

BEST OF SCOTLAND

APRIL 2027
14 days

GLASGOW AND OUR STARTING HOTEL

Scotland's largest city is a vibrant metropolis known for its rich history, cultural diversity and a dynamic arts scene.

From its impressive Victorian and Edwardian buildings to its modern art galleries, there's something of interest for everyone.

Our guests will be starting the tour at the Dakota Hotel which offers a combination of luxury, convenience and hospitality in a central Glasgow location providing access to many of the city's museums, galleries, shops, pubs and restaurants.

DAY 1 GLASGOW, SCOTLAND (B, D)

Today is the start day of the tour and is set aside for the arrival of all our guests, so no tour activities have been planned for today.

Regardless of your time of arrival, you will be transferred from the airport to the hotel. Our tour leader will then meet you in the lobby and will assist with the check-in process as required.

Please be aware that your room may not be ready until around 3 pm. If you arrive earlier, your luggage can be stored with the hotel staff in the interim.

For any guests who choose to arrive a day earlier and are planning to go out to explore parts of the city today, our tour leader will hold an optional short orientation session at the hotel right after breakfast. This session will cover the layout of the city, the location of some of the important sites, details of the full tour itinerary and a few other items of interest.

In the late afternoon, please plan to join the tour leader for a complimentary happy-hour and welcome dinner together.

Overnight at the Dakota Hotel.

DAY 2 GLASGOW (B, L)

Breakfast at the hotel.

This morning, we will head out for a simple panorama bus tour through a few interesting parts of eastern Glasgow that may include photo stops at sites such as People's Palace, Tennant's Brewery, Necropolis, St. Mungo Museum of Religious Life, Glasgow Cathedral and so on.

We will then stop and visit the Riverside Museum, located at the junction of the Rivers Kelvin and Clyde. It houses the city's transport and technology collections, which have been gathered over the centuries and reflect the important part Glasgow has played in the world through its contributions to heavy industries like shipbuilding, train manufacturing and engineering.

We then continue into Kelvingrove Park where we stop at the Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum. Here, you will have some free time to explore things that interest you the most such as the gallery itself, parts of the park or parts of Glasgow University such as the famous cloisters and the Hunterian Museum.

Around 1:00 pm, we'll enjoy lunch together.

After lunch, we'll continue to the south of the city where we'll be dropped at the

incredible Burrell Collection for a personal visit.

The museum offers a rich and immersive experience through display of the vast and eclectic art collection of Sir William Burrell, a wealthy Scottish shipping magnate and art collector who passed away at the age of 96 in 1958. It features over 9,000 objects spanning various art forms and historical periods including paintings, sculptures, ceramics, tapestries and artifacts from ancient civilizations. Highlights of the collection include works by artists such as Rodin, Degas and Cézanne, as well as artifacts from ancient Egypt, China, and medieval Europe.

The museum's tranquil setting within Pollock Country Park offers visitors the chance to enjoy both art and nature in one visit.

We plan to return to the hotel by around 5:30 pm to allow everyone time to get re-packed for tomorrow's departure from Glasgow.

Free for dinner tonight.

Overnight at the Dakota Hotel.

DAY 3 GLASGOW – INVERARAY – TARBERT (B, L, D)

Breakfast at the hotel.

This morning, after breakfast, we leave Glasgow and drive westward into highland council areas of Argyll and Bute.

On the way, we will make a quick stop at the Golden Hill Antonine Wall Fort, a simple UNESCO site to add to your collection.

We then continue to the picturesque town of Inveraray, located on the western shore of Loch Fyne.

Inveraray is steeped in history, with its origins dating back to the 17th century. The town's architecture reflects its heritage, with well-preserved Georgian buildings lining its quaint streets.

The town is perhaps best known for Inveraray Castle, the ancestral seat of the Dukes of Argyll. This stunning castle is set amidst lush gardens and has a rich history dating back to the 15th century when it was originally built as a fortress. It was later reconstructed in the 18th century in the neoclassical style for the 3rd Duke of Argyll, Chief of Clan Campbell.

