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

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

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

NATURAL SCOTLAND450

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 2016 when 62% of Scots voters chose to remain in the EU, while the UK as a whole voted to leave.

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 (based on the novel by Irvine Welsh) dives into the gritty underbelly of life among Edinburgh drug addicts.

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.

An Independent Scotland?

Since the return of the Scottish parliament to Edinburgh in 1999, politics north of the border has headed in a different direction from England. A perceived disconnect between Scotland's social-democratic aspirations and what many voters felt was an increasingly authoritarian and right-wing Westminster government led to a landslide victory for the Scottish National Party in the 2011 Scottish parliamentary election, and a commitment to put the question of Scottish independence to the vote.

A referendum took place on 18 September 2014, posing the question: 'Should Scotland be an independent country?' The result was that a majority (55%) voted 'No' (from a record turnout of 85%). Despite maintaining the status quo, the referendum campaign re-energised Scottish politics and led to a huge increase in membership of political parties and a flourishing of debate, not only in the mainstream media but also online and among local interest groups.

The subsequent Scottish parliamentary election of May 2016 saw the SNP fall short of a majority by two seats, and the Conservative Party overtake Labour to come second – a huge shock for Labour, which had dominated Scottish politics for decades prior to 2011. The Scottish Green Party came fourth, another big turnaround, pushing the Liberal Democrats into fifth place. (In a notable achievement for equality, the leaders of the three biggest parties in Scotland, including the First Minister, were all women, and four out of the five main party leaders were openly gay.)

But the June 2016 referendum on whether the UK should remain part of the EU heralded a new era of uncertainty. While the UK as a whole voted to leave the EU by a margin of 52% to 48%, Scotland voted to remain by 62% to 38%.