

THE NATURE OF SCOTLAND NATURAL HISTORY TOUR

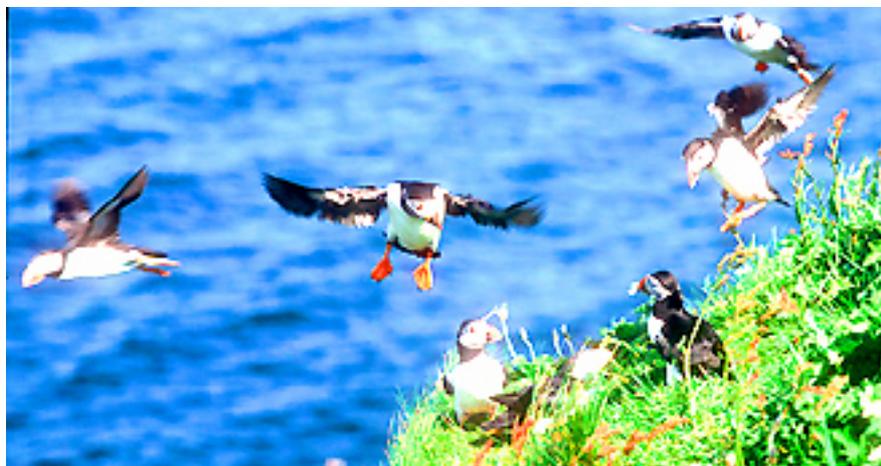


A stunning natural history discovery tour offering wonderful encounters with wildlife together with comfortable hotels and the intimacy of small groups.

On our guided natural history tours we introduce you to the fascinating flora and fauna of Scotland against a backdrop of unparalleled coastal scenery and high lonely moorland. You gain unique experiences in wildlife watching and encounter an unbelievably large variety of rare seabirds, plants and flowers as well as wild animals in one of the last true wildernesses of Europe.



*It does not matter whether you are already really knowledgeable about natural history, or want to take a closer look at the hidden wonders of nature for the first time - seabirds such as guillemots, razorbills, puffins or fulmars (which can live for over 100 years) as well as seal colonies, dolphins or whales, and the rarest of plants like *Primula Scotica*, will enthuse expert and beginner alike.*



Constantly changing views of nature lead you along towering cliffs with bizarre rock formations and caves, by way of isolated white beaches, picturesque green hills and through flower bedecked island valleys to the enchanting Highland world of mountain and waterfall. On our unique tour you don't have to go for very long hikes, but you should have the wish, determination and fitness to spend long days in the open air.



You discover the Highlands, Central Scotland, the east, north and west coasts as well as the beautiful Orkney Islands and the Hebrides, the island highlights being the Orkneys, Hoy, Mull and Iona or Staffa. You find out about interesting eco-systems and the geology of Scotland. In addition the riches of a unique

culture cannot be ignored, with so much evidence of 6000 years of eventful history all around; nor should the opportunities for getting to know the local people in relaxed and informal circumstances be forgotten.

You stay in good small hotels in comfort and with personal service. You enjoy generous breakfasts and very good three course dinners. In your small group or on your own initiative you discover whisky distilleries, castles and amazing landscaped gardens, the renowned abbey of Iona, a woollen mill and perhaps the most impressive stone circle in the world, sheepdog trials and much more. The ever present influences of Scandinavian and Celtic life and the little fishing villages whose inhabitants and visitors alike let the world pass by quietly and timelessly each day add to the special charm of our unique tour.



Depending on the timing of the tour, you have the promise of wonderful and varied impressions: these include large breeding colonies of gannets, puffins and great skuas (known in Scotland as bonxies), to say nothing of the chances of seeing red and black throated divers, golden eagles, ospreys, sea eagles, dolphins and whales, herds of red deer, otters, mountain hares, incredibly luxuriant woods of rhododendrons, golden gorse, moorland plants such as bog myrtle, wild orchids and insectivorous plants, and rare ferns, as well as arctic/alpine ecosystems and the magical purple of heather covered hillsides.

