to enter, which makes it a peaceful stop between Dirleton and Tantallon.

DON'T MISS

The riverside setting and the vaulted pit prisons.

At a glance

REGION

Edinburgh and the Lothians

FROM EDINBURGH

About 24 miles (39 km) east; 1.5 miles from East Linton

BUILT

Early 13th century onwards

FAMILY

Hepburn family; Earls of Bothwell

ACCESS

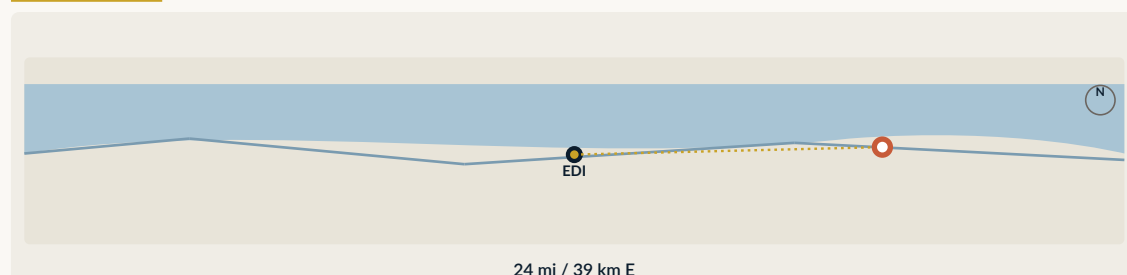
Free and unstaffed; check site access

SUGGESTED VISIT

30–45 minutes



LOCATION



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hailes-castle/

10

Midhope Castle

Lallybroch, on the Hopetoun Estate

Hopetoun Estate, near Abercorn, West Lothian, about 15 miles (24 km) west of Edinburgh

Midhope is a tall sixteenth-century tower house standing among farm buildings on the private Hopetoun Estate, a few minutes from the Forth bridges. For most of its life it was an unremarkable laird's house, extended in the seventeenth century and later left empty.

Then came *Outlander*. The courtyard and harled façade became Lallybroch, the Fraser family home, and Midhope turned into one of the most photographed buildings in Scotland. Visitors come from all over the world to stand in the archway.

Be clear about what you get: the interior is unsafe and firmly closed, so this is an exterior visit only. Access is through the estate, a parking or entry charge applies, and opening arrangements change – always check the Hopetoun Estate before setting out.

DON'T MISS

The Lallybroch archway from *Outlander*.

At a glance

REGION

Edinburgh and the Lothians

FROM EDINBURGH

About 15 miles (24 km) west, via South Queensferry

BUILT

About 1582; extended in the 17th century

FAMILY

Drummond family; later the Hopes of Hopetoun

ACCESS

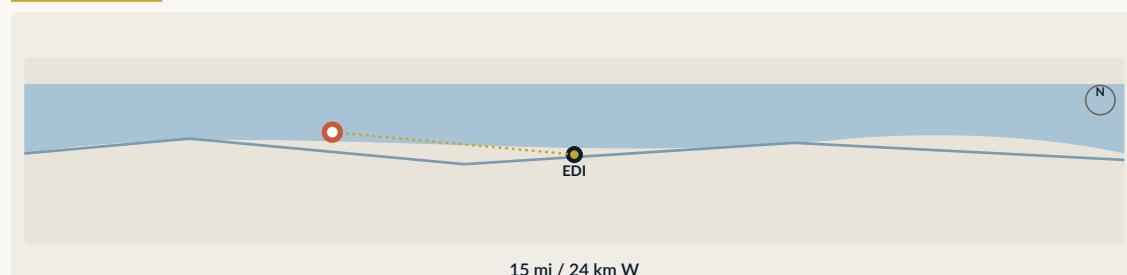
Exterior only; estate charge; check ahead

SUGGESTED VISIT

30–45 minutes



LOCATION



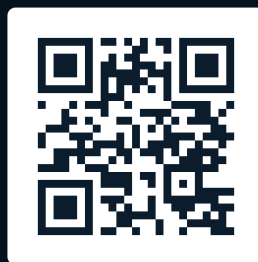
Scan for full entry
midhope-castle/

Continue exploring Scotland's castles

This independent field guide accompanies the castle entries on CastleScotland.app. Use the website for additional photographs, location pages and future updates.

Before you travel

- Confirm current opening, access and ticketing arrangements.
 - Allow extra time for weather, walks and photography.
- Respect private estates, signed closures and local parking restrictions.



Scan to open the project

Text and photography: DG / CastleScotland.app

Guide information is for trip planning and may change.

castlescotland.app