The castle is renowned for its stunning architecture, characterized by its fairytale-like turrets, battlements and picturesque setting. The castle's interiors are equally impressive, featuring opulent rooms adorned with fine artworks, tapestries, and period furniture.

The castle has served as a filming location for several movies and TV shows, including short segments of the popular TV series "Downton Abbey" and the Diplomat.

Upon arrival in Inveraray, we will visit the castle.

Afterwards, we will enjoy lunch at one of our favourite restaurants in town.

After lunch, we offer some free time to enjoy exploring Inveraray's short main street with its charming shops offering a range of locally crafted Scottish goods.

We then begin our drive south toward Tarbert and enroute, we may have time to visit Crarae Woodland Garden or Brainport Heritage Trail.

We then continue south to Tarbert and check in to our castle.

Dinner and overnight at Stonefield Castle.

DAY 4 TARBERT TO ISLAY (B, L, D)

Breakfast at the hotel.

This morning, we board the ferry to the Inner Hebrides, a diverse range of islands, each with its own character and attractions. Some of the most notable islands include Skye, Mull, Islay, Jura and Tiree.

We chose Islay as your introduction to the Inner Hebrides.

Islay is home to some ancient ruins and historic villages, providing insights into Scotland's past. Visitors also explore local crafts, art, the Islay Woollen Mill and a local museum showcasing the island's cultural heritage.

As well, the waters surrounding the Inner Hebrides are teeming with life, including seals, dolphins, whales and seabirds as well as deer.

But, most importantly, Islay has unique attractions in the form of whisky distilleries producing a renowned product - peaty and smoky single malt whiskies which attract enthusiasts from around the world.

For the remainder of today and the full day tomorrow, we will visit various sites on the island such as:

- we will spend a few hours on a local wildlife boat tour which takes us along the southeast coast of the island, sharing some interesting history along the way. We will also get to see three of the island's famous distilleries from the water. Once we are in the conservation area, we will have the opportunity to spot a variety of local wildlife possibly including red deer, an assortment of bird species and possibly seals;
- a lunch at the Ardbeg distillery;
- a full tour of the Lagavulin distillery;
- a panoramic photographic drive to Caol Ila, Bunnahabhain and Bruichladdich distilleries;
- visit to the museum of Islay Life;
- visit to Finlaggan Trust;
- visit to the Islay Woollen Mill, first established in 1883.

Since its re-opening in 1981 it has been owned and run by a husband-and-wife team, Gordon and Sheila Covell. Their traditional family-run business initially used two restored Dobcross looms dating from the 1920s and for decades, Gordon, Sheila and their son Marcus worked together to weave cloth that they designed in house.

Unfortunately, during a flood in December 2023 the looms were both damaged. Since that time, the family has had their tweeds woven for them on the Scottish Mainland.

King Charles III, Princess Anne and the late Queen Elizabeth II have all visited the Mill on separate occasions during their former holidays on Islay.

Our visit will be to the original mill, which now operates as a shop, where an excellent range of top-quality woven fabrics are displayed. These were, and still are, much in demand by the Hollywood film industry. The designs have been featured in *Braveheart*, *Forrest Gump*, *Rob Roy*, *Far and Away*, *December Bride*, *Chaplin*, *Kidnapped*, *Kenneth Brannagh's Hamlet*, *Wind in the Willows*, *The Legend of Bagger Vance*, *Amazing Grace* and *The Spiderwick Chronicles*;

- We will also have free time to explore the main town of Bowmore on our own and perhaps to do a little shopping.

The exact schedule of activity today and tomorrow will be determined by our guide.

This afternoon, we will check in for a two-night stay and this evening we will enjoy dinner and drinks together. Slainte!

Overnight at Bridgend Hotel.

DAY 5 ISLAY (B, L, D)

Breakfast at the hotel.

Today, we continue our visits to planned sites around Islay.

Lunch included at an appropriate time.

Dinner and overnight at Bridgend Hotel.

DAY 6 ISLAY - FREE MORNING & FERRY TO THE MAINLAND (B, D)

Breakfast at the hotel.

