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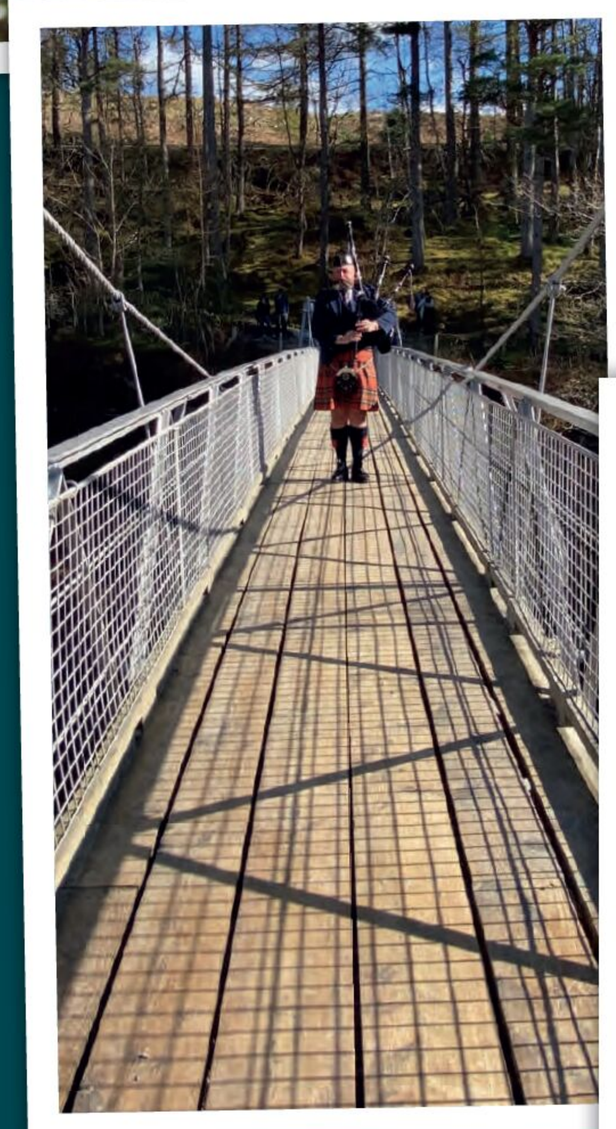

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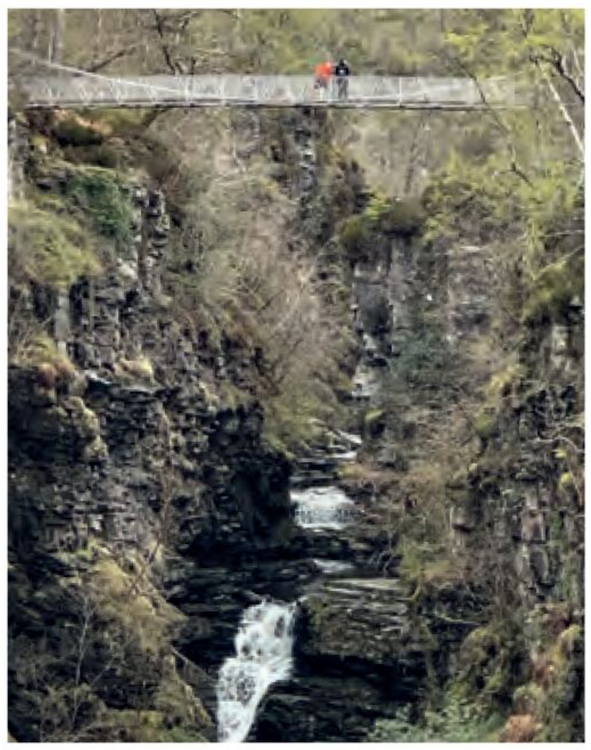

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Ready To Explore?

WELCOME to *Ultimate Scottish Road Trips*, your fantastic 132-page guide to some of the best driving routes that Scotland has to offer.

Inside, we showcase the country's most popular journeys, pointing out route highlights and places of interest along the way.

We start with an overview of the famous North Coast 500 (NC500), but there are lots of other lesser-known yet equally thrilling trips to be enjoyed, including the Heart 200 and Borders Historic Route.

It will soon become apparent that one of the best ways to see Scotland is on four wheels – so, in a bid to make your adventure as safe and comfortable as can be, there are driving tips to take on board while on the open road.

If you don't wish to take your own vehicle, you could consider hiring a campervan. Read on for some vital advice for novices from a self-confessed van fan.

And if you cannot, or would rather not, drive then there are plenty of other enjoyable ways to navigate Scotland – by bus, train, ferry or plane!

Hear from pilot Eddie Watt who says that flying over our picturesque landscape is the ultimate way to see the country.

Others may opt to travel by rail, the first choice for environmentally conscious travellers. If you are a keen train traveller, you will love reading about Scotland's greatest rail journeys.

A bus trip is also perfect for those who would rather sit back and take in the scenery without worrying about navigation or co-ordination.

Scotland's islands are also worth exploring. And, thanks to our fantastic ferry network, accessing them could not be easier – book your ticket for a "ferry" memorable experience.

Whichever road trip you choose to explore, by whatever method of travel, remember that the journey is just as important as the destination!

Ultimate Scottish Road Trips is brought to you by the award-winning team behind *The Scots Magazine*, the oldest magazine in the world still in publication. Turn to page 130 for a superb *Scots Magazine* subscription offer to ensure you never miss an issue of your favourite read. Happy travelling!

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North Coast 500 Route

Scotland's first official touring route, the NC500 is an absolute delight to drive

by FIONA RUSSELL

The North Coast 500 near the village of Helmsdale, Sutherland

THE North Coast 500, which travels around mainland Scotland's northern fringes, is recognised as one of the world's most spectacular routes, due to the breathtaking scenery around almost every corner.

Officially starting and ending at Inverness Castle, the North Coast 500 is actually 516 miles (830km) in length and has been described as Scotland's Route 66.

Taking in castles, distilleries, pretty fishing villages and the remote wilderness where the Highlands meet the sea, the North Coast 500 was launched in 2015 and its success inspired other new driving routes around the country.

The official website offers an interactive map, pointing out local attractions, ideal lunch stops and desirable detours.

FOR MORE INFO VISIT
www.northcoast500.com and turn the page for route highlights

Culloden

NORTH COAST 500 ROUTE

Inverness To Shieldaig

BEFORE you leave Inverness and set off on the road, it's worth spending some time getting to know the capital of the Highlands. The attractions in and around the city are fascinating and rich in heritage, from Inverness Castle to Culloden Battlefield. It's worth going a day early to explore the area – and stock up on snacks for the road.

Heading west from Inverness the initial stage of the journey really whets the appetite for what lies ahead. Wild moorland, gorgeous lochs, colossal mountains and rugged coastline are all on show, perfectly illustrating the wonderful country we live in.

This scenery is perhaps best exemplified by the 27km (17-mile) stretch between Kinlochewe and Shieldaig. Here iconic peaks such as Beinn Eighe, Liathach and Beinn Alligin strike skywards above Upper Loch Torridon before Shieldaig, and a slice of Scotland's renowned west coast, grants a perfect spot for an overnight stay.

Before this, though, drivers have to tackle the infamous Bealach na Bà, a winding single track road through the mountains of the Applecross peninsula. Expect your ears to pop in the descent from 625 metres (2,053ft) to sea level in less than 10km (six miles).

Reflections on Loch Torridon

Route Highlight

Applecross Inn

A white-washed B&B with views right across the peninsula and out to sea. In the summer months nothing beats relaxing on the outdoor benches, eating hand-picked scallops from the inn's impressive kitchen. **applecrossinn.co.uk**

Other Things To See And Do:

- Attadale Gardens
- Applecross Smokehouse
- Kishorn Seafood Bar

Beinn Eighe

“It’s known as the Great Wilderness, with some of the most picturesque fresh water lochs in Scotland”

Gruinard Bay

Route Highlight

The Mountain Coffee Company Gairloch

This backpacker's delight is a quirky shrine to mountaineering and travelling. Giant homemade cakes and scones accompany delicious coffee, while the bookshop stocks an impressive range of travel guides and amusing greeting cards for all tastes.

NORTH COAST 500 ROUTE

Shieldaig To Ullapool

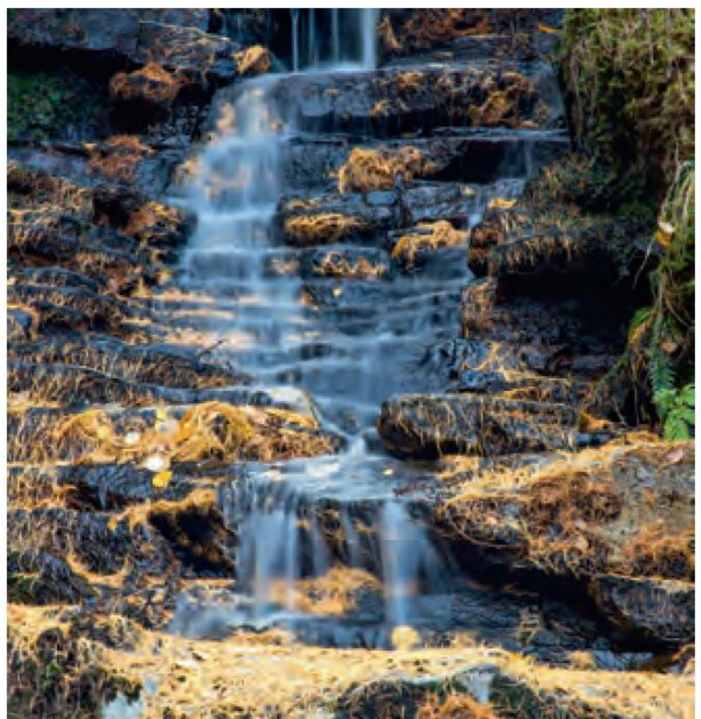
FROM Shieldaig you can see the mountains of Torridon looming closer, but as you edge along Loch Torridon, the sheer scale of them becomes apparent. You're coming into an area often referred to as the Great Wilderness, a land of magnificent sandstone mountains and some of the most picturesque fresh water lochs in Scotland.

From Kinlochewe, a small village 80km (50 miles) west of Inverness, the route continues its spectacular passage for another 120km (75 miles) to the bustling village of Ullapool.

The early stages of the route run alongside the steely blue waters of Loch Maree, itself framed by the magnificent and shapely mountain of Slioch. Rising to 981 metres (3,218ft) above sea level, it is thought that the word Slioch originates from Gaelic sleagh, meaning spear.

Beyond the attractive settlements of Charlestown and Gairloch, with its beautiful arc of golden sand, the North Coast 500 tapers its way around a wonderfully rugged coastline, in the shadow of An Teallach and Sail Mor, passing the First and Second Coast and the incredible Gruinard Bay. It then continues high above Little Loch Broom.

The final miles head north along the shores of Loch Broom, all the way to Ullapool, a great place to stop and relish some of the finest seafood in the world.



Above: Loch Shieldaig

Left: Corrieshalloch Gorge

Other Things To See And Do:

- Flowerdale Glen and waterfall, Gairloch
- GALE Community Centre & Tourist Information Point
- Corrieshalloch Gorge, Braemore

A view towards Loch Kanaird

NORTH COAST 500 ROUTE

Ullapool To Durness

THE diversity of the North Coast 500 is perfectly illustrated on the road between Ullapool and Durness. Much of the journey runs north through Sutherland's incredibly dramatic landscape, where the rocks are some of the oldest in the world.

After leaving Ullapool, and passing Loch Kanaird, the breathtaking and savage beauty of the landscape unfolds. The view towards the mountains of Coigach is incredible, particularly that of Stac Pollaidh, its translation from the Norse language meaning the stack at the pool.

If you have time, it's worth exploring the wee roads between Achiltibuie and Lochinver, stopping in at Achins Bookshop for a chat and Peet's Restaurant for the best of local seafood.

The scenery becomes ever more dramatic as the A837 runs through Inchnadamph, underneath the unique profile of Quinag and past the remains of little Ardvreck Castle.

It is then onto the A894, which twists and turns through more wild countryside, then Scourie and the Kyle of Durness, eventually culminating at Durness and the stunning Sango Bay.

Ardvreck Castle

Route Highlight

Knockan Crag National Nature Reserve

The North West Highlands Geopark comes to life at this visitor centre where you can discover Scotland's geological history on sculpture trails, poetry trails in a landscape that held the key to an amazing story of colliding continents and scientific intrigue. **knockan-crag.co.uk**

“After leaving Ullapool, the breathtaking and savage beauty of the landscape unfolds”

Other Things To See And Do:

- Ardvreck Castle
- Clachtoll Broch and beach
- Hermit’s Castle, Achmelvich

Sango Bay

“Stop at the signpost for the compulsory photograph”

John O’Groats

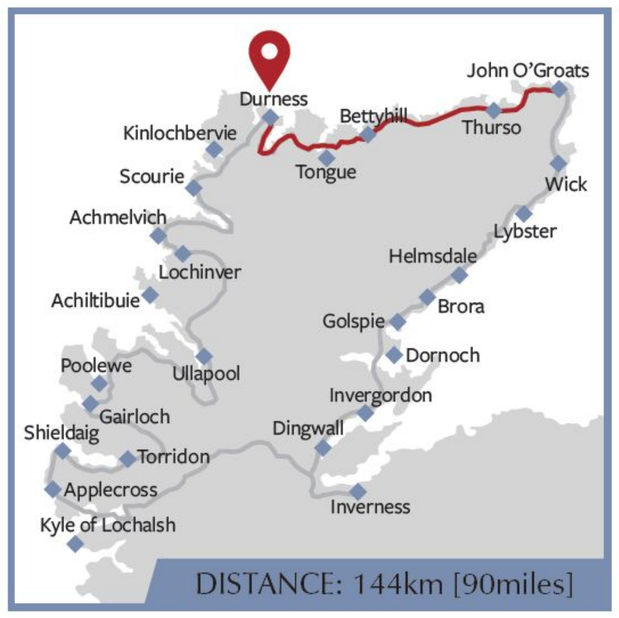
Route Highlight

Smoo Cave, Durness

You can walk into this giant floodlit sea cave and over a walkway into a smaller freshwater cave and waterfall chamber. Over time the caves have merged into one.

NORTH COAST 500 ROUTE

Durness To John O'Groats



THIS section takes in the whole of the north coast of Scotland. To your left the Atlantic Ocean meets the North Sea, and extends northwards to the horizon and beyond, past the Faroe Islands and Greenland to the Arctic Ocean.

The exposed north coast is littered with fascinating sea caves, carved by an age-old battle between sea and sandstone.

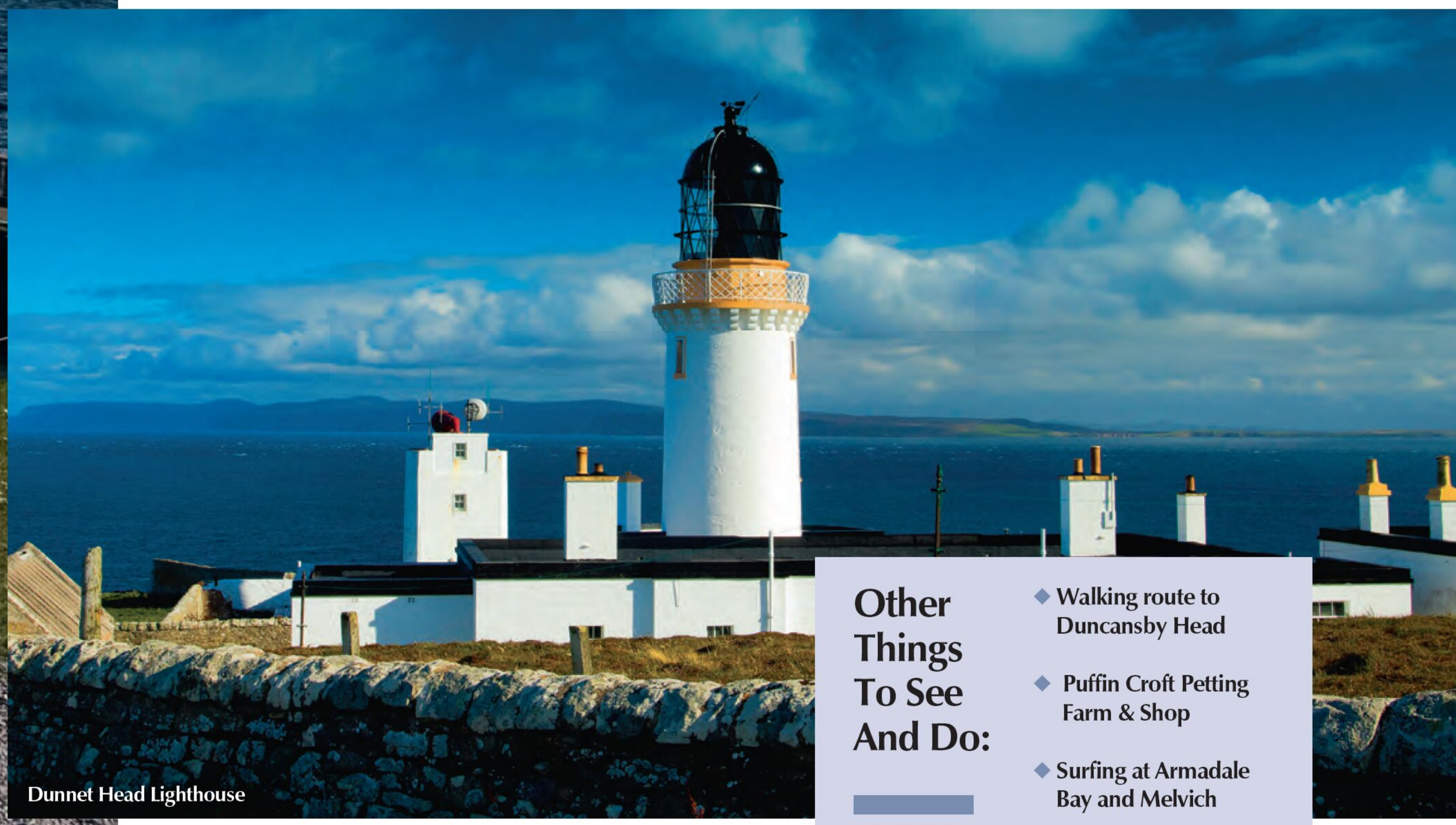
Passing the foot of Ben Hope the most northerly Munro – Scottish mountains over 3,000ft (918m) – and its crooked neighbour Ben Loyal, you'll arrive at the sleepy coastal village of Tongue.

Look out for Coldbackie Beach, which is a hidden gem of white sands and turquoise waters reached by a steep walk down from the road.

Don't miss Dunnet Head, the most northerly point in mainland Britain. You can spot puffins, razorbills, guillemots, fulmars and kittiwakes on walks in the RSPB nature reserve to the lighthouse.

Back on the A836, the main road along the north coast, you'll pass the Castle and Gardens of Mey, once home of the Queen Mother. Within this attraction you can take a tour of the castle itself and learn of its fascinating history. The walled garden is also worth a visit and any young tourers will delight in the animal centre based there.

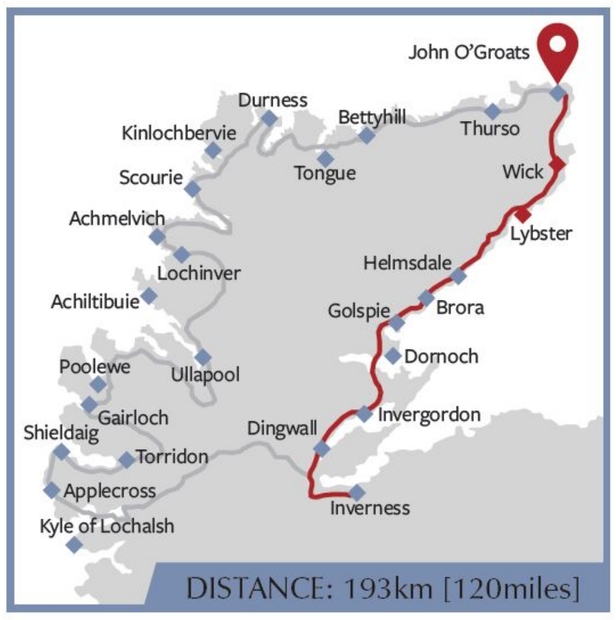
In John O'Groats, stop for the almost compulsory photograph with the Journey's End signpost that marks the end of the 970km (603-mile) route from Land's End, Cornwall.



Dunnet Head Lighthouse

Other Things To See And Do:

- Walking route to Duncansby Head
- Puffin Croft Petting Farm & Shop
- Surfing at Armadale Bay and Melvich



Duncansby Head

NORTH COAST 500 ROUTE

John O'Groats To Inverness

THE eastern side of the North Coast 500 might not have the immediate impact that the huge mountains of its western fringes provide, but spend some time immersing yourself in the landscape of Caithness, Sutherland and Ross & Cromarty and you may not want to leave. It is spectacular.

The route visits the most northeasterly points of mainland Scotland, Duncansby Head, where the views out to the Orkney Islands are breathtaking, as is the array of wildlife.

A walk here reveals the dramatic coastal scenes of Geo of Sclaites, a huge cleft bitten deep into the cliffs, Thirle Door and the Stacks of Duncansby.

Heading south through Wick, Latheronwheel and Helmsdale it is the sense of space, and enormous skies, that really captures the spirit of this quieter portion of Scotland.

Just north of Wick, stop off to witness the historic and impressive ruins of Castle Sinclair Girnigoe. Poised precariously on a cliff edge, with a renewed drawbridge, the site goes back to Neolithic times.

Ousdsale Broch, located just south of Berriedale and dating back to the Iron Age, is another for history buffs.

The route also passes Dornoch, which is home to one of our finest beaches, and Dornoch Castle which is a destination in itself.

Don't miss the Carnegie Whisky Cellars, either to browse the endless shelves of rare and priceless whiskies, or to sample a few under expert guidance in the Tasting Vaults.

As you travel south you come across signs to some of Scotland's best-known whisky distilleries. Combine this with the stunning scenery and wildlife, and you have the perfect finale to the North Coast 500.

Thirle Door

Route Highlight

Dunrobin Castle

This 800-year-old castle looks like something out of a fairytale. More a turreted, stately home than a castle, Dunrobin is the family seat of the Earl of Sutherland and boasts 189 rooms. The immaculate landscaped gardens are worth a wander, too. **dunrobincastle.co.uk**

“The route passes Dornoch, which is home to one of our finest beaches and Dornoch Castle”

Other Things To See And Do:

- Wick Heritage Museum
- Pulteney Distillery
- Nucleus: The Nuclear and Caithness Archives

Dornoch

NORTH COAST 500 ROUTE

In High Spirits

Exploring an alternative route to the impressive summit of Beinn Bhàn

The flat ridge top

by FIONA RUSSELL

BEINN Bhàn is an impressive sight from a popular tourist road in north-west Scotland. Yet, as I discover during a rewarding walk, this mountain's summit appears surprisingly less visited. The adventure with my friend Ben begins close to the base of the Bealach na Bà, an iconic pass on the famous North Coast 500.

While traffic passes almost constantly on the single track road, we are very quickly immersed in a peaceful and wonderfully wild landscape.

At first, there is a well-trodden path along the western bank of the River Kishorn. Its gentle incline lulls us into a relaxed pace as we enjoy sunshine and increasingly spectacular views of the high cliffs, buttresses and sandstone amphitheatres that form the eastern flanks of the mountain ridge.

Then, as we meet a junction and veer north-west, the slope steepens and the terrain becomes more rugged.

The trail fades and returns, then fades again, until we decide to simply follow a compass bearing towards Coire an Fhamair, at the northern end of the ridge.

Arriving at a beautiful lochan at 365 metres (1,200 feet) elevation, we can see more clearly that the ascent of the corrie is going to be a muscle-punishing affair.

At first, it's quite steep, and then from around 579m (1,900ft) elevation it's seriously steep.

For the final 198m (650ft), Ben and I set our own paces. There is a faint zigzag sheep path on the grassy slope and this helps to ease the incline a little.

A final push uphill takes me over the ridge edge and on to a wide and much flatter top. While I wait for Ben to catch up, I walk west and take in a magnificent view over the sea to numerous islands – including Skye, Raasay, Rum and the Outer Hebrides.

After a rest for a snack and to enjoy the vista, Ben and I continue south along the ridge and carefully peer down at another dramatic corrie, Coire na Poite, and two lochans far below.

Some people ascend this route, but we're happy we made an alternative choice.

We soon reach the summit at 896m (2,940ft) – Beinn Bhàn is categorised as a Corbett – where there is a stone shelter and trig point. Here, we meet the only other people we see all day.

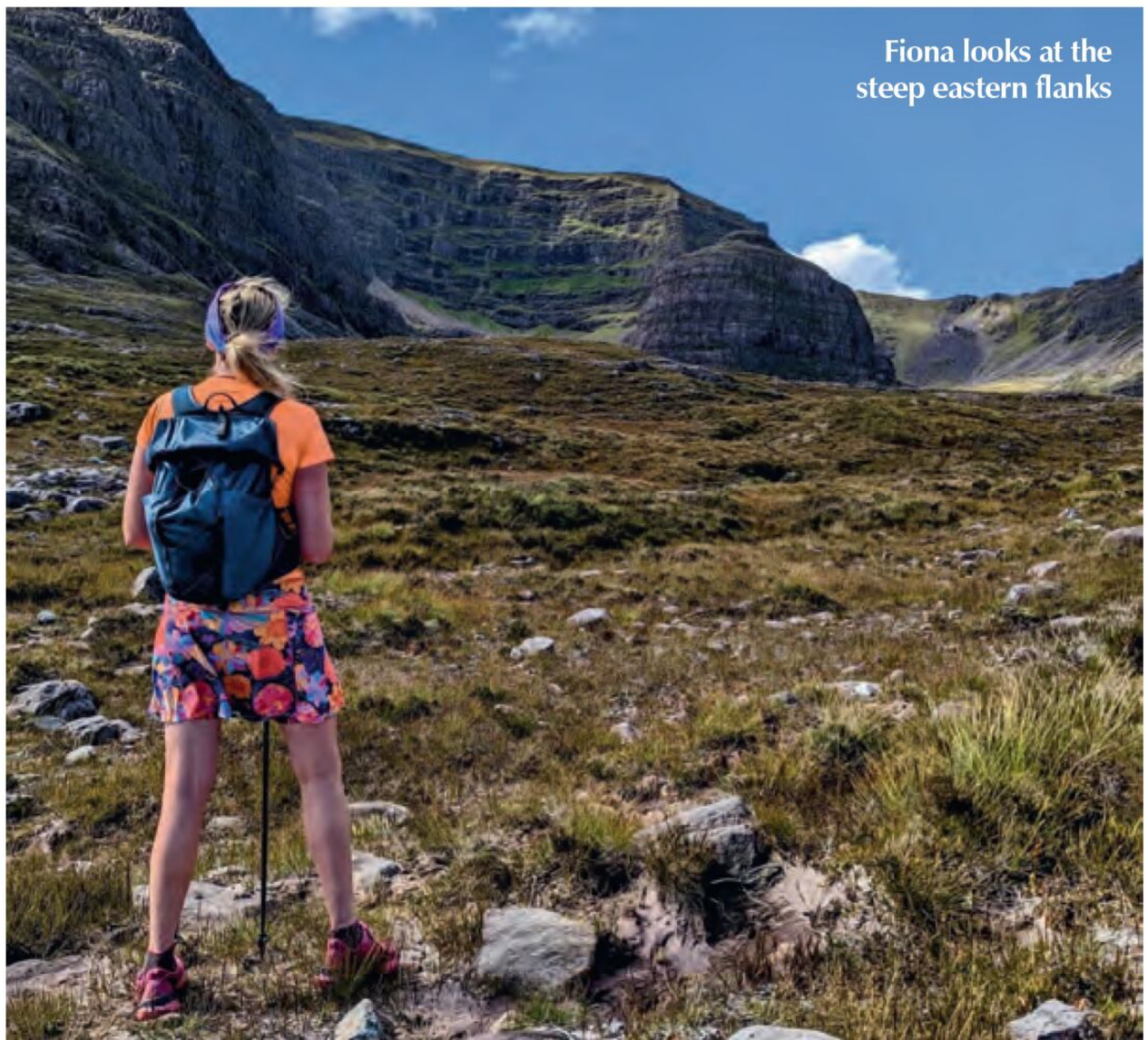
This couple have chosen to ascend from higher up the Bealach na Bà and plan to return the same way, missing what Ben and I believe to be the best part of the walk – the superb eastern corries.

As well as the sublime coastal views, we can see the many high peaks of the Torridon area to the east.

We're keen to complete a circuit, so we continue south-easterly, descending on a rough and grassy slope.

To our right, we see Loch Coire nan Arr

Ben faces Beinn Bhàn


Fiona looks at the steep eastern flanks

"A peaceful and wonderfully wild landscape"

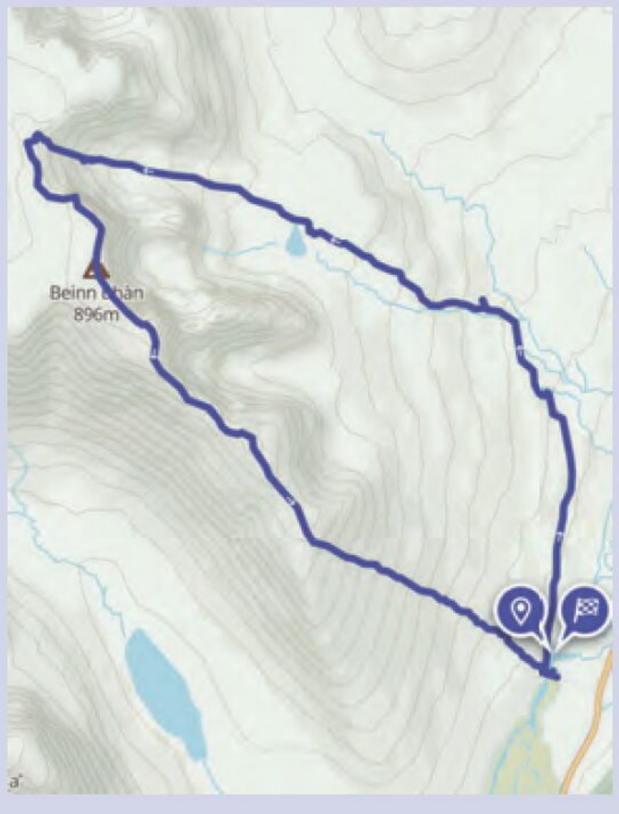
below and the imposing flanks of another Corbett, Sgùrr a' Chaorachain, as well as a climbing route known as Cìoch Nose. The vehicles look tiny on the Bealach na Bà.

