

Arty escape: the insider's guide to Glasgow

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Berlin's got a rival. From community arts venues to underground warehouse raves - Glasgow is filling spaces with creativity at every turn, discovers Bertie Brandes. Get a heads up on the city's hidden gems and book that trip now



Above: Kelvingrove art gallery and bowling greens. Lead image: Bertie outside Cottonrake Bakery. All photographs: Phil Taylor

I love tracing my way through unfamiliar places and recently I've found myself drawn to the many cities that stud the UK. Glasgow has been on my list for a while, so as my train from London pulls into Central station and I emerge into the sunny heart of the city centre I feel more than ready to dive in. Within 20 minutes I'm striding up the sandstone steps of my beautiful Airbnb rental home: a large, bright and airy apartment in the West End. I'm welcomed by my Airbnb host (and Glasgow native) Helen, who quickly transpires to be an indispensable font of local knowledge. Sinking into a velvet armchair, I extract all possible tips from her, scribbling down recommendations to add to my already bursting itinerary - from the best local coffee and need-to-know restaurants, to the history of the tenement building we're in, the likes of which line virtually every street in Glasgow. Helen also explains Glasgow's explosion in fine dining which started in near-by Finnieston, and recommends a few of her favourite galleries. It's fascinating to hear her talk about the city she knows so well and I'm left even more inspired to explore. I hastily pull my trainers on and get out there. Glasgow, I'm ready for you.

Read on for Bertie's guide to some of Glasgow's coolest corners ...



Bertie in the West End Airbnb apartment; more historic tenement buildings in the surrounding streets; the chic and homely sitting room of the Airbnb home

Brunch like a local
Coffee is a really big deal here. If you're the type of person who likes to know the name of the bean grower, roaster and local supplier behind your long black before taking a sip, book your tickets now. Papercup in the West End, recommended by my Airbnb host Helen, is a great to kick-start your day, or Cottonrake Bakery for amazing pastries and cakes. Just a short walk away there's also Kaf Coffee - chef-trained owner Leonora Belcher cut her teeth with the best in the country at Brew Lab in Edinburgh, before opening her doors to serve seriously delicious (and ethical) coffee. There are Norwegian-style brunch plates, too, and the vegetarian haggis and fried egg roll definitely gets my vote. Belcher recommends the brunch at Strange Brev in Southside, and to look out for soundough from Freedom - "a really interesting bakery in Glasgow that was started in a prison - the bread's great" - which is stocked at many cafes and shops throughout the city. Serenity Now, in the West End, is one of them - a beautifully bright space with a plant-based menu packed with smoothies and scrambles. For the not-quite-as-holy among us, there's Gnom (on Southside), where you can grab a heavenly hazelnut, cacao and banana French toast ice-cream sandwich. Who said you can't have brunch multiple times in one day? Surely that's why decaf was invented.

