Tour Code
XSCI

ADVENTURESABROAD

SCOTTISH ISLANDS WALKER

Western Highlands, Lewis, Skye, Mull & Iona

15 days

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Day 1 Arrival in Edinburgh

Welcome to Scotland!

Today we arrive in Edinburgh, where the buzz of Scotland's capital city sits in perfect contrast to the peaceful tranquility of the surrounding Lothians region. Edinburgh has one of the most beautiful cityscapes in the world; with Scotland's most famous castle dominating the city skyline, there is plenty to see and do with the perfect balance between all things traditional and contemporary.

Overnight in Edinburgh.

Included Meal(s): Dinner, if required.

Day 2 Edinburgh: City Touring

Today we depart on a full day Edinburgh tour to visit Edinburgh Castle, Holyrood House and Rosslyn Chapel Edinburgh is one of the most beautiful cities in Europe.

We start our sojourn in Scotland's capital with a tour of one of Europe's foremost attractions; the dramatic Edinburgh Castle. Standing aloof and massive on its hill, Edinburgh Castle both dominates and adds majesty to the deep historical ambiance of the city. Within the castle itself we view the Honors of Scotland Exhibition and display of Scottish crown jewels, visit St. Margaret's Chapel, see the famous 500-year-old cannon "Mons Meg", then stroll through the Great Hall. We take lunch in a local café then next visit Holyrood House Palace, long the residence of the Scottish Royal family, now HRH the (English) Queen's official residence in Scotland. We view the 17th century state rooms, the historic apartments where Mary Queen of Scots lived, and the ruined abbey of Holy Rood.

Our final visit today is to Rosslyn Chapel. Rosslyn Chapel was founded as a Roman Catholic collegiate church in the mid-15th century CE by William Sinclair, 1st Earl of Caithness. After the Scottish Reformation in 1560 CE Roman Catholic worship in the Chapel ended, although the Sinclair family continued to be Roman Catholics until the early 18th century. Now the Chapel belongs to the Scottish Episcopal Church. More recently, the Chapel has featured in speculative theories regarding Freemasonry and the Knights Templar, including the Dan Brown book, The De Vinci Code.

After our visit we return to our hotel with the evening is at leisure (we include lunch instead of dinner today owing to our full day, an early start tomorrow, and the lingering effects of jetlag).

Overnight in Edinburgh.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Lunch

Day 3 Edinburgh - Ullapool via Inverness & Corrieshalloch Gorge

This morning we depart our Edinburgh hotel, and drive up into the Scottish Highlands to the West Coast fishing port of Ullapool.

En route, we stop at Queen's View, most iconic viewpoint at the heart of Highland Perthshire. When Queen Victoria visited in 1866 CE, she assumed that the sweeping view west along Loch Tummel was named after her – but she was wrong. We think the view was really named after Isabella, the first wife of Robert the Bruce, who lived more than 500 years earlier. We then continue our journey, stopping in Inverness with a break for lunch.

We continue to Ullapool through breathtakingly beautiful scenery, and visit the fantastic Corrieshalloch Gorge with its stunning views, en route. Ullapool is the main town in the Northwest Highlands and seems to float on the surface of lovely Loch Broom. It is a gateway for highland walking and the lush scenery immediately around Loch Broom contrasts with the dramatic mountain ranges just to the south through which we drive on todays' journey. The Fannichs are a range of nine 'Munros' that sit like sentinels along a fine ridge, crowned by shapely Sgurr Mor. On the opposite side of the main road is the Beinn Dearg range, a craggier, steeper group of peaks with fine views. West of

Loch Broom, reached via the Destitution Road, is the peaceful haven of Dundonnell. This area has a great variety of scenery, from the beautiful woodlands of Corrie Hallie to the lonely coastline of the Scoraig Peninsula and the great wilderness of the Fisherfield peaks. Towering over all is An Teallach, perhaps the most magnificent mountain in all of Scotland. On arrival in Ullapool, we check into our hotel.

