

## Scotland: The Highlands & the Isle of Skye

### Tour-Only Itinerary

Unparalleled scenery, incredible walks, local folklore, and history come together effortlessly in the Scottish Highlands and Western Islands. Your adventure begins on “The Bonnie Banks o’ Loch Lomond,” the largest inland stretch of water in Great Britain by surface area. Then continue to the spectacular grandeur of Glencoe with its wild mountain range. The Isle of Skye, buffering Scotland’s northwest from the Atlantic, contrasts rocky shoreline and plunging cliffs with soft white-sand beaches and timeless villages in placid bays. Our final location has been on the tourist map since the arrival of the railroad more than 150 years ago: the vibrant Pitlochry, with its Victorian Scottish Baronial architecture. Your walks reveal the rugged Scottish interior, coastal headlands, distant views of islands and mainland, and waters shimmering among verdant pastures. Scotland’s history comes alive along the way, in stories true and tall, with iconic sights, legendary castles, and country-house hotels. Along the way, your hotels exude comfort, coziness, and elegance while your meals showcase creative Scottish fare, from freshly caught salmon to handmade whisky.



### Highlights

Sample the smooth and smoky handmade Scotch whisky of Bells Blair Athol Distillery, one of the oldest distilleries in Scotland, established in 1798.

Learn about the massacre of Glencoe, which took place in 1692 in the very area you explore. Walk among the pastel-hued fishing villages and along the staggering high cliffs of the Isle of Skye.

## On all Guided Adventures you can count on ...



Expert local guides to introduce you to the best of your destination.



Gracious accommodations that are a clean, comfortable home away from home.



Off-the-beaten-path places you'd never find on your own.



Experts to handle all the details.



A maximum of 18 fun-loving fellow travelers to share the journey.



Flight + Tour Combos include plane tickets, airport car service, and pre- and post-tour accommodations.



Delicious, authentic multi-course meals—virtually all are included.

## DAY 1

### Join Your Country Walkers *Scotland: The Highlands & the Isle of Skye* tour

Section of the West Highland Way and Loch Lomond. 4 ½ miles, easy moderate; 3 ½ miles, easy

Once your group has gathered in Glasgow, drive to the picturesque village of Drymen. Your walk follows a

section of The West Highland Way, Scotland's premier long distance footpath covering 96 miles from Milngavie, just north of Glasgow, to Fort William. You have the opportunity to walk additional sections of the route over the next few days. Today's route passes through open countryside and wooded areas, with rewarding views over Loch Lomond. Meet the coach in Milton of Buchanan and drive a short distance to Balmaha, located on the banks of Loch Lomond.

Gather for lunch at the Oak Tree Inn, a family-run inn constructed of local slate on the shores of Loch Lomond. Enjoy farm-fresh Scottish fare here. Throughout your journey, you find that Scottish cuisine has left its reputation for bland food in the past. Today, chefs infuse the typical fresh meats and produce from farming communities and the fresh fish from the North Sea and Atlantic Ocean with creative flair and color, making for memorable meals that are sure to be a rewarding part of your experience. You also enjoy a wide range of ales, malts, and whiskies.

Balmaha is home of the Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park, a spellbinding canvas of hills, lochs and glens where Scotland's renowned Highlands converge with the heather-covered Lowlands. After lunch, you set out on your pleasant and easy walk along the shores of Loch Lomond, enjoying magnificent views over the lake and its nearby islands. This is Rob Roy country, where the outlaw "Red Robert" MacGregor gained status as a local folk hero.

Afterwards transfer just less than one hour, through the National Park and lovely countryside to your hotel, located on the banks of Loch Ard. There will be time to relax before dinner tonight in the hotel.

## DAY 2

### Loch Ard Forest walk, Loch Katrine cruise

6 miles, easy

After breakfast, set off on your days walk directly from the hotel. This wide trail skirts the banks of Loch Ard, one of the most picturesque in Scotland, through the peaceful Loch Ard Forest, all set within The Queen Elizabeth Forest Park. Beautiful views keep emerging across the loch and towards the surrounding mountains. The Scottish outlaw, and later folk hero, Rob Roy knew this area well, having been born at Glengyle, at the head of Loch Katrine. He used a small cave on banks of this loch as a hiding place during the Jacobite risings.

Meet the coach at the end of the walk and drive a short distance along the valley to The Pier Cafe, Stronachlachar. With breathtaking views across Loch Katrine enjoy lunch in this isolated cafe.

