

Squiz the World goes to... Scotland

Each fortnight, we give the world globe a spin, and see where we land. Then we take the kids of Australia and the World on an audio excursion to visit that country and its people.

I'm Christie Kijurina, and today on Squiz the World we're visiting a country of rugged mountains, ancient castles and deep, mysterious lochs... where people compete by tossing enormous tree trunks through the air... and where the national animal is a creature that doesn't even exist...

Can you guess? ... Strap yourselves into the Squiz Kids Super Fast Supersonic Jetliner as we take off and take a squiz at Scotland.

JUST THE FACTS

"Scotland sits at the top of the island of Great Britain, with England directly below it and the Atlantic Ocean and North Sea wrapping around its rugged coastline.

Now, a quick geography untangle, because this gets confusing. Scotland is a country. Great Britain is the island that contains Scotland, England and Wales. And the United Kingdom, or UK, is made up of Scotland, England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

About 5 and a half million people live in Scotland. Its capital is Edinburgh, famous for its castle sitting high above the city, while Glasgow is Scotland's biggest city and a major centre for music, art, sport and culture."

"Head north from the cities and things get much wilder. Scotland is famous for its Highlands, a huge sweep of mountains, valleys, rocky peaks and open countryside. The highest mountain in the whole United Kingdom, Ben Nevis, is here too, rising more than 1,300 metres above sea level.

And in Scotland, you'll hear some special words for the landscape. A lake is often called a loch, and a valley can be called a glen. Scotland has thousands of lochs, including one particularly famous one called Loch Ness... but we'll come back to what may, or may not, be swimming around in there later.

Scotland also has nearly 800 islands, scattered around its coast. Some are tiny and remote, while larger island groups like Orkney, Shetland and the Hebrides have their own towns, schools, traditions and strong sense of identity."

Most people in Scotland speak English, but you'll also hear Scots and Scottish Gaelic. Scots gives us words like wee for small and bairn for child, while Gaelic is a Celtic language with deep roots in Scottish history, particularly in the Highlands and islands.

"And history? Scotland has plenty. Romans, Vikings, clans, castles, kings, queens, battles and centuries of complicated relations with England.

But that, frankly, is a whole other podcast.

For now, let's leave the history books on the shelf and find out what makes Scottish culture feel so unmistakably Scottish... from tartan and bagpipes to golf, Hogmanay and the rather unusual sport of throwing enormous tree trunks through the air..."

LET'S GET CULTURAL

"Scotland has no shortage of traditions, and some of them are very easy to spot.

Take tartan. Those criss-crossing patterns of coloured stripes are woven into fabric and are strongly associated with Scotland. Different tartans can be linked with clans (sort of extended family groups), regions, organisations and families, although not every Scottish person has a clan tartan tucked away in the wardrobe."

"Then there's the kilt, the pleated woollen garment traditionally associated with Highland dress. Kilts are still worn today for weddings, ceremonies, Highland Games and other special occasions.

And of course, Scotland has bagpipes.

Now, bagpipes were not invented in Scotland. Versions of bagpipes have existed in different parts of Europe, the Middle East and North Africa for centuries. But the Great Highland Bagpipe became deeply woven into Scottish culture. Traditionally, the air bag itself was often made from an animal skin, including sheep or goatskin. The player blows air into the bag, then squeezes it with their arm to keep the sound going, which is why bagpipes can produce that long, unmistakable wail."

Scotland also gave the world one of its oldest and most famous sports: golf. People have been whacking little balls around Scottish countryside for hundreds of years, and St Andrews is often called the home of golf. In the 1700s, its famous course helped establish the now-standard game of 18 holes.

"If golf sounds a little too calm, you could always try the Highland Games.

These community gatherings feature music, dancing and strength events, including the caber toss. A caber is basically a huge wooden pole, and the aim is not to throw it the farthest. Competitors lift it upright, run with it, then try to flip it end-over-end so it lands pointing straight ahead."

"Another huge Scottish celebration is Hogmanay, the name for New Year's Eve. There are fireworks, parties and traditions like first-footing, where the first visitor through the door after midnight is believed to bring luck for the year ahead.

And Scotland takes poetry seriously too. Every January, people celebrate poet Robert Burns with Burns Night suppers, where haggis is carried in with great ceremony and Burns' poem Address to a Haggis is recited:

"Fair fa' your honest, sonsie face,
Great chieftain o' the puddin'-race!"

Which is a very grand way of saying hello to your dinner. And a nod to Scotland's Stories on YouTube for that one."

But Scottish kids still have to swap the kilts, cabers and poetry for something much more familiar...It's...

TIME FOR SCHOOL

"If you walked into a primary school in Scotland, plenty would feel familiar. There'd be classrooms, teachers, maths, reading, science, sport and probably someone wondering how long until lunch.

But there are a few differences.

Scottish children usually start school between the ages of four-and-a-half and five-and-a-half, and instead of Prep, Year 1, Year 2 and so on, primary school runs from Primary 1, or P1, through to P7. After that, students move to secondary school, from S1 to S6. Education is compulsory, and state schooling is free."

School uniforms are very common too, often with jumpers, polo shirts, skirts or trousers. Individual schools set their own clothing policies, and current Scottish guidelines say uniforms should be affordable, comfortable and practical, especially when the weather turns cold and soggy, which in Scotland is not exactly a rare event.

And lunchtime comes with another bonus. Children in P1 to P5 at council schools receive free school lunches, no matter how much money their family earns.

