

welcome to Scotland's Highlands & Islands



Lonely Landscapes

Since the 19th century – when the first tourists began to arrive, inspired by the Romantic movement's search for the sublime – the Scottish Highlands have been famed for their wild nature and majestic scenery. Today the region's biggest draw remains its magnificent landscape.

At almost every turn is a vista that will stop you in your tracks, from the bluebell woods, gentle hills and warm autumn colours of Loch Lomond and the Trossachs to the primeval grandeur of Coigach and Assynt, where pillared peaks rear above desolate expanses of gnarled and ancient gneiss. Keep the camera close at hand.

Outdoor Adventures

These Highland landscapes are not just for looking at. Scotland's mountains, lochs and seaways offer some of the most rewarding outdoor adventures in Europe. As well as classic challenges like the West Highland Way long-distance footpath and the gruelling ascent of Ben Nevis, there are long wilderness walks through the roadless wilds of Knoydart and Sutherland, and spectacular summits such as An Teallach, Stac Pollaidh and that icon of the north-west Highlands, Suilven.

Mountain bikers can enjoy a multitude of off-road routes, from easy trails through ancient pine forests to strenuous coast-to-

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The hills and glens and wild coastline of Scotland's Highlands and Islands offer the ultimate escape – one of the last corners of Europe where you can discover genuine solitude.

(left) Loch Erisort, Lewis (p201)
(below) Highland Games, Ballater (p138)

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coast rides, complemented by Britain's best purpose-built MTB (mountain bike) centres offering everything from beginners' zones to funparks to nerve-shredding downhill courses. For sea-kayaking enthusiasts, the turbulent tidal waters around the Outer Hebrides, Orkney and Shetland provide the ultimate test of paddling mettle.

And then there's a treasure trove of unparalleled wildlife experiences to be discovered. Where else can you watch an osprey swoop and snatch a trout from a loch, witness a minke whale breach through a shoal of mackerel, and make eye contact with an otter – all in one day?

Legend & Tradition

Legend and tradition run deep in the Highlands. Crumbling forts and monastic cells were once home to Gaelic chieftains and Irish saints; lonely beaches and mountain passes once echoed to the clash of clan battles and Viking raids; and empty glens are still haunted by the ghosts of the Clearances.

History is everywhere – in the tumbled stones and vague outlines of township and field preserved on a hillside like a fossil fragment; in the proud profile of broch and castle silhouetted against a Highland sunset; in the Gaelic lilt of Hebridean speech and the Nordic twang of Shetland dialect.