For over 150 years Loch Katrine has offered a serene and tranquil spot for visitors from all over the world and is recognized as the favored and much loved setting of some of Sir Walter Scott's most famous poetic works. After lunch board the Lady of the Lake, named after Sir Walter Scott's classic poem. Sit back, relax and admire the magnificent scenery unfold whilst listening to the tales and legends of the loch during this one-hour cruise. Meet the coach at the far end of the loch and transfer into Glencoe, about 2 hours away. En route, you stop for photos of one of Scotland's most famous and scenic glens. There is time to unwind and relax at your next inn before dinner.

## DAY 3

### Glencoe

Glencoe village; 3.8 miles, easy. Altnafeidh to Kinlochleven; 7 miles, moderate. Afternoon options from 1 ½ miles

Widely considered one of the most breathtakingly scenic corners of Scotland, the narrow, U-shaped Glencoe is part of the National Scenic Area of Ben Nevis and Glencoe. Wild and jagged mountains, shaped by volcanic activity over millions of years, surround the emerald-green valley floor. Drama also permeates the history, both real and imagined, of this magical, mysterious place. The Glencoe Massacre was one of the most infamous events in Scottish history and one legend says that it began with the lighting of a torch near where the Clachaig Inn now stands. In fiction, Glencoe is the setting for Skyfall, birthplace of the father of James Bond in Ian Fleming's novels.

Today's easier option starts at your inn. During an invigorating walk, you follow a footpath upward through An Tor woodland to the historic Signal Rock. Continue down the valley to the village of Glencoe. Admire sweeping views across Loch Leven and grand vistas of surrounding mountains. Later, meet in a local cafe for lunch.

Alternately, choose a longer and more challenging hike, rejoining a section of the West Highland Way. You transfer ten minutes to Altnafeadh and begin walking along a stony path up a steep hill, joining The Devil's

Staircase, so named by the soldiers who helped build the local roads under General George Wade during his infrastructure campaign of the early 1700s. The workers not only had great difficulty transporting materials up this incline; it's said that the devil claimed some of them for himself as they made the journey one cold winter night.

The path soon rises into undulating exposed moorland above the plain of Rannoch Moor. The views from here are stunning. Continue on a downward trail, sometimes along stepping stones, before ascending again. To your right, the Blackwater reservoir appears. Its dam was built in the early 20th century to run the now-defunct aluminum smelter at Kinlochleven and could keep it operating for 80 days. As you lose elevation, your footpath leads through a long wooded slope on stone tracks, delivering you to Kinlochleven. Transfer to Glencoe for lunch in a local café.

Later, you may choose from several shorter walks directly from Glencoe village through the woodlands, home to pine martens, roe deer, and red squirrels. Or begin a scenic stroll from Glencoe House, enjoying spectacular scenery and loch views over Glencoe Lochan and Loch Leven.

Enjoy dinner this evening in the Clachaig Inn.

## DAY 4

### Glencoe to Isle of Skye

Scorrybreac circuit; 2 miles, easy

Today's shuttle transfer to the Inner Hebridean Isle of Skye reveals more of Scotland's stunning beauty. You trace the dramatic shores of two sea lochs, Loch Leven and Loch Linnhe, surrounded by heather-covered hills and soaring peaks. Later, you arrive at the Neptune's Staircase at Banavie, near Fort William. Built by Thomas Telford between 1803 and 1822, the staircase comprises eight locks on the Caledonian Canal and is the longest of its kind in Britain. Originally hand-powered, these impressive locks today operate with hydraulics and lift boats 64 feet in about 90 minutes.

After time to view this engineering wonder, continue to Glenfinnan Monument. This poignant monument was erected in 1815 to commemorate the Jacobite clansmen who fought and died for the cause of Prince Charles Edward Stuart, "Bonnie Prince Charlie". Continue to the fishing and ferry port of Mallaig. Dating

from the 1840s, it was one of the region's most active herring ports and Europe's busiest in the 1960s, gaining notoriety for its smoked kippers. Today, this working village specializes in landing shellfish and providing moorings for pleasure boats. It is also your ferry port to the Isle of Skye. But before you embark, you can stretch your legs on a pleasant and scenic walk around the harbor, enjoying views over to islands of Skye, Eigg and Rum, with time to browse the local shops and have lunch.

Embark your ferry for a 45-minute crossing to Armadale on the Isle of Skye. Upon arrival, drive along the island's east coast for an hour to Portree, the island's capital, where you stay for the next two nights. While your luggage is being delivered to your rooms, enjoy an easy circular walk around the hotel, initially through woodland and then dropping down along the north side of Portree bay with lovely views over to the town.

