

# HIDDEN SCOTLAND

JOIN US ON A JOURNEY OF DISCOVERY

issue //

12.

Spring/Summer 2026



HIDDEN SCOTLAND

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# HIDDEN SCOTLAND

Hidden Scotland is a source of inspiration and information, carefully curated to showcase and encourage travel to and within Scotland. Our mission is to discover hidden corners as well as rediscover time-trodden trails, sharing them through a creative approach to storytelling and collaboration – all in the hope of inspiring travellers and Scotland’s inhabitants to get out and explore one of the most beautiful countries our planet has to offer.

With that in mind, we aim to encourage conscious travel, helping visitors reach the very heartbeat of Scotland’s awe-inspiring locations. By fostering meaningful experiences, travellers can immerse themselves in their surroundings, forge lasting connections and gain a deeper understanding of the areas they visit.

By connecting with the people who live in Scotland and sharing their stories – as well as meeting the small business owners who are at the heart of their communities – we learn what makes them, their work and their home so unique.

We want to show that sustainable travel can enrich these communities while offering travellers a more authentic and memorable experience.



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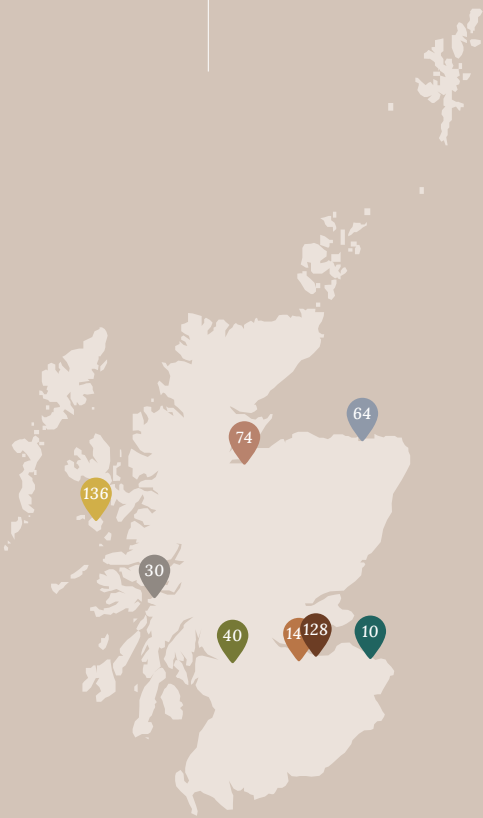
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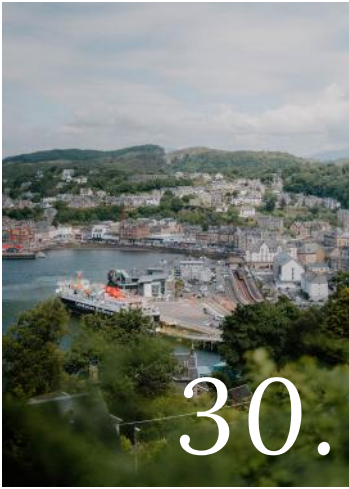
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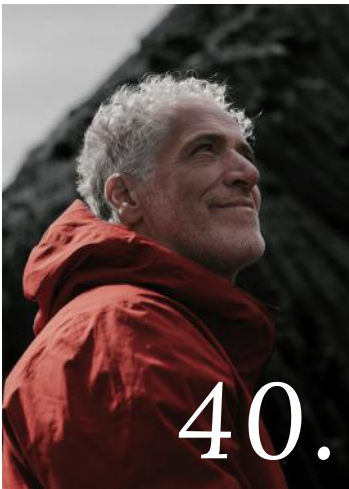
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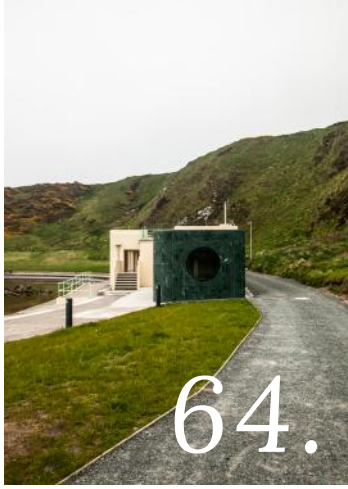
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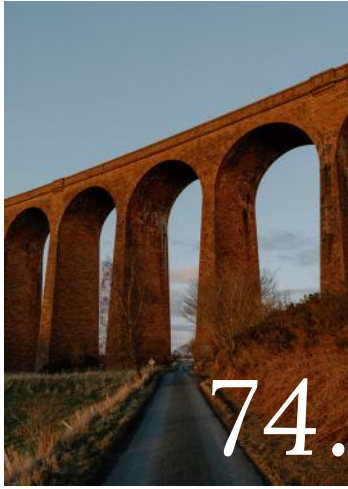
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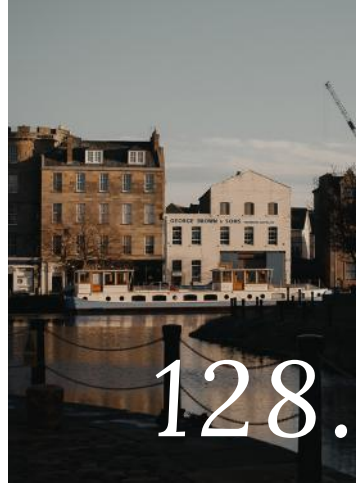
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## WELCOME

The publication in your hands is one we're very proud of. This is the 12th issue of Hidden Scotland Magazine, and like its predecessors it shines a light on some of the many elements that make this country such a special one.

Over the following 150-plus pages you'll encounter people and places with rich and meaningful tales to tell. We visit the quiet bays of the Borders, travel to the green contours of the Isle of Rum, meet experts in ceramics and wildlife film-making – Gordon Buchanan fans are in for a treat – and turn deserved attention to everything from modern lifestyle stores to medieval castles.

A common theme in the issue is a sense of character and purpose. We round up some of the country's best farm shops, all of which reconnect people with local produce; visit a truly stylish selection of independent boutique hotels; and take a bracing dip in some of Scotland's most notable open-air lidos (this is, after all, the spring/summer issue).

There's much more to enjoy, too. Artist Lorna Freytag gives excellent advice on how best to spend time in and around Oban, Darcie Maher of Edinburgh's Lannan Bakery shares a recipe for spelt jammies, while writer Laurie Goodlad rambles the shorelines to highlight the many pleasures of beachcombing. You'll want to head straight out and hunt for groatie buckies.

Upping the coastal adventure stakes further, we also speak to Jamie Maclean, who with his two brothers spent almost 140 days rowing non-stop across the Pacific Ocean last year, unsupported by any vessels and carrying all they needed. It's a remarkable story. And returning to terra firma, we take a detailed look at Inverness and the surrounding area, spotlighting what to see, where to eat and stay, and how to make the most of a trip to one of Scotland's most varied regions.

We hope the following pages bring you joy and inspiration.

Happy reading, and enjoy the journey.

*Slàinte mhath*

# Blue Cabin *by the Sea*

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*Reached by way of quiet adventure, this secluded cabin stay is guided not by itinerary but by atmosphere. A place to pause, breathe and simply be – where family time meets the living heritage of the harbour it calls home.*

Words: Karla Rose Hall // Photography: Jack Cairney

There are spots along the Scottish coast that can make you feel a certain way. They have an atmosphere that takes you out of time and slows life down, a mood that makes you feel as though you've been waiting for years to walk their shores. These are places of little fanfare but big views, places where the sky billows out forever, the waves roll rhythmically against the sands, the fishing boats drift in and the rest of the world feels somewhere else altogether.

Such is the way with a particular harbour in a historical but well-hidden bay south of Dunbar, around an hour east of Edinburgh. It's reachable only by sea or by walking through a dark, rock-cut tunnel. It has no pubs, no fish and chip shops and no amusement arcades: it has nothing, in fact, save for a soft crescent beach, curved harbour walls and a scattering of sea-facing buildings. And it was to one of these buildings, the fittingly named Blue Cabin by the Sea, that we felt drawn in January.

The winter had been a cold one and our rural Aberdeenshire home was almost snowbound. Living where we do is frequently a joy, being surrounded by pine forests and nature trails, but when the idea of taking a New Year's break to the sea was suggested – coupled with the prospect of falling asleep to the white noise of the waves – we were pulled towards this coastal corner of the Borders.

Our family of three – my partner Jack and I and our young son Aedan – left home on a drizzly Friday lunchtime with a packed boot and a rucksack full of diggers and tractors for the beach. By the time we'd made our way south over the Cairn o' Mount and across the Queensferry Crossing – one of the crowning glories of the brilliant engineer Naeem Hussain – with a couple of unrushed pitstops en route, the sun had set. It was dark when we reached our destination – a fitting welcome, perhaps, to somewhere that by its very nature keeps itself concealed.





*'Emerging from  
the tunnel into  
the salt air felt  
like stepping into  
another world.'*

The pre-arrival information we'd received from cabin owners Ben Tindall and Jill Watson meant we knew what to expect: a walk to reach the cabin, a wheelbarrow to help with luggage and a secret tunnel to find by torchlight. Aedan threw himself into the adventure, splashing his way through inky puddles in his crocodile wellies as – the tunnel now safely located – we headed towards the sea, the crash of the still-invisible waves growing louder.

Then, just like that, the tunnel gave way to damp evening air as we emerged into the harbour. In front of us, a narrow footpath led us down towards a dimly lit bay and a small gate. Adorned on the gate in bold traditional signwriting were the words "Blue Cabin by the Sea". We had arrived. It felt like a victory. Boots off. Kettle on. Stove crackling. And relax.

When you reach a destination late at night, waking up the next morning can sometimes be disorienting, your mind playing catch-up as you look around at your surroundings. Not here. As the January daylight seeped in through the curtains and the North Sea foamed against the foreshore, the cosy rooms around us already seemed like home. We were somewhere special. Time to explore in daylight both indoors and out.

The bracing sea air hit us as we stood on the cabin's outdoor terrace. Gulls wheeled offshore. Around us was coastal greenery sloping down to an empty beach and beyond it the waves. The whole scene – sights, sounds, scents and all – could have been taken from any point in the last 200 years. It felt soul-lifting.

It's thought that the bay here has been home to some form of harbour since prehistory. There were numerous attempts to construct early piers, although the rock-cut tunnel that links the harbour to the outside world wasn't built until 1752. The current piers – arranged like a pair of arms sheltering the bay from the open sea – were designed in 1828 and helped the dock briefly become one of the most important herring ports on the east coast.

The harbour's past, however, is not without heartbreak. It was hit disproportionately hard by the infamous East Coast Fishing Disaster of 1881, its tight-knit community tragically losing 11 lives and three of its four boats. Jill, a renowned figurative sculptor, has erected a poignant artwork commemorating the disaster at the very top of the track leading down to the tunnel.

As Jack, Aedan and I wandered from the cabin down onto the rock-fringed sands, the little harbour had the air of somewhere with an importance belying its size. Jill's husband Ben, a highly regarded architect, purchased the harbour from the council in 1991 to save it from development and conserve its character. Impressively, it's still managed in a way that prioritises fishing and all profits from guests at the Blue Cabin support its conservation.

For Aedan, the modestly sized beach had the pull and potential of a vast coastal kingdom. He excitedly dug holes in the sand with his toy tractors, burying treasure and building castles. We peered hand-in-hand into rockpools and marvelled at the fact that we had an entire beach and harbour almost to ourselves. We combed the tideline for shells and seaweed, then later took them back to the cabin to use as stencils, before returning them to the sand.

*'There was something about  
the harbour's salty-aired  
seclusion that had already  
worked its spell on us.'*







The cabin was like a magnet, in fact, its charm and proximity meaning it routinely pulled us back from our beach wanderings. Paintings show it was built in the 1880s and found use as an out-of-the-ordinary holiday chalet circa-1920s, although today its gorgeous styling is the work of Ben and Jill.

The cabin is aptly named. Its bright blue exterior comes from a richly hued paint also used on local fishing vessels. The same striking colour was very much in evidence inside the cabin, paired with an equally bold green. The cabin sleeps four and when the couple designed it, they imagined it “as belonging to a retired sea captain who’d travelled the world”.

This storybook romanticism was evident in every room, with artworks, books, trinkets and antiques turning it into a nautical mini-universe of its own. I was especially fond of the woodcut print of the Blue Cabin, handprinted on Skye by artist Kathleen Lindsley ([highlandprintstudio.co.uk](http://highlandprintstudio.co.uk)), a friend of Ben and Jill’s. Other standout design features included the maps that came down like roller blinds in the

living room, a delicate shell-ringed mirror made by Ben hanging above the fire, a handsome pair of wooden-framed, straw-backed Orkney chairs and a comfy ship-style box bed – decorated with seaweed cutouts drawn by Jill and a joy to drift away in at night.

Aedan, meanwhile, was in his element in the specially designed bunk bed in the second bedroom. Reading him the cabin’s collection of children’s books on the top bunk – and listening to him craft his own adventure stories – is a memory that will stay with us.

His creativity ran wild, too, when it came to the winding rock-cut tunnel. Exploring it again in the daylight, we reimagined it as the stomach of a whale, its corrugated walls doubling as a cetacean ribcage. In all sorts of ways, Cove Harbour is a glorious place for letting your imagination set sail.

We learned, indeed, that writers, painters and other creatives have found themselves drawn







here for generations. The radical young modernist artists known as The Glasgow Boys were inspired by the area at the end of the 19th century and in more recent times the bay's hushed character and picturesque location have seen it appear on screen in various TV and film productions.

In honesty, this all came as no surprise. There was something about the harbour's salty-aired seclusion that had already worked its spell on us. Some holiday homes serve mainly as bases for the wider area – and it's worth mentioning that there are ample diversions and local walks close by, from clifftop coastal paths and wooded valleys to the famed sandstone geology of Siccar Point, where James Hutton's 18th-century observations changed our perception of science and deep time – but we were more than content to stay put.

Our stay became shaped by our surroundings: the clouds, the rocks, the beach, the waves, the birdlife, the comings and goings at sea, the cherished hours of not needing to be anywhere else anytime soon.

We cooked when we needed to and ambled back down to the sands when the fancy took us. Nothing was rushed or overscheduled. It was a luxury in the truest sense of the word.

Before leaving, we met Ben and Jill in person. It was a reminder of something significant: if there's anything that our six-year journey of publishing Hidden Scotland has taught us, it's the people who truly make a place special. They were warm, welcoming and brimming with stories.

The harbour still depends on the generosity of donations – and profits from the Blue Cabin – to fund its ongoing repairs and renovations and we can confirm this much: when somewhere is this adept at capturing your heart, it needs preserving.

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*Hidden Scotland readers can enjoy an exclusive discount at The Blue Cabin by the Sea. Quote "Storybook" when enquiring to redeem the offer.*

[bluecabinbythesea.co.uk](http://bluecabinbythesea.co.uk)





12

*of the best*

FARM SHOPS  
IN SCOTLAND

# Where the Green Grass Grows

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*Offering pure-tasting, zero-miles food in restorative rural settings, farm shops reconnect us with real produce and the people who grow and raise it. Here are 12 across Scotland to stock up at this season, writes Emily Rose Mawson.*

Words: Emily Rose Mawson // Photography: Simon Hird

There's a farm kiosk my family and I buy vegetables from every week. It's little more than a blue-painted three-sided shed on the roadside, at the top of the lane that leads to the farm, with geese grazing nearby. My heart always leaps when it comes into sight: outside, old buckets display a forest of kale and cavolo nero, sprouts are the size of small cakes and misshapen cabbages are rowed up in trays.

This is the core appeal of a farm shop – food so fresh you sometimes have to pick slugs off it – but at the other end of the scale, there is an immersive rural experience that allows us to reconnect with the countryside. There are farms serving home-cooked, own-produce lunches in beautifully renovated outbuildings, others with additional shops selling small-batch preserves and artisanal treasures, as well as playgrounds, scenic trails and opportunities for children to help feed the animals. Some champion

organic farming with their wide ranges of produce, and some have their own butcheries and florists. All of them give us the chance to support local.