Free time will be available this morning to get repacked and to enjoy a local walk or simply to relax at the hotel.

At about 11:30, we will leave the hotel in order to check in for the ferry by noon.

Lunch is not included today, but you won't go hungry. The ferry has a very good on-board cafeteria offering good food at reasonable prices.

We should arrive at the ferry terminal about 3 pm and will then drive about 45 minutes to our hotel and check in for a one-night stay on our way to Inverness.

Dinner and overnight at the Crinan Hotel.

DAY 7 CRINAN – FT. WILLIAM – INVERNESS (B, D)

Breakfast at the hotel.

Today, we continue our drive northward toward the city of Inverness, the capital of the highlands, renowned for its stunning landscapes, rich history and cultural heritage. Our total driving time will be about four hours and we will be stopping a few times along the way.

The first stop will be in the Glencoe area, perhaps Scotland's most famous and most scenic glen, which is a narrow valley deep in the mountains. Glencoe is a very popular destination for walkers and climbers, partly because of its scenic qualities and partly because it has easy access off the main north-south road.

Around noon, we will stop in the town of Fort William and offer some free time for you to explore the main street on your own and enjoy lunch at your leisure. The main street of town, High Street, offers a lively and eclectic mix of shops and eateries.

The town is surrounded by stunning natural scenery, with Loch Linnhe to the south and towering mountains to the north. It is known as the gateway to Ben Nevis, the highest peak in the British Isles.

After lunch, we continue our drive north to Drumnadrochit, where we can visit the famous Urquhart Castle ruins before boarding the Jacobite Cruise up to Inverness.

Upon arrival, we transfer to our hotel, where we check in for a two-night stay.

We'll have dinner together at one of our favourite restaurants downtown, about a 3 minute walk from the hotel.

Overnight at the Radisson River Ness Hotel.

DAY 8 INVERNESS (B, D)

Breakfast at the hotel.

Today we will enjoy a full-day tour around the Inverness area.

This will include visits to local sites such as Dunrobin Castle, Clava Cairns and Culloden Battlefield.

The timing of the visits will depend on local traffic and will be determined by our guide.

Dunrobin Castle is a turreted, opulent castle which has been Clan Sutherland's home since the 1400s. During our visit, we will also have a chance to enjoy a demonstration of falconry.

Free for lunch.

Clava Cairns is an archaeological site that provides a window into Scotland's ancient past. Its well-preserved cairns, standing stones and astronomical alignments offer visitors a glimpse into the beliefs and practices of the people who inhabited the Highlands thousands of years ago.

Culloden Battlefield is a historic site where the 1745 Jacobite Rising came to a tragic end. Jacobite supporters, seeking to restore the Stuart monarchy to the British thrones gathered on 16 April 1746 to fight the Duke of Cumberland's government troops. It was the last pitched battle on British soil and, in less than an hour, around 1,500 men were slain – more than 1,000 of them Jacobites, leading to a Jacobite collapse and rout.

For dinner and music tonight, we will take you out to one of our favourite local restaurants in Inverness.

Overnight at the Radisson River Ness Hotel.

DAY 9 INVERNESS TO BALLATER (B, L, D)

Breakfast at the hotel.

Today we drive east, into the council areas of Moray and Aberdeenshire where, over the next two and a half days, we will visit several interesting sites related to Scottish culture and heritage, Scottish Whisky, scenic landscapes and natural beauty.

This morning, upon arrival in the town of Elgin, we will first include a photo stop at the Elgin Cathedral and, from here, we can walk a few blocks and visit "Johnstons of Elgin", a world-famous creator of estate tweeds, knitwear and woven accessories initially founded in 1797. The Elgin mill is Scotland's only vertical weaving mill, meaning all processes from fibre to finishing happen on-site. This offers a rare insight into the industrial heritage. The mill, its grounds, its old buildings, the weaving machines, archives and artwork offer an aesthetic pleasure just as visiting a museum might. It's an opportunity to wander and take photos.

We will then drive into the countryside and enjoy lunch together at one of our favourite local pubs or restaurants.