The final section downhill to the car is the roughest of the walk, but we are soon out of our walking boots and making our way to the nearest shop for an ice cream.

Give It A Go!

There are several different routes for Beinn Bhàn (Applecross). See **www.walkhighlands.co.uk**, as well as the Scottish Mountaineering Club book *The Corbetts* and Cicerone's *Walking The Corbetts Volume 2 – North Of The Great Glen*.

Factfile



- **Start and finish:** Layby on a minor road, soon after the Applecross turn-off from the A89, just before a bridge over the River Kishorn.
- **Distance:** 13.6 kilometres (8.5 miles)
- **Total elevation:** 948m (3,110 ft)
- **Highest point:** 896m (2,940ft)
- **Time:** 5 hours
- **Route:** bit.ly/3J6tsB9 (anti-clockwise)

Seven Stops To Savour

Scotland's iconic A82 has more than its fair share of stunning sights

by ALEX DEMPSTER-CORLETT

THE Great Western Road leads travellers to and from the heart of Glasgow along a wide and lively boulevard. Peppered with trendy eateries, vintage shops and historic music venues, it's a showcase for Glasgow's thriving cultural scene. It also serves as the start to a unforgettable trip through Scotland's scenery and history, all along one remarkable road.

The A82 is roughly 270km (170 miles) long and runs from Glasgow to Inverness. It hasn't found a place in any publicised scenic tour but deserves a mention for its own merits. It rolls past some of some of the country's must-see sights, squeezing between the shores of Loch Lomond and the Arrochar Alps, crossing lonely Rannoch Moor and descending through the awe-inspiring Glencoe before turning north-east along the Great Glen to Inverness.

When the road finally rolls into Inverness, it joins the A9 at a roundabout just south of the Kessock Bridge. The capital of the Highlands can serve as a springboard to further adventures to the north or is well-connected for return trips home. These are our top seven sights along this stunning stretch of tarmac.

The Bonnie Banks

There are number of resting spots along the length of Loch Lomond. Firkin Point offers a lovely wee beach with grand views across the water, along with overnight camping (with permission) for those in motorhomes.

Inveruglas Pier, a few miles north, has a Visitor Centre, a wee café and the Inveruglas Pyramid. This striking structure rises eight metres (26ft) above the ground, with steps to the top for folk wanting to take in the view. Offering glorious panoramas towards Scotland's most-climbed Munro Ben Lomond and back into the wild heart of the Arrochar Alps, it's already a marked contrast to the streets of Glasgow, only an hour down the road.

The Three Waters

Glencoe offers up one stunning view after another as you reach Buachaille Etive Mor and the long descent to Glencoe village. Impossible to drive through without at least one stop, consider making it at a small layby near the "meeting of the three waters". The Three Sisters serve as a backdrop – three hulking mountains that hide secret glens between them.

Three burns join forces here to start the River Coe, which tumbles downhill to form Loch Achtriochtan before heading on and out towards the sea. The brave can take a dip in the crystal clear waters but the scene is just as well enjoyed from the railings overlooking it.

For an even better panorama of the Three Sisters, a popular car park a little further down the road offers an uninterrupted view.

Sword Fishing

The Loch of the Legend of the Lost Sword is a small pool of water with a big secret. Set in the hills just above the road between Crianlarich and Tyndrum, it's said to hold the sword of Robert the Bruce. On the run from the English, Robert and his soldiers ditched their weaponry in this body of water to speed up their escape. The Claymore he fought with now lies at the bottom, watched over by a Lady of the loch. A car park just off the A82 lies a short walk away. It's well sign-posted, taking in a brief section of the West Highland Way.

Loch Achtriochtan, Glencoe

The awe-inspiring shores of Loch Lomond

Connected by the canal

Caledonian Canal Centre

Fort William and Inverness lie at either end of the Great Glen, the two sides moving in opposite directions, with the valley in carved out by glaciers just 10,000 years ago. Although nature gave a helping hand, a complete through-route on water – the Caledonian Canal – was not open until 1822, when 35km (22 miles) of waterway and 29 locks connected the lochs.

The Canal Centre at Fort Augustus is a great spot to learn about its history. There are also a few places to eat while watching the boats, not to mention a short walk to Loch Ness and a fine view up the water. For an overnight stay, you can book a room at the centre within this unforgettable setting.

Where Loch Leven meets Loch Linnhe

Ballachulish Bridge

Opened in 1975, the bridge at Ballachulish replaced ferry services that had been plying their trade across these waters for centuries. Unashamedly utilitarian in its aesthetic, it does suit the rugged landscape around it. It even echoes the shape of its surrounding scenery, with two peaks at either end and a sunken middle over the river. The colour might also seem drab – a dark olive green – but it was chosen to blend in with its surroundings.

Commando Memorial

An elite fighting force designed to strike back at the Axis powers, Churchill formed the Commandos in 1940 after the evacuation at Dunkirk. Nearby Achnacarry Castle was the base of the training operations.
Set within the toughest terrain in Britain, those who passed the test went on to serve with distinction across the world. This statue was commissioned in 1942 and unveiled by the Queen Mother in 1952, looking out across the unforgiving mountains that forged such hardy heroes.

The statue honours elite fighting forces

Castle Urquhart

High on the list of must-see spots, Castle Urquhart occupies an evocative location on the shores of Loch Ness. Facing the water, it's not hard to imagine life hundreds of years ago, when the threat of enemies coming over the hills or up the loch was ever-present. With a fantastic visitor centre, complete with film presentation, the scene is set before you even step foot in the grounds.

Although the gatehouse was blown up in 1692, there is plenty left to explore. After holding out against the English in the early 14th century, it was the target of raids by the McDonalds of the Isles. Life was rarely peaceful – hard to reconcile now with this tranquil setting.

Conflict amidst the calm at Castle Urquhart

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Getting Behind The Wheel

Before venturing out on to the open roads of Scotland, read these driving must-dos

by LAURA COVENTRY

TOURISM on Scotland's famous road routes has increased dramatically in recent years. The pandemic was one reason for the rise in the number of vehicles using the roads as Scots opted for staycations. The higher footfall of local traffic coupled with tourist vehicles, campervans, motorhomes, caravans, cars and motorbikes does mean that routes could potentially be more dangerous. It is imperative, therefore, that everyone using must adhere to the Highway Code, particularly when it comes to single track roads and so on. So, here are a list of dos and don'ts and tips to make your trip as safe as possible.

Speed

Tourists enjoying the numerous picturesque views along Scotland's best-loved road routes tend to drive a little too slow. So, be mindful of this. Always adhere to speed limits on local roads and avoid driving too fast or too slowly. Did you know that driving too slowly is just as dangerous as driving too fast? The speed limit on many routes is 60mph (96kmph). However, if you are unfamiliar with the road, and its unexpected corners, it is safer to drive around 50mph (80kmph). Also, when enjoying your scenic drive, take in the sights as you go, but be mindful of wildlife, like sheep, cattle and deer, crossing the road. This is particularly common at night when your headlights are on. If you are driving your car and strike a deer, it could cause serious damage to your vehicle and in some occasions, write it off. Take extra care with your speed on narrow, winding roads and on single track roads.

Passing places are a key asset of Scotland's country roads

Keep within speed limits

Passing Places

If you are not used to driving on country roads in Scotland, then you may have never used a passing place before. Passing places are like little mini laybys that sit on both sides of the road. Their purpose is to allow two cars to safely pass on a narrow, single track road. Passing places do make some drivers nervous, but it is important to remember road etiquette when approaching and using passing places. They are there to assist you, and should not be feared. If you see an oncoming vehicle coming towards to you on a single-track road, then firstly, do not panic! Next, look ahead to see if there is a passing place near you on the left-hand side of the road. If so, simply pull in to it, and wait patiently for the approaching driver to pass. If you are not near a passing place, maybe the closest one is behind you. If so, make sure no other vehicles are behind and reverse into the passing place. It may be that the nearest passing place is actually on the oncoming driver's side of the road so, in this case, allow them to pull in and let you pass. You may also use a passing place if a vehicle is behind you and is travelling faster than you. If so, pull into the nearest passing place to allow them to overtake. Remember to give the other driver adequate space, especially if they are driving a larger vehicle (like a motorhome). »

The big freeze can pose hazards

Weather

Roads on Scotland's routes are susceptible to icy conditions in winter, especially the further north you travel or on higher ground. Snow may be on the roads until March, so take extra care when travelling in winter months. Some routes have snow gates and they may be closed, so check with Transport Scotland's website before setting off. Make sure you have prepared your car for all weathers. Unlike in some countries, it is legal not to have snowchains on your vehicle in Scotland. However, you vehicle must be suitable for the road conditions and the weather. See "Kit Your Car Out" for more weather-related driving tips.

Signage

Read and follow local road signs. Look out for guidance on the gradient, speed limit and warning for roads on the route. For example, did you know that the NC500 has the steepest single-track road in the UK? If travelling this route, take care, as even experienced drivers may find the road tricky to negotiate with its tight hairpin bends and steepness. The sign on the road to Applecross states this particular road is "not suitable for learner drivers, large vehicles or caravans after the first mile". If you need to turn back, then there is an alternative low level route.

Signs are there to help!

Be sure to stop somewhere safe

Stopping & Parking

The Scottish scenery is spectacular but, however tempting it may be to stop randomly on the route, or slow down to capture a photo out the window on your smartphone, don't! Wait and find a suitable place to pull in and park, like a layby – it is worth noting that you should not park in a passing place. Then start snapping. Always park legally and do not block entrance or farm tracks. Don't mount grass verges when pulling in to park as it damages the landscape. Be considerate to locals and other road users. And, be courteous – if someone has parked up for the night, don't park to near them.

Tight corners can be hard to negotiate

Know The Vehicle

If you have hired a car, camper or motorhome for your road trip, be sure to practise driving it before you set off on your epic journey. Get used to manoeuvring it, be comfortable with its length and width, and try reversing it and negotiating tight corners before hitting the open roads of Scotland.

Don't take any risks on your road trip

Kit Your Car Out

As we plan our road trip in Scotland this year, we will inevitably be spending more time in our cars. So, before you set off, make sure you have all the essentials packed.

According to the RAC, there is a list of more than 30 items and accessories that we should be carrying with us in our vehicles before we turn on the ignition.

These essential items give you peace of mind as they prepare you for every eventuality, including a breakdown.

On the list are some things you would expect to carry in your car for safety reasons, like jump leads, an empty fuel car, a spare tyre and jack, as well as a high-visibility vest – which is critical and ensures you are seen by other drivers should you stop and need to get out your vehicle. Interestingly, if driving in Europe, this is required by law according to the RAC.

Another two safety-related items are: a warning triangle, so that if you have a breakdown or minor bump, you are able to warn other drivers that there is a hazard ahead; and a first aid kit, which you can pick up from your local car accessory story, petrol station or supermarket.

A warning triangle will help alert other drivers

"Packing the essentials will make your journey safer"

The modern driver uses an in-built satnav or Google Maps to navigate their way around the country – however, the RAC recommends all drivers carry an old-fashioned A-to-Z road map.

If your screenwash reservoir is empty and you are stopped by police, then you could be fined, in winter or summer. So, keep it topped up and carry a spare bottle. And did you know that driving without an ice scraper is illegal? So this is a must-have in winter.

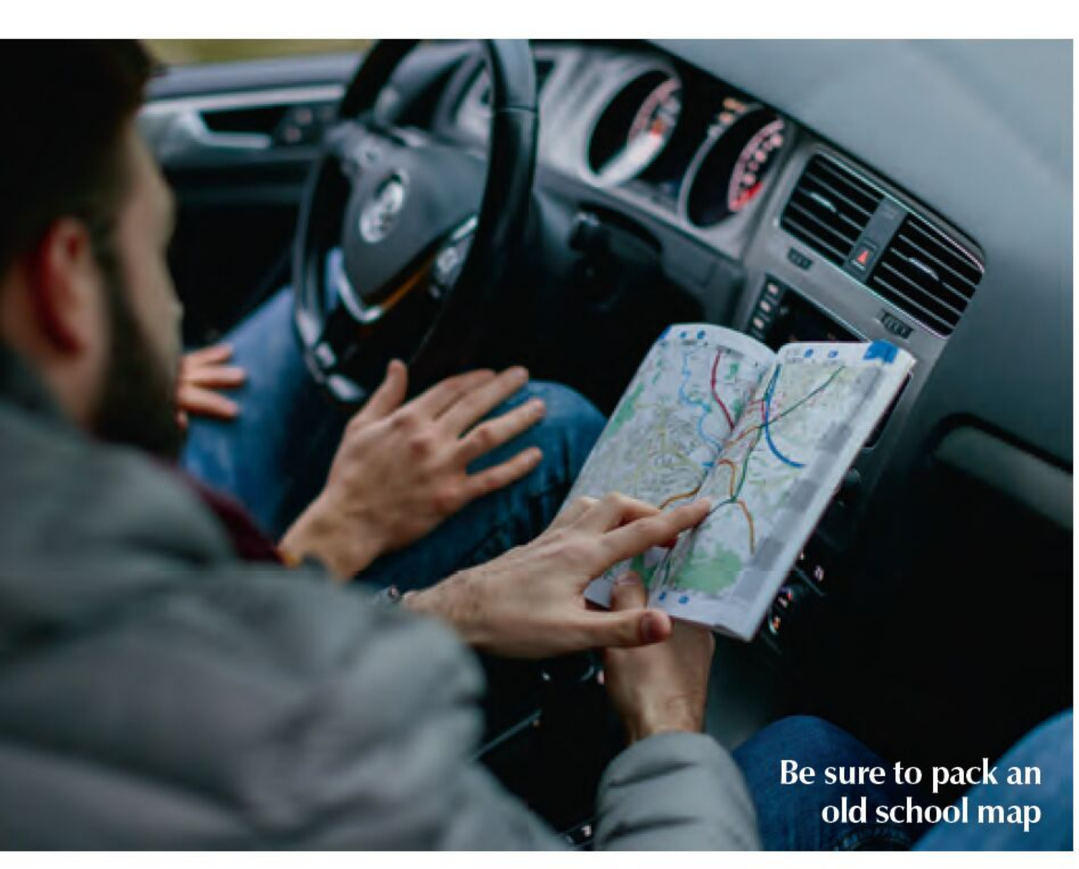
It is also advisable to have a USB charger so your phone battery never runs out of power. This ensures you have a means of communication should you need to call for a breakdown/recovery firm or police in an emergency.

Carrying cash seems to be a thing of the past now with contactless technology and electronic payment-methods such as Google Pay, however, before setting off in the car, always have a small stash of cash for tolls, parking machines or even to buy a snack en route.

There are other more random must-travel-with items that the RAC advise you to take on your journey, which you may not think about, including: sunglasses; a torch; a blanket; tissues; and a Swiss army knife.

Packing the essentials mentioned above will make your journey safer and more comfortable as you – and your vehicle– will be prepared.

So, wherever you are heading off to, stay safe and enjoy the journey.



Be sure to pack an old school map

North East 250 Route

The North East 250 driving route allows travellers to experience the best of the country in one long weekend

The village of Crovie in Aberdeenshire

YOU'D be hard pushed to find a driving route that encapsulates the diverse and dynamic personality of Scotland as much as the North East 250.

Snaking through glens and mountain passes of the Cairngorms National Park, the 250-mile (402km) route travels past the famous castles of Royal Deeside and the copper stills of Scotland's largest concentration of whisky distilleries, Speyside.

As the rugged North Sea coastline opens up, picturesque villages, hidden coves, golf courses and secluded beaches lie in wait, before the vibrant cultural excitement and shopping mecca of the Granite City, Aberdeen.

The North East 250 was launched in 2018 by local businessman and owner of Ballindalloch Castle, Guy Macpherson-Grant, who was inspired by the economic injection the North Coast 500, hailed as Scotland's Route 66, gave local businesses in the area.

There are two obvious places to start and finish the circular NE250, the city of Aberdeen or by travelling north from Edinburgh or Glasgow, to the Spittal of Glenshee, just south of the Glenshee mountains in the Cairngorms.

The route is very accessible for motorhomes, campervans and caravans, with good roads and many campsites and caravan parks nearby. There are also a wide variety of hotels, guest houses and B&Bs for drivers and cyclists.

NORTHEAST250

FOR MORE INFO VISIT
www.northeast250.com and turn the page for route highlights.

The stunning Cairngorms

Route Highlight

Crathie Kirk

Near Braemar, this church is where the Royal Family go to worship when they're staying at Balmoral. Take a wander around the kirkyard, where you can find intricately carved gravestones with messages from Queen Victoria.
braemarandcrathieparish.org.uk

NORTH EAST 250 ROUTE

Spittal Of Glenshee To Aberlour

THE Cairngorms scenery quickly envelops travellers and offers huge open views of rounded mountains and wide glens.

The road climbs to several high points as it passes two ski resorts, Glenshee and The Lecht, and also Tomintoul, the highest village in the Highlands.

Glenshee is the largest ski and snowboard area in Scotland, and also has seven of the easiest Munros in the country.

A fast-flowing river is never far from sight and, as the seasons change, the heather-covered moorlands provide a colourful backdrop through browns, yellows, oranges, greens and purple-pinks.

You'll pass Balmoral, the Queen's residence in Scotland, hidden away behind trees on the other side of the River Dee from the road.

The estate house is open for tours when the Queen isn't in residence, and there are holiday cottages in the extensive grounds.

A long descent takes you into the rolling countryside of Speyside, which is famed for its fertile lands and whisky distilleries.

More than half the distilleries in Scotland are in Speyside and the NE250 takes you past some of the finest in the area.

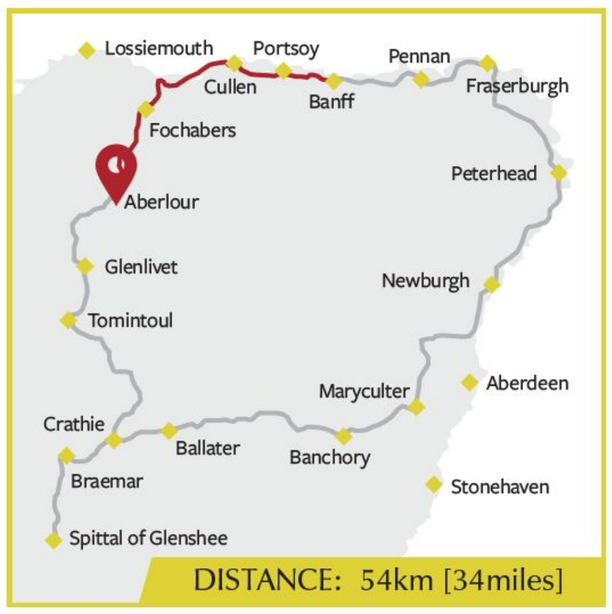
Glenlivet has a fantastic visitor centre, and runs a great tour.

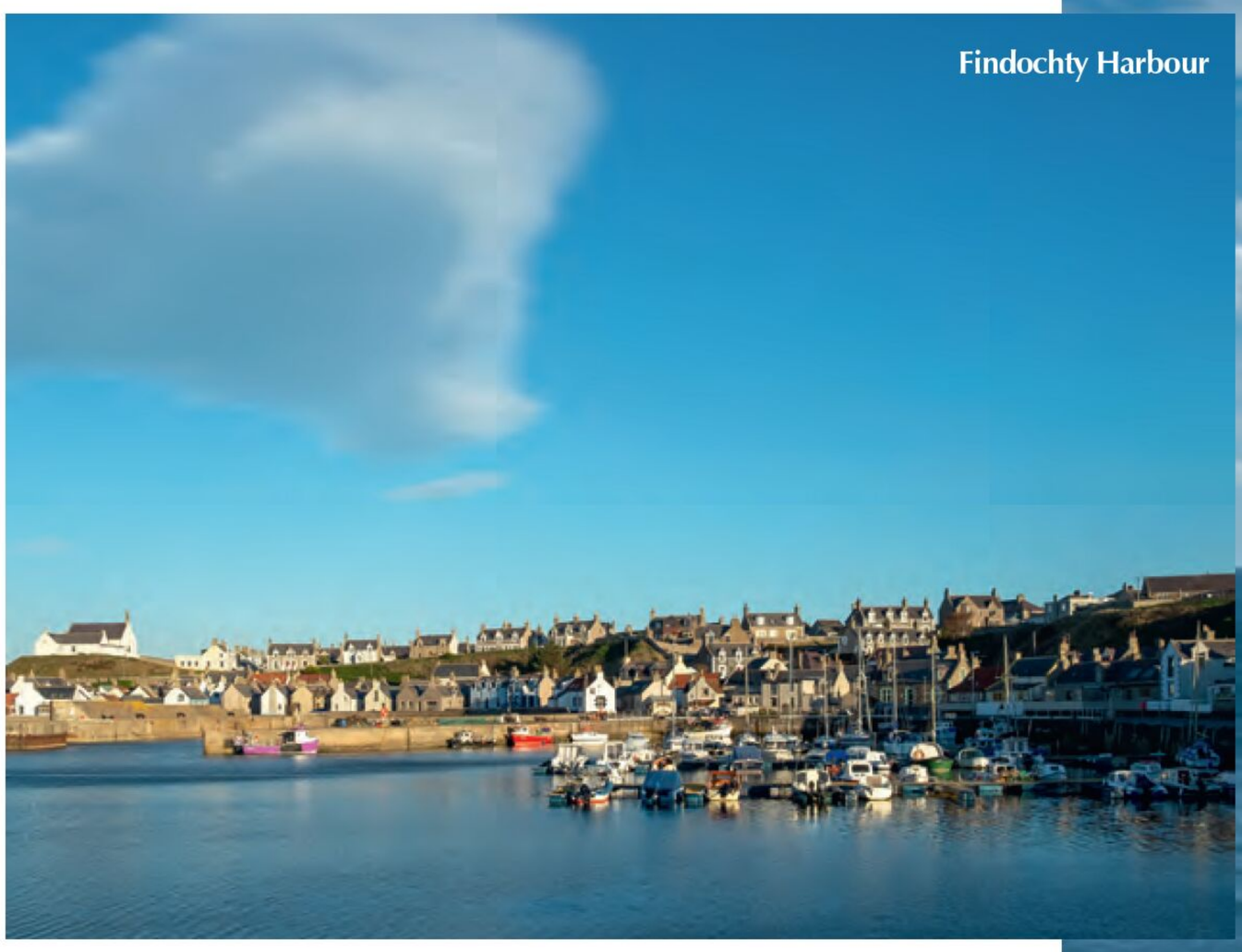
Glenshee

Balmoral Estate

Other Things To See And Do:

- Walking and mountain biking trails at Glenlivet Estate
- Tour a whisky distillery
- Ballindalloch Castle
- Pictish stones at Inveravon Church




Findochty Harbour

NORTH EAST 250 ROUTE

Aberlour To Banff

DRIVING north from Aberlour, the landscape turns from rolling farmland to flatter coastal plains before reaching Spey Bay on the Moray Firth. This north coast is a famous location for spotting wildlife, especially dolphins.

A slight detour north west up the coast takes you to Lossiemouth, where Outfit Moray & Bike Revolution offer outdoor adventure sports from rock climbing to kayaking.

Several former fishing villages and towns, such as Findochty, Portnockie and Cullen, boast historic harbours and pretty beaches. A coastal walking path links the settlements and provides views of striking geological formations, including sea stacks and arches.

There is a well-trodden path to a cove to view a slanted arched rock called Whale's Mouth. Further along the shore at Portknockie is another striking and famous sea arch, Bow Fiddle Rock.

Findlater Castle is also worth a detour to the coast. While the ancient building is in ruins, the airy cliff-top location is magnificent.

Stop in at Portsoy Ice Cream, and pick your favourite – from more than 100 flavours – to eat on the picturesque harbour front.

Findlater Castle ruins, near Cullen

Route Highlight

Scottish Dolphin Centre, Spey Bay

Where the River Spey reaches the sea, you'll find the Scottish Dolphin Centre, a conservation and observation hub with live web cams to spot bottlenose dolphins in the bay, film screenings, and a collection of whale bones. **dolphincentre.whales.org**

Other Things To See And Do:

- Craigellachie Telford Bridge
- Cardhu Country House
- Fochabers Folk Museum and Heritage Centre
- Duff House at Banff

Bow Fiddle Rock

Slains Castle

Route Highlight

Museum of Scottish Lighthouses

Visit the first lighthouse in Scotland, Kinnaird Head, built in 1787.The museum celebrates the famous Stevenson family who constructed 93 lighthouses in 150 years.
museum.org.uk

NORTH EAST 250 TOURIST ROUTE

Banff To Maryculter

DISTANCE: 137km [85miles]

YOUR first port of call is the tiny settlement of Pennan, made famous as the fictional village of Ferness in the 1980s film *Local Hero*. It's a steep road down – and back up – but well worth it for the picturesque setting. Note, this road is not recommended for caravans.

From here you can follow coastal paths on foot either left to the RSPB Scotland Troup Head Nature Reserve, or right to Aberdour Bay, where tiny sandy coves lie waiting to be discovered between high rocky cliffs.

Driving further east and then south through the large fishing town of Fraserburgh, the eastern coast of Aberdeenshire serves up more fabulous landmarks. Bullers of Buchan, located adjacent to a precariously perched hamlet, is a collapsed sea cave, now serving as a natural bridge over to a tiny peninsula.

Stop in Peterhead for lunch break and take the self-guided Town Trail of 21 storyboards telling tales from the town's past 400 years.

Next is Slains Castle, an imposing cliff-top ruin accessed by a narrow sandy road. The castle is claimed to have been the inspiration for author Bram Stoker's 1897 novel *Dracula*.

Pennan

Bullers of Buchan

Other Things To See And Do:

- Fraserburgh Bay and esplanade
- Peterhead Prison Museum
- Cullen Bay
- Balmedie beach and country park

Route Highlight

Burn O'Vat

Just before Ballater you can find the Muir of Dinnet National Nature Reserve and visitor centre. A short walk of less than two hours takes you to the impressive geological feature, Burn O' Vat. This giant granite cauldron, formed at the end of the last Ice Age, was the hideout of a notorious band of cattle rustlers in the 1600s.

NORTH EAST 250 ROUTE

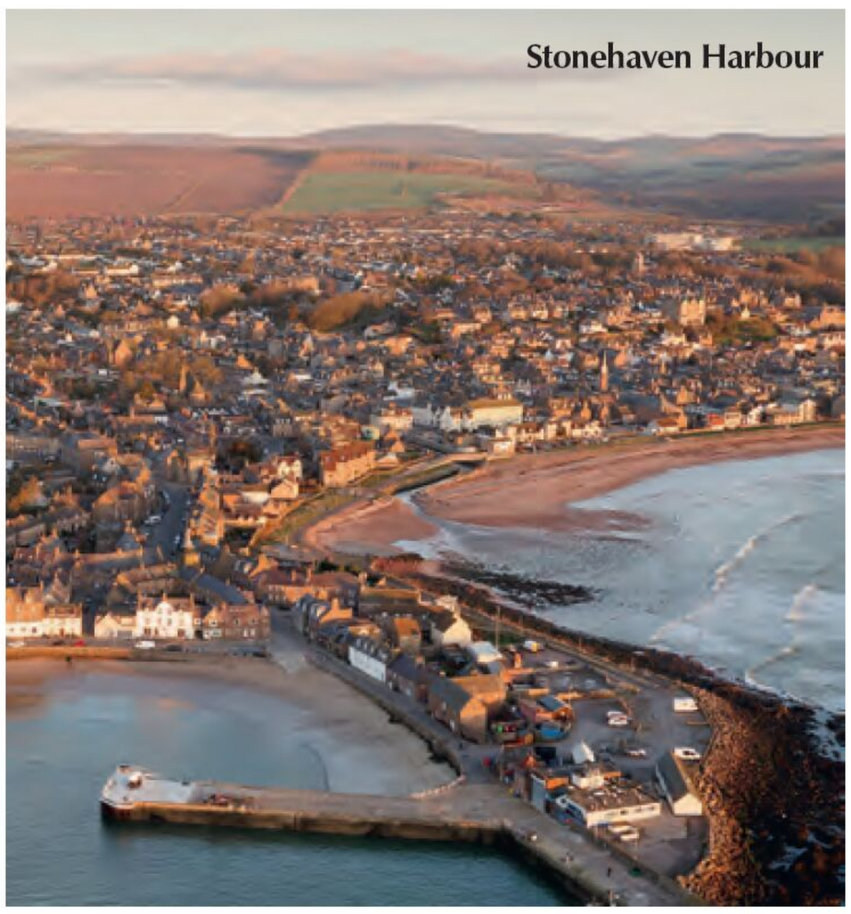
Maryculter To Spittal Of Glenshee

HEADING west through beautiful Royal Deeside country the attractions come thick and fast. The 16th-century Crathes Castle near Banchory has beautiful gardens – and look out for the Green Lady who is said to haunt the tower.

Ballater is perfect for lunch. Here you'll find the Old Royal Station, where Queen Victoria arrived on her annual trip to Balmoral. The station building has been refurbished sympathetically, so a visit now is a step back in time to the Victorian era. Don't miss the VisitScotland information centre, restaurant, tea room and exhibition.

After Ballater you're back in familiar territory, passing through Crathie and Braemar for the chance to visit anything you missed on your route north. A detour to Loch Muick provides a fantastic walk, and Braemar Castle, often unfairly overlooked in favour of Balmoral's royal accreditation, is well worth a tour.

The mountains beckon again and soon the route returns you to the long winding Glen Shee, and a fabulous descent back to Spittal of Glenshee.



Stonehaven Harbour

Ballater Railway Station

Above: Path around Loch Muick

Main: Crathes Castle

Other Things To See And Do:

- Royal Deeside Railway
- Road from Braemar to Linn of Dee
- Detour to Stonehaven for the open-air pool

Our Amazing Access Laws

Scotland's groundbreaking roaming rights are the envy of the world

by LAURA COVENTRY

Glen Etive is a favourite of walkers

IT is often said that Scotland has the best access rights in the world with a right to roam almost anywhere of our choosing. This is great news if you live in or are visiting Scotland.

Next year marks 20 years since the Scottish Outdoor Access Code was introduced, so it feels the right time to celebrate the many rights walkers, ramblers, mountaineers and members of the general public have when out and about in the Scottish landscape.

It was a couple of years after the 2001 foot and mouth outbreak across the country that the Scottish Government launched the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003.

This legislation outlines new rights of "responsible public access to land and the countryside". It excludes houses, private gardens and building sites. As well as opening up access on foot, legally, the 2003 act also covers water sports, cycling, horse-riding, and camping. It also allows people to wild camp, provided they camp using a small tent and are out of sight of buildings or roads.

The right does not apply to motorised transport. Then, in 2005, the Scottish Outdoor Access Code was created and came into operation.

