

SCOTTISH HIGHLANDS & ISLANDS

July 12-20, 2017



It's not just all about kilts and bagpipes! From the utterly charming UNESCO World Heritage-designated city of Edinburgh to the stunningly dramatic land and seascapes of the Isle of Skye; from castles both intact and in moody ruins to Scotch Whisky distilleries . . . Scotland packs a punch with its steep and fascinating history, strong cultural traditions, jaw-dropping scenery, a very tasty culinary scene, 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 pages outline 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 Wednesday, July 12, 2017

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 and/or at the end of the tour 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 — Stirling Castle / Argyll

Leaving Edinburgh behind (for now) we venture westward to the impressive **Stirling Castle**. Perched on a volcanic crag at the top of its eponymous town this historic royal fortress and palace is among Britain’s most fascinating. Scotland’s two most important battles for independence were fought within sight of this hilltop stronghold. Views abound

from here. These vistas, combined with its physical situation, architecture, and very important historical significance, make Stirling Castle a grand sight. Among its most extraordinary components is the mid-16th century **Royal Palace**, where the Stuart monarchs resided and where Mary, Queen of Scots was crowned.

Stirling's beautifully preserved **Old Town**, where our lunch spot is located, is certainly worth exploring, too, with its wealth of noble buildings and cobbled streets.

The Lowland belt gives way to **Highlands** splendor as we head north from here into the **Argyll** region, where a multitude of lochs (narrow lakes or sea inlets) pepper the beautiful landscape reflecting the peaks and clouds above them. Evocative scenery takes hold as we wind our way around the "bonnie banks" of pretty **Loch Lomond** with 3,000-foot mountains flanking its sides, meandering on country roads through some grand mountain scenery, and eventually reaching our overnight spot on lovely **Loch Awe** where beautiful surroundings and a delicious dinner await us.

Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
Overnight on Loch Awe

Day 4 — Road to the Isles / Skye

Today we continue up through Argyll, passing through more beautiful Highlands scenery: rolling forested hills, spectacular mountains, more lochs, a view of **Castle Stalker** (appearing in the final scenes of *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*), and past **Ben Nevis** (Britain's highest peak at 4,400 feet).



Eventually we join the **Road to the Isles**. This 46-mile scenic route, passing birch and bracken-covered mountains and glassy lochs, will take us to **Glenfinnan**, where a monument to Bonnie Prince Charlie is erected, at one end of **Loch Shiel** – a beautiful setting. It was from here in 1745 that he began his (ill-fated) rebellion against the English. Depending on the weather and timing we may enjoy a pleasant walk of $\frac{3}{4}$ mile each way for a great view of Loch Shiel and the **Glenfinnan Viaduct** – the famous 21-arch rail bridge built in 1901 and featured in one of the *Harry Potter* films.

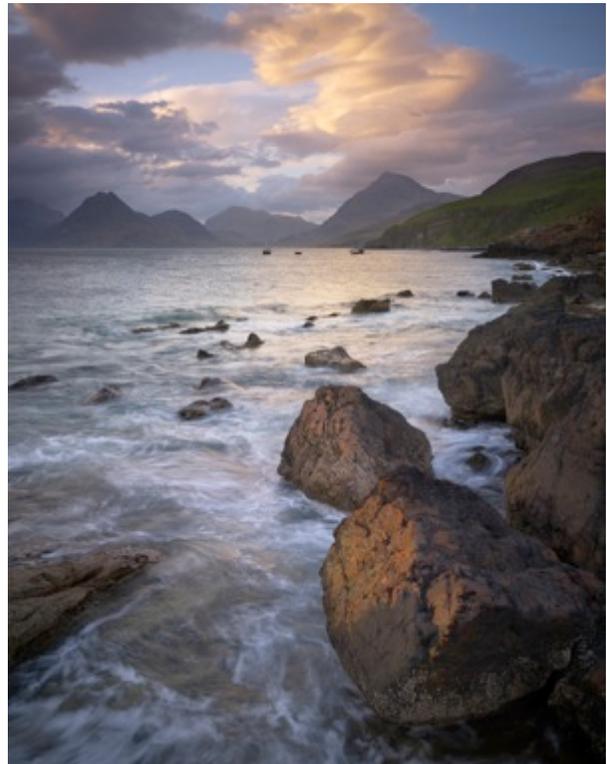
The end of the Road to the Isles is the little town of **Mallaig** where we have some lunch, and then from here it's a 30-minute ferry ride over to the wonderful **Isle of Skye**. We make our way up to **Portree**, one of the most attractive port towns in northwest Scotland with a cliff-edged harbor, fishing boats, and multicolored houses. It's here that we settle into our lovely hotel perched above the town and have a delicious dinner awaiting us this evening.

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

Day 5 – 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. The castle’s gardens are very pretty.



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 restaurant.

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

Day 6 – Eilean Donan Castle / Perthshire

The next stage of our itinerary has us returning to mainland Scotland. Shortly after crossing the Skye Bridge we’ll 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. After visiting the castle lunch is on your own at the very good self-service restaurant next to the gift shop.



Onward we travel now to **Perthshire**, the epitome of a well-groomed rural Scottish county and the long-established domain of Scotland’s well-to-do country set. But first, why not a

stop at a **Scotch whisky distillery** where we can have an interesting tour and learn about the process of producing a single-malt whisky — and follow this up with a tasting, of course.

Our splendid hotel for two nights is by the River Tummel, a pleasant 15-minute walk from the center of **Pitlochry** on the opposite bank of the river. Dinner is included at the hotel this evening.

