



Southern Highlands & Islands

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Why Go?

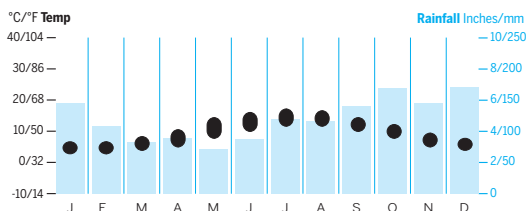
From the rasping spout of a minke whale as it breaks the surface, to the 'krek-krek-krek' of a corncrake, the coast and islands of southwest Scotland are filled with unusual wildlife experiences. You can spot otters tumbling in the kelp, watch sea eagles snatch fish from a lonely loch, and thrill to the sight of dolphins riding the bow-wave of your boat.

Here, sea travel is as important as road and rail – dozens of ferries allow you to island-hop your way from the Firth of Clyde to Oban and beyond, via the whisky distilleries of Islay, the wild mountains of Jura and the scenic delights of diminutive Colonsay.

The bustling town of Oban is the gateway to the isles – from the peaceful backwaters of Kerrera and Lismore to the dramatic coastal scenery of Mull and the wild, windswept beaches of Coll and Tiree.

When to Go

Oban



May Feis Ile (Islay Festival) celebrates traditional Scottish music and whisky.

June Roadsides and gardens become a blaze of colour with deep-pink rhododendron blooms.

August The best month of the year for whale watching off the west coast.



Southern Highlands & Islands Highlights

- ① Staring in wonder at the magnificent marble-clad halls of **Mount Stuart** (p269)
- ② Walking barefoot across the strand from Colonsay to **Oronsay** (p282) to visit the medieval priory
- ③ Riding a high-speed motorboat through the surging white water of the **Gulf of Corryvreckan** (boxed text, p280)
- ④ Sitting by a log fire in the **Port Charlotte Hotel** (p278), sampling some of Islay's finest single-malt whiskies
- ⑤ Whale watching in the waters off the west coast of **Mull** (boxed text, p295)

LOCH LOMOND & AROUND

The 'bonnie banks' and 'bonnie braes' of Loch Lomond have long been Glasgow's rural retreat – a scenic region of hills, lochs and healthy fresh air within easy reach of Scotland's largest city (Loch Lomond is within an hour's drive of 70% of Scotland's population). Since the 1930s Glaswegians have made a regular weekend exodus to the hills – by car, by bike and on foot – and today the loch's popularity shows no sign of decreasing.

The region's importance was recognised when it became the heart of **Loch Lomond & the Trossachs National Park** (www.lochlomond-trossachs.org) – Scotland's first national park, created in 2002.

Loch Lomond

Loch Lomond is the largest lake in mainland Britain and, after Loch Ness, perhaps the most famous of Scotland's lochs. Its proximity to Glasgow (20 miles away) means that the tourist honeypots of Balloch, Loch Lomond Shores and Luss get pretty crowded in summer. The main tourist focus is along the A82 on the loch's western shore, and at the southern end, around Balloch, which occasionally becomes a nightmare of jet skis and motorboats. The eastern shore, which is followed by the West Highland Way long-distance footpath, is a little quieter.

Loch Lomond straddles the Highland border and its character changes as you move north. The southern part is broad and island-studded, fringed by woods and Lowland meadows. However, north of Luss the loch narrows, occupying a deep trench gouged out by glaciers during the Ice Age, with 900m mountains crowding in on either side.



Activities

Walking

The big walk around here is the **West Highland Way** (www.west-highland-way.co.uk), which runs along the eastern shore of the loch. There are shorter lochside walks at Firkin Point on the western shore and at several other places around the loch. You can get further information on local walks from the national-park information centres at Loch Lomond Shores (p262) and Balmaha (p262).

Rowardennan is the starting point for an ascent of **Ben Lomond** (974m), a popular and relatively easy five- to six-hour round trip. The route starts at the car park just past the Rowardennan Hotel.

Boat Trips

The main centre for boat trips is Balloch, where **Sweeney's Cruises** (www.sweeney.uk.com; Balloch Rd) offers a range of trips including a one-hour cruise to Inchmurrin and back (adult/child £7/4, departs hourly), and a two-hour cruise (£12.50/6, departs 1pm and 3pm) around the islands. The quay is directly opposite Balloch train station, beside the tourist office. Sweeney's also runs hourly cruises from the Maid of the Loch jetty at Loch Lomond Shores.

Cruise Loch Lomond (www.cruiselochlomondltd.com) is based in Tarbet and offers trips to Inversnaid and Rob Roy MacGregor's Cave. You can also be dropped off at Rowardennan and picked up at Inversnaid after a 9-mile hike along the West Highland Way.

The mail boat, run by **Balmaha Boatyard** (www.balmahaboatyard.co.uk; The Boatyard, Balmaha), cruises from Balmaha to the loch's four inhabited islands, departing at 11.30am and returning at 2pm with a one-hour stop on Inchmurrin (adult/child £9/4.50). Trips depart daily in July and August, and Monday, Thursday and Saturday in May, June and September.

Other Activities

The mostly traffic-free **Clyde and Loch Lomond Cycle Way** links Glasgow to Balloch (20 miles), where it links with the **West Loch Lomond Cycle Path**, which continues along the loch shore to Tarbet (10 miles).

You can rent **rowing boats** at Balmaha Boatyard for £10/30 per hour/day (or £20/50 for a boat with outboard motor). **Lomond Adventure** (01360-870218), also in Balmaha, rents out Canadian canoes (£30 per day) and sea kayaks (£25).

At Loch Lomond Shores (p262) you can hire canoes (£12/17 per half/full hour) and bicycles (£12/17 per three hours/full day), take a **guided canoe trip** on the loch (£30 for two hours) or try **power kiting** (£30 for 2½ hours).



Information

Balloch tourist office (0870 720 0607; Balloch Rd; 9.30am–6pm Jun–Aug, 10am–6pm Apr & Sep)

Balmaha National Park Centre (📞01389-722100; Balmaha; ☀️9.30am-4.15pm Apr-Sep)

National Park Gateway Centre (📞01389-751035; www.lochlomondshores.com; Loch Lomond Shores, Balloch; ☀️10am-6pm Apr-Sep, to 5pm Oct-Mar; 📶📶)

Tarbet tourist office (📞0870-720 0623; ☀️10am-6pm Jul & Aug, to 5pm Easter-Jun, Sep & Oct) At the junction of the A82 and the A83.

📍 Getting There & Away

BUS First (www.firstgroup.com) Glasgow buses 204 and 215 run from Argyle St in central Glasgow to Balloch and Loch Lomond Shores (1½ hours, at least two per hour).

Scottish Citylink (www.citylink.co.uk) coaches from Glasgow to Oban and Fort William stop at Luss (£8, 55 minutes, six daily), Tarbet (£8, 65 minutes) and Ardlui (£14, 1¼ hours).

TRAIN There are frequent trains from Glasgow to Balloch (£4.15, 45 minutes, every 30 minutes) and a less-frequent service on the West Highland line from Glasgow to Arrochar & Tarbet station (£10, 1¼ hours, three or four daily), halfway between the two villages, and Ardlui (£13, 1½ hours), continuing to Oban and Fort William.

📍 Getting Around

Pick up the useful public transport booklet (free), which lists timetables for all bus, train and ferry services in Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park, available from any tourist office or park information centre.

BUS McColl's Coaches (www.mccolls.org.uk) bus 309 runs from Balloch to Balmaha (25 minutes, every two hours). An **SPT Daytripper ticket** (www.spt.co.uk/tickets) gives a family group unlimited travel for a day on most bus and train services in the Glasgow, Loch Lomond and Helensburgh area. Buy the ticket (£9.80 for one adult and one or two children, £17.50 for two adults and up to four children) from any train station or the main Glasgow bus station.

BOAT There are several passenger ferries on Loch Lomond, with fares ranging from £3 to £7 per person; bicycles are carried free. Except for the ferries out of Loch Lomond Shores, these are mostly small motorboats that operate on demand, rather than to a set timetable – telephone or visit for more information.

Ardlui to Ardluish (📞01307-704243; Ardlui Hotel; ☀️9am-7pm May-Sep, to 6pm Apr & Oct) On demand.

Balmaha to Inchcailloch (📞01360-870214; Balmaha Boatyard, Balmaha; ☀️9am-8pm daily) On demand.

Balmaha to Luss (www.cruiselochlomondltd.com; ☀️Jul-Sep) Four daily.

Inveruglas to Inversnaid (📞01877-386223; Inversnaid Hotel) On demand; no fixed timetable.

Loch Lomond Shores to Balmaha (www.clydecruises.com; ☀️late Jul-early Sep) Five daily.

Rowardennan to Luss (www.cruiselochlomondltd.com; ☀️Jul-Sep) One daily. Departs Rowardennan at 9.30am; Luss at 4.15pm.

Tarbet to Inversnaid (www.cruiselochlomondltd.com; ☀️Apr-Oct) Three daily.

Tarbet to Rowardennan (www.cruiselochlomondltd.com; ☀️Apr-Oct) Twice daily. Departs Tarbet 10am and 4pm; Rowardennan at 10.45am and 4.45pm.

WESTERN SHORE

The town of **Balloch**, which straddles the River Leven where it flows from the southern end of Loch Lomond, is the loch's main population centre and transport hub. A Victorian resort once thronged by day-trippers transferring between the train station and the steamer quay, it is now a 'gateway centre' for Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park.

Loch Lomond Shores (www.lochlomondshores.com), a major tourism development a half-mile north of Balloch, sports a national-park information centre plus various visitor attractions, outdoor activities and boat trips. In keeping with the times, the heart of the development is a large shopping mall. It's also home to the **Loch Lomond Aquarium** (www.sealife.co.uk; adult/child £12/9; ☀️10am-5pm), which has displays on the wildlife of Loch Lomond, an otter enclosure (housing short-clawed Asian otters, not Scottish ones), and a host of sea-life exhibits ranging from sharks to stingrays to sea turtles.

The vintage paddle steamer **Maid of the Loch** (www.maidoftheloch.com; admission free; ☀️11am-4pm daily May-Oct, Sat & Sun only Nov-Apr), built in 1953, is moored here while awaiting full restoration – you can nip aboard for a look around.

Unless it's raining, give Loch Lomond Shores a miss and head for the little picture-postcard village of **Luss**. Stroll among the pretty cottages with roses around their doors (the cottages were built by the local laird in the 19th century for the workers on his estate), then pop into the **Clan Colquhoun tourist office** (adult/child £1/free; ☀️10.30am-6pm Easter-Oct) for some background history before enjoying a cup of tea at the Coach House Coffee Shop.

Sleeping & Eating



Drover's Inn

PUB £

(01301-704234; www.thedroversinn.co.uk; Inverarnan; bar meals £8-10, steaks £15-17; ☺lunch & dinner; (P)) This is one howff (drinking den) you shouldn't miss – a low-ceilinged place with smoke-blackened stone, bare wooden floors spotted with candle wax, barmen in kilts, and walls festooned with moth-eaten stags' heads and stuffed birds. There's even a stuffed bear, and the desiccated husk of a basking shark. The bar serves hearty hill-walking fuel such as steak-and-Guinness pie with mustard mash, and hosts live folk music on Friday and Saturday nights. We recommend this inn more as a place to eat and drink than to stay – accommodation (single/double from £40/78) varies from eccentric, old-fashioned and rather run-down rooms in the old building (including a ghost in room 6), to more comfortable rooms (with en suite bathrooms) in the modern annexe across the road. Ask to see your room before taking it.

Loch Lomond Youth Hostel

HOSTEL £

(SYHA; 01389-850226; www.syha.org.uk; Arden; dm £18; ☺Mar-Oct; (P)☺) Forget about roughing it, this is one of the most impressive hostels in the country – an imposing 19th-century country house set in beautiful grounds overlooking the loch. It's 2 miles north of Balloch and very popular, so book in advance in summer. And yes, it *is* haunted.

Ardlui Hotel

HOTEL ££

(01301-704243; www.ardlui.co.uk; Ardlui; s/d £60/95; (P)) If the Drover's Inn is a little rough for your bedtime tastes, nip down the road to the plush Ardlui Hotel, a comfy country-house hotel with a great lochside location and a view of Ben Lomond from the breakfast room.

Coach House Coffee Shop

CAFE £

(Luss; mains £5-11; ☺10am-5pm) With its chunky pine furniture and deep, deep sofa in front of a rustic fireplace, the Coach House is one of the cosiest places to eat on Loch Lomond. The menu includes coffee and tea, home-baked cakes, scones, ciabattas and more substantial offerings such as haggis.

EASTERN SHORE

The road along the loch's eastern shore passes through the attractive village of **Balmaha**, where you can hire boats or take

a cruise on the mail boat (see p261). There are several picnic areas along the lochside; the most attractive is at **Millarochy Bay** (1.5 miles north of Balmaha), which has a nice gravel beach and superb views across the loch to the Luss hills.

The road ends at **Rowardennan**, but the West Highland Way continues north along the shore of the loch. It's 7 miles to Inversnaid, which can be reached by road from the Trossachs, and 15 miles to Inverarnan on the main A82 road at the northern end of the loch.

Sleeping & Eating

Oak Tree Inn

INN ££

(01360-870357; www.oak-tree-inn.co.uk; Balmaha; dm/s/d £30/60/75; (P)☺) An attractive traditional inn built in slate and timber, the child-friendly Oak Tree offers luxurious guest bedrooms for pampered hikers, and two four-bed bunkrooms for hardier souls. The rustic **restaurant** dishes up hearty lunches and dinners (meals £8 to £15) such as steak-and-mushroom pie, and roast Arctic char with lime and chive butter, and cooks up an excellent bowl of Cullen skink (soup made with smoked haddock, potato, onion and milk).

Passfoot Cottage

B&B ££

(01360-870324; www.passfoot.com; Balmaha; s/d from £55/64; ☺Apr-Sep) Passfoot is a pretty little whitewashed cottage decked out with colourful flower baskets, with a lovely location overlooking Balmaha Bay. The bright bedrooms have a homely feel, and there's a large lounge with a wood-burning stove and loch view.

Rowardennan Hotel

HOTEL ££

(01360-870273; www.rowardennanhotel.co.uk; Rowardennan; s/d £65/90, bar meals £7-11; ☺lunch & dinner; (P)) Originally an 18th-century drovers' inn, the Rowardennan has two big bars (often crowded with rain-soaked hikers) and a good beer garden (often crowded with midges). It had just been taken over by new owners at the time of research, and much-needed refurbishment has made it a pleasant place to stay, with a choice of traditional but stylish hotel rooms and luxury self-catering lodges.

Rowardennan Youth Hostel

HOSTEL £

(01360-870259; Rowardennan; dm £17; ☺Mar-Oct) Housed in an attractive Victorian lodge, this hostel has a superb setting right on the loch shore, beside the West Highland Way.

Cashel Campsite

(0201360-870234; www.forestholidays.co.uk; Rowardennan; dm £6.50, tent sites per 2 people incl car £15-17; ☉Mar-Oct; 🏠) This is the most attractive campsite in the area. It's 3 miles north of Balmaha, by the loch.

CRIANLARICH & TYNDRUM

POP 350

Surrounded by spectacular hillsides begging to be walked, and on the West Highland Way, these villages are well-visited service junctions on the main A82 road, just north of the Loch Lomond & the Trossachs National Park. Crianlarich has a train station and more community atmosphere than Tyndrum, but Tyndrum (*tyne*-drum), 5 miles up the road, has two stations, a bus interchange, petrol station, late-opening motorists' cafes and a flash **tourist office** (0201838-400246; ☉10am-5pm Apr-Oct) – a good spot for route information and maps for walking and ascents of popular **An Caisle** (995m), **Ben More** (1174m) and magnificent **Ben Lui** (1130m).

🍴 Sleeping & Eating

Crianlarich makes a more appealing base than Tyndrum: vehicles slow down through town and the views and food choice are better.

Crianlarich SYHA

HOSTEL £

(0201838-300260; www.syha.org.uk; Station Rd, Crianlarich; dm £18.75; 🏠🚰🚰) Well-run and comfortable, with spacious kitchen, dining area and lounge, this is a real haven for walkers or anyone passing through Crianlarich. Dorms vary in size – there are some great en suite family rooms that should be prebooked – but all are clean and roomy.

Strathfillan Wigwams

CAMPING, CABINS £

(0201838-400251; www.wigwamholidays.com/strathfillan; camping per adult/child £6/3, wigwam d small/large £28/33, lodge d from £45; 🏠) This charismatic place, 3 miles from Crianlarich and 2 miles from Tyndrum, is off the A82 and has 16 heated 'wigwams' – essentially wooden A-frame cabins with fridge and foam mattresses that can sleep four at a pinch. More upmarket are the self-contained lodges with their own bathroom and kitchen facilities. There's also camping with access to all facilities.

☕ Real Food Café

CAFÉ £

(www.therealfoodcafe.com; Tyndrum; meals £6-9; ☉10am-10pm; 🏠) Don't be put off by the decor of this former chain eatery – concen-

trate on the food. The menu looks familiar, with fish and chips, soups, salads and sausages, but it makes an effort to source sustainably and locally, and the quality shines through.

Crianlarich Hotel

HOTEL, PUB ££

(0201838-300272; www.crianlarich-hotel.co.uk; Crianlarich; budget/standard d £90/105; 🏠🚰) On the junction where all roads meet, this has large rooms with appealingly comfortable beds, compact bathrooms, and a feeling that they spent more on the reception area than the carpet. It's good value in the low season. The bar meals (mains £8 to £13) are pricey but served in a most elegant space, with venison, lamb hotpot and salmon available. The **restaurant** serves classier dinners (two courses £28).

Tyndrum Lodge Hotel

HOTEL, PUB ££

(0201838-400219; www.glhoteles.co.uk; Tyndrum; s without bathroom £28, s/d £33/66; 🏠🚰) The heart of Tyndrum is this cheerily run pit-stop that features decent-value rooms and two convivial bars. Walkers should head for rooms 1 to 12, which are towards the back and a bit quieter, ensuring a decent night's shut-eye. Shared bathrooms have baths not showers; breakfast is a buffet affair, and bar meals (£7 to £9) are supplemented by weekend all-you-can-eat curry nights.

📍 Getting There & Away

BUS Scottish Citylink (www.citylink.co.uk) runs several buses daily to Edinburgh, Glasgow, Oban and Skye from both villages. A **postbus** (www.royalmail.com) links Crianlarich, Tyndrum and Killin twice on each weekday and once on Saturday.

TRAIN Trains run from Tyndrum and Crianlarich to Fort William (£15, 1¼ hours, four daily Monday to Saturday, two on Sunday), Oban (£8.90, one hour, three or four daily) and Glasgow (£16.10, two hours, three or four daily).

Helensburgh

POP 16,500

With the coming of the railway in the mid-19th century, Helensburgh – named in the 18th century after the wife of Sir James Colquhoun of Luss – became a popular seaside retreat for wealthy Glaswegian families. Their spacious Victorian villas now populate the neat grid of streets that covers the hillside above the Firth of Clyde, but none can compare with the splendour of **Hill House** (NTS; www.nts.org).

uk; ☎01436-673900; Upper Colquhoun St; adult/child £8.50/5.50; ☉1.30-5.30pm Apr-Oct). Built in 1902 for the Glasgow publisher Walter Blackie, it is perhaps architect **Charles Rennie Mackintosh's** finest creation – its timeless elegance feels as chic today as it no doubt did when the Blackies moved in a century ago.

Helensburgh has a ferry connection with Gourock (p133) via Kilcreggan, and a frequent train service to Glasgow (£5, 50 minutes, two per hour).

Arrochar

POP 650

The village of Arrochar has a wonderful location, looking across the head of Loch Long to the jagged peaks of the **Cobbler** (881m). The mountain takes its name from the shape of its north peak (the one on the right, seen from Arrochar), which looks like a cobbler hunched over his bench. The village has several hotels and shops, a bank and a post office.

If you want to **climb the Cobbler**, start from the roadside car park at Succoth near the head of Loch Long. A steep uphill hike through the woods is followed by an easier section as you head into the valley below the triple peaks. Then it's steeply uphill again to the saddle between the north and central peaks. The central peak to the left (south) is the highest point, but it's awkward to get to – scramble through the hole and along the ledge to reach the airy summit. The north peak to the right is an easy walk. Allow five to six hours for the 5-mile round trip.

There's good camping at **Ardgartan Caravan & Campsite** (☎01301-702293; www.forestholidays.co.uk; Ardgartan; tent site plus car & 2 people £15-17; ☉Apr-Oct) at the foot of Glen Croe. Bike hire also available.

The black-and-white, 19th-century **Village Inn** (☎01301-702279; www.villageinnarrochar.co.uk; Arrochar; s/d from £50/75; mains £8-18; ☉lunch & dinner; ♻️) is a lovely spot for lunch, or just a pint of real ale – the beer garden has a great view of the Cobbler. There are 14 en suite bedrooms; the ones at the top end of the price range have four-poster beds and a view over the loch.

Citylink (www.citylink.co.uk) buses from Glasgow to Inveraray and Campbeltown call at Arrochar and Ardgartan (£8, 1¼ hours, three daily). See p262 for trains to Arrochar & Tarbet station.

BOOTS, BOATS, BIKES & BUSES

A new service called **Loch Lomond 4Bs** (www.lochlomond4bs.co.uk) allows you to explore Loch Lomond's hiking and biking trails by using ferry services and buses with bike trailers to deliver you to the start and finish of your chosen route.

