

# Understand Scotland

## **SCOTLAND TODAY.....440**

Although part of Great Britain for 300 years, Scotland proudly retains its own distinct identity.

## **HISTORY .....442**

From the Roman period through to today, Scotland has weathered invasions, civil wars, religious reformation and industrial revolution.

## **THE SCOTTISH LARDER.....450**

Forget the deep-fried stereotypes: food in Scotland offers so much more, and it's a paradise for whisky and beer lovers.

## **SCOTTISH CULTURE.....456**

From proud traditions in literature and music to architecture and sport, Scottish culture runs deep, and continues to innovate today.

## **NATURAL SCOTLAND .....463**

Scotland has stunning, dramatic scenery to be found throughout, not to mention the best wildlife-spotting in Britain.

# Scotland Today

Although an integral part of Great Britain since 1707, Scotland has maintained a separate and distinct identity throughout the last 300 years, which strengthened with the return of a devolved Scottish parliament to Edinburgh in 1999. Since then, Scottish politics has diverged significantly from Westminster, culminating in September 2014 when a referendum on whether Scotland should become an independent country resulted in a narrow majority voting to remain part of the UK.

## Best in Print

**Raw Spirit** (Iain Banks; 2003) An enjoyable jaunt around Scotland in search of the perfect whisky.

**Mountaineering in Scotland** (WH Murray; 1947) Classic account of climbing in Scotland in the 1930s, when just getting to Glen Coe was an adventure in itself.

**Adrift in Caledonia** (Nick Thorpe; 2006) An insightful tale of hitchhiking around Scotland on a variety of vessels.

**The Poor Had No Lawyers** (Andy Wightman; 2010) A penetrating (and fascinating) analysis of who owns land in Scotland, and how they got it.

## Best on Film

**Whisky Galore!** (1949) Classic Ealing comedy about wily Scottish islanders outfoxing the government when a cargo of whisky gets shipwrecked.

**Local Hero** (1983) Gentle Bill Forsyth comedy-drama sees American oil executive beguiled by the Highland landscape and eccentric locals.

**Trainspotting** (1996) 'Who needs reasons when you've got heroin?' Danny Boyle's second film dives into the gritty underbelly of life among Edinburgh drug addicts.

## Scottish Independence

From the Red Clydeside movement of the 1920s to the 1997 UK elections when the country returned no Conservative MPs at all, Scotland's politics have always been more left-wing and communitarian than England's (or, at least, the south of England's).

Since the return of the devolved Scottish parliament to Edinburgh in 1999, policies that have been applied in Scotland but not in the rest of the UK include free long-term care for the elderly, the abolition of tuition fees for university students, and higher pay for teachers. A perceived disconnect between Scotland's social-democratic aspirations and what voters felt was an increasingly authoritarian and right-wing Westminster government led to the Scottish National Party's (SNP) 2011 victory at Holyrood and its commitment to put the question of Scottish independence to the vote.

The implications of Scotland breaking away from the UK were hotly debated in the year leading up to the 2014 referendum. Would the Scots need a new currency, or be able to keep using the pound? Would there be border controls with England? Would Scotland be able to remain in the EU? How would North Sea oil revenues be divided? Would the Queen still be head of state?

The referendum took place on 18 September 2014, posing the question: 'Should Scotland be an independent country?' The result was that 55% voted to maintain the status quo (from a turnout of 85%). What this means for the future of Scotland remains unclear. Will there be increased powers for the Scottish parliament in Edinburgh? Will there be a collapse in support for the SNP? The closeness of the result promises that there will be wrangling for years to come.