“Farm shops take many visitors back to their roots – connecting them to the food story, farming and the land,” says Scottish Agritourism member Ailsa Currie, of Bellevue Farm on the Isle of Arran. “They can also feel satisfaction in knowing they have played a part in holding together the infrastructure of a small business, creating employment within rural communities.”

Currently, the approximately 700 businesses involved in the agritourism sector contribute some £60 million to the economy, according to figures from VisitScotland, and they can be found across the country. Here are 12 you can make a day of visiting.



## Sillyflatt

*Off the A92 between Inverbervie and Gourdon,  
Aberdeenshire*

Ailsa van Rooyen's family have farmed the land at Sillyflatt for three generations, right where wildflower meadows meet the North Sea near Montrose. Today, the farm offers an all-encompassing rural experience: an Airstream trailer, the Field Kitchen, serves farm-grown and foraged brunches featuring smoked, pickled, fermented and cured ingredients; the Farm Shop stocks fresh harvests, small-batch preserves and artisanal homeware made with wool and sheepskin; and historic buildings host barn dances.

[sillyflatt.co.uk](http://sillyflatt.co.uk)

**MUST TRY:** Mutton stovies with Deeside oatcakes

## Westerton Farm

*Two miles from the A90 near Laurencekirk,  
Aberdeenshire*

What started in 2017 as a simple "spud hut" proved so popular that owners, the Gammie family, decided to develop their sustainable farming concept into Farm to Table, where their own produce is the star of the menu. When it's cold, hunker down by the log burner for a long lunch of soup and toasties. On sunny days, picnic on farm-grown salads, sandwiches and bakes as you soak in the wide green setting, before browsing the farm's chemical-free produce in the shop. Children will love the play park with a mud kitchen, climb-on Davie Brown tractor and goats to feed.

[westertonfarmers.co.uk](http://westertonfarmers.co.uk)

**MUST TRY:** Year-round pick-your-own



Westerton Farm, photography by Bostock



## Gloagburn Farm Shop

*Tibbermore, Perth*

Everything is made on the premises at this third-generation farm just outside the village of Tibbermore, including loaves, sausage rolls and the award-winning house oatcakes made with almost 33% butter. The butcher counter is excellent, stocked with organic lamb, beef and wild venison, and a delicatessen sells pastries, pies and eggs from the 4,500-strong flock of hens. The setting, among pastures of Highland cows, sheep, pigs and chickens, is blissful, and there's an excellent play area for kids.

[gloagburn.co.uk](http://gloagburn.co.uk)

**MUST TRY:** *Homemade scones with jam and butter*



## Ardross Farm Shop

*Ardross Farm, Elie, East Neuk of Fife*

The Pollock family, who have farmed on the golden coastline of the East Neuk since 1968, opened their farm shop in 2005 after moving away from supplying supermarkets. These days, they aim to offer good local food as a sort of rural supermarket: the 40 varieties of seasonal vegetables are beloved for their non-uniform appearance, and rotational grazing allows the cattle and sheep to enjoy their natural diet of wildflower-rich pasture. Along with farm produce, the now award-winning shop also has a kitchen serving seasonal soups, pies and home baking to take away.

[ardrossfarm.co.uk](http://ardrossfarm.co.uk)

**MUST TRY:** *Pies filled with the farm's grass-fed beef*



## Bowhouse

*Anstruther, East Neuk of Fife*

This hub of small producers and growers on the A917 between Elie and St Monans aims to replace a missing link by connecting consumers with makers. On-site businesses, including East Neuk Market Garden, Scotland The Bread and Butchery at Bowhouse are open throughout the week, but a great time to visit is the second weekend of every month, when an additional Bowhouse Market Weekend brings producers from across Scotland to the converted barn near St Monans, selling seasonal produce, cured meats and craft beer.

[bowhousefife.com](http://bowhousefife.com)

**MUST TRY:** *Seasonal loaves from Baern Café*

## Blair Drummond Smiddy

*Stirling*

Pastures of oak trees and cattle radiate around Blair Drummond Smiddy – named after the old iron works that served the local community for generations. These days, the name denotes an award-winning farm shop, café and deli, 10 minutes from Stirling that sells produce from Scottish suppliers and local farms. Depending on the season, hearty fare in the café might include blue cheese gratin tart or venison burger with smoked cheese followed by apple pie or salted caramel cheesecake.

[blairdrummondsmiddy.co.uk](http://blairdrummondsmiddy.co.uk)

**MUST TRY:** *Cheesecake of the day*

Home  
Grown  
Courgette  
£2.40  
1KG





Blair Drummond Smiddy

## Balgove Larder

St Andrews

Just outside the seaside town of St Andrews, the golden stone buildings of Balgove Larder contain a farm shop, butcher, café and the hugely popular Steak Barn restaurant – serving steaks, hung for no less than 28 days, along with homemade burgers and kebabs, all cooked to order on the wood-fired barbecue. Throughout, the focus lies on Scottish and local produce. Much of it is home grown, reared and stalked, and irresistible: grab a basket to stock up on market garden veg, milk, eggs, sourdough and coffee.

[balgove.com](http://balgove.com)

**MUST TRY:** Butcher's steak pie to take home

## Comrie Croft Farm Shop

Crieff, Perthshire

With festoon lights draped across a collection of wood-panelled buildings, Comrie Croft Farm Shop is a magical hideaway among the woodland and meadows of the 231-acre estate. Head here for the likes of organic fruit and vegetables with zero food miles from Tomnaha's Market Garden, right on the croft, artisan bread from Wild Hearth Bakery, meat from Carroglen, a hill farm on the southern flank of Ben Chonzie overlooking Comrie, and local Perthshire honey, as well as curated gifts including hand-carved bowls and candles made by Croft-based craftspeople.

[comriecroft.com/farm-shop](http://comriecroft.com/farm-shop)

**MUST TRY:** Free-range duck eggs

## Grow Wild Organics

*Linlithgow, West Lothian*

Conscious buyers will love this organic shop on Bonnytoun Farm near Linlithgow, run by Ben Cadell and his family. You'll find everything you need for your weekly shop here, including store cupboard essentials and household items, as well as homegrown vegetables and herbs. Organic meat and poultry are delivered by Sascha Grierson and deli favourites include fennel salami and smoked chorizo.

[growwild.co.uk](http://growwild.co.uk)

**MUST TRY:** *Home-grown organic fruit and veg*

## Loch Levens Larder

*Kinross*

Overlooking Loch Leven from its spot on the region's Heritage Trail, this farm shop emphasises local and own-label produce across three spaces – the Larder Café, Greenhouse Café and Food Hall. Each overlooks the fields where the produce is grown, on the family farm Channel of Pittendreich, and visitors are invited to walk between the beds that are planted with the likes of potatoes and leeks, cabbage and cavolo nero, oats and wheat. An additional design shop, 1848, specialises in quiet luxury.

[lochlevenslarder.com](http://lochlevenslarder.com)

**MUST TRY:** *Pork and sage sausage meatballs*

## Long Island Retreats & Larder

*Loch Skipport, South Uist*

Island crofting couple DJ and Lindsay are the current custodians of the land at Tigh Na Breacain on the tidal inlet Loch Skipport, where hardy native cattle breeds like Aberdeen Angus and Beef Shorthorn graze machair pastures and Highland cattle and North Country Cheviot sheep can be seen on the hills. All the meat, which is processed at island abattoirs, is available in the croft shop – including sausages and bacon for the most delicious breakfast if you are staying in one of the croft's off-grid cottages.

[longislandretreats.co.uk](http://longislandretreats.co.uk)

**MUST TRY:** *Full-day croft & island tour with picnic*

## Loch Arthur Farm Shop

*Beeswing, Dumfries*

Just off the A711, near the Solway Firth Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, this organic farm shop is run by the working Camphill Community, including men and women with learning disabilities. The café serves excellent lunches – with magnificent home bakes – and in the shop you can buy breads and rolls from the farm's bakery, organic meats from the house butchery, an enormous range of organic produce from the gardens, artisan cheese and dairy products, and a lovely range of crafts and kitchen accessories.

[locharthur.org.uk](http://locharthur.org.uk)

**MUST TRY:** *The day's home baking*



*A weekend exploring*

# OBAN

*a local's guide*



*From studio mornings overlooking the bay to favourite shoreline walks, artist Lorna Freytag shares her insider's guide to Oban, revealing the creative corners, much-loved dining spots and restorative landscapes that shape her life here.*

Words: Lorna Freytag // Photography: Simon Hird



Meet your local guide

## Lorna Freytag

*Lorna Freytag is an artist and illustrator based in Oban on the north-west coast of Scotland. She grew up in Edinburgh and has lived and worked in New York, Sydney, London, Dubai and Glasgow before settling in Oban with her husband Daniel, their two children and their springer spaniel. She works from a studio overlooking Oban Bay, which still feels special every day.*

*Her illustration work includes children's picture books, magazines and commercial projects, but she is best known for her alphabet wall prints and large-scale paintings found in nurseries and playrooms around the world. Alongside that, she has recently ventured into the art world, creating mixed-media pieces using natural materials like pressed flowers. These are experimental one-offs made for exhibitions and private homes.*

*How long have you lived in Oban, and what brought you here?*

I've lived in Oban for 12 years. After growing up in Edinburgh and spending time living in cities all over the world, my husband and I were ready for a slower pace of life to raise our kids. Daniel already had family here and remote working meant the move was actually doable. Oban just felt right, a place where we could work creatively, slow things down a bit and give our children the freedom to grow up surrounded by the sea, hills and fresh air.

### LORNA'S IDEAL WEEKEND IN OBAN

In the warmer months, I'd start the weekend with a morning walk down to Ganavan Sands with our springer Heidi, followed by coffee and pastries at Hinba and a browse at The Modern Croft. Grab a takeaway sandwich (and maybe one of their amazing cakes) from Sorcha Bakery and take it with you for a climb up to McCaig's Tower (which is right in the centre of town) for the spectacular views across Oban Bay to the islands, before hopping on the little boat to The Waypoint for dinner, maybe finishing the evening with a drink at The Oban Inn.

Day two would be exploring Dunollie Castle and its surrounding woods, enjoying lunch at The Kettle in the grounds of Dunollie, then a drive out to Sutherland's Grove at Barcaldine, for another stunning forest walk up the river gorge before heading to Highland Fold Ice Cream for coffee and ice cream or cake. We'd finish off with a barbeque or Sòlas Pizza and some paddleboarding at Wee Ganavan.

*What is it that you particularly enjoy about living and working in this part of Scotland?*

I love being surrounded by nature while still feeling connected. Oban strikes a rare balance of remoteness and everyday life. I can enjoy quiet walks along the coast, then easily pop into a café, meet friends or head out for a nice meal. And when we fancy a change of pace, Edinburgh or Glasgow are just a few hours away, so it's easy to enjoy peaceful surroundings at home while keeping city life within reach.

*What advice would you give to anyone looking to explore the area?*

My advice would be not to rush straight onto the ferries to the islands, tempting as they are. Take a bit of time to explore Oban and the surrounding area first. There's so much close by, from easy forest walks and beautiful beaches to old castles and cairns. It's the kind of place best enjoyed when you slow down and take the time to look around. Take in the landscape before heading further afield.

*Can you give us a rundown on what Oban is like as the seasons change and when the best time to visit is?*

Summer is lively, with a buzzy vibe, perfect for warm evenings in a beer garden or at the beach. Winter is more peaceful (some businesses close in January, reopening by Easter) but storms can affect travel. Clear, frosty winter days, however, are absolutely stunning. For me, the best times to visit are May or late September. There are fewer tourists, lovely weather and still plenty of life in town, making it the perfect balance of calm and activity.

*When you fancy a getaway, where in Scotland do you like to spend time?*

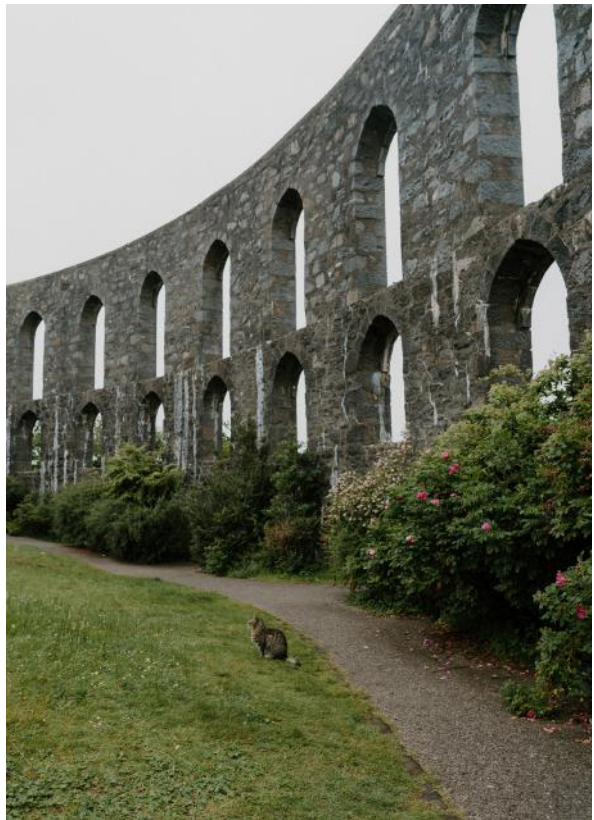
That's a tricky one. I have so many favourites! We often escape to Edinburgh, usually stopping for lunch at Mhor 84 Motel along the way. We're so lucky to be surrounded by stunning landscapes and nature every day, so it's hard to beat where we already live. We tend to head to the city when we want a change: a bit of culture, galleries, museums and city life. It's such a nice contrast to our coastal surroundings and always feels refreshing to swap hills and sea views for cobbled streets and exhibitions for a few days. If I had to choose more rural destinations, I'd say we've had amazing recent trips to the south of Mull, Ulva and Ardnamurchan as well as Colonsay.



Dunollie Castle



Ganavan Sands



McCaig's Tower



*plan your weekend with*

# Lorna's Top Picks

## Eat ~ Daytime

### Hinba

My absolute favourite café with the best coffee in town. The perfect spot to watch boats and locals go by. I try not to be tempted by their pastel de natas every day.

### The Kettle at Dunollie

Great seasonal café in the grounds of Dunollie Castle. The seating is all outdoors and on a warm spring day it's a lovely place to enjoy the birds and have lunch or coffee, along with their tasty homemade soup.

### Sorcha Bakery

Incredible pastries, breads and sandwiches, all locally made in small batches. Think boutique micro-bakery.

### Oban Chocolate Company

Heaven for chocolate lovers. They also serve good coffee and cakes (you can also watch the chocolate being made). It overlooks the bay, so it's a great place to sit and watch the weather come in.

## Eat ~ Evening

### Inverlonan Wild Dining

A totally unique, off-grid dining experience, serving local, seasonal ingredients cooked by a top chef. These only run every now and then, so it's always best to check their socials.

### Coast

Cosy and intimate restaurant in the centre of town. Food is always great, as are the lovely staff and it's where Daniel and I usually go for a romantic meal on date night.

### Sòlas Pizza Pop-Ups

Fun, casual pizza nights; keep an eye on their socials to find where they're pitched up. They're often at Tralee Bay beside the sauna, making it perfect for a relaxed evening on the beach.

### Waypoint on the Isle of Kerrera

An easy ferry trip from the pier in town, with stunning views and fresh local food. It feels far away from everything, even though you're only five minutes from the mainland.

## Drink

### The Oban Inn

Classic old local pub with lots of character and a cosy, friendly vibe in the winter.

### MacGregor's Bar at the Whisky Vaults

Cosy yet traditional whisky bar with live folk music.

### No17 The Promenade

Something a bit different for Oban in the form of a modern bar with stylish interiors. I like to meet friends here for a creative cocktail catch-up. They also serve lovely Italian food in their restaurant, Porcini.

### Markie Dans

If you fancy something a bit livelier, I can't go without mentioning Markie's. An intimate live music venue with a mix of traditional and cover bands. It's full to bursting with lively locals on Friday and Saturday nights and is great for a dance. It also serves good pub grub.



Seil



Oban Chocolate Shop

## Explore/Walks ~ Local

**Dunollie Wood** (*Scotland's rainforest*)  
With peaceful trails to explore, it's a quiet escape close to town. I love walking through all the different types of trees (and collecting acorn cups or bits of fallen lichen for my art). Head up nearby Battleship Hill for more of a hike and amazing views.