For example, if you don't have time for the full 95 miles of the West Highland Way, you can spend a day on one of its most scenic sections. Starting from Balloch train station, a bus takes you to Tarbet, then you travel by boat to Rowardennan and the start of the 7-mile hike along the eastern shore of Loch Lomond to Inversnaid, where the boat returns you to Tarbet and the bus back to Balloch (bus £5, ferry £14.50).

The service operates daily July to September, and on holiday weekends from Easter to June. See the website for full details of timetables and possible walking and cycling itineraries.

SOUTH ARGYLL

Cowal

The remote Cowal peninsula is cut off from the rest of the country by the lengthy fjords of Loch Long and Loch Fyne – it's an area more accessible by boat than by car. It comprises rugged hills and narrow lochs, with only a few small villages; the scenery around Loch Riddon is particularly enchanting. The only town on the mainland is the old-fashioned holiday resort of Dunoon.

From Arrochar, the A83 to Inveraray loops around the head of Loch Long and climbs up Glen Croe. The pass at the head of the glen is called the **Rest and Be Thankful** – when the original military road through the glen was repaired in the 18th century, a stone was erected at the top inscribed 'Rest, and be thankful. This road was made, in 1748, by the 24th Regt...Repaired by the 93rd Regt. 1786'. A copy of the stone can be seen at the far end of the parking area at the top of the pass.

There's a Forest Enterprise **tourist office** (☎01301-702432; Ardgartan; admission free;

☀10am-5pm Apr-Oct) at the foot of the glen, with information on various walks on the Cowal peninsula.

As you descend Glen Kinglas on the far side of the Rest and be Thankful, the A815 forks to the left just before Cairndow; this is the main overland route into Cowal. From Glasgow, the most direct route is by

ferry from Gourock to Dunoon (see p133 for details).

DUNOON & AROUND

Like Rothesay on the Isle of Bute, Dunoon (population 9100) is a Victorian seaside resort that owes its existence to the steamers that once carried thousands of Glaswegians

GAELIC & NORSE PLACE NAMES

Throughout the Highlands and islands of Scotland the indigenous Gaelic language has left a rich legacy of place names. They're often intermixed with Old Norse names left behind by the Viking invaders who occupied the western and northern islands between the 8th and 13th centuries. The spelling is now anglicised, but the meaning is still clear once you know what to look for. Here are a few of the more common Gaelic and Norse names and their meanings.

GAELIC PLACE NAMES

- ach, auch** – from *achadh* (field)
- ard** – from *ard* or *aird* (height, hill)
- avon** – from *abhainn* (river or stream)
- bal** – from *baile* (village or homestead)
- ban** – from *ban* (white, fair)
- beg** – from *beag* (small)
- ben** – from *beinn* (mountain)
- buie** – from *buidhe* (yellow)
- dal** – from *dail* (field or dale)
- dow, dhu** – from *dubh* (black)
- drum** – from *druim* (ridge or back)
- dun** – from *dun* or *duin* (fort or castle)
- glen** – from *gleann* (narrow valley)
- gorm** – from *gorm* (blue)
- gower, gour** – from *gabhar* (goat), eg Ardgour (height of the goats)
- kyll, insh** – from *inis* (island, water-meadow or resting place for cattle)
- inver** – from *inbhir* (rivermouth or meeting of two rivers)
- kil** – from *cille* (church), eg Kilmartin (Church of St Martin)
- kin, ken** – from *ceann* (head), eg Kinlochleven (head of Loch Leven)
- kyle, kyles** – from *caol* or *caolas* (narrow sea channel)
- more, vore** – from *mor* or *mhor* (big), eg Ardmere (big height), Skerryvore (big reef)
- strath** – from *srath* (broad valley)
- tarbert, tarbet** – from *tairbeart* (portage), meaning a narrow neck of land between two bodies of water, across which a boat can be dragged
- tay, ty** – from *tigh* (house), eg Tyndrum (house on the ridge)
- tober** – from *tobar* (well), eg Tobermory (Mary's well)

NORSE PLACE NAMES

- a, ay, ey** – from *ey* (island)
- bister, buster, bster** – from *bolstaor* (dwelling place, homestead)
- geo** – from *gja* (chasm)
- holm** – from *holmr* (small island)
- kirk** – from *kirkja* (church)
- pol, poll, bol** – from *bol* (farm)
- quoy** – from *kvi* (sheep fold, cattle enclosure)
- sker, skier, skerry** – from *sker* (rocky reef)
- ster, sett** – from *setr* (house)
- vig, vaig, wick** – from *vik* (bay, creek)
- voe, way** – from *vagr* (bay, creek)

on pleasure trips 'doon the watter' (down the water) in the 19th and 20th centuries. As with Rothesay, Dunoon's fortunes declined in recent decades when cheap foreign holidays stole its market – however, while the Bute resort appears to be recovering, Dunoon is still a bit down in the dumps.

The **tourist office** (☎0845 225 5121; 7 Alexandra Pde; ☉9am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-5pm Sat & Sun Apr-Sep, shorter hr Oct-Mar; @) is on the waterfront 100m north of the pier.

👁️ Sights & Activities

The town's main attraction is still, as it was in the 1950s, strolling along the **promenade**, licking an ice-cream cone and watching the yachts at play in the Firth of Clyde. On a small hill above the seafront is a **statue of Highland Mary** (1763–86), one of the great loves of Robert Burns' life. She was born near Dunoon, but died tragically young; her statue gazes longingly across the firth to Burns' home territory in Ayrshire.

Benmore Botanic Garden

GARDEN

(www.rbge.org.uk; Benmore; adult/child £5/1; ☉10am-6pm Apr-Sep, to 5pm Mar & Oct) This garden, 7 miles north of Dunoon, was originally planted in the 19th and early 20th centuries. It contains the country's finest collection of flowering trees and shrubs, including spectacular displays of **rhododendrons** and **azaleas**, and is entered along a spectacular avenue of giant **Californian redwoods** planted in 1863. A highlight is the recently restored **Victorian fernery**, nestled in an unlikely fold in the crags. The **cafe** here (which stays open all year) is a nice place for lunch or a coffee.

🌟 Festivals & Events

Cowal Highland Gathering HIGHLAND CULTURE (www.cowalhighlandgathering.com) Held in Dunoon in mid-August. The spectacular finale traditionally features 3000 bagpipers playing en masse.

Cowalfest

ARTS, OUTDOORS

(www.cowalfest.org) A 10-day arts and walking festival featuring art exhibitions, film screenings, guided walks and bicycle rides throughout the Cowal peninsula.

🛏 Sleeping & Eating

Dhailling Lodge

B&B ££

(☎01369-701253; www.dhaillinglodge.com; 155 Alexandra Pde; s/d £40/76; 📞📺) You can experience some of Dunoon's former elegance

at this large Victorian villa overlooking the bay about 0.75 miles north of the CalMac ferry pier. The owners are the essence of Scottish hospitality, and can provide excellent evening meals (£20 per person) if you wish.

Chatters

RESTAURANT ££

(☎01369-706402; 58 John St; mains lunch £5-9, dinner £15-22; ☉lunch & dinner Wed-Sat) Chatters is a pretty little cottage restaurant with tartan sofas in the sitting room and a few tables in the tiny garden. It serves a mix of lunchtime snacks and brasserie dishes, and is famous for its open sandwiches and tempting homemade puddings. Booking recommended.

📍 Getting There & Away

Dunoon is served by two competing ferry services from Gourrock (p133) – the **CalMac** (www.calmac.co.uk) ferry is better if you are travelling on foot and want to arrive in the town centre.

TIGHNABRUAICH

POP 200

Sleepy little Tighnabruaich (tinna-*broo*-ach), a colony of seaside villas built by wealthy Glasgow families at the turn of the 20th century, is one of the most attractive villages on the Firth of Clyde. It was once a regular stop for Clyde steamers, and the old wooden pier is still occasionally visited by the paddle steamer *Waverley* (see p117).

The link with the sea continues in the **Tighnabruaich Sailing School** (www.tssargyll.co.uk; Carry Farm; ☉May-Sep), 2 miles south of Tighnabruaich. A five-day dinghy-sailing course costs £230, excluding accommodation.

The village is home to **An Lochan** (☎01700-811239; www.anlochan-argyll.co.uk; Tighnabruaich; mains £10-22; 📞), a luxurious boutique hotel (rooms £110 to £180) that's comfortable, but in our opinion, a tad over-priced. The food is exquisite, and uses fresh, locally sourced produce – summer-vegetable risotto with basil dressing, to seared scallops with black pudding, apple puree and curry oil.

If all you want to do is fill up with good, hearty homemade grub, go for the mussels and chips at the **Burnside Bistro** (mains £6-15; ☉breakfast, lunch & dinner) in the village centre, or a bar meal at the **Kames Hotel** (mains £8-15; ☉lunch & dinner), a mile to the south.

Isle of Bute

POP 7350

The island of Bute lies pinched between the thumb and forefinger of the Cowal peninsula, separated from the mainland by a narrow, scenic strait known as the Kyles of Bute. The Highland Boundary Fault cuts through the middle of the island so that, geologically speaking, the northern half is in the Highlands and the southern half is in the central Lowlands – a metal arch on Rothesay's Esplanade marks the fault line.

The **Isle of Bute Discovery Centre** (☎01700-505156; www.bestofbute.co.uk; Esplanade, Rothesay; ☉10am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-5pm Sat & Sun Jul & Aug, 10am-5pm daily Apr-Jun & Sep, shorter hr Oct-Mar; @) is in Rothesay's restored Winter Gardens.

The five-day **Isle of Bute Jazz Festival** (www.butejazz.com) is held over the first weekend of May.

ROTHESAY

From the mid-19th century until the 1960s, Rothesay – once dubbed the Margate of the Clyde – was one of the most popular holiday resorts in Scotland. Its Esplanade was bustling with day-trippers disembarking from the numerous steamers crowded around the pier, and its hotels were filled with elderly holidaymakers and convalescents taking advantage of the town's famously mild climate.

The fashion for foreign holidays that took off in the 1970s saw Rothesay's fortunes decline, and by the late 1990s it had become dilapidated and despondent. But in the last few years a nostalgia-fuelled resurgence of interest in Rothesay's holiday heyday has seen many of its Victorian buildings restored, the ferry terminal and harbour rebuilt and marinas constructed at Rothesay and Port Bannatyne. There's a new feeling of optimism in the air.

👁 Sights

Victorian Toilets

HISTORIC BUILDING

(Rothesay Pier; adult/child 20p/free) There aren't too many places where a public toilet would count as a tourist attraction, but Rothesay's Victorian toilets, dating from 1899, are a monument to lavatorial luxury – a disinfectant-scented temple of green marble, glistening white enamel, glass-sided cisterns and gleaming copper pipes. The attendant will escort ladies into the hallowed confines of the gents for a look around when the facilities are unoccupied.

Rothsay Castle

CASTLE

(HS; www.historic-scotland.gov.uk; King St; adult/child £4.20/2.50; ☉9.30am-5.30pm Apr-Sep, to 4.30pm Sat-Wed Oct-Mar) Just two blocks inland from the pier are the splendid ruins of 13th-century Rothesay Castle, with seagulls and jackdaws nesting in the walls. Once a favourite residence of the Stuart kings, it is unique in Scotland in having a circular plan, with four massive round towers. The landscaped moat, with its manicured turf, flower gardens and lazily cruising ducks, makes a picturesque setting.

Bute Museum

MUSEUM

(www.butemuseum.org; 7 Stuart St; adult/child £2/1; ☉10.30am-4.30pm Mon-Sat & 2.30-4.30pm Sun Apr-Sep, 2.30-4.30pm Tue-Sat Oct-Mar) The most interesting displays in Bute Museum are those recounting the history of the famous Clyde steamers. Other galleries cover natural history, archaeology and geology; the prize exhibit is a stunning jet necklace found in a Bronze Age burial on the island.

🚢 Sleeping

Boat House

B&B ££

(☎01700-502696; www.theboathouse-bute.co.uk; 15 Battery Pl; s/d from £45/65; ☎) The Boat House brings a touch of class to Rothesay's guesthouse scene, with quality fabrics and furnishings and an eye for design that makes it feel a bit like a boutique hotel without the expensive price tag. Other features include sea views, a central location and a ground-floor room kitted out for wheelchair users.

Glendale Guest House

B&B ££

(☎01700-502329; www.glendale-guest-house.com; 20 Battery Pl; s/d/f from £35/60/90; ☎☎) Look out for the ornate, flower-bedecked facade on this beautiful Victorian villa, complete with pinnacled turret. All those windows mean superb sea views from the front-facing bedrooms, the elegant, 1st-floor lounge and the breakfast room, where you'll find homemade smoked haddock fishcakes on the menu as well as the traditional fry-up.

Moorings

B&B ££

(☎01700-502277; www.themoorings-bute.co.uk; 7 Mountstuart Rd; s/d from £37/55; ☎) Another delightful Victorian lodge with good sea views, the family-friendly Moorings has an outdoor play area for kids and a high chair in the breakfast room. Vegetarian breakfasts are not a problem.

Roseland Caravan Park

(☎01700-504529; www.roselandcaravanpark.co.uk; Roslin Rd, Canada Hill; tent site & 2 people £8) The island's only official campsite is a steep climb up the winding Serpentine Rd from the ferry terminal. There's a small but pleasant grassy area for tents amid the static caravans.



Eating

Waterfront Bistro

BISTRO ££

(www.thewaterfrontbistro.co.uk; 16 East Princes St; mains £8-16; ☎dinner Thu-Mon) Cheerful and informal, the wood-panelled Waterfront has a bistro menu that ranges from haddock and chips to venison in red-wine sauce to grilled langoustines with garlic butter. Bottled real ale from the Arran Brewery complements the wine list.

Brechin's Brasserie

BRASSERIE ££

(01700-502922; 2 Bridgend St; mains £9-16; ☎lunch Tue-Sat, dinner Fri & Sat) A friendly neighbourhood brasserie owned by jazz fan Tim (check out the sheet music and posters on the wall), Brechin's serves unpretentious but delicious dishes such as homemade lasagne, local lamb chops with redcurrant and red-wine sauce, and grilled salmon with savoury herb butter.

Pier at Craigmore

BISTRO ££

(Mount Stuart Rd; mains £7-13; ☎lunch daily, dinner Sat) Housed in the former waiting room of a Victorian pier on the eastern edge of town, the Craigmore is a neat little bistro with fantastic views. The lunch menu offers sandwiches, salads, homemade burgers and quiche, while Saturday dinner is more sophisticated with seafood, steak and roast lamb. No credit cards.

Musicker

CAFE £

(11 High St; mains £3-5; ☎breakfast & lunch) This cool little cafe, tricked out in pale minty green, serves the best coffee on the island, alongside a range of sandwiches with imaginative fillings (haggis and cranberry, anyone?). It also sells music CDs (folk, world and country) and sports an old-fashioned jukebox.

AROUND ROTHESAY

Mount Stuart

HISTORIC BUILDING

(www.mountstuart.com; adult/child £8/4; ☎11am-5pm May-Sep) The Stuart Earls of Bute are direct descendants of Robert the Bruce, and have lived on the island for 700 years. When a large part of the family seat was destroyed by fire in 1877, the third Marquess of Bute,

John Patrick Crichton-Stuart (1847–1900) – one of the greatest architecture patrons of his day, and the builder of Cardiff Castle and Castell Coch in Wales – commissioned Sir Robert Rowand Anderson to create a new one. The result – Mount Stuart – became the finest neo-Gothic palace in Scotland, and the first to have electric lighting, central heating and a heated swimming pool.

The heart of the house is the stunning **Marble Hall**, a three-storey extravaganza of Italian marble that soars 25m to a dark-blue vault spangled with constellations of golden stars. Twelve stained-glass windows represent the seasons and the signs of the zodiac, with crystal stars casting rainbow-hued highlights across the marble when the sun is shining.

The design and decoration reflect the third Marquess' fascination with astrology, mythology and religion, a theme carried over into the grand **Marble Staircase** beyond (where wall panels depict the six days of the Creation), and the lavishly decorated **Horoscope Bedroom**. Here the central ceiling panel records the positions of the stars and planets at the time of the Marquess' birth on 12 September 1847.

Yet another highlight is the **Marble Chapel**, built entirely out of dazzling white Carrara marble. It has a dome lit to spectacular effect by a ring of ruby-red stained-glass windows – at noon on midsummer's day a shaft of blood-red sunlight shines directly onto the altar. It was here that Stella McCartney – daughter of ex-Beatle Sir Paul, and friend of the present Marquess, former racing driver Johnny Dumfries – was married in 2003.

Mount Stuart is 5 miles south of Rothesay. Bus 90 runs from the bus stop outside the ferry terminal at Rothesay to Mount Stuart (15 minutes, hourly May to September). You can buy a special Mount Stuart day-trip ticket (adult/child £16/8) that includes return ferry and bus travel from Wemyss Bay ferry terminal to Mount Stuart, as well as admission.

REST OF THE ISLAND

In the southern part of the island you'll find the haunting 12th-century ruin of **St Blane's Chapel**, set in a beautiful wooded grove, and a sandy beach at **Kilchattan Bay**.

There are more good beaches on the west coast. **Scalpsie Bay** is a 400m walk across a field from the parking area, and has a fantastic outlook to the peaks of Arran. You

THE MAIDS OF BUTE

One of the best walks on Bute is from the ferry pier at Rhubodach to the northern tip of the island (1.5 miles), where you can watch yachts negotiate the rocky narrows at the Burnt Islands. Just around the point are the Maids of Bute, two rocks painted to look like old women. The story goes that the distinctively shaped (but then unpainted) rocks were first noticed by the skipper of a pleasure steamer in the early 20th century, who always pointed them out to the passengers on his boat. Frustrated that the tourists could never see the resemblance, he sent a deckhand ashore with a couple of tins of paint to give them some clothes and recognisable faces. No one is quite sure who now maintains the maids, but every time the paint begins to peel, it's not long before a fresh coat brightens them up.

can often spot seals basking at low tide off Ardscaipsie Point, to the west.

Ettrick Bay is bigger, easier to reach, and has a tearoom (not the most attractive building on the island), but it's not as pretty as Scalpsie.

There are lots of easy walks on Bute, including the **West Island Way**, a way-marked, 30-mile walking route from Kilchattan Bay to Port Bannatyne; map and details are available from the Isle of Bute Discovery Centre (p268).

Cycling on Bute is excellent – the roads are well surfaced and fairly quiet. You can hire a bike from the **Bike Shed** (www.thebikeshed.org.uk; 23-25 East Princes St, Rothesay) for £10/15 per half-/full day.

Kingarth Trekking Centre (www.kingarthtrekkingcentre.co.uk; Kilchattan Bay) offers pad-dock rides for kids (£5; minimum age eight years), riding lessons (£20 per hour), and pony treks (£35 for two hours).

Getting There & Away

BOAT CalMac (www.calmac.co.uk) ferries travel between Wemyss Bay and Rothesay (passenger/car £4.25/16.85, 35 minutes, hourly). Another CalMac ferry crosses the short stretch of water between Rhubodach in the north of the island and Colintrave (passenger/car £1.35/8.50, five minutes, every 15 to 20 minutes) in Cowal.

BUS West Coast Motors (www.westcoastmotors.co.uk) buses run four or five times a week from Rothesay to Tighnabruaich and Dunoon via the ferry at Colintrave. On Monday and Thursday a bus goes from Rothesay to Portavadie (via the Rhubodach–Colintrave ferry), where there's a ferry to Tarbert in Kintyre (passenger/car £3.60/16.25, 25 minutes, hourly).

Inveraray

POP 700

You can spot Inveraray long before you get here – its neat, whitewashed buildings stand out from a distance on the shores of Loch Fyne. It's a planned town, built by the Duke of Argyll in Georgian style when he revamped his nearby castle in the 18th century. The **tourist office** (☎0845 225 5121; Front St; ☉9am-6pm Jul & Aug, 10am-5pm Mon-Sat Apr-Jun, Sep & Oct, 10am-3pm Mon-Sat Nov-Mar; @) is on the seafront.

Sights

Inveraray Castle

CASTLE

(www.inveraray-castle.com; adult/child £9/6.10; ☉10am-5.45pm Apr-Oct) Inveraray Castle has been the seat of the Dukes of Argyll – chiefs of Clan Campbell – since the 15th century. The 18th-century building, with its fairytale turrets and fake battlements, houses an impressive armoury hall, its walls patterned with a collection of more than 1000 pole arms, dirks, muskets and Lochaber axes. The castle is 500m north of town, entered from the A819 Dalmally road.

Inveraray Jail

MUSEUM

(www.inverarayjail.co.uk; Church Sq; adult/child £8.25/5.50; ☉9.30am-6pm Apr-Oct, 10am-5pm Nov-Mar) Inveraray Jail is an award-winning, interactive tourist attraction where you can sit in on a trial, try out a cell, and discover the harsh torture meted out to unfortunate prisoners. The attention to detail – including a life-sized model of an inmate squatting on a 19th-century toilet – more than makes up for the sometimes tedious commentary.