Forget the myth that it always rains in Scotland! The mild, soft climate is influenced by the warmth of the Gulf Stream. Often a light breeze blows, and the summer temperatures are not too hot for pleasant walking or observing wildlife. In Scotland the summer daylight scarcely fades. The evening atmosphere is prolonged by an enchanting luminescence that only towards midnight fades slowly from an idyllic and spectacular sunset into a romantic half light.

Your friendly humorous guide, Richard, is our expert for wildlife tours. He always knows exactly where the wild things are and can identify every kind of bird, even if it looks to you no more than a black dot in the sky. For evening entertainment he may, as one possibility, get you into the swing of Scottish country dancing.

Daily itinerary

Day 1:

Arrival in Edinburgh and welcome from the tour leader.

Drive to East Lothian and the nature reserve at Aberlady Bay or to North Berwick. Very varied marine habitats such as an estuary, dunes, salt flats, all rich in rare plants. Birds which may be seen include, among others, a variety of waders and ducks, and gannets.

Alternative bad weather programme:

To the Scottish Seabird Centre in North Berwick. The very interesting and interactive Seabird Centre is situated directly opposite the world famous Bass Rock, with its enormous gannet colony.

The displays are especially interesting to nature lovers. There are cameras set up on the offshore islands which the watcher can control from the Centre. Besides many other rare and fascinating seabirds whose breeding colonies gather on these islands in spring, gannets and puffins will definitely still be seen in July. Entry: £6.00 per person. Finally we still have time for a guided stroll along North Berwick's beautiful beach.



Excellent weather alternative:

From North Berwick we take a boat trip to the world famous Bass Rock to watch the unbelievably crowded seabird colonies in close up. The boat does not land and you can see everything on the steep cliffs wonderfully well on the round trip. Cost £8.00.

Drive back to the beautiful city of Edinburgh. Short city tour of the city centre. Dinner and overnight stay.

In the evening we recommend a pub crawl, or would you prefer to be taken by Dr Jekyll himself on a Ghost Tour (optional) through the darkest alleyways of Edinburgh's medieval Old Town?

Or we will walk in the evening on the geologically interesting volcanic plug of Arthur's Seat, the mountain in the middle of Edinburgh, and enjoy the late lingering sunset.

Day 2:



- We drive in a northerly direction.

On the way we visit Loch of the Lowes where we might possibly watch a rare osprey at the nest or, with luck, hunting.

Our next destination is the Cairngorms National Park. Cairn is Gaelic for a heap of stones or a mountain, and gorm is Gaelic for blue. The Cairngorm massif, especially in the evenings, is coloured in intense shades of dark blue. The Cairngorms are unique. The high plateau is the only arctic-alpine environment in Great Britain with a herd of reindeer and a flora and fauna unique in the British Isles. The blooming of the heather turns the surrounding landscape of the Cairngorm mountains, Rothiemurchus estate and Glenmore Forest Park, into an unforgettable experience.

Here you enter Scotland's primary woodland as it originally appeared. The unique ecosystem depends on the Scots pine. This is the only coniferous forest in Scotland that has persisted since the end of the last ice age.

Both geology and flora are very interesting. Animals and birds that we will probably encounter are, among others, many red deer, rare Scottish crossbills and red grouse.



Day 3:

We continue northwards.

On request we make a little detour to Loch Ness, as well as to a small whisky distillery to sample Scotland's water of life (already included in the price). At the impressive Falls of Shin we watch wild Scottish salmon dauntlessly leaping the waterfall. We go on next to reach Scotland's north coast and embark on a beautiful trip by ferry to Orkney's mainland.

Sightseeing at the unique Stone Age settlement of Skara Brae and a short walk along the imposing and geologically interesting cliff scenery of Yesnaby's rocky coast, a playground for many different kinds of seabird such as guillemot, razorbill, fulmar, shag and arctic skua. With a lot of luck we might see dolphins or whales. Today we can admire the extremely rare *primula scotica* which is often to be found growing on Yesnaby's cliffs.

Overnight in Kirkwall, the friendly "capital" of Orkney with its traditional pubs. The gothic St. Magnus cathedral is one of only two in Scotland that survived the destruction of the Reformation.



