

SCOTTISH HIGHLANDS & ISLANDS

June 8-16, 2015



It's not just all about kilts and bagpipes! From the utterly charming UNESCO World Heritage-designated city of Edinburgh to the Great Glen with its mythical Loch Ness and Inverness; from the stunningly dramatic land and seascapes of the Isle of Skye to one of the world's most beautiful train journeys . . . Scotland packs a punch with its steep and fascinating history, strong cultural traditions, simply jaw-dropping scenery, a much-progressed and tasty culinary scene, the home of Scotch Whisky, and lovely first-rate accommodations along the way.

VentureOut

575 Pierce Street, Suite 604 • San Francisco, CA 94117 • (888) 431-6789 • (415) 626-5678

info@venture-out.com • www.venture-out.com

The following is our planned itinerary, which is being published about a year in advance of operating this tour. It is possible that there will be changes to some of the specific sights visited during this program.

Day 1 — Meet in Edinburgh
Monday, June 8, 2015

We will come together at our 4-star hotel in the center of Edinburgh in the early evening for a welcome drink and to meet fellow travelers before heading out for our welcome dinner in this beautiful city.



*Meals included: Welcome Drink, Welcome Dinner
Overnight in Edinburgh*

{**Please Note:** We can arrange an extra night for you at our group hotel in Edinburgh before our tour begins depending on your travel plans. See “Arrival & Departure Logistics” towards the end of this program for further information regarding arrival into Edinburgh.}



Day 2 — Edinburgh

Beginning in **Edinburgh** — Scotland’s captivating capital — we see what makes this city so enticing: from its impressive, history-steeped medieval **castle** looking out over the city to **Old Town** and the **Royal Mile**; from lovely **New Town** (“new” meaning 1700s) to the ultramodern **Scottish Parliament** building; attractive Georgian- and Victorian-period **architecture**; the **Princes Street Gardens**; and the view from the volcanic crag that is **Calton Hill**. This will be a full-day tour of the city’s highlights.

Dinner will be on your own this evening, and Edinburgh has a great selection of restaurants.

*Meals included: Breakfast, Lunch
Overnight in Edinburgh*

Day 3 — Edinburgh

In the morning we’ll venture a short distance out of Edinburgh to visit a place that’s been cloaked in legend for centuries. The riotously ornate **Rosslyn Chapel** is revered for its sublime 15th-century stone carvings – some of the finest in the world – and its past is steeped in intrigue and great mystery, probably accounting for its connection to myths and

legends and its appearance in *The Da Vinci Code*. Covering almost every square inch of stonework are human figures, animals, and plants.

After a very nice lunch outside of Edinburgh we'll head back into the city where you have free time to explore some further sights that interest you or perhaps do some shopping. Your dinner is open again this evening.

*Meals included: Breakfast, Lunch
Overnight in Edinburgh*



Day 4 — Perthshire / Inverness

Leaving Edinburgh and moving northward into the scenic **Highlands** we come first to picturesque **Perthshire** – the epitome of a well-groomed rural Scottish county and the long-established domain of Scotland's well-to-do country set. For lunch we call in at splendid **Blair Castle** – one of the country's grandest of grand houses in the middle of the Grampian Mountains — surrounded by extensive parklands and that once hosted

Queen Victoria. When this castle was besieged during the 1745 Jacobite rebellion it was the last instance of any castle being attacked in Scotland.

After lunch we call in at a single-malt **whisky distillery** – reputedly Scotland's smallest traditional distillery (hand-crafted as in Victorian times) and dating back to 1825 – where we learn about the making of Scotland's signature drink and enjoy a “nosing” (tasting). From here we continue to the north through the very scenic **Cairngorms National Park** with its mountains, forests and lochs, following much of the River Spey on our route, until we reach the city of Inverness.

*Meals included: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
Overnight in Inverness*

Day 5 – Around Inverness / Loch Ness

We are now in an area known as the **Great Glen**, defined by striking topography bringing together mountains and myths, history and wild nature, with views from almost every twist and turn in the roads. Using the small city of **Inverness** on the banks of the River Ness as our base we'll have a boat ride today to explore the famous, super-deep **Loch Ness** (home to the mythical monster) and a stop at the impressive ruins of the 13th-century **Urquhart Castle**, scenically sited on a rocky



promontory overlooking the loch. The castle has a complex history involving military offense and defense due to its strategic position in the Great Glen line of communication.

In the center of Inverness we stop in at the **Scottish Kiltmaker Visitor Centre**, an educational center of the tradition of tartan and also a shop with a variety of products for sale. The city itself makes for some pleasant independent strolling and shopping. Afterwards a short drive leads us to the nearby moorland at **Culloden**, which was the scene of the infamous and last-ever battle fought on British soil that ended the Jacobite forces' uprising (under Bonnie Prince Charlie) against the British in 1746 and was a turning point in the history of the Scottish nation. The Scots were hopelessly outnumbered here. Its name to this day can invoke raw feelings among Scots though it's also a place of natural beauty.