Inveraray Maritime Museum



MUSEUM

(www.inveraraypier.com; The Pier; adult/child £5/2.50; ☉10am-4pm) The **Arctic Penguin**, a three-masted schooner built in 1911 and one of the world's last surviving iron sailing ships, is permanently moored in Inveraray harbour and houses the Inveraray Maritime Museum. It has interesting photos and models of the old Clyde steamers and puffers, and a display about Para Handy, the fic-

tional sea captain created by local novelist Neil Munro (and celebrated in two successful TV series in the 1960s and 1990s). Kids will love exploring below the decks – there's a special play area in the bowels of the ship.

Sleeping & Eating

George Hotel HOTEL ££
(☎01499-302111; www.thegeorgehotel.co.uk; Main St E; s/d from £35/70; ) The George Hotel boasts a magnificent choice of opulent rooms, complete with four-poster beds, period furniture, Victorian roll-top baths and private Jacuzzis (superior rooms cost £130 to £165 per double). The cosy wood-panelled bar, with its rough stone walls, flagstone floor and peat fires, is a delightful place for a bar meal (mains £7 to £10, open for lunch and dinner).

Claonairigh House B&B ££
(☎01499-302160; www.claonairighhouse.co.uk; Bridge of Douglas; s/d from £45/90;  ) This grand 18th-century house, built for the Duke of Argyll in 1745, is set in three hectares of grounds on the bank of a river (salmon-fishing available). There are three homely en suite rooms, one with a four-poster bed, and a resident menagerie of dogs, ducks, chickens and goats. It's 4 miles south of town on the A83.

Inveraray Youth Hostel HOSTEL £
(SYHA; ☎01499-302454; www.syha.org.uk; Dalmally Rd; dm £16; ☺Apr-Oct; ) To get to this hostel, housed in a comfortable, modern bungalow, go through the arched entrance on the seafront – it's set back on the left of the road about 100m further on.

Loch Fyne Oyster Bar RESTAURANT ££
(www.lochfyne.com; Clachan, Cairndow; mains £10-22; ☺breakfast, lunch & dinner) Six miles northeast of Inveraray in Cairndow, this rustic-themed restaurant serves excellent seafood, though the service can be a bit hit-and-miss. It's housed in a converted byre, and the menu includes locally farmed oysters, mussels and salmon. The neighbouring shop sells packaged seafood and other deli goods to take away, as well as bottled beer from the nearby Fyne Ales microbrewery.

Getting There & Away


Scottish Citylink (www.citylink.co.uk) buses run from Glasgow to Inveraray (£10, 1¼ hours, six daily Monday to Saturday, two Sunday). Three of these buses continue to Lochgilphead

and Campbeltown (£11, 2½ hours); the others continue to Oban (£9, 1¼ hours).

Crinan Canal

Completed in 1801, the picturesque Crinan Canal runs for 9 miles from Ardrishaig to Crinan allowing seagoing vessels – mostly yachts, these days – to take a short cut from the Firth of Clyde and Loch Fyne to the west coast of Scotland, avoiding the long and sometimes dangerous passage around the Mull of Kintyre. You can easily **walk** or **cycle** the full length of the canal towpath in an afternoon.

The canal basin at Crinan is the focus for the annual **Crinan Classic Boat Festival** (www.crinanclassic.com), held over the first weekend in July, when traditional wooden yachts, motor boats and dinghies gather for a few days of racing, drinking and music.

The basin is overlooked by the **Crinan Hotel** (☎01546-830261; www.crinanhotel.com; Crinan; s/d from £145/260 incl dinner; ) which boasts one of the west coast's most spectacular sunset views and one of Scotland's top seafood restaurants. You're paying for that view, and for the olde-worlde atmosphere – don't expect five-star luxury. You can also eat in the hotel's **Crinan Bar** (mains £9-12; ☺lunch & dinner) – the menu includes excellent local mussels with lemon, thyme and garlic.

The **coffee shop** (☺10am-5:30pm) on the western side of the canal basin at Crinan has great home-baked cakes and scones.

If you want to walk along the canal and take the bus back, bus 425 from Lochgilphead to Tayvallich stops at Cairnbaan, Belanoch and Crinan Cottages (20 minutes, three or four daily Monday to Saturday).

Kilmartin Glen

In the 6th century, Irish settlers arrived in this part of Argyll and founded the kingdom of Dalriada, which eventually united with the Picts in 843 to create the first Scottish kingdom. Their capital was the hill fort of Dunadd, on the plain to the south of Kilmartin Glen.

This magical glen is the focus of one of the biggest concentrations of prehistoric sites in Scotland. Burial cairns, standing stones, stone circles, hill forts and cup-and-ring-marked rocks litter the countryside. Within a 6-mile radius of Kilmartin village

RETURN OF THE BEAVER

Beavers have been extinct in Britain since the 16th century. But in 2009 they returned to Scotland, when a population of Norwegian beavers was released into the hill lochs of Knapdale in Argyllshire. In 2010 the beavers had their first offspring. The five-year **Scottish Beaver Trial** (www.scotishbeavers.org.uk) hopes to reveal whether the animals have a positive effect on habitat and biodiversity. If so, they could be introduced to other parts of the country.

Meanwhile, you can try and get a glimpse of them on the **Beaver Detective Trail**. It starts from the Loch Coille-Bharr forestry car park on the B8025 road to Tayvallich, about 1.5 miles south of the Crinan Canal.

there are 25 sites with standing stones and over 100 rock carvings.

👁 Sights

Your first stop should be **Kilmartin House Museum** (www.kilmartin.org; Kilmartin; adult/child £5/2; ☀10am-5.30pm Mar-Oct, 11am-4pm Nov-23 Dec), in Kilmartin village, a fascinating interpretive centre that provides a context for the ancient monuments you can go on to explore, alongside displays of artefacts recovered from various sites. The project was partly funded by midges – the curator exposed his body in Temple Wood on a warm summer's evening and was sponsored per midge bite!

The oldest monuments at Kilmartin date from 5000 years ago and comprise a linear cemetery of **burial cairns** that runs south from Kilmartin village for 1.5 miles. There are also ritual monuments (two stone circles) at **Temple Wood**, three-quarters of a mile southwest of Kilmartin. The museum bookshop sells maps and guides.

Kilmartin Churchyard contains some 10th-century Celtic crosses and lots of medieval grave slabs with carved effigies of knights. Some researchers have surmised that these were the tombs of Knights Templar who fled persecution in France in the 14th century.

The hill fort of **Dunadd**, 3.5 miles south of Kilmartin village, was the seat of power of the first kings of Dalriada, and may have

been where the Stone of Destiny (p51) was originally located. The faint rock carvings of a wild boar and two footprints with an Ogham inscription may have been used in some kind of inauguration ceremony. The prominent little hill rises straight out of the boggy plain of the **Moine Mhor Nature Reserve**. A slippery path leads to the summit where you can gaze out on much the same view that the kings of Dalriada enjoyed 1300 years ago.

🏠 Sleeping & Eating

Burndale B&B

B&B ££

(☎01546-510235; www.burndale.net; s/d from £35/54; 📶) Set in a lovely Victorian manse (minister's house), this homely and hospitable B&B is just a short walk north from the Kilmartin House Museum. Expect a warm welcome and Loch Fyne kippers for breakfast. Credit cards not accepted.

Kilmartin Hotel

INN ££

(☎01546-510250; www.kilmartin-hotel.com; s/d £40/65; 📶) Though the rooms here are a bit on the small side, this attractively old-fashioned hotel is full of atmosphere. There's a restaurant here too, and a whisky bar with real ale on tap where you can enjoy live folk music at weekends.

TOP CHOICE Glebe Cairn Café

CAFÉ £

(Kilmartin House Museum; mains £5-8; ☀breakfast & lunch, dinner Thu-Sat Jun-Aug) The café in the Kilmartin House Museum has a lovely conservatory with a view across fields to a prehistoric cairn. Dishes include homemade Cullen Skink, a Celtic cheese platter and hummus with sweet-and-sour beetroot relish. The drinks menu ranges from espresso to elderflower wine by way of Fraoch heather-scented ale.

📍 Getting There & Away

Bus 423 between Oban and Ardrishaig (four daily Monday to Friday, two on Saturday) stops at Kilmartin (£4.50, one hour 20 minutes).

You can walk or cycle along the Crinan Canal from Ardrishaig, then turn north at Bellanoch on the minor B8025 road to reach Kilmartin (12 miles one way).

Kintyre

The Kintyre peninsula – 40 miles long and 8 miles wide – is almost an island, with only a narrow isthmus at Tarbert connecting it to the wooded hills of Knapdale. During

the Norse occupation of the Western Isles, the Scottish king decreed that the Vikings could claim as their own any island they could circumnavigate in a longship. So in 1098 the wily Magnus Barefoot stood at the helm while his men dragged their boat across this neck of land, thus validating his claim to Kintyre.

TARBERT

POP 1500

The attractive fishing village and yachting centre of Tarbert is the gateway to Kintyre, and well worth a stopover for lunch or dinner. There's a **tourist office** (☎01880-820429; Harbour St; ☎9am-5pm Mon-Sat Apr-Oct) here.

👁 Sight & Activities

The picturesque harbour is overlooked by the crumbling, ivy-covered ruins of **Tarbert Castle**, built by Robert the Bruce in the 14th century. You can hike up to it via a signposted footpath beside the **Loch Fyne Gallery** (www.lochfynegallery.com; Harbour St; ☎10am-5pm), which showcases the work of local artists.

Tarbert is the starting point for the 103-mile **Kintyre Way** (www.kintyreway.com), a walking route that runs the length of the peninsula to Southend at the southern tip. The first section, from Tarbert to Skipness (9 miles), makes a pleasant day-hike, climbing through forestry plantations to a high moorland plateau where you can soak up superb views to the Isle of Arran.

Highland Horse Riding (www.highlandhorse riding.com; An Tairbeart; per person per hr £25-30; ☎Apr-Oct), on the western edge of the village, offers sightseeing and wildlife-spotting pony treks into the hills of Knapdale.

🌟 Festivals & Events

Scottish Series Yacht Races SAILING (www.scottishseries.com) Held over five days around the last weekend in May. The harbour is crammed with hundreds of visiting yachts.

Tarbert Seafood Festival FOOD & DRINK (www.seafood-festival.co.uk) First weekend in July; food stalls, cooking demonstrations, music, family entertainment.

Tarbert Music Festival MUSIC (www.tarbertmusicfestival.com) On the third weekend in September: live folk, blues, beer, jazz, rock, *ceilidhs* (evening of traditional Scottish entertainment), more beer...

🍴 Sleeping & Eating

There are plenty of B&Bs and hotels here, but be sure to book ahead during festivals and major events.

Springside B&B

B&B £££

(☎01880-820413; www.scotland-info.co.uk/springside; Pier Rd; s/d £35/60; P) You can sit out the front of this attractive fisherman's cottage, which overlooks the entrance to the harbour, and watch the yachts and fishing boats come and go. There are four comfy rooms, three with en suite, and the house is just five minutes' walk from the village centre in one direction, and a short stroll from the Portavadie ferry in the other.



Corner House Bistro SEAFOOD £££

(☎01880-820263; Harbour St; mains £14-26; ☎lunch & dinner) It's worth making the trip to Tarbert just to eat at this relaxed and romantic restaurant, with its log fires, candlelight and award-winning French chef who knows exactly what to do with top-quality local seafood. The entrance is on the side street around the corner from the Corner House pub – look for the green awning. Best to book a table.

📍 Getting There & Away

BOAT CalMac (www.calmac.co.uk) operates a car ferry from Tarbert to Portavadie on the Cowal peninsula (passenger/car £3.60/16.25, 25 minutes, hourly).

Ferries to the islands of Islay and Colonsay depart from Kennacraig ferry terminal on West Loch Tarbert, 5 miles southwest of Tarbert.

BUS Tarbert is served by five **Scottish Citylink** (www.citylink.co.uk) coaches a day between Campbeltown and Glasgow (Glasgow to Tarbert £14, 3¼ hours; Tarbert to Campbeltown £7, 1¼ hours).

SKIPNESS

POP 100

The tiny village of Skipness is on the east coast of Kintyre, about 13 miles south of Tarbert, in a pleasant and quiet setting with great views of Arran. There's a post office and general store in the village.

Beyond the village rise the substantial remains of 13th-century **Skipness Castle** (admission free; ☎24hr), a former possession of the Lords of the Isles. It's a striking building, composed of dark-green local stone trimmed with contrasting red-brown sandstone from Arran. The tower house was added in the 16th century and was occupied until the 19th century. From the top you can see the roofless, 13th-century **St Brendan's Chapel** down by the shore. The

kirkyard contains some excellent carved grave slabs.

Skipness Seafood Cabin (sandwiches £3, mains £5-9; ☎11am-6pm Sun-Fri late May-Sep), in the grounds of nearby Skipness House, serves tea, coffee and home baking, as well as local fish and shellfish dishes. In fine weather you can scoff the house special – crab sandwiches – at outdoor picnic tables with grand views of Arran.

Local bus 448 runs between Tarbert and Skipness (35 minutes, two daily Monday to Saturday).

At Claonaig, 2 miles southwest of Skipness, there's a daily car ferry to Lochranza on the Isle of Arran (passenger/car £5.20/23, 30 minutes, seven to nine daily).

ISLE OF GIGHA

POP 120

Gigha (*ghee-ah*; www.gigha.org.uk) is a low-lying island, 6 miles long by about a mile wide, that's famous for its sandy beaches and mild climate – subtropical plants thrive in the island's **Achamore Gardens** (www.gigha.org.uk/gardens; Achamore House; admission free, donation requested; ☎9am-dusk).

Locally made **Gigha cheese** is sold in many parts of Argyll – there are several varieties produced on the island, including pasteurised goat's-milk cheese and oak-smoked cheddar.

The island's limited accommodation includes **Post Office House** (☎01583-505251; www.gighastores.co.uk; d £45; ☐), a Victorian house at the top of the hill above the ferry slip with two self-catering cottages (it houses the island post office and shop as well). There's also the **Gigha Hotel** (☎01583-505254; www.gigha.org.uk/accom; r per person £50), 100m south of the post office, which serves up bar meals, or if you're feeling peckish, four-course dinners. You can also eat at the **Boat House Café Bar** (☎01583-505123; www.boathouse-bar.com; mains £7-12; ☎lunch & dinner) near the ferry slip.

There's a range of self-catering cottages available as well (see www.gigha.org.uk for details). Camping is allowed on a grassy area beside the Boat House near the ferry slip – there's no charge but space is limited, so call the Boat House in advance to check availability.

CalMac (www.calmac.co.uk) runs a ferry from Tayinloan in Kintyre to Gigha (passenger/car return £6.20/22.80, 20 minutes, hourly Monday to Saturday, six on Sunday). Bicycles travel free.

You can rent bikes from Post Office House for £12 per day.

CAMPBELTOWN

POP 6000

Campbeltown, with its ranks of gloomy, grey council houses, feels a bit like an Ayrshire mining town that's been placed incongruously on the shores of a beautiful Argyllshire harbour. It was once a thriving fishing port and whisky-making centre, but industrial decline and the closure of the former air-force base at nearby Machrihanish saw Campbeltown's fortunes decline.

The town feels a very long way from anywhere else, a feeling intensified by the continuing failure to reopen the ferry link from Campbeltown to Ballycastle in Northern Ireland (every year the message from the government is, 'Something will be done *next* year'). But renewal is in the air – the spruced-up seafront, with its flower beds, smart Victorian buildings and restored art-deco cinema, lends the town a distinctly optimistic air.

The **tourist office** (☎01586-552056; the Pier, Campbeltown; ☎9am-5.30pm Mon-Sat) is beside the harbour.

👁 Sights & Activities

There were once no fewer than 32 distilleries in the Campbeltown area, but most closed down in the 1920s. Today **Springbank Distillery** (www.springbankwhisky.com; tours £4; ☎by arrangement 10am & 2pm Mon-Fri, 2pm only Oct-Apr) is one of only three that now operate in town. It is also one of the very few distilleries in Scotland that distils, matures and bottles all its whisky on the one site.

One of the most unusual sights in Argyll is in a **cave** on the southern side of the island of **Davaar**, at the mouth of Campbeltown Loch. On the wall of the cave is an eerie **painting of the Crucifixion** by local artist Archibald MacKinnon, dating from 1887. You can walk to the island at low tide across a shingle bar called the Dhorlinn (allow at least 1½ hours for the round trip), but make sure you're not caught by a rising tide – check tide times with the tourist office before you set off.

Mull of Kintyre Seatours (☎0870 720 0609; www.mull-of-kintyre.co.uk) operates two-hour, high-speed boat trips (adult/child from £30/20) out of Campbeltown harbour to look for wildlife: seals, porpoises, minke whales, golden eagles and peregrine falcons

live in the turbulent tidal waters and on the spectacular sea cliffs of the Mull of Kintyre. Book in advance by phone or at the tourist office.

The **Mull of Kintyre Music Festival** (www.mokfest.com), held in Campbeltown in late August, is a popular event featuring traditional Scottish and Irish music.

Getting There & Away

AIR Loganair/FlyBe (www.loganair.co.uk) operates two flights daily, Monday to Friday, from Glasgow to Campbeltown (£50, 35 minutes).

BOAT From April to September, **Kintyre Express** ([01294-270160](tel:01294-270160); www.kintyre-express.com) operates a small, high-speed passenger ferry from Troon to Campbeltown (£50 one way, 1¼ hours, once daily Wednesday, Friday and Sunday). Tickets must be booked in advance.

BUS Scottish Citylink (www.citylink.co.uk) buses run from Campbeltown to Glasgow (£17, four hours, three daily) via Tarbert, Inveraray, Arrochar and Loch Lomond. It also runs to Oban (£15, four hours, three daily), changing buses at Inveraray.

MULL OF KINTYRE

A narrow winding road, about 18 miles long, leads south from Campbeltown to the **Mull of Kintyre**, passing some good **sandy beaches** near Southend. The name of this remote headland was immortalised in Paul McCartney's famous song – the former Beatle owns a farmhouse in the area. A **lighthouse** marks the spot closest to Northern Ireland, the coastline of which, only 12 miles away, is visible across the North Channel.

Isle of Islay

POP 3400

The most southerly island of the Inner Hebrides, Islay (*eye-lah*) is best known for its single-malt whiskies, which have a distinctive smoky flavour. There are eight working distilleries here, all of which welcome visitors and offer guided tours.

Islay's whisky industry contributes approximately £100 million a year to the government in excise duty and value-added tax (VAT); that's about £30,000 for every man, woman and child on the island. Little wonder that the islanders complain about the lack of government investment in the area.

With a list of over 250 recorded bird species, Islay also attracts birdwatchers. It's an important wintering ground for thousands

of white-fronted and barnacle geese. As well as the whisky and wildfowl, there are miles of sandy beaches, pleasant walking trails, and good food and drink.

There's a campsite and bunkhouse at Kintra, near Port Ellen, and a campsite and youth hostel in Port Charlotte. If you want to camp elsewhere, ask permission first. Camping is prohibited on the Ardtalla and Dunlossit estates on the eastern side of Islay.

Tours

Islay Birding

BIRDWATCHING

(www.islaybirding.co.uk) Birdwatching tours by bicycle (£30/60 per half-/full day). There are also 2½-hour wildlife walks (£30 per person) and family bushcraft courses (two adults plus children £60 per half-day) teaching outdoor-survival skills.

Islay Sea Safaris

CUSTOM TOURS

(www.islayseasafari.co.uk) Can arrange customised tours (£25 to £30 per person per hour) by sea from Port Ellen to visit some (or all) of Islay and Jura's distilleries in a single day. Also available are birdwatching trips, coastal explorations, and trips to Jura's remote west coast and the Corryvreckan Whirlpool.

Islay Stalking

WILDLIFE WATCHING

(www.thegearach.co.uk) Here's your chance to stalk deer and other wildlife in the company of a gamekeeper, and shoot them not with a gun but with a camera. Two-hour morning and evening photographic tours are £20/10 per adult/child.

Festivals & Events

Fèis Ile

SCOTTISH CULTURE

(Islay Festival; www.theislayfestival.co.uk) A week-long celebration of traditional Scottish music and whisky at the end of May. Events include *ceilidhs*, pipe-band performances, distillery tours, barbecues and whisky tastings.

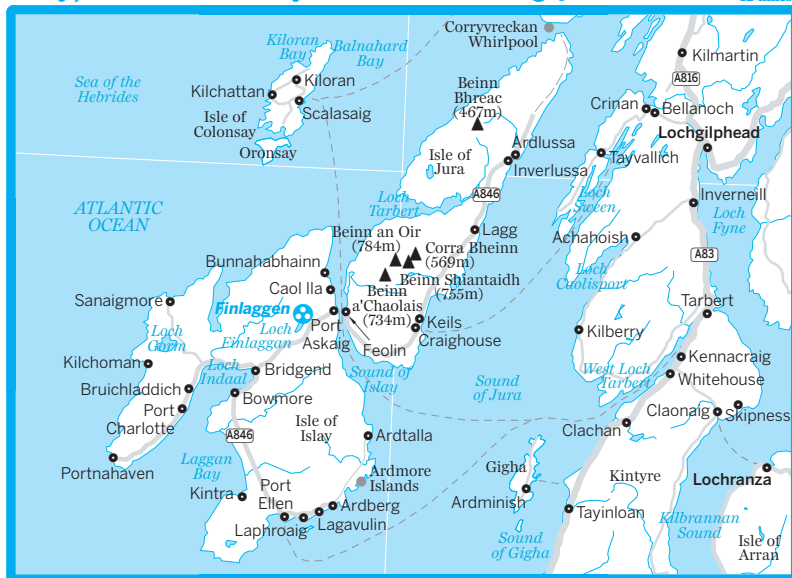
Islay Jazz Festival

MUSIC

(www.islayjazzfestival.co.uk) This three-day festival takes place over the second weekend in September. A varied line-up of international talent plays at various venues across the island.

