

Hooked on The Borders? Here are 5 more areas to explore and discover...

Tour O The Borders has been bringing people to our region for years, with riders enjoying great hospitality and the stunning hill views of the sportive route. But the truth is, a trip to Touro only scratches the surface of what the Borders has to offer.

This is a huge and varied region with big landscapes, layered history and a warm welcome - all the richness of the Highlands, just with fewer visitors and more space to breathe. After Touro and Peebles have charmed you, here are five other hubs where you can delve deeper into what makes the South of Scotland so special.

THE BORDERS RAILWAY – STOW, GALASHIELS, TWEEDBANK, MELROSE

Getting to this part of the Borders is easier than ever thanks to the brilliant **Borders Railway**. Trains every 30 minutes from Edinburgh Waverley stopping at Stow, Galashiels & Tweedbank. This railway corridor is one of the easiest ways to explore the Borders, a string of settlements each with their own character, stories and must see attractions.

A stop at **Stow** (it rhymes with wow!) allows you to explore the quiet valley of the Gala Water, and the historic, quirky village of Stow which once welcomed pilgrims and today rewards travellers with excellent walks, a great café and gem of a bookshop. **Top Tip – Check out Stow Cycle Hub for affordable e-bike hire, a great way to explore the quiet roads around the village.**

Galashiels is a former industrial town, once home to dozens of textile mills and still a commercial hub for the region. It is home to the **Great Tapestry of Scotland**, a one of a kind attraction which tells the whole story of Scotland in one purpose built room. It's a genuine must see, and perfect starting point for understanding the Borders. After the Tapestry, Galashiels is home to some of the best eateries in the region – my personal tips are The Salmon Inn (sticky chicken is incredible) and the newly opened and highly rated Café Auberge. It's also worth checking out **MacArts** programme when planning a

Borders trip. The community led Galashiels venue is a shining light of live performance in the region, bringing excellent music, poetry, talks and more to the town.

Tweedbank is the terminus of the Borders Railway and a short walk from the station will bring you to **Tempest Taproom**. This is a beer lovers nirvana with the awesome selection of freshly brewed craft beers, great street food and good times guaranteed. Another must visit when in The Borders. **Top Tip – Book a table in advance, as Tempest can get very popular.**

A short walk or cycle from Tweedbank is the gorgeous Borders town of **Melrose**. The town owes its existence to its magnificent medieval Abbey which still draws visitors by the thousands to the town, despite showing the ravages of time, war and reformation. It is home to some of the finest gothic carvings in Scotland and forms the centrepiece of four great abbeys in the region along with Kelso, Jedburgh and Dryburgh. History lovers will be drawn here but the truth is its worth a visit for everyone. **Top Tip – Climb up the bell tower to get a look at the very unusual gargoyle a bagpipe playing pig!** Hill lovers will find themselves drawn to Eildon Hill while in the Melrose area – its silhouette is iconic in the Borders. The triple topped hill (known to locals as ‘The Eildons’) must be one of Scotland’s finest half day hikes, with seemingly endless possibilities for routes. My advice is to use the Walk Highlands route which shows off the best way around the hill. By the time you’ve hiked the Eildons you will be ready for refreshment, and the good news is that Melrose has no end of options! Coffee lovers will flock to trendy Haus & Co and Twelve Triangles, while those in need of something a bit sweeter will find ice cream and hand made chocolates at Simply Delicious. From pub grub to fine dining, Melrose covers all tastes and budgets.

The town is also home to our region’s biggest annual event (next to Touro, of course!) **The Borders Book Festival**. For four days in June the cultural world of Scotland focuses in on the stunning Harmony Garden in Melrose as authors, journalists, famous faces and thousands of book lovers hit the town. A wonderful festival atmosphere and of course it never rains!

Together, these places along the Borders Railway corridor show just how much variety the Borders packs into a small area with heritage, food, culture, landscapes creating a place that visitors love.