*Meals included: Breakfast, Dinner
Overnight in Pitlochry*

Day 7 – Blair Castle / Pitlochry

This morning 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. Thirty rooms are open to the public, and they vividly portray upper-class Highland life from the 16th century onward. The entire estate covers over 200 square miles and is the seat of the Murray clan. The castle’s gardens are also worthy of a stroll.

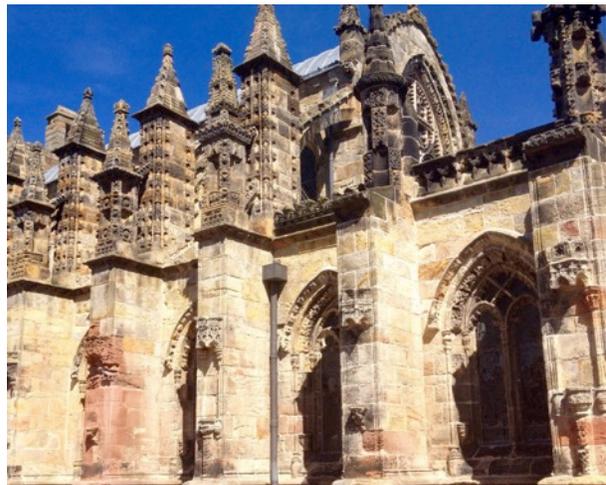


After our group lunch in the area we’ve got some free time to have a wander around the pleasant town of Pitlochry. You might also want to avail yourself of the very nice pool and spa at our hotel or enjoy a walk along the River Tummel. Dinner is open this evening.

*Meals included: Breakfast, Lunch
Overnight in Pitlochry*

Day 8 – Rosslyn Chapel / Edinburgh

Leaving Perthshire this morning we make our way back down to our starting point — Edinburgh. Before entering the city though, we skirt around to lovely **Rosslyn Chapel**, a place that’s been cloaked in legend for centuries. The riotously ornate 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.



Then back into handsome Edinburgh we go where you can spend the afternoon according to your interests — shopping, good museums, perhaps the Royal Yacht Britannia, or Palace of Holyroodhouse. There's much to choose from.

This evening we'll come together for our farewell dinner and recount the many extraordinary sights we got to enjoy along the way.

*Meals included: Breakfast, Dinner
Overnight in Edinburgh*

Day 9, Thursday, July 20, 2017 – Departure

Today we're homeward bound – or perhaps you'll be continuing your travels to further exciting destinations. A taxi to the Edinburgh airport or train station is easily arranged.

Meals included: Breakfast

{Please Note: We can arrange extra hotel nights for you in Edinburgh after the tour if you'd like to extend your stay.}

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. We stay two nights at the beginning and one night at the end of the tour. Additional hotel nights can be arranged for you on either end.



Originally an 18th-century cattle drover's inn and in one of the most beautiful locations nestled on the shore of Loch Awe, this secluded country inn in the **Argyll** region has cozy lounges, a dining room with an excellent standard of cuisine, open-plan lounges, snooker room, and lovely views. Spacious rooms are well appointed and contain custom

furnishings. Staff are friendly and experienced and the hotel has received several tourism awards over the years. Surrounded by mountains, Loch Awe, and forests, this inn, with a sense of peace and serenity, is a perfect spot for a relaxing overnight stopover.

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 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 center of Portree.

We stay two nights in **Perthshire** in a beautiful renovated castle (with a modern wing) set in gorgeous countryside on the banks of the River Tummel. 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. It's a pleasant 15-minute walk into the center of Pitlochry.

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 8-11 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
- 4 group lunches
- 5 group dinners
- Welcome drink
- Entrance fees to all sights mentioned in the itinerary
- Whisky distillery tour and tasting

- 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)

Tour Cost Does Not Include:

- Airfare
- Meals not specified above
- Beverages with the group meals (although coffee/tea is often included)
- Additional hotel nights pre- or post-tour that may be desired or required by flight schedules or other factors
- Gratuities for tour guide, driver(s), hotel porters, and restaurant staff
- Airport or train station transfers at the beginning and end 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 U.S. dollar. Over the past few years the value of the U.S. dollar has fluctuated in quite a volatile manner against the pound. *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), and you ought to have good walking shoes. 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. There’s a lot to see in Scotland (and even with the distances we cover we’re only scratching the surface, really). None of the driving is done at very 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 3, 4, 6, and 8) – about 100 to 150 miles on those days.

The weather is another factor to consider. This is northern Europe, and even in July there’s a chance it could be cool and there’s a chance it could be rainy. It’s the luck of the draw. On our previous Scotland tour we were blessed with mostly fine weather all along the way and got some rain only during one of the longer drives. We hope for the best but are realistic. Edinburgh has an average high temperature of 66 F in July and about 2.75 inches of rain for

the month. On the Isle of Skye the average high temperature is 61 F with rainfall about 3.8 inches over the month.

ARRIVAL & DEPARTURE LOGISTICS

At the time of publishing this program Edinburgh's airport is served by a few nonstop flights from North America (from JFK, Newark, Chicago, and Toronto). This may change in the coming months should new routes be introduced. Otherwise, it's easy to connect via many other cities (e.g., London Heathrow, London City, London Gatwick, Dublin, Paris, Brussels, Frankfurt, Amsterdam, and possibly others).



Alternatively, you can fly into Glasgow and take a train to Edinburgh, which only takes about an hour from central Glasgow or around 2 hours from Glasgow airport.

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. (There are also many flights between the various London airports and Edinburgh.)

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 transfer service for you.

The tour ends in Edinburgh as well, so you can do any of the above, in reverse, to go where you need to.

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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