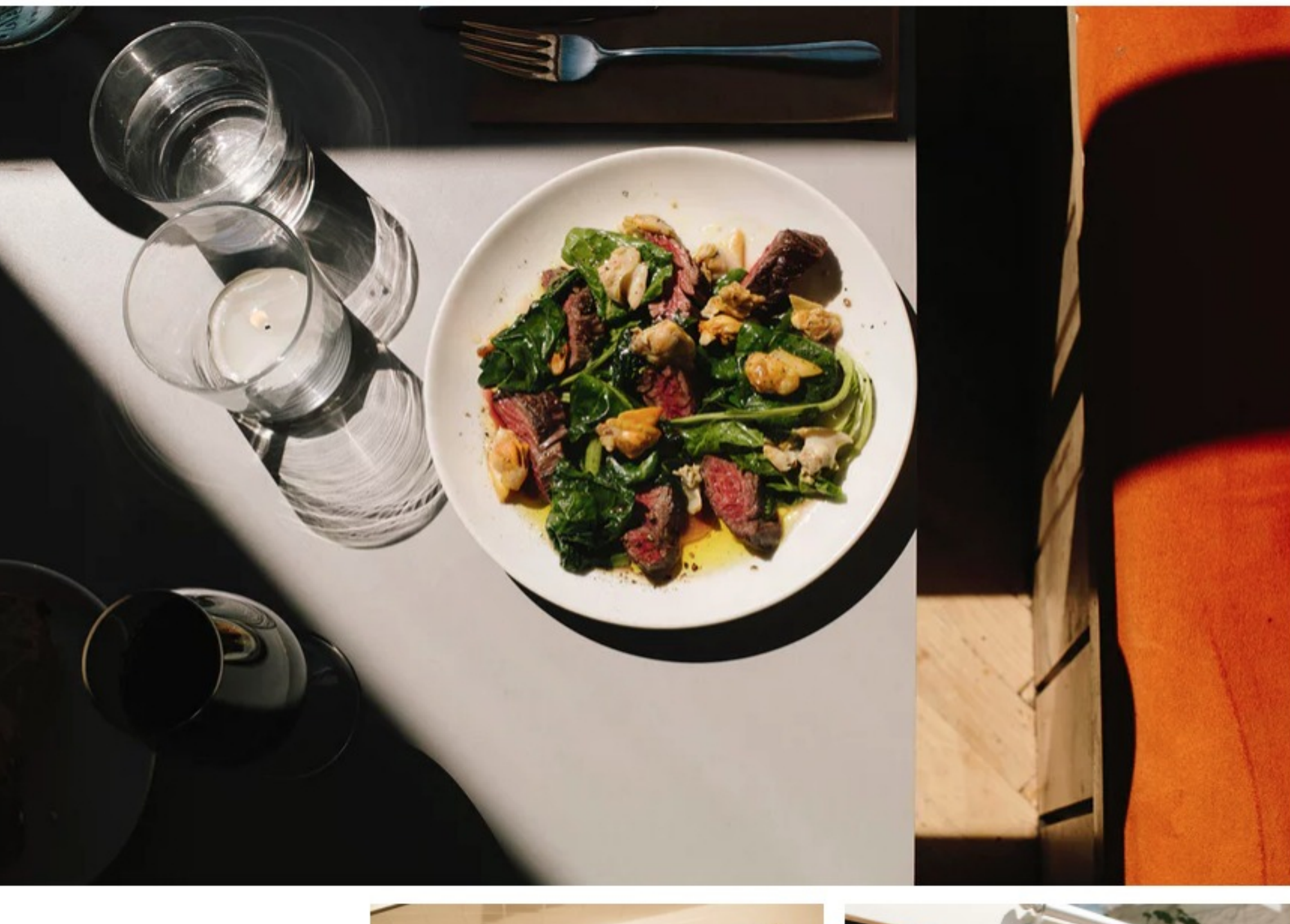


Where there's empty space you'll find creativity



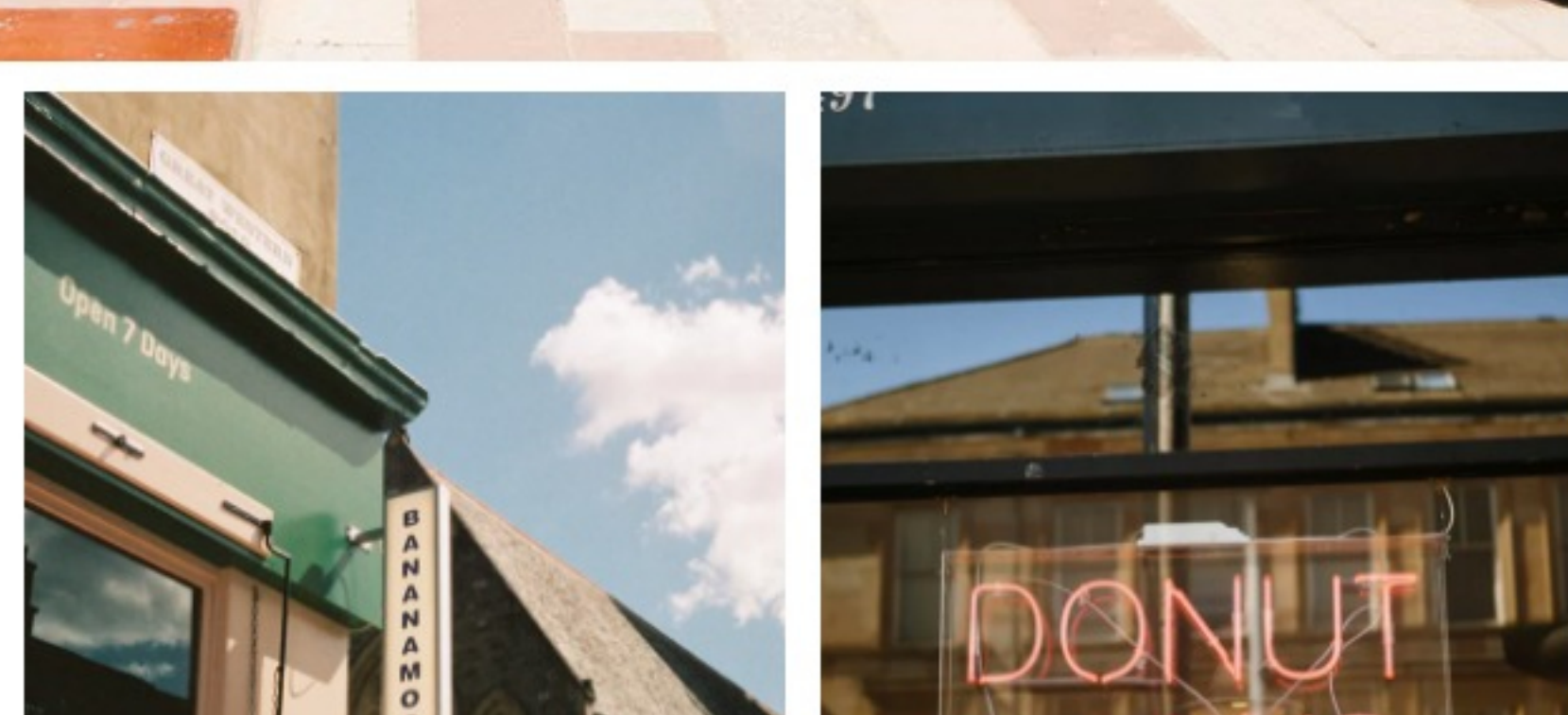
Clockwise from top left: Serenity Now cafe; Bertie in the Airbnb apartment kitchen; the Centre for Contemporary Arts