"With access rights come responsibilities for both users and land managers that are detailed in the Scottish Outdoor Access Code. We encourage all our members to become familiar with the code before they head out to the hills or crags," advises Mountaineering Scotland.

For almost two decades we have, in Scotland, been adhering to our access rights and adhering to the code's three main principles: respecting the interests of others; caring for the environment and taking responsibility for our own actions. We continue to enjoy the freedom that our access rights (sometimes referred to as "freedom to roam" or "right to roam") bring, especially as legislation is stricter elsewhere, including south of the border.

However, this legislation was a long time coming. Scotways, the Scottish Rights of Way and Access Society, points out, "The right of responsible access to land and inland water throughout Scotland was groundbreaking when it came into operation in February 2005, but it didn't just happen. It took centuries."

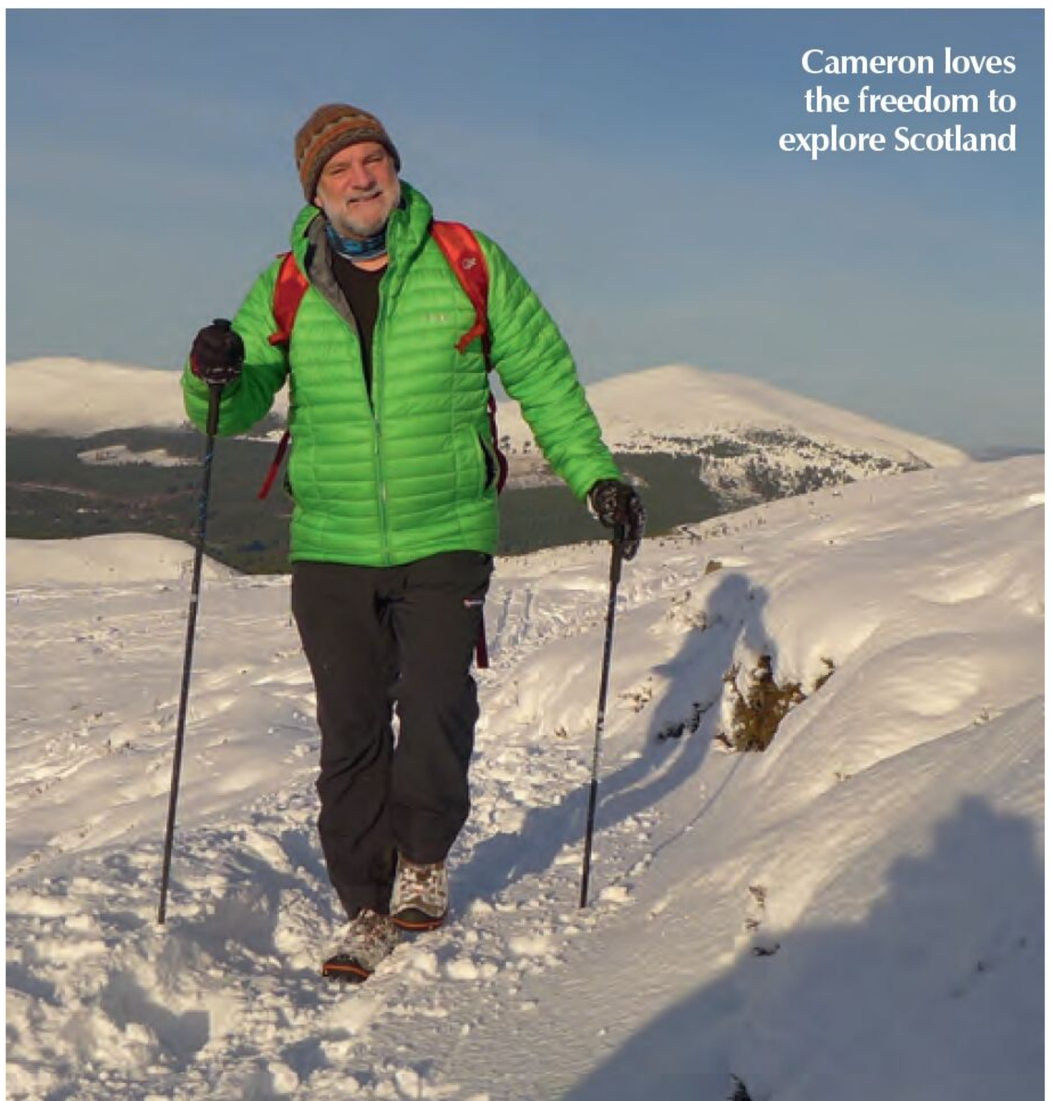
That's because there were dozens of different bills and acts of Parliament and other key events leading to, as Scotsways puts it, "our amazing access legislation".

"The legislation was hailed at the time as truly progressive and has become the envy of many," says adventurer and *Scots Magazine* columnist, Cameron McNeish.

He added, "The only comparable legislation is the Allemannsretten of the Scandinavian countries. Many people feel that the right to walk on land responsibly is a human right and that the Scottish legislation is a beacon to the rest of the world.

"To be honest, in my 50 years of walking and climbing in Scotland I've never known anything other than a right to walk the land but many people were concerned about threats, like trespassing and breaking laws that didn't actually exist in Scotland. So, it was felt that the long-established right of access in Scotland should be codified by law."

Before you go out and about in Scotland, know the code: www.outdooraccess-scotland.com



Cameron loves the freedom to explore Scotland

"Many feel the right to walk on land responsibly is a human right"

Aviemore Adventurer

Get your skiis on

The Aviemore Adventurer (service 30) operates up to every hour between **Aviemore** and **Cairngorm Mountain** Car Park.
No need to book ahead - just hop on!

Stagecoach

Campervans Unpacked

Van fan Marie Penman sets out some vital tips and warnings for novices

IF you've often gazed in envy at a sleek campervan gliding past you on the motorway, and imagined how it would feel to undertake a proper road trip in something similar, why not stop dreaming and start driving?

You might not have the funds available to actually buy a campervan – top-of-the-range models often cost around the same as a small property – but there are so many campervan hire companies around these days that a short break away in a van is definitely do-able!

Just for a moment, though, put aside the fantasies and daydreams and think seriously about what a road trip might involve. The first thing to say is that van life is not for everyone…

If you're used to boutique hotels, fine dining and luxury bedding, then living for several days in a small and, by any measure, cramped space might not be for you.

It's a holiday, for sure – but a very different kind of break to what you might be imagining.

Road trips are exciting, exhilarating and often hilarious, but they can also be tough, tiring and frustrating.

If you decide to go for it, though, here are our top tips for making the most of life on the road…

DO choose your travelling companion carefully. Think you get on well with your partner/ best friend/ sibling? A campervan holiday will really put this to the test. Any annoying habits are magnified 100-fold in a van!

DON'T take a lot of luggage with you. Chances are you'll end up wearing the same things every day with the possible exception of underwear. And put your clothes into a squashy bag that can be crammed under a seat or into a cupboard. No need for actual suitcases on this trip…

DO make a meal in advance for your first night away. Rustle up a chilli or a curry and keep it in a sealed tub so that all you have to do is heat it up on arrival. Cooking in a van can take a bit of getting used to, and as you might be a bit stressed after your first day on the road, make it easy on yourself by coming prepared. Home-made food always tastes better, but cans of supermarket curry are also good options!

DO get used to driving the van before heading out on a trip. Make sure the seat is the right height, all-round visibility is good and that you know how to drive in reverse – use the onboard navigation for this, to avoid hitting walls, lampposts and other vehicles.

DON'T forget to take along an extra container of water for topping up the reservoir under the sink. It's amazing how much water you get through and actually, living in a van for a few days will teach you to be very frugal with tap water, which is obviously a good thing!

DON'T forget a pair of flip-flops. They're handy for nipping out to the loo in the middle of the night, or for visiting a shower block.

DON'T leave rubbish behind at your camping spot – EVER! This is what gets campervanners a bad name and it's such bad form. Keep a roll of bin bags in a cupboard and dispose of all waste carefully and responsibly when you get to a proper bin.

DO take extra layers if the weather is likely to be cold at night. Sleep in bedsocks, a fleece, leggings or joggers – but make them easily removable. You may actually find that you overheat while you sleep, especially if you're in a sleeping bag.

DON'T park on a slope when you've stopped for the night. A slight gradient is manageable, but make sure you go to sleep with your head lying at the higher end of the van, otherwise you'll feel dizzy when you wake up!

DO relax and enjoy the ride. Nothing beats the feeling of heading out on the open road, knowing you can stop and camp whenever and wherever you feel like it. This is what freedom tastes like…

DO pack a few personal hygiene essentials. Baby wipes, toothpaste, soap and sun cream are all important. You may not have proper washing facilities for a while, so do the best you can with whatever you can cram into a toilet bag.

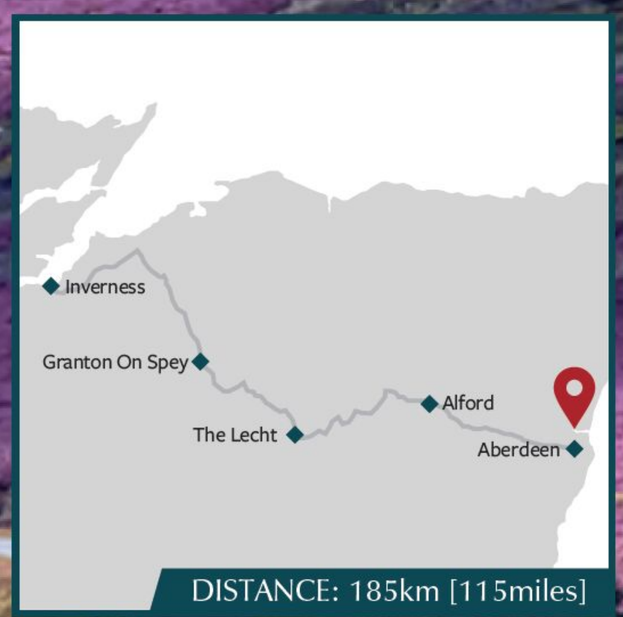
Now Try The Latest Model

If after a brief taste of life on the road, you find that you totally love van life, take a look at this beauty, new from Ford in 2024. It's available to buy from selected showrooms, including AM Philip in Dundee, Edinburgh and Glasgow, with prices from around £75,000. Yes, you could buy a small property for that – but then would you get an amazing, ever-changing view from the windows of a flat?

Highland Tourist Route

Discover the awe-inspiring, rugged beauty of the Highlands on one of Britain's most scenic roads

The Lecht road

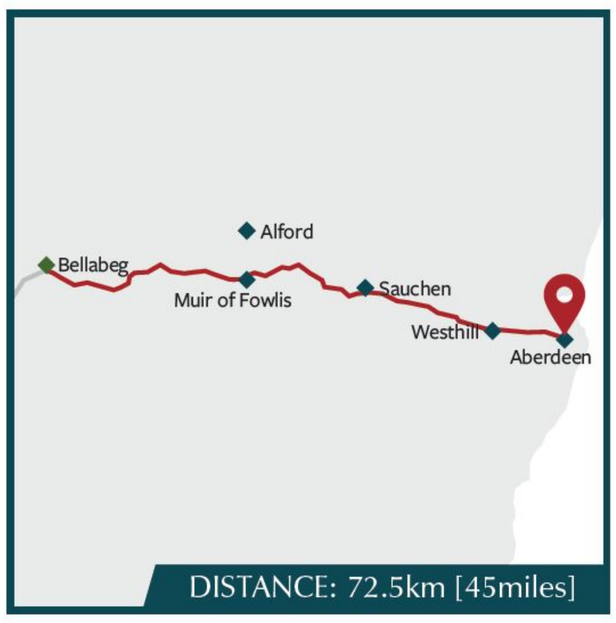


THE Highlands are Scotland's rugged and beautiful wilderness. With expanses of bright heather and imposing mountains, the scenery is truly breathtaking. Travelling between Inverness and Aberdeen you can take in the extent of this beauty as you pass over the snowy summits of The Lecht, following one of the UK's most scenic roads. The Highlands have everything from captivating wildlife to fascinating history. Spot golden eagles as you cross over the Cairngorms or take in the fascinating story of Loch Ness's Urquhart Castle.

From the country's most stunning scenery to action-packed adventures, the Highlands have something for everyone.

FOR MORE INFO VISIT
roadtrips.visitscotland.com and turn the page for route highlights.

Castle Fraser
Garden and Estate



HIGHLAND TOURIST ROUTE

Aberdeen To Bellabeg

ABERDEEN city has loads to entertain for at least a couple of days so make the most of it before heading into the countryside.

Past city centre flats to the leafy western suburbs, the route flows out into open fields. The A944 boasts rich farmland, forests and wide open skies.

At Dunecht, you can turn off to Castle Fraser Garden and Estate with its walks and lovely tearoom, after which the countryside then becomes hillier.

The road climbs by Little Ley to Tillyfourie, where you could turn off and walk to the Whitehill Stone Circle at Pitfichie Forest Car Park.

Back on the main road we reach the rural town of Alford, which offers supplies as well as a dry ski slope and a great base for exploring Royal Deeside.

On leaving the town, the scenery appears more remote as you cross the River Don and follow it through glorious rural Aberdeenshire.

Cutting though the wild forests, lichen covered trunks show how fresh the air is, so take any chance to stop and breath it in.

As the Don winds away south, the route picks up the small and pretty Mossat Burn before turning onto the A97 where you will find the Kildrummy Inn with great food and accommodation.

Descending into Glenkindie, where you'll find a handy petrol station, the road reunites with the River Don.

The route descends, crossing the river then reaching Bellabeg, the small Strathdon village with shop, public toilets and the famous signpost to the hamlet of Lost.

River Don

Route Highlight

Stone Circles

Aberdeen has around 10% of the total number of stone circles in Britain, and the region even boasts its own unique style of circle, the Recumbent Stone Circle, which is believed to relate to the rising or setting of the major standstill moon.

Other Things To See And Do:

- Gordon Highlanders Museum
- Kildrummy Castle
- Grampian Transport Museum

Kildrummy Castle Gardens

Well of Lecht

Route Highlight

The Lecht 2090

At 637 metres (2,090ft) above sea level, the Lecht is a natural playground for skiing in winter and mountain-biking in summer – yes, you can take bikes on the chairlift! Views from the top are incredible and the adrenaline-rush on your descent is well worth the trip.
www.lecht.co.uk

HIGHLAND TOURIST ROUTE

Bellabeg To Grantown-On-Spey

CROSSING the bridge over the Water of Nochty and chuckling at the signpost to Lost, the route passes by Strathdon and you can see Poldullie Bridge, built in 1715, from the road.

A 16km (10-mile) stretch of beautiful countryside and a winding river leads to a delicious coffee stop at Goodbrand & Ross in Corgarff.

The route then climbs into territory that feels more like the Cairngorms should – vast, rugged and remote. The sun sparkled on the river as we crossed Luib Bridge, before the fir-lined route led us to Lecht Road, one of Scotland's top drives.

Admire the superb Cairngorm vista at The Watchers – four specially commissioned sculptural seats by John Kennedy.

Climbing still, the lands empties to remote moorland and regular snow poles point to the area's winter transformation into a popular ski resort.

The road descends into greener pastures to the Well of Lecht, a gorgeous spot for a walk or camp for the night.

The route then follows an Old Military Road, one of many built in the mid-18th century to bring order to the Highlands after the Jacobite Rebellions, into whisky and gin territory – the Caorunn Distillery offers a lovely tour – and to Tomintoul – the highest village in the Highlands at 355 metres (1,164ft).

The next 19km (12 miles) are a feast for the senses as you enter Moray and Historic Banffshire after crossing the River Avon. On a clear day the views are laid out and the colourful landscape is awe-inspiring.

Entering Grantown-on- Spey, the A95 crosses the wide River Spey and visitors are then spoilt for choice in this small town with lots to offer.

The Watchers

Glenlivet Distillery

Other Things To See And Do:

- "Still" Art Sculpture
- Glenlivet Distillery
- Loch Garten Osprey Centre

Grantown Museum

HIGHLAND TOURIST ROUTE

Grantown-On-Spey To Inverness

THE smart planned town of Grantown-on-Spey is worth a couple of days' exploring, with golf, fishing, walking and wildlife.

Grantown Museum tells the story of the area through fascinating interactive displays as well as changing art exhibitions.

Back on the road, the route heads north on an Old Military Road through a tall and thick forest which opens up to stunning countryside before engulfing the road in woods once more.

It's a colourful drive in autumn but any time of year is gorgeous here.

Just five miles out of the town you'll see a small car park on the right for Huntly's Crags which offers a nice walk and some fun rock climbing routes.

The road then climbs to open moors and vast skies. This snow road is often closed in winter and has a wild feel to it.

The scenery softens into more greenery, small copses and then larger woodlands interspersed with many lochans.

Turning wild again, it's a beautiful drive north until a sharp turn southwest shortly after which you may want to detour to visit the haunted ruin of Rait Castle and the impressive Cawdor Castle and Gardens.

Here you could also head north to the lovely coastal town of Nairn or north-east to the magnificent Findhorn Bay and the towns of Forres and Elgin.

Following the Highland Tourist Route you can also choose to turn off at the pretty hamlet of Clephanton to visit Fort George – an active army barracks and home to the Black Watch, it's an amazing site and the ramparts are ideal for dolphin spotting over the Moray Firth.

The route then winds prettily southwest to the incredibly moving Culloden Battlefield and Visitor Centre.

And as the number of houses increases, the route finally descends upon the outskirts of Inverness – the capital of the Highlands.

Dolphins in the Moray Firth

Route Highlight

Culloden Battlefield and Visitor Centre

Walk the field where the last battle on British soil took place, now restored to how it would have looked in 1746, and see the story of Culloden brought to life through living history presentations and an immersive battle theatre.
www.nts.org.uk

“Fort George is an amazing site and the ramparts are ideal for dolphin spotting”

Other Things To See And Do:

- Clava Cairns
- Inverness Castle
- Dava Way Walking & Cycling Route

Guns on the battlements at Fort George looking over the Moray Firth

Crathes Castle

Dunnottar Castle

HIGHLAND TOURIST ROUTE

Castle Country

YOU could stay in a hotel when you visit Aberdeenshire. Or a bed and breakfast, or a campsite. Maybe Airbnb it like everyone else. Or you could live like a lord at Lickleyhead Castle.

This 16th-century pile at Auchleven, near Insch, sits on the banks of the Gadie Burn and has been held by the Leiths, the Leslies, the Forbes, the Lumsdens and the Duffs – all powerful north-east families – at various points throughout its colourful history.

Game Of Thrones actress Rose Leslie – Ygritte in the popular HBO drama and the real-life wife of co-star Kit Harington, who played Jon Snow – spent her childhood here, before the castle and grounds were sold in 2019.

And today, it has to rank as one of the poshest self-catering holiday lets in Aberdeenshire.

There are eight bedrooms, a great hall, a library, a games room, a chapel, enormous open fires and a hand-carved Queen Anne four-poster bed.

Guests can roam across the four-hectare (10 acres) estate, sample paid activities – such as a mini Highland games – or enjoy a complimentary round at nearby Insch Golf Club.

And while most visitors are happy with self-catering, a butler, maids and a private chef can all be at your service if you want to go the full Downton.

With more than 260 castles, stately homes and mansions – more per acre than anywhere else in the UK – it's easy to see why Aberdeenshire is known as Castle Country.

Scotland's Castle Trail offers a greatest hits tour of some of the most scenic, fascinating and visitor-friendly sites, from Balmoral – with its royal connections – to tumbledown ruins.

The 370km (230-mile) route starts in Stonehaven and finishes in Alford, or vice-versa.

And if you're a castles completist, a six-day itinerary should offer sufficient time to do them justice.

Dunnottar Castle will be at the top of most visitors' lists. Its location, on a rocky headland 3km (two miles) south of Stonehaven, is enough to take the breath away. And its history, from medieval fortress to the hiding place of the Scottish crown jewels, is straight out of a storybook.

More recently, the ruin has become one of the most iconic backdrops in Scotland, beloved by Instagrammers and stealing the limelight from stars such as Mel Gibson, who was here for the filming of Zeffirelli's 1990 version of *Hamlet*.

Crathes Castle, near Banchory, is another stunner, inside and out. The interior is famous for its Jacobean painted ceilings and the resident ghost, the Green Lady.

Visitors can also lose themselves in the grounds, which stretch out from beautiful gardens on to a series of walking trails and a Go Ape! treetop adventure park.

Crathes Castle is run by the National Trust for Scotland (NTS), as is Fyvie Castle, near Turriff, which contains 800 years of history and an incredible collection of furniture, tapestries, arms and armour. William the Lion, Robert the Bruce and Charles I are

Balmoral Castle

“Dunnotar’s history is straight out of a storybook”

among the guests whose footsteps you’ll be following in here. It’s also home to a portrait collection, which includes one of the largest private collections of Raeburns in the world. Again, the grounds are as much a draw as the castle itself, with attractions including an 18th-century walled garden and Fyvie Loch.

Corgarff Castle is less well-known than some of the others on the trail. It’s certainly more remote, but it’s no less fascinating.

Dating from the 16th century, this imposing white structure in glorious Strathdon was converted into a barracks for government redcoat troops in 1748. Its last military use was to control the smuggling of illicit whisky in the early 1800s.

Today, it’s run by Historic Scotland and guided tours have to be booked in advance.

From the starkness of Corgarff, it’s a short journey to Craigievar Castle. This NTS property, near Alford, is said to be the inspiration for Disney’s Cinderella Castle and was a family home right up to the 1960s.

Craigievar is regarded as one of the finest examples of Scottish Baronial architecture, all turrets and towers, and is crammed with historical artefacts and paintings. The grounds boast a Scottish glen garden, two waymarked woodland trails and a Victorian kitchen garden.

And last but not least, Balmoral Castle. Built by Queen Victoria and Prince Albert, it’s been a holiday hideaway for generations of royals.

The grounds and gardens are open to the public daily and visitors can also take a peek inside the ballroom.

There’s a gift shop and coffee shop – and who knows who you might bump into on one of the Land Rover tours of the estate, or in the shops in nearby Ballater?

Craigievar Castle

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Take A Spirited Safari

Twelve top distilleries to include on a taste tour of Scotland's national drink

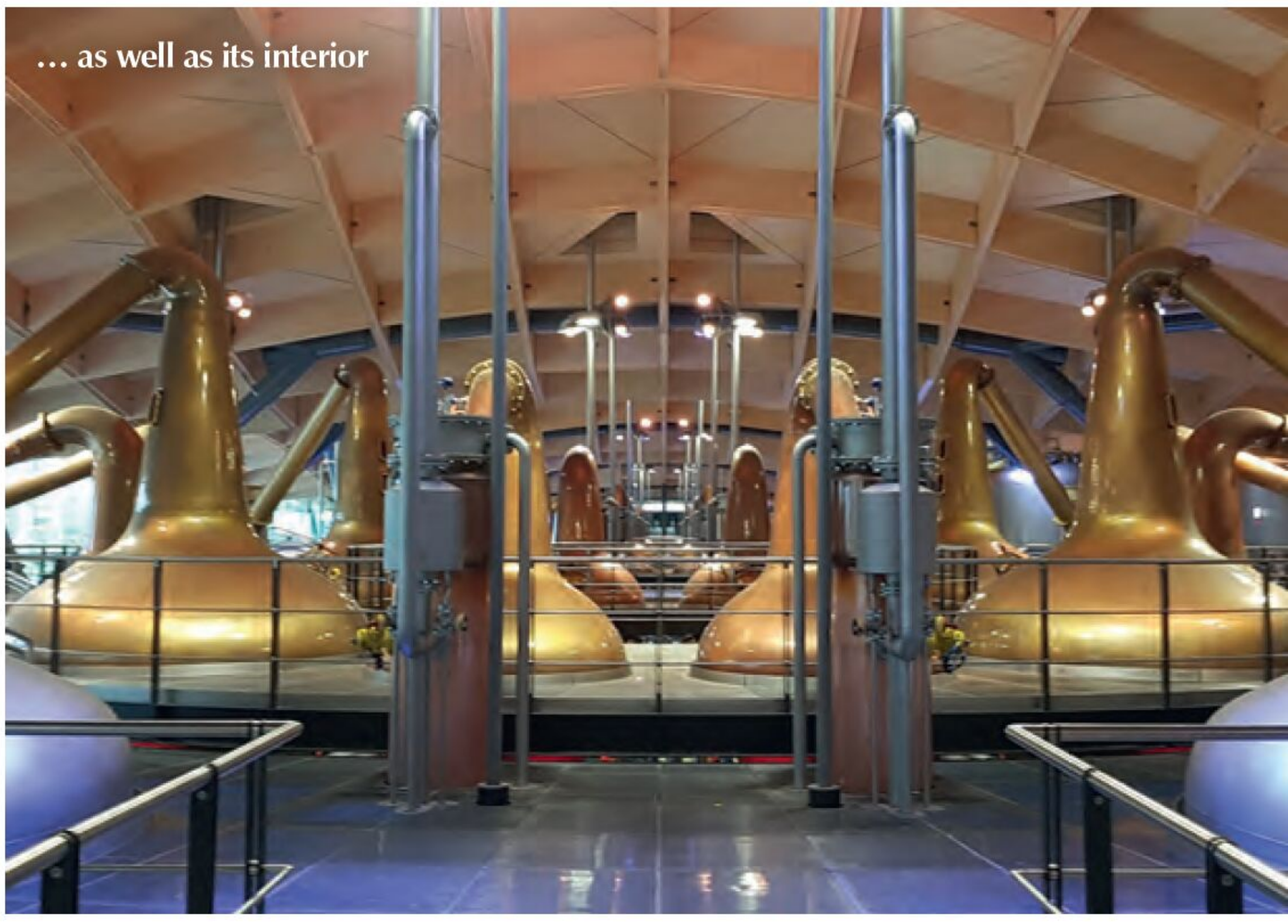
by DANIELLA THEIS

WHISKY has been distilled in Scotland as far back as the 17th century. Back then, distilling was most often carried out at farmhouses, but the 1781 private distillation ban would see this change. It was the dawn of bootleg whisky, but also the start of the larger scale mass production sites we see today, many of which have become popular venues to visit. There are a total of five whisky regions and around 150 active distillers in Scotland, each with its unique flavours, surroundings and processes. From the Orkney Islands in the North, to some historical sites operating since the 1700s, to Edinburgh's newly-opened vertical distillery (the first of its kind in Scotland!) – these are 12 distilleries to consider for your next trip.

Unique Architecture

The Macallan Distillery's site is a distillery like no other, with huge windows and a swirling grass-topped roof. It is worth a visit not only for the unique architecture but also for its tours, which offer a glimpse of the distiller's traditions. There is also a bar and brasserie on site. Spaces must be booked in advance. **themacallan.com**

The Macallan distillery is remarkable for its exterior…



… as well as its interior

Speyside & The Malt Whisky Trail

Dubbed "malt whisky country", Speyside in Moray is not the biggest whisky region by size but trumps all other regions when it comes to numbers of distilleries, with more than 50 operating from there. One of the easiest ways to explore Speyside's whiskies is by embarking on the Malt Whisky Trail. Deemed "a uniquely immersive whisky experience", it features nine beloved malt producers, including popular names like Glenfiddich and Glenlivet. An additional plus is that the route takes you through beautiful Moray, its inland and old mills, coastline with beautiful fishing villages, and more.

A hidden gem

Driving The Trail

The key routes through the Speyside trail are the A95 from Aviemore to Keith and the A96 from Inverness to Aberdeen. Once you're en route, keep your eyes peeled for the brown '"pagoda" symbol used on road signs for each stop.

Don't Miss

A visit to The Glenallachie Distillery. It may not be part of the trail, but the venue is one of few privately-owned sites in Scotland and won Visitor Attraction of the Year at the Icons of Whisky Awards 2022. Find out more via **theglenallachie.com** »

The stills at Highland Park, Kirkwall

Highland

The Highland region is the largest whisky region in Scotland. It stretches across what is known as the Highland council area, as well as several islands including Harris, Jura, and even parts of Aberdeenshire. Some of its most famous names are Dalmore, Glenmorangie, Oban Whisky, and Highland Park. Due to the vast area, difference in terrain and weather conditions, flavours differ strongly between producers. Some are peaty, while others are lighter, but all are well worth the trip!

Atop A Mountain

Highland Park distillery has been operating on the southern edge of Kirkwall, in Orkney, for the past 226 years. They run regular tours for visitors to see and taste the "spirit of Orkney" from Tuesday to Saturday until April, and more during summer months. Book online: **highlandparkwhisky.com**

Worth A Detour

Newcomers Nc'Nean, only bottling since 2020, are changemakers. They have built their processes with sustainability in mind and were the first whisky company in the UK to use 100% post-consumer recycled glass for their bottles. Sitting in the beautiful area of Lochaline, across from Oban and the Sound of Mull, their distillery is worth a detour! **ncnean.com**

Don't Miss

A visit to The Glenturret, Scotland's oldest working distillery, located in Crieff, Perthshire and running since 1763 – although with a 30-year hiatus between 1927 and 1957 during which a dedicated team looked after the existing stock and site until it was reopened. Glenturret runs regular distillery tours and has an adjacent restaurant. **theglenturret.com**

Home of The Famous Grouse blend

The Prince of Wales hammers in a cork on a visit to Glenturret

Islay

Known for its peaty flavours, Islay whisky is much-loved across the globe. The island may only measure around 40km (25 miles) in width and 25km (15 miles) in length, but it is home to nine (and growing) distilleries. Some are old, such as Bowmore – which has been running since 1779 – and some new, such as the upcoming Portintruan Distillery and Port Ellen Distillery, both expected to open in 2024. Reach Islay by ferry from Kennacraig, Kintyre.