After lunch, we will enter Speyside where we will visit one of the most famous distilleries.

The order of visits and the timing will be determined by our guide.

We plan to arrive at our hotel by about 5:30 and we will check in for a two-night stay.

Dinner and overnight at Darroch Learg Hotel in Ballater.

DAY 10 ABERDEENSHIRE (B, L, D)

Breakfast at the hotel.

Today we continue exploration of this beautiful area.

We will begin with a visit to Balmoral Castle, the favourite summer home of the late Queen Elizabeth II and a private residence of the British Royal Family since 1852.

The castle and grounds offer stunning Scottish Highland scenery, royal history and beautiful gardens. Enjoy the walking trails and the estate's peaceful, natural charm.

Lunch is included enroute today at one of our favourite pubs.

This afternoon, we will try our hand at clay shooting, rifle target shooting, archery and crossbow.

Dinner and overnight at Darroch Learg Hotel.

DAY 11 DRIVE TO EDINBURGH (B)

Breakfast at the hotel.

Today we head south to the city of Edinburgh.

On the way this morning, we'll visit Crathes Castle and then continue to Stonehaven.

Free for lunch in Stonehaven.

This afternoon, we'll stop at the amazing Dunnottar Castle, a medieval fortress located on a rocky headland south of Aberdeen.

The castle is perched atop a rugged cliff, providing breathtaking views of the surrounding coastline. Its dramatic setting makes it one of Scotland's most picturesque castles and a favorite among photographers and sightseers.

We plan to arrive at our hotel in Edinburgh Old Town by about 5:30 pm and we'll check in for a three-night stay.

Free for dinner. Our hotel is surrounded by restaurants and pubs and the tour leader will have suggestions.

Overnight at the Radisson Blu Hotel.

DAY 12 EDINBURGH (B, L)

Breakfast at the hotel.

Welcome to the Old Town!

Edinburgh's Old Town is a captivating labyrinth of narrow alleys, cobblestone streets and centuries-old buildings, all steeped in history and myth. It's a UNESCO World Heritage Site, known for its medieval and reformation-era architecture with landmarks like Edinburgh Castle looming over the city atop an extinct volcano and the Royal Mile, a historic street that stretches from the castle in the west to the Palace of Holyroodhouse in the east.

Walking along the Royal Mile, you'll encounter a mix of tourist shops, pubs, historic sites and hidden closes (alleyways) that lead to secret courtyards and gardens. The Old Town is also home to notable attractions like St. Giles' Cathedral, the Scottish Parliament and the Museum of Edinburgh.

Today, we will enjoy a full-day in Edinburgh Old Town.

We'll begin by taking a detailed look at Real Mary King's Close, located under the Edinburgh City Chambers on the Royal Mile. It took its name from one

Mary King, a merchant burgess who resided on the Close in the 17th century.

We then will visit the famous Edinburgh Castle which has played a prominent role in Scottish history and has served variously as a royal residence, an arsenal, a treasury, a national archive, a mint, a prison, a military fortress and the home of the Honours of Scotland – the Scottish regalia.

Lunch at a local restaurant.

This afternoon we'll enjoy a guided walking tour of Old Town with a local guide.

Free for dinner tonight.

Overnight at the Radisson Blu Hotel.

DAY 13 EDINBURGH (B, D)

Breakfast at the hotel.

Today is an entirely free day to explore the Old Town on your own and perhaps do a little shopping for the folks back home.

You may also decide to explore Edinburgh's New Town, a stunning example of Georgian urban planning and architecture. It was constructed in the 18th and 19th centuries as a response to the overcrowding and unsanitary conditions of the medieval Old Town. Designed primarily by architect James Craig, the New Town is characterized by its wide streets, spacious squares and neoclassical buildings.

Tonight, we will have a farewell dinner together at one of our favourite restaurants in Old Town, just a short walk from the hotel.

Overnight at the Radisson Blu Hotel.

DAY 14 DEPART EDINBURGH (B)

Breakfast at the hotel.

TrailFinders will provide our guests with transportation to the airport at appropriate times today.