

# Destination Scotland

As an old Scots saying has it, 'guid gear comes in sma' bouk' (good things come in small packages). And despite its small size, Scotland certainly has many treasures crammed into its compact territory. There's something for all tastes, from sophisticated cities, fine food and malt whisky to wild mountain scenery and sparkling, island-studded seas. Wildlife watchers will find otters, eagles, whales and dolphins, while hill walkers have almost 300 Munros to bag. There's turbulent history and fascinating genealogy, castles and country pubs, canoeing and caber-tossing, golfing and fishing and all-round good *craic* (lively conversation).

Although an integral part of Great Britain since 1707, Scotland has maintained a separate and distinct identity throughout the last 300 years. The return of a devolved Scottish parliament to Edinburgh in 1999 marked a growing confidence and sense of pride in the nation's achievements.

The new Scottish parliament building (p85) was officially opened in 2004. The project was dogged with controversy, costing 10 times the original budget and running three years over schedule, and reaction to the building has been mixed, to say the least. Experts have acclaimed it as a masterpiece, and it has won half a dozen major international architectural awards, but the general public has been less appreciative.

Now the fuss has died down, more attention is being focused on what's happening inside the building. The Scottish parliamentary elections of 2007 saw the Labour party lose control of Scottish politics for the first time since their rise to dominance in the 1960s. The Scottish Nationalist Party (SNP), whose central platform is independence for Scotland, won by just one seat and Alex Salmond, the SNP leader, became first minister. But with only 47 out of 129 seats, it is very much a minority administration.

The first decade of devolution has seen Scottish politics diverge significantly from the Westminster way. Distinctive policies that have been applied in Scotland but not in the rest of the UK include free long-term care for the elderly, the abolition of tuition fees for university students, and higher pay for teachers. The SNP has committed itself to holding a referendum on whether Scotland should have full independence, but opinion polls show that most Scots are happy with the status quo.

Ask them what they do worry about, and the Scots come up with much the same answers as the rest of the UK – the health service, education, crime, immigration, soaring property prices and the war in Iraq. Press them on distinctly Scottish problems, however, and – beyond moaning about the utter uselessness of Holyrood politicians – their list will probably mention things such as sectarianism and traffic congestion.

Sectarianism – the bitter hatred that exists between sections of the country's Protestant and Catholic communities – has been called Scotland's 'secret shame'. At its worst in Glasgow, where 'religiously aggravated offences' (a category introduced in 2003) are 60 times more common than in the rest of the country, sectarianism's most public face appears in football matches between Rangers and Celtic. The issue has come to the fore in debates about state funding of 'faith schools' (schools run by a religious body). Many Scots feel that having separate schools for Roman Catholics simply entrenches the sectarian divide, and that the state should not be providing financial support for them.

If you're unfortunate enough to find yourself driving into one of Scotland's larger cities during the weekday rush hour, you'll soon find that traffic

## FAST FACTS

Population: 5.1 million

Area: 78,722 sq km

Number of seats in  
Scottish parliament: 129

First Minister: Alex  
Salmond (Scottish  
National Party)

GDP (per head): £16,332  
(2004)

Inflation: 2.5% (2007)

Unemployment: 4.8%  
(2007)

Amount of whisky  
exported annually:  
1 billion bottles

Value of haggis sold for  
Burns Night: £1.2 million

Number of times Scotland  
has won the football  
World Cup: 0

congestion is one of the country's curses. Edinburgh has led the way in trying to discourage car use with popular measures like cycle routes, dedicated bus lanes and park-and-rides schemes, and unpopular ones like increased parking charges and fines, and a small army of parking 'enforcers'. Construction work has begun on a scheme to reintroduce trams to the city by 2011.

One of the worst traffic bottlenecks in the country is the Forth Road Bridge, with southbound tailbacks several miles long on weekday mornings. Controversial plans have been proposed for a second road bridge across the Firth of Forth, which would allow Edinburgh's new tram network to be extended as far as Dunfermline. These have been lent a new urgency by the discovery of serious corrosion problems with the existing bridge; already carrying close to double its planned capacity of 30,000 vehicles a day, it may have to be closed to heavy goods traffic by 2013, and possibly closed completely by 2020.

These are mainly metropolitan concerns, however, and north of the Highland line other talking points dominate debate. One of the first laws to be passed in the new Scottish parliament gave the Gaelic language official status. Opinion in Scotland is deeply divided between those who believe Gaelic should receive state support in the form of bilingual signage, a dedicated Gaelic TV channel and school classes taught in Gaelic, and those who feel that Gaelic is irrelevant to modern Scotland and should be allowed to die a natural death if it cannot survive without external funding.