Overnight in Ullapool.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 4 From Ullapool: Half-day Highlands Walk - Bone Caves, Traligill Caves & Inchnadampf

This morning we depart Ullapool on a half-day Highlands walk to visit the Bone Caves, Traligill Caves and Inchnadampf. Our walk today is along the beautiful limestone valley of the Allt nan Uamh (Burn of the Caves) to the famous Bone Caves. Here the bones of bears, reindeer and wolves have been discovered. In past times, these majestic animals roamed in this part of the country. From the Bone Caves, we make our way up towards the foot of Breabag, from here we turn north walking pathless towards Inchnadampfh. Another stunning limestone landscape opens up in front of us. The Traligill Valley, named by Norsemen, translates as 'the Valley of the Trolls', which we explore, and make our way to the impressive entrances of the largest cave system in Scotland. The entire area is surrounded by excellent mountain views. We finish this superb walk at the walker's car park in Inchnadamph. After our walk, we return to the hotel.

Walk Summary: About 4.5 hours of moderately-easy walking with about 400m (1,312 feet) elevation gain/loss; distance of about 10 km (6.4 mi) today; terrain is mildly undulating on crushed gravel and natural path with some stairs, some unmarked path through open fields, rocks, and undulating ground.

Overnight in Ullapool.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 5 Ullapool - Ferry to Stornoway: Half-day Lewis Tour

This morning we transfer to the dock to catch the morning ferry from Ullapool to Stornoway on the Western Isles (Outer Hebrides). The two-hour sail first follows Loch Broom passing the Summer Isles, then strikes out across the Minch to Stornoway, the main town on the Isle of Lewis and capital of the Outer Hebrides. During the crossing, it is possible to see dolphins, whales and many species of seabirds. One arrival, we are met off the ferry and transfer to our hotel for check-in. There is some time to settle in and arrange our own lunch.

In the afternoon, we depart on a half-day tour of Lewis to explore the northwest coast, from Arnol with its historic old "blackhouse", through the traditional crofting townships, to Port of Ness and the very northern tip of the island – the Butt of Lewis. From the Lighthouse at the Butt of Lewis there is nothing but sea all the way to Canada!

Overnight in Stornoway.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 6 From Stornoway: Full-day Walking - West Coast of Lewis

This morning we depart on a full-day of moderate walking on one of Lewis Island's finest walks (the biggest of our trip!) following the clifftops, stacks and bays of the coastline, between An Gearrannan and Bragar on the Great Bernera Trail (we walk a section of this route as determined by the weather and our guide). The trail follows the coastline but is infrequently waymarked, so much of the route is pathless and we are led through some areas of boggy ground. This is a rewarding and bracing walk with wonderful long views, plus dramatic cliff, coastal and seascapes.

Walk Summary: About 5 hours of moderate cliff-top walking with insignificant elevation gain/loss (mostly flat) on an undulating route; distance of about 14km (9.4 mi), terrain undulates on natural path unmarked path through open fields, rocks, and undulating ground.

Overnight in Stornoway (box lunch included today, dinner on your own).

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Lunch

Day 7 From Stornoway: Full-day Tour - Stone Fort, Gearrannan, Shawbost

On our final day in the Outer Hebrides, we depart on a full-day tour of Stornoway to explore some of the prehistoric remains on the island and view the island's finest beaches. Our first visit is the circular stone fort, or Broch, at Carloway, followed by a visit to the more traditional crofting communities such as Gearrannan and Shawbost. Then it's on to the ancient stone circle at Callanish. In the afternoon, we drive to the remote district of Uig to explore the fine sandy beaches and dramatic sea cliffs of Bhaltos. This is the wilderness of the Western Isles at its finest. We spend much of the day afoot, walking the monuments and scenes natural beauty. After our tour we return to the hotel.

Overnight in Stornoway.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 8 Stornoway - Harris - Tarbet - Ferry to Portree (Isle of Skye)

Today we drive south, through the wild moorlands of the Isle of Lewis to the smaller and more mountainous Isle of Harris – almost but not quite an island on its own. Famous for the locally-produced cloth, Harris Tweed, Harris is also home to the highest mountains in the Outer Hebrides and the stunning white sands of Luskentyre. We spend a couple of hours exploring the natural beauty of South Harris, then have free time to arrange our own lunch in the small port of Tarbet, followed by free time to wander the town. In the late afternoon, we take the ferry from Tarbet to Portree on the Isle of Skye (Inner Hebrides). On arrival, we transfer to our hotel for check-in.