### Ganavan Sands

We're here most days walking the dog and there are always people sea swimming (no matter the season or the weather). You can also head past the beach and walk along the coast over the hills to the little fairy circle.

### McCaig's Tower

Oban's iconic viewpoint (you can't miss it) gives a stunning panorama of the town and surrounding hills after a short, steep climb.

## Day trips from Oban

### Tralee Bay

A long, beautiful beach that's perfect for a stroll along the sand.

### Sutherland's Grove, Barcaldine

Home to huge old trees and a river gorge walk up to the "troll bridge", one of my favourite places.

### Easdale

Tiny slate island (famous for the annual World Stone Skimming Championship) with traditional cottages and water-filled quarries (great for swimming). You can walk around the whole island in about an hour. It always feels special going on the little boat from Seil.

### Kilmartin Glen and Museum / Carnasserie Castle

Fascinating ancient sites. A must-see if you love history and the kids will love the castle.

### Isle of Kerrera

Take a spectacular walk along the coast from the ferry to Kerrera Tea Garden & Bunkhouse and Gylen Castle (about an hour's walk). Or walk around the whole island in a few hours if you're feeling energetic. You can also stay overnight in the cosy bothy beside the newly converted schoolhouse.

### Arduaine Garden

Being obsessed with flowers I always seek out gardens. Arduaine is a beautiful National Trust garden on the coast, a 20-minute drive south of Oban, so we visit often.

### Fairy Bridge of Glen Creran

A secret walk at Glen Creran leads to a hidden little bridge that looks like something out of Tolkien. It's a bit off the beaten path but well worth the effort.



Isle of Kerrera

## Shop

### **The Modern Croft**

A stylish lifestyle and homeware shop. Izzy carefully curates a selection from local independent makers, from textiles and jewellery to ceramics, prints and books. It's my go-to place for gifts.

### **Oban Whisky and Fine Wines**

An unbeatable selection, with great advice and tastings available.

### **The Highland Soap Company**

Handmade soaps and skincare (made right here in the Highlands). They have a small shop on the main street.

### **Alba the Artshop**

As an artist, I have to mention Alba as it's where I'll grab an emergency paintbrush, glue stick or charcoal pencil. They also have lovely cards and gifts for young kids.

## Relax

### **Wild Bathing**

Jo's wood-fired beach saunas and sea dips are a great new addition to Oban at Ganavan Sands and Tralee Bay.

### **Isle of Eriska Hotel & Spa**

Whenever I need a special treat, I head here for the quiet pool, steam room or a relaxing massage treatment.

## Activities

### **Cycling**

There's a great cycle track away from traffic that takes you from Ganavan Sands to Dunstaffnage Castle.

### **Paddle boarding**

Nothing better on a calm day at the local beaches than just paddling close to shore. Basking Shark Scotland offers lessons if you've never tried it before.

### **Fishing trips with Argyll Sea Tours**

My 12-year-old son and husband love these mackerel fishing trips. Good for more serious anglers too. They also do wildlife and history tours around the bay or the island of Kerrera. Small numbers make it feel more intimate and Jack's great with local knowledge.

### **The Rockfield Centre**

Gigs, workshops, fashion shows and theatre – always best to check what's upcoming as tickets sell out fast in a small town.

Lastly, take a short flight on Hebridean Air Services' little yellow plane to Colonsay from Oban Airport (or just as a sightseeing tour). There's something special about being on a tiny eight-seater plane flying over stunning beaches and landscapes.



*and don't forget*

# Lorna's Top Tips

## *Early morning Ganavan Sands*

Enjoy the calm of the morning (before it gets busier, particularly during the summer months) with a peaceful walk or wild swim here. It's beautiful at sunrise.

## *Take your time in local cafés*

Places like Hinba are perfect for people-watching and it's easy to get chatting to locals for insider knowledge and advice.

## *Artmap Argyll art trail*

The 'Open Studios' event runs over two weeks every August – a great way to meet local artists in their studios and workshops and see how and where they work. Maybe even buy some unique art pieces. With a lot of artists living quite remotely, it also gives you the opportunity to visit places you would never normally go.

*Lorna's illustration work can be found on Instagram at @lornafreytag, and her mixed-media art is shared at @lornafreytagart.*



Dunollie Museum, Castle and Grounds

## MUST NOT MISS

One of my favourite places – Dunollie Museum, Castle and Grounds – is the perfect mix of history, wildlife and nature (with a café thrown in). Walk along the coast from town via The Dog Stone (you might be lucky enough to see the otter on the rocks). Wander around the castle ruins, explore the peaceful woodland trails and enjoy the views over the bay, watching the ferries sail off to Mull. It's perfect for some quiet time away from the town. They also run special events during the year from craft workshops to music events.

# Wild Places, Scottish Roots

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*In this interview with Rosie Morton, wildlife film-maker and photographer Gordon Buchanan looks back on close encounters in the wild, his upbringing on Mull, and the Scottish landscapes that continue to shape his life and work.*

Interview with Rosie Morton // Photography: Grant Anderson

As I sit speaking with Gordon Buchanan, an old adage springs to mind: 'You can take the man out of Scotland, but you can't take Scotland out of the man.'

Of course, the passport of this renowned wildlife film-maker and photographer tells of adventures in far-flung places, each stamp serving as a reminder of extraordinary encounters with grizzlies, being chased down by lions or coming face-to-face with hungry polar bears. Yet for all the miles travelled, Gordon's heart remains firmly rooted in Scotland. His is a tale shaped by Caledonian mountains, West Coast seascapes and Scottish pine martens, wildcats and capercaillie.

Gordon spent his formative years enveloped by nature on the Isle of Mull. It was here he learned that the natural world, given time and space, would tell better stories than any documentary script ever could. His words are a reminder of the power of patience and quietude – of stepping into the wilderness, slowing down and revelling in the beauty of the place we call home.





*'I was back up on Mull a few times recently and even in places that I've known all my life, I still have this sense that I'm seeing them for the first time.'*



*You moved from Dumbarton to Mull when you were very young. What was it like spending your formative years in that rural environment?*

The level of freedom growing up in a rural community was brilliant. We lived in Dumbarton on a housing estate until I was seven, so although we did have quite a lot of freedom there, there was always the worry for my mum that we would get ourselves into trouble. The reality was that on Mull there was probably a lot more trouble you could get yourself into! Going out on boats, climbing trees, building swings, climbing cliffs... The outdoors was my place. I felt more at home outside than I did inside.

We lived in a caravan for the first couple of years when we moved to Mull. It was a nice place to sleep and to come back to for your tea, but I felt very claustrophobic – not because it was a caravan, but because being indoors was comparatively really boring.

*What was the first experience as a youngster that made you want to pursue a career in wildlife film-making?*

As a youngster, I never went out looking for wildlife as such. The outdoors was just a gateway to exploring, having adventures and having a really immersive experience – whether that was climbing a tree, building a hut or looking for newts, frogs and birds' nests. It wasn't until I was 17 and I met a wildlife film-maker that I suddenly thought, 'That's the job for me.'

The job found me more than anything. I was lucky to be in the right place at the right time. It was with Nick Gordon. I worked for his wife, Anne. They had a restaurant and I was washing pots and pans there. I didn't think Nick was ever going to offer a 17-year-old Tobermory High School pupil with limited academic prospects a job, but that's what he did.

*Where did Nick take you first?*

We went to Sierra Leone for a year and a half. I had never travelled abroad before and had never been on a plane. As soon as I got my passport, I packed in school and off we went. We lived on an uninhabited island in the middle of the rainforest.

It was a huge opportunity, but it was really tough, too. It was incredible as far as experiences go, but it was all set against this backdrop of abject homesickness. I felt so cut off. Well, I was cut off from everyone and everything I knew.

*What did you miss about Scotland at that point?*

I missed that sense of community – my immediate family and friends. And I missed the weather. For the first few months, it didn't rain at all. Unless there's some sort of summer heatwave in Scotland, rain is just part of life. I missed the seasonality of Scotland and how it changes. In Sierra Leone there are the dry and rainy seasons, but it's hot and steamy all the time.

*You go to incredible far-flung locations across the globe with your work. When you're on your way back home to Scotland, what are you most looking forward to?*

I really miss the mountains and the ocean. Growing up on the West Coast, your horizon is mountains and your immediate foreground is the sea. I never feel completely at home if there isn't a mountain or the ocean in sight.

There's just something about the ocean. You know that it connects you to the rest of the world, especially in a busy fishing port or a port where boats come and go and yachts or big naval ships or cruise ships come in.

I used to walk down the main street in Tobermory and check out what boats showed up. I'd go beachcombing, look in rockpools, but also just scour the shoreline to see what had washed up. I really liked that connectedness.

*Apart from Mull, where is the place in Scotland that is closest to your heart?*

Glasgow. If you'd told me when I was 15 years old – when I was first starting to get to know Glasgow – that I would one day be living in that city, I'd have said, 'What went wrong?!' I was really intimidated by Glasgow.

But now I really do love Glasgow. I like my relationship with it. It was the last place I ever expected to move to, but it's the place we have raised our kids. It's a funny city: the people are very real and there's very little pretence. It is a friendly city. It is beautiful as well, architecturally. I'm really proud of Glasgow. In a big way, it feels like home now.

*If you have a day off, how do you spend a day in Glasgow?*

We live in the West End and I love walking into town. It takes me back. When I was in Sierra Leone, all my mates went to Glasgow to study at college or university there and because we didn't have any money there was no way we'd ever get a taxi or the tube or any form of public transport – unless we were going to Oban for the day – so we'd walk everywhere.

So now just walking in Glasgow, taking a nice route through the West End into town and having a wander round before walking home is what I do. I love time in nature and watching a wild world, but I suppose I don't draw any distinction between an urban environment and a wilder environment. I like people-watching – it's one of my favourite things to do. I will watch both people and animals gladly.

*When you live somewhere as beautiful as Scotland, it's easy to take it for granted. Does Scotland still surprise you?*

It definitely does. I'm very lucky that I get to see different parts of the world, but I'm no more excited about going to film somewhere like Kenya than I am about filming somewhere like Shetland. I never take Scottish scenery for granted.

I was back up on Mull a few times recently and even in places that I've known all my life, I still have this sense that I'm seeing them for the first time. The light, the weather – I could never grow tired of Scottish scenery.

Scottish wildlife too – some of the best encounters I've had with any animal have been in Scotland. I've been swimming with basking sharks here and the best bottlenose dolphin encounter of my whole career was just round the corner from Tobermory. I've had amazing days out in the Cairngorms and phenomenal adventures in the mountains above Glencoe. I would one hundred per cent say that my most memorable adventures have been in Scotland.

*What's the most elusive species you've spotted in Scotland?*

I've captured Scottish wildcats on camera traps, but I've never conclusively seen one in the wild with my own eyes. I also spent a year and a half living between Kingussie and Newtonmore, doing three half-hour wildlife documentaries up there and in the whole time that I was there, I didn't see a single pine marten. That was in the heartland of pine martens! But funnily enough since then, because their numbers have really bounced back in the last 30 years, I've seen pine martens just on the edge of Glasgow. I've seen pine martens just south of Crianlarich as well. But for something that was elusive, it has never been easier to see pine martens in Scotland than it is now. It's not going to be too long before people have pine martens at their feeders in Glasgow.

*What about capercaillie? Have you ever been lucky enough to spot them lekking?*

That's one of my favourite times: sitting in a hide waiting for an animal. I was up in Abernethy Forest filming capercaillie. It was the end of the winter, the start of spring, when the capercaillie start lekking. If you're in those forests and you've slept the whole night in a little hide in the woods which are blanketed in snow, then wake up to the bizarre call of a male capercaillie as the light comes up and they're right there in front of you – these huge,





turkey-sized birds – that is really hard to beat. Just the thought of seeing such an impressive bird makes the hair stand up on the back of my neck.

*Those moments stick with you forever, as do the landscapes you find them in. What inspires you to keep exploring these places?*

It's good for your physical and mental health to be in green spaces, but also to be challenged. I like a day in the mountains where you really have to work for a view – whether you're climbing a Munro or getting up onto the hills and being rewarded with an amazing view.

Also, I just like the simplicity of being in those landscapes and environments. My daughter Lola and I did three days of the West Highland Way and we didn't really do that much talking. We chatted a bit and in the evening we'd bletcher, but on the walk itself we were mostly just in company and walking in silence with our own thoughts. I love that. I find that really calming and peaceful. In that type of landscape, I feel really content. Life is simple. The mission is to walk 15 or 20 miles from

A to B – that's it. Or if you're doing something a bit more challenging, all you're doing is climbing this mountain, walking that bridge and then you can get back to the car and enjoy a pint in the evening. Or maybe a couple of pints...

*You've scaled plenty of mountains in your time. What has been your favourite?*

I fulfilled a lifetime ambition last year. You know Curved Ridge on Buachaille Etive Mòr? I had always wanted to climb that. I had climbed the North Buttress with a mountaineering friend of mine and he said, "Well, Curved Ridge is a piece of cake compared to this." So buoyed by my confidence, I said, "I'll take my mates up Curved Ridge!" He said, "That's fine, you just have to be really careful that you get the right route."

I got all the safety equipment that we needed and looked properly prepared and I gave my friends an equipment list. We were walking in with high levels of confidence, but we went wrong on the route fairly early on and then completely bottled it. We were going to get ourselves into trouble. It's not



a mountain climb; it's just a very precipitous rock scramble. I thought, "No, we're not scrambling, we're mountaineering here. We've gone wrong."

All three of us walked back and felt really defeated. But I said, "We're going to do it but we need a guide to take us." It was me and two male friends. We all have boys and girls, so we said to the kids, "Who wants to come?" The boys wanted to come so it was a daddy-son bonding experience. We got some guides to take us up and that was really cool. Visually it's an impressive mountain, but to climb up the hard way was great. Doing it with friends and our sons meant that it was one of my favourite days out.

*Apart from your family, who would be your dream travel companion, dead or alive?*

I think someone I'd have a laugh with. I did a three-day shoot with Sara Cox. We were looking for wildlife and doing a bit of camping and we had such a laugh. She is such a clever, quick-witted and funny person. So probably her. She was good value. Especially if it's uncomfortable, you're camping and the conditions aren't great, you want someone who's going to make you laugh and she certainly did that.

*What's the one non-essential item you always take with you when travelling?*

I always take coffee and I generally take whisky if I'm away for any length of time. I would say that whisky isn't even a non-essential item. There have been expeditions that I've been on where at the end of the day you realise how essential a dram is. So I would say it's actually part of the medical kit...

*What is your fondest memory of Scotland?*

When the kids were really young, we booked a little house up in Abernethy Forest. Letting them explore those big Caledonian forests was magical. For our Easter egg hunt, we had it in an old woodland and the kids were still believers in the Easter Bunny and fairies. Being able to introduce them to that was wonderful.

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*For more of Gordon's story, his memoir 'In the Hide: How the Natural World Saved My Life' is well worth reading.*

# A Ceramic Declaration

*created by Katie Rose Johnston*



Words: Rachel Rowley // Photography: Katie Rose Johnston & Theodora Van Duin



*Born in Shetland and shaped by its stark geology and Norse past, ceramicist Katie Rose Johnston, the maker behind Manifesto, creates dark, timeless pieces that feel unearthed from history. From Glasgow to Japan, her practice honours ancient craft with quiet intensity.*



*Katie Rose Johnston, the maker behind Studio Manifesto, was born in Shetland and lived there until she was six. In those early years the distinct, beautifully harsh environment seeped into her core, setting the foundations of who she was to become and perhaps moulding the pieces she would come to make, long before her first encounter with clay. The distinct treeless landscape, complex geology, ancient settlements and Norse heritage of Shetland are where her hands first touched the earth and remains significant to this day. She describes her pride at being “a Shetlander” and the feeling that “everything just made so much sense” when she returned after an 18-year wait following her relocation with her family to Dunblane and then Aberdeenshire.*



It wasn't until she headed to Glasgow School of Art as a Sculpture student that she had her first experience with clay. She was in her third year when a kiln arrived at the school, much to the delight and excitement of students. She was used to working with fine materials, textiles and plaster, but clay was entirely new. Thanks to a workshop led by fellow student Viv Lee (@studiovivlee) she had enormous fun making her first piece, a wee porcelain chair. It wasn't just the kiln that was fired up, Katie had found a new thrill. She loved and continues to love the way clay feels, how quickly shapes can be made, things added and taken away and its forgiving nature which ensures creativity and possibilities flow.