Hit the art trail and shop for one-offs
Famously home to one of the best art schools in the world, it's no surprise that Glasgow boasts a growing number of brilliant independent galleries and spaces. My Airbnb host Helen recommends the Common Guild, a space devoted to contemporary visual art. A ten minute walk from here is the Centre for Contemporary Arts. Director Francis McKee, shares his open-door community-focused approach to creative spaces while walking me through the gallery. The two cafes here are great, plus there's free wifi throughout the building if you get caught short while you're out. McKee also recommends a couple of must-see smaller galleries - Transmission and Market Gallery. "Where there's empty space you'll find creativity, and there's still a lot of empty space in Glasgow," he tells me. (The tiny Arti San Toi space near the Barrowland Ballroom is perhaps typical of this description.) There's no question the energy is catching. Stroll from the CCA up to Mono, a record store and vegan cafe, which is a firm favourite for locals and visitors alike. McKee also recommends Good Press, an independent bookshop bursting with unique zines and hosting evening events. If that's got you in a shopping mood, vintage clothes shop Mr Ben is a treasure trove located just a few minutes away. Over the river Tramway is another sizeable art space - great for both performance and visual art - that is working to expand engagement and involvement, particularly with refugees and the local Romanian, Syrian and Iranian communities.



Alchemilla; and Alchemilla chef Rosie Healey

Take a bite out of the special food scene
There are very few of the special food requirements that aren't catered to in Glasgow, but if you're on a diet you're going to struggle. The food here is good - really, really good. And while the brunch scene dominates plates until about 5pm, there's absolutely no shortage of delicious dinner spots come evening. My Airbnb host is the first of three locals to recommend Alchemilla, a Mediterranean restaurant serving sharing plates in "food heaven" Finnieston. The menu adapts to seasonal ingredients, while the style is consistently light and fresh. Burrata with white asparagus and lemon zest, and a circle of yellow polenta with liquid gorgonzola melting in the middle, are just two of the delights on the menu. Another must-visit is Ramen Dayo in the centre of town for fresh noodles so good you'll try to fit in a second bowl before your train home. Non-meat eaters will fall over themselves for the veggie tantanmen complete with "mince" and a silky boiled egg (vegan options are also available, naturally). Special mentions are also due to Ox and Finch, Paesano Pizza, Julie's Kopitiam, and not forgetting Mother India's cafe, for the best mango chutney I've ever tasted.