Bunnahabhain – remote and distinctive

Striking Views

Down a single-track road and on the shores of the Sound of Islay, you'll struggle to find a better view than the one from Bunnahabhain, the most remote distillery on the island. Not only is it a beautiful site, but tours are worth the visit to get a taste of their whiskies, which are less peated than other Islay malts. **bunnahabhain.com**

100% Islay

Visit Kilchoman Distillery, one of Islay's newer sites, to try their 100% Islay Range – currently Islay's only Single Farm Single Malt Scotch Whisky. Barley is often imported to the island, but for this range, all its components are grown, distilled, and bottled in the same place. Tours start from as little as £10 (including a nip!) and are held in small groups. **kilchomandistillery.com**

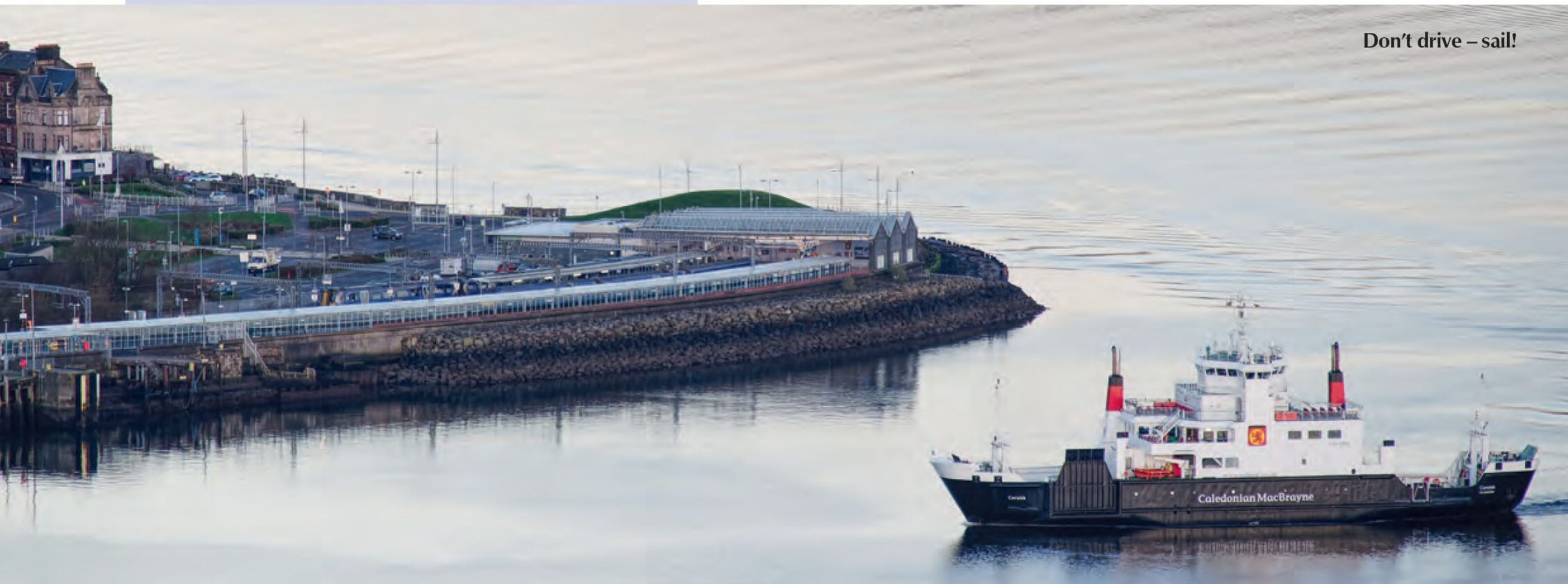
Don't Miss

From Islay you can easily hop over to nearby Jura to try whisky from the island's one and only distillery, first established in 1810 and "reborn" in 1963. It runs daily tours for visitors that include two drams chosen by your tour guide. Starting from £15. **jurawhisky.com** »

Jura Distillery

A Whisky Cruise

CalMac offer a Scottish Island Whisky adventure through their multi-journey ticket option and its connected routes taking you around some key Scottish whisky producers and regions. Kick off by taking the ferry from Ardrossan to Brodick (Arran) to taste Crofter's Still whisky. From there, visit Clonaig or Tarbet in Kintyre and head to Campbelltown and its many offerings. From nearby Kennacraig, you can take the ferry to Islay. Three regions with one road trip and one ticket! Find out more via **calmac.co.uk**



Don't drive – sail!

Campbeltown from the harbour

Campbeltown

Its influence may seem small compared to other areas far bigger or with much higher numbers of distilleries, but Campbeltown was and remains a big player in the whisky industry. In the 19th century, it was even referred to as "the whisky capital of the world" with over 30 distilleries in the one, relatively small, town.

World-Renowned

Glen Scotia, established in 1832, may be one of Scotland's smallest whisky distilleries, but it has long been a big name. One of its products was crowned 'world's best single cask single malt' at the World Whiskies Awards in 2023. Having opened a visitor centre, the distillery now runs tours to enable enthusiasts to get a behind-the-scenes glimpse of their production site. To enquire, email **shop@glenscotia.com** or call 01586 552288.

Steeped In Tradition

Founded in 1828, Springbank Distillery in Campbeltown remains within the family that founded it, making it one of the oldest family-run and owned distilleries in Scotland. A standout feature is its continued use of processes that are steeped in tradition. Barley is malted on-site using traditional floor malting methods. Tours will give you a glimpse of this and other production stages (everything is done on site!), as well as a taste of one of the whiskies. Visit **springbank.scot** to book.

Go behind the scenes

Lowlands

Known for the likes of Auchentoshan and Glenkinchie, the Lowlands too are a major part of the whisky industry. In recent years especially there have been several new distilleries launching or reopening. Close to the central belt, these sites are often very accessible.

Annandale Distillery

Located at Annan, in Dumfries and Galloway, Annandale Distillery was originally established in 1863. It has only been distilling again since 2014. Yet, since the relaunch, it has made quite a name for itself, both for its product and the visitor experience, which has attracted a VisitScotland 5-star rating. The site does hourly tours, has an on-site café, offers venue hire, and more. Find out details at **annandaledistillery.com**

A taste of the lowlands at Auchentoshan

The First Of Its Kind

The nine-storey Port of Leith Distillery is Scotland's first vertical distillery. Located in Leith, it only opened its doors in 2023 and, thus far, is still working on producing a malt, but it does have port and sherry on sale. The distillery runs regular tours giving an insight into the process, and you'll receive very own 10ml bottle of spirit. Starting at £25. **leithdistillery.com**

MICHELIN
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'a culinary gem'

There's nowhere in the world like The Globe Inn in Dumfries - the favourite haunt of Scotland's national bard Robert Burns, who lived, loved, and entertained here.

One of the most historic bars in Scotland, with an impressive collection of more than 300 whiskies, it is also home to our Michelin-listed, award-winning destination restaurant, 1610.

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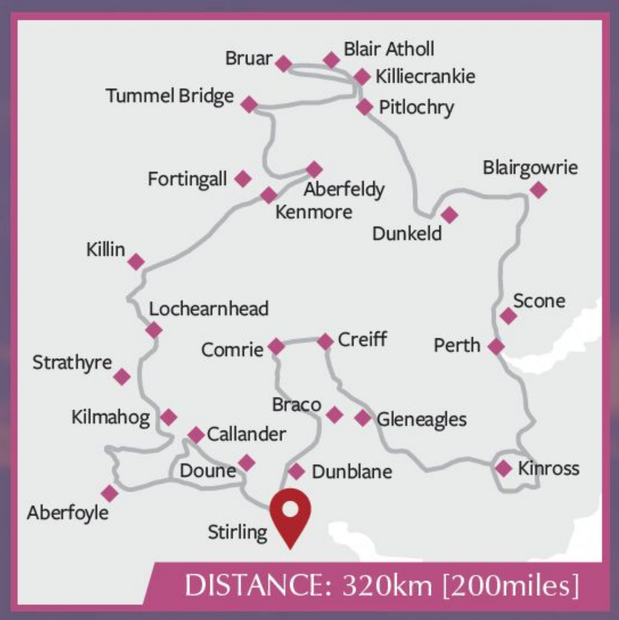
Book Now

Heart 200 Route

The youngest member of Scotland's official driving routes, Heart 200 links the country's National Parks

by FIONA RUSSELL

Crieff looking over to Ben Chonzie



THE 200-mile-or-so Heart 200 is one of the more recent circular road tours to be established in Scotland. The route, through the regions of Stirlingshire and Highland Perthshire, visits two historic cities, Stirling and Perth, as well as many attractive towns and villages. Uniquely, it also links both of Scotland's national parks, Loch Lomond & The Trossachs and the Cairngorms.

In addition, a range of different sub-tours encourage drivers, as well as walkers and cyclists, to get off the beaten track.

Robert Cairns is the managing director of Heart 200 and owner of the Fortingall Hotel near Aberfeldy, which is on the route.

"Heart 200 has been designed to encourage tourism back into the heart of Scotland," he said. "We offer visitors a leisurely journey with plenty of options to stay in the area for as long as possible.

"The Heart 200 website is full of ideas for planning a holiday, providing suggested itineraries and tours and highlighting the numerous attractions and places to stay, eat and spend time."

This route offers natural gems such as rolling hills, rugged mountains, pretty lochs, winding rivers, waterfalls and fabulous trees.

There is a vast array of visitor attractions including castles, monuments, heritage centres, museums, whisky distilleries and walking trails.

You will only wish that you had planned to spend more time driving the route so you could explore further...

FOR MORE INFO VISIT
www.heart200.scot and read on for route highlights.

The Duke's Pass

HEART 200 ROUTE

Stirling To Lochearnhead

Route Highlight

Steamship cruises, Loch Katrine

Choose from four cruise vessels and relax while you sail around the beautiful Loch Katrine admiring stunning Trossachs landmarks such as Ben A'an and Ben Venue.
lochkatrine.com

YOU could easily spend a couple of days visiting the multiple historic gems of Stirling, including a hilltop castle, the National Wallace Monument, the Battle of Bannockburn Visitor Centre and the Old Town Jail.

Leaving the city quickly behind, Heart 200 then heads into a well-named section, the "Wooded Western Edge".

Amid an increasingly bucolic landscape, villages and small towns pop up one by one and call for your attention. Doune is first, with its must-see 14th-century courtyard castle. The fortification is a popular choice with movie directors and has been used as Castle Winterfell in the original pilot episode of Game of Thrones and as Castle Leoch in Outlander.

Travelling west to Aberfoyle, or a detour north-west to Callander, the route passes into the beautiful scenery of The Trossachs.

Of particular note is the winding Duke's Pass – the A821 – north of Aberfoyle, which climbs almost 244 metres (800ft) offering plentiful opportunities to stop for a fabulous vista, or to enjoy a walk or a mountain bike ride in the vast Queen Elizabeth Forest Park.

Continuing on the A821, the route descends to skirt the undulating western and northern shores of picturesque Loch Achray, passing through the small settlement of Brig o'Turk, before edging another waterway, Loch Venachar, to reach Kilmahog.

A rewarding short walk from Kilmahog leads to Samson's Stone, a huge rock deposited by a prehistoric glacier on Bochastle Hill, and Dunmore Fort beyond it.

Again, back on the Heart 200, tourers follow the A84 northwards, through more villages, including Balquhidder, Lochearnhead and Strathyre, which all offer attractive bases, especially if you enjoy spending time outdoors.

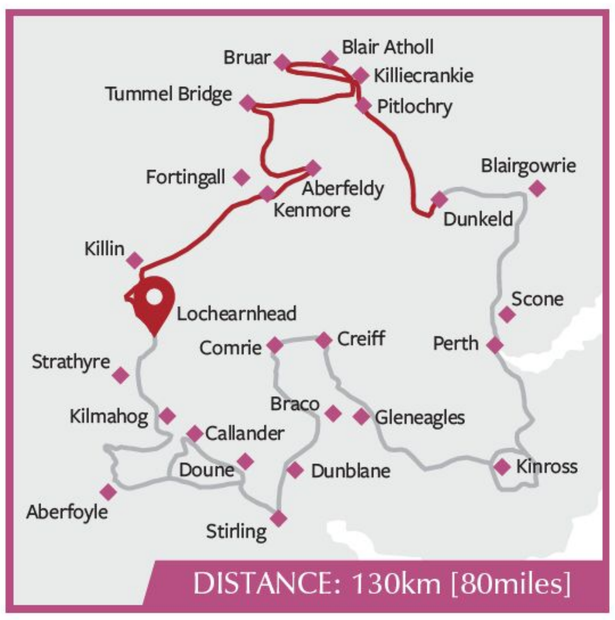
There are plenty of options for a shorter or longer walk, such as Kirkton Glen in Balquhidder; the Glen Ogle Trail in Lochearnhead; and the mountain of Ben Ledi.

Doune Castle

Inchmahome Priory

Other Things To See And Do:

- Go Ape, by Aberfoyle
- BLiSS Sculpture Trail
- The Rob Roy Way
- The Engine Shed, Stirling
- Three Lochs Forest Drive



Loch Tay at Kenmore

HEART 200 ROUTE

Lochearnhead To Dunkeld

HEART 200 passes from Stirlingshire to Perthshire – and into the "Highland North" section – the mountains grow taller and rugged. Water is a constant feature, whether a fast-flowing river, waterfalls or lochs.

A visit to Killin reveals the fantastic Falls of Dochart, before the route joins the northern shore of Loch Tay with the Ben Lawers range of mountains rising tantalisingly above. The many rounded summits of the National Nature Reserve are ideal for exploring further on foot.

Back on the road, a tourist sign at Fearnan points towards Fortingall, where an ancient yew stands in a churchyard. The reputedly 5,000-year-old yew is said to be the "oldest living thing" in Europe – and possibly the world.

At Kenmore there's a marina, a boat centre, riding stables, a golf course and the fascinating living history museum, the Scottish Crannog Centre.

Aberfeldy, the next town, has highlights such as a walk to the Birks of Aberfeldy, made famous by the Robert Burns poem, Wade's Bridge, 16th-century Castle Menzies and Dewar's Aberfeldy Distillery.

Heading west, then north, the Heart 200 climbs into moorlands with pretty native trees. A descent with delightful views leads to Tummel Bridge and the Loch Tummel National Scenic Area. At Queen's View there is a wonderful view of one of Scotland's most famous mountains, Schiehallion.

And still there are further natural hotspots, including Killiecrankie river gorge.

A short "extra" loop at the northern point of Heart 200 visits the village of Blair Atholl, on the edge of the Cairngorms National Park and Bruar, where there is a spectacular series of waterfalls.

Heading south again, now on the busier and faster A9, the route visits the popular town of Pitlochry. This is the start of the section known as the Riverside East, thanks to the backdrop of the rivers Tummel, Braan, Ericht and Tay. Then it's on to Dunkeld.

Route Highlight

Blair Castle

This example of Scottish baronial architecture has been the home of the Atholl family for more than seven centuries. Visitors can explore the history contained within its 30 rooms or wander the grounds, visiting Hercules Garden and Diana's Grove. There's also the ruins of St Bride's Kirk to explore.
blair-castle.co.uk

Queen's View

Other Things To See And Do:

- Forestry Commission's Visitor Centre at Tummel Bridge
- Highland Fling Bungee, Killicrankie
- The House of Bruar
- Glen Tilt walks

Falls of Dochart, Killin

HEART 200 ROUTE

Dunkeld To Perth

AS appropriate for this section named the Riverside East, you could begin the day with a walk along the River Braan.

Or you might stroll below tall Douglas Firs at The Hermitage or mountain bike on some of Scotland's best quality trails, both near Dunkeld.

The Heart 200 then continues clockwise heading towards the town of Blairgowrie and, once again, into rolling countryside with pretty woodland and several small lochs. En route is the Loch of Lowes, which is home to a wildlife reserve and the chance to spot beautiful ospreys.

The large town of Blairgowrie is the starting point for a super 96km (60-mile) walking route, the Cateran Trail, following ancient drove roads once used by cattle rustlers.

The town also marks the start of the Snow Roads – a scenic driving route through the Cairngorms National Park to historic Grantown-on-Spey.

Travelling south again, Heart 200 tourers reach two highlights, Meikleour Beech Hedge, acclaimed as Britain's longest hedge and the highest of its kind in the world, and Scone Palace.

One of Scotland's most popular tourist attractions, Scone Palace has been the seat of parliaments and the crowning places of Scottish rulers, including Robert the Bruce.

If you have time, drive through Scone for a walk up Kinnoull Hill.

A circuit from Perth city centre takes two to three hours, and reaches magnificent views across the Carse of Gowrie and across the Tay to the Lomond Hills.

Perth itself is a lovely city to stroll around, with it two parks North Inch and South Inch, the River Tay and attractions including a concert hall, theatre, Balhousie Castle and Black Watch Museum, Huntingtower Castle and Greyfriars Burial Ground.

Loch of Lowes

Route Highlight

Dunkeld Cathedral

Nestled in the heart of Dunkeld, the current building dates from 1318, but the area was an important religious centre for the early Celtic Church from the ninth century. A beautiful site, the active church is a joy to wander around. **dunkeldcathedral.org.uk**

Above: Tay Estuary from Kinnoull Hill

Left: Perth City Bridges

Other Things To See And Do:

- Beatrix Potter Exhibition & Garden
- Wee Scottish Gallery
- The Library of Innerpeffray
- Active Kids Adventure Park, Stanley

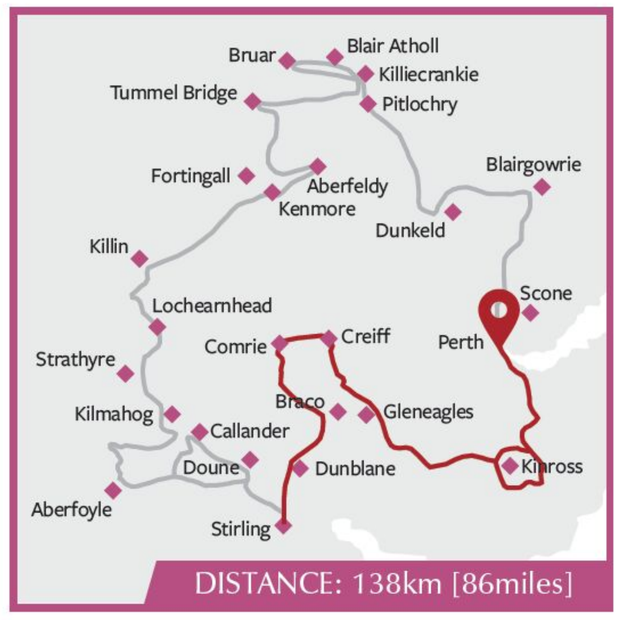
Route Highlight

Gleneagles Hotel, Spa & Golf Resort

If you fancy a dose of luxury at the end of your Heart 200 tour, stop off at 5-star Gleneagles Hotel. Spend some time relaxing in their world-class spa, enjoy a round of golf or even stay a night or two and sample their fine dining. **restaurants.gleneagles.com**

HEART 200 ROUTE

Perth To Stirling



LEAVING Perth, Heart 200 journeys into a stretch called The Historic South. Travellers might like to visit Loch Leven, where Mary, Queen of Scots was imprisoned on Castle Island and learn about her story.

Before this, though, there's the chance to climb West Lomond, the highest peak in the Lomond Hills, as your route strays into Fife.

After Kinross, the route winds through pretty countryside via atmospheric Glendevon to the famous Gleneagles Hotel, and then on towards to the market towns of Crieff and Comrie.

The historic highlights come thick and fast, including the ruins of Auchterarder Castle and nearby Tullibardine Chapel; Muthill Parish Church; and Drummond Castle.

Just a short drive west is Comrie, which is a popular destination for walkers with some great routes, such as Deil's Cauldron and the Melville Monument. Comrie is known as the "shaky toun", because of its location on the Highland Fault Line – the town experiences more tremors than any other in Scotland. Visit Earthquake House to find out more.

History is brought into focus again at former Second World War prisoner of war camp and army training area at Cultybraggan camp.

Travelling south again, the Heart 200 reaches Braco, a village that dates to Roman times, as shown by the fort at Ardoch.

The town of Dunblane offers another fascinating diversion and the jewel in the crown of attractions is the cathedral.

If you have time to spare, visit the Stirling attractions that you missed at the start of the trip.

You could stand atop the Wallace Monument and look back on where you've been and really take your trip to heart.

Above: Farmland around Crieff

Left: Drummond Castle

Other Things To See And Do:

- Famous Grouse Experience
- Auchingarrich Wildlife Centre
- Dunblane Museum

Taking The High Line

For a truly up-close-and-personal experience of Scotland's stunning scenery, book your tickets, pack your bag then put your feet up for these rail rides to remember

by LAURA COVENTRY

Caledonian Sleeper

There has always been something so magical about the romance of sleeper trains. As a passenger, you board at night, enter your own private cabin, then bed down for the night, before waking up in a different world, hundreds of miles away.

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Travel by the Caledonian Sleeper and you board at the bustling city of London to wake up in the tranquil Highlands.

And, as you will discover, many other surprises await you on board the famous train.

You can choose from several options, from the Caledonian Double which has a full-sized double bed in the cabin with en suite, to the Club Room with twin bunk beds and an en suite.

There is also a Classic Room, one of the best-kept secrets is the seating coach. Did you know that you can also book a seat, rather than an overnight cabin, on the Sleeper and travel from London to Scotland for around £50?

On board, guests can dine in the Club Car. This is also where breakfast is served.

Once you depart from London Euston, there is only one stop before reaching the Scottish Borders.

For the environmentally conscious traveller

Fine dining awaits in the Club Car

Then, once in Scotland, the train stops at a number of Highland destinations including Crianlarich, Ardlui, Spean Bridge, Bridge of Orchy and, Britain's highest train station, Corrour.

What's unique about Corrour is that the station is so remote that is cannot be accessed by road.

Reaching it is only possible by train. It's the perfect stop for exploring the hills and the West Highlands of Scotland. And did you know that Corrour's tiny platform featured in the 1996 cult movie *Trainspotting*?

Steven Marshall is head of sales and marketing at The Caledonian Sleeper so, naturally, he has experienced the overnight journey – for research purposes!

He said, "There's nothing more special than falling asleep in London Euston and lifting the blind in your cabin the next morning to a scene of mountains, lochs and deer. It is quite spectacular.

"Once you have travelled beyond Helensburgh,

Fit For Royalty

Every year, the Caledonian Sleeper carries four times the population of Fort William on board, and 2023 was one of the most successful for passenger numbers, with cabins busy into November. The mattresses on the Sleeper are manufacturer by Aberdeen-based Royal Warrant-holders, Glencraft, so you are guaranteed a comfortable night's sleep. A number of members of the royal family have travelled on the Sleeper, including to Aberdeen, for onward travel to Balmoral.

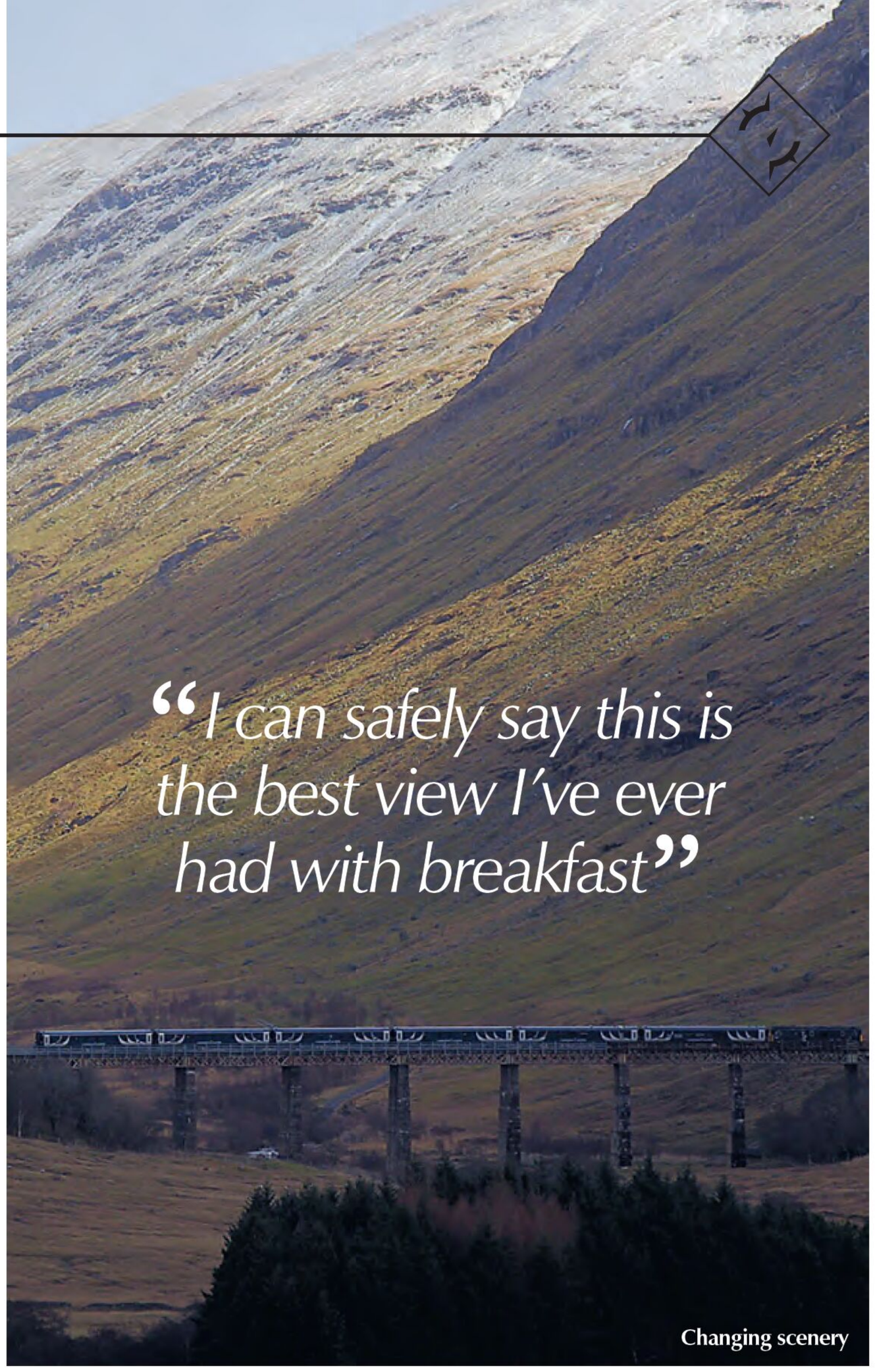
the scenery completely changes. I can safely say, this is the best view I have ever had with breakfast.

"Even after two years of working here and going on countless trips, it doesn't get old, because it is different every time you travel. It changes so much with the seasons and the weather conditions."

And, the experience does not only include the overnight on-board experience as your ticket also includes lounge access before and after your trip.

You can prepare for your train ride by relaxing in the newly-opened passenger lounge at London Euston before departure. Or, if you want to freshen up at your final destination of Fort William, then you can access the lounge there on arrival.

To book a memorable experience travelling on an overnight sleeper train, visit sleeper.scot »



Changing scenery

Passengers board at Euston

The Glenfinnan Viaduct is the highlight of the trip

West Highland Line

The Fort William to Mallaig railway line was one of the last major railway-building projects in the British Isles. The West Highland Railway was completed in 1894 and originally terminated at Fort William.

However, according to sources, it was still "far from the fishing ground of the Minch and the ability to get to market", so the railway was extended to Mallaig and took four years to build, and it was well worth the wait for today it is regarded as the "most scenic rail journey in the world" – high praise indeed.

Stunning views from the steam train

If you have not been on the West Highland Line, better climb aboard to see it for yourself. Regular, daily train services travel along the Iron Road to the isles – but to make the trip truly memorable, The Jacobite steam train should be the transport of choice. Every year, thousands of people travel along the famous rail route to enjoy the spectacle of steam hauled trains, which were re-introduced to the line in 1984.

It's not hard to see why the line has become so popular, for the journey runs through an extraordinary landscape. Beginning in the shadow of Ben Nevis, it then runs near to the shores of Loch Eil and Loch Ailort, under the craggy mountains of the West Highlands, and past the gorgeous sands of Arisaig. Then comes the highlight – travelling over the Glenfinnan Viaduct. This magnificent 21-arch 380 metre-long (1246 feet) structure is the longest concrete railway bridge in Scotland with people flocking to Glenfinnan to catch a glimpse of the steam train trundling over the archways. As well as its appearance in the Harry Potter films, Glenfinnan Viaduct has also been featured on Scottish bank notes.

The route terminates at Mallaig but even though the journey has ended, the scenery continues to impress. Here, you can enjoy the remarkable views extending across to Knoydart, the Small Isles and the jagged outline of Skye.

West Highland Line: Glasgow To Fort William

The Glasgow to Fort William route sits on the West Highland Line, which boasts the accolade of "best railway line in Scotland" due to the stunning scenery the line snakes through. This trip begins by boarding at Glasgow's Queen Street Station, just off George Square. It then travels through the city's suburbs, along the River Clyde to Dumbarton then Helensburgh before entering the Highlands. If you are a keen hillwalker, it is worth stopping at Tarbet to climb Cruach Tairbeirt. Beyond this is Loch Lomond, and the mountains towering above Crianlarich, Tyndrum and Bridge of Orchy are spectacular. Beautiful pit stops at the likes of Tulloch and Roybridge offer chances to explore stunning landscapes like the Creag Meagaidh National Nature Reserve. It's then on to Spean Bridge before the route, under the shadow of Ben Nevis, terminates at Fort William.

The Best Of The Rest...

In Scotland there are dozens of amazing railway journeys. Here are some of the others:

A trip through castle country

The Far North Line

Even its name sounds like an adventure into the wilderness. Enjoy the view as you pull out of Inverness, across the Black Isle and the natural harbour of the Dornoch Firth. Then you enter castle country – the line goes right past the doorsteps of Foulis, Skibo and Carbisdale Castles. Glenmorangie Distillery and the Black Isle Brewery make excellent pit stops, before reaching the Moray coast where there are many picturesque villages and towns to explore. At Latheronwheel, the lines cuts inland for its final destination – the most northern station in the UK, Thurso.

Glasgow To Stranraer

Scotland's railways allow you to reach some of the country's best-loved destinations with ease. And, as you sit in comfort on board a train, the journey itself is just as enjoyable as the destination. The Glasgow to Stranraer trip takes in diverse scenery and landscapes. It departs from Scotland's largest city, Glasgow, and takes passengers through the historic and industrial confines of Paisley. Then, it's out into the Renfrewshire countryside before traversing the glorious Ayrshire coast. Just outside Ayr, the Robert Burns Birthplace Museum in Alloway is within easy reach. Into Galloway and the remains of Glenluce Abbey are stunning, as is Castle Kennedy, before reaching Loch Ryan and Stranraer, the ideal place to explore the rugged Rhinns of Galloway.

Edinburgh To Aberdeen

There are few railway journeys in the world like the one from Edinburgh to Aberdeen, as this route takes in two world-famous engineering feats: the Forth and Tay bridges. Both were constructed in the late 1800s and the Tay is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The line snakes along the Fife coast, passing through Aberlour, before heading inland through Leuchars to meet the Tay. The line crosses the Tay and passes through Dundee, hugging the Angus and Aberdeenshire coasts before its terminus at Aberdeen. Throughout the journey, bus links are available to St Andrews, Culross, Hopetoun House and the castles of Dunnottar and Glamis. This is the line to marvel at superb engineering achievements, pretty coastal villages and stunning historic castles.

The Borders Railway: Edinburgh To The Scottish Borders

The Borders Railway links Edinburgh with the Scottish Borders and is regarded as "the longest new domestic railway" to be built in over 100 years. The journey tracks the old Waverley Line and now goes as far as Tweedbank, near Melrose, having reopened in 2015. Stops include Newtongrange, Gorebridge, Stow and Galashiels – look out for the amazing sunsets on the Gorebridge to Stow stretch. From Stow the train pushes on to Galashiels, before arriving in Tweedbank, a jumping off point to explore the market town of Melrose, or head to Abbotsford House, home of Sir Walter Scott.