She went on to graduate with a First Class Honours degree in Sculpture in 2017 but had already decided that crafting small batch ceramics was where she wanted to focus her attention. Fortuitously, her Dad was on board and helped her to build a studio in his back garden in the south of Glasgow, which is where she remains today.

Her work has been featured in the 1000 vases exhibition during Paris Design Week 2020

(her vase was able to travel through Covid restrictions even though she was not!), The Royal Scottish Academy, The Ingram Collection London and most recently three "Mysterious Objects" as part of Craft Scotland's fair, Harvest (September 2025). These pieces were designed to hold collections of your favourite treasures. Inspired by Bronze Age kitchenware found in Jarlshof, Shetland, and very simple Viking chess boards, they have their own distinctive set of plinths and nests, props and grooves to display upon.

Glimpse her website or Instagram (which she shoots and manages herself) and you see a collection of thoughtful, timeless pieces gently highlighted by soft, natural light or candlelight. The forms are not surprisingly sculptural, raw, earthy and dark.

The main change she has made to her studio since it was completed is to paint the walls darker (using Earthborn Paints in shade Muddy Boots) adding to the intimacy of the space and focusing her energy on the pieces. This presence of earthy darkness is not accidental nor is it ominous; it reflects Katie's Shetlandic roots and the ancient history of ceramics



*'The distinct treeless landscape, complex geology, ancient settlements and Norse heritage of Shetland is where her hands first touched the earth and remains significant to this day.'*







alongside a commitment to build something worth illuminating in the dark. Her pieces are textured and grown, not from the earth, but in Katie's hands. Many of her pieces are hand built and this method enhances her work; it draws you in. She giggles when describing her work as "dark" but it's clear that this is no bad thing; it's thoughtful, deliberate and powerful.

While clearly an accomplished maker, Katie's learning journey is constant. She was blessed with an Anagama firing residency at Shiro Oni studios in Onishi, Japan. The residency spanned six weeks and was "an incredible and very special trip. I feel so lucky to have been there. Living in a mountain town, working with really cool potters, embracing the community, firing the amazing kiln (working in shifts to stoke the fire continually for three days and nights) all had a huge and lasting impact. The whole experience changed me and how I work, something had shifted so monumentally that it's still hard to describe and took a long time to settle back to making after I got home."

She's also, thanks to funding from The Hugo Burge Foundation, learning more about ash glazing.

"This has given me an insight into what is thought to be the earliest form of glazes. They are softly coloured and very beautiful and the process is chemistry, very technical and much less experimental and forgiving than my usual way of working. I am loving the way it brings another element of history to my work, an anchor to the past, a new quality with old depth. I make my work to look and feel like it might have come out of the ground, aged, from the earth, like a pot shard that's been discovered. While I don't think of myself as making history, I do think about the trajectory of my work in the future. I am very considered over what I fire, I always try to fix even minor imperfections and make my work the best it can be, knowing that ceramics can last hundreds or even thousands of years."

To see more of Katie's work, visit:  
[studiomanifesto.co.uk](http://studiomanifesto.co.uk)  
Instagram @m\_a\_n\_i\_f\_e\_s\_t\_o  
Also available at [bard-scotland.com](http://bard-scotland.com)



## KATIE'S FAVOURITE ARTISTS & CERAMICISTS

### Glasgow

Cathpotsss - @cathpotsss ,  
Claire Henry - @clairehenryceramics  
Monica Findlay - @mo.fin

### Scotland

Cara Guthrie - @caraguthrieceramics  
Lizzie Farey - @lizziefarey  
Bjorn Lie - @bjornlie

### International

Victoria Drisaldi - @victoriadrisaldi  
Elsa Boch - @elsa\_boch  
Ingelin Dokmo Norheim - @myrfivel

# And They Would Row 9,000 Miles



*Raised on the remote shores of Assynt, the Maclean brothers embarked on an epic 9,000-mile Pacific adventure, breaking a world record and raising more than £1 million for clean water charities.*

Words: Ben Lerwill



Jamie, Lachlan & Ewan Maclean, photography by Fran Mart

*It sounds like the plot to a far-fetched adventure story. Three brothers decide to attempt a crossing of the Pacific Ocean in a boat powered only by their own oar-strokes. They depart west from South America one morning, heading into the path of anticyclones, vicious storms and tropical heatwaves. They eat and sleep on the go, rowing in shifts and resolving not to touch dry land until they reach Australia.*

After 9,000 miles and almost 140 days, they arrive at their destination, having grown heavy beards, overcome extreme physical hardship, and raised more than a million pounds for charity. If the whole thing sounds almost superhuman, well, meet the Maclean brothers.

Their epic 2025 oceanic voyage broke the world record for an unsupported crossing of the Pacific. Six months after its completion, middle brother Jamie Maclean – now recovered save for a few

lingering salt sores – is speaking from a croft in Assynt and reflecting on how the challenge first came about.

“I’d say we all had quite an adventurous upbringing,” he remembers. “I’m 31 now, my older brother Ewan is 32 and my younger brother Lachlan is 27, so there’s only a few years between us all. Our grandfather built the cottage where I am now, up in the far northwest, and we spent all our childhood holidays here. It’s so remote. There was no television or wi-fi, so it was a case of entertaining ourselves.”

“We had dinghies with holes in them and little kayaks that were barely seaworthy,” he continues. “We used to very unsuccessfully attempt to go mackerel fishing, but I suppose that was the genesis of it all – three boys bobbing offshore around the coasts and hills of Assynt, imagining what it would be like to set sail into the horizon.”



Fast forward a couple of decades and the three siblings are now well accustomed to venturing into the great beyond. Their Pacific crossing was actually a saltwater sequel of sorts. Six years earlier in 2019, the three brothers – none of whom had a background in rowing – embarked on their first major seafaring feat, crossing together from the Canary Islands to the Caribbean in 35 days as part of the Talisker Whisky Atlantic Challenge team endurance event.

“The Atlantic crossing appealed initially as a kind of call to adventure,” says Jamie. “We saw it as a chance to do something remarkable, a once-in-a-lifetime experience for the three of us.” Their success in the event itself, however, astonished them. They became the fastest and youngest trio ever to cross the ocean, raising some £200,000 for a clean water charity in Madagascar in the process.

“We got a huge amount from it in so many ways. It changed the direction of our lives, and the charitable aspect really stuck with us. It was that

combination of doing something exciting and fulfilling while doing some good in the world.” When Covid restrictions were lifted, the brothers headed out to Madagascar to see first-hand the impact of their fundraising. Moved by what they saw, they began talking about ideas for further challenges, and slowly but surely, the prospect of taking on the Pacific began to take shape.

Ewan, Jamie and Lachlan Maclean departed Lima in Peru on 12th April 2025, on board a 280kg purpose-built carbon-fibre boat laden with 500kg of meals that they'd cooked and freeze-dried themselves. The boat's hull was hand-painted with the name Rose Emily, in memory of their unborn sister. The world's largest ocean stretched out beyond them to infinity. Next stop Australia.

“There was no easing into the crossing,” says Jamie. “You set off, and you're into it.” The brothers operated on a rota pattern, with each of them spending around 18 hours on the rowing deck daily and snatching sleep in shifts. From the off, the going



*'It changed the direction of our lives, and the charitable aspect really stuck with us. It was that combination of doing something exciting and fulfilling while doing some good in the world.'*

was tough. “The boat was very low in the water with the weight of the food, particularly early on, so any wave that came in at the wrong angle went right over the deck.” Being in the tropics, meanwhile, meant the sun was often intense. “The first half of the crossing was an almost relentless discomfort of heat, cramped conditions and salt.”

As the weeks turned into months and the prevailing wind and waves proved more strenuous than predicted, they took solace in what comforts they had. “Food was really powerful,” continues Jamie, who had helped prepare vast batches of porridge oats, pasta arrabbiata, lamb saag and ruby chicken curry. “Even on the worst days, it was something to look forward to. We just tried to find little positives to grasp onto. And if one of us was having a bad time, the other two would be more buoyant.”

There were moments, too, when a pod of dolphins or spectacular sunset would send their spirits soaring. Four and a half months of almost non-stop physical exertion, however, is an extraordinarily

long time. “You do everything you can to forget you’re rowing,” he adds. “A lot of each day we’d be chatting away, talking about how the experience is going, talking about childhood memories, that sort of thing.” With solar power on board to power their essential equipment such as a water desalination device, they also had occasional audio diversions. “We’d ration ourselves to an hour of audiobook and an hour of music each day.”

Artists getting airplay among the giant waves of the mid-Pacific included Beluga Lagoon and Dougie MacLean, while *Endurance* – Alfred Lansing’s classic account of Shackleton’s Antarctic mission – served as an apt choice of audiobook. “It was really helpful in getting perspective when we were feeling sorry for ourselves,” Jamie remembers. “There’s us, having mango chutney with our curries and with fresh water on demand, and Shackleton’s crew had spent two years surviving on seal blubber.”

The adversity the brothers faced, however, was nonetheless extreme. Tropical storms battered them



regularly, with 30-foot-high waves threatening to overcome the boat on several occasions. They got “knocked down” three times – half-capsized, essentially – but the most terrifying moment came one night when Lachlan was washed off his feet and overboard by a wall of water, while trying to reach the tiny cabin. Mercifully, he was tethered to Rose Emily around his waist and was able to be hauled back aboard. “If he’d been unclipped, it would have been almost impossible for us to recover him,” says Jamie.

There were times during the voyage when battling against the thunderous strength of the Pacific proved too arduous, and their planned route was substantially lengthened by being blown off course. They had initially aimed to finish in Sydney, but instead were forced to make landfall at Cairns, more than 1,200 miles to the north.

They completed the crossing in 139 days, five hours and 52 minutes, greeting the waiting crowd on the Cairns quayside by lighting flares and playing the

bagpipes. Reaching journey’s end was an emotional moment. “Stepping back on land was like being reborn, in the sense that everything was new again. Your first bite of watermelon, your first bite of pizza, a proper bed.”

The exposure that greeted their arrival meant that by the time they returned home to Scotland, their fundraising total had surpassed the target £1 million mark. A book telling the full story of their mammoth crossing, *Three Brothers in a Boat* is due out in September, and donations towards their extraordinary achievement can still be made via the brothers’ website.

“It was amazing,” concludes Jamie, describing with some understatement the sense of relief and accomplishment at journey’s end. “It really was amazing.”

[themacleanbrothers.com](http://themacleanbrothers.com)



# Castle Tioram *and The Adventures of Allan MacRuari*

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Words: Graeme Johncock // Photography: Jack Anstey

Castle Tioram is perched on a tidal island in Loch Moidart, seemingly isolated at the end of a long and winding road. However, hundreds of years ago, a location like this was ideal for a seafaring clan to have their base of operations. They had safe harbour for warships and easy access to the Hebrides, along the coast or even upriver as far as Loch Shiel.

We don't know for sure who first built Castle Tioram, but it became home to the MacDonalds of Clanranald and their cunning clan chief, Allan MacRuari.

MacRuari kept his neighbours on their toes with his lightning raids, becoming a thorn in everybody's side. When the chief of Clan Mackintosh moved to a new castle far inland on an island in Loch Moy, he

felt that he was finally safe. He hosted a banquet and declared loudly that, for the first time in his life, he could be happy and free from the terror of Allan MacRuari.

Unfortunately for Mackintosh, the Irish harp player hired for the banquet was playing his next gig at Castle Tioram. For a couple of extra coins, he let slip what Mackintosh had said and MacRuari didn't like what he heard. He gathered his men along with some light wicker boats and travelled day and night to reach Loch Moy. Deploying the little boats to cross the loch in the dead of night, they quietly slipped into the castle. MacRuari delighted in waking his enemy to remind him that he would never be safe, before dragging him back to Castle Tioram as a prisoner.



The only person who might have hated MacRuari more than Mackintosh was MacLean of Duart.

One day, MacRuari was sailing out of Loch Moidart with a handful of men in a single boat, when he saw ten MacLean ships coming towards them.

Knowing they didn't stand a chance in a fight, Allan ordered his men to lay a plaid over him and instructed the piper to play a lament. When the lead MacLean ship got closer, they were informed that the mighty Allan MacRuari had died and that they were taking his body for burial on the island of Iona. MacLean was delighted at finally being rid of his nightmare and allowed the ship to pass so they could help themselves to the goods in Castle Tioram.

As soon as they were out of sight, MacRuari changed direction and sailed towards Mull. They couldn't carry off any loot, so instead they burned down cottages, making sure to build the fires as high as possible. Before the MacLeans could get any stolen property aboard their ships, they saw the huge pillars of smoke rising from their island and panicked. They rushed back to the ships to take vengeance on whoever was attacking them.

MacRuari wasn't about to get caught in the act, so his little ship sailed into Loch Sunart, where only a narrow strip of land separated them from the River Shiel. Carrying the boat cross-country, the group reached the river and sailed back to the safety of Castle Tioram. Once MacLean had put out the fires, he was left to curse the name of Allan MacRuari.

# Making a Splash

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*Pack your beach towel and head to the coast this summer – not for a dip in the sea but to dive into one of the country’s open-air lidos. Hot on the heels of the wild swimming phenomenon comes a newfound passion for pools – both rocky tidal and historic art deco lidos. Some are even heated.*

Words: Lucy Gillmore

Scroll through Instagram and you’ll find plenty of images of woolly-hatted heads dipping into peaty rivers and taking invigorating dunks in icy lochs. Wild swimming’s health benefits – the skin-tingling glow and feel-good factor of cold-water therapy – have been well documented. But for those not quite brave – or bonkers – enough for a chilly plunge in winter, a more civilised option is the growing trend for a tamer style of summer swimming in the country’s restored tidal pools and the increasing number of community-saved open-air lidos.

It was the pandemic that was the catalyst for the revival of three historic tidal pools in the East Neuk of Fife: Pittenweem, Cellardyke and St Monans. Neglected for decades by a cash-strapped council, they had fallen into disrepair. Dating back to the 1930s, Cellardyke or “the bathy” originally boasted a high diving board, water chute and changing cabins. Now, following its revamp by the Cellardyke

Tidal Pool, aka a bunch of enthusiastic locals, it’s a popular hangout once more for swimmers, a model boat club and paddleboarders. Where the authorities fail, local communities step in.

It was people power too that helped restore St Monans tidal pool in 2021, which had become a dumping ground for rubbish. Now it’s a safe and picture-perfect place to swim in the shadow of the windmill that once pumped seawater to the surrounding salt pans.

Tidal pools, usually part natural and part man-made, fill with seawater as the tide goes out, disappearing beneath the surface when it rushes in. In Wick on the north coast there’s not one but two, cared for again by a couple of can-do community groups. Friends of the North Baths power-wash and paint the walls and concrete steps and clear out storm debris, while the Trinkie Heritage Preservation



Tarlair Lido, photography by Athina Kontos



Stonehaven Outdoor Swimming Pool

*'another success story is Stonehaven pool, which opened on 4th June 1934 and today is the UK's only Olympic-size art deco seawater lido..'*

Group maintains the spectacular seawater pool set into the rugged cliffs of Wick's South Head. Carved out of an old quarry, the Trinkie opened in the 1920s and its setting couldn't be more dramatic, the coastal path curving round the cliffs to the ruins of old Wick Castle – a perfect spot for picnics, sunbathing on the rocks and spotting seals and seabirds soaring above the waves.

And then there's the lido. It might be hard to imagine (especially when the words "British summer" and "Scottish weather" often spark a frantic search on budget airline sites for cheap flights to the sun), but the staycation's original heyday followed the First World War.

Coastal towns around Scotland began to rebrand themselves as seaside resorts, building sleek swimming pools to attract domestic holidaymakers. The Victorians and Edwardians had started swimming for exercise, but after the war splashing

about in the pool for pleasure became a popular pastime. The Golden Age of the open-air lido was the 1930s, with a peppering of pools springing up around the country from Prestwick to Portobello, the grand pavilions designed in the glamorous new Art Deco style.