The Gaelic Language Act (2005) recognises Gaelic as an official language in Scotland and requires the creation of a national plan for the future development of the language. This is quite a turnaround from an attitude that began with an act passed by the old Scottish parliament in 1616 ruling that Gaelic be 'abolishit and removit' from Scotland. State persecution of Gaelic language and culture intensified following the Jacobite rebellion of 1745, and this attitude persisted well into the 20th century; indeed, there are people still alive today who can recall being beaten for speaking Gaelic in school.

Crofting and land ownership are important issues in the Gaelic-speaking areas of northwest Scotland. A headline-grabbing clause in the Land Reform (Scotland) Act (2003) allowed crofting communities to buy out the land that they live on with the aid of taxpayers' money, in the hope of halting or even reversing the gradual depopulation of the Highlands and islands. Several estates have followed the likes of Eigg, Gigha, Knoydart and North Harris into community ownership. The Isle of Gigha, which underwent a community buyout in 2002, has seen its population increase by 50% and several new businesses start up. In 2006 South Uist saw the biggest community buyout yet, with plans for a world-class golf course, a wind farm and a new pier and marina complex at Lochboisdale.

Scotland may be small but as you can see even from this brief overview, there's a lot going on. Take a little time to look behind the latest news headlines when you arrive and you'll find your experience of the country to be that much richer and more memorable.

# Getting Started

Scotland is the sort of place you can arrive in without a plan, and have a great time just wandering around and following your whims. But planning your trip is half the fun, and essential if your time is limited or if there is something in particular that you want to see or do.

## WHEN TO GO

Any time is a good time to visit Scotland, but your choice of when to go will depend on what you want to do.

The main tourist period is April to September, and the height of the season is during the school holidays in July and August when accommodation, be it camping grounds, B&Bs or luxury hotels, is at a premium. Edinburgh in particular becomes impossibly crowded during the festival period in August, so book well ahead if you plan to visit then (a year ahead is not too early!).

In winter public transport is less frequent and travel to the islands can be a problem if high winds disrupt the ferries. Outside the main cities, some tourist attractions are closed from November to March.

Considering how far north it lies – Edinburgh is on the same latitude as Labrador in Canada – you might expect Scotland to have a colder climate, but the breezes from the Atlantic are warmed by the Gulf Stream, a warm ocean current that flows from the southeast coast of the USA and bathes the western shores of the British Isles.

The east coast tends to be drier than the west – rainfall averages around 650mm – and it is often warmer in summer and colder in winter. Temperatures rarely drop below 0°C on the coast, although a wind blowing off the North Sea will make you shiver any time of year. The west coast is milder and wetter, with more than 1500mm of rain and average summer highs of 19°C. The western Highlands around Fort William are the wettest place in Britain, with annual rainfall as high as 3000mm.

Statistically, your best chances of fine weather are in May, June and September; July and August are usually warm, but may be wet too. In summer, daylight hours are long; the midsummer sun sets around 11pm in the Shetland Islands and even Edinburgh evenings seem to last forever in June and July. Conversely, in December the sun doesn't show its face until after 9am, and it's dark again by 4pm.

In April and May Scotland's glorious scenery is set off by snow lingering on the mountains and colourful displays of wildflowers in the bluebell woods of southern Scotland and the machair (grass- and wildflower-covered dunes) of the Western Isles. June brings a pink haze of rhododendron blossoms to the Highland glens, but it's not until August that the hill sides put on their famous show of purple heather.

October sees the forests of Perthshire and the Trossachs alight with a blaze of glorious autumn colours. Midwinter can be dreich (a wonderfully descriptive Scots word meaning 'dull and miserable'), but if you get a clear spell of hard frost and sunshine the scenery can be every bit as stunning as in summer.

The many seabird colonies around the Scottish coast are at their most spectacular during the nesting season (April to July), while coastal nature reserves see huge flocks of migrating ducks, geese and waders in spring and autumn. You can see seals, dolphins and porpoises almost all year round, but the whale-watching season peaks in July and August. One seasonal species you should definitely be aware of is the dreaded midge (p458). They are usually around from June to September, but are at their worst in July and August.

See Climate Charts (p439) for more information.