Day 4:

Short ferry journey to the island of Hoy, a paradise for hikers and for nature. Today many seals will certainly keep us company on the boat trip. Hoy is a nature reserve.

We enjoy a varied walk through fairy tale glens to the rock stack of the Old Man of Hoy and along 300 metre high cliffs, where puffins breed. In landscape terms this is a highlight of any Scottish tour, further enhanced by the wildlife. Where else would you go to see such a large breeding colony of great skuas, as well as arctic skuas, red throated divers, razorbills and guillemots? But watch out for the great skuas, or "bonxies" as they are known locally, which defend their nest sites even against people.

Two nights in Kirkwall. In the glow of the evening light, perhaps we can summon up the will or the energy to visit the Ring of Brodgar and the Stones of Stenness, two of the best preserved stone circles in the world. In addition Kirkwall can offer you plenty of historical interest on both days. We will not miss out the Churchill Barriers, Scapa Flow and the Italian Chapel.

Day 5:

Ferry trip back to the mainland. Today we encounter "the wild, wild west".

We drive along Scotland's north coast through Sutherland (so named by the Vikings for whom it was indeed a southern land) and Wester Ross.



These landscapes are supremely wild and little changed since the last ice age.

Sutherland is part of a region which is the least populated in all Europe. Today we see rare moorland and coastal plants, and, of course, wildly romantic landscapes, as well as deserted, kilometre-long, white, sandy beaches - not forgetting the world's most northerly palm tree. We spend the night in the small town of Ullapool.

Day 6:

We begin with the geologically extremely interesting and very deep Corrieshalloch Gorge. Who will trust themselves to the shaky bridge above the waterfall? Further on, and sheltered in a bay warmed by the Gulf Stream, lie the totally unexpected and wonderful subtropical Inverewe Gardens. Sightseeing with free time. As the journey continues, we encounter ever more impressive landscapes. We enjoy an unforgettable drive beside picturesque Loch Maree.

Then Torridon makes the hearts of any climbers beat faster. At Loch Duich we stop at famous Eilean Donan Castle (featured in the film, "Highlander"). Through wild Kintail, and by way of the geological fault of the Great Glen, and a little later via Fort William, we continue our journey to the ferry crossing to the Isle of Mull. This evening we can amuse ourselves with a ceilidh when you can practise some Highland dancing under the guidance of your tour leader.

Day 7:

After the strenuous activities of the previous day we can choose to take things a little easier. We decide for ourselves the evening before.

Possibility 1: In Tobermory there is a successful nature conservation project which concerns itself with whales and dolphins. There is the possibility of organising a whole day's boat trip to look for sea mammals.

The price is dependent on the size of the group.

Possibility 2: First we visit the picture book Torosay Castle with its superb gardens. This laird's house is very welcoming, with hardly any barriers, and above much of the furniture is a notice inviting you to take a seat. Then we continue, according to the wishes of the group, either to beautiful Loch Buie and nature observation, an ancient castle, a cliff walk and stone circle, or we drive to the pretty little island capital, Tobermory.



Its colourfully painted fishermen's houses overlooking the harbour bay and its friendly inhabitants give Tobermory an exceptionally homely and welcoming feel. Here the locals and the visitors have plenty of time and peace to allow each day to take its course. Relax on a guided tour of Tobermory whisky distillery, with a sampling of Scotland's "water of life". Enjoy lunch in a traditional pub or a real British afternoon tea in one of the pleasant tea rooms with a panoramic view of the harbour and the sea.

Many small shops sell interesting and tasteful souvenirs, jewellery and the products of local craftsmen. There are also interesting visits to be made to the Tobermory chocolate factory or to Sgriob Ruadh cheese farm. Both the chocolates and the traditional cheese are splendid. A coastal walk to the picturesque lighthouse, from which one can often see dolphins, or a stroll along the attractive seafront and into Aros Park concludes a rewarding day. (all entry fees in Tobermory optional).

After dinner in a fish restaurant (optional) we take a look at the renowned Mishnish pub in Tobermory which has been chosen as the friendliest pub in Scotland. Second night on Mull.