## DAY 5

### Flora Macdonald's Grave & Skye Museum of Island Life

4 miles, easy to moderate with shorter, easier option available. Optional afternoon free time in Portree

You awaken to magnificent scenery and an ample breakfast then embark on a scenic drive north along the coast of the Trotternish peninsula. In the tiny settlement of Kilmuir, you first visit the grave of the famed 18th-century heroine Flora Macdonald, who assisted Bonnie Prince Charlie in his flight through the Highlands after the Battle of Culloden. Nearby is the Skye Museum of Island Life, a privately owned outdoor museum housed in original and traditional thatched cottages. Its collection of tools and artifacts depicts the simple lives of local crofters in the 19th century and emphasizes the tenacity required in their daily struggle to survive in this inhospitable environment.

You then embark on the morning's walk to the tip of Skye's most northerly point, Rubha Hunish. The walk begins near a red telephone booth, incongruous in this remote area. The ruins of the abandoned village of Erisco soon come into view as you ascend gently northwards onto Meall Tuath, eventually reaching a former coastguard lookout overlooking the Little Minch, an important shipping channel. A volunteer-maintained hut offers shelter from the wind if needed and from this spectacular location the north cliffs plunge down hundreds of feet, with magnificent views across the sea to the mountains on the Isle of Harris. The headland's northernmost tip is the best place on Skye for spotting dolphins, porpoise, and whales. The trail circles back along the coast with views of the melancholy ruins of 13th-century Duntulm

Castle, once the seat of the chiefs of Clan MacDonald of Sleat, and for several centuries an important clan stronghold.

Lunch will be taken in The Flodigarry Hotel with splendid views along the coast. The cottage where Flora MacDonald's raised five of her seven children is now part of the hotel.

After lunch, you may choose to explore the pleasant harbor of Portree, the largest town on the Isle of Skye—its cultural center and an active fishing and pleasure port – before strolling back to the hotel for dinner.

## DAY 6

### Eilean Donan Castle & Pitlochry

2 miles easy

You awaken to magnificent scenery and another hearty breakfast then embark on a scenic drive back through the Highlands. Our first stop is one of the most iconic sites of Scotland, Eilean Donan Castle, perched on a small tidal island where three lochs meet: Loch Duich, Loch Long, and Loch Alsh. First inhabited around the 6th century, it was fortified in the mid-13th century and stood guard over the lands of Kintail. It was built and re-built as the feudal history of Scotland unfolded through the centuries. Lieutenant Colonel John MacRae-Gilstrap bought the island in 1911 and after years of toil and labor the castle was re-opened in 1932. Today, four generations of the MacRae family still look after the castle as its stewards and constables.

After a short stop, continue your journey past multiple lochs, such as Loch Cluanie, Garry, Lochy and Laggan, traversing the agricultural valleys and high mountains of scenic Perthshire County. You skirt the wilderness of Cairngorms National Park. Named for its scenic Cairngorms mountain range, it is the largest national park in the British Isles. Stop for lunch on your own at the House of Bruar. Later, arrive into Pitlochry. A major center where hill walkers gather before and after their treks, Pitlochry has a rich Victorian past that began after the Queen herself visited in 1842. Many stone buildings from the period named for the monarch grace the main street, making the small town a pleasure to wander.

This afternoon, you set out on a short easy walk to the hotel, passing the Pitlochry Dam Visitor Centre.



Here you can learn the rich history and transformative role of hydroelectricity in the north of Scotland and see the town's famous fish ladder that played an integral role to the project in the early 1950s. Witness this innovative route that helps fish to their upstream breeding grounds and perhaps even see them moving through.

Later enjoy a final evening's celebratory dinner at the excellent restaurant.

## **DAY 7**

### ***Your Scotland: The Highlands & the Isle of Skye* tour concludes**

After enjoying breakfast in Pitlochry leave the hotel for Blair Atholl distillery, one of the oldest distilleries in Scotland, established in 1798 by John Steward and Robert Robertson. It is also famous for its 12-year-old single Blair Athol Malt with a mellow deep-toned aroma and a strong fruity flavor with a smooth finish which can only be bought at this distillery. After a tour and tasting a private coach brings you to the Grand Central Hotel for your post-tour night. (Dinner is on your own.)



## What's Included

### Tour Only

Two expert, local guides (for groups of 8 or more), with you 24/7	✓
All meals included except two lunches. Local wine and/or beer included with dinner.	✓
All accommodations while on tour	✓
Transportation from the meeting point to the departure point	✓
Entrance fees and special events as noted in the itinerary	✓
Destination information (weather, visa requirements, etc.) and other travel assistance available 24/7 provided by One Call International	✓
The unbeatable and cumulative experience of the Country Walkers staff	✓