## COSTS & MONEY

The strength of the pound sterling makes Scotland an expensive destination for non-Europeans. Food, accommodation and transport are all fairly pricey, and more so in Edinburgh, Glasgow and Aberdeen than in the rest of the country; the only real bargains are the many excellent museums and galleries that you can visit for free.

A realistic daily budget for two people sharing a double room, staying in B&Bs and guesthouses and eating in midrange restaurants is around £40 to £50 per person per day. Backpackers using hostels and cooking their own meals can get by on £25 to £30 a day, not including transport.

If you're travelling in your own car you'll probably average a further £12 to £20 per day on petrol and parking; car rental will add a minimum of £23 a day.

If you're travelling as a family, be aware that many hotels and guesthouses have family rooms, usually with a double bed and one or two singles, plus a folding bed, which can save a fair bit of money. Most tourist attractions with admission fees also offer discounted family tickets – a major saving at places such as Edinburgh Castle, which charges £11 for one adult.

Students, young people (under 26) and seniors (over 60) can get discounts on transport (see p456), and admission fees.

The price of food and fuel rises quite steeply in remote parts of the Highlands and islands where delivery costs are higher. Petrol can cost 10% to 15% more in the Outer Hebrides than in the Central Lowlands.

Surprisingly, Scotland is one of the most expensive places to buy Scotch whisky. If your travels will be taking you to mainland Europe, you'll find you can buy whisky there for about 60% of the price charged in Scottish shops.

## TRAVEL LITERATURE

Two of the greatest Scottish travelogues date from the 18th century. *A Journey to the Western Isles of Scotland* (1759) and *Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides* (1785) by James Boswell are vivid accounts of two journeys made by the author in the company of the famous lexicographer Samuel Johnson. Boswell writes engagingly of their travails and encounters with the local people, from lairds to crofters, and paints a vivid picture of Highland life in the late 18th century.

A much more recent travelogue is *Raw Spirit* (2004) by novelist Iain Banks (see the boxed text, p46), an immensely enjoyable jaunt around Scotland supposedly in search of the perfect single malt whisky. Although half the book has nothing to do with whisky, and reads more like an extended pub conversation, Banks makes an entertaining companion as he regales you with his opinions on cars (he owns several), tales of driving on Scottish roads and hilarious anecdotes from his youth.

Another travel tale with a twist is recounted in *Adrift in Caledonia* (2006) by Nick Thorpe, an entertaining and insightful tale of travelling around Scotland by hitching rides on a variety of vessels, from canal barge and rowing boat to steam puffer and square-rigged sailing ship.

### HOW MUCH?

Scotsman newspaper 65p

Fish and chips £4.80

Cinema ticket £6

Bottle of malt whisky  
£25-35

Car hire per day from £23

See also Lonely Planet  
Index, inside front cover.

The full text of Boswell's  
*Journal of a Tour to the  
Hebrides* is available  
online for free at [www  
.gutenberg.org](http://www.gutenberg.org).

### DON'T LEAVE HOME WITHOUT...

- a copy of your travel insurance policy details (p443)
- a pair of binoculars for whale- and dolphin-spotting
- insect repellent (p458)
- waterproofs, patience and a sense of adventure

# TOP 10



## TOP TENS

### Favourite Festivals & Events

Scots always enjoy a good party, and will find some reason to celebrate at almost any time of the year. The following list is our Top 10, but for comprehensive listings of festivals and events, see the Directory, p441.

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| 1 Up-Helly-Aa (Shetland), January (p426)               | 7 Edinburgh Festival & Fringe (Edinburgh), August (see boxed text, p97) |
| 2 Melrose Rugby Sevens Match (Melrose), April (p158)   | 8 Edinburgh Military Tattoo (Edinburgh), August (see boxed text, p97)   |
| 3 Feis Ile (Islay Festival; Isle of Islay), May (p290) | 9 Braemar Gathering (Braemar), September (see boxed text, p256)         |
| 4 Burns an' a' That (Ayr), May (p173)                  | 10 Edinburgh's Hogmanay (Edinburgh), December (see boxed text, p96)     |
| 5 Royal Highland Show (Edinburgh), June (p97)          |   |
| 6 Jethart Callant Festival (Jedburgh), July (p161)     |   |

### Natural Wonders

Scotland's stunning scenery has many awe-inspiring natural features, including spectacular sea stacks and rock formations, thundering waterfalls, impressive gorges and swirling whirlpools. Here are our 10 favourites:

- |   |                           |
|---|---------------------------|
| 1 Corryvreckan Whirlpool (boxed text, p294) | 6 Smoo Cave (p368)        |
| 2 Fingal's Cave (p310)                      | 7 Stac Pollaidh (p371)    |
| 3 Carsaig Arches (boxed text, p307)         | 8 Falls of Measach (p374) |
| 4 Falls of Lora (p314)                      | 9 The Quiraing (p388)     |
| 5 Sgurr of Eigg (p351)                      | 10 Old Man of Hoy (p418)  |

### Must-See Films

Head down to the local video store or browse [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com) to pick up our choice of Scotland's 10 best films. All are set in Scotland and many were directed by Scots. See the Culture chapter, p46, for more on Scottish cinema.