Above left: The border town of Melrose

Above: The Tay Rail Bridge

ONWARD, VOYAGER

to Orkney and Shetland

Discovering the Northern Isles has never been easier with NorthLink Ferries.

The comfortable and reliable service offers sailings to Orkney's port of Stromness from Caithness, just off the North Coast 500 route. This 90 minute journey on MV Hamnavoe is the only sailing to Orkney which passes the iconic sea stack, the Old Man of Hoy.

Alternatively travel from Aberdeen to Shetland's port of Lerwick. This convenient service calls regularly into Orkney's capital of Kirkwall.

northlinkferries.co.uk

Operated by serco

NorthLink FERRIES

Fantastic Ferries

Travelling by sea to Scotland's islands, you can take your car and your dog, see seabirds up close – and enjoy a superb cooked breakfast on board!

by LAURA COVENTRY

SITTING on the top deck with a hot drink in hand, watching gannets diving into the water around you – travelling by ferry in Scotland is an experience! And, whenever you are going, once you board one, you will discover that the journey is just as important as your destination.

Whether you are after history and heritage, nature and wildlife, food and drink or a combination of all three, Scotland's islands have all this and more. So, once you have decided to make the trip, the next thing on your to-do list should be to choose which islands to visit.

The Jura ferry

Going West?

If you are travelling to any island on the west coast, then the chances are it will be a Caledonian MacBrayne ferry that will take you there. As well as transporting visitors and tourists to more than 50 destinations, CalMac also provides "an everyday lifeline service to west coast communities".

It's the UK's largest ferry operator and has 29 routes in total. One of its most popular routes is the Ardrossan to Brodick sailing, which takes passengers on a 55-minute journey from the mainland across the Firth of Clyde to isle of Arran.

The *MV Caledonian Isles* travels the route five times a day. She was launched in 1993 and named by HRH The Princess Royal. You board at Ardrossan's ferry terminal on Harbour Road. A shorter trip to Arran, from Claonaig to Lochranza, takes just 30 minutes.

The ferry journey to Skye is visually dramatic whether you are sailing into Armadale in the south, or Uig in the north. It features in the Top 10 ferry journeys on TripAdvisor.

The CalMac website says, "The perfect retreat for photographers and adventurers alike, Skye's whimsical Fairy Glen, rugged Trotternish peninsula and picturesque fishing villages are enough to impress any traveller.

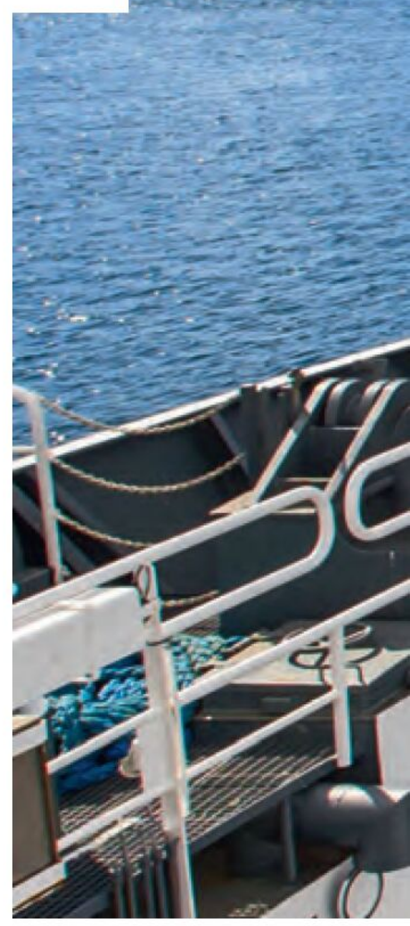
"Add to that a world class reputation for locally sourced produce and a Michelin Star awarded restaurant and you have the perfect recipe for an unforgettable weekend away."

You needn't wait until you disembark to enjoy the finest local produce. Another reason travellers opt to board a CalMac ferry is the cooked breakfasts! The Mariners Café is a must-visit.

There are plenty of other things to do on board. There is an outdoor seating area where you can admire the sights from the water; there's also a recliner lounge, observation lounge, TV lounge, shop, coffee cabin, bar and pet lounge. »

The glorious landscape of Skye

Passing The Old Man of Hoy, Orkney



Heading North?

It's said that visiting the northern isles, like Orkney or Shetland, is like stepping into a different country – only you don't need a passport. All you need is a sense of adventure and a ferry ticket!

If you are up north to follow the North Coast 500 route, then take advantage of its proximity to the Orkney Islands. Did you know that there is more archaeology per square mile on the Orkney isles than anywhere else in the UK?

To get there, simply board a NorthLink Ferry at Caithness – the Caithness to Orkney Isles route is one of the operator's most popular.

The sailing itself only takes around 90 minutes and runs several times a day. Look out for the famous Old Man of Hoy. This landmark is a 137-metre (449ft) sea stack on Hoy, one of the Orkney Islands.

It got its name as the stormy seas carved an arch, which looked like two legs, so the locals named him the Old Man. Years later, a storm battered the sea stack causing one of the "legs" to break off, so now it stands as a pillar.

The tourist attraction is one of the tallest sea stacks in the British Isles and possibly the most famous. No other ferry sails past this, besides the NorthLink one.

The other popular ferry crossing off the north coast is Aberdeen to the Orkney Islands, then on to Shetland. This 346km (215-mile) trip, the longest internal ferry crossing in the UK, costs just £20 as a foot passenger.

"I can't think of any other mode of transport where you can travel more than 200 miles for just £20," smiles Magnus Dixon of NorthLink Ferries.

The Aberdeen to Shetland sailing is an experience, as it sets off from the port in the evening. You can enjoy a meal or entertainment, even watch a film in the on-board cinema, before bedding down for the night in your cabin. Some 14 hours after embarking, next morning, you arrive in Shetland. This crossing has always been well-used by tourists, and locals use it to commute to the mainland, but it's even more popular since the *Shetland* television series.

Besides transporting tourists back and forth to some of Scotland's most historic and scenic isles, the ferry »

"Travel more than 200 miles for just £20"

A Northlink ferry at Lerwick

Approaching the jetty at Lerwick

Top Tips Before Travel

◆ If travelling by train, make sure your mainland connections work out and always check the timetables on the ScotRail (**www.scotrail.co.uk**) or National Rail (**www.nationalrail.co.uk**) websites before making a booking.

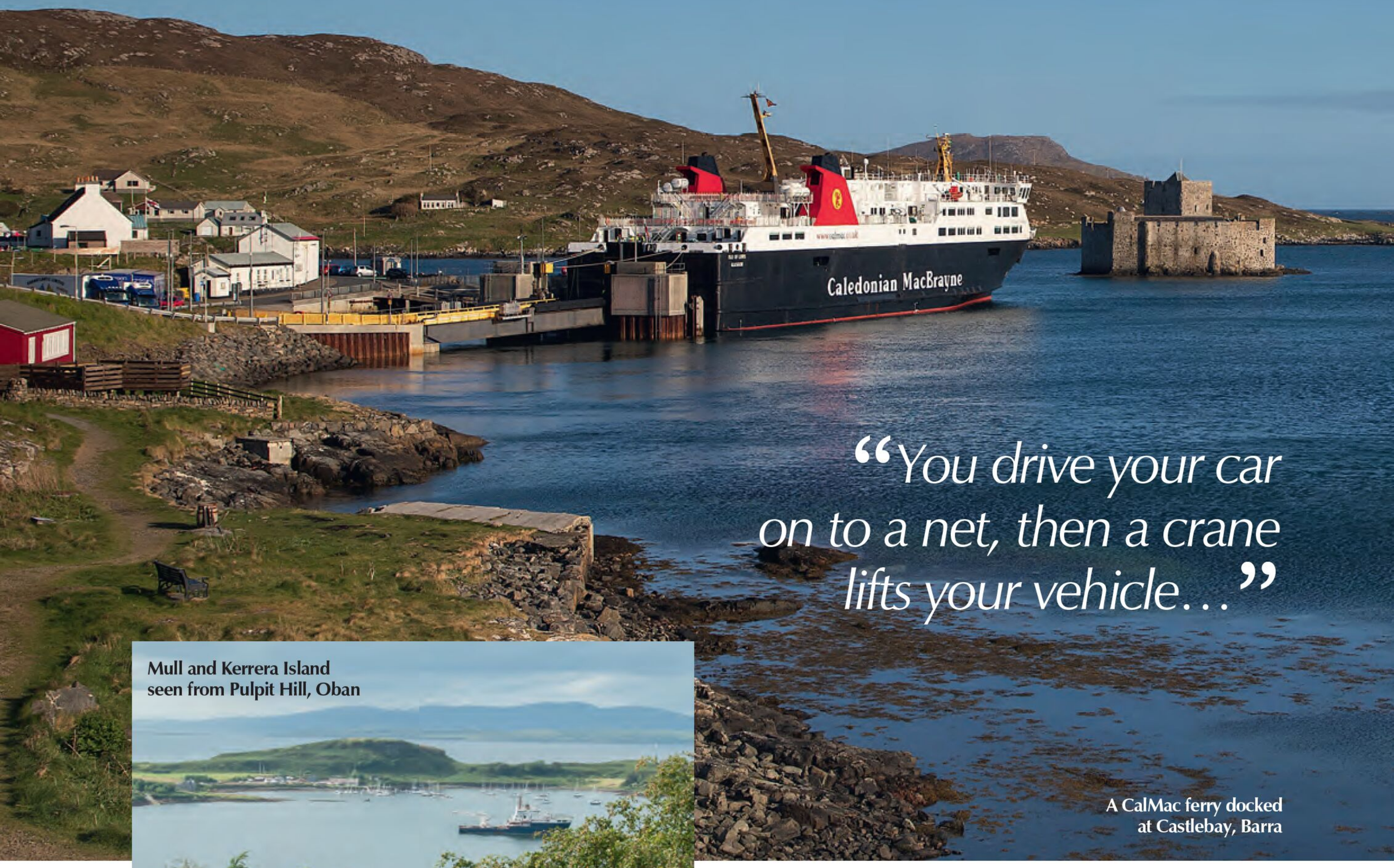
◆ Arrive in plenty of time, as there can be long queues just before boarding a ferry.

◆ Book in advance if you can – online is advisable, and it will save time on the day of travel.

◆ When driving on to the ferry, turn on your headlights and drive slowly, allowing plenty of room to brake.

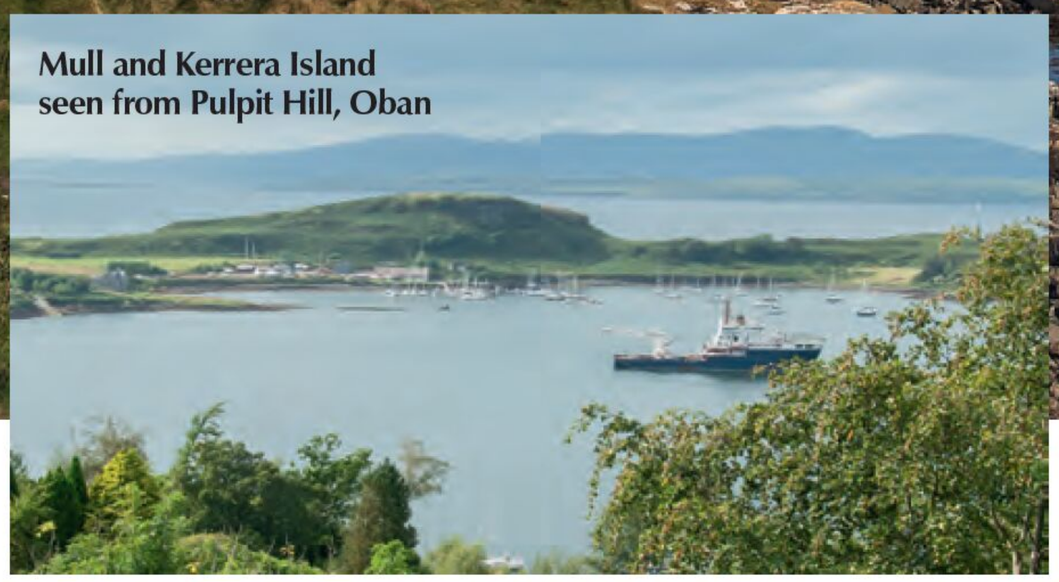
◆ Follow the instructions of staff carefully – don't use your mobile phone, turn off your radio and open your window to make sure you can hear what they say.

The *Hamnavoe* arrives at Stromness



"You drive your car on to a net, then a crane lifts your vehicle…"

A CalMac ferry docked at Castlebay, Barra



Mull and Kerrera Island seen from Pulpit Hill, Oban

services are also important to islanders. Locals rely on the daily ferry services for business and pleasure alike.

This is why Scotland's intricate network of ferries is regarded as a "lifeline service", says Magnus Dixon.

Orkney Ferries operate between Orkney's mainland and 13 of its islands. Since 1987, Orkney Islands Council has been responsible for the inter-islands ferry services.

There are now 10 vessels in the fleet serving 13 island destinations, carrying over 82,000 vehicles and undertaking around 320,000 passenger journeys annually.

Most are classed as roll-on, roll-off (RORO) which means you can take your car. However at North Ronaldsay, the crossing is not a RORO, but a lift-on, lift-off (LOLO) service. To board, you drive your car onto a net; then a crane lifts your vehicle onto the deck of the ferry! There it sits alongside other cargo and containers being delivered to the islanders.

You can also, of course, travel as foot passengers to the islands.

How To Book

To book your ferry, visit **www.northlinkferries.co.uk** or **www.calmac.co.uk** Vehicle reservations are recommended on the most popular routes. You can book travel online, and when you do, you'll receive an eTicket direct to your email inbox, ready to board.

Ferry Facts And Figures

- £3.40 for an adult return is the cheapest ferry crossing on a CalMac ferry. This will take you from Gallanach near Oban to the isle of Kerrera and back.
- Each passenger is allowed 40kg of luggage, free of charge, on a CalMac ferry.
- A fleet of 33 CalMac vessels complete approximately 136,000 sailings a year.
- One of the shortest ferry crossings for a CalMac ferry is just five minutes.
- Dogs travel free of charge on CalMac ferries, but they still need a ticket – either for inside the pet-friendly lounge or "in-vehicle".
- As well as kennel facilities, the Northlink service to Shetland has a number of dog-friendly cabins – however these are snapped up fast so book early.
- The only public ferry route to pass the Old Man of Hoy is NorthLink's Caithness to Orkney Isles service.
- Orkney Ferries operates 74 different point-to-point connections across its network, and there are more than 20,000 sailings each year.

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Borders Historic Route

Visitors can expect adventure, culture and history alongside magnificent scenery in the Scottish Borders

Scotts View

THE Borders are their own slice of Scottish paradise with plenty of fascinating history sitting alongside beautiful scenery and captivating culture.

Starting from Edinburgh, travel south to take in sights such as Melrose Abbey and Floors Castle. Enjoy rolling countryside and views that inspired the works of Sir Walter Scott and John Buchan.

For adventure seekers there are plenty of opportunities for adrenaline-filled escapades including cycling, surfing and climbing or for a slower pace of adventure enjoy a round of golf or a scenic walk among pretty woodland areas.

Towns such as Jedburgh and Hawick make for perfect stops along your journey with quaint shops and charming cafés. Drive via St Boswells for an excellent bookshop or stop off at Melrose for a look around the magnificent Abbotsford House.

FOR MORE INFO VISIT
roadtrips.visitscotland.com turn the page for route highlights.

Route Highlight

Dalkieth Country Park

With Go Ape, myriad walks, a children's playground and lovely choice of cafes, this attraction really does have something for everyone. Set in gorgeous grounds, you may need a full day for a visit. **dalkeithcountrypark.co.uk**

BORDERS HISTORIC ROUTE

Edinburgh To Lauder

THERE is so much to see in the capital that it's important to set aside at least a couple of days here before setting off.

Iconic Edinburgh Castle, set atop the extinct volcanic plug of Castle Rock, is the centrepiece of the stunning Edinburgh skyline. A walk to Arthur's Seat is also a must and there are so many other attractions from museums, to galleries, top restaurants, and world-class entertainment.

Once you've had your fill of city life and stocked up on essentials, the route heads south and onto the A68 past Dalkeith, as the scenery opens onto colourful farmland and low hills.

Passing through small villages of pretty farmhouses and ancient dykes looking over patchwork fields, there are plenty opportunities to stop at a café, turn off and visit a local attraction or pull over to enjoy the calming views.

The road climbs after you enter the Scottish Borders until you're looking over beautiful countryside below.

Suddenly immersed in a huge windfarm, this only adds to the increasing drama of the vista.

Descending again, there's a lovely parking spot to stop for a cuppa and admire the view, which was hazy on our trip but would be stunning on a clearer day.

Entering Lauderdale, sheep and newborn lambs enjoy the lush green fields as we turn off for a bite to eat at Carfraemill and then to our pitch for the night.

Leftt: Arthur's Seat

Above: Rosslyn Chapel

Above Right: Lauder countryside

Other Things To See And Do:

- Rosslyn Chapel
- Stewart Brewing
- National Mining Museum

Abbotsford House

BORDERS HISTORIC ROUTE

Lauder To Hawick

THE pretty market town of Lauder offers a trail exploring the local history and has many places to stop for a coffee or for lunch. Nearby Thirlstane Castle is an impressive turreted and towered Baronial mansion with grounds and interior worth exploring.

Back on the A68, you are immersed once more in patchwork scenery with splashes of colour among varying shades of peaceful green.

The road winds alongside the River Leader – rivers are a near constant accompanying feature on this route – and the scenery is reminiscent of verdant parts of Perthshire.

As you drive high up into a forested area, the road cuts through land carpeted with wild garlic and towering tress before slowly descending into Earlston – historic home of Thomas the Rhymer.

Adding interest to this stretch are monuments atop the higher hills, such as the Waterloo monument to the southeast and Monteath Mausoleum to the west.

Carrying on towards Jedburgh, the route passes through the daffodil lined verges of St Boswells and into bright yellow fields on undulating roads.

The rolling hills and visible as the tree-lined route descends again before a right turn towards Hawick and onto a smaller country road leading to the A7.

Hawick, famous for fine quality knitwear, is the largest of the Border towns and is part of the Textile Trail with lots of shops, cafés, pubs and good restaurants.

Thirlstane Castle

Route Highlight

Born In Scotland

There is so much packed into this venue, it's like Scotland in miniature. Offerings include haggis nachos and Irn Bru sausages in the café, whisky soaps and craft gins in the shop, grass sledging and the biggest walkable map of Scotland as well as Ospreys and a distillery and brewery. **borninthebborders.com**

Other Things To See And Do:

- Abbotsford House
- Scott's View
- Thirlstane Castle

Hawick

BORDERS HISTORIC ROUTE

Hawick To Scotsdike

SETTING off from our campsite on the banks of the River Teviot, the route passes through Hawick on the A7 through beautiful countryside, with the river for company again before climbing to higher ground.

Surrounded by hills and farms, adventurous sheep and newborn lambs traverse the rough land clambering among the boulders and leaping along the river.

You are suddenly plunged into an open, remote-feeling landscape along a tree-lined road, following a pretty stream and then out over high rolling hills. There are many stopping places to enjoy the scenery.

The road then descends into Dumfries & Galloway, cutting through hills and winding downwards through gorgeous scenes, over Ewes Water and into Langholm, known colloquially as the Muckle Toon and apparently the Chilli Capital of Scotland.

Langholm has cafes, a bakery and a lovely park on the River Esk – the perfect location for a relaxing stop.

Leaving the town, the route enters the kind of countryside we come to the Borders to see, and it does not disappoint. Rolling hills and stunning vistas require several stops to take in and appreciate them.

The road accompanies the wide River Esk, over 17th-century Skipper's Bridge and finally we cross the border and reach Scots Dyke.

Scots Dyke – or Dike – is an earthwork constructed in 1552 around 5.5km (three-and-ahalf miles) long to mark the border between Scotland and England.

The dyke was created to divide the Debatable Lands between the kingdoms and bring peace to a lawless region reigned over by the Borders Reivers notorious for rustling livestock, pillaging, kidnapping and extorting protection money.

A view from Thomas Telford Bridge, Langholm

Route Highlight

Gilnockie Tower

This 16th-century tower house has been renovated and turned into a fabulous visitor attraction telling the story of Clan Armstrong and the Border Reivers. There's also a lovely walk by the river – a great spot for an informative and relaxing stop. **gilnockietower.co.uk**

Above: Langholm

Left: Borders Textile Museum

Other Things To See And Do:

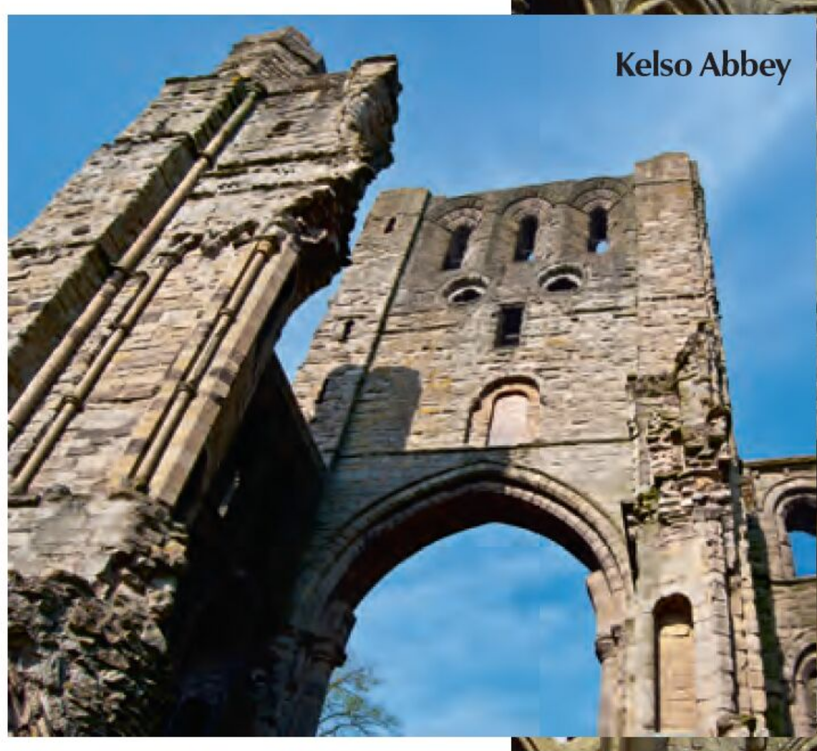
- Borders Textile Towerhouse
- The Borders Distillery
- Ale Water Valley

BORDERS HISTORIC ROUTE

Great Borders Abbeys

Experience the spiritual atmosphere of four magnificent monasteries along this top route

Jedburgh Abbey


Kelso Abbey

THE four Great Borders Abbeys of Melrose, Kelso, Jedburgh and Dryburgh are a testament to the Christian monks who journeyed from Europe.

It is possible to visit the four abbeys in a whirlwind day trip, but in order to explore all that is on offer in the Borders towns where they're found, a few days is advised.

The abbeys are looked after by Historic Environment Scotland, where Adrian Cox is the senior cultural resources advisor.

"The abbeys are individually hugely important, and as a group their significance is increased," Adrian says. "Each abbey contributes greatly to an understanding of monastic life."

You can wander around the grounds of the abbeys, with Melrose the best preserved of the four. It was founded in 1136 by Cistercian monks at the request of David I of Scotland. The heart of Robert the Bruce is believed to be buried in the chapter house – his ghost is even said to linger here – and the Commendator's House Museum holds a rich collection of medieval objects.

"Melrose Abbey not only displays magnificent architecture," Adrian says, "but is also the place where the Chronicle of Melrose was composed, providing important historical evidence."

Kelso Abbey also boasts exceptional architecture – one of Scotland's wealthiest religious houses, it suffered the wrath of Henry VIII in the 1540s, leaving it in ruin.

Jedburgh Abbey combines an unusual mix of Gothic and Romanesque architecture, built over 70 years.

Visit the nave where Alexander III was married in 1285 – according to legend, a ghost appeared at the

Melrose Abbey

ceremony, foretelling the king's death. Alexander died less than a year later in a fall from his horse.

You can climb to the walkways of Jedburgh's chapter house to get a bird's-eye view of the dormitories, too.

The last on your tour of the Borders' Great Abbeys is Dryburgh. Despite three fires and four attacks over the centuries, it is remarkably intact.

In the chapter house, there is even original paintwork dating back to the abbey's construction in 1150.

"Look out for the important graves at Dryburgh," Adrian says, "including that of Sir Walter Scott."

Whether you catch a glimpse of the benevolent spirits that still linger in the abbeys or not, a visit to the majestic Borders Abbeys is a spiritual and humbling experience.

Dryburgh Abbey

Borders Abbeys Way

Distance:
107km (66 miles)

Start/finish:
Melrose, Scottish Borders

Getting there:
Melrose is close to the Borders Railway terminus at Tweedbank.

- This five-day walk charts a route through the ruined abbeys of Melrose, Dryburgh, Kelso and Jedburgh.
- It also passes Abbotsford House, the home of Scottish novelist and poet Sir Walter Scott.
- The scenery includes long sections alongside the rivers Tweed and Teviot.
- You can even get an official certificate for completing the whole Borders Abbey Way in one continuous journey over five – or fewer – subsequent days.

scotborders.gov.uk/borders abbeys way/

BORDERS HISTORIC ROUTE

The Border Reivers

The land where Scotland meets England was a lawless place where theft, blackmail and arson was rife – until King James V took action

FROM the 14th century to the late 17th century the border between England and Scotland was a lawless place. Cattle rustling, feuding, murder, arson and pillaging were common occurrences, all of which were conducted by a group of border dwelling families known as the Border Reivers.

If your surname is Armstrong, Maxwell, Johnston, Graham, Bell, Scott, Nixon, Kerr, Crozier or Robson it is more than likely that you are descended from one of these Border Reivers families. These families occupied the wasteland of the Borders which had been decimated time and time again by the frequent Anglo-Scots wars.

Reiving was an accepted way of life in the Borders with Reivers just as likely to raid and rob fellow Scots as they were to cross the border.

One of the most famous of these men was Johnnie Armstrong of Gilnockie who has fair claim to being the Borders' answer to Robin Hood. Depending on who you believe, Armstrong was either a genuine Robin Hood type who was generous to the poor, or the nastiest Scottish outlaw of them all, a thief who made Rob Roy MacGregor look like a choirboy.

Johnnie Armstrong

From his family base at Gilnockie Tower, just more than a mile north of Canonbie in modern-day Dumfries and Galloway, Johnnie set up a lucrative business that would now be called a protection racket. Landowners and farmers were forced to pay "blackmeale" (blackmail) or else Armstrong and his crew would raid their lands and remove their cattle.

Johnnie carried out his crimes largely unchecked for years and it wasn't until 1530 that King James V decided to put a stop to his Borders rule of terror. He headed south from Edinburgh with a massive army and sent a letter to Armstrong to meet him at Caerlanrig Chapel.

The bold Johnnie turned up dressed to the nines with perhaps 30 or 40 of his men also attired in their best. James apparently took umbrage at their show of finery and condemned them all to death on the spot. On July 5, 1530, Armstrong and his men were hanged from the trees around the chapel. Their mass grave was only found 30 years ago.

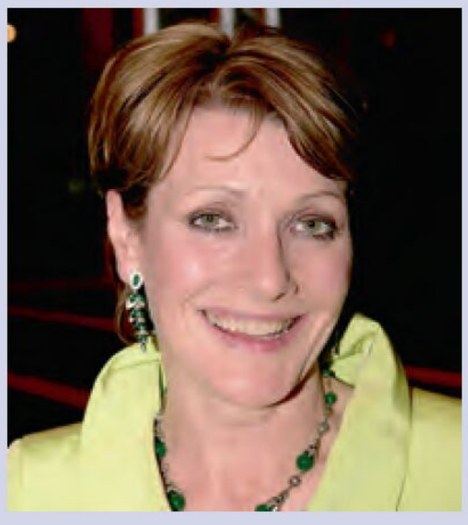
Above: Glinlockie Tower from the sky

Left: The tower in Dumfriesshire

“Farmers were forced to pay blackmail or else Armstrong and his crew would raid their lands”

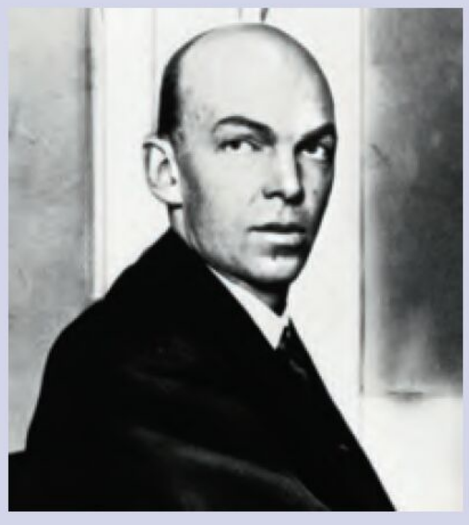
Famous Armstrongs

Neil Armstrong
American astronaut He was the first person to walk on the moon.



Fiona Armstrong
Scottish journalist and author, also Lord Lieutenant of Dumfries.

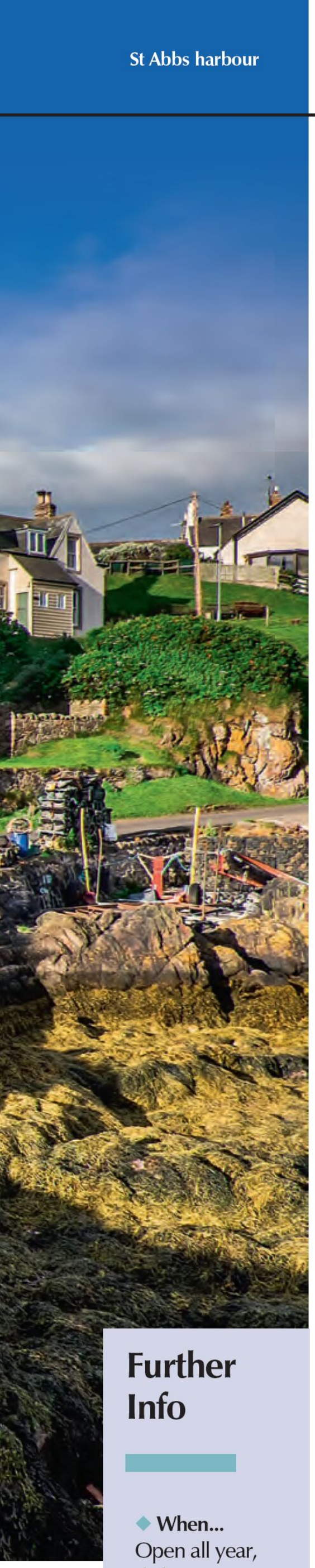
Louis Armstrong
American trumpeter and vocalist, one of the most influential figures in jazz.