In East Lothian, the Royal Burgh of North Berwick was dubbed the Biarritz of the North. This little seaside town on the south-east coast of Scotland might not have the old-world elegance of the French Atlantic resort, but in the late 19th and throughout much of the 20th century it was a tourist hotspot. The first open-air tidal pool was created in 1840 on Milsey Bay Beach, while a larger open-air saltwater pool opened in 1900, nicknamed 'the pond' and famous for its swimming galas.

Today, with its narrow streets lined with independent shops, a harbour full of bobbing boats and the state-of-the-art Scottish Seabird Centre,



'Gateway' by Joana Vasconcelos at Jupiter Artland, photography by Owen Humphreys

weekenders come in search of fish and chips and bracing beach walks. The pool, however, closed in 1995, a victim of the growth in cheap package holidays and dwindling visitor numbers. There have been petitions and campaigns launched by residents to try to bring it back, but so far with little success. However, a project to regenerate North Berwick Harbour led by the North Berwick Harbour Trust might see the tides turn, with a tidal pool potentially part of the new design.

One pool that won't, unfortunately, be making a comeback is Portobello on the edge of Edinburgh, which closed in 1979 and was demolished in 1988 to make way for five-a-side football. Once the largest outdoor pool in Europe, Portobello opened in 1936. At 330ft long by 150ft wide, it was the size of two Olympic swimming pools. It took one and a half million gallons of filtered seawater to fill it, and it was heated by the run-off from the neighbouring power station. With its striking Art Deco design, seating for 2,000 spectators and a daredevil-high

diving board tower, the most exciting innovation, however, was the groundbreaking wave machine. The first of its kind in Scotland, it could produce waves three feet high and was so powerful that a warning klaxon had to be sounded to warn swimmers.

During the Second World War, the pool was closed and camouflaged to prevent it being used by German bombers to pinpoint the power station. Its starriest claim to fame, however, is that Sean Connery worked here as a lifeguard in the 1950s.

Somewhere you can still swim is Gourrock on the west coast. The outdoor lido here opened in 1909 and it's the oldest heated pool in Scotland. You can watch boats sail by on the Clyde Estuary and gaze out towards Loch Long and the hills beyond as you swim laps. The saltwater pool is kept at a balmy 29°C and is open from May to September. Originally a tidal pool, in 1935 it was refurbished and an Art Deco pavilion was added.



Tarlair Lido, photography by Athina Kontos

A water heating system was installed in 1969 and in 2012 the pool underwent a £1.8 million refurbishment, part of efforts to regenerate the historic boatbuilding area with new changing rooms and a gym and a programme of aqua fitness classes and starlight swims. You can even book a Doggy Dip at the end of the season. The dog-friendly swimming sessions include hose-down stations for pups and dog treats on sale, including doggy ice cream.

If you're a Britpop fan you might recognise Gourock from the band Blur's album cover *The Ballad of Darren*, released in 2023. Photographer Martin Parr took the striking image of a lone swimmer back in 2004, the bright blue of the pool in sharp contrast to the choppy grey waters of the Clyde and the threatening sky.

Also out west, the New Cumnock Pool in Ayrshire is the country's only heated freshwater lido, rescued from demolition by the determination of local residents, its refurbishment funded by the King's Foundation. It was reopened by King Charles III in 2017.

Over on the north-east coast, another success story is Stonehaven pool, which opened on 4th June 1934 and today is the UK's only Olympic-size Art Deco seawater lido. During the Second World War it was used by troops to relax and shower. Changing holiday habits over the decades, however, led to a dip in its fortunes and it was threatened with closure in the 1990s. However, a community group, the Friends of Stonehaven Open Air Pool, campaigned to save it – and succeeded. It now has charitable status and the group continues to run fundraising events – one of the most popular, an Aqua Ceilidh – think Drip the Willow and the Splashing White Sergeant.

Just up the road, meanwhile, is one of the most inspirational restoration projects currently under way, Tarlair pool just outside Macduff. The unique triple tidal pool opened in 1931, designed by architect John C. Miller, who used Loch Craig's dramatic setting to frame the three-tiered paddling

pool, swimming pool and boating lake topped by an Art Deco pavilion tearoom. At the height of its popularity, it was the scene of swimming competitions and pop concerts (Wet Wet Wet performed here). But in the 1990s the opening of an indoor pool in nearby Banff contributed to its eventual closure.

Abandoned and at the mercy of the elements, which began to ravage the structure, a Save Tarlair group was formed in 2012. And so began the long restoration journey. The first phase, repairing the boating and paddling pools and terraces, was led by conservation and design engineer John Addison. Phase 2, with the help of funding from the Scottish Government and Aberdeenshire Council, was the renovation of the Art Deco pavilion and tearoom, with architects Studio Octopi and Heritage Architecture appointed. In spring 2025 the pavilion and tearoom finally reopened, the project a finalist in the Scottish Design Awards. Next on the agenda are the category A-listed pools themselves. Planning permission has been put in and, hopefully, in the not-too-distant future, there will be swimming at Tarlair once more.

Until then, there is plenty of choice. You can even go for a swim in a contemporary sculpture park on the outskirts of Edinburgh. 'Gateway' by Joana Vasconcelos is an artwork within a swimming pool in the grounds of Jupiter Artland. The inspiration behind the work is the ley lines that are said to connect here and which some believe channel the Earth's energy. The pool is made up of 11,366 dazzling hand-painted and glazed Portuguese tiles – no two the same.

Joana Vasconcelos explains: 'Gateway is a big splash that invites the public to immerse in a joyful and spirited dimension, leading to a connection with the energy of the Earth. It's like a threshold to another universe that we're not conscious of but through which we can flow.'

And on a sunny summer's day, what could be more perfect? Come on in, the water's lovely.

*shopkeeper focus*

# DÖR

Jack Blackwell



*Dör is a design-led lifestyle store on Kelso's high street, created by Jack Blackwell. Built around coffee, craft and considered everyday luxuries, it has quickly become a thoughtful community hub in the Borders.*

Words: Rachel Rowley // Photography: Sarah Louise



As soon as you set foot inside Dör, there's a welcome feeling that isn't always typical of retail. Shop owner Jack Blackwell started out in hospitality: initially by his mum's side helping her in the cafés she ran, and later in bars and restaurants. (Not just any old places: Timberyard, Edinburgh, and Noma, Copenhagen, most notably.) It's immediately clear that this desire and ability to look after people is extended to his small, thoughtful store, an atypical addition to the Kelso high street.

Even on the dreichest of days, he takes his time to carefully prepare a coffee from Assembly and to set it down in a hand-crafted mug by Acme on a linen coaster; it, like everything else inside, is done with intention. Coffee is the conversation starter for me and anyone who comes in.

As I take my coat off and greet the sweetest border terrier, Effie (who is curled up so peacefully on her bed you'd hardly know she was there), I begin to take in the curated shelves as I prop myself on the counter – it looks like a studio bench but more akin to a continental coffee bar for the role it plays in creating an amiable atmosphere.

While a strong, design-led influence is clear (with obvious nods to Jack's time living and working in Copenhagen), there are also Japanese qualities: calm, minimalist order; clever, modular design; and a stationery selection that calls out to be held – simple journals and weighted pens are just the start.

Jack explains his love of sourcing and sharing stories – what started for him in restaurants with a focus on provenance is neatly continued in his responsible retail choices, from suppliers such as KINTO, Milkman and Slowform, to Scottish brands including Kestin and Jorum Studio.

'Coffee was always going to be a focus, and the rest came together from there. I thought a lot about everyday luxuries – a quality handwash, a great jumper, a timeless fragrance. I love bringing different places and people together in my own space and I'm constantly learning from the stories behind the products, considering every single detail including an emphasis on simple, beautiful packaging.'

*'I love bringing  
different places and  
people together in my  
own space and I'm  
constantly learning  
from the stories  
behind the products.'*

Just as a waiter is responsible for guiding and shaping a restaurant experience, here Jack is responsible for ensuring a retail experience that is warm, memorable and considered.

He opened the door to Dör two years ago after Covid-19 paused his hospitality career. At that time, he moved from Copenhagen to London, where he soon found himself furloughed from a new job in hospitality. This was when he took the quick decision to move back north, offering brand consultancy for a short time in Edinburgh while the dream of his own business quietly took shape. Seeking to escape ridiculous rents and relentless hours in favour of a slower pace, a new home and a new community, he found all of this in Kelso.

'When I first saw this space, it had been a florist's shop, cold and damp for over 20 years. From those early days, it really felt like time to do something rather than dream about it. It wasn't easy. The outside of the building was disgusting, and the walls were falling in places, but I was heartened to uncover some original details like the fireplaces, floor and window boxes. Because I was doing most of the work myself, I could take my time to bring back the character and figure out how I would use the space. I have kept the traditional shop front but made the interior fresh and flexible.'



While Dör started as a brand he created himself alongside coffee and conversation, it has evolved to have a plethora of memorable details at its heart. More than that, Jack also creates occasional events from gyoza nights to paper workshops and collaborates with several local creatives. These have included the likes of Sarah Louise, photographer and part-time shopkeeper (@sarahlouise.photo), who is currently exhibiting and selling her prints in store. There's also local customer and friend Nick Unsworth (@wyrth.co.uk), who trained at the nearby Hugo Burge Foundation and is a florist who regularly creates installations for the shop.

Jack has certainly created a community here and is well on his way to creating a destination – not bad for two years' work. He will soon be popping up at Custom Lane in Leith, Kirsty Bell's Exhibition and later in the year Outsider Festivals, Muck n' Mac, Blair Atholl and South Scotland. As we finish the interview, he alludes to the potential to develop the upstairs space at WoodMarket.

There's little doubt that whatever happens with Dör, Jack will ensure it evolves with added new details and opportunities, without a rush, one carefully made coffee at a time.

## JACK'S FAVOURITE BORDERS INDEPENDENTS

Scott's of Kelso, Kelso  
[scottsofkelso.com](http://scottsofkelso.com)

Rüda, St Boswells  
[rudastudio.com](http://rudastudio.com)

Twelve Triangles, Melrose  
[twelvetriangles.co.uk](http://twelvetriangles.co.uk)

Made In Grey Britain, Lauder  
[madeingreybritain.com](http://madeingreybritain.com)

Hugo Burge Foundation,  
 Marchmont Estate, Duns  
[hugoburgefoundation.org](http://hugoburgefoundation.org)

[dorlifestyle.co](http://dorlifestyle.co)

The Best of  
**INVERNESS**  
*and surrounds*



*Being seen as the capital of the Scottish Highlands comes with a certain level of expectation. So it's fitting, perhaps, that Inverness is very much a place apart, sitting more than 100 miles from the nearest major city and serving as a gateway to some of the country's most renowned attractions.*



Culloden Viaduct



Culloden Battlefield

Keen on history? The battlefield of Culloden is just 15 minutes away. Looking for super-sized scenery? World-famous Loch Ness is right here, stretching handsomely for more than 20 miles along the Great Glen Fault. Hoping to bag a Munro? Head an hour north to the walkable, whaleback ridge of nearby Ben Wyvis, from where the clear-day views furl out forever.

There's much more, too. Nairnshire and the fabled Black Isle peninsula are both within easy day-trip distance of the city, opening up rural regions of beaches, castles, lochs, waterfalls, wildlife, harbour towns and whisky distilleries. And then, of course, there's the pull of Inverness itself. The UK's northernmost city is compact but rewarding, being bisected by the pretty River Ness and blessed not just with centuries' worth of culture and architecture but some excellent places to stay, eat and drink.



## History

This is one of those regions where the passage of time takes on new meaning. The origins of Loch Ness date back some 10,000 years, when the Great Glen Fault became filled with melting glacial water at the end of the last Ice Age. Inverness, meanwhile, has had some form of human presence for almost six millennia, although the first key date in its history was 569 CE, when St Columba visited what was then a Pictish stronghold.

It gained a royal charter in the 12th century and later, in the 1650s, was the site of a citadel built by Oliver Cromwell during the English occupation. The following century, Inverness Castle was twice occupied by Jacobites, who were defeated in the decisive Battle of Culloden in April 1746. The 19th-century arrival of both the Caledonian Canal and the railway saw Inverness become even more important. It achieved city status in the year 2000.

## Getting There & Around

Inverness is straightforward to reach by bus or rail, being some 2.5 hours by direct train from Aberdeen and around 3.5 hours by direct train from Edinburgh. It's even possible to reach the city on the overnight Caledonian Sleeper from London and – as of this year – Birmingham. Buses also frequent the region, heading to the main visitor spots, while for self-drivers the North Coast 500 road trip officially starts and ends at Inverness Castle. Cyclists and hikers can enjoy the long-distance Loch Ness 360 trail, and Inverness also has an airport with connections to elsewhere in Scotland and the wider UK.



Inverness Cathedral

### WHAT IT'S BEST KNOWN FOR

*Jacobite history, rampant scenery and a fine range of different attractions and activities all within simple reach of each other. Inverness might not have the big-town cachet of Glasgow or Edinburgh, but there's more than enough here to make the cathedral city an appealing base and the surrounding Highland landscapes are rich with outdoor potential, whether you're looking to get active or just wallow in the scenery. Oh, and that lovely-looking loch on the city's doorstep? They say there's a beastie to be found in its deep waters...*

A scenic view of a forested valley. In the foreground, there is a large blue rectangular overlay with white text. The background shows a lush green forest covering rolling hills. In the middle ground, a small village with several buildings, including a church with a tall spire, is visible. A body of water, likely a lake or river, is in the lower right foreground. The sky is overcast and grey.

## THE FIRST NESSIE SIGHTING

*In AD 565, an Irish monk named Saint Columba was said to have encountered a fearsome creature in the River Ness. According to an early biography, the beast attacked a swimmer before retreating at Columba's command. This account is widely regarded as the earliest recorded sighting of the Loch Ness Monster.*



# Things to do

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*The area around Inverness has everything you could want – scenic beauty, crashing waterfalls and buckets of history alongside distilleries, mountains and one very famous loch. No matter which direction you travel, the Capital of the Highlands makes the perfect base for an adventure.*

## Walks, Wildlife & Nature

### **River Ness & Ness Islands**

The River Ness is the heart of the city, flowing right through the middle, linking loch to sea. Hidden away on the Ness Islands, you'll find a tranquil retreat of tree-lined paths, connected by footbridges and a welcome escape from the hustle and bustle.

### **Inverness Botanic Gardens**

Set just back from the river, warm glasshouses shelter tropical blooms and cacti from the cold Highland air. Inverness Botanic Gardens offer colour and life in every season, while outdoor gardens provide peaceful benches to soak in the surroundings and engage the senses.

### **Loch Ness (Drumnadrochit, Dores, Foyers, Invermoriston)**

Loch Ness stretches deep and mysterious through the Great Glen for an enormous 22.5 miles! Famously, the loch holds more water than all the lakes of England and Wales combined, as well as the possibility of a monster. There are a number of villages giving different perspectives to the loch, from bustling Drumnadrochit to Dores' open shoreline, Foyers' waterfall and Invermoriston's bridges.

## Falls of Foyers

Hidden in the woods above Loch Ness, the Falls of Foyers plunge dramatically through a wooded gorge once admired by Robert Burns. Be careful on the steep path as it descends through pines and mossy rocks to a viewpoint of the roaring water – best enjoyed after heavy rain.

## Farigaig Forest

On the quiet side of Loch Ness and rarely crowded, the towering trees of Farigaig Forest are squeezed between the water and the ancient fort of Dun Dearduil. An hour-long circular walk along steep trails reaches Lochan Torr an Tuill, otherwise known as the Magic Loch.

## Farigaig Falls

A short woodland walk reveals Farigaig Falls tumbling through a narrow, moss lined gorge. Although the river can swell greatly after bad rain, these are usually much gentler, cascading falls.

## Suidhe Viewpoint

High above Loch Ness on the Old Military Road, the Suidhe Viewpoint offers the chance to admire the Great Glen in all its glory. Built in the early 1700s, this was once the main route for soldiers marching between Inverness and Fort Augustus but now offers a quieter, more scenic journey than the busy A82.

