



Northwest Highlands

Includes »

| | |
|---|-----|
| East Coast | 219 |
| Black Isle | 219 |
| Strathpeffer | 222 |
| Golspie | 229 |
| Brora | 231 |
| Caithness | 232 |
| Helmsdale to Lybster | 233 |
| Lybster & Around | 234 |
| Castle of Mey | 236 |
| North & West Coasts | 239 |
| Ullapool | 254 |
| Plockton | 257 |
| Walking in the Northwest Highlands | 263 |

Best Places to Eat

- » The Albannach (p249)
- » Captain's Galley (p238)
- » Plockton Shores (p263)
- » Badachro Inn (p259)
- » Shorehouse Seafood Restaurant (p247)

Best Places to Stay

- » Mackays (p242)
- » The Torridon (p261)
- » Summer Isles Hotel (p253)
- » Ceilidh Place (p255)
- » Applecross Inn (p262)

Why Go?

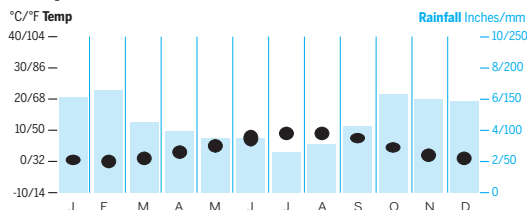
Scotland's vast and melancholy soul is here: an epic land whose stark beauty leaves an indelible imprint on the hearts of those who journey through. Mist and mountains, rock and heather, and long, sun-blessed summer evenings are the payoff for so many days of horizontal rain. It is magical.

Stone tells stories throughout. The chambered cairns of Caithness and the brochs of Sutherland are testament to the skills of prehistoric builders; cragtop castles and the broken walls of abandoned crofts tell of the Highlands' turbulent history.

Outdoors is the place to be, whatever the weather; there's nothing like comparing windburn or mud-ridden boots over a well-deserved dram by the crackling fire of a Highland pub. The landscape lends itself to activity, from woodland strolls to thrilling mountain-bike descents, from sea-kayaking to Munro-bagging, from beachcombing to birdwatching. Best are the locals, big-hearted and straight-talking; make it your business to get to know them.

When to Go

Ullapool



June Long evenings up north bathe achingly sublime landscapes in a dreamy light.

Jul-Aug Pretty Plockton comes alive with sailboat races and ceilidhs for Regatta Fortnight.

Sep Not as busy as summer, the midges have gone and (if you're lucky) temperatures are still OK.

EAST COAST

In both landscape and character, the east coast of the old counties of Ross and Sutherland is where the real wilderness of the Highlands begins to unfold. A mounting splendour and a feeling of escapism mark the route along the twisting A9, as it heads north for the last of Scotland's far-flung, mainland population outposts. With only a few exceptions the tourism frenzy is left behind once the road traverses Cromarty Firth and begins to snake its way along the wild and pristine coastline.

While the interior is dominated by the mournful moor-and-mountain landscapes of Sutherland, along the coast great heather-covered hills heave themselves out of the wild North Sea. Rolling farmland drops suddenly into the icy waters, and small, historic towns are moored precariously on the coast's edge.

Black Isle


The Black Isle – a peninsula rather than an island – is linked to Inverness by the Kessock Bridge. The villages of Avoch, Fortrose and Rosemarkie run along the peninsula's southern side.

The pretty village of Cromarty (pop 720) at the northeastern tip of the Black Isle has lots of 18th-century red-sandstone houses, and a lovely green park beside the sea for picnics and games. An excellent walk, known as the **100 Steps**, leads from the north end of the village to the headland viewpoint of South Sutor (4 miles round trip).

Sights & Activities



Black Isle Wildlife Park

WILDLIFE PARK

(01463 731656; www.blackislewildlifepark.co.uk; North Kessock; adult/child £7.50/5.50; 10am–6pm daily Apr–Oct; ) Just north of the Kessock Bridge, this landscaped wildlife park has families of zebra, lemurs, and everybody's favourite – meerkats. There are also goat kids, lambs, baby rabbits and other animals you can pet.

Black Isle Brewery

BREWERY

(01463-811871; www.blackislebrewery.com; Old Allangrange, Munloch; admission free; 10am–6pm Mon–Sat, 11.30am–5pm Sun Apr–Sep) One of Britain's best artisan breweries, which has won many awards for its organically produced ales. Try a glass of Yellowhammer, a light, hoppy and refreshing bitter, or the

strong, flowery Heather Honey Beer. Just north of the Kessock Bridge.

Cloutie Well



SHRINE

Not far from the A9, on the road to Fortrose near Munloch, the Cloutie Well is an ancient shrine to St Boniface. Local people still come here to tie a clout (piece of cloth) to the nearby tree and make a wish.

CROMARTY

Cromarty Courthouse

MUSEUM

(01381-600418; www.cromarty-courthouse.org.uk; Church St, Cromarty; adult/child £2/free; 11am–4pm Apr–Sep) This 18th-century courthouse is now a museum chronicling the town's history using contemporary references. Kids will love the talking mannequins.


Hugh Miller's Cottage & Museum

MUSEUM

(Church St, Cromarty; adult/child £5.50/4.50; 1–5pm Sun–Wed May–Sep) Hugh Miller's Cottage is the thatch-roofed birthplace of Hugh Miller (1802–56), a local stonemason and amateur geologist who later moved to Edinburgh and became a famous journalist and newspaper editor. The Georgian villa next door is home to a museum celebrating his life and achievements.

Ecoventures

WILDLIFE CRUISES

(01381-600323; www.ecoventures.co.uk; Cromarty Harbour, Cromarty; adult/child £22/16) Ecoventures runs 2½-hour boat trips from Cromarty harbour into the Moray Firth to see bottlenose dolphins and other wildlife.

FORTROSE & ROSEMARKIE

Fortrose Cathedral

HISTORIC SITE

At Fortrose Cathedral you'll find the vaulted crypt of a 13th-century chapter house and sacristy, and the ruinous 14th-century south aisle and chapel.

Dolphin Trips Avoch

WILDLIFE CRUISES

(www.dolphintripsavoch.co.uk; Avoch; adult/child £12/8) Chanonry Point, 1.5 miles east of Fortrose, is a favourite dolphin-spotting vantage point. One-hour dolphin-watching cruises depart from the harbour at Avoch (pronounced 'auch'), 3 miles southwest of Fortrose.

Groam House Museum

MUSEUM

(01381-620961; www.groomhouse.org.uk; High St, Rosemarkie; admission by donation; 10am–5pm Mon–Sat, 2–4.30pm Sun May–Oct, 2–4pm Sat & Sun Apr & Nov) This museum in Rosemarkie has a superb collection of Pictish stones engraved with designs similar to those on Celtic Irish stones.