*Meals included: Breakfast, Lunch
Overnight in Inverness*



Day 6 – The Road to Skye

The next stage of our itinerary has us traveling to the far west of Scotland to the wonderful Isle of Skye. On our way we stop at one of the most iconic images of Scotland. **Eilean Donan Castle** perches on an islet set against a backdrop of mountains and guards the confluence of three lochs – Alsh, Long, and Duich. The unique beauty of the place has led it to appear in movies and television and is perhaps the most photographed sight in

Scotland after Edinburgh's castle. It connects to the mainland via a stone-arched bridge. Dating from the 14th century this romantic sight has what you'd expect in an ancient castle: massive stone walls, timber ceilings, and winding stairs.

Crossing over to Skye we settle into our lovely hotel perched above the town of **Portree**, one of the most attractive ports in northwest Scotland with a cliff-edged harbor, fishing boats, and multicolored houses. We have a delicious dinner awaiting us this evening.



*Meals included: Breakfast, Dinner
Overnight on the Isle of Skye*

Day 7 – Skye

The rugged beauty of the **Isle of Skye** has been proclaimed since the early 1800s when Sir Walter Scott visited. Mountains, sea, cliffs, lochs, glens, farming villages, castles, fine dining, arts and crafts – they're all here on this remarkable island, which is also an important center of **Gaelic culture and language**.

Skye has some extraordinary geological scenery to be seen on the **Trotternish Peninsula**, and then we head westward to the **Glendale** region where we may spot otters, seals, and dolphins off its rocky coast and eagles above. In a commanding position **Dunvegan Castle** has been the seat of the chiefs of Clan MacLeod for over 700 years. A curious note here is the scrappy remnant of the Fairy Flag, said to have been a gift from a fairy to the clan and thought to have miraculous powers when unfurled in battle, and the castle's gardens are attractive.

After a full day out in Skye we return to our base in Portree where you have an open dinner this evening. You may wish to walk into town or enjoy another meal at our hotel's excellent, award-winning restaurant.

*Meals included: Breakfast, Lunch
Overnight on the Isle of Skye*



Day 8 – Jacobite Steam Train

This morning we leave Skye and head back to the mainland via a short ferry ride to the town of Mallaig. Then we embark on one of the world's prettiest train journeys – on the famously scenic 42-mile **Jacobite Steam Train** route – passing birch and bracken-covered mountains, glassy lochs, the Caledonian Canal, and the 21-arch viaduct at Glenfinnan (where passengers get to live out *Harry Potter* fantasies). Disembarkation is in

Fort William, where we reboard our coach and head back down to Perthshire, where we have a final night's accommodation at a beautiful castle and a farewell dinner.

Meals included: Breakfast, Dinner

Day 9, Tuesday, June 16, 2015 – Departure,

We're about 90 minutes from the Edinburgh airport. Our coach will drop us there at 10:30am, and you'll be able to catch flights departing 11:30 or later. Alternatively, you can go into the city from the airport and take a train to other parts of Britain if you plan to travel around further.

Meals included: Breakfast

{Please Note: We can arrange a hotel night for you back in Edinburgh after the tour if you have an early flight out the next morning.}

The program outlined in the preceding pages is our planned itinerary, which is being published about a year in advance of operating the tour. It is possible that there will be changes to some of the specific sights visited during this program.

ACCOMMODATIONS

During our tour we'll be using excellent, comfortable 4- and 5-star properties that are recipients of numerous accolades and awash with plenty of character. Please note, however, that we reserve the right to make changes to our selection of hotels described here.

Fronted by a traditional Georgian townhouse facade the accommodation in **Edinburgh** is a stylish, contemporary hotel with a fun, entertaining vibe, attentive service, one of the best-known bars in Edinburgh, and just 33 rooms with luxury details like very nice bathroom goodies, pre-loaded in-room iPods, and contemporary, designer-clad interiors. The hotel is on a trendy street in New Town -- an excellent, central location close to shopping, restaurants, and bars.



In the **Inverness** area we'll be staying about a mile outside the city center at a hotel set in a woodland garden. It was once an 18th-century private mansion and has since been extended with a new wing. The property has hosted distinguished guests over the years including royals and film stars. There's a country-house atmosphere here, and the hotel has a fine restaurant with an extensive wine list and selection of single-malt whiskies. Facilities include a pool and spa.

On the **Isle of Skye** our selected hotel used to be a Victorian-period hunting lodge. From the property, set within 15 acres of mature private grounds, are views of the Cuillin Mountains, Portree's harbor, and the sea. With excellent dining options and a friendly staff, the hotel has received many accolades over the years. Its lounge boasts some 130 malt whiskies. The 27 luxurious rooms have reproduction antique furniture. It's also just a 10-minute walk down to the town.

Finally, our last evening will be spent in **Perthshire** in a beautiful renovated castle set in gorgeous countryside on the banks of Loch Faskally. Winner of Rural Hotel of the Year in 2014 this late 19th-century castle opened as a hotel in 2013 and is a unique luxurious experience. Further industry accolades have been received for its bar as well as the hotel's breakfast. A welcoming atmosphere, excellent service, and fine dining all come together to create a special experience.

