

Edinburgh's August Festivals Will Not Take Place in 2020

1 April 2020, Edinburgh: For the first time in over 70 years, the five festivals that transform Edinburgh into the world's leading cultural destination every August are not going ahead this year due to concerns around the Covid-19 pandemic. **Edinburgh Art Festival, The Edinburgh Festival Fringe, Edinburgh International Book Festival, Edinburgh International Festival** and **The Royal Edinburgh Military Tattoo** are not happening as planned in 2020.

Together, the five August festivals comprise over 5,000 events across Scotland's capital each summer, welcoming audiences of 4.4 million and over 25,000 artists, writers and performers from 70 countries, making them the second biggest cultural event in the world after the Olympics.

The festivals' history stretches back to 1947, where in the aftermath of the Second World War the Edinburgh International Festival was founded to reconcile and reunite people and nations through art, in an event that transcended political and cultural boundaries. Many years later the International Festival continues to present the world's leading theatre, dance and music artists in Edinburgh's magnificent venues. The Fringe story began when eight theatre groups turned up uninvited to perform on the fringes of the very first International Festival. Since the dawn of this spontaneous artistic movement, millions have flocked to the Edinburgh Festival Fringe to produce, and to enjoy art of every genre. Conceived in 1950 the iconic major event, now known as The Royal Edinburgh Military Tattoo, brings together a huge cast of international military and folkloric performers to perform live to 220,000 visitors each August, with many millions seeing the show on BBC TV around the world.

The Edinburgh International Book Festival began in 1983 and has grown rapidly in scope and size, welcoming writers from all over the world to exchange ideas on some of the world's most pressing issues. The youngest of the August festivals, Edinburgh Art Festival was founded in 2004 to provide a platform for the visual arts, each year bringing together the capital's leading galleries, museums and artist-run spaces to present work by international and UK artists.

Since their visionary beginnings the August festivals have presented the very best established and emerging artists from all corners of the globe and across all aspects of the performing, literary and visual arts in what has become the most significant and important celebration of culture anywhere in the world.

Said **Sorcha Carey**, Director, **Edinburgh Art Festival**,

"It is with deep sadness that today we announce the cancellation of Edinburgh Art Festival 2020. Our decision is taken in response to the ongoing risks posed by the Covid-19

pandemic, and the need to prioritise the safety of our audiences, artists, participants, staff and indeed all those working to combat coronavirus.

“While it has become impossible to deliver a festival this year, we remain fully committed to doing all we can to continue to support our visual arts community during what is going to be a hugely challenging time in the weeks and months to come.

“We hope that it will be possible for galleries, museums and production spaces across the city to reopen their doors in the coming months; and in the meantime, we will work creatively to find alternative ways to share the work of artists with audiences.

“We will be back next year – as always working closely with our partner galleries, and alongside our extended network of sister festivals, to celebrate the work of artists with audiences and communities across the city.”

Said **Shona McCarthy**, Chief Executive, **Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society**,

“It’s heart-breaking that the Fringe and our sister August festivals will not take place as planned this summer. However, having taken advice and considered all the options, we collectively believe this is the only appropriate response.

“The safety of participants, audiences, local residents and indeed everyone connected to our festivals will always come first. Our thoughts today are with the doctors, nurses, health and social care professionals on the front line, as well as all those affected by this dreadful pandemic. Our sympathies too are with the thousands of artists and participants directly affected by today’s decision – we will do everything we can to support you over the coming months.

“Culture brings out the best in us. It gives the marginalised a voice, it shapes and reshapes how we think of ourselves and, crucially, it unites us. Since their inception in 1947 the Edinburgh festivals have existed to champion the flowering of the human spirit and, in the face of this truly unprecedented global emergency, we believe that this spirit is needed now more than ever.”

Said **Nick Barley**, Director, **Edinburgh International Book Festival**,

“It is with great sadness that I can confirm that the Edinburgh International Book Festival will not take place as a physical entity in August of this year due to the risks surrounding the Covid-19 pandemic. This is not a decision we have taken lightly, however the safety of not only our authors, our audiences, our staff and our suppliers, but also that of the people who live and work in our wonderful city, is of paramount importance and we believe that planning to bring large numbers of people from all over the world together in Edinburgh in August is not appropriate this year. We hope to be able to programme a series of online events to take place in the summer.

“We will be back! The Edinburgh International Book Festival is an integral part of the Scottish cultural offering, and we will return next year. We are already looking forward to authors and audiences coming together to celebrate the written word in 2021. In the meantime, please

keep reading and please keep supporting your local independent bookshops, many of whom are offering a mail order or door drop delivery service.”

Said Fergus Linehan, Festival Director, Edinburgh International Festival,

“We are hugely disappointed to announce this cancellation but given the current outlook we believe it is the correct decision. We recognise that Edinburgh’s festivals play a very important role in the cultural, social and economic lives of our city and country, and this decision has not been taken lightly. Our thoughts are with all the country’s key workers and we hope that we can celebrate your heroic efforts when this awful pandemic has passed.

“The Edinburgh International Festival was born out of adversity – an urgent need to reconnect and rebuild. The current crisis presents all at the Festival with a similar sense of urgency. Work begins straight away on a 2021 Festival season that will boost both our spirits and our economy.