Information

Islay Service Point (Jamieson St, Bowmore; ☎9am-12.30pm & 1.30-5pm Mon-Fri; @) Free internet access.



Islay tourist office (☎0870-720 0617; The Square, Bowmore; ☀10am-5pm Mon-Sat, & 2-5pm Sun Apr-Aug, shorter hr Sep-Mar)

MacTaggart Community CyberCafé (www.islaycybercafe.co.uk; 30 Mansfield Pl, Port Ellen; ☀9am-10pm Mon & Wed-Sat, to 5pm Tue & Sun; @☎) Internet access.

MacTaggart Leisure Centre (School St, Bowmore; ☀noon-9pm Mon-Fri, 10.30am-5.30pm Sat & Sun) Coin-operated laundrette.

i Getting There & Away

There are two ferry terminals on the island, both served by ferries from Kennacraig in West Loch Tarbert – Port Askaig on the east coast, and Port Ellen in the south. Islay airport lies midway between Port Ellen and Bowmore.

AIR Loganair/FlyBe (www.loganair.co.uk) flies from Glasgow to Islay (£70 one way, 45 minutes, two or three flights daily Monday to Friday, one or two Saturday and Sunday).

Hebridean Air Services (☎0845 805 7465; www.hebrideanair.co.uk) operates flights (£65 one way, twice daily Tuesday and Thursday) from Connell Airfield (near Oban) to Colonsay (30 minutes) and Islay (40 minutes).

BOAT CalMac (www.calmac.co.uk) runs ferries from Kennacraig in West Loch Tarbert to Port Ellen (passenger/car £9.20/49, 2½ hours, one to three daily) and Port Askaig (£9.20/49, two hours, one to three daily). On Wednesday only in

summer the ferry continues from Port Askaig to Colonsay (£4.85/24.70, 1¼ hours).

i Getting Around

BICYCLE You can hire bikes from Bowmore Post Office (per day £10), and from the house opposite the Port Charlotte Hotel.

BUS A bus service links Ardbeg, Port Ellen, Bowmore, Port Charlotte, Portnahaven and Port Askaig (limited service on Sunday). Pick up a copy of the *Islay & Jura Public Transport Guide* from the tourist office.

CAR D & N MacKenzie (☎01496-302300; Port Ellen; from £30 a day) Hire cars.

TAXI Bowmore (☎01496-810449); Port Ellen (☎01496-302155).

PORT ELLEN & AROUND

Port Ellen is the main point of entry for Islay. It has a **Co-op Food minimarket** (☀8am-8pm Mon-Sat, noon-7.30pm Sun), a pub and a bank (closed most afternoons and Wednesdays). There's an ATM in the Spar shop around the corner from the bank. While there's nothing to see in the town itself, the coast stretching northeast from Port Ellen is one of the loveliest parts of the island.

There are three whisky distilleries in close succession (check websites for tour times):

Laphroaig

DISTILLERY

(www.laphroaig.com; tours £3; ☎9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, also 10am-4pm Sat & Sun Mar-Dec)

Lagavulin

DISTILLERY

(www.discovering-distilleries.com; tours £6; ☎9am-5pm Mon-Fri Apr-Oct, to 12.30pm Nov-Mar, plus 9am-5pm Sat & 12.30-4pm Sun Jul & Aug)

Ardbeg

DISTILLERY

(www.ardbeg.com; tours £5; ☎10am-5pm Jun-Aug, 10am-4pm Mon-Fri Sep-May).

A pleasant **bike ride** leads past the distilleries to the atmospheric, age-haunted **Kildalton Chapel**, 8 miles northeast of Port Ellen. In the kirkyard is the exceptional late-8th-century **Kildalton Cross**, the only remaining Celtic high cross in Scotland (most surviving high crosses are in Ireland). There are carvings of biblical scenes on one side and animals on the other. There are also several extraordinary grave slabs around the chapel, some carved with swords and Celtic interlace patterns.

The kelp-fringed *skerries* (small rocky islands or reefs) of the **Ardmore Islands**, off the southeastern corner of Islay near Kildalton, are a wildlife haven and home to the second-largest colony of common seals in Europe. For details of wildlife cruises see the Tours section (p285).

**Sleeping & Eating****Kintra Farm**

CAMPSITE, B&B ££

(☎01496-302051; www.kintrafarm.co.uk; Kintra; tent sites £4-10, plus per person £3, r per person £30-38; ☎Apr-Sep) At the southern end of Laggan Bay, 3.5 miles northwest of Port Ellen, Kintra offers three bedrooms in a homely farmhouse B&B. There's also a basic but beautiful campsite on buttercup-sprinkled turf amid the dunes, with a sunset view across the beach.

Oystercatcher B&B

B&B £££

(☎01496-300409; www.islay-bedandbreakfast.com; 63 Frederick Cres, Port Ellen; r per person £32; ☎☎) If you like your breakfasts fishy, then this welcoming waterfront house is the place for you – there's smoked haddock, smoked salmon and kippers on the menu, as well as the usual stuff. Bedrooms are small but comfortable and nicely decorated.

**Old Kiln Café**

CAFÉ £

(Ardbeg; mains £4-10; ☎breakfast & lunch daily Jun-Aug, Mon-Fri only Sep-May) Housed in the former malting kiln at Ardbeg Distill-

ery, this well-run café serves hearty homemade soups such as sweet-potato and chilli; tasty light meals (try a panini sandwich with haggis and apple chutney, or a platter of smoked Islay beef, venison and pastрами); and a range of home-baked desserts including traditional cloutie dumpling (a rich steamed pudding filled with currants and raisins) with ice cream.

BOWMORE

The attractive Georgian village of Bowmore was built in 1768 to replace the village of Kilarrow, which just had to go – it was spoiling the view from the laird's house. Its centrepiece is the distinctive **Round Church** at the top of Main St, built in circular form to ensure that the devil had no corners to hide in.

Bowmore Distillery

(www.bowmore.co.uk; School St; tours adult/child £4/2; ☎9am-5pm Mon-Fri & 9am-noon Sat, also 9am-5pm Sat Easter-mid-Sep & noon-4pm Sun Jul-mid-Sep)

is the only distillery on the island that still malts its own barley. The tour (check website for times), which begins with an overblown 10-minute marketing video, is redeemed by a look at (and taste of) the germinating grain laid out in golden billows on the floor of the malting shed, and a free dram at the end.

Islay House Square, a collection of craft shops and studios 3 miles northeast of Bowmore at Bridgend, is home to **Islay Ales** (www.islayales.com; Bridgend; ☎10.30am-5pm Mon-Sat, plus noon-4pm Sun Jun-Aug), a micro-brewery that produces a range of real ales, all bottled by hand. After a complementary tour of the premises, you can taste the ales for free, and buy a bottle or two to drink outdoors or back home (the brewery doesn't have a bar licence). Our favourite is Saligo Ale, a refreshing, summery pale ale.

**Sleeping & Eating****Harbour Inn**

RESTAURANT WITH ROOMS £££

(☎01496-810330; www.harbour-inn.com; The Square; s/d from £95/130; ☎☎) The plush seven-room Harbour Inn, smartly decorated with a nautical theme, is the poshest place in town. The **restaurant** (mains £16 to £24, open for lunch and dinner) has harbour views and serves fresh local oysters, lobster and scallops, Islay lamb and Jura venison.

Lambeth House

B&B ££

(☎01496-810597; lambethguesthouse@tiscali.co.uk; Jamieson St; s/d £60/90; ☎☎) A short

stroll from the harbour, the Lambeth is a simple, good-value guesthouse with comfy en suite bedrooms. Breakfasts are excellent, and it also offers a two-course evening meal for £12.

Lochside Hotel

HOTEL ££

(☎01496; 810244; www.lochsidehotel.co.uk; 19 Shore St; r per person from £50; ☎) The 10 en suite bedrooms at the Lochside are kitted-out with chunky pine furniture, including one room adapted for wheelchair users. The conservatory dining room provides sweeping views over Loch Indaal, plus the bar boasts a range of more than 250 single-malts, including many rare bottlings.

PORT CHARLOTTE

Eleven miles from Bowmore, on the opposite shore of Loch Indaal, is the attractive village of Port Charlotte. It has a **general store** (☎9am-12.30pm & 1.30-5.30pm Mon-Sat, 11.30am-1.30pm Sun) and post office.

Islay's long history is lovingly recorded in the **Museum of Islay Life** (www.islaymuseum.org; adult/child £3/1; ☎10am-5pm Mon-Sat, 2-5pm Sun Easter-Oct), housed in the former Free Church. Prize exhibits include an illicit still, 19th-century crofters' furniture, and a set of leather boots once worn by the horse that pulled the lawnmower at Islay House (so it wouldn't leave hoof prints on the lawn!). There are also touch-screen computers displaying archive photos of Islay in the 19th and early 20th centuries.

The **Islay Natural History tourist office** (www.islaynaturalhistory.org; adult/child £3/1.50; ☎10am-4pm Mon-Fri Apr-Oct, also Sat Jun-Aug), next to the youth hostel, has displays explaining the island's natural history, with advice on where to see wildlife and lots of interesting hands-on exhibits for kids.

The **Bruichladdich Distillery** (☎01496-850190; www.bruichladdich.com; tours £5; ☎9am-5pm Mon-Fri & 10am-4pm Sat), at the northern edge of the village, reopened in 2001 with all its original Victorian equipment restored to working condition. Independently owned and independently minded, Bruichladdich (brook-lah-day) produces an intriguing range of distinctive, very peaty whiskies. Call ahead to book a tour.

Sleeping & Eating

Port Charlotte Hotel

HOTEL £££

(☎01496-850360; www.portcharlottehotel.co.uk; Port Charlotte; s/d £95/160; ☎) This lovely old Victorian hotel has stylish, in-

dividually decorated bedrooms with sea views, and a candlelit **restaurant** (mains £15 to £22, open for dinner) serving local seafood (seared scallops with braised leeks and truffle cream sauce), Islay beef, venison and duck. The bar (bar meals £7 to £10, open for lunch and dinner) is well stocked with Islay malts and real ales, and has a nook at the back with a view over the loch towards the Paps of Jura.

Debbie's Minimarket

CAFE £

(Bruichladdich; ☎9am-5.30pm Mon-Sat) The village shop and post office at Bruichladdich doubles as a deli that stocks good wine and posh picnic grub, and also serves the best coffee on Islay – sit at one of the outdoor tables and enjoy an espresso with a sea view.

Croft Kitchen

CAFE ££

(Port Charlotte; mains lunch £4-7, dinner £11-15; ☎lunch & dinner) This laid-back little bistro serves as a cafe during the day and transforms into a restaurant serving quality meals in the evening.

Port Mor Campsite

CAMPSITE £

(☎01496-850441; www.islandofIslay.co.uk; Port Charlotte; tent sites per person £8; ☎) The sports field to the south of the village doubles as a campsite – there are toilets, showers, laundry and a children's play area in the main building. Open all year.

Islay Youth Hostel

HOSTEL £

(SYHA; www.syha.org.uk; ☎01496-850385; Port Charlotte; dm £15; ☎Apr-Oct; ☎) This modern and comfortable hostel is housed in a former distillery building with views over the loch.

PORTNAHAVEN

Six miles southwest of Port Charlotte the road ends at **Portnahaven**, another pretty village that was purpose-built as a fishing harbour in the 19th century. A mile north of the village is the pretty little shell-sand beach of **Currie Sands**, with a lovely view of Orsay island.

The next inlet to the north of the beach is occupied by the world's first commercially viable, wave-powered electricity generating station, built on cliffs that are open to the Atlantic swell. The 500kW plant – known as the **Limpet** (Land-installed, marine-powered energy transformer) – provides enough electricity to power 200 island homes.

LOCH GRUINART & AROUND

Seven miles north of Port Charlotte is **Loch Gruinart Nature Reserve**, where you can hear corncrakes in summer and see huge flocks of migrating ducks, geese and waders in spring and autumn; there's a hide with wheelchair access. The nearby **RSPB tourist office** (admission free; ☎10am-5pm Apr-Oct, to 4pm Nov-Mar) offers two- to three-hour guided walks around the reserve (£3 per person, 10am Thursday April to October).

Kilchoman Distillery (www.kilchomandistillery.com; Rockfield Farm, Kilchoman; tours £4; ☎10am-5pm Mon-Fri, plus Sat Apr-Oct), 5 miles southwest of Loch Gruinart, is Islay's newest, going into production in 2005. The distillery grows its own barley on Islay, and the tourist office explores the history of farmhouse distilling on the island. Its first single-malt was released in 2010, and was so popular it sold out within days.

The **café** (mains £5-10; ☎lunch Mon-Fri Mar-Oct, plus Sat Apr-Sep, plus Sun Jul & Aug) at Kilchoman Distillery rustles up an excellent lunch – crusty brown rolls filled with hot-smoked salmon and dill mayo, and bowls of rich, smoky Cullen skink.

FINLAGGAN

Lush meadows swathed in buttercups and daisies slope down to reed-fringed Loch Finlaggan, the medieval capital of the Lords of the Isles. This bucolic setting, 3 miles southwest of Port Askaig, was once the most important settlement in the Hebrides, the central seat of power of the Lords of the Isles from the 12th to the 16th centuries. From the little island at the northern end of the loch the descendants of Somerled administered their island territories and entertained visiting chieftains in their great hall. Little remains now except the tumbled ruins of houses and a chapel, but the setting is beautiful and the history fascinating. A wooden walkway leads over the reeds and water lilies to the island, where information boards describe the remains.

Finlaggan tourist office (www.finlaggan.com; adult/child £3/1; ☎10.30am-4.30pm Mon-Sat & 1.30-4.30pm Sun Apr-Sep), in a nearby cottage (plus modern extension), explains the site's history and archaeology. The island itself is open at all times.

Buses from Port Askaig stop at the road's end, from where it's a 15-minute walk to the loch.

PORT ASKAIG & AROUND

Port Askaig is little more than a hotel, a shop (with ATM), a petrol pump and a ferry pier, set in a picturesque nook halfway along the Sound of Islay, the strait that separates the islands of Islay and Jura.

There are two distilleries within easy reach: **Caol Ila Distillery** (www.discovering-distilleries.com; tours £6; ☎9.15am-5pm Mon-Fri & 1.30-4.30pm Sat Apr-Oct, shorter hr in winter), pronounced 'cull ee-lah', a mile to the north, and **Bunnahabhain Distillery** (www.bunnahabhain.com; tours £5; ☎9am-4.30pm Mon-Fri Mar-Oct, by appointment Nov-Feb), pronounced 'boo-na-hah-ven', 3 miles north of Port Askaig. Both enjoy wonderful locations with great views across to Jura.

The rooms at the **Port Askaig Hotel** (☎01496-840245; www.portaskaig.co.uk; s/d from £40/90; ☐), beside the ferry pier, seem pleasantly stuck in the 1970s, but the staff are warm and friendly, the breakfast is good and there's a great view of the Paps of Jura from the residents lounge. The beer garden is a popular spot to sit and watch the comings and goings at the quay.

Isle of Jura

POP 170

Jura lies off the coast of Argyll – long, dark and low like a vast Viking longship, its billowing sail the distinctive triple peaks of the Paps of Jura. A magnificently wild and lonely island, it's the perfect place to get away from it all – as George Orwell did in 1948. Orwell wrote his masterpiece *1984* while living at the remote farmhouse of Barnhill in the north of the island, describing it in a letter as 'a very un-get-at-able place'.

Jura takes its name from the Old Norse *dýr-a* (deer island) – an apt appellation, as the island supports a population of around 6000 red deer, outnumbering their human cohabitants by about 35 to one.

The community-run **Jura Service Point** (Craighouse; ☎10am-1pm Mon-Fri; ☎), 400m north of the Jura Hotel, provides tourist information and free internet access.

Jura Stores (www.jurastores.co.uk; Craighouse; ☎9am-1pm & 2-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm & 2-4.30pm Sat) is the island's only shop. There's no bank or ATM, but you can get cash on a debit card at the Jura Hotel.

THE SCOTTISH MAELSTROM

It may look innocuous on the map, but the Gulf of Corryvreckan – the 1km-wide channel between the northern end of Jura and the island of Scarba – is home to one of the three most notorious tidal whirlpools in the world (the others are the Maelstrom in Norway's Lofoten Islands, and the Old Sow in Canada's New Brunswick).

The tide doesn't just rise and fall twice a day, it flows – dragged around the earth by the gravitational attraction of the moon. On the west coast of Scotland, the rising tide – known as the flood tide – flows northwards. As the flood moves up the Sound of Jura, to the east of the island, it is forced into a narrowing bottleneck jammed with islands and builds up to a greater height than the open sea to the west of Jura. As a result, millions of gallons of sea water pour westwards through the Gulf of Corryvreckan at speeds of up to 8 knots – an average sailing yacht is going fast at 6 knots.

The Corryvreckan Whirlpool forms where this mass of moving water hits an underwater pinnacle, which rises from the 200m-deep sea bed to within just 28m of the surface, and swirls over and around it. The turbulent waters create a magnificent spectacle, with white-capped breakers, standing waves, bulging boils and overfalls, and countless miniature maelstroms whirling around the main vortex.

Corryvreckan is at its most violent when a flooding spring tide, flowing west through the gulf, meets a westerly gale blowing in from the Atlantic. In these conditions, standing waves up to 5m high can form and dangerously rough seas extend more than 3 miles west of Corryvreckan, a phenomenon known as the Great Race.

You can see the whirlpool by making the long hike to the northern end of Jura (check tide times at Jura Hotel, and look under Activities, below, for walk details), or by taking a boat trip from Easdale (p289).

For more information, see www.whirlpool-scotland.co.uk.

Sights

Apart from the superb wilderness walking and wildlife-watching, there's not a whole lot to do on the island except for visiting the **Isle of Jura Distillery** (www.isleofjura.com; admission free; ☎by appointment Mon-Fri) or wandering around the beautiful walled gardens of **Jura House** (www.jurahouseandgardens.co.uk; adult/child £2.50/free; ☎9am-5pm) at the southern end of the island. There's a lovely walk from the gardens down to a tiny white-sand beach where, if you're lucky, you might spot an otter. In summer a **tea tent** (☎11am-5pm Mon-Fri, to 4pm Sun Jun-Aug) sells hot drinks, home baking, crafts and plants.

There's also the **Feolin Study Centre** (www.theisleofjura.co.uk; admission free; ☎9am-5pm), just south of the ferry slip at Feolin, which has a small exhibition on Jura's history and provides information on all aspects of the island's history, culture and wildlife.

There are regular **ceilidhs** held throughout the year where visitors are made very welcome; check the notice board outside Jura Stores for announcements.

Activities

There are few proper footpaths on Jura, but any off-the-beaten-path exploration will involve rough-going through giant bracken, knee-deep bogs and thigh-high tussocks. Most of the island is occupied by deer-stalking estates, and access to the hills may be restricted during the stalking season (July to February); the Jura Hotel can provide details of areas to be avoided.

The only real trail is **Evans' Walk**, a stalkers' path that leads for 6 miles from the main road through a pass in the hills to a hunting lodge above the remote sandy beach at Glenpatrick Bay. The path leaves the road 4 miles north of Craighouse (just under a mile north of the bridge over the River Corran). The first 0.75 mile is hard-going along an interwoven braid of faint, squelchy trails through lumpy bog; aim at or just left of the cairn on the near horizon. The path firms up and is easier to follow after you cross a stream. On the descent on the far side of the pass, look out for wild orchids and sundew, and keep an eye out for adders basking in the sun. Allow six hours for the 12-mile round trip.

Another good walk is to a viewpoint for the **Corryvreckan Whirlpool** (see boxed

text, p280), the great tidal race between the northern end of Jura and the island of Scarba. From the northern end of the public road at Lealt you hike along a 4WD track past Barnhill to Kinuachdrachd Farm (6 miles). About 30m before the farm buildings a footpath forks left (there's an inconspicuous wooden signpost low down) and climbs up the hillside before traversing rough and boggy ground to a point 50m above the northern tip of the island. A rocky slab makes a natural grandstand for viewing the turbulent waters of the Gulf of Corryvreckan; if you have timed it right (check tide times at the Jura Hotel), you will see the whirlpool as a writhing mass of white water diagonally to your left and over by the Scarba shore. Allow five to six hours for the round trip (16 miles) from the road end.

Climbing the **Paps of Jura** is a truly tough hill-walk over ankle-breaking scree that requires good fitness and navigational skills (you'll need eight hours for the 11 long, hard and weary miles). A good place to start is by the bridge over the River Corran, 3 miles north of Craighouse. The first peak you reach is **Beinn a'Chaolais** (734m), the second is **Beinn an Oir** (784m) and the third is **Beinn Shiantaidh** (755m). Most people also climb **Corra Bheinn** (569m), before joining Evans' Walk to return to the road. If you succeed in bagging all four, you can reflect on the fact that the record for the annual Paps of Jura fell race is just three hours!

There are easier **short walks** (one or two hours) east along the coast from Jura House, and north along a 4WD track from Feolin. *Jura – A Guide for Walkers* by Gordon Wright (£2) is available from the tourist office in Bowmore, Islay (p276).

