

# Welcome to Scotland's Highlands & Islands

*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.*

## Lonely Landscapes

Since the 19th century – when the first tourists began to arrive, inspired by the Romantic movement – 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 gnarled and ancient gneiss. Keep your camera close.

## Outdoor Adventures

Scotland's mountains, lochs and seaways offer some of the most rewarding outdoor adventures in Europe. As well as classic challenges such as the West Highland Way and the ascent of Ben Nevis, there are wilderness walks through the roadless wilds of Knoydart and Sutherland, and spectacular summits such as An Teallach, Stac Pollaidh and Suilven. Mountain bikers can enjoy a multitude of off-road routes, from easy trails through pine forests to strenuous coast-to-coast rides, while the turbulent tidal waters around the Outer Hebrides, Orkney and Shetland provide the ultimate test of paddling mettle for sea-kayakers.

## 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 empty glens are still haunted by the ghosts of the Clearances. History is everywhere – in the abandoned crofts preserved on a hillside like fossil fragments; 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.

## A Taste of Scotland

An increasing number of visitors have discovered that Scotland's restaurants have shaken off their reputation for deep-fried food and unsmiling service and can now compete with the best in Europe. A new-found respect for top-quality local produce means that you can feast on fresh seafood mere hours after it was caught, beef and venison that was raised just a few miles away from your table, and vegetables that were grown in your hotel's own organic garden. And top it all off with a dram of single malt whisky – rich, evocative and complex, the true taste of Scotland.



## Why I Love Scotland's Highlands & Islands

by Neil Wilson, Author

It's the weather. Yes, seriously. We get four proper seasons here (sometimes all of them in one day) and that means that you get to enjoy the same landscapes over and over again in a range of different garbs – August hills clad in purple heather, native woodlands gilded with autumn colours, snowpatched winter mountains, and Hebridean machair sprinkled with a confetti of spring wildflowers. And the unpredictability of the weather means that even the wettest day can be suddenly transformed by parting clouds and slanting shafts of golden light. Sheer magic.

**For more about our authors, see page 304**

Above: Hiker on the summit of Ben A'an, overlooking Loch Katrine (p52)