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| 1 <i>Whisky Galore!</i> (1949), Director: Alexander Mackendrick | 6 <i>Trainspotting</i> (1996), Director: Danny Boyle     |
| 2 <i>Tunes of Glory</i> (1960), Director: Ronald Neame          | 7 <i>Small Faces</i> (1996), Director: Gillies Mackinnon |
| 3 <i>Gregory's Girl</i> (1981), Director: Bill Forsyth          | 8 <i>Sweet Sixteen</i> (2002), Director: Ken Loach       |
| 4 <i>Local Hero</i> (1983), Director: Bill Forsyth              | 9 <i>Young Adam</i> (2003), Director: David MacKenzie    |
| 5 <i>Rob Roy</i> (1995), Director: Michael Caton-Jones          | 10 <i>Red Road</i> (2006), Director: Andrea Arnold       |

*Stone Voices: The Search for Scotland* (2002), by respected Scots journalist Neal Ascherson, is a highly readable and very personal exploration of Scottish history and culture, filled with fascinating insights and some contentious conclusions that will provide the starting point for some lively bar-room conversations.

Anyone with an interest in the Scottish hills should seek out *Always A Little Further* (1939) by Alastair Borthwick and *Mountaineering in Scotland* (1947) by WH Murray. Both are classic accounts, beautifully written, of camping, hiking and rock climbing in Scotland in the 1930s, when just getting to Glen Coe was an adventure in itself and the most advanced ice-climbing equipment was a slater's pick.

## INTERNET RESOURCES

**Internet Guide to Scotland** ([www.scotland-info.co.uk](http://www.scotland-info.co.uk)) The best of several online tourist guides to Scotland.

**Lonely Planet** ([www.lonelyplanet.com](http://www.lonelyplanet.com)) Get started with summaries on Scotland, the popular Thorn Tree bulletin board and links to Scotland-related sites.

**ScotchWhisky.net** ([www.scotchwhisky.net](http://www.scotchwhisky.net)) Everything you wanted to know about Scotch whisky.

**Scotland's People** ([www.scotlandsppeople.gov.uk](http://www.scotlandsppeople.gov.uk)) A comprehensive online resource for exploring your Scottish ancestry.

**Traveline** ([www.travelinescotland.com](http://www.travelinescotland.com)) Public transport timetables and journey planner for all of Scotland.

**VisitScotland** ([www.visitscotland.com](http://www.visitscotland.com)) The official Scottish Tourist Board site, with an online accommodation-booking service.

# Itineraries

## CLASSIC ROUTES

### A HIGHLAND FLING

Two Weeks / Edinburgh to Inverness

This route takes you through the magnificent mountain scenery of the western Highlands. From **Edinburgh** (p68) head northwest to see Scotland's other great castle at **Stirling** (p193), then on to the **Trossachs** (p199) for your first taste of Highland scenery. As you continue north, the mountain scenery becomes more impressive, culminating in the grandeur of **Glen Coe** (p337).

Keen hill walkers will pause at **Fort William** (p340) to climb **Ben Nevis** (p345), or you can view it from **Corpach** (p345) at the start of the Road to the Isles. Head on to glorious **Glenfinnan** (p347) and the **Silver Sands of Morar** (p348), then **Mallaig** (p348); stop for lunch or overnight here and dine at one of its seafood restaurants.

From Mallaig take the ferry to the **Isle of Skye** (p378), and spend a day or two here exploring the island. Cross the Skye Bridge back to the mainland, and head north via the pretty village of **Plockton** (p377) to the magnificent mountain scenery of **Glen Torridon** (p375). Follow the A832 alongside lovely **Loch Maree** (p375) and continue north into the big-sky wilderness of western Sutherland, beneath the towering pinnacles of **An Teallach** (p374), before heading back east to the fleshpots of **Inverness** (p318).