Sleeping & Eating

Places to stay on the island are very limited, so book ahead – don't rely on just turning up and hoping to find a bed. Most of Jura's accommodation is in self-catering cottages that are let by the week (see www.juradevelopments.co.uk).

You can camp for free in the field below the Jura Hotel (ask at the bar first, and pop a donation in the bottle); there are toilets and hot showers (£1 coin) in the block behind the hotel.

Sealladh Na Mara

( 01496-820349; www.isleofjura.net; Knockmore; per person from £25) A modern croft

house about 4 miles north of Craighouse, this place offers B&B in two cosy, IKEA-furnished bedrooms and a lovely guest lounge with a patio overlooking the sea. Evening meals can be provided, and there's also a self-catering two-bedroom chalet (from £200 a week).

Jura Hotel

HOTEL, PUB **££**

( 01496-820243; www.jurahotel.co.uk; Craighouse; s/d from £50/84; ) The 18-room Jura is the most comfortable place to stay on the island; ask for a room at the front with a view of the bay. The hotel also serves decent bar meals (£7 to £12, open for lunch and dinner) and the bar itself is a very sociable place to spend the evening. Food is served from noon to 2pm and 6.30pm to 9pm.



Antlers

BISTRO **££**


( 01496-820123; www.theantlers.co.uk; Craighouse; mains £5-9, 2-/3-course dinner £25/29;  10.30am-4.30pm daily, 6.30-9.30pm Tue-Sun; ) This brand-new bistro makes the most of locally sourced produce, offering soup, sandwiches and burgers during the day, and an unexpectedly classy menu at dinner time, with dishes such as grilled goats cheese on black pudding with onion marmalade, glazed loin of pork with a cider reduction, and Cajun-style pan-fried venison.

Getting There & Away

A car ferry shuttles between Port Askaig on Islay and Feolin on Jura (passenger/car/bicycle £1.25/7.60/free, five minutes, hourly Monday to Saturday, every two hours Sunday). There is no direct car-ferry connection to the mainland.

From April to September **Jura Passenger Ferry** ( 07768-450000; www.jurapassengerferry.com) runs from Tayvallich on the mainland to Craighouse on Jura (£17.50, one hour, one or two daily except Wednesday). Booking recommended.

Getting Around

BICYCLE You can hire bikes from **Jura Bike Hire** ( 07092-180747; www.jurabikehire.com; Bramble Cottage, Keils; per day £12.50) a mile northeast of Craighouse.

BUS The island's only bus service runs between the ferry slip at Feolin and Craighouse (20 minutes), timed to coincide with ferry arrivals and departures. One or two of the runs continue north as far as Inverlussa.

TAXI Mike Richardson ( 07899-912116) operates a Landrover taxi service from the road's end at Lealt to Kinuachdrachd Farm for those

wanting to shorten the hike to the Corryvreckan Whirlpool (minimum £20 per two people, plus £5 per extra person).

Isle of Colonsay

POP 100

Legend has it that when St Columba set out from Ireland in 563, his first landfall was Colonsay. But on climbing a hill he found he could still see the distant coast of his homeland, and pushed on further north to found his monastery in Iona, leaving behind only his name (Colonsay means 'Columba's Isle').

Colonsay is a connoisseur's island, a little jewel-box of varied delights, none exceptional but each exquisite – an ancient priory, a woodland garden, a golden beach – set amid a Highland landscape in miniature: rugged, rocky hills, cliffs and sandy strands, machair and birch woods, even a trout loch. Here, hill walkers bag **McPhies** – defined as 'eminences in excess of 300ft' (90m) – instead of Munros (see boxed text, p30). There are 22 in all; the supercompetitive will bag them all in one day.

The ferry pier is at **Scalasaig**, the main village, where you'll find a **general store** (☎9am-1pm & 2-5.30pm Mon & Wed-Fri, 9am-1pm Tue & Sat), post office, public telephone and free internet access at the **Service Point** (☎9.30am-12.30pm Mon-Fri). There isn't a tourist office, bank or ATM on the island. General information is available at the CalMac waiting room beside the ferry pier, and at www.colonsay.org.uk.

The tiny **Colonsay Bookshop** (☎200232; Port Mor; ☎2-5pm Mon, Tue & Thu-Sat, 12.30-5pm Wed) at Kilchattan, on the west side of the island, has an excellent range of books on Hebridean history and culture.

👁 Sights & Activities

If the tides are right, don't miss the chance to walk across the half-mile of cockleshell-strewn sand that links Colonsay to the smaller island of Oronsay. Here you can explore the 14th-century ruins of **Oronsay Priory**, one of the best-preserved medieval priories in Scotland. There are two beautiful late-15th-century stone crosses in the kirkyard, but the highlight is the collection of superb 15th- and 16th-century carved grave slabs in the Prior's House; look for the ugly little devil trapped beneath the sword-tip of the knight on the right-hand side of the two horizontal slabs. The island is accessible on foot for about 1½ hours either

side of low tide, and it's a 45-minute walk from the road-end on Colonsay to the priory. There are tide tables posted at the ferry terminal in Scalasaig.

The **Woodland Garden** (Colonsay House, Kiloran; admission free; ☼garden dawn-dusk, cafe breakfast & lunch Wed & Fri Easter-Sep) at Colonsay House, 1.5 miles north of Scalasaig, is tucked in an unexpected fold of the landscape and is famous for its outstanding collection of hybrid rhododendrons and unusual trees. The formal walled garden around the mansion has a terrace cafe.

There are good sandy beaches at several points around the coast, but **Kiloran Bay** in the northwest, a scimitar-shaped strand of dark golden sand, is outstanding. If there are too many people here for you, walk the 3 miles north to beautiful **Balnahard Bay**, accessible only on foot or by boat.

Back at Scalasaig, the **Colonsay Brewery** (www.colonsaybrewery.co.uk; ☎shop 10.30am-1pm & 2.30-5.30pm Wed, 4-7pm Fri & Sun, 10am-1pm Sat) offers you the chance to have a look at how it produces its hand-crafted ales – the Colonsay IPA is a grand pint.

Kevin & Christa Byrne (☎01951-200320; byrne@colonsay.org.uk) offer customised guided tours on foot (£25 per hour per tour for up to eight people), or by minibus (£50 per hour per tour for up to eight people). There's also a regular 'Hidden Colonsay' walking tour (adult/child £10/5) every Saturday in summer; booking essential.

🛏 Sleeping & Eating

Short-stay accommodation on Colonsay is limited and should be booked before coming to the island. Wild **camping** is allowed, as long as you abide by the provisions of the **Scottish Outdoor Access Code** (www.outdooraccess-scotland.com). See www.colonsay.org.uk for self-catering accommodation options.

TOP CHOICE **Colonsay Hotel**

(☎01951-200316; www.colonsayestate.co.uk; Scalasaig; r £100-145; Completely refurbished in 2007, this wonderfully laid-back hotel is set in an atmospheric old inn dating from 1750, a short walk uphill from the ferry pier. The bar is a convivial melting pot of locals, guests, hikers, cyclists and visiting yachties, and the stylish **restaurant** (mains £11 to £18, open for lunch and dinner) offers down-to-earth cooking using local produce as much

HOTEL **££**

www.colonsayestate.co.uk

as possible, from Colonsay oysters and lobster to herbs and salad leaves from Colonsay House gardens.

Backpackers Lodge

HOSTEL £

(☎01951-200312; www.colonsayestate.co.uk; Kiloran; dm £14-16, tw £36) Set in a former gamekeeper's house near Colonsay House, this lodge is about a 30-minute walk from the ferry terminal (you can arrange to be picked up at the pier). Advance bookings are essential. You can hire bikes here for £7 per day, and you can even use the tennis court at Colonsay House.

Island Lodges

SELF-CATERING ££

(☎01343-890752; www.colonsayislandlodges.co.uk; Scalasaig; chalets 2-night stay £150-250; ☎) These comfortable and modern self-catering holiday chalets, sleeping from two to five people, are just a 10-minute walk from the ferry pier at Scalasaig. You can check last-minute availability on the website.

Pantry

CAFE £

(Scalasaig; ☎breakfast & lunch Mon-Sat, dinner Mon-Fri plus Sun Apr-Sep) This tearoom, close to the ferry pier, serves up light meals, snacks and ice creams. It also opens from October to March on the days that the ferry calls.

i Getting There & Around

AIR Hebridean Air Services (☎0845 805

7465; www.hebrideanair.co.uk) operates flights from Connel Airfield (near Oban) to Colonsay andIslay (£65 one way, twice daily Tuesday and Thursday).

BOAT From April to October, **CalMac** (www.calmac.co.uk) operates a car ferry from Oban to Colonsay (passenger/car £13/65, 2¼ hours, one daily except Saturday). From November to March the ferry runs on Monday, Wednesday and Friday only.

From April to October, on Wednesday only, the ferry from Kennacraig on the Kintyre peninsula toIslay's Port Askaig continues to Colonsay. A day-trip from Kennacraig or Port Askaig to Colonsay allows you six hours on the island; the day return fare from Port Askaig to Colonsay per passenger/car is £8.35/44.

BUS A 90-minute **minibus tour** (☎01951-200320; per person £10; ☎11.30am Tue) of the island departs from the Colonsay Hotel; bookings essential. On Wednesdays, the minibus service is aimed at day-trippers, and makes two circuits of the island – you can be dropped off/picked-up at any point (per person £7.50). See www.colonsay.org.uk/walks.html for details.

OBAN & MULL

Oban

POP 8120

Oban is a peaceful waterfront town on a delightful bay, with sweeping views to Kerrera and Mull. OK, that first bit about peaceful is true only in winter; in summer the town centre is a heaving mass of humanity, its streets jammed with traffic and crowded with holidaymakers, day-trippers and travellers headed for the islands. But the setting is still lovely.

There's not a huge amount to see in the town itself, but it's an appealingly busy place with some excellent restaurants and lively pubs, and it's the main gateway to the islands of Mull, Iona, Colonsay, Barra, Coll and Tiree.

👁 Sights

McCaig's Tower

HISTORIC BUILDING

(admission free; ☎24hr) Crowning the hill above the town centre is the Victorian folly known as McCaig's Tower. Its construction was commissioned in 1890 by local worthy John Stuart McCaig, an art critic, philosophical essayist and banker, with the philanthropic intention of providing work for unemployed stonemasons. To reach it on foot, make the steep climb up **Jacob's Ladder** (a flight of stairs) from Argyll St and then follow the signs. The views over the bay are worth the effort.

Oban Distillery

DISTILLERY

(www.discovering-distilleries.com; Stafford St; tour £7; ☎9.30am-5pm Mon-Sat Easter-Oct, plus noon-5pm Sun Jul-Sep, closed Sat & Sun Nov-Dec & Feb-Easter, closed Jan) This distillery has been producing Oban single-malt whisky since 1794. There are guided tours available (last tour begins one hour before closing time), but even without a tour, it's still worth a look at the small exhibition in the foyer.

FREE War & Peace Museum

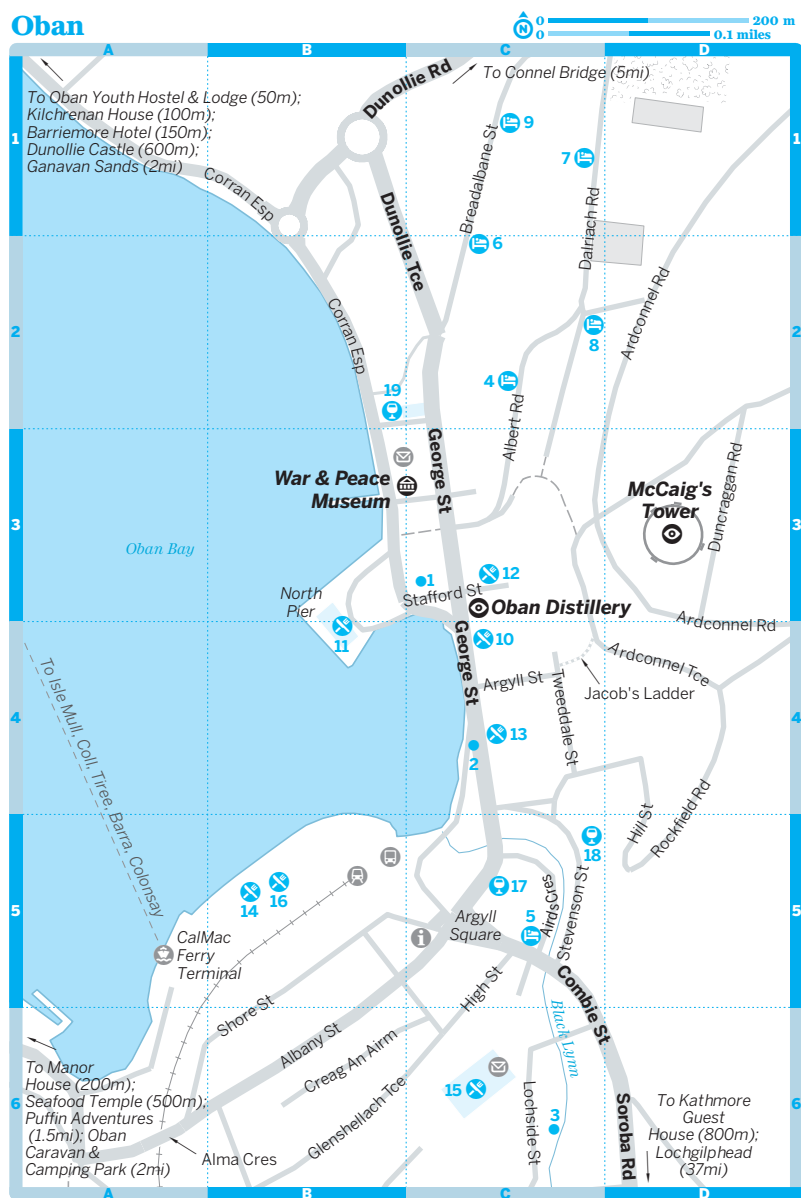
MUSEUM

(www.obanmuseum.org.uk; Corran Esplanade; ☎10am-6pm Mon-Sat & 10am-4pm Sun May-Sep, 10am-4pm daily Mar, Apr, Oct & Nov) Military buffs will enjoy the little War & Peace Museum, which chronicles Oban's role in WWII as a base for Catalina seaplanes and as a marshalling area for Atlantic convoys.

FREE Dunollie Castle

RUINS

(☎24hr) A pleasant 1-mile stroll north along the coast road beyond Corran



Esplanade leads to Dunollie Castle, built by the MacDougalls of Lorn in the 13th century and unsuccessfully besieged for a year during the 1715 Jacobite rebellion. It's always open but very much a ruin.

Pulpit Hill

An excellent viewpoint to the south of Oban Bay; the footpath to the summit starts to the right of Maridon House B&B on Dunuaran Rd.

VIEWPOINT

Oban

Top Sights

McCaig's Tower.....	D3
Oban Distillery.....	C3
War & Peace Museum.....	C3

Activities, Courses & Tours

1 Bowman's Tours.....	C3
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Sleeping

4 Heatherfield House	C2
5 Jeremy Inglis Hostel.....	C5
6 Oban Backpackers Lodge.....	C2
7 Old Manse Guest House	C1
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Eating

10 Cuan Mor.....	C4
11 Ee'usk.....	B4
12 Julie's Tearoom	C3
13 Kitchen Garden.....	C4
14 Shellfish Bar.....	B5
15 Tesco.....	C6
16 Waterfront Restaurant.....	B5

Drinking

17 Aulay's Bar.....	C5
18 Lorne Bar.....	C5
19 Oban Chocolate Company.....	B2

Ganavan Sands

BEACH

Sandy, bucket-and-spade beach; 2.5 miles north of town along Corran Esplanade.



Activities

A tourist-office leaflet lists local bike rides, which include a 7-mile Gallanach circular tour, a 16-mile route to the Isle of Seil and routes to Connel, Glenlonan and Kilmore. You can hire mountain bikes from **Evo Bikes** (www.evobikes.co.uk; 29 Lochside St; ☎9am-5.30pm Mon-Sat), opposite Tesco supermarket, from £15 to £30 per day.

Based at North Connel, sea-kayaking coach **Rowland Woollven** (☎01631-710417; www.rwoollven.co.uk) offers instruction for beginners and guided tours (£100 for a full day for one person, £60 per person for two or three people) for more experienced paddlers in the waters around Oban.

If you fancy exploring the underwater world, **Puffin Adventures** (☎01631-566088; www.puffin.org.uk; Port Gallanach) offers a 1½-

hour Try-a-Dive package (£87) for complete beginners.

Various operators offer **boat trips** to spot seals and other marine wildlife, departing from the North Pier slipway (adult/child £8/5.50); ask for details at the tourist office.



Tours

From April to October, **Bowman's Tours** (☎01631-563221/566809; www.bowmantours.co.uk; 3 Stafford St & 1 Queens Park Pl) offers a Three Isles day-trip (adult/child £49/24.50, 10 hours, daily) from Oban that visits Mull, Iona and Staffa. Note that the crossing to Staffa is weather dependent.

Bowman's also runs a wildlife tour (adult/child £49/24.50) departing from Oban at 9.50am Sunday to Friday from May to July, and returning to Oban at 8pm. The trip takes in a ferry crossing to Craignure on Mull, travel by coach to Fionnphort, and a cruise around Staffa and the Treshnish Isles, plus two hours ashore on Lunga to visit a puffin colony.



Festivals & Events

West Highland Yachting Week

SAILING

(www.whyw.co.uk) At the end of July/beginning of August, Oban becomes the focus of one of Scotland's biggest yachting events. Hundreds of yachts cram into the harbour and the town's bars are jammed with thirsty sailors.

Argyllshire Gathering

HIGHLAND GAMES

(www.obangames.com; adult/child £8/4) Held over two days in late August, this is one of the most important events on the Scottish highland-games calendar and includes a prestigious pipe-band competition. The main games are held at Mossfield Park on the eastern edge of town.



Sleeping

Despite having lots of B&B accommodation, Oban's beds can still fill up quickly in July and August so try to book ahead. If you can't find a bed in Oban, consider staying at Connel, 4 miles to the north.

Barriemore Hotel

B&B ££

(☎01631-566356; www.barriemore-hotel.co.uk; Corran Esplanade; s/d from £65/92; ☎) The Barriemore enjoys a grand location, overlooking the entrance to Oban Bay. There are 13 spacious rooms here (ask for one with a sea view), plus a guest lounge with

magazines and newspapers, and plump Loch Fyne kippers on the breakfast menu.

Heatherfield House

B&B ££

(☎01631-562681; www.heatherfieldhouse.co.uk; Albert Rd; s/d from £35/70; The welcoming Heatherfield House occupies a converted 1870s rectory set in extensive grounds and has six spacious rooms. If possible, ask for room 1, complete with fire-place, sofa and a view over the garden to the harbour.

Kilchrenan House

B&B ££

(☎01631-562663; www.kilchrenanhouse.co.uk; Corran Esplanade; s/d £50/90;) You'll get a warm welcome at the Kilchrenan, an elegant Victorian villa built for a textile magnate in 1883. Most of the rooms have views across Oban Bay, but rooms 5 and 9 are the best: room 5 has a huge freestanding bath tub, perfect for soaking weary bones.

Old Manse Guest House

B&B ££

(☎01631-564886; www.obanguesthouse.co.uk; Dalriach Rd; s/d from £62/74; Set on a hillside above the town, the Old Manse commands great views over to Kerrera and Mull. The sunny, brightly decorated bedrooms have some nice touches (a couple of wine glasses and a corkscrew), and kids are made welcome with Balamory books, toys and DVDs.

Manor House

HOTEL £££

(☎01631-562087; www.manorhouseoban.com; Gallanach Rd; r £154-199;) Built in 1780 for the Duke of Argyll as part of his Oban estates, the Manor House is now one of Oban's finest hotels. It has small but elegant rooms in Georgian style, a posh bar frequented by local and visiting yachters, and a fine restaurant serving Scottish and French cuisine. Children under 12 are not welcome.

Oban Backpackers Lodge

HOTEL £

(☎01631-562107; www.obanbackpackers.com; Breadalbane St; dm £12.50-13.50; This is a friendly place with a good vibe and a large and attractive communal lounge with lots of sofas and armchairs. Breakfast is included in the price, there's free tea and coffee, a laundry service (£2.50) and powerful showers.

Oban Caravan & Camping Park

CAMPSITE £

(www.obancaravanpark.com; Gallanachmore Farm; tent & campervan sites £17; ☉Apr-Oct) This spacious campsite has a superb location overlooking the Sound of Kerrera, 2.5

miles south of Oban (bus twice a day). The quoted rate includes up to two people and a car; extra people are £2 each. A one-person tent with no car is £8. No prebooking – it's first-come, first-served.

Oban Youth Hostel & Lodge

HOTEL £

(SYHA; ☎01631-562025; www.syha.org.uk; Corran Esplanade; dm £17, r per person £17-20; Oban's SYHA hostel is set in a grand Victorian villa on the Esplanade, 0.75 miles north of the train station. The metal bunks are a bit creaky, but there are good showers and the lounge has great views across Oban Bay. The neighbouring lodge has three- and four-bedded rooms with en suite bathrooms.

Jeremy Inglis Hostel

HOTEL £

(☎01631-565065; 21 Airds Cres; dm/s £15/22;) This bargain place is more of an eccentric B&B than a hostel – most 'dorms' have only two or three beds, and are decorated with original artwork, books, flowers and cuddly toys. The kitchen is a little cramped, but the owner is friendly and knowledgeable (and makes delicious homemade jam). The price includes a continental breakfast.