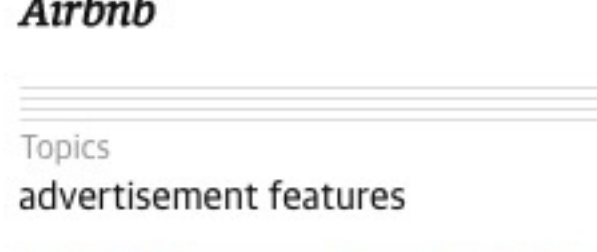
Art San Toi gallery; Bananamoon; Cottonrake Bakery

Find the nightlife buzz
The nightlife scene is pretty serious here and afterparties are a big deal; the warehouses around Laurieston are known to rival Berlin with their legendary all-night raves. Bar culture is booming too. (Of course the beauty of having some well-placed Airbnb digs is you can pop home and freshen up after dinner without sacrificing on time or energy.) Legendary Glaswegian DJ duo Optimo have just opened their second spot Bananamoon in the West End, serving food and coffee by day and cocktails after dark, in the slick retro surroundings. But it's also well worth venturing further out. A five minute train ride from Glasgow Central is Pollokshields East, Southside, an up-and-coming neighbourhood packed with bars and pubs. I grab a beer at the Allison Arms followed by cocktails at Rum Shack over the road. If you're looking for a midnight snack, try the £3 falafel from Kurdish Street Food round the corner, which is possibly the "best bargain in the city". Then, put a nightcap on a perfect day in Glasgow with a drink at Chinaskis, the Old Hairdresser's or Tabac, all local favourites.

Bertie Brandes is a writer and the co-founder of satirical fashion and art zine Mushpit

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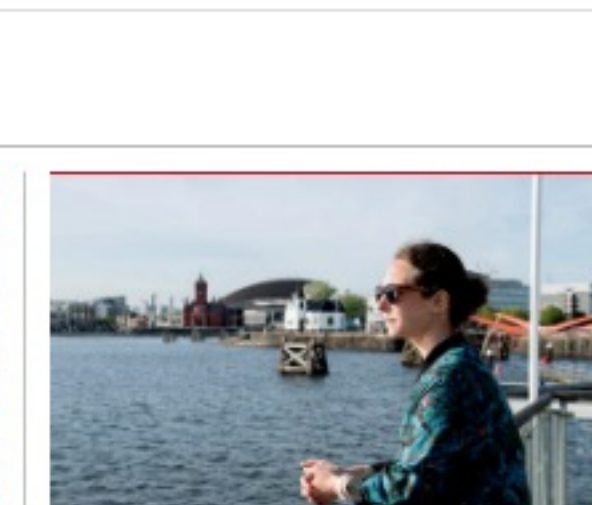


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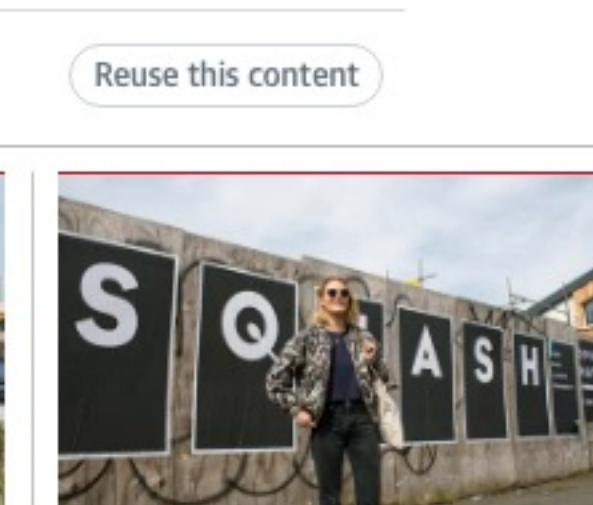
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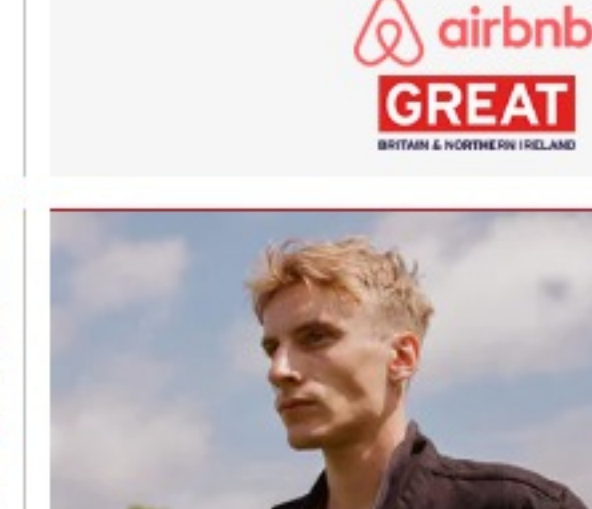
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