In theory you could cover this spectacular 475-mile route in two days, but allowing time to stop and enjoy the scenery and the seafood makes two weeks a more realistic estimate.



## CASTLES & WHISKY

### Two Weeks / Edinburgh to Edinburgh

From **Edinburgh** (p68) head west to Queensferry to visit stately **Hopetoun House** (p115), then go north across the Forth Road Bridge to Fife and turn east along the coastal road through the delightful fishing villages of **East Neuk** (p214) to the home of golf, **St Andrews** (p208). Continue north across the Tay Bridge to **Dundee** (p234) and **Glamis Castle** (p239) before heading into the Grampian Mountains to reach **Braemar** (p255).

A feast of castles lies ahead as you travel east along Deeside, passing royal residence **Balmoral Castle** (p255) and fairy-tale **Crathes Castle** (p254) on your way to the granite city of **Aberdeen** (p245). Try to get a table at the **Silver Darling restaurant** (p251) here.

Now strike west again along the A944, making small detours to visit **Castle Fraser** (p254), **Craigievar Castle** (p258) and **Kildrummy Castle** (p258) before turning north to **Huntly** (p260) and west again to **Dufftown** (p262) in the heart of the Spey valley. Base yourself here for at least a day to explore the many whisky distilleries nearby.

Go northwest to **Elgin** (p260), then west on the A96, visiting **Brodie Castle** (p324), **Fort George** (p323), **Cawdor Castle** (p324) and **Culloden** (p323) on the way to **Inverness** (p318).

Whisky fans (see the boxed text, p55) can make the short trip north to the **Glenmorangie Distillery** (p356) at Tain before returning south to Edinburgh on the A9 and M9, stopping off at **Blair Castle** (p230), **Dunkeld** (p226) and **Scone Palace** (p218).

This journey through the heart of Scotland is a 475-mile round-trip, starting and finishing in Edinburgh, with a total driving time of around 10 to 12 hours. Tain is an extra 50-mile round-trip north of Inverness.





## ROADS LESS TRAVELLED

### BORDER RAID

**Eight Days / Edinburgh to Glasgow**

From **Edinburgh** (p68) the majority of tourists head north, which is a very good reason to head south, into the Borders...

Your first objective should be a traipse around the beautiful Border abbeys of **Melrose** (p158) and **Jedburgh** (p160); Melrose is a charming place to stay the night. Then head southwest to **Selkirk** (p160) and along the A708 to **Moffat** (p190). Continue to **Dumfries** (p178) and make a short side-trip to see spectacular **Caerlaverock Castle** (p180).

Push on southwest around the Galloway coast to **Newton Stewart** (p185), and detour south to visit the bookshops of **Wigtown** (p185) and the holy site of **Whithorn** (p186). From Newton Stewart head back east along the A712 to **New Galloway** (p184), via the lovely Galloway Forest Park, and then north on the A713 towards Ayr and Burns country.

At **Alloway** (p175) allow at least a day to visit Robert Burns' birthplace and other Burns-related sites, then go on to **Ayr** (p173) and head north to **Ardrossan** (p168). Take the ferry here across to the lovely **Isle of Arran** (p168) for a spot of hill walking, fishing or relaxing at one of the island's pubs.

Back on the mainland, head north to **Wemyss Bay** (p148) and take the ferry to **Rothsay** (p282) on the Isle of Bute, where you can visit stunning Mount Stuart, one of Scotland's most impressive stately homes. Return to the mainland again and head east to **Glasgow** (p119).

You could cover this 430-mile arc through the Southern Uplands in two long days, or spin it out to two weeks, but eight days is comfortable.



## ISLES AT THE EDGE OF THE SEA

Two Weeks / Oban to Thurso

This route can be done by car, but it also makes a brilliant cycle tour taking three to four weeks. Both start and finish are accessible by rail.

From **Oban** (p297) make the long ferry crossing to **Barra** (p401). After a look at romantic Kisimul Castle and a circuit of the island take the ferry to **South Uist** (p400); if you've brought your fishing rod, look forward to a bit of sport on the island's many trout lochs. Keep your binoculars handy as you follow the road north through **Benbecula** (p400) and **North Uist** (p399), as this is prime bird-watching country; then, take another ferry to **Harris** (p396).

Pray for sun, as the road along Harris' west coast has some of the most spectacular beaches in Scotland. The road continues north through the rugged Harris hills to **Lewis** (p391).