Edwin Howard Armstrong
American electrical engineer, the inventor of FM radio.

Memorial sculpture

Puffins on the cliffs



St Abbs harbour

Head For The Heights

While you're in the Borders, the village of St Abbs offers all you need for a day of scenic walks, bird watching and fresh seafood

IF you're looking for dramatic coastal vistas with some exceptional seafood thrown in, then look no further than the picturesque fishing village of St Abbs on the Berwickshire coast.

Surrounded by jagged cliffs and crystal clear sea, the village is popular with birdwatchers, scramblers and scuba divers. To the north of the village lies the St Abbs Head Nature Reserve, looked after by the National Trust for Scotland, which has established sign-marked trails to take in the best of the coastline.

"It gives you the feeling of being somewhere really wild and remote, yet it's just off the A1," says head ranger, Ciaran Hatsell. "You can easily spend hours in the summer months watching and listening to the thousands of seabirds who nest in the high cliffs."

Indeed, the reserve is home to more than 50,000 sea birds, and its location just off the main road makes it one of the UK's most accessible seabird colonies.

As you wander the cliff-top trails, you can spot guillemots, kittiwakes and razorbills.

"The cliffs provide spectacular vantage points from which to watch these seabirds," Ciaran says. "Look out for northern gannets too – in 2017 they bred at St Abb's Head for the first time in living memory."

One of the finest viewpoints in the reserve is overlooking the St Abbs Head Lighthouse, which was built by famous engineers David and Thomas Stevenson in 1862. And if you want to linger longer you can – the lighthouse keeper's cottage has been turned into a stunning self-catering holiday lodge.

If you don't have a head for heights, the reserve also has inland trails which lead to the peaceful Mire Loch, which is equally impressive for its resident wildlife.

"The surrounding woodland resonates with birdsong in the summer months and is a refuge for migrating birds in the spring and autumn."

After you've worked up an appetite on the reserve's many trails, take a short trek down to the St Abbs itself – and don't be surprised if the harbour looks familiar.

> *"The last place you'd expect to be big in Hollywood"*

The picturesque little seaside village is the last place you'd expect to be big in Hollywood, but its screen credits are pretty impressive.

Most notably, St Abbs starred as Thor's home on Earth, "New Asgard", in the 2019 film *Avengers: Endgame*. The locals are proud of their connection with the god of thunder and had added a signpost declaring the village officially "twinned with New Asgard".

Don't miss a wander along the coast where you can see memorials by Jill Watson to the local fishermen lost in the Eyemouth Disaster of 1881, when a severe storm took the lives of 189 fishermen from the area.

Keen surfers can find a perfect sandy beach just south of the village at Coldingham Bay.

You can pick up recommendations on local eateries, of which there are several, in the St Abbs Visitor Centre and learn about the tale of the 7th-century Northumbrian princess Æbbe, who the village is named after, that struggled ashore here on being shipwrecked and went on to found a nunnery.

A day wandering its serene harbour and cliffs will show you why St Abbs is so beloved by locals and location scouts alike.

St Abbs coastline

Further Info

When...
Open all year, daily

Where...
St Abb's Head
St Abbs
Berwickshire
TD14 5QF

Contact
01890 771443
st.abbs@nts.org.uk

South West Coastal 300 Route

Explore the beauty of Dumfries & Galloway and Ayrshire with the SWC300

by CAMERON McNEISH

The South West Coastal 300 explores stunning coastline

HISTORY, romance, seascapes, wildlife and great coastal walks are all intertwined in a region of Scotland that many strangely disregard or are simply unaware of.

That, however, is changing. A marketing initiative motivated by the success of the North Coast 500 route was set up to encourage more visitors. And those who travel along the South West Coastal 300 will be very pleasantly surprised by what they find.

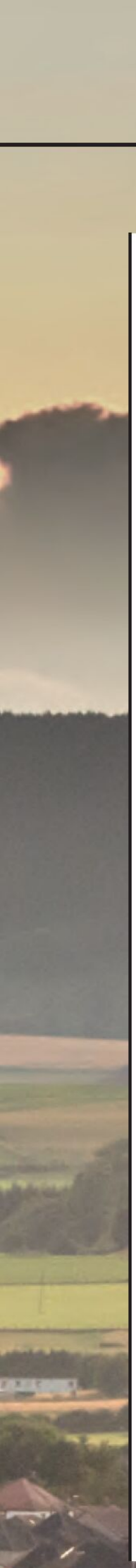
Castles, ruined abbeys, pretty villages and more ancient artefacts that you can shake a stick at are linked by a road system that is both relatively quiet and scenic. I've never seen such magnificently luxurious hedgerows anywhere else in Scotland.

Compared with the convoys of coaches, motorhomes and motorbikes that can be seen in other parts of Scotland, a journey through the south west makes you appreciate the benefits of the "slow roads" approach.

The SWC300 is a circular 300-mile (482km) route that winds south to Dumfries, skirting the coast round to South Ayrshire and South Lanarkshire, through the magnificent Mennock Pass and the highest villages in the country, Wanlockhead and Leadhills.

FOR MORE INFO VISIT
visitsouthwestscotland.com/swc300
and turn the page for more.

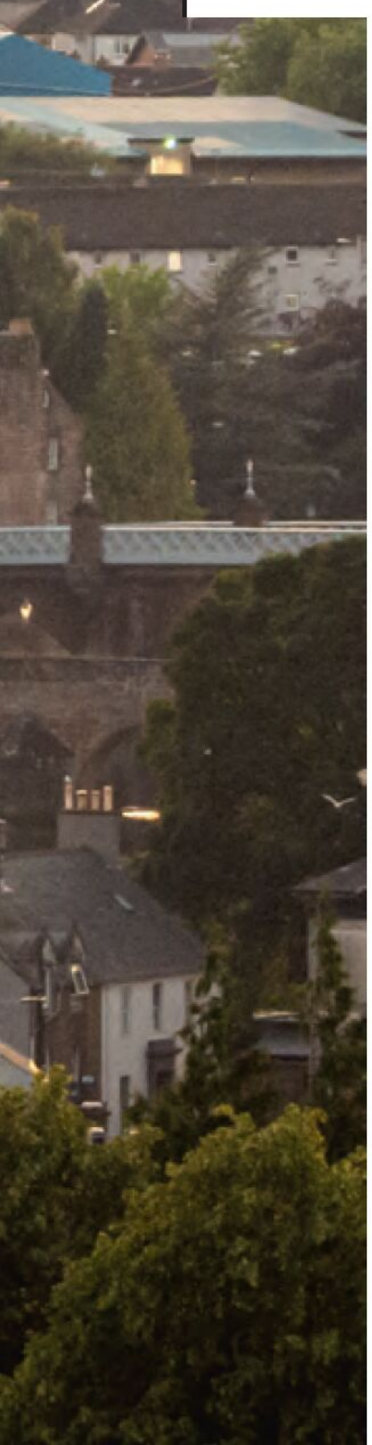
Dumfries



Route Highlight

Caerlaverock Castle

This is Britain's only triangular castle, dating back to the 13th century, and it played a significant role in the Wars of Independence. It is now a ruin, but intricate carving is still visible on the stonework, giving an idea of how impressive Caerlaverock must have looked in its day.
historic environment.scot



SOUTH WEST COASTAL 300 ROUTE

Dumfries To Wigtown

THERE are many starting points for the South West Coastal 300, but Dumfries is a great one as it's so accessible from the M6 and A74.

Spend time exploring the bustling town then start your journey by driving south, which offers the best scenery as urban developments recede, endless fields spring up and all at once the Solway Coast opens up in front of you offering terrific views of the sea and across to the Lake District.

At Colvend, a detour to Rockcliffe is a must. Sit on a bench enjoying the rocks-and-sand bay before taking a short coastal trail, Jubilee Walk, toward Kippford.

The route takes the coast road west, via Dalbeattie to Borgue, near Kirkcudbright. The winding A711 runs close to the shore of the Solway Firth, the watery border between Scotland and England, and you'll find your eyes wandering occasionally towards the sea. The view is spectacular across the sands of Auchencairn Bay.

Kirkcudbright has been renowned as an artists' town since the 1830s, when E.A. Hornel and Charles Oppenheimer relocated here to paint. Artists' studies and galleries thrive in the town today.

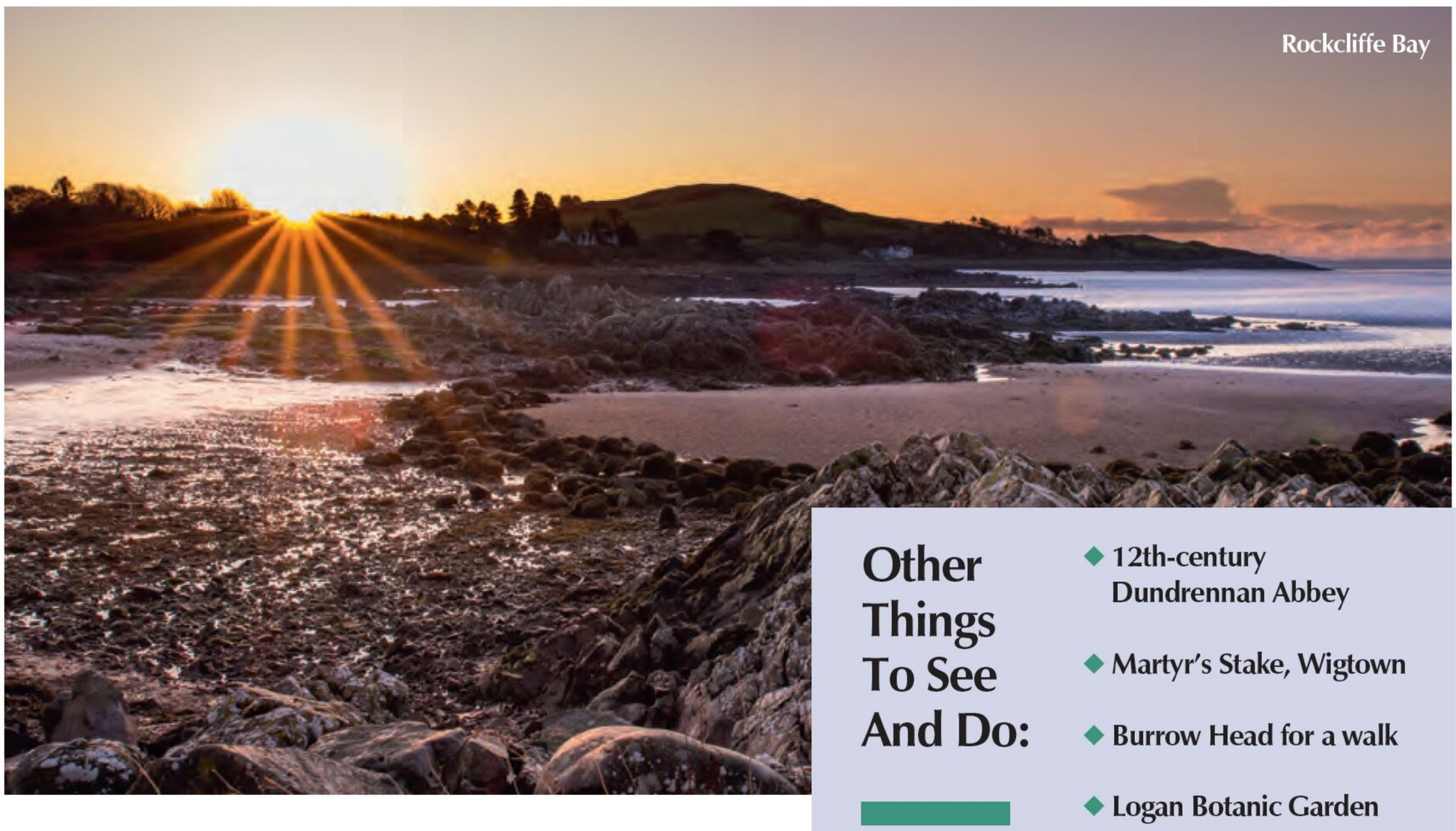
From the town take the A755 south, then the narrow B272 to Borgue, Old Norse for "stronghold" , heading west to pick up the A75 towards the low-lying Machars Peninsula.

Here the attractions are well-signposted, such as one pointing to Laggan Outdoor activity centre at Gatehouse of Fleet and another to Creetown Gem Rock Museum.

The landscape grows more rural and luscious green fields, like plumped up duvets, roll and billow towards a shoreline of pebble beaches and a beautiful turquoise sea.

Scotland's National Book Town, Wigtown, makes the perfect overnight stop.

Browse the independent bookshops and picturesque Wigtown Bay.



Rockcliffe Bay

Other Things To See And Do:

- 12th-century Dundrennan Abbey
- Martyr's Stake, Wigtown
- Burrow Head for a walk
- Logan Botanic Garden

“Settlements, beautiful beaches and golf courses aplenty lie waiting to be explored”

Turnberry Lighthouse and golf course

Route Highlight

Castle of St John

Medieval town house dating back to 1510. It has been used as a home, a court, military garrison, prison and a ARP base in the Second World War. The tower house is now a museum with exhibitions.
dgculture.co.uk

SOUTH WEST COASTAL 300 ROUTE

Wigtown To Turnberry

DISTANCE: 100km [62miles]

THE SWC300's whistlestop tour takes you south through a landscape of lowland farmland and shoreline to the Isle of Whithorn, no longer an island after a causeway was built in the 18th century.

Nearby is the village of Whithorn, where the early missionary St Ninian built a priory that is now acclaimed as the birthplace of Christianity in Scotland.

Rounding on to another peninsula, the Rhins of Galloway, you will find yourself stopping frequently to gaze at headland vistas of sandy bays and sea.

Eventually, the route joins a single-track Tarmac road going south to the Mull of Galloway, the most southerly point in Scotland. A lighthouse, completed in 1830, sits proudly atop a 79-metre (260ft) high cliff.

Return along the Rhins and on to Portpatrick, a popular seaside town, where it's lovely to sit for a while and watch the sun begin to set over the harbour and bay edged by pastel-coloured houses.

Continuing in a clockwise direction, the SWC300 leaves Portpatrick to travel the west coast into South Ayrshire.

It would be easy to rush north along the A77, imagining that the only attraction is the view of the omnipresent island Aisla Craig.

It is a mesmerising sight in the Firth of Clyde but there is so much more to this area.

Settlements, beautiful beaches, and golf courses aplenty lie waiting to be explored, including Ballantrae, Girvan, Maidens and Dunure.

Lighthouse at Portpatrick

Other Things To See And Do:

- Castle Kennedy Gardens
- Viking Carved Stones, Kirkcolm
- Turnberry Lighthouse

Alloway

SOUTH WEST COASTAL 300 ROUTE

Turnberry To Sanquhar

FOLLOW the winding coastline northwards, stopping at Croy Shore to enjoy wide, sweeping views of historic clifftop Culzean Castle, Ailsa Craig and the Isle of Arran in the distance.

The landscape becomes increasingly rugged with high hills on one side and a sandy-rocky shoreline on the other. It is worth detouring north slightly here, to stop in at the seaside town of Ayr – especially if you like horse racing as Ayr Racecourse is Scotland's only Grade 1 track and is known to host some of the best horse racing in Scotland.

Once you've filled your boots here, head back south east to visit Alloway.

The village is the famous birthplace of the poet Robert Burns and fascinating attractions like Burns Cottage and Burns Birthplace Museum tell the story of his life and works.

It is the chance to visit new and lesser-visited places that you'll relish most about the SWC300. Driving from Alloway through glorious rolling hills and moors you can discover two beautiful conservation villages, Kirkmichael and Straiton, before reaching another village, Dalmellington.

Your final stop for the day is Sanquhar, a pretty town with a ruined castle and the world's oldest post office, from 1712!

Loch Doon Castle

Route Highlight

Scottish Dark Sky Observatory, Dalmellington

If you want to really get away from it all, enter the Galloway Forest Dark Sky Park, the first in the UK to be honoured with the status. The observatory has two powerful telescopes with which to explore the universe – and beyond! **scottishdarkskyobservatory.co.uk**

Other Things To See And Do:

- Dunskey Castle
- Electric Brae
- Varyag memorial at Lendalfoot
- Hike from Straiton to a hilltop memorial
- Loch Doon Castle

Culzean Castle

Wanlockhead

SOUTH WEST COASTAL 300 ROUTE

Sanquhar To Dumfries

NOW back in Dumfries & Galloway, you'll be spoilt for choice again. One definite must-see is the Crawick Multiverse, the land art project by designer Charles Jencks, and then Wanlockhead, in the Lowther Hills.

Wanlockhead and nearby Leadhills are famed for their mining heritage, including lead and gold.

From Leadhills, the road descends a superb remote-feeling road with rounded grassy hills beneath a huge sky.

The historic spa town Moffat will prompt a wave of nostalgia when you visit the Toffee Shop and order paper bags of sherbet pips and soor plooms.

The route continues to Lockerbie, a town that is known to most people after the Pan Am flight disaster in 1988. The tragedy is remembered in a number of ways including a Garden of Remembrance and the Lockerbie Air Disaster Memorial.

From Lockerbie, the SWC300 turns west heading towards the coast again.

At Dumfries, various attractions, such as Robert Burns's House and a museum, offer a diversion and excellent lunch options.

Leave enough time to visit the picturesque village of New Abbey, just south of Dumfries. Although in ruins, the village's Sweetheart Abbey is stunning.

The 13th-century abbey was founded by Lady Dervorgilla in tribute to her husband, John Balliol.

Garden of Remembrance

Route Highlight

The Globe Inn, Dumfries

Taste traditional, local fayre with a twist from this historic pub frequented by Robert Burns. There's a small museum dedicated to the bard, too, in the room where he slept – and etched a few verses on the windows! **globeinndumfries.co.uk**

Other Things To See And Do:

- World's oldest Post Office at Sanquhar
- Gold panning at Museum of Lead Mining
- Moffat Museum
- Southerness Lighthouse

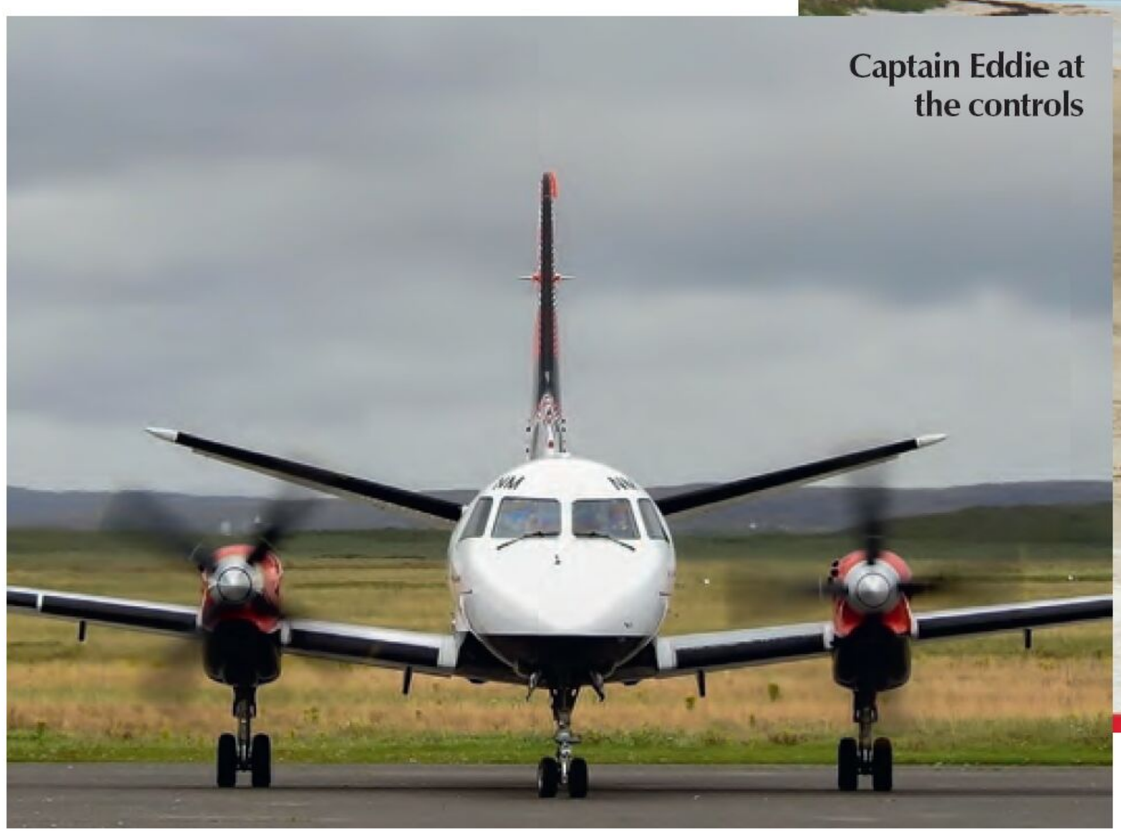
Sweetheart Abbey

‘Aye’ In The Sky!

Scotland has so many internal flight routes – from cities to the islands, it’s a great way to get around and see the sights

by LAURA COVENTRY

Preparing to take off from Barra



Captain Eddie at the controls

BESIDES amazing road routes, Scotland and its many islands can be accessed by air. Scores of aircraft fly across the Scottish skies every day, transporting locals and tourists to some of its most scenic destinations. The internal flight network is huge for a country of its size.

Former pilot Eddie Watt, who retired in January 2024, is well placed to explain why flying is the best way to see Scotland. He’s being flying locals, visitors, and tourists through the clouds for many years as a pilot with Loganair.

Eddie said, “Flying is the best way to see Scotland as you can experience so much in one journey, and everything is seen from a different perspective.

“There is something quite magnificent about being airborne when the light is just right, the angle for the photo is perfect and once captured, you literally have history in your hands.

“Observing the building of the Queensferry crossing is a great example. Watching from week to week as the infrastructure began to span the River Forth, seeing the bridge gradually reach across the Forth and in time, connected for public use – it was marvellous to see.

“Then there are the Trossachs covered in fog with just the peaks sticking up; sunrises and sunsets, often only seen by us aviators in the long grey Scottish winter; or in autumn, when all of Scotland is golden and shining like a treasure.”

According to a recent report by the UK Parliament on domestic flights in the UK, more than a third (38%) of passengers on Scottish island flights were travelling to or from Glasgow. Almost one in four (23%) were travelling to or from Aberdeen, and 15% to or from Edinburgh.

Read on to explore the generous number of airports and how to go about booking internal flights, as well as discovering the “best” and the shortest flights in the world.

A small Loganair plane at Inverness Airport

An Extensive Network

Aside from its four international air hubs at Glasgow, Edinburgh, Prestwick and Aberdeen, Scotland has a dozen small airports.

Barra, Benbecula, Campbeltown, Dundee, Inverness, Islay, Kirkwall, Stornoway, Sumburgh, Tiree and Wick airports are all owned by Highlands and Islands Airports Limited.

Oban and the Isles Airports, owned by local authorities, run regular flights from Oban to Tiree, Colonsay and Islay. These local routes are a great gateway for exploring the Inner Hebrides. And, the company says, you can “even enjoy some stunning scenery from the comfort of the airport itself”.

Hebridean Air flies to the islands several times a week. And, with average flight times of just 30 minutes, it’s one of the most time-efficient ways to go island-hopping.

The Smallest Airport

Barra Airport is the smallest airport in Scotland and is reported to be the only airport in the world with a beach for a runway! Interestingly, *The Scots Magazine*’s publishers, DC Thomson, regularly uses this airport to fly copies of newspapers to its readers on the islands.

Eddie Watt

The Best Flight Of All?

Loganair is regarded as “Scotland’s airline” and is the UK’s largest regional carrier. The company operates routes around Scotland and its islands.

Eddie Watt usually captained the Loganair Shetland flying route, which he calls “the best route in Scotland”, and is well-known in the Shetland community.

In early 2024, Captain Eddie retired, coincidentally at the same time as the fleet of aeroplanes he has been flying – Loganair’s Saab flight fleet.

Unlike the retiring planes, Eddie won’t be grounded. His plan now is to fly Bibles across the world as part of his missionary duties!

The 65-year-old said, “Each route is special but Edinburgh to Shetland has to be my favourite. Taking in the Forth bridges, the Ochill hills, the River Tay, Perth, the Grampians, Cairngorm, Lochnagar, Balmoral, then Aberdeen and north by the Buchan Coast and on to Shetland.

“I’m often on the PA address system telling the folks in the back what they can see on the left or the right for the best view.”

Shortest Flight In The World

The flight from Orkney islands Westray to Papa Westray is scheduled for 90 seconds, with the actual flight time under a minute at just 53 seconds, making it the shortest scheduled flight in the world. Loganair operates the route which is in the Guinness World Records. Interestingly, the fastest time from take-off to landing was once recorded at 47 seconds!

The actual distance flown is 2.7km (1.7 miles). If you want to experience this world-record-breaking flight, you need to fly to Kirkwall, on Orkney’s mainland, then book a flight from Kirkwall to Papa Westray (or Papay). There are less than 10 seats on the aircraft, including the pilot. And, if you are one of the lucky passengers to travel, you will receive a certificate to prove you have been on the world’s shortest flight!

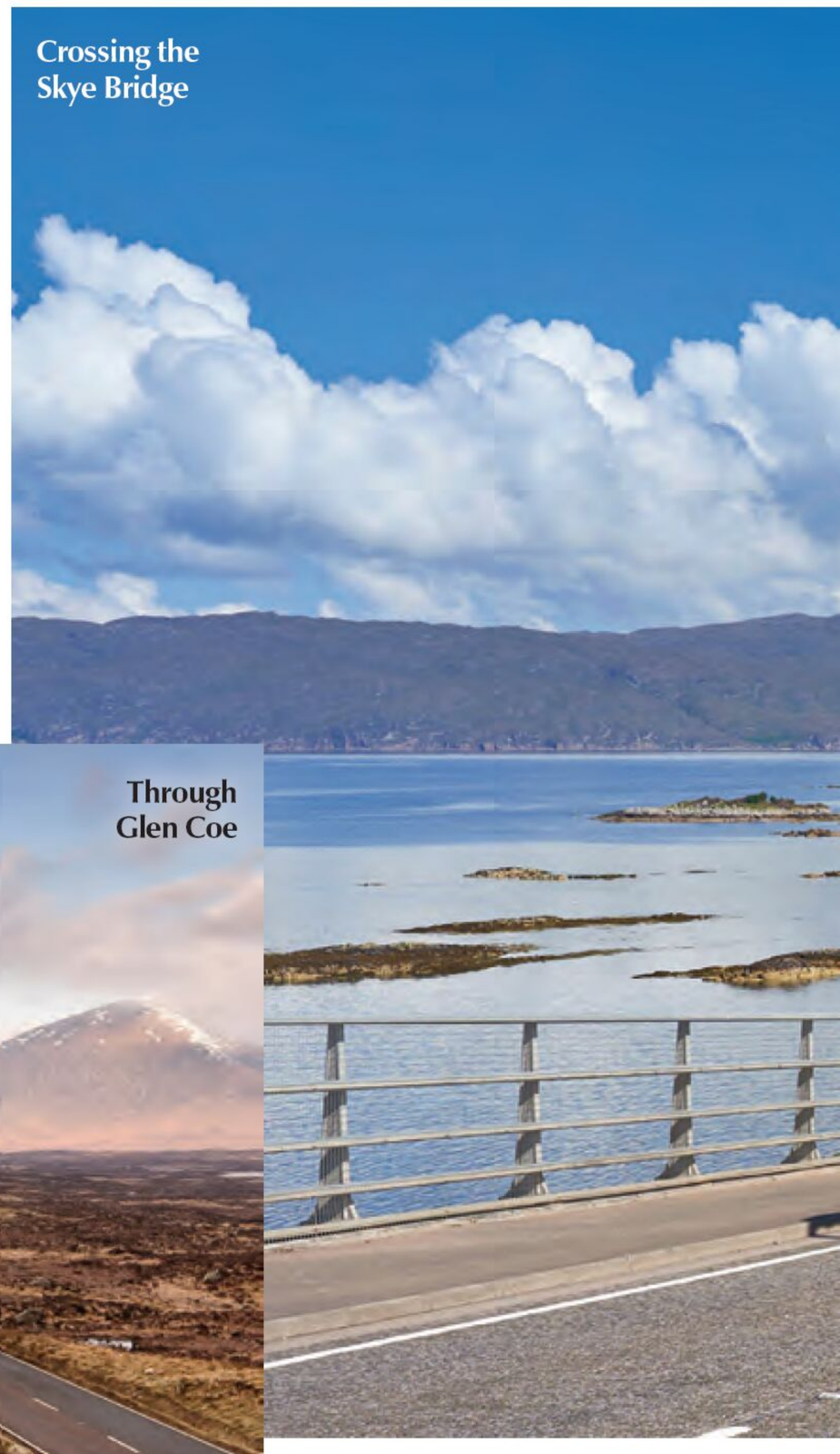
Book Internal Flights

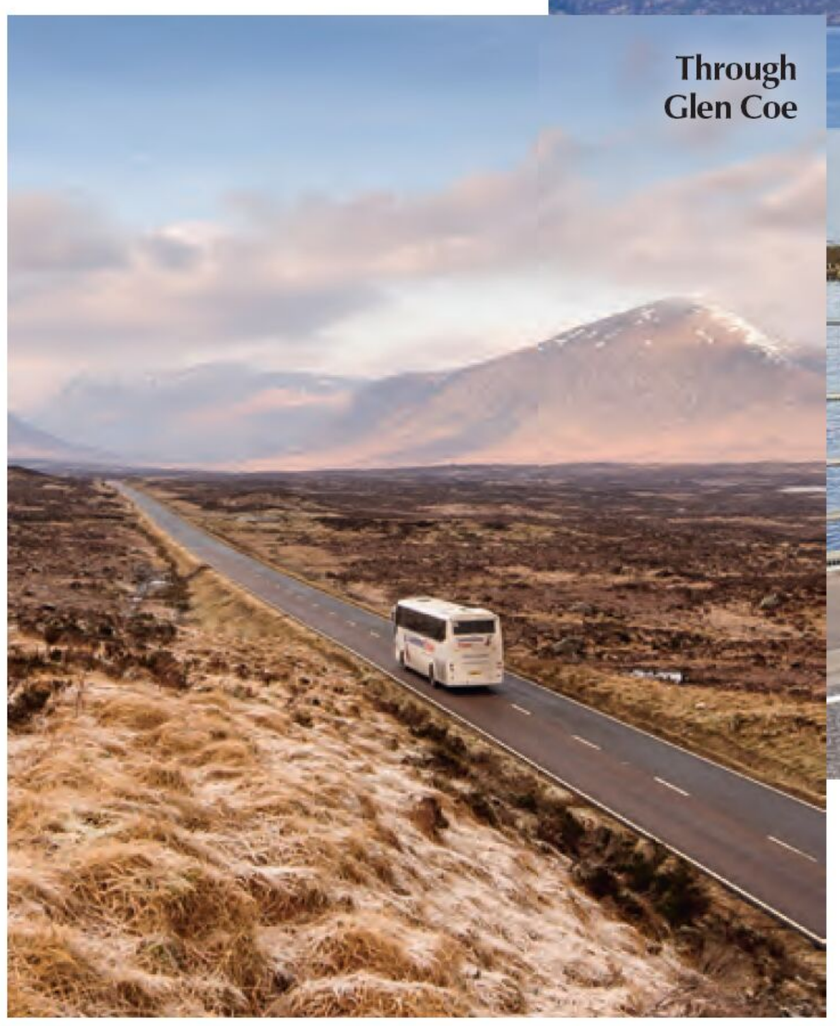
The prices of flying to, and around, Scotland varies. For the best prices, it is recommended to use comparison sites, such as Skyscanner, or check out **www.loganair.co.uk**

Better By Bus

If coach travel sounds more appealing than by car, here's all you need to know

by ALEX DEMPSTER-CORLETT


Crossing the Skye Bridge


Through Glen Coe

WHILST Scotland's scenic routes were designed to be explored by car, campervan or other form of private transport, following them on public buses is a completely different and appealing proposition for a number of reasons.