“As we observe our essential social distancing we can, I hope, look forward to being back together soon: sharing brilliant music, theatre, dance, literature and art from the greatest creative minds of our time. Until then, thank you for all your good wishes and keep safe in the coming months.”

Said Brigadier David Alfrey MBE, Chief Executive, The Royal Edinburgh Military Tattoo,

“Like most people, businesses and institutions, The Royal Edinburgh Military Tattoo has been working hard to adapt to the unprecedented conditions occasioned by the COVID-19 pandemic.

“In the first instance, we have sought to comply carefully with Government advice and guidance in looking after our customers, staff, suppliers, stakeholders and all those who rely on our annual success and charity. In addition, we have been looking at how best to make a wider and constructive contribution to the national, regional, municipal and individual effort.

“The pandemic is impacting across the world, the Tattoo – along with other major events and festivals – will need to carefully understand and adapt to whatever is our new normal.

“We are keen to do this as a great many people have come to rely on our annual routines for their livelihood and their entertainment, with an associated benefit that stretches internationally and across Scottish and UK tourism. Now though, we judge it is impractical and undesirable to stage a Tattoo in anything like its normal form in August.

“Accordingly, we have decided – for the first time in our 70-year history – to cancel our 25 shows set previously for the period 7–29 August 2020.”

Said Council Leader Adam McVey and Depute Cammy Day,

“This was a profoundly difficult decision– leaving a massive gap in our Capital – but clearly it was the right one. Our thoughts are very much with all those fantastic artists, writers, performers and organisations who were working so hard to prepare for another busy festival season.

“The most important consideration is the health of our residents and the safety of everyone in the City. We’re all working closely together as a city and internationally with the common purpose of protecting each other, whilst taking up our shared responsibility for planning towards our recovery.

“With that in mind, we’re looking at every feasible option to help to sustain our key sectors, including the festivals, and have committed to honouring all grant payments due to our cultural partners for the current year, and to the repurposing of these, as required. We’ll do everything we can to assist our world-renowned cultural sector to remain at the centre of the city’s identity going forward.

“We’re incredibly proud to be known as the world’s Festival City and must never forget the positive contribution our festivals make to our lives, bringing art to Edinburgh in a way no other city enjoys. We’ll continue to work with all of our citizens, colleagues and stakeholders to do everything we can to make sure we come through 2020 and look forward to again bringing the world to Edinburgh and Edinburgh to the world for our summer festivals in 2021!”

NOTES TO EDITORS

B-roll footage for use with broadcast media can be found [here](#)

Photos can be found [here](#)

About Edinburgh Art Festival

Founded in 2004, Edinburgh Art Festival is the platform for the visual arts at the heart of Edinburgh’s August festivals, bringing together the capital’s leading galleries, museums, production facilities and artist-run spaces in a city-wide celebration of the very best in visual art. Each year, the festival features leading international and UK artists alongside the best emerging talent, major survey exhibitions of historic figures, and a special programme of newly commissioned artworks that respond to public and historic sites in the city.

Edinburgh Art Festival is a registered charity supported by Creative Scotland and the City of Edinburgh Council.

www.edinburghartfestival.com

About Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society

The Edinburgh Festival Fringe is an open-access festival and is the largest arts festival in the world. In 2019, over 30,000 artists put on 3,841 shows in 323 venues right across Edinburgh.

The Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society is a charity that was established by artists to act as the custodian of the Fringe. It exists to support and encourage everyone who wants to participate in the Fringe; to provide information and assistance to audiences; and to promote the Fringe and what it stands for all over the world. Based on the Royal Mile in Edinburgh, the Society has a full-time team of just over 30 people, who work year-round to assist all the artists and audiences who make up the world’s greatest arts festival.

www.edfringe.com

About Edinburgh International Book Festival

The Edinburgh International Book Festival is the largest public celebration of the written word in the world, bringing together over 900 writers, poets, politicians, illustrators, journalists and thinkers with audiences to discuss, debate and share ideas in the heart of Scotland's capital city over 18 days in August.

www.edbookfest.co.uk

About Edinburgh International Festival

Edinburgh International Festival is the world's leading performing arts festival, featuring the finest performers from the worlds of dance, opera, music and theatre for three weeks each August in Scotland's capital. Created in 1947 to celebrate the human spirit, the International Festival remains an annual cultural exchange and global celebration for an international audience exceeding 400,000 per year.

Committed to being inclusive and accessible, the International Festival offers free events, discounted pricing, accessible performances and year-round community learning and engagement programmes.

www.eif.co.uk

About The Royal Edinburgh Military Tattoo

In 1950, following successful military showcases of music and dancing in Princes Street Gardens and on the Esplanade of Edinburgh Castle in the late 1940s, The Lord Provost of Edinburgh extended an invitation to the General Officer Commanding the Army in Scotland to present a bespoke military show, to be called The Edinburgh Military Tattoo.

The Royal Edinburgh Military Tattoo is a world-class event, rooted in Scottish tradition, offering audiences a live experience like no other. Performed to a live audience of 220,000 each year on the iconic Esplanade of Edinburgh Castle, the Tattoo features music, precision performances and dance from military and cultural acts from around the globe.

The Royal Edinburgh Military Tattoo's charitable purposes are at the heart of everything it does, and the organisation is proud to support several military and arts charities. To date, over £12 million has been donated with a commitment of giving £1 million each year since 2016.

www.edintattoo.co.uk/

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