

Venture to the Highlands & Islands of Scotland Itinerary

You may wish to arrive in Glasgow and/or Edinburgh before the tour starts in order to explore the city or rest. Please let the Ventures Office know your flight plans and also whether you will need a hotel room before or after the tour.

Day 1 (Friday, 31st July)

Arrive in Glasgow (GLA) -not Prestwick

We will fly overnight and arrive from the U.S. in the morning. Our hotel will be very close to the airport, so please plan to meet us at our hotel for dinner in the early evening.

Night in Glasgow

Day 2 (Saturday, August 1st)

Edinburgh

We'll drive from Glasgow to Edinburgh after breakfast and spend the morning nearby Aberlady Bay Reserve (wildflowers, shorebirds, gulls, wildfowl). In the afternoon will be free to explore the beautiful city of Edinburgh. *Night in Edinburgh*

Days 3, 4 & 5 (Sun – Tues, August 2nd- 4th)

Aviemore & the Cairngorms

After breakfast we'll head north across the Firth of Forth towards the Cairngorm National Park. On the way, we'll be taking in Loch Leven in Fife. Here we get the chance to observe numerous species of wildfowl, including Northern Pintail, Northern Shoveler, and Common Goldeneye, but also migratory shorebirds and raptors. The loch is also home to European Otter and the endearing Water Vole. We will stop for lunch as we meander slowly north, with a stop in Pitlochry, and arrive at our hotel in Aviemore in the late afternoon, with a short pre-dinner nature walk at the Craigellachie Reserve. This is an excellent town site for nesting Peregrine Falcon, Roe Deer, Spotted Flycatcher and butterflies such as Pearl-bordered Fritillary and Scotch Argus.

We'll spend the next two full days out exploring the wonders of this beautiful area. We aim to see most of the classic birds of the Scottish Highlands, including Osprey, Crested Tit, Scottish Crossbill, White-throated Dipper, Capercaillie, Common Redstart, Eurasian Siskin, Common Redpoll, Eurasian Treecreeper and Common Goldeneye all possibilities, plus we'll have a chance for numerous mammals such as Pine Martin, Roe and Red Deer. Thirteen species of dragon and damselflies (Odonata) also breed within the park boundaries such as Golden-ringed Dragonfly, Four-spotted Chaser and Emerald Damselfly, so we'll be allocating enough time for some photographic opportunities as they really are great insects to watch! The sites we'll visit during our stay include Abernethy Forest, Loch Garten, Loch an Eilean, Craigellachie National Nature Reserve and Loch Insh Marsh. *Next 3 nights in Aviemore*

Day 6 (Wednesday, August 5th)

Black Isle & Inverness

Following a delicious Scottish breakfast, we will drive north-west towards the Black Isle where we will spend most of the day. Here we could see European otter, Red Kite and the areas infamous Bottle-nosed Dolphins. We should arrive at Chanonry Point well before lunch, so will have plenty of time for exploring the picturesque seaside town of Rosemarkie. In the late afternoon we will head towards Inverness taking in productive sites around the Kessock Bridge area. *Night in Inverness.*

Day 7 (Thursday, August 6th)**Transit to Isle of Skye**

We'll leave after breakfast and head south-west along beautiful Loch Ness, stopping at suitable sites of interest including Loch Ruthven and Eilean Donan Castle. We will finally reach the west coast officially at Loch Duich and Alsh, where we will have the chance of seeing both divers (loons) and other coastal species such as White-tailed Eagle and Osprey. We will arrive at our hotel late afternoon, and look for wildlife around the Skye Bridge area early evening. *Night in Kyleakin*