Day 8:

We visit the sacred island of Iona, 'the cradle of Christianity'. The geology of Iona is surprisingly different from that of Mull, although the islands lie so close together. On Iona we find the rare ecosystem of

"Machair", typical only of the Outer Hebrides, where particular grasses and flowers grow on the sandy soil. In addition to seals and many types of seabird, with any luck we should perhaps see a sea eagle, a golden eagle, and, hopefully, an otter, or even dolphins or whales. We might even glimpse a rare corncrake on Iona, where they are making a comeback.



First by tour bus to Fionnphort and then by small passenger ferry over clear blue water we go to Iona. We see impressively carved Celtic crosses and romantically situated ruins and have the choice of a visit to the historically significant site of Iona Abbey. From here St Columba sent out his missionaries and warriors to convert the natives and to many parts of continental Europe. In the oldest graveyard in Scotland Scottish, Irish and Norwegian royalty are buried - amongst others, Macbeth and Duncan. We explore the island on foot and experience the spiritual tranquillity of the island. Our walk takes us along empty white beaches, through dramatic rock scenery and over smooth green hillocks. We get magical views of the Hebridean islands. Alternatively on this day participants can take a boat trip from Fionnphort to the island of Staffa, famous for its spectacular rock formations, unique basalt columns and Fingal's Cave. Staffa inspired Mendelssohn to compose his Hebridean Overture. After you have landed on Staffa, the boat brings you to Iona. You then have plenty of time to visit Iona Abbey.

The eventful day's programme is made complete with a wonderful bus tour of south-eastern Mull. We follow the rest of the route of David Balfour's escape from his kidnappers after his stranding on Iona in Robert Louis Stevenson's novel "Kidnapped". Depending on the time left, we visit Duart Castle (optional), seat of the chiefs of Clan MacLean, where the present chief may be in residence.

Day 9:

Ferry from Mull to Oban. Wonderfully scenic journey to Edinburgh Airport and return flight, or to the start of the next programme.



DEPARTURE 2010: (English and German speaking, Friday to Saturday)

07 - 15 May, 09 - 17 July

Further departures on enquiry

This tour can ideally be booked in combination with our other walking and sightseeing tours. Please ask us for details.

WOULD YOU LIKE TO EXTEND YOUR HOLIDAY?

You can combine this tour perfectly with the walking tours:

"In the Heart of Scotland" - walking and culture based on a single location

"Northern Highlights" - Orkney and Shetland Islands and Sutherland

"Western Highlands" - in the footsteps of Rob Roy - our classic!

"Western Isles" - Islands of Lewis, Harris, Uists, Barra, and north-west Scotland

"Lake District" - English Lake District and Yorkshire Dales

Self-guided railway and walking tour

Tours of Scotland:

"Scotland - the Whisky Trail and More" (exclusive bus tour for connoisseurs)

"Scotland in Style - Railway Adventure" (self-guided)

We can organise your own holiday extension.

INCLUDED IN THE PRICE

8 nights in good mid-range small hotels, 3 star or equivalent, with en-suite rooms, 8 full Scottish breakfasts, 7 three course dinners with coffee, English speaking guide, all transfers, travel in modern coaches, rail travel, all ferry crossings: Mainland-Orkney, Orkney-Hoy, Hoy-Orkney, Orkney-Mainland, Mainland-Mull, Mull-Iona, Iona-Mull, Mull-Mainland, all entry fees according to programme, welcome drink.

PRICES 2010:

per person sharing a twin/double room

booking through a travel agent: **£899.30,-**

single room supplement: £139.00,-
(flight not included)

booking exclusively direct with Rob Roy Tours:

Price on enquiry

special rates for small groups

group size 8 - 14

PREDICTED departure 2011:

(English and German speaking, Sunday to Monday).

06.5.-14.5.2008, 08.-16.7.2008, Further departures on enquiry

WHERE AND HOW YOU CAN MAKE A BOOKING:

You can book through a travel agent, or, of course, directly with Rob Roy Tours.

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