REIVER COUNTRY – HAWICK, NEWCASTLETON & JEDBURGH

For three hundred years, much of the Scottish Borders was a war zone. Regular conflict between Scotland and England put this region on the front line, and out of that lawlessness on both sides of the frontier grew a unique way of life - the Border Reivers. This wasn't a single criminal underclass - everyone was involved. Loyalty was to your chief or heidsman, not your country, and families like the Armstrongs, Elliots, Grahams, Maxwells, Kerrs, Turnbells and Scotts became legendary.

The Reiver era ended when the crowns united under James VI & I, with many Borderers killed or exiled (including ancestors of US Presidents Nixon and Johnson, and Neil Armstrong, the first man on the moon). But the legacy lives on in the culture and proud identity of the Borders, and there's nowhere better to start exploring it than **Hawick**, our largest town.

Hawick is one of the most characterful towns in the South of Scotland, being proud, historic and full of things to see and do throughout the year. Its two biggest claims to fame are arguably Rugby Union (the town has produced more than 60 international rugby players) and its **Common Riding**. The tradition of riding the marches dates to the time of the border reivers where it was essential to saddle up and ensure no land had been encroached upon or livestock taken. Nowadays of course this a more ceremonial ritual, but no less keenly felt – the sight of hundreds of people on horseback riding around the narrow streets and open fields of the Borders is truly stirring and does call back to when this was life or death. Many towns celebrate this border tradition, with Hawick kicking off the season at the start of June. Visitors are welcome at all the border

common riding and festivals, but they have never lost sight of the fact that they are for the local townsfolk and celebrate their special Borders identity. As they say in Hawick, it's better felt than telt!

Of course, there is more to the town than one week in June and there is a year long programme of events, with many centred on the excellent **Heart of Hawick** arts centre. The town hosts the experimental film festival **Alchemy** each spring, offering new and challenging works. Despite the downturn in our Borders industry in recent years, Hawick is still home to a number of mills and a thriving cashmere industry with tours available at **Johnstons of Elgin**, which I highly recommend – by the time the tour is over you will be in no doubt to the quality and craft behind a cashmere garment. The town is also home to the areas first distillery in 200 years – **The Borders Distillery**. Housed in an award winning, repurposed industrial building it is well worth a visit with the tours being conducted by the distillers themselves, giving a very interesting twist to the distillery experience. **Top Tip – Combine a visit to cashmere mills, distillery and Heart of Hawick by using Hawick's excellent new active travel network, built as part of a recent 100million investment in the towns flood defences.**

If you want to experience the Reiver story in its most atmospheric setting, head south from Hawick towards the wilds of Liddesdale. You'll follow the old Waverley Railway route before finding **Hermitage Castle**, one of the most brooding fortresses in Scotland. Often described as "the guardhouse of the bloodiest valley in Britain," it was a stronghold of the powerful Douglas family and often a refuge for Border Reivers. Standing beneath its towering walls, you get a real sense of how dangerous and lawless this landscape once was – I wouldn't go there alone at night!

Just along the road lies **Newcastleton** (known locally as "Copshaw", a much older name), a friendly village with a proud Reiver and railway heritage. It was a planned settlement by the Duke of Buccleuch for the railway and today it's a peaceful place with great walking and cycling (including one of the 7 Stanes trail centres). The wee village museum gives a brilliant introduction to the families who once ruled these hills, and the surrounding countryside is perfect for exploring on foot or by bike.

Top Tip: Combine Hermitage Castle with a loop through Newcastleton and back towards Hawick on the A7 for one of the most scenic drives in the South of Scotland.