Day 8 (Friday, August 7th)**Isle of Skye**

After breakfast we'll head towards Portree stopping off at suitable sites along the way to look for both Golden and White-tailed Eagles, plus seals and otters. Following an early lunch in the lovely town of Portree, we'll head counterclockwise around the Trotternish Peninsula taking in the Old Man of Storr, Quiraing, and Staffin Bay. The geology is absolutely stunning here, and well worth a look. It has to be said that it's one of the most picturesque drives anywhere in the world. Raptors, terns, seals, and wildflowers are the main focus here, as well as passerines such as Northern Wheatear, Whinchat, Common Stonechat and Skylark. Corncrake also breed on the peninsula, but are very hard to see. We'll aim to be at the port of Uig for the ferry over to North Uist in the late afternoon. During the ferry crossing, there will be excellent opportunities to view seals, basking shark and cetaceans including Minke Whale, Harbour Porpoise, Short-beaked Common Dolphin and if we're lucky, an orca or Risso's dolphin. Birds should include divers, Black and Common Guillemot, Razorbill, Manx and Sooty Shearwater, European Storm-petrel, Great and Arctic Skuas (Parasitic Jaeger) and terns. We'll arrive in Lochmaddy in the mid-evening. *Night in Lochmaddy.*

Day 9 (Saturday, August 8th) North Uist

Today we'll be heading in a clockwise direction around the island of North Uist taking in six main wildlife areas. After breakfast, we'll be having a quick look for migrant birds at the Langass Plantation, then south into the Baleshare area to look for shorebirds, wildflowers and seals, but plan to arrive at the RSPB's reserve at Balranald for lunch. Here we expect to see many flowers typical of the Machair, plus corn bunting, lapwing, redshank, hen harrier, and orchids such as heath spotted. The beautiful beaches here are peppered in pine cowrie and spiral tower shells. Continuing on, we will be heading to the Griminish area in search of Common Greenshank, Short-eared Owl and Hen Harrier. Ben Risary Plantation will be our next destination, then onto the crofts around Grenitote for Twite, various shorebirds and wildflowers. We drive back to Lochmaddy in the late afternoon.

Night in Lochmaddy.

Day 10 (Sunday, August 9th) Benbecula and South Uist

After breakfast we'll be heading south across the causeway onto the island of Benbecula. Here we'll go in search of the rare Red-necked Phalarope around Loch Mor & Loch Fada, plus wildfowl species such as Eurasian Wigeon and Northern Shoveler. Continuing south onto the island of South Uist via another causeway, we'll explore Loch Druidibeg NNR for loons (divers), Golden Eagle, Hen Harrier and Merlin. There are a number of small excellent plantations here, which will be definitely worth a look for migrant passerines. Next stop will be Bornish and Rubha Ardvule which is a great spot (especially in stronger SW winds) for sea-watching, so we'll spend some time scanning for auks, terns, loons, skuas, shearwaters and cetaceans. The areas around Bornish are good for shorebirds and gulls and several North American species such as buff-

breasted sandpiper have been recoded here. We'll change direction after our lunchtime sea-watch, and now head east over to Loch Eynort in search of White-tailed Eagle, otters and seals, then we continue to drive south towards Lochboisdale, our final destination on the Uists. *Night in Lochboisdale.*

Day 11 (Monday, August 10th) Minch and Lochaber

We'll leave our hotel early for the return ferry across the Minch to the mainland and Mallaig, so it will breakfast onboard (MacBrayne ferries offers an excellent cooked breakfast)! Again, we have the chance of observing cetaceans and seabirds from deck, as we'll be crossing some very productive waters. We will pass the Small Isles of Rum, Eigg, Canna and Muck, and southern Skye, so potentially awesome landscape views if the weather is kind! From the port of Mallaig we'll head to the nearby village of Arisaig for lunch. Here, there'll be opportunities to study wildflowers, shorebirds and seals, then it's a stop at loch Eilt for loons and ducks, and then Glenfinnan for its famous viaduct (ie the Harry Potter Bridge). We'll continue to follow Loch Eil east, and will be scanning suitable areas until we reach Fort William. *Night in Fort William*

Day 12 (Tuesday, August 11th) Transit to Glasgow

After breakfast at about 9 AM, we'll be heading straight back to Glasgow via Glencoe. The drive normally takes no more than 3 hours in total. Please plan to either spend the night near the airport and leave the next morning or book a late afternoon flight back to the US.

PLEASE NOTE:

** We will be staying mostly at small hotels and guest-houses. They have charm and character, but not all of them can always provide private bathroom facilities. We ask for your understanding if you have to share facilities on occasion.*

** Some of this itinerary is very weather-dependent and is thus liable to change.*