

Last weekend we went to Edinburgh. Gosh, what a beautiful city it is. If Edinburgh was in a foreign country, I am sure we would heap a lot more praise on it than we do. Our arrival bus took us in along George Street and, because I was neither navigating nor driving, it was easy to just sit back and admire the buildings.

We decided to go down the public transport route after hearing all those horror stories about Princes Street and the trams, all of which turned out to be true. It is so much easier as well to let someone else do all the driving, especially when you're travelling in the dark or rain. We took a flask and pieces for the trip.

Once in Edinburgh we hopped on and off buses like the locals. They are so frequent that you just wander up to a bus stop, and there is always one due in a few minutes. No just missing one, and having to wait an hour or more for the next: and it only costs £1.20 no matter how far your journey. We were visiting friends that we hadn't seen in a very long time so we were sorted for accommodation and places to eat.

We did the usual things; stroll along Princes Street Gardens, shopping for things that only Edinburgh has and, because they have young children, waving at the trains from the bridge just before Waverley station.

As it turned out I had Saturday afternoon to myself. You always think this would be a good thing – a whole afternoon with no-one but yourself to please and no jobs waiting for you around the house. I couldn't make my mind up what to do. I browsed the tourist leaflets in the National Gallery after a quick peruse of their Homecoming photographs (the usual suspects and some Burns poetry) and a half-hearted viewing of a skating minister on my way out.

I toyed with the new parliament building (is it still new or are the years just flashing past me?), the castle and the numerous attractions between the two. But in

the end I decided to head up to the National Gallery of Modern Art. This was a fifteen minute walk from where I was, so I headed off using one of those vague maps on the back of a leaflet, passing what claimed to be the city's oldest private bathing club and some pretty ancient houses. I later discovered they are highly fashionable confirming I have taste way beyond my income.

I found the museum quite easily, which surprised me, as I can get lost in my own living room. They had some Damien Hirst stuff, which was what attracted me to the museum in the first place. I had read a really good story a few weeks ago about a wee boy who reluctantly gets taken to the exhibition by his parents, and the author's description of one of the displays really intrigued me.

For very good reasons I am not an art critic, but I also hate that cliché 'I may not know much about art but I know what I like.' I enjoy looking at things in museums and galleries but am grateful for the little plaques that explain what you are looking at. This gallery had full guidebooks placed around so you could sit in a room and read about the artist while you looked at their work.

Many of the displays were not about something pretty that you would want to sit and look at in your own home. The artist was often making a point, about war or poverty or racism. Damien Hirst was trying to show how he thinks the modern world puts their faith in prescribed drugs, much as our forefathers used to do with gods. I didn't like what he had done, and a lot of it made me feel quite queasy, but I know that I will remember it for a long time to come and he has a point.

There's so much you need to do when you make the big trips down to the central belt but I'm glad I spent the afternoon there instead of looking at Swedish furniture that I don't need. I bought a postcard of Native American Indians in front of multi-coloured mountains and a chair. It's stuck up in front of my desk, and

makes me smile every time I look at it. I enjoy the bright colours, and the story behind the painting makes me laugh. That's good enough for me.