



Inverness & the Northern Highlands & Islands

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Why Go?

Scotland's vast melancholy soul is here, an epic land whose stark beauty indelibly imprints upon the hearts of those who see it. Mist, peat, whisky, heather... and long, sunblessed summer evenings that repay the many days of horizontal drizzle.

The region's capital, Inverness, is backed by the craggy Cairngorms, which draw skiers and walkers to its slopes. Further north, ancient stones are testament left by prehistoric builders in Caithness, and across the water on the magical Orkney and remote Shetland Islands – where wind keeps the vegetation at a minimum – isolation makes it a haven for sea birds and more.

The most epic scenery – you really need an orchestra to do it justice – is in the far northwest, and it continues on to Skye, where the mighty Cuillin Ridge towers jaggedly in the setting sun. Beyond here, the Outer Hebrides offer the nation's best beaches and a glimpse of traditional life.

Best Places to Eat

- » Albannach (p113)
- » Three Chimneys (p923)
- » Contrast Brasserie (p888)
- » Lime Tree (p902)

Best Places to Stay

- » The Torridon (p917)
- » Toravaig House Hotel (p921)
- » Rocpool Reserve (p888)
- » West Manse (p944)
- » Brinkies Guest House (p940)
- » Shetland Lighthouse Cottages (p947)

When to Go

In January hit the Cairngorms for skiing or the Shetland Islands for Up Helly Aa, a fiery Viking festival.

The long, long evenings in June up here bathe heart-achingly sublime landscapes in a dreamlike light.

September is the ideal time for hiking and hill walking – midges are dying off, but the weather is still reasonably good.

Inverness & the Northern Highlands & Islands Highlights

- 1 Hiking among the hills, lochs and forests of beautiful **Glen Affric** (p891)
- 2 Dipping your toes in the water at the beautiful beaches on **Harris** (p928) and **Barra** (p931)
- 3 Shouldering the challenge of the **Cuillin Hills** (p921), whose rugged silhouettes brood over the skyscape of Skye
- 4 Picking your jaw up off the floor as you marvel at the Highland scenery of the **far northwest** (p911)
- 5 Launching into a **sea-kayak** (p918) to explore the waters around the Isle of Skye
- 6 Shaking your head in astonishment at extraordinary **Skara Brae** (p939) and **Maes Howe** (p938), prehistoric perfection that predates the pyramids
- 7 Island-hopping Orkney's **Northern Islands** (p933), where crystal azure waters lap against glittering white-sand beaches
- 8 Capering with puffins or spotting orcas in the Shetland Islands' **nature reserves** (p945)
- 9 Soaking up the scenery in magnificent **Glen Coe** (p899)
- 10 Making it to the summit of **Ben Nevis** (p903) – and being able to see the view