Turn west to make a circuit past the **Callanish Standing Stones** (p395), **Dun Carloway** (p395) broch and **Arnol Blackhouse museum** (p395) – the highlights of the Western Isles – and if you have time detour west to the beautiful beaches around **Miavaig** (p396).

From bustling **Stornoway** (p392) take the ferry to **Ullapool** (p371), where you have the choice of heading direct to **Inverness** (p318), or continuing north around the mainland coast through the jaw-dropping wilderness of **Inverpolly Nature Reserve** (p371), **Cape Wrath** (p369) and **Durness** (p368) to **Thurso** (p364), where the ferry to the **Orkney Islands** (p405) awaits.

CalMac's Island Hopscotch ticket No 8 (p453) includes all the ferries needed for the Outer Hebrides part of this route.



This trip involves 290 miles between Oban and Thurso, plus 10 hours of ferry crossings. You could drive it in four days at a push, but two weeks is more enjoyable. Touring Orkney would add another 60 or 70 miles, plus four hours on the ferry.

## TAILORED TRIPS

### THE BONNIE PRINCE CHARLIE TRAIL

Many visitors to Scotland are captivated by the romanticised legend of Bonnie Prince Charlie (p34), who in 1745 tried to recapture the British throne for the Stuart dynasty. The Young Pretender first set foot on Scottish soil at **Prince's Strand** (p401) on the island of Eriskay, and raised his standard at **Glenfinnan** (p347) before leading his army of Highlanders south as far as Derby in England. He was harried in retreat all the way to final defeat at **Culloden** (p323) in 1746, stopping briefly at **Linlithgow Palace** (p117) on the way, after which he was on the run in the **Isle of Skye** (p388) and the **Outer Hebrides** (p400). He finally departed Scotland for the last time from a point in Arisaig marked by the **Prince's Cairn** (p348).

Museums that have exhibits relating to Bonnie Prince Charlie and other places associated with his campaign include Kingussie's **Ruthven Barracks** (p336), the **West Highland Museum** (p341) in Fort William, the **Seven Men of Moidart** (p347), Achnacarry's **Clan Cameron Museum** (p345), and on Skye, the **Museum of the Isles** (p382) in Arma-dale and **Dunvegan Castle** (p387) in Dunvegan. Sir Walter Scott's house at **Abbotsford** (p159) displays a lock of the prince's hair.



### WILDLIFE-WATCHING

Boat trips depart from **Inverness** (p318) for cruises along the Moray Firth, famous for its population of bottlenose dolphins. Further east along the southern shore of the firth is **Spey Bay** (p265), where there's an exhibit on the dolphins and the chance of seeing seals. The valley of the River Spey stretches southwest to the Cairngorms, where you can see nesting ospreys (April to July) at the **Boat of Garten** (p335) and get close to some rare species at the **Highland Wildlife Park** (p334).

On the other side of the country lies the **Isle of Rum** (p350), a nature reserve famed for its rare white-tailed sea eagles, Manx shearwaters and red deer – the island is used by Scottish Natural Heritage ([www.snh.org.uk](http://www.snh.org.uk)) as a natural laboratory for studying deer populations. To the south, the islands of **Islay** (p288), **Colonsay** (p295) and **Coll** (p310) offer the best chance of hearing and – if you're very lucky, seeing – the elusive corncrake.

The **Isle of Skye** (p378) and the **Isle of Mull** (p303) are two of the best wildlife destinations in Scotland. Both islands have a number of outfits offering land-based wildlife tours to see eagles and otters, and offshore cruises to spot whales, dolphins, seals and porpoises. Skye and the **Outer Hebrides** (p389) are probably your best bet for spotting otters in the wild.



# On the Road



## NEIL WILSON

'To the ends of the earth'... well, to the ends of Scotland, at least. This is Bosta, on the northern tip of Great Bernera (p396) in the Outer Hebrides, about as far away from my home in Edinburgh as you can get without leaving the country; next stop over the horizon is Canada. It's a wild and beautiful spot, with a superb sandy beach, and a totally unexpected bonus – a reconstruction of an Iron Age house, complete with strips of mutton smoking over the peat fire. Well worth the long journey.



## ALAN MURPHY

The northwest Highlands (p364) are simply magical and driving the single-track roads between the mighty Munros is always breathtaking. Although there are often dark rain clouds and mist swirling around the rocky peaks looming over Glen Torridon, when a sunny day strikes, the mountains themselves become crystal clear, save the long afternoon shadows cast by legions of fluffy white clouds. No matter the conditions, this area never fails to make me want to strap on my boots and head straight up the nearest one.

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