TOUR COST and IMPORTANT TRIP DETAILS

\$4,295 per person (with 14-15 participants)
\$4,445 per person (with 12-13 participants)
\$4,695 per person (with 10-11 participants)

Tour pricing is based on double occupancy.
Single supplement: \$995

A note about tier pricing: There are certain fixed costs involved with operating a trip of this nature regardless of the number of participants who have signed up. With a smaller number of group members, the fixed costs (per person) are higher. In order to cover those fixed costs for a smaller-sized group, we prefer to charge a bit extra in order to ensure that the trip can run rather than have to cancel a trip due to a low number of sign-ups

Costs are based on double occupancy of a room. If you are traveling solo and wish to have your own room throughout the tour then the single supplement will apply. If you are traveling solo and wish to share a room, we will match you with a roommate if one is available. Should there be no one to pair you with, the single supplement fee will apply.



Tour Cost Includes:

- Accommodations for 8 nights in carefully selected high-end properties (4- and 5-star; see descriptions above)
- Abundant Scottish breakfast each morning in the hotels
- 5 group lunches
- 4 group dinners
- Welcome drink
- Entrance fees to all sights mentioned in the itinerary
- Whisky distillery tour and tasting
- Shared boat ride on Loch Ness
- Historic train journey
- Professionally licensed private tour guide traveling with the group
- Venture Out tour escort accompanying the group throughout the trip
- Ground transportation in a private comfortable bus (and a short shared-ferry ride)
- Drop-off at Edinburgh airport at end of tour

Tour Cost Does Not Include:

- Airfare
- Any meals not specified above
- Beverages with the included meals (usually coffee/tea is included)

- Additional hotel nights pre- or post-tour that may be desired or required by flight schedules or other factors
- Airport or train station transfers at the beginning of the tour
- Travel insurance
- Passports and other expenses of a personal nature such as minibar charges, laundry, telephone calls, etc.

Currency Exchange Rates: Our costs to operate this tour are tied directly and entirely to the exchange rate between the British Pound Sterling and the Dollar. Over the past few years the value of the U.S. dollar has fluctuated in quite a volatile manner against the Pound — and generally in an unfavorable direction for the dollar. *We reserve the right to alter the trip pricing indicated here should there be a significant fluctuation in the exchange rate from the time this tour is published.* Please read the Terms & Conditions that accompany the Trip Enrollment Form.

FACTORS TO CONSIDER:

While this is by no means an adventure-travel type of vacation you should be comfortable walking up to a couple of miles each day (though not all at once). Please check with us if you have any concerns in this area.



We have structured the days in this program in the most logically flowing way in order to keep driving times to a minimum. However, some days will see more driving than others. None of the driving is done at long, uninterrupted intervals. We stop throughout the day for our visits, thus breaking up the day’s activities. Our transportation will be in a comfortable small tour bus, and at no time will it feel like an endless road trip. We do cover a good bit of ground on our transfer days (Days 4, 6, and 8) – from 100 to 150 miles.

ARRIVAL & DEPARTURE LOGISTICS

At the time of publishing this program Edinburgh’s airport is served by just a few nonstop flights from the U.S. (from Newark and Chicago). This may change in the coming months should new routes be introduced. Otherwise, it’s easy to connect via many other cities (London Heathrow, London City, London Gatwick, Dublin, Paris, Brussels, Frankfurt, and possibly others). You can also fly into Glasgow and take a train to Edinburgh.



If you plan to be traveling in England before (or after) the Scotland tour you could reach

Edinburgh by rail. For example, from London there are trains all throughout the day, and the travel time is about 4½ hours.

It's straightforward to take a taxi from the airport or train station to the group hotel in Edinburgh, but we can also set up a private meet & greet and transfer service for you.

On the last day of the tour we will travel from our final hotel to the Edinburgh airport and be dropped there at 10:30am, so that you can catch flights from 11:30 onwards.

Alternatively, you can go into the city from the airport and take a train to other parts of Britain.

CAVEAT

While as accurate as possible at the time of printing, this itinerary should be considered an approximate indication of the schedule and scope of activities, trip routing, and meals, rather than an inflexible schedule of events. It is subject to change due to circumstances beyond our control. We reserve the right to maintain flexibility in order to take advantage of unforeseen opportunities. This trip is subject to the Limitation of Liability and all the Terms and Conditions as detailed in the Trip Enrollment Form.

To realize the maximum enjoyment from your Venture Out trip, we encourage participants to have flexibility, a sense of humor, curiosity and enthusiasm about new people and places, and an openness to the unexpected. With a spirit of adventure and positive attitude, we're sure you will have a very special travel experience. If you are uncertain about the level of comfort, difficulty, or any of the activities described in this itinerary, please email us or call Venture Out at 1-888-431-6789 to discuss your concerns.

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