

FRINGE BENEFITS?

The city is certainly buzzing at this time of year, but what does the Edinburgh Festival do for John Lewis? Kirsty Bennett reports



Three weeks, 3,000 events and more than 50,000 performers... the Edinburgh International Festival and Fringe are back for 2016! But what happens when the largest arts festival in the world comes to town? While the cast of comedy, theatre, dance, circus, cabaret and opera (the list goes on!) performers will all be taking to the stage in pockets of the Scottish capital as part of this year's festival, the retailers and businesses in the area are also in the spotlight. The festival, which has been running since 1947, attracts hundreds of thousands of visitors to the city and in 2015 more than 2.2 million tickets were sold for the event's performances. What does this melting pot of visitors, performers and artists in the city

in August mean for retailers? In John Lewis's case, it translates as a sales uplift in particular areas, but the elevated tourism activity means some of the locals often stay away, disrupting sales in other areas. "The city obviously sees an influx of tourists for the month and we have people visiting our shop from all over the world – our translators are in demand – and there's a general feel-good factor throughout the branch with lots of chat about the festival," says Hazel Tierney, Operations Manager at John Lewis Edinburgh. "But visitors to the festival are not in the city to shop: the additional festival footfall is balanced against the regular local John Lewis shoppers staying away from the city centre, so trade



ABOVE: the new entrance to John Lewis
LEFT: Head of Branch Barry Blamire and his team experience one of their busiest periods during the Festival, but it's not without its challenges



WAITROSE IN FESTIVAL SPIRIT, TOO

It's 10 years since Waitrose first arrived in Scotland, when the Comely Bank and Morningside branches opened in the Edinburgh area in the summer of 2006, meaning both are no strangers to the Edinburgh Festival Fringe. The branches, as in previous years, are likely to see an increased number of visitors over the course of the festival, with some very specific items topping the shopping lists of festival-goers, including souvenirs – and all things Scottish.

At Comely Bank, which is located in Edinburgh's West End, the party spirit is making its mark on sales so far: "Tourists are

out looking for Scottish produce to try, or to take home as gifts, and last week haggis sales were up by 30%," says Megan O'Malley, Partner Co-ordination Manager. Other popular lines included Scottish salmon – up by 20% – while Prosecco and strawberries also reported increases.

Waitrose Comely Bank Partners are also performers. "One of our Partners – Juan Casado Y Barton (above right) – has a lead role in a show called *Emerald Diaries*. There's a great buzz in the city around the festival and it's an exciting time for the branch," adds Megan.



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Hazel Tierney, Operations Manager, John Lewis Edinburgh



ABOVE LEFT: major refurbishment is under way
LEFT: views from the Place to Eat
RIGHT: a mannequin in Haberdashery inspired by the Fringe owl – below



remains relatively level and it's not (with the exception of Back to School and university trade) a peak month for us for sales."

Festival favourite buys

The city swells with visitors but it's the dining and leisure outlets, particularly post-6pm, that will really be boosted by tourism trade, "which is why we've reverted to regular trading hours this year," adds Hazel. "Luckily, our Place to Eat offers spectacular views over the Forth and is well-known among tour guides who often recommend it as a great spot for coffee, so we're expecting this to trade extremely well." So, what will be selling? As you might

expect cagoules, umbrellas, sunglasses and wellies are all likely to be a hit with festival-goers 'who come unprepared for Edinburgh's inclement weather', Hazel says, while items such as cameras and memory cards will also be in demand for visitors looking to capture the action. Haberdashery will also be a popular haunt for performers in search of quick-fix tools and kit for costume alterations and repairs. This year a major refurbishment got under way at John Lewis Edinburgh, as the branch prepares to become part of the city's 2020 Edinburgh St James shopping centre. Over the next four years the shop will be transformed into a 165,000 sq ft anchor store of the 1.7m sq ft development: a complex

that will include shops, catering units, apartments, cinema and a five-star hotel. The project has been paused temporarily but John Lewis Edinburgh has already revealed its new store entrance, ahead of the imminent closure of the existing St James Centre where it's currently located. "John Lewis Edinburgh is an established landmark in the city and being the biggest shop in Edinburgh we are well known," says Hazel. "Our new sliding doors at the main entrance are ready to handle an increased numbers of visitors passing through it and the branch is featuring on a tourist map this year to help entice shoppers into the store. The key message is that we're very much open for business!"