Overnight in Portree.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 9 Skye: Full-day tour - Dunvegan, Kilmuir Croft Museum, Clan Donald Center

Today we depart on a full-day tour to visit Castle Dunvegan, Kilmuir Croft Museum and the Clan Donald Center. Castle Dunvegan is the seat of the clan MacLeod, and contains state rooms, video presentation, dungeons and ghostly legend. Situated on the shore of the major inlet to the north west of the Island, Dunvegan's picturesque gardens overlook the beach, and wind-swept fields where herds of distinctive Angus cattle graze.

We now drive south, the sharp teeth of the Cuillin hills always in view, to visit the Kilmuir croft Museum, which portrays the life style, often harsh, of the crofters. We also pause at the Flora McDonald Monument, erected to honor the famous woman for the assistance (and rumoured love affair) she gave to Bonnie Prince Charlie during his attempt to wrest the throne of Scotland and England from the Hanoverian monarch in London in 1745 CE. We then drive to the south of the Island to visit the Clan Donald Center, an impressive award-winning museum set in 40 acres of castle and gardens. An audio-visual presentation compliments the armory and artifacts displays.

In the late afternoon we return to our hotel in Portree (today we include lunch instead of dinner).

Overnight in Portree.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Lunch

Day 10 Skye: Full-day Walking tour - Trotternish, Old Man of Storr

Today we depart, taking packed lunches with us, on a full-day leisurely Isle of Skye walking tour to the Trotternish Peninsula, which is about 20 miles long and 8 miles wide, with a ridge running along most of its length and containing some unusual rock formations, one of which is the Old Man of Storr, the highest mountain in north Skye at 2,358 ft. The Old Man of Storr is a column of rock 165 ft high, and one of the most

photographed features on the Isle of Skye. This entire area is festooned with strange and wonderful rock formations caused by a massive landslide after the last ice age. Lava solidified over sedimentary rock which then collapsed under the immense weight and slid towards the sea, leaving behind this otherworldly landscape. Routes and regions in which we conduct our walking will be determined by the local guide, and may be influenced by the weather and local conditions. The classification for walks we will consider will be easy to moderate (walking times and distances may vary from the below summary at the guide's discretion).

Walk Summary: About 4 hours of moderate hill walking with perhaps 100m elevation gain/loss on an undulating route; distance of about 9km (6 mi) today; terrain undulates on natural paths and unmarked paths through open fields, rocks, and undulating ground.

Overnight in Portree.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 11 Skye: Full-day Leisurely Walking - The Cuillins

Today we depart, taking packed lunches with us, on a full day leisurely Isle of Sky walking tour to the Cuillin Ridge area, which is composed of 'Gabbro', a rough volcanic rock with magnetic properties rending a compass entirely untrustworthy! The range consists of 11 'munros' (peaks over 3,000 ft), with numerous other smaller peaks. Best viewed from Sligachan at the north end of the range, is one of the most striking peaks - the serrated Sgurr Nan Gillean. Another peak, Am Bastier (3,070 ft) is Gaelic for 'The Executioner' -- our guide may well relate the story. Your own research may reveal routes that are rather advanced -- not to worry! Our exact route will be determined by the local guides with a view to keeping within our moderate aspirations, and may be influenced by the weather and local conditions. After our walk, we return to our hotel in Portree (dinner on your own this evening).

Walk Summary: About 4 hours of moderate hill walking with perhaps 100m elevation gain/loss on an undulating route; distance of about 6-8km (4-6 mi) today; terrain undulates on natural paths and unmarked paths through open fields, rocks, and undulating ground.