## Loch Tarff

On a still day, Loch Tarff offers a perfect mirror-like reflection that makes it well worth pulling off the Old Military Road hugging its shoreline. Dotted with tiny islands, it's a popular spot for kayakers to explore.

## Glen Affric National Nature Reserve

Often called Scotland's most beautiful glen, Glen Affric rewards those who make the long drive with incredible walks through ancient Caledonian pine forest beneath spectacular mountains. It's a special place of supreme beauty.

## Plodda Falls

Deep within the woods, along a very rutted track, Plodda Falls is one of the most impressive waterfalls in Scotland. Plunging 150 feet past towering pines, the viewing platform juts out above the falls while a short, steep trek allows you to admire its full power from below.

## Glen Cannich

Once known as Clan Chisholm country, Glen Cannich follows the River Cannich as it flows from Loch Mullardoch towards Strathglass. Now largely cleared of its previous inhabitants, it's an open and wild landscape, well off the beaten track for most visitors.

## Strathglass Heritage Trail

There's a lot of history packed into Strathglass, but not all of it is immediately obvious. Following the Strathglass Heritage Trail brings that heritage to life, from ancient burial grounds to lost townships, memorials and clan markers.

## Strathfarrar

Only accessible for cars on a strictly controlled private road, most walkers in the area are aiming to tick off the four stunning Glen Strathfarrar Munros. This isn't a hike for beginners, at 7-10 hours taking in 15.5 miles of mountain terrain.



Loch Glass

## Loch Mullardoch

Home to the largest dam in Scotland, Loch Mullardoch is equal parts quiet and dramatic. Surrounded by rugged mountains, its waters stretch over 8 wild miles to the west, giving an impressive view to those conquering the epic 11-14 hour Munro circuit on its north side.

## Loch Glass

Tucked beneath Ben Wyvis, Loch Glass is peaceful and secluded, famous for its strange, little pink house that leaps out from the surroundings in a burst of colour. Don't be fooled by its picturesque outlook, the lodge is an unfinished, empty shell.

## Reelig Glen

Home to some of Scotland's tallest trees, many over 100 years old including Dughall Mor, Reelig Glen is a magical place to explore. Wander beneath the towering pines, alongside the babbling burn and over tiny bridges, making sure to keep your eyes open for red squirrels amongst the branches.

## South Loch Ness Trail

There's no better way to appreciate the quieter side of Loch Ness than by dedicating the time to hike the full South Trail. Over 59km, walkers pass dramatic waterfalls, thick forests and spectacular viewpoints in a huge range of scenery.

## Trail of the Seven Lochs

An even more challenging long-distance walking route follows the Trail of the Seven Lochs, weaving 80km around the south side of Loch Ness through forest and moorland. It's proof that the smaller lochs near Inverness are just as beautiful as their famous cousin.

## River Ness Walk

An easy stroll along the banks of the River Ness is a great way to explore the city's main sights without breaking a sweat. Pass Inverness Castle, Cathedral, Balnain House and the iconic Old High Church on St Michael's Mount with a series of bridges creating a circular loop.

## Caledonian Canal

Linking the lochs of the Great Glen to connect the east and west coasts, the Caledonian Canal is a wonder of industrial engineering. Dochgarroch and Fort Augustus both offer the chance to watch boats navigate the locks to climb or descend the different levels of the canal.

## Loch Vaich

Quiet and remote, Loch Vaich is only accessible by foot and since it doesn't get many visitors, it's the perfect place for solitude and connecting with nature.

## Loch Morie

Located north of Loch Glass but much less visited, Loch Morie is a popular spot for anglers looking to bag trout, salmon and Atlantic char. In 1902, the loch was used by Sir John Murray, father of modern oceanography, in a study of the depths of Scotland's freshwater lochs.

## Wyvis Forest

Spreading across the lower slopes of Ben Wyvis, this forest blends aspen, birch and rowan for an easier walk than the nearby Munro. There's plenty of wildlife to enjoy around the tumbling burn if you keep your eyes and ears open.

### **Ben Wyvis**

One of the most prominent mountains near Inverness, Ben Wyvis dominates the surroundings. At 4-5 hours of walking, it's one of the less-challenging Munros, but shouldn't be taken for granted. After a steep ascent, expect a long plateau walk to the summit and spectacular views for miles around.

### **Fairy Glen Falls**

Hidden within woodland near Rosemarkie, Fairy Glen Falls are two small, cascading waterfalls surrounded by trees, ferns and moss-covered rocks. Traditionally, children would decorate one of the pools beside a natural spring to ensure the fairies kept the water clean and pure.

### **Chanonry Point**

Where the Moray Firth narrows, Chanonry Point is famous for the chance to spot the local pod of dolphins. There's often a gathered crowd watching and waiting eagerly for a sighting amongst the waves.

### **Rogie Falls**

A well-placed suspension bridge gives the perfect viewpoint of the Black Water crashing down in the impressive Rogie Falls. Visit in late summer for a chance to see salmon leaping upstream through the foaming water to their breeding grounds.

### **Secret Beach - Nairn/Ardersier**

Hidden between Nairn and Ardersier, this quiet stretch of smooth, white sand is longer and wider than the two beaches in Nairn itself. Being outside town has earned it the nickname "Secret Beach" and you'll easily find a secluded spot to enjoy all on your own.

### **Culloden Woods**

The Battle of Culloden is one of the most iconic events in Scottish history, but not many explore the woodland beside the battlefield. There are reminders of the clash to be found amongst the trees, such as the Prisoners' Stone where 17 Jacobites were shot in the aftermath.

### **Culbin Forest**

Once shifting sand dunes, Culbin Forest is now a vast pine plantation, crisscrossed with trails to explore. The highlight is climbing the tower at Hill 99 for sweeping views across treetops to the sandbanks.

### **Randolph's Leap**

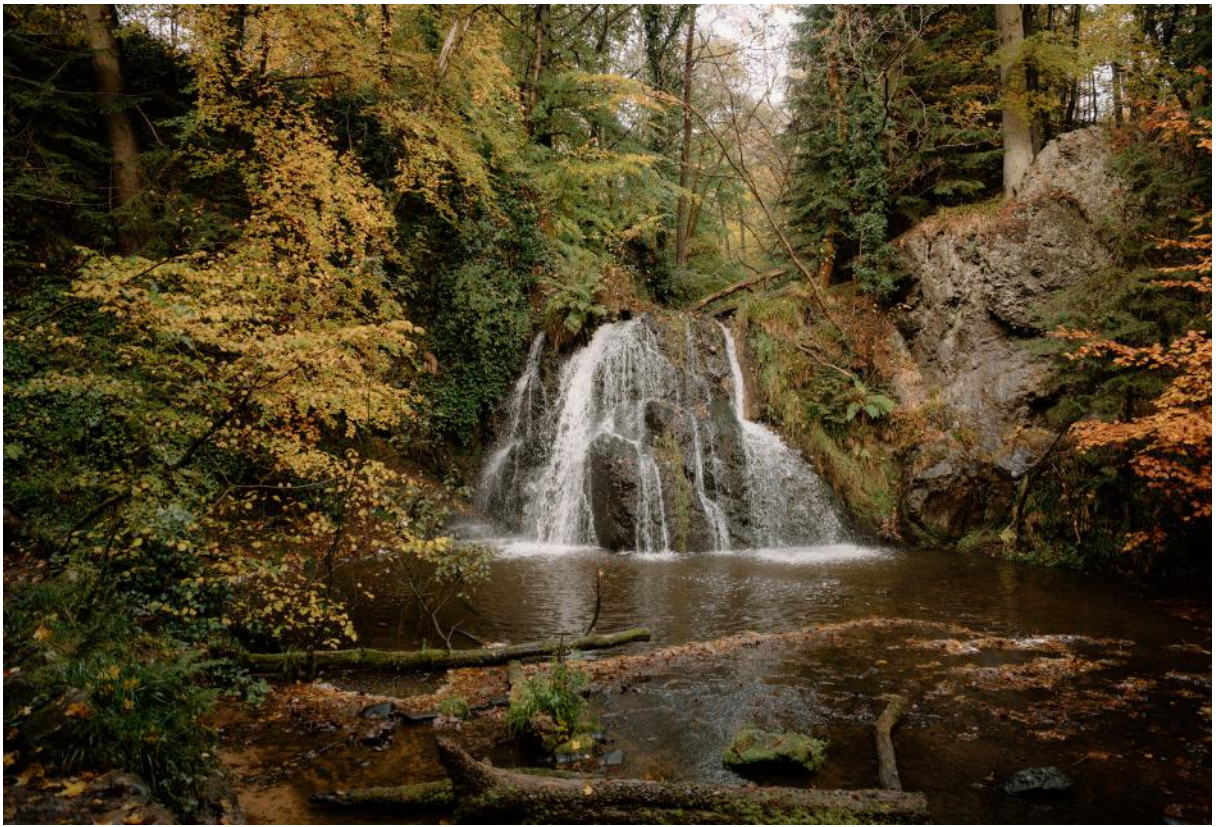
Legend says that in the 1300s, a member of the powerful Comyn family evaded the clutches of Thomas Randolph by leaping this narrow gap. An hour long leads alongside the rushing River Findhorn to admire the leap and back.

### **Logie Steading**

Set in the grounds of Logie House, Logie Steading was once a model farm, but now operates as a community hub, full of local crafts, galleries, stores and a heritage centre. It's the starting point for several short walks as well as providing access to the walled garden.

### **Findhorn Beach (East and West)**

Located on a promontory at the mouth of a major river, Findhorn is surrounded by beaches. The West Beach sticks close to the village front, but the East sands stretch for miles. Beach huts provide bursts of bright colour while a sauna offers the chance to warm up!



Fairy Glen Falls



Findhorn Beach



Photography by Andrew Cowderoy

## Cameron Hall-Gardiner

Arborist & Timber Craftsman  
[woodropestone.com](http://woodropestone.com)

### *Where do you go when you need to slow down and reset*

My Inverness itinerary begins with a meander around the High Church; stillness and views around the River Ness abound. We head south through Church Street. Along this route, Abertarff House, a 16th-century property, is well worth a visit. Onwards, past the Town House and Inverness Castle, down to the riverside via Ness Bank Church. From here, enjoy a tranquil walk to the Ness Islands along the Great Glen Way. My stomping ground as a fledgling arborist, the Islands are magical, with many beautiful specimen trees, including my first carving of 'Nessie', a storm-blown oak.

Crossing the Victorian iron bridge to the Floral Hall, now known as Inverness Botanic Gardens, a dear and personal oasis of mine. A modest botanical/tropical glasshouse with temperatures to suit. One can simply sit beneath the fronds of banana and cabbage palms, observing resident koi next to the waterfall.



## History & Heritage

### Inverness Castle

There have been castles perched on this spot above the River Ness for at least 900 years, playing host to Kings, Queens and Clan Chiefs. Freshly opened in 2026 as a visitor attraction, the Inverness Castle Experience shares the stories and spirit of the Highlands.

### Inverness Museum and Art Gallery

With over 100,000 items in its collection, the Inverness Museum and Art Gallery packs a big punch. From ancient history and Pictish Stones to everyday artefacts and even Felicity, the famous puma, it's a great way to explore the Highlands without ever leaving the city.

### Inverness Cathedral, St Andrew's

Built in the mid-1800s, Inverness Cathedral is dedicated to Scotland's patron St Andrew. Although originally intended to have two large spires, the square towers are now iconic. A small fee grants entrance to admire the interior of this stunning Episcopalian church.

### Culloden Viaduct viewed from Clava Cairns

Although often overshadowed by nearby Clava Cairns, the 29 elegant arches of the Culloden Viaduct are a sight to behold. Still used as the main trainline into Inverness, this 19th-century masonry viaduct is the longest in Scotland at 1,800ft.

### Culloden Battlefield

The site of the last battle on British soil is a very special place. In less than an hour, around 1,500 Jacobites lay dead on this moorland, effectively ending the 1745 Rising. Walking around the field is sobering, while the visitor centre offers a deeper view of events.

### Fort George

Jutting out into the firth on a promontory, Fort George was constructed in the late 18th century to suppress any future Jacobite threats. It's an incredibly impressive complex to wander around, still garrisoned by soldiers, but no shots have ever been fired here in anger.

### Urquhart Castle

The historic guardian of the Great Glen, Urquhart Castle's ruins are packed full of history from the Wars of Independence to regular clan warfare. In the Great Raid of 1545, the MacDonalds made off with over 8,000 animals belonging to the Grants.

### Beaulieu Priory

Founded by Valliscaulian monks who gave the area its name, "beau lieu" meaning beautiful place, legend says that the ruins of Beaulieu Priory are haunted by a mysterious ghoul crawling from a tomb. Best avoided after nightfall.



Fort George



The Red Flag at Culloden Battlefield



Inverness Castle

## DID YOU KNOW

*Did you know the red flags at Culloden mark the front line of the Government army during the battle of 1746? They trace the position where Government troops stood as the Jacobite forces advanced across the moor, and much of the fiercest hand-to-hand fighting unfolded along this line. Today, they help visitors visualise the scale of the engagement and the exact alignment of the opposing armies.*



Clava Cairns

## Boleskine Graveyard

The burial ground at Boleskin is an easily overlooked spot with a long, rich history, especially important to Frasers. Amongst the many old stones, look out for musket ball marks on the grave of Donald Fraser, said to have been made by soldiers after the Battle of Culloden.

## Invermoriston Bridge

Built in 1813, Thomas Telford's historic bridge was once the main route over the River Moriston and still offers an incredible view of the rushing water beneath its arches. Take the short woodland walk nearby to the old Summer House for another spectacular view of the Falls of Invermoriston.

## Cawdor Castle

One of the grandest buildings in the Highlands, Cawdor Castle has been home to the same family for over 650 years. There's family history in every room, as well as a legendary thorn tree in the vaulted cellar and beautifully curated gardens to explore.

## Clava Cairns

The remarkable Bronze Age burial complex of Clava Cairns combines standing stones and ring cairns dating back over 4,000 years and has become a popular tourist spot in recent years. Carefully aligned with the midwinter sunset, Clava gives a small insight into the beliefs of Scotland's ancient inhabitants.

## Corrimony Chambered Cairn

While not as famous as Clava Cairns, Corrimony is a much quieter experience. Archaeology work revealed a single woman was once buried inside this 4000-year-old ring cairn, but who she was remains a mystery.

## Golden Retriever Statue

In the planned Victorian village of Tomich stands the statue of a golden retriever, commemorating the quiet Highland origins of this well-loved breed. Lord Tweedmouth bred the first ever Golden at the now-ruined Guisachan House in 1868, making this an essential stop for all descendants and their owners.

## Brodie Castle

Home to the Chiefs of Clan Brodie for centuries, Brodie Castle is now a magnificent attraction for guided tours around its historic rooms filled with grandeur or for younger families to enjoy the Playful Garden or woodland adventure playground.

## Fyrish Monument

Dominating the surrounding landscape from its prominent hilltop position, the Fyrish Monument was built for Sir Hector Munro in 1782, based on the gates of Negapatam in India to commemorate his victory and provide backbreaking for his struggling tenants of in return for a meagre penny a day.

### DID YOU KNOW

*Clava Cairns inspired a global television phenomenon. Built around 2000 BC near Inverness, these Bronze Age burial chambers are aligned with the midwinter sunset, and their ringed cairns and standing circles later influenced a widely watched time-travel drama.*

## Activities



The Clansman Centre – The Show

### Eden Court Theatre

Located beside the River Ness, Eden Court boasts the largest single-site cultural venue in the Highlands, hosting theatre, cinema, music, dance, and exhibitions year-round along with Inverness' annual music festival Under Canvas.

### Jacobite Loch Ness Cruises

Loch Ness might be stunning from the shore, but there's no substitute for getting out on the water. Operating from multiple points, Jacobite Cruises provide boat trips on modern vessels with indoor seating, and informative commentary, with the option to stop off at Urquhart Castle or just enjoy a cruise.

### Whin Park

A popular family park beside the river, complete with state-of-the-art, interactive play equipment, a boating pond and miniature railway. Close to the Ness Islands, Whin Park provides an easy outdoor escape within the city for families with young children.