To continue an exploration of the Borders turbulent past, a visit to nearby **Jedburgh** is also recommended. Here you will find three excellent historic visitor attractions – **Jedburgh Castle Jail, Mary Queen of Scots House** and **Jedburgh Abbey**. The jail is Victorian and housed on the site of the towns former royal castle. It is free to enter and great fun – genuinely spooky at times! Mary Queen of Scots house is a 16th century fortified house, once home of the powerful Kerr family and now housing a museum dedicated to Mary’s life and her eventful stay in Jedburgh. It’s also free and operated by Live Borders and will appeal to anyone with an interest in Scottish history. Finally Jedburgh Abbey, once a truly might building, it still has a wow factor despite suffering in wars, as was the sad fate of all the Border abbeys. Architecture buffs will love seeing the transition from Romanesque to Gothic architecture as the building took generations to complete, with style and technique changing as they went. All three give a glimpse into the past but Jedburgh is not a museum – a vibrant High Street with cool indie shops awaits, as well as lots of places to grab food. **Top Tip – Head to Simply Scottish for Cullen skink, one of the best I have tasted 😊**

The drama of the Reivers is every bit as compelling as the better known Highland clan stories, and in Hawick and Jedburgh, you can still feel it in the bones of the place.

THE MERSE - DUNS & BERWICKSHIRE

Berwickshire sits in the eastern part of the Borders, defined by fertile farmland and one of Scotland’s most dramatic coastlines. It’s a part of the region that often feels overlooked - which is remarkable, because it’s full of stories, scenery and surprises. The wide plain of the River Tweed, known here as the Merse, has a very different character

to the upper Tweed and the Touro route, at times it will feel like another country, and depending on which bridge you cross it might well be! Here are some of the best things to see and do.

Duns is a good place to start and is a busy town with its market square, many shops and cafes. Many visitors will be drawn to the first class **Jim Clark Museum**, telling the story of Britain's finest ever racing driver, who was of proud Berwickshire farming stock. This museum will of course appeal to petrol heads, but it is such a fascinating study of a great man that it will entertain all visitors.

When in Duns, I recommend a visit to the excellent **Scotland Shop**. Founder Anna White has created a brilliant, international business selling high quality garments, including the famous **Doddie Tartan** which she designed.

The town is also home to **Duns Play Fest** each May, bringing new theatrical performances to the region. Despite being a predominantly rural area, the Borders has a thriving arts scene with Play Fest establishing itself firmly in that during recent years.

A little further afield you will find quiet roads and lanes just crying out for cycling, and if you do plan a long road route then a lunch stop at the **Allanton Inn** should be on your agenda. Award winning food and a warm welcome are always on the menu, with new Borderlands Food Tours also being offered. **Top Tip – Pizza in the beer garden in the summer with a textbook Berwickshire barley field in the background. Doesn't get better than that!**

The Berwickshire coast is one of the undoubted gems of the Borders, with huge cliffs, hidden coves and wildlife that rivals the North Coast, this is one of Scotland's most dramatic shorelines, just with far fewer crowds. Thrill seekers will love **RIB Trips** at Eyemouth and St. Abbs, nature lovers can spend hours exploring the seasonal wonders at **St. Abb's National Nature Reserve** and those just looking for a day on the beach can head to **Coldingham Bay**, where surfers and dolphins share the waves. Dig a little deeper however and you find that the Berwickshire coast has secrets such as **Siccar Point**, where the Enlightenment genius James Hutton proved his theory of the vast age

of the earth. A new trail out to the point has been created in 2026 to celebrate the 300th anniversary of Hutton's birth. Or how about the tiny village of **St. Abbs**, which was so perfect and quaint that it became New Asgaard in the Avengers movies. And don't forget the largest town in the area, **Eyemouth**. A fishing port where you can feed a particularly blubbery seal in the harbour before tucking into the finest ice cream and fish & chips in the land.

Whether you're into motorsport, coastal adventures or quiet country roads, I think Berwickshire offers a completely different flavour of the South of Scotland and should be on your list for a visit.

THE BORDER – KELSO & COLDSTREAM

The area we know as the Scottish Borders is defined by the mighty River Tweed. And here in the eastern part of the region between Kelso and Coldstream, the great river forms the Border itself. This is a landscape of grand estates, a cobbled market town, world-class fishing and some of the most significant historic sites in Scotland. It's also an area that many visitors miss entirely, but I think it is well worth a visit. If you want to understand the Borders in all its richness this is a place well worth exploring.

Kelso is often described as one of the most handsome towns in Scotland, and it's easy to see why. Its **cobbled square** is the largest in the country and reminds me of the continent – you can picture it in Belgium or the Netherlands. The Square is framed by colourful Georgian buildings and a lively mix of shops, cafés and pubs. It's the kind of place where you can happily wander for an hour, soaking up the atmosphere and enjoying a coffee in front of the large town hall.

Just a short stroll away is **Kelso Abbey**, one of the four great Border abbeys. Though now a ruin, in fact the most ruinous of them all – no coincidence as we are only 5 miles or so from England here. Despite that it still has an imposing presence and hints at the immense wealth and power this region once held. Walkers can follow the **Borders Abbeys Way**, a long-distance route linking Kelso with Jedburgh, Melrose and Dryburgh,

it's a brilliant way to explore the region and the section just out of Kelso by Roxburgh Castle is stunning with otters often spotted in the River Teviot.

Kelso is also home to **Kelso Races**, voted one of the friendliest racecourses in the UK. A day at the races here feels wonderfully Borders – we are a horsey region! National Hunt meetings run here for much of the year.

And then of course there's **Floors Castle**, Scotland's largest inhabited house, home to the Duke and Duchess of Roxburgh and their young kids. This spectacular stately home sits in magnificent parkland overlooking the Tweed and offers everything from grand interiors to woodland trails and a superb café.

Top Tip: If you have time for only one grand house, consider heading 20 minutes north to Mellerstain House. Designed by Robert Adam, it's one of the finest examples of Georgian architecture in Britain, in fact the interiors are a bit mind blowing! Guided tours here are often blissfully quiet.

Fishing fans will already know that Kelso is a gateway to some of the best **salmon fishing** in the world. Even if you're not casting a line, the riverside walks along the Tweed and Teviot are a joy. The nearby Borders Events Centre is host to two huge agricultural events each year, firstly **The Border Union Show** (late July) which is a two day celebration of rural life with livestock, food, crafts and is perfect for families. My pick for something totally different however is **The Kelso Ram Sale** (September). It's the largest one day ram sale in the world, and a fascinating insight into the region's farming heritage – grab a beer and listen to the auctioneers doing their thing – but keep your hands in your pockets or you might end up with a 20k tup!

Coldstream sits right on the line between Scotland and England, and you feel that frontier character the moment you arrive. It's a quieter town than Kelso, but full of significance as it is the home of the Coldstream Guards, and the place where General Monck famously marched south to restore Parliament in 1660. Nearby is Flodden, the battlefield which was the sight of Scotland's greatest military disaster in 1513, and which is remembered each August by a huge ride out from Coldstream to the battlefield itself. The **Coldstream Museum** tells these stories well, and the riverside walk down to the **Coldstream Bridge** gives you a sense of the Tweed as a boundary and witness to

centuries of history. You'll also see the toll house where, like the more famous Gretna Green, English runaways would come to make the most of Scotland's more relaxed marriage laws.

What makes this area particularly interesting for me is the contrast with the English villages just across the water. Norham, with its mighty Norman castle, huge Anglican Church and village green feels like a classic English country village. And just across the river **Cornhill-on-Tweed** offers a lovely shop, country pub and a different architectural flavour. This is a good place to remind you that while we are a United Kingdom, Scotland and England are still very different places with similar landscapes, shared history but distinct culture – and accents!!

Kelso, Coldstream and the English Border offer a blend of history, scenery and culture that rivals anywhere in Scotland, right at the start. With fewer crowds, more space and a warm welcome, they're a perfect addition to any Borders adventure.