Emissions are naturally lower, as with any public transport. But it's also a different pace of travel. Yes, it requires a much greater degree of organisation, but it provides opportunities to meet locals, take in the scenery without worrying about navigation and engage with local communities when picking up provisions or staying between connections.

The first rule is clearly to allow more time for a bus holiday. This is slow travel in all its glory and once all the logistics are sorted, long drives, grand scenery (through huge windows) and adventure await.

Traveline Scotland (**travelinescotland.com**) can help with the wider co-ordination of the route as they cover all forms of public transport across most of the nation's operators.

Since the demise of the Post Buses in 2017, some deeply rural sections are simply not doable. Either a private hire is required or an alternative route. Currently the Far North Bus service (**thedurnessbus.com**) operates routes on the awkward north-western edges of the NC500, whilst Stagecoach's X99 will take care of you on the return leg from Thurso from Inverness. Either in a single three-and-a-half hour stint or with stop-offs along the way.

In the Outer Hebrides, the council for the islands (Comhairle nan Eilean Siar) publishes a comprehensive list of bus timetables on its website. With single roads travelling the length of the island chain, even the Uists are surprisingly well served. Principal "spine" routes will get you from end to end, with offshoot routes for further exploration. Just a glance at the well-structured timetable may be enough to persuade even the most determined driver to leave the car on the mainland.

Catching the ferry is much cheaper in the first place as a pedestrian and the buses are small, giving a much more intimate experience. As the route is designed to serve residents, the stops are functional places like ports, banks, hospitals and the Co-op rather than any tourist attractions. Fellow passengers will be locals, going about their business.

The Coig, the Heart 200, North East 250 and South West Coast 300 are all in much the same boat. They'll need covering by a variety of buses, especially

Travelling in comfort

PRACTICALITIES

The bigger the bus, the more amenities you can expect. Large coaches will usually offer toilet facilities, WiFi, access for wheelchairs and ample storage for luggage, bikes and pushchairs. As you head further off the beaten path, the buses will get smaller and so will the services they're able to offer.

Free For Scots

If you're a resident Scot or will be travelling with Scottish friends and family, under 22s and over 60s travel for free on the country's buses. So not only do you get a more economical holiday, but you can have a proper catch-up without having to concentrate on the road and miss all that scenery! All children under five travel free on our buses, whether resident or otherwise.

“Long drives, grand scenery and adventure await”

the Coig. You’ll also need the help of several ferries to accomplish this tour of Argyll and Ayrshire’s scenic highlights, so it is best divided into a series of shorter breaks.

The Borders Historic Route, on the other hand, couldn’t be simpler. The X95 Borders Bus follows the exact line of it from Edinburgh to Carlisle. It’s a simple three-and-a-half hour trip, but with stops in Galashiels, Selkirk, Hawick and Langholm it’s easy to hit every single one of the journey’s highlights.

But this is far from the end of the story – Scotland has many fantastic bus journeys, equally practical for visitors. Take Citylink’s 915/916/917 services, for example. Beginning in Glasgow and finishing in Uig, Skye’s ferry terminal for the Outer Hebrides, travellers will be whisked through the road equivalent of the West Highland Way, passing Loch Lomond, Rannoch Moor and Glen Coe. On after Fort William, the bus heads into the majesty of the north-west Highlands, descending through Kintail on the way to Skye in around eight hours. This could just be the start of an adventure to the Hebrides.

Another favourite is McGill’s 901/906 route between Glasgow and Largs, offering panoramic views over the Firth of Clyde, where there’s always something to see out the window.

Whichever route you choose, supporting local buses helps ensure the future provision of such services, helping your wallet, the environment and the communities you’re visiting in one fell swoop.

Small bus tour firms may be the way to go

The Personal Touch

If you’d rather avoid the struggle of co-ordinating connections and explore with the bonus of an experienced guide to hand, one of Scotland’s small bus tour companies could be the answer.

Rabbie’s is arguably the most famous. Pick the starting destination wisely – if you wanted to cover the NC500, for example, only an Inverness departure allows this. The widest variety of tours starts from Edinburgh, ranging from day trips to a 17-day island-hopping extravaganza. Whilst few tours mirror the exact routes in this guide, they cover elements of them and include themed visits for those more interested in whisky-tasting or historic castles, for example.

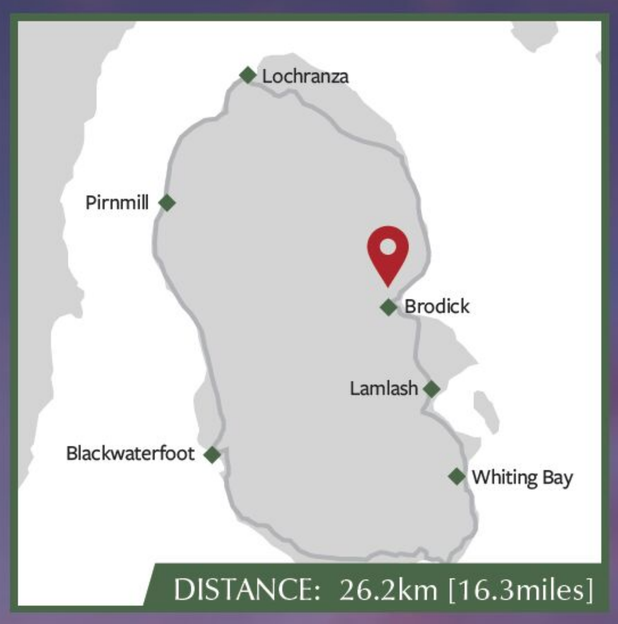
However, most of these companies cater for folk wanting to see the Highlands and Islands. Which is entirely understandable given the international fame of areas like Glen Coe, Skye and the Hebrides. As a result, you’ll struggle to find folk offering trips around the Borders Historic route or the South West Coast 300 – trips equally magical and worthy of attention, but whose charms are less well known.

The Coig – Arran Route

Explore Arran with The Coig, an exciting tourist route encouraging visitors to rediscover the coast and islands of the Firth of Clyde

by HANNAH McLAREN

The Holy Isle at sunrise



ARRAN is the perfect place for an island getaway. As soon as you set sail on the ferry and spot the distinctive silhouette of Goatfell in the distance, you will be filled with the spirit of adventure.

Often referred to as "Scotland in miniature", Arran has everything you could want when it comes to stunning scenery. From an ever-changing coastline to dramatic mountain vistas, glorious beaches and quaint villages, it truly has it all.

For those looking for an adrenaline-packed holiday, there are plenty of opportunities for hiking, mountain biking and water sports. Or if you need a more relaxing break, Arran is also a foodie paradise with a plethora of local artisans making everything from cheese to whisky. Whatever your island escape dreams, Arran can cater for it.

It's a small island that packs a big punch.

FOR MORE INFO VISIT
ayrshireandarran.com and turn the page for route highlights.

THE COIG – ARRAN ROUTE

Brodick To Lochranza

DUE to a childhood spent on the breezy Ayrshire coast, the Isle of Arran's iconic silhouette has remained indelibly printed in my mind. We were told in primary school that if you look at the island on a map, it resembles a man eating a peanut – and it does!

Gaelic for "five", The Coig is a series of five tourist routes covering Ayrshire, Arran, Bute and Cumbrae, and I jumped at the chance to explore the Arran route.

I booked my ferry tickets, packed my bags, and followed The Coig's suggested itinerary.

The island may be small, but my plan for a two-night stay was jam-packed. Once there, I decided to travel the island by bus so chose Brodick for my base as this is where all the buses leave from.

On my first day I was up early, waterproofs on and boots laced tight for a day of adventure.

We caught the 324 bus to the beautiful village of Lochranza. On three sides, spectacular hills and waterfalls surround a loch spotted with fishing boats and swans, while a ruined castle adds a splash of drama. In any weather, this former herring port will take your breath away.

It's also home to the Isle of Arran Distillery, where we received a fascinating tour and learned the intricacies of the island's unique whisky-making process, including the benefits of Arran's special micro-climate.

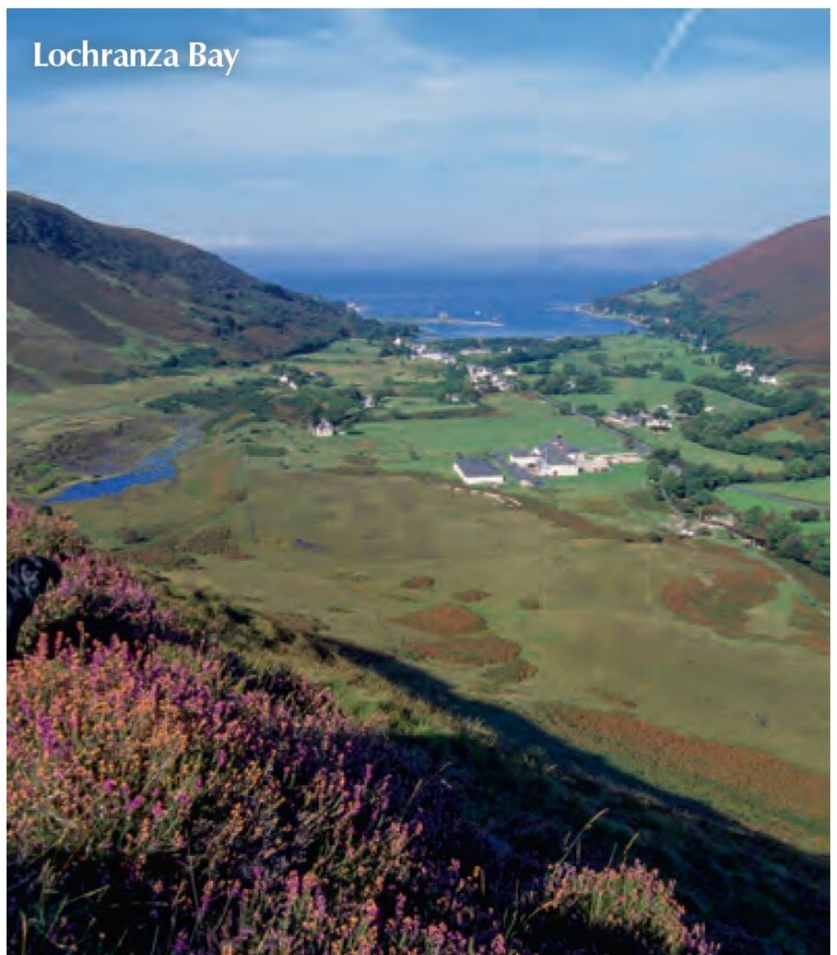
According to the distillery, Lochranza is home to the purest water in Scotland, which they use to make their award-winning whisky. The water is naturally cleaned by granite and softened by peat as it slowly trickles down from the mountaintops into nearby Loch na Davie.

After a mouthful of Arran Malt and Arran Gold – a creamy whisky-based liqueur – we browsed the gift shop, had a bite to eat at the café and dashed for our bus.

There are plenty opportunities to uncover relics of Scotland's Gaelic and Norse heritage here. Many small villages are treasure troves of Neolithic burial sites, which are part of the Clyde Cairns.

As we sat on the bus taking the scenic route back to our lodge, the driver pointed out the Auchagallon Stone Circle and the Machrie Standing Stones – both worth hopping off to explore.

It's a beautiful route with plenty to see and do and lots of opportunities to get off the bus for a scenic walk around the island.


Lochranza Bay

Route Highlight

Lochranza Distillery

Opened just over 30 years ago, Lochranza Distillery provides a fascinating tour with incredible insight into the island's history and the process of whisky distillation. Enjoy a dram or two of their iconic single malt with a guided tasting to round off an excellent tour.

“Spectacular hills and waterfalls surround a loch, while a ruined castle adds a splash of drama”

Above: Lochranza Castle

Left: Machrie Standing Stones

Other Things To See And Do:

- The Isle of Arran Heritage Museum
- Brodick Putting Green
- Arran Adventure Co.

THE COIG – ARRAN ROUTE

Brodick To Brodick Castle

THE second day of our island adventure was much busier. Early in the morning, we took the winding path up to Brodick Castle for a wander through the extensive gardens and a tour of this impressive 16th-century fortification.

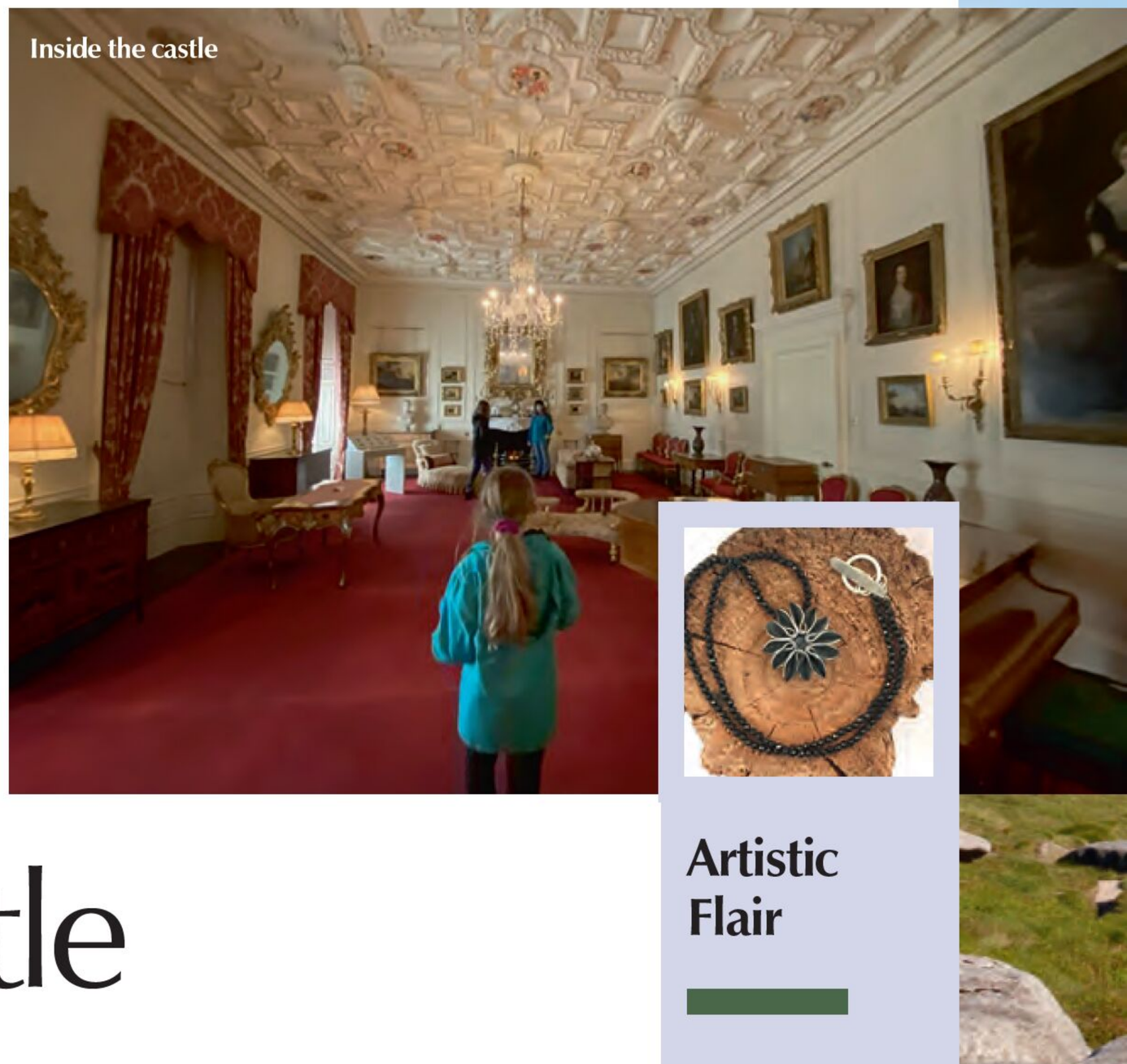
Climbing through the undergrowth, the atmosphere suddenly felt tropical as plants from around the world engulfed me.

I later learned that the castle gardens have strong links to two famous plant hunters, George Forrest and Frank Kingdon-Ward, who travelled the world in search of collector seeds and plant materials for propagating in home soil.

Thanks to Arran's unique microclimate, these far-flung seeds could successfully flourish.

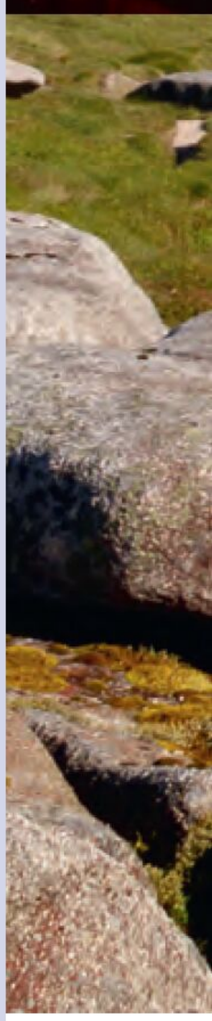
Previously home to the Dukes of Hamilton, and now run by the National Trust for Scotland, the grand and rather quirky Brodick Castle remains filled to the brim with the family's collection of valuable, worldly artefacts.

This includes 87 deer heads lining the walls of the entrance hall in an archaic display of wealth. These certainly took me aback slightly. I found the interactive visitors experience incredibly immersive and the staff dressed in period costume were always on hand with lots of fun facts and trivia.


Inside the castle

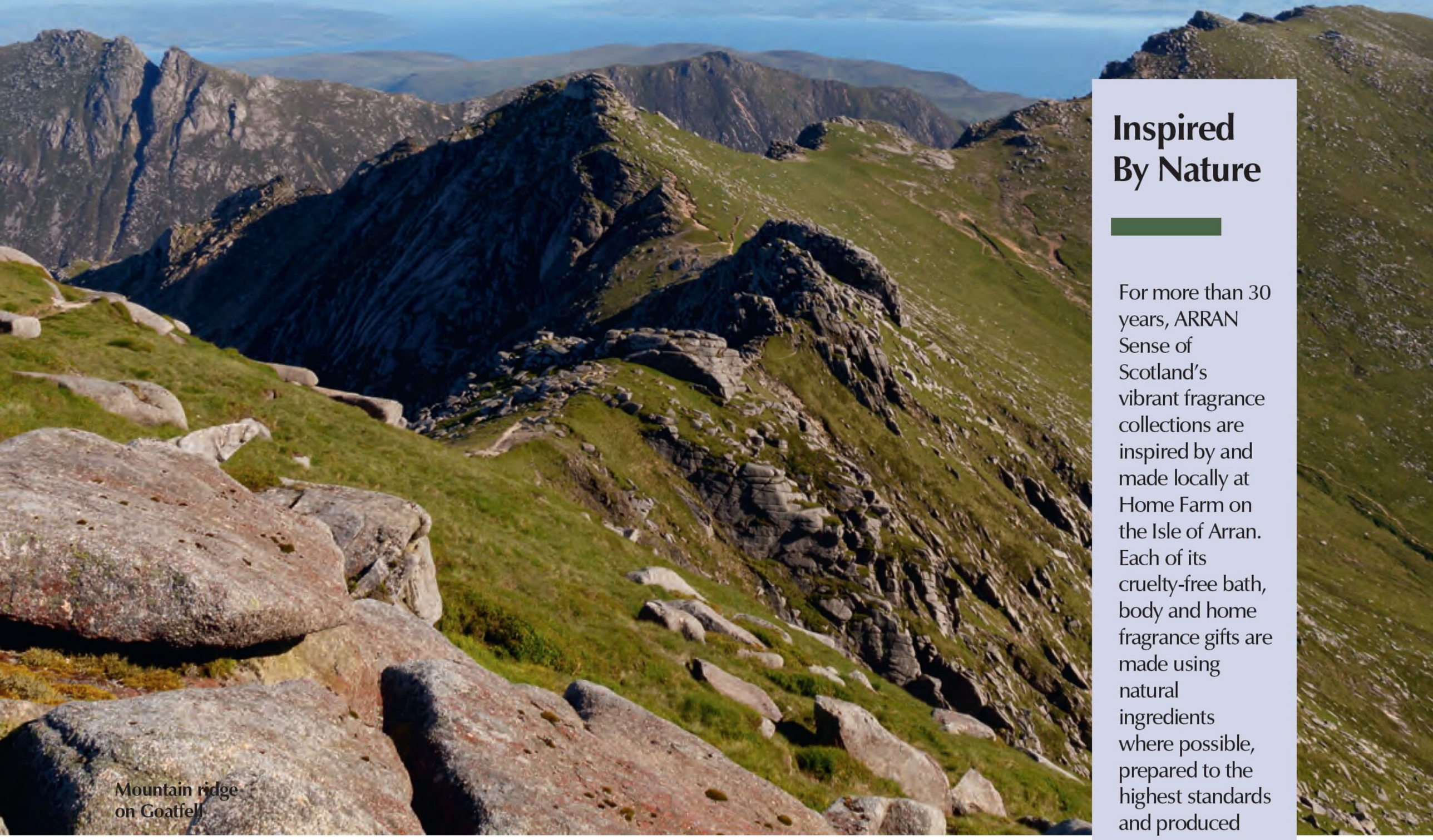
Artistic Flair

A great way to explore this island is by the Arran Art Trail. You will meet some of the island's most talented artists and makers in their studios and workshops and see some of the unique works which will form a special ALiVE exhibition at the end of September. The Arran Art Trail takes you on a journey around the island that will inspire you to embrace your inner creativity in this inspirational arty island. Painters, felters, glass artists, sculpture makers and more are all thriving on Arran!



Brodick Castle

“The foot of the castle marks the start of the most accessible way to climb Arran’s highest mountain”



Mountain ridge on Goatfell

We didn’t have the weather or the time, but the foot of Brodick Castle marks the beginning of the most accessible way to climb Goatfell – Arran’s highest mountain at 874 metres (2,867ft). I’ll definitely be back soon to give this a go.

Continuing further up the main road from the castle, we stumbled across a lovely little café called Janie’s and stopped for lunch. Conveniently, Janie’s is right next door to Arran Aromatics and Arran Cheese Shop.

Anyone who knows Arran knows Arran Aromatics, and it would have been rude not to pop in to try a few testers before the next stop!

I’d previously heard of most of the destinations we were scheduled to visit, however, I’d never come across Arran Botanical Drinks before.

Little did I know, it was time for a distillery tour with a twist.

Cooried away on the breezy east coast of the island, is Cladach Beach House – in a past life, the Arran Nature Centre – and now home to the Isle of Arran Gin Company.

The site boasts a bar, botanicals and beach views. This was the highlight for me as not only was the gin delicious, but the whole log fire and beach-front experience was a breath of fresh sea air.

This charming bar, shop and small-scale gin distillery sits opposite the Wineport café and bistro and right next to the Mountain Rescue Centre in Brodick – both very much worth a visit The Beach House is rustic, quirky, and has an interesting past.

Its location, virtually at the foot of Brodick Castle and a short walk from the ferry, welcomes foot traffic and a sense of quiet remoteness.

Visitors can tweak their itinerary to enjoy Arran’s many other delights, from golf to fishing and sailing, scenic walks and cycle routes, or dining out on delicious locally-sourced food.

Inspired By Nature

For more than 30 years, ARRAN Sense of Scotland’s vibrant fragrance collections are inspired by and made locally at Home Farm on the Isle of Arran. Each of its cruelty-free bath, body and home fragrance gifts are made using natural ingredients where possible, prepared to the highest standards and produced with a minimal impact on the environment. Visit them on the island to experience the heavenly scented world of Arran, and discover the moments that capture a true Sense of Scotland.

THE COIG – ARRAN ROUTE

The Arran Challenge

Just three hours to bike and run to Goatfell, then catch a ferry home!

by FIONA RUSSELL

DAYTRIPPERS to the Isle of Arran have around three hours and 15 minutes to explore between each return ferry in winter – if they choose to accept the challenge.

The ferry from the West Coast town of Ardrossan to the popular island's port of Brodick is timetabled to take 55 minutes.

Of course, there's no rush to leave and there are later ferries, yet three hours is also the perfect window for a challenge – to bike and run to Arran's highest point and be back in time for the next ferry home.

The adventure seemed plausible. From Brodick to the start of a southerly ascent on the mountain of Goatfell is 4km (2.5 miles).

From the base to Goatfell top is just over 5km (3 miles) – from sea level to summit it is 874m (2,867ft). To return, I'd simply reverse the route.

I expected the challenge to be tight for time. Various websites suggested the fastest walking time for Goatfell would be four and a half hours in summer conditions.

At running pace I hoped to cut the time by about 50%. Like many best-laid plans in Scotland, however, on the chosen day the weather forecast for my autumn Goatfell Challenge had changed from cold and clear to warm and wet.

A choppy sea also delayed the CalMac ferry so it docked at Brodick 15 minutes later than the expected time of 10.40am.

By the time I'd pushed my bike up the ferry ramp, it was past 11am. I had no idea if this would affect the rest of the ferry times – and I didn't want to waste time asking.

I turned on to the Arran coastal road and pedalled with haste towards Cladach Visitor Centre, where I would leave my bike and start running.

There was a headwind, but I decided having it at this stage was better – a tailwind later on would be helpful.

At first, the main path on Goatfell winds gently up through woodland and I enjoyed a comfortable running pace.

Every so often, I glimpsed patches of blue sky – and I was treated at one point to a beautiful view of Glen Rosa below – but I was grateful for the cover of the trees. The damp air had turned to drizzle and the higher I ran, the wetter it became.

This was not my first time on Goatfell and, as the forest gave way to open moorland, I was sure there should be views of the mountain.

However, I focused on a steady speed, knowing a steeper gradient was ahead.

Kit List

Bicycle (road or mountain bike)

Running clothes

Waterproof jacket and overtrousers

Trail shoes

Rucksack

Map and compass

Hat and gloves

Survival blanket/ bivi bag

Lightweight insulated jacket

Ferry timetable and ticket

The ferry passes Goatfell

Goatfell is Arran's highest point

I can never decide which Scottish season is my favourite but, despite the lowering clouds, I enjoyed the autumnal tapestry of warm browns, russets and oranges.

So far, there had been no need for a map and compass, although as I pushed upwards and into denser cloud I kept a close eye on the ground ahead.

By now, the wind was at buffeting speed and the air temperature had dipped. I stopped to add a layer of clothing and gloves.

The mountain is craggy higher up and the path had become rockier and less defined. Heading towards the eastern shoulder of Goatfell, I could feel a quiet determination ignite in me.

In clear weather, the summit direction would have been obvious, yet in cloud I was a little disorientated.

I noted a fainter path heading east, while the main route goes almost directly west and on to the steepest part of the ascent.

All around were huge boulders and I was forced to walk and scramble over wet and muddy terrain.

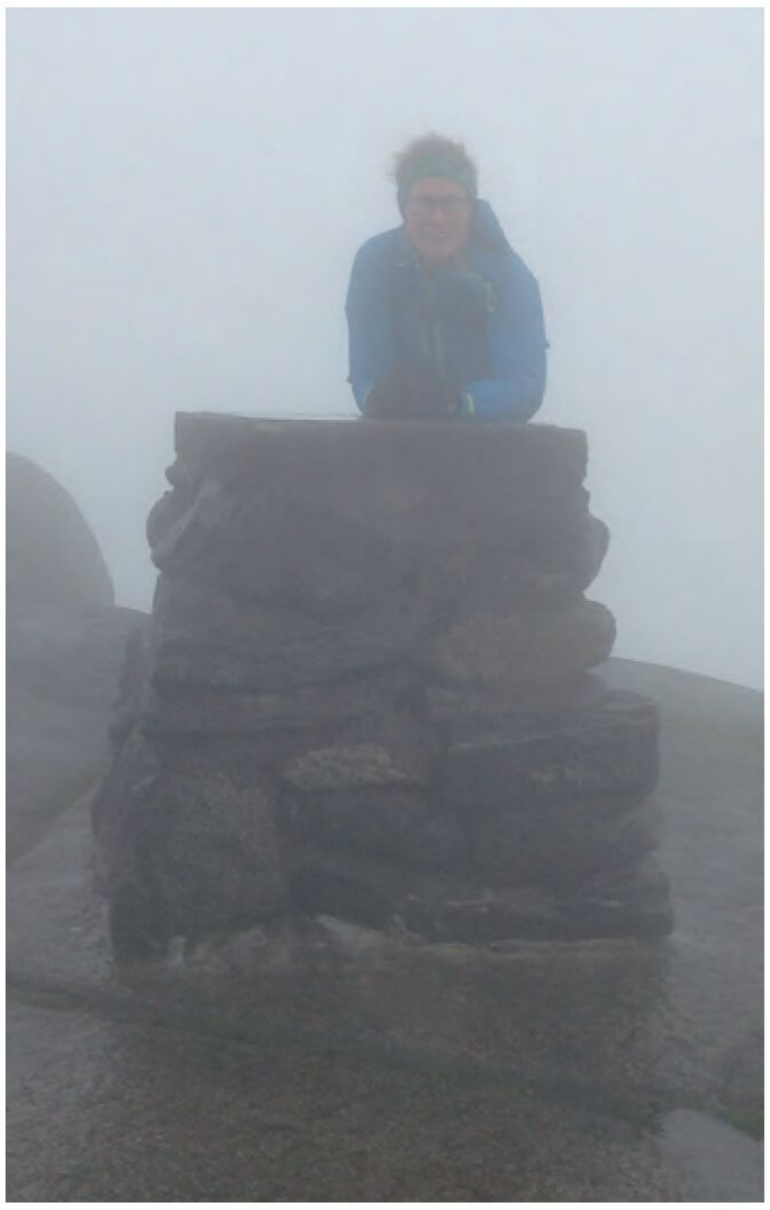
There were numerous mini summits but still no sight of the summit, and I realised time had slipped by.

