

PRESS RELEASE

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Four days of festive magic kick off Capital's Christmas

With the festive season fast approaching, Edinburgh's Christmas is gearing up for a bigger, better and more exciting programme than ever before. The city will come alive in an explosion of light, colour and sound with dancing fountains, a massive snow globe, balletic acrobatic displays performed inside a giant inflatable dome and appearances from electroglide angels and an extraordinarily realistic lifesize animatronic polar bear.

As the result of a city-wide collaboration which is scaling up the investment in Edinburgh's Christmas, the producers, Durham-based She's Got It! events, are putting the finishing touches to a programme full of Christmas magic and sparkle that will bring the capital to life for residents and visitors.

The season will kick-off with a four-day extravaganza from 26 – 29 November – Sparkle into Christmas – which gets Edinburgh's Christmas underway as the iconic Edinburgh Wheel starts turning, skaters take to the ice rink in Winter Wonderland and the Highland Village and traditional German Christmas markets open for business. Street theatre, animations and Forth One broadcasting live between 10 am and 2 pm will combine with retail promotions to make Christmas shopping a pleasure rather than a chore.

In the evening celebrations continue with a short Christmas tree lighting ceremony on The Mound which will also signal the switch on of the thousands of lights throughout Princes Street Gardens which bring the city sparkling into life. A short carol concert and ceremony will recognise the generosity of Hordaland County Council in Norway, which gifts the tree to Edinburgh every year.

On Saturday 28 November, a highlight of the four days will be a brand new event for Scotland, the Homecoming 2009 Art Car Parade, a spectacular parade of illuminated customised vehicles created by artists from all over the UK. A 'must see' for residents and visitors alike, this electrifying procession, which is being staged as part of the Homecoming Finale Weekend and national St Andrew's celebrations, will weave its way through the heart of the city to a stunning stage show climax in St Andrew Square Gardens.

The weekend will culminate on Sunday 29 November with the traditional Nativity Carol Concert around sculptor Tim Chalk's emotive Nativity Scene, which this year moves to a new location in St Andrew Square Gardens.

Commenting on the new Sparkle into Christmas event, Tom Campbell, Chief Executive of Essential Edinburgh said: "Only Edinburgh can turn a shopping trip into an experience, and Christmas is the perfect time to highlight what makes the capital stand out from all the other towns, or out of town destinations that people might choose to do their present buying. In Edinburgh it's not just about shopping, it's about shopping in a magical setting with great bars and restaurants, fantastic attractions and even some free parking. This year's programme is better than ever with a fantastic launch weekend that should be just the thing to remind people how special Edinburgh really is"

Nickie Gott, managing director of She's Gott It!, said: "This year we are hoping to put a real 'wow' factor on to the city centre streets from the Sparkle into Christmas weekend through the Santa Weekend and on to 4 January 2010. My team has been combing the country to find the newest and coolest features around to make this Christmas celebration extra-special. In these challenging economic times, it's fantastic to be able to put at least a little of the magic back into Christmas with such an innovative programme of events. I love Christmas myself and I love being able to showcase the city at its sparkling best at this wonderful time of the year!"

Commenting on Sparkle into Christmas, City of Edinburgh Council's Lord Provost, Councillor George Grubb, said: "Edinburgh's Christmas is a true highlight in our calendar and one which brings real economic benefit to Edinburgh in terms of retail and tourism. We look forward to welcoming people as they enjoy the extended programme of festivities within our unique and stunning surroundings."

Sparkle into Christmas marks the official beginning of 'Edinburgh Sparkles' - a UK-wide campaign, designed to promote the city's unique winter offer more effectively than ever before. The event which has been made possible with additional funding from Essential Edinburgh and **tie** Limited will allow people to share the Princes Street space that will be created as the tram works conclude and before buses return to Princes Street at 5 am on Sunday 29 November.

Communications director of **tie** Limited, Mandy Haeburn-Little, commented: “We are delighted to be involved in Edinburgh's Christmas and the Edinburgh Sparkles campaign. Supporting these initiatives will help create a very special experience in the city centre and allows us to say thank you to the retailers, traders and people of Edinburgh.”

Over the weekend 12 and 13 December, East Princes Street Gardens will host the popular Santa Weekend, highlights of which are the Great Scottish Santa Run and a new event for 2009, The Royal Blind Children's Lantern Parade.