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Itineraries

A Highland Fling

No trip to Scotland would be complete without a visit to Edinburgh, and even if your Scottish trip lasts only a week, the capital is worth two days of your time. On day three, head northwest to Stirling to see Scotland’s other great castle, then on to the Trossachs for your first taste of Highland scenery (overnight in Callander).

Day four starts with a scenic drive north via Crianlarich, Glen Coe and Fort William, then along the Great Glen to Loch Ness in time for an afternoon visiting Urquhart Castle and the Loch Ness Centre & Exhibition. An evening cruise on Loch Ness rounds off the day before spending the night in Inverness, on picturesque River Ness.

On day five, spend the morning visiting Culloden Battlefield, then drive west via Achnasheen and Plockton to Kyle of Lochalsh and cross the bridge to the Isle of Skye. Devote day six to exploring Skye – there will be time for a visit to Dunvegan Castle and a tour of the Trotternish peninsula.

Day seven is the long drive back south – the scenic route goes via Glen Shiel, Invergarry, Spean Bridge (pause at the Commando Monument), Laggan and then south on the A9 to Edinburgh, with a stop in Pitlochry.
From Edinburgh head north across the Forth Road Bridge to Fife and turn east along the coastal road through the delightful fishing villages of the East Neuk (pause for a seafood lunch at Anstruther or St Monans) to the home of golf, St Andrews. Stay a night or two – heck, play a round of golf – before continuing north across the Tay Bridge to Dundee and Glamis Castle. From here the A93 leads through the Grampian Mountains to reach Braemar, a good place to spend the night.

A feast of castles lies ahead as you make your way east along Royal Deeside – take your time and visit (at the very least) the royal residence of Balmoral Castle and the fairy tale Crathes Castle. Then overnight at the granite city of Aberdeen.

Now strike west again along the A944, making small detours to visit Castle Fraser and Craigievar Castle before turning north to Dufftown in the heart of Speyside. Base yourself here for at least a day while you explore the many whisky distilleries nearby – also try the Quaich whisky bar at the nearby Craigellachie Hotel.

Head northwest to Elgin and its magnificent ruined cathedral, then west on the A96 visiting Fort George and Culloden on the way to Inverness (with maybe a stopover in Nairn). Inverness itself is worth a night or two and there’s the opportunity for a side trip to Loch Ness (Drumnadrochit for monster spotters, Dores Inn for foodies).

Now for a glorious drive from Inverness to Torridon via Kinlochewe through some of the country’s finest mountain scenery; try to spend a night at the Torridon hotel. Then head south via Applecross and the pretty village of Plockton to Kyle of Lochalsh and the bridge to Skye.

Spend two days exploring Scotland’s most famous island before taking the ferry from Armadale to Mallaig, and follow the Road to the Isles in reverse, stopping to visit Glenfinnan, where Bonnie Prince Charlie raised his Highland army in 1745. Overnight at Fort William, and drive back to Edinburgh via the scenic road through Glen Coe and and along the bonnie banks of Loch Lomond.
From Edinburgh your first objective should be a visit to Sir Walter Scott’s former home at Abbotsford, followed by a traipse around the beautiful Border abbeys of Melrose and nearby Dryburgh; Melrose is a charming place to stay the night, with a choice of good hotels and eating places.

Next morning head west along the A708 to Moffat, passing through glorious scenery around St Mary’s Loch. Continue to Dumfries (and stop for the night), where you can visit the first of several sights related to Scotland’s national poet Robert Burns, and make a short side trip to see spectacular Caerlaverock Castle.

Take the A76 northwest towards Ayr, and spend the rest of day three in Alloway visiting the birthplace of Robert Burns (and other Burns-related sites); nearby Ayr has plenty of accommodation options.

North now to Wemyss Bay and the ferry to Rothesay on the Isle of Bute, where you can visit stunning Mount Stuart, one of Scotland’s most impressive stately homes. Spend the night on the island, then return to the mainland and head east to Glasgow.

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**Island Hopscotch**

This route is usually done by car, but it also makes a brilliant cycling tour (270 miles, including the 60 miles from Ullapool to Inverness train station, making both start and finish accessible by rail).

From Oban it’s a five-hour ferry crossing to Barra; book a night’s stay here. Then, after a visit to Kisimul Castle and a tour around the island, take the ferry to South Uist. Walk the wild beaches of the west coast, sample the local seafood and perhaps go fishing on the island’s trout lochs. Continue through Benbecula and North Uist, prime birdwatching country.

Overnight at Lochmaddy on North Uist (if you’re camping or hostelling, a night at Berneray is a must) before taking the ferry to Harris, whose west coast has some of the most spectacular beaches in Scotland. The road continues north from Tarbert (good hotels) through rugged hills to Lewis.

Loop west via the Callanish Standing Stones and Arnol Blackhouse Museum. Spend your final night in Stornoway (eat at Digby Chick), then take the ferry to Ullapool for a scenic drive to Inverness.
OUR STORY
A beat-up old car, a few dollars in the pocket and a sense of adventure. In 1972 that’s all Tony and Maureen Wheeler needed for the trip of a lifetime – across Europe and Asia overland to Australia. It took several months, and at the end – broke but inspired – they sat at their kitchen table writing and stapling together their first travel guide, *Across Asia on the Cheap*. Within a week they’d sold 1500 copies. Lonely Planet was born. Today, Lonely Planet has offices in Franklin, London, Melbourne, Oakland, Beijing and Delhi, with more than 600 staff and writers. We share Tony’s belief that ‘a great guidebook should do three things: inform, educate and amuse’.

OUR WRITERS

Neil Wilson
Coordinating Author, Edinburgh, Central Scotland, Northeast Scotland, Inverness & the Central Highlands, Northern Highlands & Islands

Neil was born in Scotland and, save for a few years spent abroad, has lived here most of his life. A lifelong enthusiasm for the great outdoors has inspired hiking, biking and sailing expeditions to every corner of the country. Researching this edition took him from the country’s most westerly point at Ardnamurchan Lighthouse to its most easterly at Fraserburgh, and to every corner of beautiful Perthshire where he now lives. Neil has been a full-time author since 1988 and has written around 65 guidebooks for various publishers, including the Lonely Planet guides to Edinburgh and Scotland’s Highlands & Islands. Neil also wrote most of Plan Your Trip and the Scotland Today, Scottish Larder and Scottish Culture essays.

Andy Symington
Glasgow, Southern Scotland, Southern Highlands & Islands, Northern Highlands & Islands, Orkney & Shetland

Andy’s Scottish forebears make their presence felt in a love of malt, a debatable ginger colour to his facial hair and a love of wild places. From childhood treks up the M1 he graduated to making dubious road-trips around the firths in a disintegrating Mini Metro and thence to peddling whisky in darkest Leith. Whilst living there, he travelled widely around the country in search of the perfect dram, and, now resident in Spain, continues to visit very regularly. Andy also wrote the Golf planning feature, the History and Natural Scotland essays and the Survival Guide.