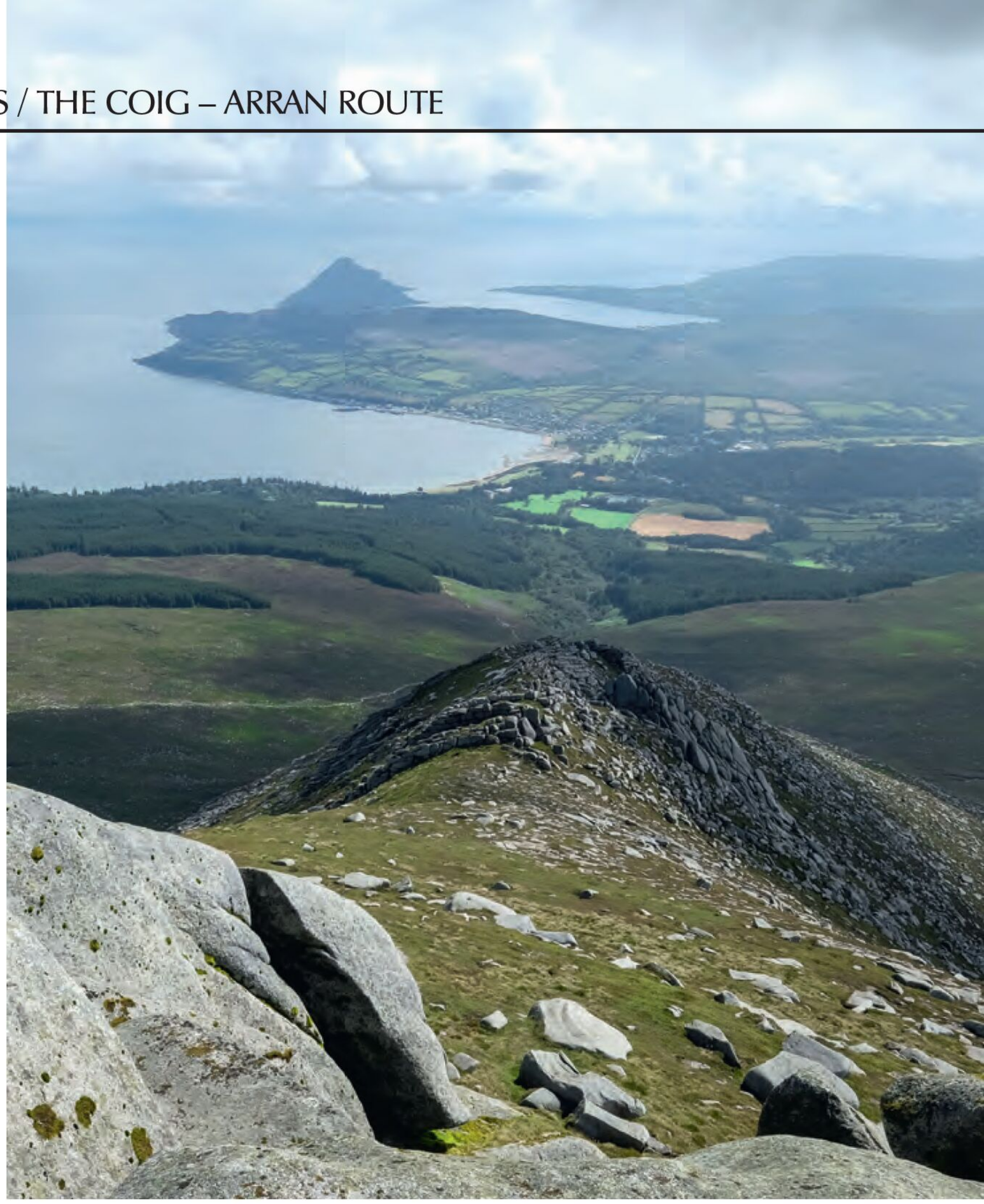
I'd hoped to do the climb in 90 minutes but I knew I needed to be quicker than that because the descent was not going to be straightforward due to the conditions. »

Fiona made the ascent in 77 minutes

Right: The usual vista from the summit of Goatfell

Below: Cloudy conditions at the top





At an hour and 17 minutes I topped out. The usual reward for making it to the peak is a fabulous vista of the granite ridges of other Arran mountains and even a sight of Ireland.

I simply felt fortunate to be able to see my watch. There was no time to stop and I quickly about-turned.

Sadly, I was too eager to get off the mountain and a silly error made the return a high-speed chase.

On the way up, the path to the coastal village of Corrie had seemed obvious enough to avoid. In retrospect, I can't recall seeing the junction.

My pace had quickened and I was making excellent progress downhill in what seemed to be the right direction.

But surrounded by cloud and rain, I couldn't see more than a few metres ahead.

The more I descended, the less "right" it felt. By the time I knew for sure I was off-route, it was too late.

Instead of returning south, I'd gone east – joining a gravel track that came to an end at the A814 at Corrie.

From Corrie, it was 9.6km (6 miles) to Brodick, although fewer to my bike – with only 25 minutes before the timetabled ferry to the mainland.

Even on fresh legs, however, I doubted I could cover the distance in time, let alone after running a mountain.

I don't like to give up easily, however, and I'd spotted an alternative to the road, on a section of the Arran Coastal Way. A tarmac run might be quicker, but it would be along a busy road, and the coastal way slightly cut a corner.

Keeping my eyes peeled for the right path, I ran as swiftly as I could along a forest track.

Autumn had again painted the flora a gorgeous palette and, now I was below the clouds, I could see the sea shimmering under a brightening sky.

The coastal path crossed the southern path on Goatfell and as I reached it, I turned left, urging myself to speed downhill.

The bike was still attached to a tree and I hastily unlocked it and jumped on. I still didn't dare look at my watch – either I'd make the ferry because it was late, or have to wait another three hours for the next one.

By now, my head was pounding, my leg muscles burned and I felt nauseous.

But then hope glimmered. I thought I could see a ferry at the terminal. Closer still and I saw passengers disembarking.

The hoped-for tailwind propelled me on and I joined a small queue of walkers and cyclists, sighing with relief.

I was still catching my breath as I boarded the ferry – delayed due to the weather – elated that I'd completed my Goatfell Challenge, albeit with a detour.

> *"The path became rockier and less defined"*

ONLINE RESOURCES

Caledonian MacBrayne Ferries: calmac.co.uk

Goatfell walking route: walkhighlands.co.uk/arran/goatfell.shtml

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See Skye In Five

Before embarking on the Outer Hebrides Route, why not spend some time doing something new and exciting on Skye?

THE biggest island of the Inner Hebrides, "Skye is a year-round destination with so many places to explore," says Dave Till, director of SkyeConnect, the destination management organisation for Skye and Raasay.

Whether you're there to see the unrivalled scenery, to entertain the wee ones or for an outdoor adventure to remember, here are five places that tick every box...

1. Portree Harbour

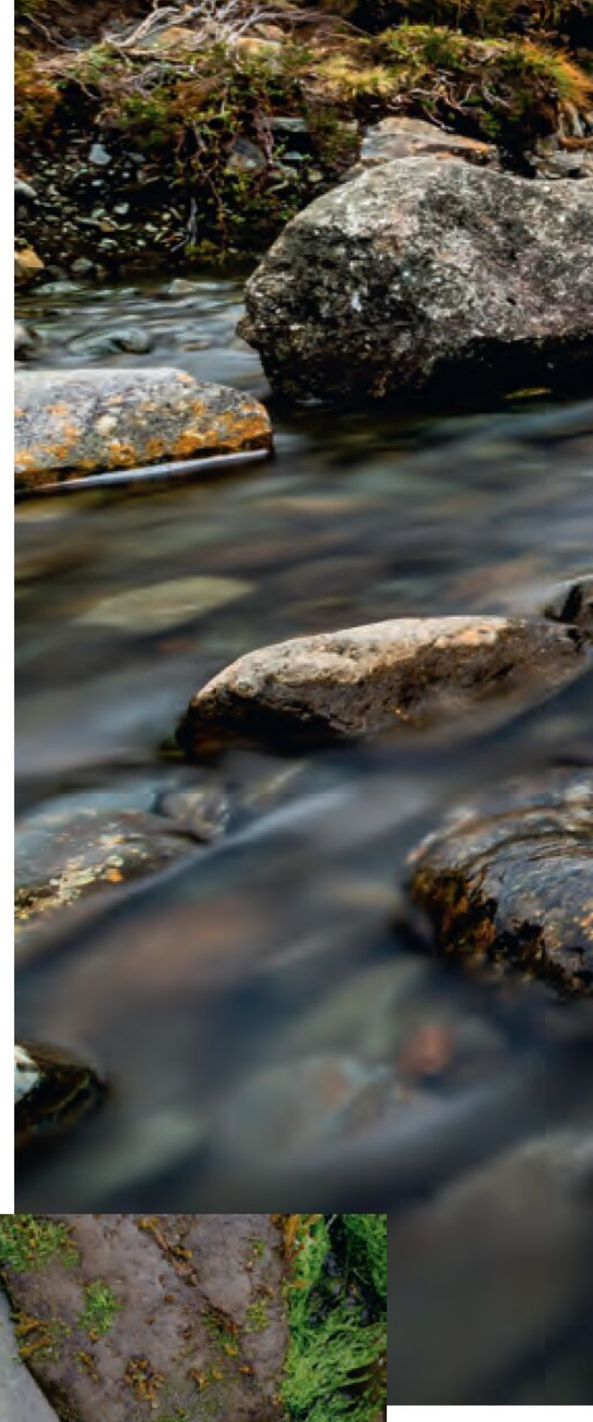
In Skye's main town of Portree, pretty pastel-coloured buildings and shop fronts dominate the view as you arrive by boat to the harbour – it is a great first stop for visitors to Skye. A scattering of seafood restaurants give a great selection of the day's catch, alongside art galleries and quirky craft shops. "There is nothing better than sitting with an ice cream down by the harbour, watching small boats come and go, with huge cruise ships anchoring in the bay," says Dave.

2. Fairy Pools

Located at Glenbrittle, the Fairy Pools are a series of magnificent rockpools with water flowing in from dramatic waterfalls. This is a popular swimming spot, but be prepared for the chill as you enter the cold, blue water – it's advisable to pack a wetsuit if you fancy braving it. The bigger pool can be accessed by a 2.4km (1.5 mile) walk from Glenbrittle car park, but those feeling more adventurous can continue up the path to discover underwater arches and quieter pools.

3. Dinosaur Footprints

If you're going dinosaur hunting, never mind Jurassic Park – Skye is the place. Many species of dinosaurs roamed the island 170 million years ago, and you'll find tracks on An Corran beach, Score Bay and Brother's Point, as well as Staffin Dinosaur Museum. Often hard to find, Dave says, "To avoid disappointment, we always advise guests to speak to the museum staff for more details."



Portree Harbour

Dinosaur Footprints

Don't Miss

The regular bus service to popular sites such as the Storr and the Fairy Pools.

Fairy Pools

The Old Man Of Storr

Candles from Skye Candle Co.

4. The Old Man Of Storr
In the north of the island, the famous Old Man of Storr is one of Skye's many natural wonders. A walk to the top of Storr hill takes around an hour, and the views are magnificent. You'll overlook the Sound of Raasay and Loch Leathan as you stand below the towering Old Man. "Every month our stunning and unique landscape changes with the light. You never get the same view twice," says Dave. A walk up the Storr hill is accessible for most, while scaling the Old Man itself is best left to experienced climbers only.

5. Isle of Skye Candle Co. Visitor Centre
Inside you'll find a pizzeria, wellness space, cinema and theatre and, of course, the flagship store of the Isle of Skye Candle Co. The restaurant, Gasta, has amazing panoramic views of Loch Portree, and is the perfect place to enjoy a delicious handmade Neapolitan-style pizza with the family before seeing a film – from big blockbusters to football and live theatre events. The bright and airy studio can be hired for yoga or exercise classes, and don't forget to stock up on goodies at the shop.

Outer Hebrides Route

This 130-mile long archipelago boasts huge skies and pristine beaches offering an unforgettable adventure

The beautiful sandy beach at Traigh Lar on the Isle of Harris

THE Outer Hebrides is one of the most beautiful areas in Scotland with stunning views and a welcoming community.

A journey from the northern town of Stornoway to Castlebay in the south will lead you through the main islands of Lewis, Harris, Berneray, North Uist, Benbecula, South Uist, Eriskay and Barra.

The archipelago's beauty combined with its fascinating history make for an ideal holiday. Explore Lewis's Callanish Standing Stones in the morning and then relax on the stunning beaches of Harris in the afternoon. Enjoy a stroll along Eriskay's beach and hill circuit for amazing views and then examine Bronze Age history on the Isle of Barra.

Whether you are on the hunt for fascinating history, breathtaking scenery or awe-inspiring nature, there will be plenty for you on these islands.

FOR MORE INFO VISIT
visitouterhebrides.co.uk and turn the page for route highlights.

“This special environment of peat bog hosts a unique array of plants and wildlife”

Dun Carloway Broch

OUTER HEBRIDES ROUTE

Stornoway To Loch Eireasort

THE largest settlement of the Outer Hebrides, with a busy seaport and airport, the welcoming town of Stornoway has a lot to offer visitors.

Make time to see the attractions in the town and stock up on supplies as shops are few and far between on the islands.

From the east coast, this route cuts inland on the A857 through wide open rust-coloured moorland interspersed with lochans.

The hilly route appears bleak and lifeless in places, but this special environment of peat bog hosts a unique array of plants and wildlife.

On reaching the west coast, the road forks with the northerly turn leading to the dramatic Port of Ness and the lovely village of Ness.

Turning left, the A858 hugs the coastline with many gorgeous beaches to stop at such as Shawbost and Dalmore.

Crossing the 19th-centry bridge over the River Carloway you arrive at the small village of Carolway.

Doune, named after its Iron Age broch, is worth turning off to for a visit, as is the beautiful settlement of Tolstachaolais.

Driving on in a land dotted with crofts, the next stop is Calanais Standing Stones, were you can marvel at the magnificent Neolithic megaliths and have a bit to eat and a coffee in the visitor centre.

At Garrynahine, continue on the A858 or take a detour on the B8011 to explore the wild mountainous area of Uig with its stunning beaches, sea stacks and wonderfully remote campsites.

The landscape becomes wide open as expanses of water interrupt the endless moorland until the route heads back east through tiny villages, turning south at Ach Mor towards Loch Eireasort.

Calanais Standing Stones

Lews Castle

Route Highlight

Harris Tweed Carloway Mill

Visit the world famous Harris Tweed Carloway Mill and see traditional craftsmanship of the finest tweed on vintage machines. There are relaxed tours by appointment and they are proud to sell only quality Scottish and British products.
harristweed carloway.com

Other Things To See And Do:

- Lews Castle, Stornoway
- Gearrannan Blackhouse Village
- Garry Beach and Bridge to Nowhere

Bonnie Prince Charlie memorial at Airidh a' Bhruaich

OUTER HEBRIDES ROUTE

Loch Eireasort To Tarbert

AFTER breakfast at the Ravenspoint Community Hostel overlooking the loch, join the route south into inviting wide open skies, craggy hills, lochans and rough moorland.

Many lochans are covered in white waterlilies in the summer and in late summer the moors turn heather-purple.

The emptiness of the land provides a peace and stillness rarely found elsewhere and it's a joy to pull over regularly and breath in that remote natural energy that this astonishing island emits.

Do make allowances for locals overtaking and ensure you pull over when they want to pass on any single-track roads.

At the village of Arivruach stop off at the Bonnie Prince Charlie monument which marks where he landed following the Battle of Culloden.

The site offers gorgeous views over Loch Shiphoirt and to the southern hills.

Mountains peep up over the horizon as the journey continues south towards North Harris and The Clisham, the highest hill in the Outer Hebrides at almost 800 metres (2,600ft).

The road aligns once more with Loch Shiphoirt in much more dramatic, hilly terrain and views.

Emerging from the drama of South Lewis and North Harris, the road descends towards the Atlantic as it cuts into the island and the main town of Harris, Tarbert.

The 19km (12-mile) detour to Huisinish along the B887 is a single-track coastal route to the Huisinis Gateway – a modern building with toilets and showers and parking for tourers.

The beaches are magnificent and the turquoise waters unmissable.

The Clisham

Route Highlight

Huisinis Gateway

At the end of a 19km (12-mile) twisting track road you are rewarded by beautiful and extensive views of the Atlantic and the island of Scarp over stunning white sands beaches. Look out for golden and sea eagles!

“The beaches at Huisinish are magnificent and the turquoise waters unmissable”

Other Things To See And Do:

- Seaforth Harris Tweed
- Isle of Harris Distillery
- The Scaladale Centre Outdoor Activities

Huisinish

“There really is no beach in Scotland quite like it – it’s truly breathtaking”

Luskentyre Beach

Route Highlight

Luskentyre

One of the largest and most spectacular beaches on Harris, it boasts miles of white sand and green-blue water framed by rugged hills and islands. The machair is a blaze of colour in the summer. There really is no beach in Scotland quite like it – it's truly breathtaking.

OUTER HEBRIDES ROUTE

Tarbert To Leverburgh

SET in a valley where North and South Harris meet, the island's main transport hub offers plenty to keep you occupied and the short drive to the nearby isle of Scalpay is worth the effort.

The road into South Harris climbs steeply out of the town and into otherworldly, moonscape-like scenery.

There's a choice of routes here: the east coast, known as Na Baigh (The Bays), is rugged, boulder-ridden and seemingly inhospitable with the most settlements, while the west coast has some of the finest stretches of golden sand in the whole of the archipelago.

Being so utterly different it's hard to choose which is finest, so it's best to explore both routes on your visit.

After reaching the coast, the terrain smooths out to the turquoise waters, white sands and fertile land.

A right turn leads you to the heaven on earth that is Luskentyre Beach, where there's a small car park, toilets and ideally placed West Harris Trust camping spots.

Hogabost Campsite gives access to a gorgeous sheltered beach with views towards the island of Taransay and a bit further south is popular Nisabost Beach and MacLeod's Stone.

The road winds past pretty farmland, small houses and sheep fill the fields – and often the road itself – when a pristine golf course jars the senses somewhat.

It's worth taking the right turn to Northton before arriving at Leverburgh to stop off at Temple Harris shop and café and Croft 36 take-away as well as the gorgeous Northton Beach.

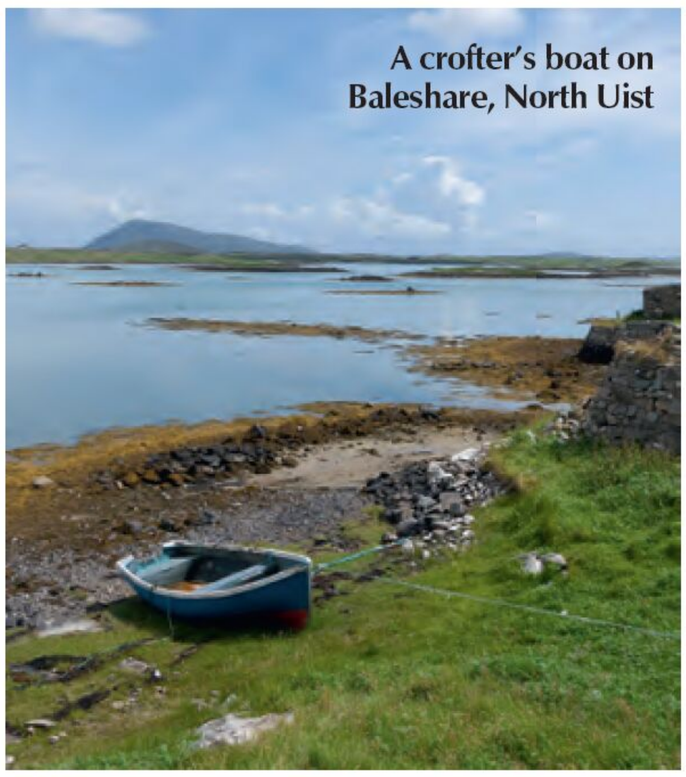
Leverburgh itself is a great point to stop and top up supplies for your ongoing island odyssey.

Macleod's Stone

St Clement's Church

Other Things To See And Do:

- St Clement's Church, Rodel
- The Mission House Studio
- Talla na Mara – shops, café, touring pitches


A crofter's boat on Baleshare, North Uist

OUTER HEBRIDES ROUTE

Leverburgh To Benbecula

FROM Leverburgh there are 80-minute ferry crossings to Berneray, but make sure you book in advance.

Once off the ferry, turn right to explore the tiny but gorgeous island of Berneray. Roughly 3km by 5km (two by three miles), it's rich in wildlife and history with beaches that will blow your mind – look out for the seals!

Pop into the Nurses Cottage Visitor Centre and enjoy the Berneray Circular Walk from Borve. There's even a small shop and bistro so make time for a visit.

Heading back south and across the spectacular causeway to North Uist, opened by Prince Charles in 1999, take a right on the A865.

Look out for the parking place for the short walk out to Dun an Sticir Iron Age Settlement, which you reach via stepping stones in the loch.

As you drive on through the rustic landscape, it's distinctly flatter than Harris and Lewis and the skies appear huge. At a junction, this route takes the west coast and the scenery of rugged green fields, sand, machair and sea is beautiful and calming.

Take the sign for Grenitote Picnic Area for a gorgeous beach. Back on the road you might want to stop at Sollas for supplies and shortly after there's a turn to stunning Malacleit Beach.

Heading onwards, the scenery continues to delight, and you may want to visit Scolpaig Tower before stopping at Balranald Nature Reserve.

The route then follows the coast and the splash of turquoise sea is mesmerising.

Drop in at the Hebridean Smokehouse for some tasty treats before the turning off to visit the tidal island of Baleshare.

Back on the A865, the mountains of South Uist beckon as you make your way towards the magnificent causeway to Benbecula – the centre of the Uists.

Causeway linking Berneray to North Uist

Route Highlight

Balranald Nature Reserve

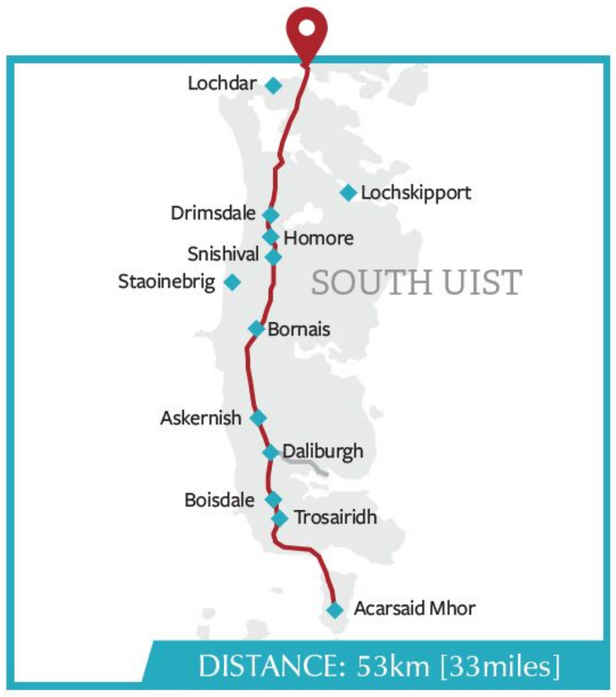
The wildlife-rich grassland haven sweeps down to sandy beaches, wild marshes, sculpted dunes and shallow inviting water. It's ideal for spotting the rare corncrake. There's also an amazing campsite with unrivalled views of the beach and sea.
rspb.org.uk

“Rich in wildlife and history with beaches that will blow your mind”

Other Things To See And Do:

- West Beach, Berneray
- Claddach Kirkibost Centre Café
- NAMARA Marine Supplies & Seafood Café

West Beach



OUTER HEBRIDES ROUTE

Benbecula To Eriskay

THE longest causeway on the Western Isles stretches 3km (5 miles) between Carinish in North Uist and Gramisdale in Benbecula and was opened by the Queen Mother in 1960.

Benbecula is small, flat, low-lying and dotted with lochs and lochans and even more stunning pristine white beaches, sand dunes and machair – although Rueval (Ruabhal) is ever present to the east at 127 metres (417ft).

Just past the airport, you arrive in the town of Balivamich where you should take advantage of the shops, cafes and petrol station before continuing through the green, almost empty land.

You can spot any weather that's coming your way before it hits and the everchanging drama in these enormous, sprawling Hebridean skies is really something to behold.

At Linaclate there's a good campsite and another petrol station, making it a handy place to pitch and explore the beautiful island further.

There are many roads leading east from the main western route and all are worth exploring to fully immerse yourself in the extraordinary atmosphere of this unique island.

The South Ford Causeway, built in 1982, leads to South Uist – a relatively large island with a mountainous east and sandy beaches to the west.

The Hebridean causeways never cease to be an exciting experience and once on South Uist we take the A865 down the middle of the island.

There are numerous offshoot roads to explore for hidden bays or the hillier eastern road to East Gerinish, which also offers a visit to Salar Smokehouse.

Crossing another causeway, with the South Uist mountains, including Beinn Mhór at 620 metres (2,034 ft), rising up in front it all feels very remote. After a small group of houses admire the view at Our Lady of the Isles – on a clear day you can see out to St Kilda.

Passing close by the hills in the southeast, the land is all lochans, mountains, farms and stone dykes.

Take a right to Howmore (Tobha Mhor) ancient chapels and hostel to explore the remains of churches and chapels that may date back to before the 9th century. Unless you need to keep moving, the wee roads to the west of the main A865 are all worth driving for stunning beaches, ruins of castle and chapels and Atlantic views – particularly the road out to Frobost Beach.

Pop into Kildonan Museum to learn more about South Uist and grab a cuppa in the tearoom as well as

"The Hebridean causeways never cease to be an exciting experience"

Route Highlight

Frobost Beach and Machair

The beach is stunning white sand, made from broken shells and the parallel machair is ideal for walking. It is a haven for wildlife such as seals and seabirds and in the summer months it's peppered with wildflowers, including rare orchids.

Eriskay Causeway

perhaps visiting Flora MacDonald's Birthplace before heading onwards to the small settlement of Daliburgh where there's a shop and Borrodale Hotel with its lovely restaurant.

Take a right here to check out the island's main town of Lochboisdale or carry on towards the beautiful Eriskay causeway, built in 2001, before which you'll find the Polochar Inn and the beautiful Kilbride Campsite and cafe.

The road towards the causeway is right on the water with bright white shell sands.

It's hard not to be envious of the people who live in the lovely cottages along this stretch, up among the smooth rocks and colourful flora overlooking the turquoise water out to Barra.

The Eriskay causeway is one of the most stunning and on reaching the other side the terrain becomes hillier as the road climbs up to a junction that turns left to the small and lovely hamlet of Haunn and right passes St Michael's Church as descends into the main settlement.

The pub and restaurant Am Politician, next to Eriskay Beach, has artefacts recovered from the shipwrecked *SS Politician* which inspired *Whisky Galore* and is a lovely spot for lunch.

After the small town the road rises again to the famous parking place overlooking Eriskay ferry terminal and the spectacular beach below – which is a lovely spot for a swim while waiting for your ferry to Barra.

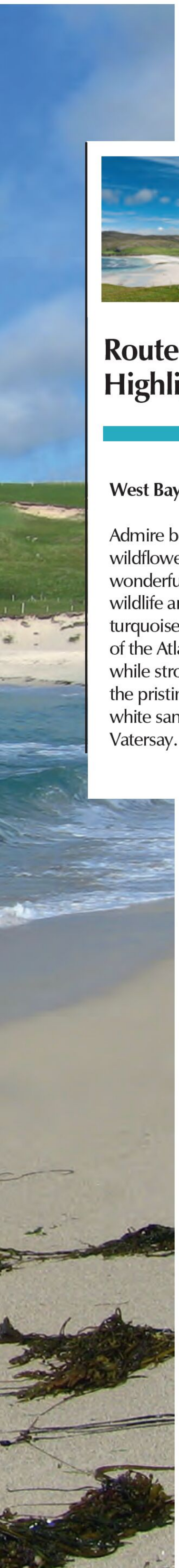
Our Lady of the Isles

Other Things To See And Do:

- Arinaban Woodland
- Otters at Loch a 'Chinn Uacraich
- Howmore Ancient Chapels

“The route leads on around the west of the island offering sandy beaches and more gorgeous countryside”

Tangasdale



OUTER HEBRIDES ROUTE

Barra

Route Highlight

West Bay Beach

Admire beautiful wildflowers, wonderful wildlife and the turquoise waters of the Atlantic while strolling on the pristine white sand of Vatersay.

THE ferry to Barra only takes 40 minutes and it's lovely, if at times breezy, to stand on deck for the trip.

Another fantastic way to reach this island is by plane, as you land on the only beach runway in the world. Time a visit to the airport and Traigh Mhor beach with a plane landing or taking off for an unforgettable sight.

Barra has no less than eight sandy beaches of which Halaman Bay is perfect for surfing and swimming. These are mostly found in the west and north and are all backed by machair that is often full of colour from the blooms of the wildflowers.

The main road is circular around the coast with hillier land in the middle, including Heaval (Heabhal) at 383 metres (1,256ft).

Driving southeast on the A888, the twisty roads pass by rocky hillocks in which cottages with striking red roofs are set and fishing boats float in small inlets of water that slice into the land. Driving close to the sea, with the higher ground of Vatersay ahead, old crofts and black house ruins are scattered next to the newer white houses.

Between the small settlements of Earsairidh and Brevig, the summit of Heaval pops into view and the road climbs before descending into the main town of Castlebay.

Kisimul Castle, the seat of the chief of Clan Macneil, who settled in Barra in the 11th century, can be seen in the bay with the hills of Vatersay behind.

Castlebay is the main port with shops, pubs, cafes and restaurants and the route leads on around the west of the island offering sandy beaches such as Tangasdale and more gorgeous countryside.

From here you can also take the causeway to Vatersay and experience the spectacular scenery of the most southerly inhabited island of the Outer Hebrides.

Kisimul Castle

Barra Airport

Other Things To See And Do:

- Barra Airport and Traigh Mhor Beach
- Balnabodach deserted village
- Barra Surf and Coastal Adventures

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