



# The Great Glen & Lochaber

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## Why Go?

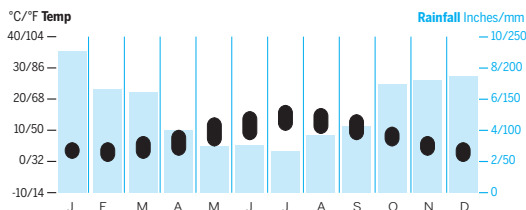
From the rugged, rocky crags of Glen Coe to the shapely, pointed peaks of Knoydart, Glenelg and Kintail, the mountain ranges of the Great Glen and Lochaber are testimony to the sculpting power of ice and weather. Here the Highland landscape is at its grandest, with soaring hills of rock and heather bounded by wooded glens and rushing waterfalls.

Not surprisingly, this part of the country is an adventure playground for outdoor sports enthusiasts. Glen Coe and Nevis Range draw hordes of hill walkers, climbers and mountain bikers in summer, and skiers, snowboarders and ice climbers in winter. Inverness, the Highland capital, provides urban rest and relaxation, while nearby Loch Ness and its elusive monster add a hint of mystery.

From Fort William, base camp for climbing Ben Nevis, the Road to the Isles leads past the gorgeous beaches along the coast from Arisaig to Morar and to Mallaig, jumping-off point for the islands of Skye, Eigg and Rum.

## When to Go

### Fort William



**Apr–May** The scenery is at its most spectacular, with snow lingering on the higher peaks.

**June** Fort William hosts the UCI Mountain Bike World Cup, pulling in huge crowds of spectators.

**Sep** Ideal time for hiking and hill walking – midges are dying off, but weather is still reasonably good.

## INVERNESS

POP 55,000

Inverness, the primary city and shopping centre of the Highlands, has a great location astride the River Ness at the northern end of the Great Glen. In summer it overflows with visitors intent on monster hunting at nearby Loch Ness, but it's worth a visit in its own right for a stroll along the picturesque River Ness and a cruise on the Moray Firth in search of its famous bottlenose dolphins.

The city was probably founded by King David in the 12th century, but thanks to its often violent history few buildings of real age or historical significance have survived. Much of the older part of the city dates from the period following the completion of the Caledonian Canal in 1822. The broad and shallow River Ness, which flows a short 6 miles from Loch Ness into the Moray Firth, runs through the heart of the city.

### Sights & Activities

#### Ness Islands

PARK

The main attraction in Inverness is a leisurely stroll along the river to the Ness Islands. Planted with mature Scots pine, fir, beech and sycamore, and linked to the river banks and each other by elegant Victorian footbridges, the islands make an appealing picnic spot.

They're a 20-minute walk south of the castle – head upstream on either side of the river (the start of the Great Glen Way), and return on the opposite bank. On the way you'll pass the red-sandstone towers of **St Andrew's Cathedral**, dating from 1869, and the modern **Eden Court Theatre**, which hosts regular art exhibits, both on the west bank.

#### Inverness Museum & Art Gallery

MUSEUM

(☎01463-237114; www.inverness.highland.museum; Castle Wynd; free; ☀10am-5pm Mon-Sat) Between the castle and the tourist office is Inverness Museum & Art Gallery, which has wildlife dioramas, geological displays, period rooms with historic weapons, Pictish stones and contemporary Highland arts and crafts.

#### Victorian Market

MARKET

If the rain comes down, you could opt for a spot of retail therapy in the Victorian Market, a shopping mall that dates from the 1890s and has rather more charm than its modern equivalents.

#### Inverness Castle

CASTLE

(Castle St) The hill above the city centre is topped by the picturesque Baronial turrets of Inverness Castle, a pink-sandstone confection dating from 1847 that replaced a medieval castle blown up by the Jacobites in 1746; it serves today as the Sheriff's Court. It's not open to the public, but there are good views from the surrounding gardens.

### Tours

#### Moray Firth Cruises

WILDLIFE CRUISES

(☎01463-717900; www.inverness-dolphin-cruises.co.uk; Shore St Quay; ☀10.30am-4.30pm Mar-Oct) Offers 1½-hour wildlife cruises (adult/child £14/10) to look for dolphins, seals and bird life. Sightings aren't guaranteed, but the commentaries are excellent, and on a fine day it's good just being out on the water.

Follow the signs to Shore St Quay from the far end of Chapel St or catch the free shuttle bus that leaves from the tourist office 15 minutes before sailings (which depart every 1½ hours). In July and August there are also departures at 6pm.

#### Jacobite Cruises

CRUISES

(☎01463-233999; www.jacobite.co.uk; Glenurquhart Rd) Cruise boats depart at 10.35am and 1.35pm from Tomnahurich Bridge for a 3½-hour trip along Loch Ness, including visits to Urquhart Castle and Loch Ness Exhibition Centre (adult/child £26/20 including admission fees). You can buy tickets at the tourist office and catch a free minibus to the boat. Other cruises, from one to 6½ hours, are also available.

#### Happy Tours

WALKING TOURS

(www.happy-tours.biz; adult/child £10/free) Offers 1¼-hour guided walks exploring the town's history and legends. Tours begin outside the tourist office at 11am, 1pm and 3pm daily.

#### Inverness Taxis

TAXI TOURS

(☎01463-222900; www.inverness-taxis.co.uk) Wide range of day tours to Urquhart Castle, Loch Ness, Culloden, and even Skye. Fares per car (up to four people) range from £50 (two hours) to £200 (all day).

#### John O'Groats Ferries

BUS/FERRY TOURS

(☎01955-611353; www.jogferry.co.uk; ☀departs 7.30am) From May to September, daily tours are run (lasting 13½ hours; adult/child £57/28.50) by bus and passenger ferry from Inverness bus station to Orkney.