



Southern Scotland

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Why Go?

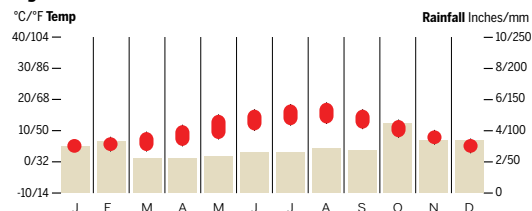
Though wise folk are well aware of its charms, for many southern Scotland is just something to drive through on the way to northern Scotland. Big mistake. But it does mean there's breathing room here in summer, and peaceful corners.

Proximity to England brought raiding and strife; grim borderland fortifications saw skirmishes aplenty. There was loot to be had in the Borders, where large prosperous abbeys ruled over agricultural communities. Regularly ransacked before their destruction in the Reformation, the ruins of these churches, linked by cycling and walking paths, are among Scotland's most atmospheric historic sites.

The rolling west enjoys extensive forest cover between bustling market towns. The hills cascade down to sandy stretches of coastline blessed with Scotland's sunniest weather. It's the land of Robert Burns, whose verse reflected his earthy attitudes and active social life.

When to Go

Ayr



May Take a fortnight to cross the whole region, hiking the gorgeous Southern Upland Way.

Jun The perfect time to visit the region's numerous stately homes, with spectacular gardens in bloom.

Oct Hit Galloway's forests to see red deer battling it out in the rutting season.

BORDERS REGION

The Borders has had a rough history: centuries of war and plunder have left a battle-scarred landscape, encapsulated by the magnificent ruins of the Border abbeys. Their wealth was an irresistible magnet during cross-frontier wars, and they were destroyed and rebuilt numerous times. Today these massive stone shells are the region's finest attraction. And don't miss Hermitage Castle; nothing encapsulates the region's turbulent history like this spooky stronghold.

But the Borders is also genteel. Welcoming villages with ancient traditions pepper the countryside and grandiose mansions await exploration. It's fine walking and cycling country too, the hills lush with an artist's palette of shades of green. Offshore is some of Europe's best cold-water diving.

Peebles

POP 8400

With a picturesque main street set on a ridge between the River Tweed and the Eddleston Water, Peebles is one of the most handsome of the Border towns. Though it lacks a major sight, the agreeable atmosphere and good walking options in the rolling, wooded hills thereabouts will entice you to linger for a couple of days. There are some excellent eating choices.

👁️ Sights & Activities

The riverside walk along the River Tweed has plenty of grassed areas ideal for a picnic, and there's a children's playground (near the main road bridge). A mile west of the town centre, **Neidpath Castle** is a tower house perched on a bluff above the river; it's closed but worth a look from the riverbank.

Two miles east of town off the A72, in **Glentress forest**, is the busiest of the **7stanes mountain-biking hubs** (www.7stanesmountainbiking.com), as well as osprey viewing and marked walking trails. The **shop** (☎ 01721-724522; www.alpinebikes.com; ☹ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, to 5.30pm Sat & Sun) here hires rigs and will put you on the right trail for your ability. These are some of Britain's best biking routes. **Go Ape** (www.goape.co.uk) also has swing and zip line forest routes and there are camping huts available (see www.glentressforestlodges.co.uk). In town, you can hire bikes to explore the region from **Glentress Bikes** (☎ 01721-729756; 20a Northgate; day hire £22).

There are further mountain-biking trails at Innerleithen, 7 miles east of Peebles.

🛏️ Sleeping

Rosetta Holiday Park

CAMPSITE ⚡

(☎ 01721-720770; www.rosettaholidaypark.co.uk; Rosetta Rd; sites for 1/2 £12/18; ☹ Apr-Oct; ☹ ☹ ☹) This camping ground, about 800m north of the town centre, has a likeably green setting with lots of trees and grass. There are plenty of amusements for the kids, such as a bowling green and a games room.

Tontine Hotel

HOTEL ⚡⚡

(☎ 01721-720892; www.tontinehotel.com; High St; s £55, d £110-120; ☹ ☹ ☹) Right in the heart of things, this is a bastion of Borders hospitality. Refurbished rooms have high comfort levels, modish colours and top-notch bathrooms, while service couldn't be more helpful. There's a small supplement for rooms with four-poster beds and/or river views. There's a good restaurant and bar here: it's the heart of town.

Rowanbrae

B&B ⚡⚡

(☎ 01721-721630; www.aboutscotland.co.uk/peebles/rowanbrae.html; 103 Northgate; s/d £42/65; ☹) In a quiet cul-de-sac but not far from the main street, this hospitable spot treats its guests like family friends. It's pleasantly and comfortably old-fashioned; there are three upstairs bedrooms, two en suite, and a commodious guest lounge for relaxation.

Cringletie House

HOTEL ⚡⚡⚡

(☎ 01721-725750; www.cringletie.com; r £135-260; ☹ ☹ ☹) Luxury without snobbery is this hotel's hallmark, and more power to it. To call it a house is being coy; it's an elegant baronial mansion, 2 miles north of Peebles on the A703, set in lush, wooded grounds. Rooms are plush and feature genteel elegance and linen so soft you could wrap a newborn in it. There's an excellent restaurant (dinner £37.50) on-site.

🍴 Eating

Cocoa Black

CAFE ⚡

(www.cocoablack.com; 1 Cuddy Bridge; sweets £1.50-3; ☹ 9.30am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm Sat, 11am-4pm Sun; ☹) Chocaholics should make a beeline for this friendly cafe, where exquisite cakes and other patisserie offerings will satisfy any cacao-focused cravings. It also runs a school where you can learn to make them yourself.