### Victorian Market

One of the highlights of Inverness, the historic indoor Victorian Market blends traditional architecture with modern independent businesses. Located in the city centre, it houses food vendors, cafés, boutiques, and local retailers beneath a beautiful ironwork roof.



Nairn Gold Club

### **The Clansman Centre – The Show**

Located in the old Fort Augustus schoolhouse, this live historical presentation in the Clansman Centre doesn't just explain Highland clan life; it demonstrates it. Learn about kilts, weapons, food and fighting – everything you need to survive in 17th-century Scotland.

### **Caths Inverness Tours**

There's no better way to learn about the history and traditions of Inverness than with Cath from Walk Inverness. This local guide provides regular 2-hour walking tours around Inverness, covering every part of the city's story from its earliest days through the Jacobite risings to modern Highland life.

### **Dolphin Spirit Inverness**

Get up close and personal with the Moray Firth's most famous residents on a Dolphin Spirit boat tour. Leaving from Inverness Marina, this high-speed journey past Chanonry Point is an excellent chance to see dolphins, but wrap up warm.

### **The Singleton of Glen Ord Distillery**

Dating back to 1838, Singleton of Glen Ord isn't just a delicious dram, it's also a fantastic visitor experience. The revamped distillery won Scotland's Leading Distillery Tour and is the perfect place for a day trip, only 10 minutes' walk from Muir of Ord train station.



The Singleton of Glen Ord Distillery

### Loch Ness Centre

Revamped in 2023, the Loch Ness Centre provides an incredible audio-visual tour through the old Drumnadrochit Hotel to uncover every facet of the long hunt for the Loch Ness Monster. The option to board the Deepscan vessel and go looking for Nessie yourself shouldn't be missed.

### Nairn Dunbar Golf Course

This traditional Scottish championship links course on the Moray Firth offers fast greens, coastal wind, and classic seaside golf. Less crowded than nearby courses, it provides a challenging but accessible round and Open competitions throughout the year.

### Nairn Golf Club

Dating back to 1887 and regularly ranked one of Scotland's finest links courses, Nairn Golf Club attracts players from around the world to what has been described as "one of the country's purest links." Don't miss the halfway house located in the old bothy.

### WildTrax Defender Land Rover Hire

What better way to explore Inverness and beyond than in a premium Land Rover hire? As well as providing the full equipped vehicle, WildTrax can help plan your itinerary to make the most of your Highland adventure.

### Benromach Distillery

A traditional Speyside distillery, Benromach doesn't follow the crowds but sticks to its roots, offering a rich single malt with just a hint of smoke. As well as production and tasting tours, this is the only Speyside distillery that also offers a gin tour.

### Great Glen Distillery

Located right outside the Loch Ness Centre, the Great Glen Distillery is Scotland's smallest distillery. This tiny space offers free tastings of its award-winning spirits, right beside Jacqueline – the copper still where its made.

### The Dalmore Distillery

Founded in 1839, Dalmore Distillery has a long story to tell and some delicious drams to sample. The guided tour is well worth the time, revealing a few of the unusual factors that make this a truly unique spirit.

### Tomatin Distillery Visitor Centre

South of Inverness, Tomatin is one of the highest distilleries in Scotland, making delicious whisky from pure mountain water. While the distillery was founded in 1897, it's thought that whisky production in this part of the Highlands stretches back to at least the 15th century.

### Boath Adventures

Boath Adventures curate bespoke adventures, perfectly designed to provide guests with the very best of Highland hospitality while exploring local landscapes, food, whisky and outdoor experiences.

### Nessieland & Nessie Hunter Cruises

It's hard to miss Nessieland, with its enormous statue of the Loch Ness Monster looming over Drumnadrochit. It's a family-friendly way to uncover the story of the Loch Ness Monster along with hourly Nessie Hunter boat trips on the loch.

# Eat, Drink & Shop

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*Surrounded by an incredible natural larder, there's no shortage of great food and drink, from fine dining to music venues and even a Victorian Market. Perfect to sate your appetite after a day of browsing locally made crafts or secondhand books.*

## **Birch**

Providing some of the best speciality coffee in the Highlands, luxurious pastries and a delicious brunch menu, Birch has fast become a firm Inverness favourite after branching out from their successful Portree location.

## **Perk Coffee and Doughnuts**

A small, popular coffee spot known for fresh doughnuts with a variety of wild and wonderful toppings. It's ideal for a quick breakfast or takeaway and with the doughnut special's rotating, you're likely to come back more than once.

## **Xoko Bakehouse**

This artisan bakery is all about quality and passion, crafting a range of incredible pastries, sourdoughs, cakes and other baked goods, although it's the cinnamon rolls that really put it on the map.

## **The Mustard Seed**

One of the highlights of the Inverness dinner scene, this long-established restaurant serves incredible, traditional Scottish cuisine with a modern influence in a beautiful old building beside the River Ness.

## **Rocpool Restaurant**

An Inverness institution since 2002, Rocpool is just as popular and polished as the day it opened. The menu is inspired by ingredients and flavours from around the world, but focused on providing local, seasonal ingredients.



Perk Coffee & Doughnuts



Uile-bheist Distillery and Brewery

### **Black Isle Brewery Bar**

The main Inverness destination for all lovers of craft beer, The Black Isle Brewery Bar, right in the heart of the city, serves up locally brewed drinks, wood-fired pizza and a great, relaxed atmosphere.

### **The Hootananny**

One of the best-loved live music bars in Inverness, serving traditional Scottish pub grub, whisky, and local ales. Regularly packed to the rafters, folk music features on stage every night and the atmosphere as the tunes ramp up is second to none.

### **The Malt Room**

For those looking for a sophisticated dram, this specialist whisky bar offers an extensive curated selection of Scottish single malts with knowledgeable staff to help you navigate them.

### **Uile-bheist Distillery and Brewery**

Inverness's first combined distillery and brewery, Uile-bheist is Gaelic for monster, taking inspiration from local legend and dedicated to producing the very best craft whisky and beer. The Taproom is a great spot to enjoy some of their products or freshly-made pizza.

#### **DID YOU KNOW**

*Nairn Golf Club is among Scotland's oldest championship courses. Established in 1887, it has hosted both the Walker Cup and the Curtis Cup, with classic links turf set against gorse and open views across the Moray Firth.*



## Jeni Lannetta

Bad Girl Bakery  
[badgirlbakery.co.uk](http://badgirlbakery.co.uk)

### *Where are your favourite places for eating out in the area?*

I'd have to start with the Victorian Market Food and Drink Hall, and not just because we have a bakery there. There's such variety, from the best vegan street food (Salt 'n Fire) to fantastic local seafood (The Redshank) and steaks and pulled pork from their farm (Highland Pulled Meats).

If you're after the best pizza and craft beer selection (their own and from around the world) it has to be Black Isle Bar – we took our son there for his 18th birthday. If you've got room for pudding, I suggest a wander down the street to Meile's Gelateria.

If you're happy to head further afield, I'd recommend IV10 for fantastic small plates and the friendliest service, and the wonderful Bakhoos Bakery (their sandwiches and pastries make the best beach picnic) both in Fortrose on the Black Isle. If you're there, then why not go to Black Isle Dairy? I'm obsessed with their dark chocolate sorbet.



LEAKEY'S BOOKSHOP

TOTE BAG  
£10

POSTCARD 50p

£1  
15  
1.34p

### **Dores Inn**

Located directly on the shores of Loch Ness, this traditional Highland pub is the best place to enjoy a drink while keeping an eye out for Nessie in quietly stunning surroundings.

### **Loch Ness Inn**

A modern inn with plenty of space near Drumnadrochit, you can find quality, seasonal Scottish food in the cosy restaurant or refreshing local drinks in the brewery bar.

### **Newhall Mains**

Serving a seasonal menu in carefully restored farm buildings, Newhall Mains is a high-class restaurant focusing on creating outstanding dishes from well-sourced, local ingredients.

### **Fiddler's Restaurant & Whisky Bar**

A popular stop for those travelling along Loch Ness, the Fiddler's Inn is a bustling spot offering traditional Scottish food in the heart of Drumnadrochit. For those sitting outside, the new and improved foodtruck is a great option for fish and chips.

### **Inverness Coffee Roasting Co**

This independent roaster knows their coffee inside out – where it comes from, who produced it and of course, how to make the perfect cup! It's almost guaranteed that after sampling one of their brews, you'll want to grab a bag of beans off the shelf.

### **Station Road**

In Fort Augustus, Station Road serves up 3 AA Rosette fine dining, using incredible local seafood, meats and seasonal vegetables to make the most of nature's larder. Everything on the tasting menu is sublime, but the Birch Bark Ice Cream is a showstopper.

### **Househill Café & Farmshop**

Based on a working farm, in renovated yet rustic outbuildings, this café and farmshop near Nairn has become a real destination, offering a simple goal – make good food, in a welcoming space to convince people to keep coming back.

### **Glen Rowan Café**

Glen Rowan Café is the perfect lunch stop as you turn onto the road to Skye at Invermoriston. The food is always delicious and the service friendly, with a small play area to keep kids entertained.

### **IV10**

A modern, family-run café and restaurant in Fortrose, IV10 serves up incredible food from its daily-changing menu in a relaxed atmosphere, as well as takeaway cakes, coffee and deli products.

### **The Allangrange**

For gourmet pub food on the Black Isle, look no further than The Allangrange. With regular deals on throughout the year, the Sunday roast is a particular highlight and best of all, it's dog-friendly.



Newhall Mains



### **Cameron's Farm Shop**

Just a short walk from the Falls of Foyers, Cameron's Tea Room & Farm Shop is an unmissable stop on the quiet side of Loch Ness. Homemade soups and sandwiches make the perfect lunch and a visit to the resident Hairy Cows goes without saying.

### **Leakey's Bookshop**

Scotland's largest second-hand bookshop and a modern-day icon of Inverness, stepping into Leakey's Bookshop is an unforgettable experience. Housed in a former Gaelic church, there are two floors stacked with books to explore, connected by its famous, spiral staircase.

### **Victorian Market Food Hall**

This modern food hall within the Victorian Market has transformed the historic shopping mall into a day-out destination. As well as the choice of a wide variety of foods from different independent businesses, there's often live music to enjoy in the evenings.

### **Bad Girl Bakery**

Providing the anchor café in the Victorian Market Food Hall as well as their original location in Muir of Ord, Bad Girl Bakery is known for its big cakes and delicious bakes but with everything made by hand, you need to be quick before they sell out.



Victorian Market Food Hall

### **The Whisky Shop**

Whether you're an experienced whisky drinker or an interested beginner, the experts in The Whisky Shop will have something to suit your tastes. They offer a wide selection of Scottish single malts, blends, and rare bottlings in the heart of Inverness.

### **Old School Beaully**

The award-winning Old School gift shop in Beaully is a treasure trove of carefully selected clothing, books, gifts and trinkets. Each of the old classrooms is like a separate shop or a different department, it's no surprise this won Best Giftshop in Scotland.

### **Merchant's Delicatessen**

Opened at the end of 2023, Merchant's Delicatessen filled the gap in the market for visitors and locals to find high-quality meats, cheeses and smoked fish. Go all in and pick up a grazing box to enjoy a little bit of everything.

### **Campbell's of Beaully**

Founded in 1858, this historic outfitter and countrywear store has even supplied tailored goods to Queen Elizabeth II, so you know you're in the right place for quality tweed, knitwear, and traditional Highland clothing.

### **The Walrus and Corkscrew**

A popular, relaxed wine bar in the historic heart of Inverness, The Walrus & Corkscrew has an extensive wine list with outdoor tables to soak up the sunshine or two floors of indoor seating to enjoy tastings accompanied by charcuterie platters.

### **Corner on the Square**

Grab a table around the packed deli counter in the Corner on the Square and prepare for a sensational lunch. Full of delicious products from across the Highlands and Islands, this little Beaully café never disappoints.

### **Harbour Lane Highlands**

With a range of handmade, illustrated homeware, surrounded by a plethora of other beautiful pieces, Harbour Lane on the Fortrose High Street is the perfect place to pick up something memorable. You may even spot owner Tori illustrating her famous lampshades while you shop.

### **James' Ice Cream**

Visit James' Ice Cream at Nairn putting green on a sunny day and expect a long queue to sample some of his delicious hand-made ice-cream. There are plenty of unique flavours and even an extensive range of vegan options to choose from.

### **Downright Gabbler**

Scotland's storytelling tradition is strong and nowhere is that more evident than at Downright Gabbler. Dinner here isn't just about delicious food; it's a real experience as host Garry regales diners with tales from Scottish history and legend in an intimate setting.

# Stay

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*Spend the night in a log cabin in a quiet glen or a plush room at a luxury hotel; there's something for everybody. You can even book an entire castle if you want to really push the boat out.*

## **Boath Cabin**

A private cabin near Nairn, perfect for families or couples seeking a country retreat, with scenic views, ample outdoor space, and easy access to the coast and nature, with a hot tub to relax in after a busy day.

## **The Hootananny Rooms**

Found above the busy Hootananny bar in central Inverness, the Hoots Hotel rooms are a calm, quiet retreat from the lively hustle and bustle downstairs. The location, right in the heart the city, couldn't be better.

## **Newhall Mains**

From single-bedroom cosy suites to individually themed cottages, Newhall Mains provides comfortable countryside lodging within easy reach of the Black Isle and Inverness, with dog-friendly options. Each offers something different, but all are luxurious and welcoming.

## **Big Sky Lodges**

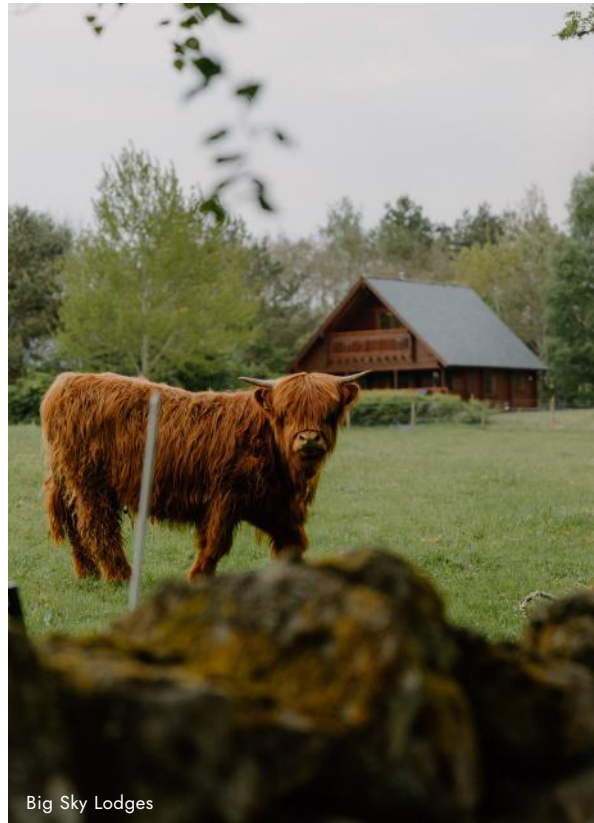
Beautifully crafted from pines grown in Lapland, each of the six Big Sky Lodges are so cosy that you might not want to leave, even with the abundance of nature on their doorstep. For other options, there's the Loft on the Croft and even a glamping caravan to choose from.

## **Foyers Lodge**

The stunning Foyers Lodge is the perfect hideaway with unrivalled views on the quiet side of Loch Ness. It's small, but perfectly formed, boutique and very, very special, with the most attentive of hosts waiting to welcome you into their stunning Victorian home.



The Lovat



Big Sky Lodges

### **Eagle Brae**

The log cabins at Eagle Brae, on a hillside above the River Glass, are traditionally built but full of modern luxury and focused on sustainability. On-site hydro and solar power means your mind is at ease while you enjoy the incredible surrounding scenery.

### **The Lovat**

This luxury hotel in Fort Augustus combines historic character with modern comfort and an eye for detail. It's the perfect base for exploring the Great Glen, with an exceptional restaurant to match the memorable rooms.

### **Arthouse Inverness**

Set just back from the River Ness, Arthouse offers luxury serviced apartments, combining historic charm with modern comfort. With all the home comforts, they're perfect for longer trips to Inverness with plenty of free off-street parking.