Scottish schools also put a strong emphasis on learning outdoors. Lessons can move outdoors beyond the classroom into playgrounds, parks, forests and local communities, with the outdoor locations used for everything from science and maths to environmental learning. Which does make sense in a country with spectacular mountains, beaches, forests and lochs.

For some kids, school itself can be very remote. Lots of Scotland's islands have small local schools. In places like Orkney, children living on the outer islands usually attend their own island school. And in some schools, there's one more very Scottish difference: children can learn through Gaelic, with subjects like maths and science taught in the language. But once the home time bell rings, things might get considerably

stranger... because Scotland's stories are crawling with monsters, magical horses, shape-shifting seals and one national animal that nobody has ever actually seen.

BELIEVE IT OR NOT

"Scotland's misty mountains, lonely islands and deep, dark lochs have inspired some seriously strange stories over the centuries.

Some grew from ancient Gaelic and Celtic storytelling traditions, others from Scots and the Viking influenced culture of islands like Orkney and Shetland. And the most famous creature of them all supposedly lives in Loch Ness."

"Of course, it's Nessie! The Loch Ness Monster, which is usually described as a huge creature with a long neck and humps rising from the water. Stories of a mysterious water beast in the area go back more than 1,000 years, and since the 1930s there have been photographs, supposed sightings and huge scientific searches of the loch.

So far, though... no monster."

"Then there are kelpies, supernatural water horses said to lurk beside Scottish rivers and lochs. They might look like perfectly friendly horses, but according to legend, climb onto one and it could gallop straight into the water with you still attached.

Much nicer are the selkies, creatures from island folklore that live as seals in the sea but can shed their skins and become human on land."

"And from Orkney comes the Stoor Worm, a gigantic sea serpent with poisonous breath. Legend says a boy called Assipattle defeated it, and when the monster died, its teeth fell out and became the islands of Orkney, Shetland and the Faroes.

With all those mythical creatures running around, perhaps it's not so surprising that Scotland chose a unicorn as its national animal. It has appeared on Scottish royal symbols for centuries, representing strength and independence."

"But Believe It Or Not, Scotland's real achievements may be even more extraordinary.

Scottish engineer James Watt made huge improvements to the steam engine. John McAdam developed a much better way to build roads. Alexander Cumming invented the S-bend that stops nasty sewer smells coming up through your toilet.... extremely important stuff!"

"The first Encyclopaedia Britannica was published in Edinburgh. Scots also helped pioneer pedal-powered bicycles, artificial refrigeration and the telephone.

Then came John Logie Baird's television, Alexander Fleming's discovery of penicillin and antibiotics, and physicist James Clerk Maxwell's work leading to the world's first colour photograph.

And what was in that historic colour photo?

A piece of tartan ribbon, of course!"

"From imaginary monsters to inventions that changed the real world, Scotland certainly knows how to keep us guessing.

And now it's time to discover something else the Scots have become rather famous for...putting almost anything on a plate, and occasionally into a deep fryer. That's right, it's..."

DINNER TIME

"After all those monsters and world-changing inventions, it's time to tackle something that frightens some visitors even more...a haggis.

Haggis is Scotland's national dish, and traditionally it's made from parts of a sheep including the heart, liver and lungs, chopped up and mixed with oatmeal, onion, spices and stock.

And yes, traditionally, that mixture was cooked inside a sheep's stomach.

Before you run screaming from the dinner table, though, haggis came from a time when wasting good food was simply not an option. People used as much of an animal as they could, and those less glamorous bits were nutritious, filling and much tastier once you added plenty of seasoning.

These days, haggis is usually cooked in a casing rather than an actual stomach, and you can even get vegetarian versions."

"A traditional plate of haggis often comes with neeps and tatties.

Tatties are easy. They're potatoes.

Neeps are what Scots often call turnips, although the vegetable they mean is usually what Australians would call a swede.

Mash them both up, put them beside the haggis and you've got one of Scotland's most famous meals.

OK, so if sheep stomachs aren't quite hitting the spot, Scotland has a much safer option...

shortbread."

These crumbly, buttery biscuits are traditionally made with just flour, butter and sugar and have been associated with Scottish celebrations for centuries. Today you'll find them in all sorts of shapes, including the classic little rectangular fingers, perfect for dunking into a cup of tea.

"And then there are Scotland's chip shops. Now, Glasgow in particular has become famous for takeaway food where the guiding culinary philosophy occasionally seems to be: Could we batter that and put it in the deep fryer?

There's pizza crunch, which is battered, deep-fried pizza. Then there's the legendary deep-fried Mars Bar, and even deep fried icecream

Yes. Ice Cream. Covered in batter. Dropped into boiling oil til crispy. What more could you ask for?"

"So whether you're brave enough for haggis and neeps, happier with a piece of shortbread, or wondering what else the Scots could possibly fit into a deep fryer, our Scottish adventure has certainly given us plenty to chew over.

And with our bellies full, there's only one thing left to do...It's "

THE S'QUIZ

This is the part of the podcast where you get to test how well you've been listening.

What is the capital city of Scotland? [Edinburgh]

True or False: Bagpipes were invented in Scotland. [False]

"What unusual object appeared in one of the world's first colour photographs?

A) A Scottish castle

B) A tartan ribbon

C) A bagpipe

[b) A Tartan Ribbon]"

That's all we have time for today. Thanks for staying curious about the world, and joining me on this incredible trip to Scotland.

Now get out there, and have a most excellent day. Over and out.