

bonnie Scotland

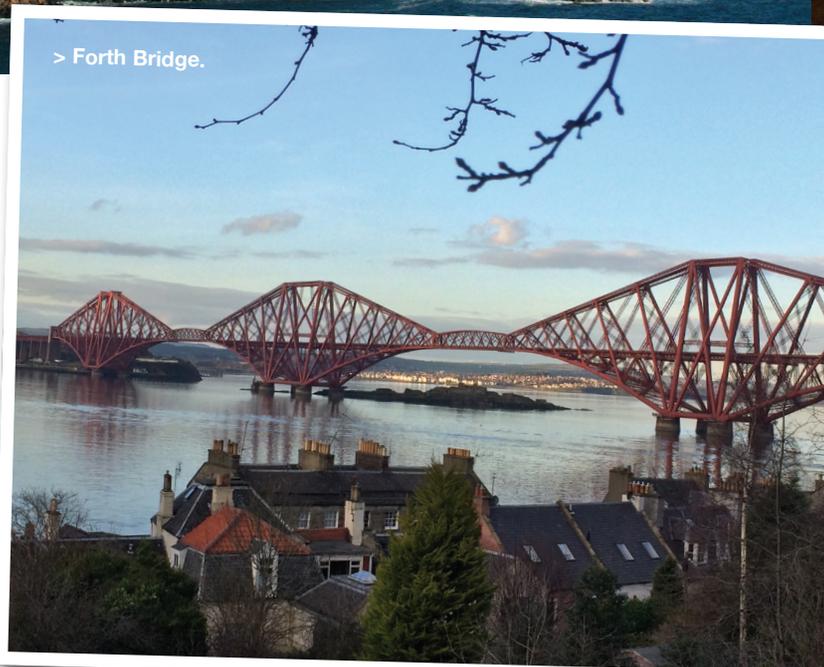
Robin McKelvie reveals what Scotland's Year of Innovation, Architecture & Design can offer groups.

> Isle of Skye.

Scotland is a destination that could quite easily recline on its shortbread tin laurels, and let its epic 800 island studded coastline, mighty mountains and swirl of picturesque castles do the talking. That has never been this dynamic nation's style, though. Scotland is a country that likes to continually reinvent itself and 2016 is no different with a flurry of new openings, revamped attractions and a massive year long festival, the Year of Innovation, Architecture and Design 2016, which brings many of the nation's multifarious creative strands together.

The Year of Innovation, Architecture and Design celebrates Scotland's rich heritage, culture and environment, alongside today's contemporary cutting edge design. The year encompasses everything from textiles and technology, through to architecture and design, then on to fashion. The year will see a mixture of special events created for the occasion and the re-working and re-branding of existing festivals and attractions.

> Forth Bridge.



One of the year's highlights sees one of Scotland's most visited tourist attractions, the National Museum of Scotland, turn 150 years old. To celebrate ten new galleries are being opened showcasing some of its internationally important collections of decorative art, design, fashion, science and technology.



> The Three Chimneys restaurant.

The year will constantly ping back and forth between Scotland's history and the ultra modern. This is most dramatically demonstrated in South Queensferry. Here the Forth Bridge, the Victorian rail bridge that was in 2015 finally recognised on UNESCO's World Heritage list, will be celebrated along with the new Queensferry Crossing, which will open late in 2016 as the longest three-tower, cable-stayed bridge in the world.

Another highlight will be the first ever Festival of Architecture 2016, which will offer a Scotland-wide programme of events. These will include a celebration at St. Peter's Seminary, a staggering modernist icon, on what will be the 50th anniversary of its opening. The event, called



The North Coast 500 is Scotland's recently launched answer to America's Route 66.

Best for groups

The North Coast 500: This is Scotland's recently launched answer to America's Route 66. Award winning tour operator Wilderness Scotland offers a range of new self-drive tours along a network of quiet roads that traverse some of the most stunning scenery in the UK. Small groups can discover the best that Wester Ross, Sutherland and Caithness have to offer on these driving or cycling holidays.

www.wildernessscotland.com

The Three Chimneys: An utterly unique restaurant in a deeply dramatic setting on the wild northwest coast of the Isle of Skye. That the visionary chef behind it – Shirley Spear – was self taught makes it all the more remarkable that it was once hailed one of the top 50 restaurants in the world. Today, promising young chef Scott Davies is the man at the helm in the kitchen.

www.threechimneys.co.uk

The Real Mary King's Close: In 2016 groups can learn more about how architectural innovation and design have shaped Scottish society at The Real Mary King's Close. The 5* attraction is a time capsule of hidden streets documenting social and architectural shifts which cover over 500 years of Edinburgh's history. The attraction offers perks for groups of 15 or more people. Advance booking is required.

groups@continuumattractions.com

> The Real Mary King's Close.



www.groupleisure.com

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◀ Hinterland, will breathe new life into the ruined seminary, which was originally designed by Scottish architects Gillespie, Kidd and Coia, and features an explosion of sound and light installations.

Actually getting to Scotland has never been easier in this special year. To add to the plethora of existing flight, rail and road options, in December 2015 Virgin Trains launched a direct London to Stirling service, while in October Flybe commenced Liverpool to Edinburgh flights. British Airways is also kicking off welcome new direct flights into the Highlands in May from Heathrow to Inverness.

Seven new stations have opened up swathes of the region and brought tourists into the Borders again.

Also on the travel front, there was the massive re-opening of the Borders Railway in Autumn 2015 by Queen Elizabeth II (or Queen Elizabeth I of Scotland). This lifeblood route from Edinburgh deep into the Borders at Tweedbank was axed in 1969. Its £294 million resurrection – which involved 30 miles of new track and the construction of 42 bridges – came in under budget and ahead of time. Seven new stations have opened up swathes of the region and brought tourists into the Borders again. Special steam services are scheduled for weekends in the summer season in 2016, too.

To help visitors get around in Scotland a brace of new trails have also been conjured up. In June the Smugglers Trail opens up a stretch of the Berwickshire Coastal Path. Thanks to historian/curator Derek Janes the history of smuggling here has been exposed and the route will have interpretations of smuggling stories along its length.

The centrepiece will be Gunsgreen House, the notorious 'Smuggler's Palace'. One of the most spectacular sections is around the seabird colonies at St Abb's Head, where a network



> The Borders' scenery.

