



Edinburgh Festival Voluntary Guides Association

Information for prospective trainees

March 2019

Welcome

Thank for your interest in joining us as a guide. Becoming a guide can be a fairly demanding process, but the role is enjoyable and very satisfying. These notes will explain what's involved.

About the Association

The Edinburgh Festival Voluntary Guides Association (EFVGA) is a group of volunteers who conduct walking tours in and around the Royal Mile. Our core "product" is the programme of free tours which we run twice a day during the Edinburgh Festival and Fringe. We also offer tours on demand at other times of the year, for which we make a small charge.

All our guides are volunteers who receive no payment of any kind. The income from our on-demand tours goes entirely to the Association's running costs.

The Association was founded in 1947, and has been part of the Festival and Fringe every year since then. The Lord Provost of Edinburgh is our patron.

What we are looking for

As a guide, you will be leading our tours in and around the Royal Mile. Your aim will be to give visitors a flavour of our city's rich and colourful history. You will show them the important historic sites, and also the "hidden corners": the closes, pends and wynds that they would be unlikely to find on their own.

As a prospective guide, we expect you to have:

- A deep interest in - and an enthusiasm for - Edinburgh, its history and its culture.
- A good speaking voice, with the ability to engage and entertain an audience - not to mention making yourself heard over the hubbub of the Edinburgh Fringe.
- A reasonable level of physical fitness. Our tours are in no way physically demanding, but you will be on your feet for up to two and half hours at a time, walking for at least a mile on narrow crowded pavements.
- Foreign language skills are an advantage but by no means essential.

We don't expect you to be an expert in Edinburgh history at the outset. But we do expect you to be willing to fully develop your knowledge of the Old Town and the Royal Mile as your training progresses.

What we offer in return

As an EFVGA member, you will enjoy:

- The chance to develop your knowledge of local history and to share your knowledge with others.
- The opportunity to meet many interesting people from around the world.
- The satisfaction of being a member of a long-standing organisation with an enviable reputation.
- The opportunity to visit interesting places in the Old Town that are not normally open to the public, as well as attending occasional talks and social events.

Your commitment

As a guide, you will be asked to commit to leading six to eight tours over the 25 days of the Festival season, on dates convenient to yourself. As far as possible, we won't expect you to lead two tours on the same day or on consecutive days (unless you prefer to do so).

We might also occasionally ask you to lead out-of-season tours, although these are in no way obligatory. These tours take place at a mutually convenient date and time.

What leading a tour involves

During the Festival, our free tours start from the City Chambers, at 10:00 and 14:00. We ask you to arrive at the start point 20 minutes before your allotted start time, to help welcome visitors and organise them into groups.

The route you take along the Royal Mile, and the choice of sites that you visit, are entirely up to you. You are unlikely to cover the whole of the route between the Castle and Holyrood in the time available, so focus on the areas that you think will be most interesting.

The tours are advertised as lasting two hours. Although you might occasionally overrun that time, keep in mind that many visitors will have other shows or attractions to go to, and will wish to finish on time in order to keep to their schedule.

Some other points to keep in mind:

- Our tours go out in all weathers.
- Guides are expected to deliver their commentary without referring to notes or reading from a script.
- We expect the highest standards of accuracy from our guides, but that doesn't mean you will be expected to answer every question that is thrown at you. If you don't know the answer to a question, say so. Never make up an answer or try to bluff.

The above points apply equally to our out-of-season tours, except that in those cases you will normally agree a starting time and place that is convenient for the visitors.

Safety briefing

At the start of each tour, we require all guides to give a simple safety briefing. You will warn your group about uneven surfaces, narrow steps, low doorways, etc. Mention that, although parts of the route are traffic-free, other parts are not, so they should take care when stepping off the kerb. And remind them that where there are crowds there are thieves, so they should keep an eye on their valuables.

The safety briefing is important – please take it seriously. If the worst happens, the fact that you gave the briefing could help defend us against any claims.

The training process

In order to become a guide, you will go through a training process followed by a practical test. The training is self-paced. You can decide for yourself how much time you want to put into it and how quickly you want to proceed. Some of our trainees spread the process over several months while others complete it more rapidly.

As a first step, we will assign you to a mentor. This will be an experienced guide who will lead you through the training process and provide you with help and encouragement. The mentor will arrange a preliminary meeting, at which he or she will discuss with you in more detail what being a guide involves. This will usually be followed by a "demonstration" tour.

Although the mentor will be available to you throughout your training, most of the process will be self-study, based on your own reading and research – and especially on walking around the Royal Mile and familiarising yourself with the various sites. (Offering to lead a practice tour for your family or friends is a particularly good way of developing your skills.)

To help in your research, there is a suggested reading list at the end of this document.

The assessment test

When you feel you are ready, contact the training co-ordinator to request an assessment test.

The test will be conducted by an experienced guide (not your mentor). You will lead the assessor on a tour, treating him or her as a member of the public. The assessor will be looking at your appearance, demeanour and ability to engage an audience, as well as testing your knowledge of the Royal Mile (and remember, if you don't know the answer to a question, it's OK to say so).

At the end of the test, the assessor will tell you if you have passed or if you need to spend more time improving your performance. If you are not successful, you will be free to repeat the assessment at a later date if you wish to do so.

After you qualify

If and when you pass the assessment test, we will invite you to attend our AGM and civic reception in the following March, at which the Lord Provost will present you with your EFVGA badge.

A few weeks before the start of the Festival season, we will ask you to fill in a rota form, in which you tell us the times and dates on which you will be available to lead tours. Based on that information, we will then let you know which tours you have been assigned to lead.

Appendix : Suggested reading list

Books

The following are suggestions for books that you might find useful for your study and research.

Catford, E.F., *Edinburgh: The Story of a City*

Fry, Michael, *Edinburgh A History of the City*

Melvin, Eric, *A Walk Down Edinburgh's Royal Mile*

Wright, Gordon, *A Guide to the Royal Mile*

The above titles are readily available from local bookshops and public libraries.

There are many more books on local history available for loan or reference in the Edinburgh and Scottish Collection in the Central Library and also at some branch libraries.

On-line resources

There are many websites devoted to Edinburgh and Scottish history and culture. A good place to start would be the following Wikipedia articles: *Edinburgh*, *Edinburgh Castle*, *History of Edinburgh*, *List of closes on the Royal Mile*, *Royal Mile* and *Timeline of Edinburgh history*. These all include links to other useful sites as well suggestions for further reading.

If you are a member of Edinburgh Public Libraries, you can access a wealth of useful material, including: an extensive collection of images and maps; *The Scotsman* and *The Times* archives; records from Scotland's Places; *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*; and a lot more. Go to yourlibrary.edinburgh.gov.uk and follow the link to Local & Family History.