Sand Villa Guest House

B&B ££

(☎01631-562803; www.holidayoban.co.uk; Breadalbane St; r per person £28-33; Ground floor room with wheelchair access. No credit cards.

Roseneath Guest House

B&B ££

(☎01631-562929; www.roseneathoban.com; Dalriach Rd; s/d from £40/60;) Peaceful location with sea views.

Kathmore Guest House

B&B ££

(☎01631-562104; www.kathmore.co.uk; Soroba Rd; s £45-65, d £55-75;) Good value, homely and welcoming.



Eating



Waterfront Restaurant

SEAFOOD ££

(☎01631-563110; www.waterfrontoban.co.uk; Waterfront Centre, Railway Pier; mains £10-18; ☉lunch & dinner) Housed on the top floor of a converted seamen's mission, the Waterfront's stylish, unfussy decor – dusky pink and carmine with pine tables and local art on the walls – does little to distract from the superb seafood freshly landed at the quay just a few metres away. The menu ranges from crispy-battered haddock and chips to pan-fried scallops with lime, chilli and coriander pickle. There's an early eve-

ning menu (5.30pm to 6.45pm) offering two courses for £11.50, or soup followed by fish and chips for £9.75. Best to book for dinner.



Shellfish Bar

SEAFOOD £

(Railway Pier; mains £2-7; ☺breakfast & lunch) If you want to savour superb Scottish seafood without the expense of an up-market restaurant, head for Oban's famous seafood stall – it's the green shack on the quayside near the ferry terminal. Here you can buy fresh and cooked seafood to take away – excellent prawn sandwiches (£2.75), dressed crab (£4.75), and fresh oysters for only 65p each.



Seafood Temple

SEAFOOD £££

(☎01631-566000; Gallanach Rd; mains £15-25; ☺dinner Thu-Sun) Locally sourced seafood is the god that's worshipped at this tiny temple – a former park pavilion with glorious views over the bay. Owned by a former fisherman who smokes his own salmon, what must be Oban's smallest restaurant serves up whole lobster cooked to order, scallops in garlic butter, plump langoustines, and the 'platter magnifique' (£60 for two persons), which offers a taste of everything. Booking essential.

Cuan Mor

BISTRO ££

(www.cuanmor.co.uk; 60 George St; mains £8-16; ☺lunch & dinner) This always-busy bar and bistro sports a no-nonsense menu of old favourites – from haddock and chips to sausage and mash with onion gravy – spiced with a few more-sophisticated dishes such as scallops with black pudding, and a decent range of vegetarian dishes. And the sticky toffee pudding is not to be missed!

Ee'usk

SEAFOOD ££

(☎01631-565666; www.eeusk.com; North Pier; mains £12-20; ☺lunch & dinner) Bright and modern Ee'usk (it's how you pronounce *iasg*, the Gaelic word for fish) occupies Oban's prime location on the North Pier. Floor-to-ceiling windows allow diners on two levels to enjoy views over the harbour to Kerrera and Mull, whilst sampling a seafood menu ranging from fragrant Thai fish cakes to langoustines with chilli and ginger. A little pricey, perhaps, but both food and location are first class.

Kitchen Garden

CAFE £

(www.kitchengardenoban.co.uk; 14 George St; mains £3-8; ☺9am-5pm Mon-Sat, 10.30am-5pm Sun, 6-9pm Thu-Sat) Deli packed with

delicious picnic food. Also has a great little cafe above the shop – good coffee, scones, cakes, homemade soups and sandwiches.

Julie's Tearooms

CAFE £

(37 Stafford St; mains £4-10; ☺breakfast & lunch Tue-Sat) Tea and scones, delicious Luca's ice-cream and homemade soup with crusty bread.

Tesco

SUPERMARKET

(Lochside St; ☺8am-10pm Mon-Sat, 9am-6pm Sun) Self-caterers and campers can stock up here.



Drinking

Oban Chocolate Company

CAFE

(www.obanchocolate.co.uk; 34 Corran Esplanade; ☺10am-5pm Mon-Sat, 12.30-4pm Sun Easter-Sep, shorter hr in winter, closed Jan) This shop that specialises in hand-crafted chocolates (you can watch them being made) also has a cafe serving excellent coffee and hot chocolate (try the chilli chocolate for a kick in the tastebuds), with big leather sofas in a window with a view of the bay.

Lorne Bar

PUB

(www.thelornebar.co.uk; Stevenson St; ☎) A traditional pub with a lovely old island bar, the Lorne serves Deuchars IPA and local Oban Brewery real ales, as well as above-average pub grub. Food is served from noon to 9pm, and there's a trad music session every Wednesday from 10pm.

Aulay's Bar

PUB

(8 Airds Cres) An authentic Scottish pub, Aulay's is cosy and low-ceilinged, its walls covered with old photographs of Oban ferries and other ships. It pulls in a mixed crowd of locals and visitors with its warm atmosphere and wide range of malt whiskies.



Information

Fancy That (112 George St; ☺10am-5pm; @) Internet access.

Lorn & Islands District General Hospital

(☎01631-567500; Glengallan Rd) Southern end of town.

Main post office (Lochside St; ☺8am-6pm Mon-Sat, 10am-1pm Sun) Inside Tesco supermarket.

Tourist office (☎01631-563122; www.oban.org.uk; Argyll Sq; ☺9am-7pm daily Jul & Aug, 9am-5.30pm Mon-Sat, 10am-5pm Sun May, Jun & Sep, 9am-5.30pm Mon-Sat Oct-Apr; @) Internet access available.

i Getting There & Away

The bus, train and ferry terminals are all grouped conveniently together next to the harbour on the southern edge of the bay.

BOAT CalMac (www.calmac.co.uk) ferries link Oban with the islands of Kerrera, Mull, Coll, Tiree, Lismore, Colonsay, Barra and Lochboisdale. See the relevant island entries for details of ferry services. Information and reservations for all CalMac ferry services are available at the ferry terminal on Oban's West Pier. Ferries to the Isle of Kerrera depart from a separate jetty, about 2 miles southwest of Oban town centre.

BUS Scottish Citylink (www.citylink.co.uk) buses run to Oban from Glasgow (£17, three hours, four daily) via Inveraray; and from Perth (£12, three hours, twice daily Friday to Monday) via Tyndrum and Killin.

West Coast Motors (www.westcoastmotors.co.uk) bus 423 runs from Oban to Lochgilphead (£5, 1¼ hours, four daily Monday to Friday, two on Saturday) via Kilmartin. Bus 918 goes to Fort William via Appin and Ballachulish (£9, 1½ hours, three daily Monday to Saturday).

TRAIN Oban is at the terminus of a scenic route that branches off the West Highland line at Crianlarich. There are up to three trains daily from Glasgow to Oban (£19, three hours).

The train isn't much use for travelling north from Oban – to reach Fort William requires a detour via Crianlarich (3¾ hours). Take the bus instead.

i Getting Around

BUS The main bus stop is outside the train station. **West Coast Motors** (www.westcoastmotors.co.uk) bus 417 runs from here to Ganavan Sands via Oban Youth Hostel (five minutes, two per hour Monday to Saturday). Bus 431 connects the train station with the Kerrera ferry and Oban Caravan & Camping Park (15 minutes, two or three daily Monday to Saturday from late May to September).

CAR Hazelbank Motors (☎01631-566476; www.obancarhire.co.uk; Lynn Rd; ☎8.30am–5.30pm Mon–Sat) hires out small cars per day/week from £40/225 including VAT, insurance and CDW (Collision Damage Waiver).

TAXI There's a taxi rank outside the train station. Otherwise, call **Oban Taxis** (☎01631-564666).

Around Oban

ISLE OF KERRERA

POP 40

Some of the best **walking** in the area is on Kerrera, which faces Oban across the bay. There's a 6-mile circuit of the island (allow

three hours), which follows tracks or paths (use Ordnance Survey map 49) and offers the chance to spot wildlife such as Soay sheep, wild goats, otters, golden eagles, peregrine falcons, seals and porpoises. At **Lower Gylen**, at the southern end of the island, there's a **ruined castle**.

Kerrera Bunkhouse (☎01631-570223; www.kerrerbunkhouse.co.uk; Lower Gylen; dm £14) is a charming seven-bed bothy (hut or mountain shelter) in a converted 18th-century stable near Gylen Castle, a 2-mile walk south from the ferry (keep left at the fork just past the telephone box). Booking ahead is recommended. You can get snacks and light meals at the neighbouring **Tea Garden** (☎01631-570223; ☎lunch Wed–Sun Apr–Oct), which also has B&B (£20 per person).

There's a daily **passenger ferry** (www.kerrera-ferry.co.uk) to Kerrera from Gallanach, about 2 miles southwest of Oban town centre, along Gallanach Rd (adult/child return £5/2.50, bicycle free, 10 minutes). From Easter to October it runs half-hourly from 10.30am to 12.30pm and 2pm to 6pm daily, plus 8.45am Monday to Saturday. From November to Easter there are five or six crossings a day.

ISLE OF SEIL

POP 500

The small island of Seil, 10 miles southwest of Oban, is best known for its connection to the mainland – the so-called **Bridge over the Atlantic**, designed by Thomas Telford and opened in 1793. The graceful bridge has a single stone arch and spans the narrowest part of the tidal Clachan Sound.

On the west coast of the island is the pretty conservation village of **Ellanbeich**, with its whitewashed cottages. It was built to house workers at the local slate quarries, but the industry collapsed in 1881 when the sea broke into the main quarry pit – the flooded pit can still be seen. The **Scottish Slate Islands Heritage Trust** (www.slateislands.org.uk; Ellanbeich; admission free; ☎10.30am–1pm & 2–5pm Apr–Oct) displays fascinating old photographs illustrating life in the village in the 19th and early 20th centuries.

Coach tours flock to the **Highland Arts Studio** (www.highlandarts.co.uk; Ellanbeich; admission free; ☎9am–7pm Apr–Sep, to 5pm Oct–Mar), a crafts and gift shop and a shrine to the eccentric output of the late 'poet, artist and composer' C John Taylor. Please, try to keep a straight face.

Just offshore from Ellanbeich is the small island of Easdale, which has more old slate-workers' cottages and the interesting **Easdale Island Folk Museum** (www.easdalemuseum.org; Easdale; adult/child £2.25/50p; 11am-4.30pm Apr-Oct, to 5pm Jul & Aug). The museum has displays about the slate industry and life on the islands in the 18th and 19th centuries. Climb to the top of the island (a 38m peak!) for a great view of the surrounding area.

Anyone who fancies their hand at ducks and drakes should try to attend the **World Stone-Skimming Championships** (www.stoneskimming.com), held each year in Easdale on the last Sunday in September.

Boat Trips

From April to October **Sea.fari Adventures** (01852-300003; www.seafari.co.uk; Easdale Harbour) runs a series of exciting boat trips in high-speed rigid inflatable boats (RIBs) to the Corryvreckan Whirlpool (adult/child £35/27; call for the dates of 'Whirlpool Specials', when the tide is at its strongest), and the remote Garvellach Islands (£44/34). There are also three-hour whale-watching trips (£44/34), mostly in July and August, cruises to Iona and Staffa (£70/55), and a weekly day-trip to Colonsay (£44/34).

Sea Life Adventures (01631-571010; www.sealife-adventures.co.uk; Clachan Seil) offers similar trips, but is based on the eastern side of the island and has a bigger, more comfortable boat.

i Getting There & Around

West Coast Motors (www.westcoastmotors.co.uk) bus 418 runs four times a day, except Sunday, from Oban to Ellanbeich (45 minutes) and on to North Cuan (one hour) for the ferry to Luing.

Argyll & Bute Council (01631-562125) operates the daily passenger-only ferry service from Ellanbeich to Easdale island (£1.55 return, bicycles free, five minutes, every 30 minutes).

Isle of Mull

POP 2600

From the rugged ridges of Ben More and the black basalt crags of Burg to the blind-ing white sand, rose-pink granite and emerald waters that fringe the Ross, Mull can lay claim to some of the finest and most varied scenery in the Inner Hebrides. Add in two impressive castles, a narrow-gauge railway, the sacred island of Iona and easy access from Oban and you can see why it's

sometimes impossible to find a spare bed on the island.

Despite the number of visitors who flock to the island, it seems to be large enough to absorb them all; many stick to the well-worn routes from Craignure to Iona or Tobermory, returning to Oban in the evening. Besides, there are plenty of hidden corners where you can get away from the crowds.

The waters to the west of Mull provide some of the best whale-spotting opportunities in Scotland, with several operators offering whale-watching cruises (see the boxed texts, p295 and p294).

About two-thirds of Mull's population lives in and around Tobermory, the island's capital, in the north. Craignure, at the southeastern corner, has the main ferry terminal and is where most people arrive. Fionnphort is at the far-western end of the long Ross of Mull peninsula, and is where the ferry to Iona departs.

🚢 Tours

See Bowman's Tours, p290 for details of day-trips from Oban to Mull, Staffa and Iona by ferry and bus.

Gordon Grant Marine

BOAT TOURS

(01681-700388; www.staffatours.com) Runs boat trips from Fionnphort to Staffa (adult/child £25/10, 2½ hours, daily April to October), and to Staffa and the Treshnish Isles (£45/20, five hours, Sunday to Friday May to July).

Mull Magic

WALKING TOURS

(01688-301213; www.mullmagic.com) Offers guided wildlife walking tours in the Mull countryside (£35 to £45 per person including packed lunch), as well as customised tours and four-day walking holidays.

🌟 Festivals & Events

Mishnish Music Festival

MUSIC

(www.mishnish.co.uk) Last weekend of April; three days of foot-stomping traditional Scottish and Irish folk music at Tobermory's favourite pub.

Mendelssohn on Mull

MUSIC

(www.mullfest.org.uk) A week-long festival of classical music in early July.

Mull Highland Games

HIGHLAND GAMES

(www.mishnish.co.uk) Third Thursday in July; piping, highland dancing etc.

Mull & Iona Food Festival

FOOD & DRINK

(www.mict.co.uk) Five days of food- and drink-tastings in early September, with chef demonstrations, farm tours, produce



markets, restaurant visits and a host of other events.

Tour of Mull Rally

CAR RALLY

(www.2300club.org) Part of the Scottish Rally Championship, with around 150 cars involved. Public roads are closed for parts of the early-October weekend.

Information

MEDICAL Dunaros Hospital (☎01680-300392; Salen) Has a minor injuries unit; the nearest casualty department is in Oban.

MONEY Clydesdale Bank (Main St, Tobermory; ☎9.15am-4.45pm Mon-Fri) The island's only bank and 24-hour ATM. You can get cash using a debit card from the post offices in Salen and Craignure, or get cash back with a purchase from Co-op food stores.

POST Post office (Main St, Tobermory; ☎9am-1pm & 2-5.30pm Mon, Tue, Thu & Fri, 9am-1pm Wed & Sat) There are also post-office counters in Salen, Craignure and Fionnphort.

TOURIST INFORMATION Craignure tourist office (☎01680-812377; Craignure; ☎8.30am-5pm Mon-Sat, 10.30am-5pm Sun)

Tobermory tourist office (☎01688-302182; The Pier, Tobermory; ☎9am-6pm Mon-Sat & 10am-5pm Sun Jul & Aug, 9am-5pm Mon-Sat & 11am-5pm Sun May & Jun, shorter hrs rest of year)

Getting There & Away

There are frequent **CalMac** (www.calmac.co.uk) car ferries from Oban to Craignure (passenger/car £4.65/41.50, 40 minutes, every two hours). There's another car-ferry link from Lochaline to Fishnish, on the east coast of Mull (£2.80/12.55, 15 minutes, at least hourly).

A third CalMac car ferry links Tobermory to Kilchoan on the Ardnamurchan peninsula (£4.45/23, 35 minutes, seven daily Monday to Saturday). From June to August there are also five sailings on Sunday.

Getting Around

BICYCLE You can hire bikes for around £10 to £15 per day from the following places.

Brown's Hardware Shop (☎01688-302020; www.brownstobermory.co.uk; Main St, Tobermory)

On Yer Bike (☎01680-300501; Inverinate, Salen) Easter to October only. Also has an outlet by the ferry terminal at Craignure.

BUS Public transport on Mull is fairly limited.

Bowman's Tours (☎01680-812313; www.bowmantours.co.uk) is the main operator, connecting the ferry ports and the island's main villages. Bus 495 goes from Craignure to Tobermory (£7 return, one hour, six daily Monday to Friday, four or five Saturday and Sunday), and bus 496 links Craignure to Fionnphort (£11 return, 1¼ hours, three or four daily Monday to Saturday, one Sunday). Bus 494 goes from Tobermory to Der-

vaig and Calgary (three daily Monday to Friday, two on Saturday).

CAR Almost all of Mull's road network consists of single-track roads. There are petrol stations at Craignure, Fionnphort, Salen and Tobermory.

TAXI Mull Taxi (☎07760 426351; www.mulltaxi.co.uk) is based in Tobermory, and has a vehicle that is wheelchair accessible.

CRAIGNURE & AROUND


There's not much to see at Craignure other than the ferry terminal and the hotel, so turn left, walk 200m and hop onto the **Mull Railway** (www.mullrail.co.uk; Old Pier Station; adult/child return £5/3.50; ☉Apr-Oct), a miniature steam train that will take you 1.5 miles south to Torosay Castle.

Torosay Castle & Gardens (www.torosay.com; adult/child £7/4; ☉house 10.30am-5pm Apr-Oct, gardens 9am-sunset year-round) is a rambling Victorian mansion in the Scottish Baronial style, stuffed with antique furniture, family portraits and hunting trophies. You're left to wander at will: a sign advises, 'Take your time but not our spoons.'

Two miles beyond Torosay is **Duart Castle** (www.duartcastle.com; adult/child £5.30/2.65; ☉10.30am-5.30pm daily May-mid-Oct, 11am-4pm Sun-Thu Apr), a formidable fortress dominating the Sound of Mull. The seat of the Clan Maclean, this is one of the oldest inhabited castles in Scotland – the central keep was built in 1360. It was bought and restored in 1911 by Sir Fitzroy Maclean and has damp dungeons, vast halls and bathrooms equipped with ancient fittings. A bus to the castle meets the 9.50am, 11.55am and 2pm ferries from Oban to Craignure.

Sleeping

To **camp** within walking distance of the ferry, turn left and walk south for five minutes to **Shieling Holidays** (☎01680-812496; www.shielingholidays.co.uk; tent & 2 people £14, with car £16.50, dm £12.50; ☉late Mar-Oct), a well-equipped campsite with great views. Most of the permanent accommodation, including the hostel dorms and toilet block (dribbly showers), consists of 'cottage tents' made from heavy-duty tarpaulin, which gives the place a bit of a PVC-fetish feel.

Recommended B&Bs within 10 minutes' walk of the ferry include **Pennygate Lodge** (☎01680-812333; www.pennygatelodge.com; s/d from £50/70; , next to the Shieling Holidays entrance, and **Dee-Emm B&B**

(☎01680-812440; www.dee-emm.co.uk; s/d from £50/60; , a half-mile south of Craignure on the road towards Fionnphort.

TOBERMORY

POP 750

Tobermory, the island's main town, is a picturesque little fishing port and yachting centre with brightly painted houses arranged around a sheltered harbour, with a grid-patterned 'upper town'. The village was the setting for the children's TV program *Balamory*, and while the series stopped filming in 2005 regular repeats mean that the town still swarms in summer with toddlers towing parents around looking for their favourite TV characters (frazzled parents can get a *Balamory* booklet from the tourist offices in Oban and Tobermory).

Sights & Activities

Places to go on a rainy day include **Mull Museum** (www.mullmuseum.org.uk; Main St; admission by donation; ☉10am-4pm Mon-Fri Easter-Oct), which records the history of the island. There are also interesting exhibits on crofting, and on the **Tobermory Galleon**, a ship from the Spanish Armada that sank in Tobermory Bay in 1588 and has been the object of treasure seekers ever since.

There's also **An Tobar Arts Centre** (www.antobar.co.uk; Argyll Tce; admission free; ☉10am-5pm Mon-Sat May-Sep, plus 1-4pm Sun Jul & Aug, 10am-4pm Tue-Sat Oct-Apr), an art gallery and exhibition space with a good vegetarian-friendly cafe; and the tiny **Tobermory Distillery** (www.tobermorymalt.com; tour £3; ☉10am-5pm Mon-Fri Easter-Oct), established in 1798.

The Hebridean Whale & Dolphin Trust's **Marine Discovery Centre** (www.whaledolphintrust.co.uk; 28 Main St; admission free; ☉10am-5pm Mon-Fri, 11am-4pm Sun Apr-Oct, 11am-5pm Mon-Fri Nov-Mar) has displays, videos and interactive exhibits on whale and dolphin biology and ecology, and is a great place for kids to learn about sea mammals. It also provides information about volunteering and reporting sightings of whales and dolphins.

Sea Life Surveys (☎01688-302916; www.sealifesurveys.com), based in the new harbour building beside the main car park, runs whale-watching boat trips out of Tobermory harbour; for more information see the boxed text, p295.

WALKING ON MULL

More information on the following walks can be obtained from the tourist offices in Oban, Craignure and Tobermory.

