Three festivals

Up Helly Aa

On the last Tuesday of every January, local men in the town of Lerwick, in the Shetland Islands, go a little crazy! Teams of men called Guizers parade through the streets to celebrate the festival of Up Helly Aa – and they all wear Viking costumes. Up Helly Aa started in the 1800s, but it comes from an old Viking festival to celebrate the sun.

After sunset, four or five thousand people watch as one group of Guizers pulls a wooden Viking boat through the streets! About a thousand Guizers follow them with burning torches. They burn the boat in the town centre, and perform dances and songs around the town – the parties continue until the next morning!

Preparations for the next Up Helly Aa start again in February. The Guizers – all men – practise in groups, make the costumes and build the boat. It takes months of hard work to build a Viking boat, but only one hour to burn it!
Traditional events called Highland Games happen all year in different parts of Scotland. The Games started in the 1820s, with competitions for traditional sports, music and dancing. The biggest event is the Cowal Highland Gathering, at Dunoon. Thirty thousand people come from all over the world for three days at the end of August to watch strange sports events. In tossing the caber, strong men throw big tree logs. In the stone put, men and women throw a stone ball as far as they can.

Pierre de Coubertin, ‘the father of the modern Olympic Games’, saw an exhibition of Highland sports in 1889. People say that they became the model for his Olympic Games in 1896. But the Highland Games aren’t just a sports event. About 750 dancers come to Dunoon to compete in the Highland Dancing Competition, and 150 Scottish bands parade through the town playing traditional instruments like the bagpipes.
The Edinburgh Festival

Every summer, nearly two million visitors come to Edinburgh to see some of the world’s best theatre, comedy and musical events. The Edinburgh International Festival began in 1947, and it brings world-famous actors and musicians to the city. Another festival called the Edinburgh Festival Fringe, or The Fringe, started in the same year, and it’s now the biggest arts festival in the world. The Fringe events are usually in smaller theatres or outside on the streets (on the fringe of the main festival) – and a lot of them are free! Both festivals are at the same time in August. In three weeks, there are about 2,500 different shows in the city!

The Royal Mile is one of the best places to see street performances during the festivals. It’s a historic street in the centre of old Edinburgh. You can walk along the Royal Mile, visit a few historical buildings, and enjoy the free entertainment.