Overnight in Portree.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Lunch

Day 12 Skye - Oban via Eilean Donan Castle, Fort William, Glen Coe Walk

Today we depart the Isle of Skye and drive south to Oban via visits to Eilean Donan Castle, Fort William, and Glencoe. Soon after we cross the bridge to the mainland from Skye, our route takes us along the lakeshore of a sweeping valley, where we catch our first glimpse of the iconic 13th century CE Eilean Donan Castle, beautifully situated on a small Island out in the Loch. The castle is the ancestral home of the McRaes, and has been fully restored to its original splendor. It is perhaps the most famous image of a Scottish castle and was used to good effect in such films as 'The Highlander'. We pause here to take photographs (exterior only) then continue our journey, passing through Fort William en route to Glen Coe, "The Glen of Weeping". Arguably the most beautiful glen in Scotland, Glen Coe was the location of the famous massacre of 38 members of the MacDonald clan at the hands of soldiers of King William III (their killers were actually other lowland Scots in protestant British employ) in 1692 CE, following the Glorious Revolution of 1688 CE. The Glorious Revolution ousted the oppressive British King, James II, a Catholic, and gave the crown to William of Orange, a Dutch protestant nobleman who married Mary, daughter of beheaded Charles I, giving William legitimacy. The Glorious Revolution turned the UK into a protestant country for good, at the same time it removed much of the English monarch's power in favor of an elected parliament, taking tax collection and major fiscal spending out of the hands of the king, and putting it into the hands of an elected body. This created the first constitutional monarchy, and it also made England's parliament by far the most representative political body in history to date.

After a break for lunch en route, we continue to Glencoe Visitors' Center located not far from the spot where the slaughter took place, visit the center, then depart into the valley for our 2–3-hour Glen Coe walk. We walk to Coire Gabhail, a small valley at 650 ft. the walk takes an hour and a half without stops, but with photo stops and pauses to view the beautiful countryside it will take about 2.5 hours. This walk is classified as easy to moderate, and takes participants through stunning scenery to a valley hidden high among the mountains of Glencoe.

Walk Summary: About 2 hours of easy walking with little to no elevation gain/loss; distance of about 5 km (2.8 mi) over mildly undulating terrain on crushed gravel and natural paths with some slopes and across open fields.

Ovenight on Oban.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 13 Oban: Isle of Mull & Isle of Iona, Duart Castle

Today we depart on a full day excursion to visit the Islands of Mull & Iona.

We transfer to the harbour and catch the ferry to the Isle of Mull, where we visit the small but imposing Duart Castle, built on a rocky outcrop at the northeastern edge of the Isle of Mull. Duart Castle has seen much history including clan battles, Cromwellian invasion and Jacobite uprisings. Originally built in 1360 CE when Lachlan Lubanach Mclean, 5th Chief of the Clan Maclean, married Mary Macdonald, the daughter of the powerful Clan Donald 'the Lords of the Isles'. Duart was part of her dowry and despite the legitimacy of the marriage being challenged, the castle and lands became the possession of the Clan Maclean. Murders, battles, betrayals and feuds fly like flags in the history of the castle. One of the last to support the catholic Stuart King Charles I in the Civil War of the 1640s CE, one Charles had been beheaded for betraying England to continental Catholics, Cromwell sent six ships to capture the castle, but it survived unscathed due to a storm which sunk three of the ships. The clans Campbell, McDonald and MacLean fought over the castle for the next 300 years. Today the castle is in the hands of the McLeans.

Continuing our excursion, we drive across Mull to Fionnphort, where we take the passenger ferry to Iona, the tiny Isle made so famous by the arrival from Ireland of St. Columba in 563 CE. This was Christianity's first arrival on Scottish soil. On Iona is a ruined 13th century CE Nunnery, and a restored Abbey of similar date, which we explore. We take lunch en route, and returning to Oban by ferry late afternoon.

We take lunch en route (dinner on your own this evening), and returning to Oban by ferry late afternoon.

Overnight in Oban.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Lunch

Day 14 Oban - Edinburgh

This morning we check out and drive back to Edinburgh, where we check in on arrival. The afternoon is free in Edinburgh for personal exploration and relaxation. This evening we gather in the hotel foyer and depart for our farewell meal in a local restaurant.

Overnight in Edinburgh.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 15 Departure

Departure from Edinburgh.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast