



In September a huge celebration of Scotland's Viking history will take place in Shetland. A Viking camp will be recreated on Unst between 2nd and 3rd of the month. Visitors will be able to step aboard long ships, watch re-enactments of beach raids and see displays of fire breathing.

Another highlight will be the Mary Queen of Scots Festival, which will run on a weekend in September, yet to be confirmed, in Kinross and Loch Leven. The event will commemorate Mary's life in Kinross and the 450th anniversary of her internment in the castle on Loch Leven. The programme will include living history encampments, music, food and drink.

Of course there is a lot more to Scotland in 2017 than the Year of History, Heritage and Archaeology.



> Loch Leven Castle.

On the fringes of Edinburgh at South Queensferry one of Scotland's most dramatic pieces of architectural heritage, the Forth Bridge, has just been recognised on UNESCO's coveted World Heritage list.

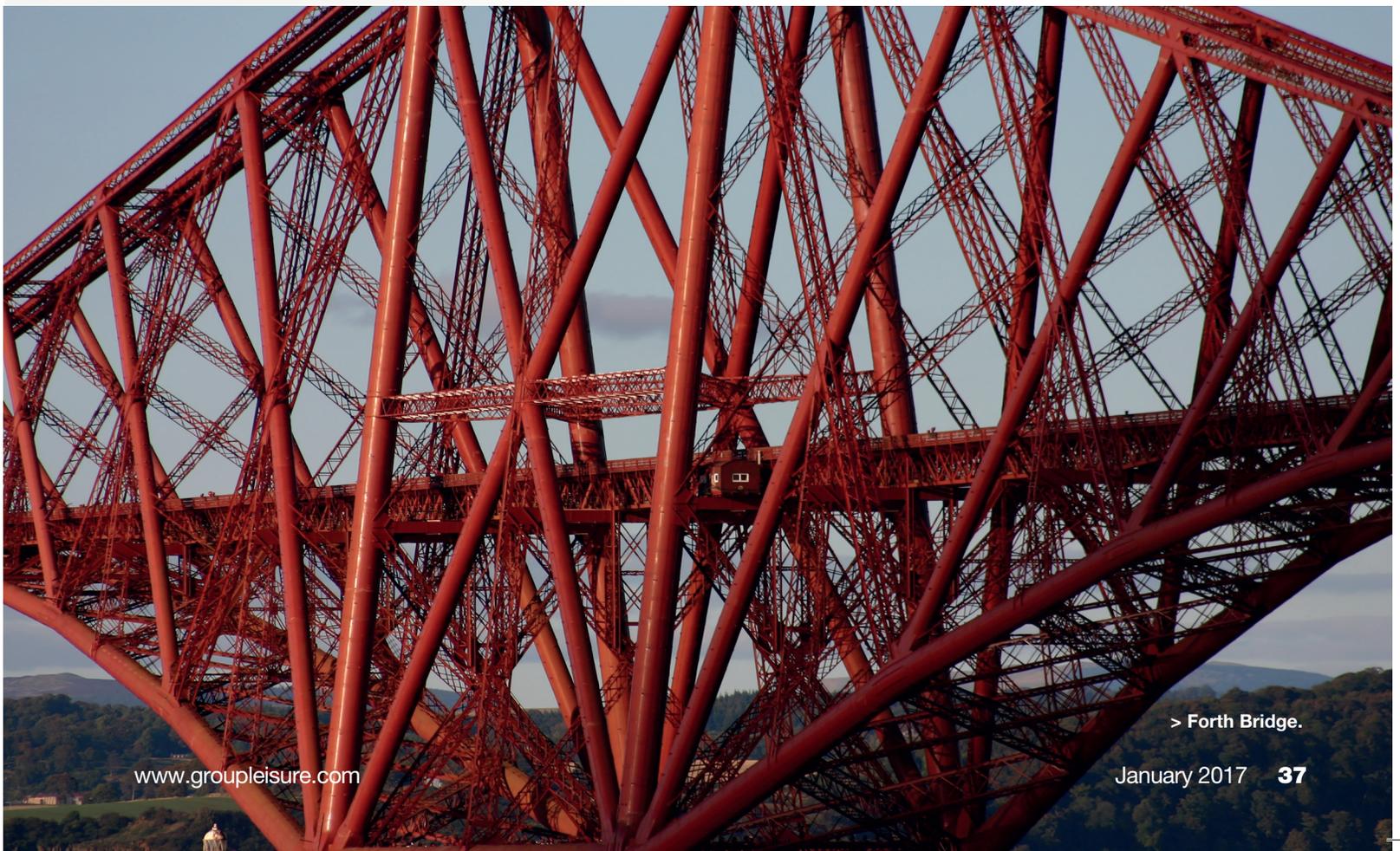
It sits beside another dramatic crossing, the Forth Road Bridge (when opened in 1964 this was the largest suspension bridge outside North America), and will be joined this spring by the epic new Queensferry Crossing. Together they offer the unique chance to view three world-class bridges built across three successive centuries.

In June the National Museum in Edinburgh will host its most comprehensive exhibition in years, detailing the Jacobite era in Scotland's history, with more than 300 exhibits. The museum has also partnered with the National Trust for Scotland, Historic Environment Scotland and the Palace of Holyroodhouse to launch a Jacobite Trail (www.jacobitetrail.com), which covers key Jacobite sites such as Glencoe, the Palace of Holyroodhouse, Urquhart Castle and Culloden.

On the accommodation front the big news in Edinburgh has been the emergence of luxury self catering proprieties, welcome in a city that has one of the highest hotel occupancy rates in Europe. The Old Town Chambers is the most exciting, bringing all modern luxury finishes into the deeply historic Old Town to go with its breathtaking views.



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> Forth Bridge.



> Abbotsford.

Best for Groups

◀ Up in little explored Angus the most intriguing new opening is Balbinny, which offers the chance to stay in historic broch-style buildings with grass roofs.

Across Scotland, food and drink not only continues to be a major export for the UK, but Scotland's restaurants also continue to curry favour with the Michelin inspectors. Andrew Fairlie at Gleneagles retains his well-deserved two Michelin stars, while TV chef Tom Kitchin has recently expanded his Edinburgh eatery and is surely now in the running for a second star. On the isles the big player these days is Skye. Marcelo Tully continues to share his one Michelin star skills at Kinloch Lodge through his superb group cookery courses, while Scott Davies, the new chef at the legendary Three Chimneys, is pushing to regain their star. ▶

> Inchcolm.



> Maid of the Forth at Inchcolm.

Abbotsford: The Borders Railway from Edinburgh, which opened late in 2015, has really opened up this bucolic region. Scotland's Shakespeare, Sir Walter Scott, was beguiled by the region and the grand home he fashioned for himself here on the banks of the River Tweed is handily within walking distance of the railway terminus at Tweedbank. This year sees a couple of new displays, one on Rob Roy (whose legend Scott was instrumental in cementing) and 'Scott the Antiquary'. Dedicated group tours are available.

📄 www.scottsassbotsford.co.uk

Maid of the Forth: This graceful wee tour boat is family run from a handy base in the Edinburgh suburb of South Queensferry. Traditionally the main attraction has been the cruises that sweep under the Victorian splendour of the Forth Bridge out to the wee island of Inchcolm. Here a dramatically ruined abbey and epic views back towards Edinburgh await, along with puffins in summer. On the way back to South Queensferry the cruises now also circle under the might of the new Queensferry Crossing too. Group bookings and exclusive use are available.

📄 www.maidoftheforth.co.uk

Royal Yacht Britannia: It is easy to see why the Royal Yacht Britannia has been named 'Scotland's Best Attraction' for ten years running by Visit Scotland. The history of this grand old dame and her role within the Royal Family is brought to life in an engaging and never dull way. Groups can enjoy private tours, Champagne afternoon teas and can even hire her for a very special private function. All groups enjoy free audio tours and guides/leaders enjoy complimentary refreshments.

📄 www.royalyachtbritannia.co.uk