SCOTT COUNTRY - SELKIRK & THE ETRICK FOREST

If the Tweed Valley shows the Borders at its most scenic, and Reiver Country reveals its wild past, then Selkirk and the Ettrick Forest combine both to and takes you into the literary heart of the region. This is Scott Country, a landscape full of stories, ballads, legends and the life of the great Sir Walter Scott himself. Once a vast hunting forest, today it is quiet and full of surprises – including a very special pub!

Selkirk is one of the oldest Royal Burghs in Scotland, sitting at the head of the Ettrick and Yarrow valleys. Sir Walter Scott served here as Sheriff of Selkirkshire for 30 years, dispensing justice from the courthouse that still stands proudly on the Market Place, with its statue towering outside. Selkirk is rightly proud of Scott and the town in turn shaped his writing with the stories of the Ettrick Forest finding their way into his novels and poems.

A short drive from Selkirk brings you to **Abbotsford**, Scott's extraordinary home on the banks of the Tweed. It is one of the absolute must see attractions in the Borders. The house is packed with curiosities, weapons, books and treasures, while the gardens and woodland trails offer peaceful riverside walks. If you want to understand Scott (and by extension, the Borders) then this is the place to start – a kind of Borders Disneyland for history buffs!

Selkirk itself has a proud identity, celebrated each June during the **Selkirk Common Riding**, one of the most moving and historic of all the Border festivals. The casting in the Market Place recalls the sorrow of the town's legendary sole survivor of the battle of Flodden and is a truly great spectacle.

Just outside Selkirk lies **Bowhill House**, the elegant country seat of the Duke of Buccleuch, a distant relative of Sir Walter Scott. Set within thousands of acres of woodland and parkland, Bowhill is a classy place to visit. They have a summer programme of events and are kid friendly with the adventure playground having entertained generations of Borders youngsters, including me and my own kids.

A drive up Ettrick valley will give you clues to the dangerous past – Aikwood and Dryhope Towers still stand as they have for 500 years, now private homes but once the domain of fearsome, cunning members of the Scott family.

If the towers and their often chilling past leaves you in need of a little warmth, then fear not as these valleys are home to two of The Borders finest inns. **The Cross Keys Inn**, in Ettrickbridge is a classic coaching inn with hearty food, Tempest beer and a warm fire. It has been voted Scotland's pub of the year 3 times in a row by the Visit Scotland Thistle Awards so be in no doubt this place is worth the visit. In neighbouring Yarrow you will find **The Gordon Arms**, once frequented by Scott, James Hogg and Robert Burns and now home to fine dining from chef-owner Bryn Jones. Both also have letting rooms and make perfect bases for exploring the Ettrick and Yarrow valleys.

At the heart of Ettrick Forest lies **St Mary's Loch**, the largest natural loch in the Borders and well known to Touro participants. Whether you're walking the ring o the loch hike, riding the valley or simply sitting with a coffee from the Glen Café, it's a place that.

Popular with wild swimmers all year round, who extol the virtues of the cold water, but I will have to take their word for that...

Nearby stands the statue of **James Hogg**, the Ettrick Shepherd, a poet, novelist and friend of Scott. His writing captured the spirit of these hills, and his presence is still felt in the landscape both here and in neighbouring Ettrick where he lies in the remote kirkyard. Hogg was a regular at Tibbie Shiels Inn, on the small spit of land between St. Mary's Loch and the neighbouring Loch of the Lowes. The Inn was named after the redoubtable landlady Tibbie, and while no longer open as an Inn it does welcome campers and events in its stunningly located grounds. The Southern Upland Way also runs nearby, with Tibbie Shiels being the location of its official opening in 1984.

Selkirk and the Ettrick Forest offer a blend of history, literature and textbook Borders landscape that I believe rivals anywhere in Scotland. From Scott's grand Abbotsford to the beauty of St Mary's Loch, this is a part of the Borders that rewards visitors all year round and keeps us locals coming back too!