Ben More

The highest peak on the island, Ben More (966m) offers spectacular views of the surrounding islands when the weather is clear. A trail leads up the mountain from Loch na Keal, by the bridge on the B8035 over the Abhainn na h-Uamha (the river is 8 miles southwest of Salen – see Ordnance Survey (OS) 1:50,000 map sheet 49, grid reference 507368). Return the same way or continue down the narrow ridge to the eastern top, A'Chioch, then descend to the road via Gleann na Beinn Fhada. The glen can be rather wet and there's not much of a path. The round trip is 6.5 miles; allow five to six hours.

Carsaig Arches

One of the most adventurous walks on Mull is along the coast west of Carsaig Bay to the Carsaig Arches at Malcolm's Point. There's a good path below the cliffs most of the way from Carsaig, but it becomes a bit rough and exposed near the arches – the route climbs and then traverses a very steep slope above a vertical drop into the sea (not for the unfit or faint-hearted). You'll see spectacular rock formations on the way, culminating in the arches themselves. One, nicknamed the 'keyhole', is a freestanding rock stack; the other, the 'tunnel', is a huge natural arch. The western entrance is hung with curtains of columnar basalt – an impressive place. The round trip is 8 miles – allow three to four hours' walking time from Carsaig plus at least an hour at the arches.

Burg

At the tip of the remote Ardmeanach peninsula there is a remarkable 50-million-year-old fossil tree preserved in the basalt lava flows of the cliffs. A 4WD track leads from the car park at Tiroran to a house at Burg; the last 2.5 miles to the tree is on a very rough coastal path. About 500m before the tree, a metal ladder allows you to climb down to the foreshore, which is only accessible at low tide – check tide times at Tobermory tourist office before setting off. Allow six to seven hours for the strenuous 14-mile round trip.

Sleeping

Tobermory has dozens of B&Bs, but the place can still be booked solid in July and August, especially at weekends.




Highland Cottage Hotel

BOUTIQUE HOTEL **£££**

(☎01688-302030; www.highlandcottage.co.uk; Breadalbane St; d £155-190; ☺mid-Mar-Oct; ) Antique furniture, four-poster beds, embroidered bedspreads and fresh flowers and candlelight lend this small hotel (only six rooms) an appealingly old-fashioned cottage atmosphere, but with all mod cons including cable TV, full-size baths and room service. There's also an excellent fine-dining restaurant here.

Sonas House

B&B **££**

(☎01688-302304; www.sonashouse.co.uk; The Fairways, Erray Rd; s/d £80/125; ) Here's a first – a B&B with a heated, indoor 10m swimming pool! Sonas is a large, modern

house that offers luxury B&B in a beautiful setting with superb views over Tobermory Bay; ask for the 'Blue Poppy' bedroom, which has its own balcony.

Cuidhe Leathain

B&B **££**

(☎01688-302504; www.cuidhe-leathain.co.uk; Salen Rd; r per person £35; ☺) A handsome 19th-century house in the upper town, Cuidhe Leathain (coo-lane), which means Maclean's Corner, exudes a cosily cluttered Victorian atmosphere. The breakfasts will set you up for the rest of the day, and the owners are a font of knowledge about Mull and its wildlife.

2 Victoria St

B&B **£**

(☎01688-302263; 2 Victoria St; s/d £25/40; ☺Easter-Oct) Traditional, old-school B&B with simple, homely bedrooms (with shared bathroom) and a friendly and hospitable landlady.



Tobermory Campsite

CAMPSITE £

(☎01688-302624; www.tobermorycampsite.co.uk; Newdale, Dervaig Rd; tent sites per adult/child £6/3; ☼Mar-Oct; 🏠) A quiet, family-friendly campsite a mile west of town on the road to Dervaig.

Tobermory Youth Hostel

HOSTEL £

(SYHA; ☎01688-302481; www.syha.org.uk; Main St; dm £15; ☼Mar-Oct; @) Great location in a Victorian house right on the waterfront. Bookings recommended.



Eating & Drinking

Campers can stock up on provisions at the **Co-op supermarket** (Main St; ☼8am-8pm Mon-Sat, 12.30-7pm Sun), and the **Tobermory Bakery** (Main St; ☼9am-5pm Mon-Sat), which sells delicious, locally baked wholegrain bread, cakes, biscuits and pastries, as well as having a great deli counter.



Café Fish

SEAFOOD ££

(☎01688-301253; www.thecafefish.com; The Pier; mains £10-16; ☼lunch & dinner) Seafood doesn't come much fresher than the stuff served at this warm and welcoming little restaurant overlooking Tobermory harbour – as their motto says, 'The only thing frozen here is the fisherman!' Langoustines and squat lobsters go straight from boat to kitchen to join rich shellfish bisque, fat scallops, seafood pie and catch-of-the-day on the daily-changing menu. Also has freshly baked bread, homemade desserts and a range of Scottish cheeses on offer.

Fish & Chip Van

SEAFOOD £

(Main St; mains £4-7; ☼12.30-9pm Mon-Sat Apr-Dec) If it's a takeaway you're after, you can tuck into some of Scotland's best gourmet fish and chips down on the waterfront. And where else will you find a chip van selling freshly cooked prawns and scallops?

MacGochan's

PUB ££

(Ledaig; mains £9-15; ☼lunch & dinner) A lively pub beside the car park at the southern end of the waterfront, MacGochan's does good bar meals (haddock and chips, steak pie, vegetable lasagne), and often has outdoor barbecues on summer evenings. There's a more formal restaurant upstairs, and live music in the bar on weekends.

Mishnish Hotel

PUB ££

(www.mishnish.co.uk; Main St; mains £11-20; ☼lunch & dinner; 🏠) 'The Mish' is a favourite hang-out for visiting yachties and a good

place for a bar meal, or dinner at the more formal restaurant upstairs. Wood-panelled and flag-draped, this is a good old traditional pub where you can listen to live folk music, toast your toes by the open fire, or challenge the locals to a game of pool.

Tobermory Chocolate Factory

CAFE £

(www.tobermorychocolate.co.uk; Main St; ☼breakfast & lunch) This tempting little shop not only sells exquisite handmade chocolates, but also has a cafe that serves excellent espresso, cappuccino and hot chocolate.



Entertainment

Mull Theatre

THEATRE

(☎01688-302828; www.mulltheatre.com; Salen Rd, Druimfin) One of Scotland's best-known touring companies, putting on shows all over Scotland. It is based at Druimfin, about a mile south of Tobermory, which is the venue for most of its Mull-based performances; check the website for details of the latest shows.

NORTH MULL

The road from Tobermory west to Calgary cuts inland, leaving most of the north coast of Mull wild and inaccessible. Just outside Tobermory a long, single-track road leads north for 4 miles to majestic **Glengorm Castle** (www.glengorm.com; Glengorm; admission free; ☼10am-5pm Easter-mid-Oct) with views across the sea to Ardnamurchan, Rum and the Outer Hebrides. The castle outbuildings house an art gallery featuring the work of local artists, a farm shop selling local produce, and an excellent coffee shop (see p294). The castle itself is not open to the public, but you're free to explore the beautiful castle grounds.

The **Old Byre Heritage Centre** (www.old-byre.co.uk; Dervaig; adult/child £4/2; ☼10.30am-6.30pm Wed-Sun Easter-Oct) brings Mull's heritage and natural history to life through a series of tableaux and half-hour film shows. The prize for most bizarre exhibit goes to the 40cm-long model of a midge. The centre's tearoom serves good, inexpensive snacks, including homemade soup and clottie dumpling, and there's a kids' outdoor play area.

Mull's best (and busiest) silver-sand **beach**, flanked by cliffs and with views out to Coll and Tiree, is at **Calgary**, about 12 miles west of Tobermory. And yes – this is the place from which the more famous Calgary in Alberta, Canada, takes its name.

THAR SHE BLOWS!

The North Atlantic Drift – a swirling tendril of the Gulf Stream – carries warm water into the cold, nutrient-rich seas off the Scottish coast, resulting in huge blooms of plankton. Small fish feed on the plankton, and bigger fish feed on the smaller fish... This huge seafood smorgasbord attracts large numbers of marine mammals, from harbour porpoises and dolphins to minke whales and even – though sightings are rare – humpback and sperm whales.

In contrast to Iceland and Norway, Scotland has cashed in on the abundance of minke whales off its coast by embracing whale-watching rather than whaling. There are now dozens of operators around the coast offering whale-watching boat trips lasting from a couple of hours to all day; some have whale-sighting success rates of 95% in summer.




While seals, porpoises and dolphins can be seen year-round, minke whales are migratory. The best time to see them is from June to August, with August being the peak month for sightings. The website of the **Hebridean Whale & Dolphin Trust** (www.whaledolphintrust.co.uk) has lots of information on the species you are likely to see, and how to identify them.

A booklet titled *Is It a Whale?* is available from tourist offices and bookshops, and provides tips on identifying the various species of marine mammal that you're likely to see.

Sleeping & Eating

Achnadriish House

B&B ££

(☎01688-400388; www.achnadriish.co.uk; Dervaig Rd; d from £85;   ) There aren't too many B&Bs where *pad Thai* noodles appear on the breakfast menu, but Achnadriish is one. The dish is a legacy of the owner's extensive Asian travels, as are many of the decorative touches in this wonderfully welcoming guest house. A three-course dinner (£30 per person) based on fresh local produce is also available, as is a dram of Tobermory single-malt (complementary) beside the open fireplace while Mike tells you all about the local wildlife (and his three friendly Labradors).




Calgary Farmhouse

SELF-CATERING ££

(☎01688-400256; www.calgary.co.uk; Calgary; 2-person apt per 2 nights from £120;  ) This farmhouse complex offers eight fantastic self-catering properties (sleeping from two to eight people), beautifully designed and fitted out with timber furniture and wood-burning stoves. The Hayloft (sleeps eight, £850 a week high season) includes a spectacular lounge/dining room with curved oak frames and locally produced art work.

Bellachroy

HOTEL, PUB ££

(☎01688-400314; www.bellachroyhotel.co.uk; Dervaig; s/d from £65/90;   ) The Bellachroy is an atmospheric 17th-century droving inn with six plain but comfortable

bedrooms. The bar is a focus for local social life and serves excellent meals (mains £9 to £15, plus kids' menu) based on fresh local produce: pork from a local Dervaig farm, lamb from Ulva, mutton from Iona, mussels from Inverlussa and Mull-landed seafood.



Glengorm Coffee Shop

CAFE £

(www.glengorm.com; Glengorm Castle; mains £5-8; ☺lunch) Set in a cottage courtyard in the grounds of Glengorm Castle, this cafe serves superb lunches (noon-4.30pm) – the menu changes daily, but includes sandwiches and salads (much of the salad veg is grown on the Glengorm estate), soups and specials such as curry-flavoured salmon fishcakes with mint and cucumber salad.

Calgary Farmhouse Tearoom

CAFE £

(www.calgary.co.uk; Calgary; mains £5-8; ☺lunch;  ) Just a few minutes' walk from the sandy beach at Calgary Bay, this tearoom serves soups, sandwiches, coffee and cake using fresh local produce as much as possible. There's also an art gallery and craft shop here. Open till 5.30pm in July and August.

Dervaig Hall Bunkhouse

HOSTEL £

(☎01688-400491; www.dervaigbunkroomsnull.co.uk; Dervaig; dm/q £14/50; ) Basic but very comfortable bunkhouse accommodation in Dervaig's village hall, with self-catering kitchen and sitting room.

Calgary Bay

You can camp for free at the southern end of the beach at Calgary Bay – keep to the area south of the stream. There are no facilities other than the public toilets across the road; water comes from the stream.

CENTRAL MULL

The central part of the island, between the Craignure–Fionnphort road and the narrow isthmus between Salen and Gruline, contains the island's highest peak, Ben More (966m) and some of its wildest scenery (see the boxed text, p292).

The narrow B8035 road along the southern shore of Loch na Keal squeezes past some impressive cliffs before cutting south towards Loch Scridain. About a mile along the shore from Balmeanach, where the road climbs away from the coast, is **Mackinnon's Cave**, a deep and spooky fissure in the basalt cliffs that was once used as a refuge by Celtic monks. A big, flat rock inside, known as **Fingal's Table**, may have been their altar.

Balmeanach Park Caravan & Camping Site (☎01680-300342; per 2 people, tent & car £15; ☼Mar-Oct) is a peaceful camp-

CAMPSITE &

site a 10-minute walk from the Fishnish–Lochaline ferry, on the main road between Craignure and Tobermory (booking advised).

There's a very basic **campsite** (per person £3) at Killiechronan, half a mile north of Gruline (toilets and water are a five-minute walk away), and plenty of wild camping on the south shore of Loch na Keal below Ben More.

SOUTH MULL

The road from Craignure to Fionnphort climbs through some wild and desolate scenery before reaching the southwestern part of the island, which consists of a long peninsula called the **Ross of Mull**. The Ross has a spectacular south coast lined with black basalt cliffs that give way further west to white-sand beaches and pink granite crags. The cliffs are highest at Malcolm's Point, near the superb **Carsaig Arches** (see the boxed text, p295).

The little village of **Buinessan** has a hotel, tearoom, pub and some shops, and is home to the **Ross of Mull Historical Centre** (www.romhc.org.uk; admission £2; ☼10am–4pm Mon–Fri Apr–Oct), a cottage museum that

WATCHING WILDLIFE ON MULL

Mull's varied landscapes and habitats, from high mountains and wild moorland to wave-lashed sea cliffs, sandy beaches and seaweed-fringed skerries, offer the chance to spot some of Scotland's rarest and most dramatic wildlife, including eagles, otters, dolphins and whales.

Mull Wildlife Expeditions (☎01688-500121; www.torrubuan.com; Ulva Ferry) offers full-day Land Rover tours of the island with the chance of spotting red deer, golden eagles, peregrine falcons, white-tailed sea eagles, hen harriers, otters and perhaps dolphins and porpoises. The cost (adult/child £43/40) includes pick-up from your accommodation or from any of the ferry terminals, a picnic lunch and use of binoculars. The timing of this tour makes it possible as a day-trip from Oban, with pick-up and drop-off at the Craignure ferry.

Sea Life Surveys (☎01688-302916; www.sealifesurveys.com) runs whale-watching trips from Tobermory harbour to the waters north and west of Mull. An all-day whale-watch (£60 per person) gives up to seven hours at sea (not recommended for kids under 14), and has a 95% success rate for sightings. The four-hour family whale-watch is geared more towards children (£39/35 per adult/child).

Turus Mara (☎0800 085 8786; www.turusmara.com) runs boat trips from Ulva Ferry in central Mull to Staffa and the Treshnish Isles (adult/child £50/25, 6½ hours), with an hour ashore on Staffa and two hours on Lunga, where you can see seals, puffins, kittiwakes, razorbills and many other species of seabird.

Loch Frisa Sea Eagle Hide (☎01680-812556; www.forestry.gov.uk/mullseaeagles) runs escorted trips to a viewing hide on Loch Frisa where you can watch white-tailed sea eagles. Tours (£5/2 per adult/child) leave twice a day, Monday to Friday, from the Aros end of the Loch Frisa access trail (book in advance at the Craignure tourist office, p290).

houses displays on local history, geology, archaeology, genealogy and wildlife.

A minor road leads south from here to the beautiful white-sand bay of **Uisken**, with views of the Paps of Jura. You can camp beside the beach here (£1 per person; ask for permission at Uisken Croft), but there are no facilities.

At the western end of the Ross, 38 miles from Craignure, is **Fionnphort** (*fīnn-a-fort*) and the ferry to Iona. The coast here is a beautiful blend of pink granite rocks, white sandy beaches and vivid turquoise sea.

Sleeping & Eating

Seaview

B&B ££

(☎01681-700235; www.iona-bed-breakfast-mull.com; Fionnphort; s/d £55/75;

☐☎) Barely a minute's walk from the Iona ferry, the Seaview has five beautifully decorated bedrooms and a breakfast conservatory with grand views across to Iona. The owner – a semiretired fisherman and his wife – offers tasty three-course dinners (£22 per person, September to April only), often based around local seafood. Bike hire available for guests only.

Staffa House

B&B ££

(☎01681-700677; www.staffahouse.co.uk; Fionnphort; s/d from £48/66; ☐) This charming and hospitable B&B is packed with antiques and period features, and like the Seaview offers breakfast in a conservatory with a view of Iona. Solar panels top up the hot-water supply, and the hearty breakfasts, packed lunches (£5.50 to £7) and evening meals (£25 per person) make use of local and organic produce where possible.

Ninth Wave

SEAFOOD ££

(☎01681-700757; www.ninthwaverestaurant.co.uk; Bruach Mhor; 4-course dinner £42; ☎dinner) A new venture based in a former croft a mile east of Fionnphort, this restaurant is owned and operated by a lobster fisherman and his Canadian wife. The daily menu makes use of locally landed shellfish and crustaceans, and vegetables and salad grown in the croft garden, served in a stylishly converted bothy. Advance booking essential.

Fidden Farm

CAMPSITE £

(☎01681-700427; Fidden; tent sites per adult/child £6/3; ☎Apr-Sep) A basic but beautifully situated campsite, with views over pink granite reefs to Iona and Erraid. It's 1.25 miles south of Fionnphort.

Isle of Iona

POP 130

There are few more uplifting sights on Scotland's west coast than the view of Iona from Mull on a sunny day – an emerald island set in a sparkling turquoise sea. From the moment you step off the ferry you begin to appreciate the hushed, spiritual atmosphere that pervades this sacred island. Not surprisingly, Iona attracts a lot of day-trippers, so if you want to experience the island's peace and quiet, the solution is to spend a night here. Once the crowds have gone for the day, you can wander in peace around the ancient graveyard where the early kings of Scotland are buried, attend an evening service at the abbey, or walk to the top of Dun I and gaze south towards Ireland, as St Columba must have done so many centuries ago.

History

St Columba sailed from Ireland and landed on Iona in 563 before setting out to spread Christianity throughout Scotland. He established a monastery on the island and it was here that the *Book of Kells* – the prize attraction of Dublin's Trinity College – is believed to have been transcribed. It was taken to Kells in Ireland when Viking raids drove the monks from Iona.

The monks returned and the monastery prospered until its destruction during the Reformation. The ruins were given to the Church of Scotland in 1899, and by 1910 a group of enthusiasts called the **Iona Community** (www.iona.org.uk) had reconstructed the abbey. It's still a flourishing spiritual community that holds regular courses and retreats.

Sights & Activities

Head uphill from the ferry pier and turn right through the grounds of a ruined 13th-century **nunnery** with fine cloistered gardens, and exit at the far end. Across the road is the **Iona Heritage Centre** (adult/child £2/free; ☎10.30am-4.30pm Mon-Fri Apr-Oct), which covers the history of Iona, crofting and lighthouses; the centre's **coffee shop** serves delicious home baking.

Turn right here and continue along the road to **Reilig Oran**, an ancient cemetery that holds the graves of 48 of Scotland's early kings, including Macbeth, and a tiny Romanesque chapel. Beyond rises the spiritual heart of the island – **Iona Abbey** (HS; www.iona.org.uk; adult/child £4.70/2.80; ☎9.30am-5.30pm Apr-Sep, to 4.30pm Oct-Mar).

The spectacular nave, dominated by Romanesque and early Gothic vaults and columns, contains the elaborate, white marble tombs of the 8th duke of Argyll and his wife. A door on the left leads to the beautiful Gothic cloister, where medieval grave slabs sit alongside modern religious sculptures. A replica of the intricately carved **St John's Cross** stands just outside the abbey – the massive 8th-century original is in the **Infirmiry Museum** (around the far side of the abbey) along with many other fine examples of early Christian and medieval **carved stones**.

Continue past the abbey and look for a footpath on the left signposted **Dun I** (dun-ee). An easy walk of about 15 to 20 minutes leads to the highest point on Iona, with fantastic views in all directions.

Boat Trips

Alternative Boat Hire

BOAT TOURS

(☎01681-700537; www.boattripsiona.com) Offers cruises in a traditional wooden sailing boat for fishing, birdwatching, picnicking, or just drifting along admiring the scenery. One-/three-hour trips cost £9.50/18.50 per adult (child £5/8.50).

MV Iolaire

BOAT TOURS

(☎01681-700358; www.staffatrips.co.uk) Three-hour boat trips to Staffa (£25/10), departing Iona pier at 9.45am and 1.45pm, and from Fionnphort at 10am and 2pm, with one hour ashore on Staffa.

MV Volante

BOAT TOURS

(☎01681-700362; www.volanteiona.com) Four-hour sea-angling trips (£35 per person including tackle and bait), as well as 1½-hour round-the-island wildlife cruises (adult/child £15/8) and 3½-hour whale-watching trips (£35 per person).

Sleeping & Eating

Argyll Hotel

HOTEL ££

(☎01681-700334; www.argyllhotel.co.uk; Baile Mor; s/d from £61/97; ☉Mar-Oct) The terrace of cottages above the ferry slip houses this cute little hotel – it has 16 snug rooms (a sea view costs rather a bit more – £131 for a double) and a country-house **restaurant** (mains £8-15, ☉lunch & dinner) with wooden fireplace and antique tables and chairs. The kitchen is supplied by a huge organic garden around the back, and the menu includes Cullen skink, home-grown salads, and venison-and-rabbit hotpot.

Iona Hostel

HOSTEL £

(☎01681-700781; www.ionahostel.co.uk; Lagandorain; dm £18.50; ☉check-in 4-7pm) This hostel is set in an attractive, modern timber building on a working croft, with stunning views out to Staffa and the Treshnish Isles. Rooms are clean and functional, and the well-equipped lounge/kitchen area has an open fire. It's at the northern end of the island – to get here, continue along the road past the abbey for 1.5 miles (a 20- to 30-minute walk).

