

TRAVEL

with MELANIE HARVEY



CAPITAL GAIN Enjoy what Edinburgh has to offer just a short walk from the apartments

City apartments are fit for Royalty

APARTMENT accommodation is not always what you hope for.

The concept that you can feel as though you are staying in your own home-from-home is the ideal one.

Rarely, though, does it ever come to pass.

The majority tell you they have a homely feel, yet are little more than a basic hotel room with a kettle and your own cups.

Bang in the heart of Edinburgh, however, there is an exception to this rule.

Located on Queen Street in the centre of the Capital, the newest addition to Fountain Court Apartments' portfolio, Royal Garden, is an exciting collection of luxury serviced apartments located in a traditional historic building and immaculately furnished in a contemporary style.

That's what is says on the website. It also says that apartments are spacious with comfortable and stylish furnishings, and the two-bedroom penthouse apartments feature rooftop balconies with spectacular views over the River Forth and on to Fife.

It is ideally located opposite the Scottish National Portrait Gallery and St Andrew Square, is easily reached from the airport via the nearby St Andrew Square tram stop and is also close to Waverley Station.

Alternatively for a shopping break, world-renowned fashion stores are on the doorstep with the bars and restaurants of George Street and Rose Street just a few moments away.

Culture vultures, meanwhile, will be inspired by such attractions as the National Museum of Scotland and Edinburgh Castle.

That's what it says on the tin, but modestly must prevent them advertising the best part.

The beauty of Royal Garden is not how it looks or where it is, but how it feels.

It's homely. Ridiculously so. To the extent that you half expect to fall over someone's shoes when you walk into the apartment or the occupants' mail to be behind the door of any of the Studio, one or two bedroom apartments.

Within seconds of entry, it feels like

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you own it. It's the little touches which make it.

The spacious rooms are great, but additions such as alarm clocks in each room, the pictures on the walls and my personal favourite, a doorbell, which each room has.

It sounds silly, but how many hotel rooms or apartments have a doorbell?

It's home alright, to such an extent that make-up tables in rooms can be transformed into business centres with one word to ever-friendly reception staff.

It's your own house and there is yet another stunning aspect to Royal Garden.

Go out the front of the building and you are in the hustle and bustle of a thriving city centre.

Wander out the back, however, and you'll find yourself in another world.

Free access to the adjacent private Queen Street Gardens is one of the aces in their pack.

Beautiful, peaceful, it's a haven.

With two kids in tow, it was a joy to have access to space and peace just seconds from the chaos of a city centre.

It's like a virtual world, only it's very real and it is sure to be a deal-clincher for many visitors.

If you are a business traveller, it is absolutely perfect for staving off work blues and giving you a feel of home.

For a holiday break, it's just as good, with as much noise and bustle or peace and quiet as you can handle.

The Royal Garden really is a Royal experience.

●To book, go to www.fountaincourtapartments.com or call 0131 622 6677.

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SUNSHINE, good food, culture, the great outdoors.

If this sounds like your idea of a great holiday, (and why wouldn't it?) then there is a new flight from Scotland that can take you right to the very place for all this and more.

Abu Dhabi is the capital of the United Arab Emirates but it has been overshadowed in recent years by its smaller and noisier neighbour Dubai.

While they were throwing up skyscrapers galore, a slightly slower pace of development was taking place in this part of the desert.

Don't get me wrong, Abu Dhabi does have the tall buildings and the bling, but you get the impression there is a more long-term approach to tourism and progress.

With attractions like a Louvre museum and a Guggenheim well under way, there will also be a slightly different feel to a holiday here.

There is still much to be done, but this part of the UAE has lots to see and do and from next month a new flight can take you right to its heart.

Etihad start flying from Edinburgh Airport on June 8 and if you move quick you will be able to bag yourself a great deal.

At a flight time of less than eight hours, you can enjoy a film, have a bite to eat and arrive refreshed and ready to go.

I visited Abu Dhabi last month and the mercury was hovering around 30C. The hotels I saw were magnificent and the biggest surprise for me? There was loads to do.

So much in fact that my four-day trip meant I enjoyed very little of my usual holiday activity – sunbathing.

The temperature outside the heat of the high summer is perfect and with fabulous beaches and luxurious pools and beach clubs, it's perfect to top up your tan.

I was lucky enough to stay at the gorgeous St Regis Abu Dhabi hotel.

It lies right on the Corniche, the long sandy stretch of one of Abu Dhabi's collection of 200 islands.

The hotel has everything you need for a luxury holiday. Great restaurants, a stunning view of the Arabian Gulf, classy bars and the Nation Riviera Beach Club where you can relax day or night.

The beach is a stone's throw away and I enjoyed a run along a long promenade each morning before a full day of seeing what this area of the Middle East has to offer.

For those after a bit of culture, the previously mentioned Louvre

JUST



STUNNING A jaw-dropping view of the Corniche is a must for those who visit



JEWEL OF A TRIP The Pearl Journey is filled with interesting history

won't be open until later this year. The Guggenheim is due to follow in 2017, with the Zayed National Museum – which will tell the story of the unification of the UAE – opening its doors next year.

But if you visit before then, a trip to the Sheik Zayed Grand Mosque is a must.

It is a vision in white, a truly imposing site. Female visitors be warned though, as is common in this part of the world, the sexes get a very different deal.

I saw numerous men in short sleeves and below the knee shorts but my long trousers and white

long sleeved cardigan were deemed unsuitable and I was dispatched to a dressing area for more cover.

Once dressed and inside it was a sight to behold. The white marble is dazzling, the chandeliers awe inspiring and with 1000 gilt-topped marble columns it is no wonder it cost around £350million to build.

If you want to immerse yourself in the history of Abu Dhabi the Pearl Journey is a step back in time.

Before oil and tourists, the pearl trade was central to this part of the UAE and it was fascinating to learn about. The fun part came when we were all presented with oyster