Tigh na Tobrach

B&B ££

(☎01861-700700; www.bandb-iona.co.uk; Baile Mor; per person £28; ☐) Comfortable B&B in modern house, with one family and one twin room. A short distance south of the ferry.

Cnocoran Campsite

CAMPSITE £

(☎01681-700112; cnocoran@yahoo.co.uk; Cnocoran; tent sites per person £5) Basic campsite about a mile west of the ferry. Open year-round.

Information

POST There's a tiny post office on the right as you head uphill from the ferry.

SHOPS Spar (☉9am-5.15pm Mon-Sat, noon-4pm Sun) Grocery store above the ferry slip.

Finlay Ross Ltd (☉9.30am-5pm Mon-Sat, 11.30am-4pm Sun) To the left of the ferry slip; sells gifts, books and maps, hires out bikes and provides a laundry service.

TOURIST INFORMATION Iona Community

Council (www.isle-of-iona.com) There's a notice board at the top of the ferry slip that lists island accommodation and services.

Getting There & Away

The passenger ferry from Fionnphort to Iona (£4.30 return, five minutes, hourly) runs daily. There are also various day-trips available from Oban to Iona (see p290).

Isle of Coll

POP 100

Rugged and low-lying, Coll is Tiree's less fertile and less populous neighbour. The northern part of the island is a mix of bare rock, bog and lochans (small lochs), while the south is swathed in golden shell-sand beaches and machair dunes up to 30m high.

The island's main attraction is the peace and quiet – empty beaches, bird-haunted

ISLE OF STAFFA

Felix Mendelssohn, who visited the uninhabited island of Staffa in 1829, was inspired to compose his *Hebrides Overture* after hearing waves echoing in the impressive and cathedral-like **Fingal's Cave**. The cave walls and surrounding cliffs are composed of vertical, hexagonal basalt columns that look like pillars (Staffa is Norse for 'Pillar Island'). You can land on the island and walk into the cave via a causeway. Nearby **Boat Cave** can be seen from the causeway, but you can't reach it on foot. Staffa also has a sizable puffin colony, north of the landing place.

Northwest of Staffa lies a chain of uninhabited islands called the **Treshnish Isles**. The two main islands are the curiously shaped **Dutchman's Cap** and **Lunga**. You can land on Lunga, walk to the top of the hill and visit the shag, puffin and guillemot colonies on the west coast at **Harp Rock**.

Unless you have your own boat, the only way to reach Staffa and the Treshnish Isles is on an organised boat trip – see p297, and the boxed text, p295, for details.

coastlines, and long walks along the shore. The biggest and most beautiful sandy beaches are at **Crossapol** in the south, and **Hogh Bay** and **Cliad** on the west coast.

In summer you may be lucky enough to hear the 'krek-krek-krek' of the corncrake at the **RSPB Nature Reserve** at Totronald in the southwest of the island; there's a **tourist office** (admission free; ☎24hr) here. From Totronald a sandy 4WD track runs north past the dunes backing Hogh Bay to the road at Totamore, allowing walkers and cyclists to make a circuit back to Arinagour rather than returning the way they came.

There are two ruined castles about 6 miles southwest of Arinagour, both known as **Breachachadh Castle**, built by the Macleans in medieval times.

Sleeping & Eating

Most accommodation on Coll is self-catering, but a few places offer B&B, including **Taigh-na-Mara** (☎01879-230354; www.taighnamara.info; r per person £30-35) in Arinagour. You can camp for free on the hill above the Coll Hotel (no facilities); ask at the hotel first.

Coll Hotel

HOTEL ££

(☎01879-230334; www.collhotel.com; Arinagour; s/d £55/100; ) The island's only hotel is an atmospheric old place. It has quirkily shaped rooms with white-painted, wood-panelled walls, many of which have lovely views over the manicured hotel gardens and the harbour. The hotel also has a really good **restaurant** (mains £9-18, ☎lunch & dinner) serving dishes ranging from crab chowder to lamb chops with herb-and-Parmesan crust.

Island Café

CAFE £

(Arinagour; mains £5-8; ☎lunch Fri-Tue) This cheerful little cafe serves hearty, home-made meals such as sausage and mash with onion gravy, haddock and chips, and vegetarian cottage pie, accompanied by organic beer, wine and cider. Open till 7.30pm on Fridays and Saturdays.

Garden House Camping & Caravan Site

CAMPSITE £

(☎01879-230374; Uig; per person £2, tent site £3-4; ☎May-Sep) Basic campsite with toilets and cold water only, 4.5 miles southwest of Arinagour. Dogs are not allowed.

Information

Arinagour, a half-mile from the ferry pier, is the only village on Coll, and is home to the **Island Stores** (☎10am-5.30pm Mon & Fri, 10am-1pm Tue & Thu, 9am-5.30pm Wed, 9.30am-5pm Sat) grocery shop, a post office (with ATM), some craft shops and a petrol pump. There is no reliable mobile-phone signal on the island; there are payphones at the pier and in the hotel. For more information see www.visitcoll.co.uk.

Getting There & Around

AIR Hebridean Air Services (☎0845 805 7465; www.hebrideanair.co.uk) operates flights from Connel Airfield (near Oban) to Coll (£65 one way, twice daily Monday and Wednesday).

BIKE Mountain bikes can be hired from the post office in Arinagour for £10 per day.

BOAT A CalMac (www.calmac.co.uk) car ferry runs from Oban to Coll (passenger/car £16.70/85.50 return, 2¼ hours, one daily) and continues to Tiree (one hour), except on Wednesday and Friday when the boat calls at

Tiree first. The one-way fare from Coll to Tiree is £2.60/12.75 per passenger/car.

On Thursdays only, you can take a ferry from Coll and Tiree to Barra in the Outer Hebrides (£7.10/35.25 one way, four hours).

Isle of Tiree

POP 765

Low-lying Tiree (tye-ree; from the Gaelic *tìrìodh*, meaning 'land of corn') is a fertile sward of lush, green machair liberally sprinkled with yellow buttercups, much of it so flat that, from a distance, the houses seem to rise out of the sea. It's one of the sunniest places in Scotland, but also one of the windiest – cyclists soon find that although it's flat, heading west usually feels like going uphill. One major benefit – the constant breeze keeps away the midges.

The surf-lashed coastline here is scalloped with broad, sweeping beaches of white sand, hugely popular with windsurfers and kite-surfers. Most visitors, however, come for the birdwatching, beachcombing and lonely coastal walks.

👁️ Sights

In the 19th century Tiree had a population of 4500, but poverty and overcrowding – plus food shortages following the potato famine of 1846 – led the landowner, the Duke of Argyll, to introduce a policy of assisted emigration. Between 1841 and 1881, more than 3600 people left the island, many of them emigrating to Canada, the USA, Australia and New Zealand.

An Iodhlann (www.aniodhlann.org.uk; Scarinish; admission free; ☎9am–5pm Mon–Fri; 📖) is a historical and genealogical library and archive, where many of the estimated 38,000 descendants of Tiree emigrants come to trace their ancestry. The centre stages a **summer exhibition** (adult/child £3/free; ☎11am–5pm Tue–Fri Jul–Sep) on island life and history.

At **Sandaig**, in the far west of the island, is the **Island Life Museum** (admission free; ☎2–4pm Mon–Fri Easter–Sep), a row of quaint thatched cottages each restored as a 19th-century crofter's home.

The picturesque harbour and hamlet of **Hynish**, near the southern tip of the island, was built in the 19th century to house workers and supplies for the construction of the Skerryvore Lighthouse, which stands 10 miles offshore. **Skerryvore Lighthouse Museum** (admission free; ☎9am–5pm) occu-

pies the signal tower above the harbour, which was once used to communicate by semaphore with the lighthouse site.

For the best view on the island, walk up nearby **Ben Hynish** (141m), which is capped by a conspicuous radar station known locally as the Golf Ball.



Activities

Reliable wind and big waves have made Tiree one of Scotland's top windsurfing venues. The annual **Tiree Wave Classic** (www.tireewaveclassic.com) competition is held here in October.

Wild Diamond Watersports (☎01879-220399; www.wilddiamond.co.uk), based at Loch Bhasapoll in the northwest of the island, runs courses in windsurfing, kite-surfing, sand-yachting and stand-up paddleboarding, and rents out equipment. Six hours' equipment hire costs from £50, and a beginners course (six hours over two days) costs £100 including gear. Sand-yachting on Gott Bay beach at low tide is £25 per hour.



Sleeping & Eating

Scarinish Hotel

HOTEL ££

(☎01879-220308; www.tireescarinishhotel.com; Scarinish; s/d £50/80; 📞) There's hospitality on tap at the Scarinish, with enthusiastic owners who go out of their way to make you feel welcome. The refurbished rooms are crisp and clean, and the **restaurant** (mains £8–18, ☎lunch & dinner) and traditional lean-to bar have a cosy atmosphere.

Ceabhar

B&B ££

(☎01879-220684; www.ceabhar.com; Sandaig; r per person from £35; 📞📞) This snug little cottage B&B has a fantastic location at the western end of the island, looking out over the Atlantic towards the sunset. The owners are outdoor enthusiasts and can advise on kite-surfing, power-kiting and scuba diving. There's also a **restaurant** (mains £8–14, ☎dinner Wed–Sat) in a sunny conservatory with sea views.

Kirkapol

B&B ££

(☎01879-220729; www.kirkapoltiree.co.uk; Gott Bay; s/d £35/66; 📞) Set in a converted 19th-century church overlooking the island's biggest beach, the Kirkapol has six homely rooms and a big lounge with a leather sofa. It's 2 miles north of the ferry terminal.

Millhouse Hostel

HOSTEL £

(☎01879-220435; www.tireemillhouse.co.uk; Cornaigmore; dm/tw £15/35) Housed in a converted barn next to an old water mill,

this small but comfortable hostel is 5 miles west from the ferry pier.

Balinoe Croft Campsite

CAMPSITE

(☎01879-220399; www.wilddiamond.co.uk; Balinoe; tent sites per person £12; 🚻) A sheltered site with full facilities in the south-west of the island, near Balemartine, with great views of Mull.

i Information

There's a bank (without ATM), post office and Co-op supermarket (h8am-8pm Mon-Fri, 8am-6pm Sat, noon-6pm Sun) in Scarinish, the main village, a half-mile south of the ferry pier. You can get cash back with debit-card purchases at the Co-op.

Tourist information and internet access are available at the **Rural Centre** (☎01879-220677; Crossapol; ☉11am-4pm Mon-Sat), and An Iodh-lann (see p299), but there is no accommodation booking service. For more information see www.isleoftiree.com.

i Getting There & Around

AIR Loganair/FlyBe (www.loganair.co.uk) flies from Glasgow to Tiree once daily (£56, 50 minutes) from Monday to Saturday.

Hebridean Air Services (☎0845 805 7465; www.hebrideanair.co.uk) operates flights from Connel Airfield (near Oban) to Tiree via Coll (one way from Oban/Coll £65/25, twice daily Monday and Wednesday).

BIKE You can rent bicycles from Millhouse Hostel (p299) and from **McLennan Motors** (☎01879-220555; Scarinish); the latter can also rent you a car.

BOAT Ferry connections and fares are the same as for Coll (see Getting There & Around, p298). Except on Wednesday and Friday the ferry goes to Coll first; journey time from Oban to Tiree is then four hours.

TAXI John Kennedy (☎01879-220419).

NORTH ARGYLL

Loch Awe

Loch Awe is one of Scotland's most beautiful lochs, with rolling forested hills around its southern end and spectacular mountains in the north. It lies between Oban and Inveraray and is the longest loch in Scotland – about 24 miles long – but is less than a mile wide for most of its length. See www.loch-awe.com for more information.

At its northern end, Loch Awe escapes to the sea through the narrow **Pass of Brand-eer**, where Robert the Bruce defeated the Mac-

Dougalls in battle in 1309. In the pass, by the A85, you can visit **Cruachan power station** (www.visitcruachan.co.uk; Lochawe village; adult/child £6/2.50; ☉9.30am-4.45pm Easter-Oct, tours every 30min). Electric buses take you more than half a mile inside Ben Cruachan, allowing you to see the pump-storage hydro-electric scheme which occupies a vast cavern hollowed out of the mountain.

Also at the northern end of Loch Awe are the scenic ruins of **Kilchurn Castle** (admission free; ☉9am-5pm Apr-Sep), built in 1440, which enjoys one of Scotland's finest settings; you can climb to the top of the four-storey castle tower. It's a half-mile walk from the A85 road, just east of the bridge over the River Orchy.

Scottish **Citylink** (www.citylink.co.uk) buses from Glasgow to Oban go via Dalmally, Lochawe village and Cruachan power station. Trains from Glasgow to Oban stop at Dalmally and Lochawe village. See p288 for details.

Connel & Taynuilt

Hemmed in by dramatic mountain scenery, **Loch Etive** stretches for 17 miles from Connel to Kinlocheteive (accessible by road from Glencoe). At Connel Bridge, 5 miles north of Oban, the loch is joined to the sea by a narrow channel partly blocked by an underwater rock ledge. When the tide flows in and out – as it does twice a day – millions of tons of water pour through this bottleneck, creating spectacular white-water rapids known as the **Falls of Lora**. You can park near the north end of the bridge and walk back into the middle to have a look.

Dunstaffnage Castle (HS; www.historic-scotland.gov.uk; Dunstaffnage; adult/child £3.70/2.20; ☉9.30am-5.30pm Apr-Sep, to 4.30pm Oct, closed Thu & Fri Nov-Mar), 2 miles west of Connel, looks like a schoolkid's drawing of what a castle should look like – square and massive, with towers at the corners, and perched on top of a rocky outcrop. It was built around 1260 and was captured by Robert the Bruce during the Wars of Independence in 1309. The haunted ruins of the nearby 13th-century **chapel** contain lots of Campbell tombs decorated with skull-and-crossbone carvings.

One of the region's most unusual historical sights is **Bonawe Iron Furnace** (HS; www.historic-scotland.gov.uk; adult/child £4.20/2.50;

(Continued on page 309)

(Continued from page 300)

☉ 9.30am-5.30pm Apr-Sep), near Taynuilt. Dating from 1753, it was built by an iron-smelting company from the English Lake District because of the abundance of birchwood in the area. The wood was made into charcoal, which was needed for smelting the iron – to produce Bonawe's annual output of 700 tons of pig iron took 10,000 acres of woodland.

A fascinating self-guided tour leads you around the various parts of the site.

From the jetty opposite the entrance to Bonawe, **Loch Etive Cruises** (☎07721-732703, 01866-822430) runs boat trips to the head of Loch Etive and back between one and three times daily (except Saturday) from March to November. There are two-hour cruises (adult/child £10/8, departing 10am and noon) and three-hour cruises

LOCAL KNOWLEDGE

WHALE-WATCHING WISDOM: RUSSELL LEAPER

Russell Leaper works for the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW), conducting scientific research to try and help reduce threats to whales around the world. He lives in Banavie, near Fort William.

How does Scotland's west coast compare in the league of world whale-watching spots? Rather like the weather, whale-watching in Scotland is less predictable than elsewhere. There is a good chance of seeing minke whales and harbour porpoises. Bottlenose and common dolphins are also seen regularly, and there is a small chance of seeing several other species of whales and dolphins. Basking sharks are also often seen on whale-watching trips. The whale-watching season tends to run from April to September because of the weather (they're easier to spot in calm conditions) but the whales may be around longer than this.

What was your most memorable whale sighting in Scottish waters? In 20 years of studying whales around the world, it's Scotland that has given me some of my most memorable encounters. On a small sailing boat on a glassy calm day in the Sound of Arisaig, myself and a group of children watched for nearly an hour as a minke whale played with the boat like a dolphin. The huge body with a small, curious eye would pass back and forth underneath us before surfacing to breathe out with a rasping blow that smelt of rotten vegetables. A special experience shared with my own children, but also with two girls from Belarus. Visiting Scotland for a month to escape a home still suffering from the effects of Chernobyl, they had never seen the sea before, let alone made eye contact with a whale.

Are whale and dolphin numbers in Scottish waters rising, falling, staying the same? We only have rather approximate estimates of numbers for a few species and almost no information on trends. The numbers of animals close to the coast varies from year to year but we don't really know how this relates to overall numbers. Unfortunately, Norway still kills several hundred minke whales a year from the same population that is watched around Scotland.

Does the whale-watching industry in Scotland have any negative impact on cetacean populations? There's certainly a risk that whale-watching can disturb whales but we don't have any evidence that this is a problem on the west coast of Scotland. The quantity of boat traffic, including whale-watching, is much lower than many other areas.

How can visitors ensure that their whale-watching activity has minimal impact? Scottish Natural Heritage has developed the **Scottish Marine Wildlife Watching Code** (www.marinecode.org). These are simple, common-sense measures to minimise disturbance. Feedback from customers is probably the most effective way of ensuring that operators stick to the code. You can contribute to minimising impact by knowing the code and telling the boat operator if they are not respecting it.

Are there any organisations that people can get involved with on a voluntary basis? IFAW is one of a number of groups campaigning on behalf of whales and dolphins at an international level. Locally, the Hebridean Whale & Dolphin Trust based in Tobermory (see p291) runs programs with volunteers and also collates sightings.

(£15/12, departing 2pm). You may spot eagles, otters, seals and deer, and at the head of the loch you can see the famous Etive slabs – dotted with rock climbers in dry weather. Bookings essential.

Buses between Oban and Fort William or Glasgow, and trains between Oban and Glasgow, all stop in Connel and Taynuilt. See p288 for details.

Appin & Around

The Appin region, once ruled over by the Stewarts of Appin from their stronghold at Castle Stalker, stretches north from the rocky shores of Loch Creran to the hills of Glencoe.

The **Scottish Sea Life Sanctuary** (www.sealsanctuary.co.uk; Barcaldine; adult/child £12.50/10; ☺10am-5pm Mar-Oct), 8 miles north of Oban on the shores of Loch Creran, provides a haven for orphaned seal pups. As well as the seal pools there are tanks with herrings, rays and flatfish, touch pools for children, an otter sanctuary and displays on Scotland's marine environment.

North of Loch Creran, at Portnacroish, there's a wonderful view of **Castle Stalker** perched on a tiny offshore island – Monty Python buffs will recognise it as the castle that appears in the final scenes of the film *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*. **Port Appin**, a couple of miles off the main road, is a pleasant spot with a passenger ferry to the island of Lismore.

The delightfully quaint **Pierhouse Hotel** (☎01631-730302; www.pierhousehotel.co.uk; Port Appin; s £70-120, d £120-175; P☺) sits on the waterfront above the ferry pier for Lismore, and has stylish modern rooms, a sauna and an excellent **restaurant** (mains £15-25, ☺lunch & dinner) that enjoys a view across the water to Lismore, and specialises in local seafood and game.

You can hire bikes from **Port Appin Bike** (☎01631-730391), at the entrance to the village, for £8/12 per half-/full day.

Scottish Citylink (www.citylink.co.uk) buses between Oban and Fort William stop at the Sea Life Sanctuary and Appin village. See p288 for details.

Lismore

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The first thing you notice about the island of Lismore is how green it is (the Gaelic name

Lios Mor means 'Great Garden') – all lush grassland sprinkled with wildflowers, with grey blades of limestone breaking through the soil. And that's the secret – limestone is rare in the Highlands, but it weathers to a very fertile soil.

St Moluag's Centre (www.celm.org.uk; adult/child £3.50/free; ☺11am-4pm May-Sep, noon-3pm Apr, Oct & Nov) houses a fascinating exhibition on Lismore's history and culture; alongside stands a reconstruction of a crofter's cottage. The **Lismore Café** (☎01631-760020; mains £3-6; ☺lunch daily, dinner Fri & Sat Apr-Oct) here has an outdoor deck with a stunning view of the mainland mountains (booking necessary for dinner). The centre is in the middle of the island – if you're walking, you can take a short cut by starting along the coastal path north of the pier at Achnacroish (2 miles by road, just over 1 mile by the path).

The romantic ruins of 13th-century **Castle Coeffin** have a lovely setting on the west coast, a mile from Clachan (follow the waymarked path). **Tirefour Broch**, a defensive tower with double walls reaching 4m in height, is directly opposite on the east coast.

There is very little short-stay accommodation on Lismore. However, there are several self-catering options advertised on www.isleoflismore.com.

Lismore is long and narrow – 10 miles long and just over a mile wide – with a road running almost its full length. **Clachan**, a scattering of houses midway between Achnacroish and Point, is the nearest the island has to a village. **Lismore Stores** (☺9am-5.30pm Mon, Tue, Thu & Fri, to 1pm Wed & Sat; @), between Achnacroish and Clachan, is a grocery store and post office, and has internet access.

i Getting There & Around

BIKE Lismore Bike Hire (☎01631-760213) will deliver your bike to the ferry slip; hire costs £6/10 per half-/full day.

BOAT A CalMac (www.calmac.co.uk) car ferry runs from Oban to Achnacroish, with two to five sailings Monday to Saturday (passenger/car £5.55/45.90 return, 50 minutes).

Argyll & Bute Council (www.argyll-bute.gov.uk) operates the passenger ferry from Port Appin to Point (£1.35, 10 minutes, hourly). Bicycles are carried for free.

TAXI Phone ☎01631-760220.

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