### **Aldourie Castle**

There's nothing quite like staying in your own 300-year-old castle in the Scottish Highlands! Only available for exclusive-use hires, Aldourie Castle sleeps 24 people in 12 rooms with private chefs, housekeepers and even a sauna yurt to enjoy after a wild swim in the grounds.

### **Golf View Hotel & Spa**

This coastal hotel in Nairn provides incredible views over the Moray Firth, with comfortable rooms and full spa facilities for a comfortable coastal break. Whether it's golf, beach walks, dolphin walks or a trip into Inverness, there are plenty of options from the Golf View.



Photography by Andrew Cowderoy

## Andrew Cowderoy

Owner of Boath Cabin  
[boathcabin.com](http://boathcabin.com)

*Where are your favourite places to visit, and which destinations would you recommend for families with children?*

Nairn Beach is a top recommendation, just a short drive from the cabin and suitable in most weather. Even on grey days, the sea air and wide skies make for a revitalising walk. In summer, a splash pad for children is nearby. If it's raining but you want to go outside, Culbin Forest through Kingsteps is perfect. The Scots pines offer shelter from wind, rain, or snow, and the trails are great for family walks or a quick 5K run. For indoor activities, Brodie Castle is popular with local families, with the Playful Garden Café offering soft play and good coffee. Without children, both Brodie and Cawdor Castle are worth visiting, each with a unique Highland history. Art lovers should visit Browns Gallery in Inverness or Kilromach Gallery further west, known for being quieter and more intimate. These places are beloved by locals, simple, restorative, and easy to enjoy during your stay.



Brodie Castle



Eagle Brae



# Events

## **Inverness Highland Games** 11th July 2026

Held at Bught Park, this long-running gathering features heavy athletics, Highland dancing and top-tier piping contests, attracting competitors and spectators from across Scotland and overseas.

## **Belladrum Tartan Heart Festival** 30th July to 1st August 2026

Staged near Beauly, this major Highland music festival mixes headline acts with family areas, themed stages, comedy and late-night performances across a three-day programme.

## **Black Isle Show** 6th August 2026

One of the north's largest agricultural gatherings in Muir of Ord, featuring livestock judging, local food producers, craft stalls and countryside skills displays.

## **Nairn Book and Arts Festival** 29th August to 6th September 2026

A respected cultural festival filling Nairn's venues with author talks, live music, theatre and creative events over nine days at the height of late summer.

# A Warm Welcome

## *Some of Scotland's best boutique hotels*

Scotland is famous for providing visitors with a warm welcome, and perhaps the most authentic way to experience this exceptional hospitality is by staying at one of the country's top boutique hotels. These are typically venues with fewer than 100 bedrooms, many of which are independently owned by people with a passion for personalised service that you rarely find at larger establishments or chain hotels.

A list of the UK's top 50 boutique hotels, compiled last year by hospitality news outlet The Morning Advertiser, featured seven entries from Scotland, demonstrating the breadth of high-quality independent venues operating across the country.

'Scotland's boutique hotel scene has really grown up alongside a shift in how we all value experience,' says Stephen Montgomery, director of trade organisation the Scottish Hospitality Group, who believes that today's tourists are looking to immerse themselves in the local landscapes, heritage and culture. 'Guests no longer want somewhere that simply provides a bed for the night – they want a sense of place, a story and a connection to where they are.'

Despite the recent rise of the experience economy, for many independent hotel operators the past few years have been exceptionally challenging, due largely to economic factors beyond their control (increases in business rates, energy prices and employer National Insurance). 'All of these additional costs make it hard to reinvest,' says Tom Lewis, whose family-owned hotel Monachyle Mhor is one of Scotland's pioneering boutique destinations.

Lewis points out that hospitality represents about five per cent of Scotland's total economy and is crucial for tourism and local employment, particularly in rural areas. By diversifying his business with offerings ranging from farm tours to loch-side sauna sessions, Lewis hopes to continue attracting new and repeat customers who come to experience the hotel's legendary hospitality and laid-back attitude, encapsulated by his mantra: 'We don't own a table our customers can't dance on.'

Stephen Montgomery feels confident that this kind of entrepreneurial approach, and an unrelenting focus on providing the best possible guest experience, will enable Scotland's boutique hotels to weather the current challenges.

'Today's hoteliers are designers, storytellers and hosts first, and then hoteliers second,' he claims. 'They are creating real destinations, real memories and friendships, not just accommodation, and that has completely transformed expectations.'

So, whether you're looking for a swanky suite in central Edinburgh or a whisky-themed retreat in the Highlands, Scotland's boutique hotels have you covered. You can check out a few of our favourites over the following pages, and if you see something you like, why not check in and enjoy an unforgettable experience while supporting a local business? Have a nice stay!

Words: Alyn Griffiths



Lundies House, photography by Fran Mart



Links House

## Lundies House

*Tongue, Sutherland*

Part of Anders Holch Povlsen's Wildland estate, Lundies House is a haven tucked away in a far-flung corner on Scotland's northern coast. The former church manse has been expertly restored and is joined by several cosy studio rooms arranged around a cobbled courtyard. The hotel's pared-back Scandi-Scot décor contributes to its restful feel, while antique furniture and local art add personality to spaces with incredible views across the Kyle of Tongue.

## Cromlix Hotel

*Stirlingshire*

Cromlix was a passion project for local tennis legend Andy Murray and his wife Kim, who gradually transformed the former Victorian mansion they purchased in 2013 into one of Scotland's most popular rural hotels. The latest phase in its renaissance involves the creation of a new 60-cover restaurant that will immerse diners in the landscape, while a smaller fine-dining venue will allow visitors to sample some of executive head chef James Mearing's more experimental dishes.



Cromlix House



Kinloch Lodge, photography by Simon Hird

## Links House

*Royal Dornoch, Sutherland*

There's a lot to like at Links House, which offers five-star accommodation to guests seeking somewhere to rest their head while exploring the iconic North Coast 500 route or enjoying a round of links golf on the adjacent Royal Dornoch course. Fans of fine dining can get their fill at the hotel's MARA restaurant, which holds two AA rosettes for culinary excellence, while the 15 individually styled bedrooms feature curated artworks and antique furniture.

## Kinloch Lodge

*Isle of Skye*

Nestled on a hillside overlooking Loch na Dal, Kinloch Lodge is popular with tourists seeking an authentic Isle of Skye retreat. The historic lodge, converted from a family home into a hotel in the 1970s, offers an experience centred around sustainability, seasonal eating and a connection with the local environment. The beautifully appointed rooms and suites provide spectacular views, while the public spaces are perfect for curling up by the fire with a good book.



Lundies House, photography by Fran Mart





Gleneagles Townhouse

## Monachyle Mhor

*Loch Voil, Perthshire*

Welcoming, decadent and packed with personality, Monachyle Mhor helped to redefine Highland hospitality with its focus on quality food, design and service. The picturesque pink farmhouse is joined by a collection of quirky accommodation options, ranging from a converted ferry terminal to contemporary woodland cabins. The hotel's visionary owners, Tom and Lisa May Lewis, are experts in curating unforgettable experiences, including farm tours, wine safaris and apitherapy, which, in case you didn't know, is a sustainable relaxation experience based around honeybees.

## Gleneagles Townhouse

*Edinburgh*

The Gleneagles name is synonymous with high-end Scottish hospitality, so there was a feverish sense of excitement when, in 2022, the Perthshire icon announced it was opening a 33-bedroom sister hotel in Edinburgh. Gleneagles Townhouse instantly became one of the city's hottest spots for a luxurious overnight stay, while its private members' club and restaurant and bar, The Spence, have made it a popular destination for bougie brunches, quality cocktails and fine dining.



Monachyle Mhor

## Glenmorangie House

*Tain, Easter Ross*

The joyful spirit of Glenmorangie whisky informed the imaginative interior of this boutique hotel, situated just moments from the brand's distillery in the Black Isle. Russell Sage Studio was tasked with revamping Glenmorangie House in 2021, resulting in an interior defined by eclectic artworks and materials that evoke the whisky-making process. Guests can stay in one of six bedrooms based on Glenmorangie's range of whiskies, while communal spaces, such as the dedicated tasting room, help bring the brand's story to life.

## St Columba Hotel

*Iona*

Visitors making the pilgrimage to Iona are offered a warm welcome at the St Columba Hotel, which sits just a stone's throw from the Hebridean island's world-famous abbey. The hotel is owned and operated by a cooperative of locals who take pride in Iona's rich history. With stunning views across to the Isle of Mull, the grounds include a quiet garden for peace and meditation, as well as an organic garden providing fresh produce to the hotel's kitchen.



The Fife Arms



## The Fife Arms

*Braemar, Aberdeenshire*

Built in the 19th century, The Fife Arms was transformed by gallerists Iwan and Manuela Wirth into an extraordinary hotel featuring more than 16,000 artworks. Hotel guests can join a complimentary art tour to hear tales about pieces by famous names including Pablo Picasso, Lucian Freud and Louise Bourgeois, while each guest room is decorated to tell a unique story about Braemar and its history. The hotel also hosts important events in the Scottish cultural calendar, including the Braemar Literary Festival and the Festival of Fashion.

## The Torridon

*Torridon, Wester Ross*

This former hunting lodge, built by the first Earl of Lovelace, is now a quintessential Highland hotel, with its grand Victorian architecture perfectly framed by a backdrop of towering trees and rugged mountains. Daniel and Rohaise Rose-Bristow have spent the past two decades honing a five-star experience centred around comfort, heritage and a sense of refined grandeur. Guests can spend the day exploring the stunning surroundings before sitting down for dinner at the Bo & Muc Brasserie or the fine dining 1887 restaurant.



The Torridon

*'...today's tourists are looking to immerse themselves in the local landscapes, heritage and culture. Guests no longer want somewhere that simply provides a bed for the night – they want a sense of place, a story and a connection to where they are.'*





An aerial photograph of a rugged Scottish coastline. The scene features a wide, sandy beach curving along the shore, with turquoise water lapping at its edge. The surrounding land is rocky and covered in low-lying vegetation. In the distance, several small, rocky islands are scattered across the sea. The sky is filled with soft, white clouds, suggesting a bright but slightly overcast day.

# The Joy of Beachcombing

*For Laurie Goodlad, beachcombing is one of the simplest ways to feel restored, wandering Scotland's shorelines in search of sea glass, grottie buckies and rare sea beans, each find carrying a story and a journey across distant seas.*

Words: Laurie Goodlad // Photography: Simon Hird



St Ninian's Cave

There's something so restorative in the simplicity of beachcombing, especially in a world that often leaves us feeling wrung out. Beachcombing provides a cathartic escape from the day-to-day.

I've always enjoyed raking the shore for treasure tossed up on the incoming tide from distant shores. Living in the Northern Isles, we see finds from America, Greenland, Europe and beyond. I love to think about the journey each object has taken before it arrives in my sandy clutches on a windswept far-flung northern beach. It's a feeling that roots me to that place and that time and is one of the few activities that really allow you to become immersed in that moment alone.

I realised that I was not unique in my life-long passion for scouring beaches after reading George Mackay Brown's *Greenvoe*, where the reader is introduced to Timmy Folster, an eccentric local character who seemed to survive on a passion and need to beachcomb along with frequent glugs of "medicinal" meths.

*'I love to think about the journey each object has taken before it arrives in my sandy clutches.'*

We are all magpies at heart, searching for treasure and scouring the shoreline for a glittering shell or a salt-encrusted sea-worn pebble. And that's fine as long as we do so responsibly. Whenever we beachcomb, we must ask ourselves how our actions will impact the greater environment. Nine times out of ten I empty my sandy pockets onto the beach before I leave, taking only litter home with me.



Greenan Castle



Polin Beach

### *Grottie Buckies*

Scotland's shorelines are a veritable treasure trove to discover, a place where the discerning eye can pick out sea glass, precious stones, shells and most highly coveted of all the elusive grottie buckie – or cowrie shell, to give them their proper name. Commonly found along the west and north coasts of Scotland, they're believed to bring luck, prosperity and fertility to the finder. Their silken like shells have also been used as currency throughout the world in times past. Can you imagine? A currency based on gifts from the sea!

In Orkney, women will often keep one of these delicate pink shells in their purse to bring them good fortune. (I must admit to having one squirrelled away amongst the loose change and crumpled receipts.) It's funny how we still hold on to these age-old traditions.

It's important to highlight that taking a few shells from a beach would have little impact if you were the only person doing it, but as collecting becomes more popular – fuelled in part by attractive images on social media – it does become an issue from an ecological point of view. We must remember that as well as breaking down and releasing minerals and nutrients to the complex shoreline ecosystem, shells create homes for many species. Removing too many from the shoreline disrupts this fragile balance. Generally, except for the one in my purse and those my children get past me, I photograph my finds and scatter them once more for another finder – human or otherwise.

### *Sea Glass and Pottery*

Sea glass and pottery have always fascinated me. I seem to have been collecting it since I was a child, but I don't have a collection. I guess it gets collected at one end of the beach and discarded at the other before the trudge back home. The joy is always in the finding.

But where does it come from? The answer is as simple as you would imagine. Sea glass simply comes from glass, broken or otherwise, which finds its way into the sea in the same way as other marine pollution. This glass breaks down, tossed and turned by the ocean before being spat out onto the beach, ready to be discovered. Some colours are common: white, green and brown. Others are rarer, bringing added joy to their discovery: blue, red and amber.

Sea pottery is another fascinating treasure to seek out – broken pottery, porcelain, tile and earthenware. This treasure is slightly more baffling to understand than glass. Namely, how do plates, bowls and crockery find their way into the ocean in such vast quantities?

Sea pottery is beautiful; the tumbling motion of the sea deglazes, softens the edges and creates an altogether "chalkier" appearance. This process, like a giant rock tumbler, takes decades. It makes you wonder "Where did it come from?", "Who owned it?" and "What did their lives look like?"

It's most likely that the piece of sea pottery – or glass – is found close to where it was discarded, likely thrown, lost or perhaps washed ashore from the wreck of a ship. There are a thousand different reasons why it could have ended up in the sea, and yet no real answers.

For example, much of the sea pottery found around Scotland's shores dates to the 18th and 19th centuries when access to mass-produced pottery became more widely available. That said, some of the pottery found around trading areas such as Shetland may be much older, dating to the 16th and 17th centuries when Hanseatic (German) traders visited the islands. This type of earthenware pottery is known as Werra-ware and has a very distinctive style.

Sea pottery is popular in jewellery making and you can buy locally made pieces from places like Red Houss Shetland.

### *Message in a Bottle*

Nobody can admit to visiting a beach and not peering inside a bottle to check for a message sent from afar, tossed from the deck of an ancient ship or an intrepid explorer on a deserted island. The Police even wrote the song 'Message in a Bottle', inspired by the magic and intrigue of beachcombing.

Most famous for using the sea as a communications vessel were the islanders of St Kilda, who developed the "St Kilda Mail Boat". Communication from St Kilda was difficult, so remote was the island that St Kildans would put their correspondence in a waterproof container attached to a homemade buoy before launching it out to sea in the hope that someone, somewhere, would find it and forward the correspondence.

This method was developed in the late 19th century and was used as a frequent means of communication in a pre-digital age. Mail Boats washed up across Scotland and even reached as far as Shetland, following the tides and currents north. One report from around 1904 states:

'There was picked up on St Ninian's Isle, Dunrossness, a St Kilda mail bag. The "bag" is that usually employed by the St Kildians to communicate with the outside world, consisting of a sheepskin bag inflated, to which was attached a tin canister, wrapped with cotton wool and covered with cotton sewn around it and tarred, then served with stout twine. The bag was forwarded to Lerwick Post Office. The tin was found to contain two letters and eight postcards, which were duly forwarded to their destination. A shilling was also enclosed. The bag had been sent off on 21st June, so it had taken two months and one day to travel from St Kilda to Shetland.'

### *Sea Beans*

Perhaps the real holy grail of beachcombing is sea beans, a true rarity that I continuously look out for, scanning the tideline like an owl searching for prey. Sea beans are small, smooth, glossy seeds that fit in the palm of the hand. They are rich brown in colour and lightweight. Thought to bring luck, they make a remarkable journey across the North Atlantic to reach our shores. They are tropical seeds native to Central and South America and the Caribbean and are often heart-shaped, which is why they are sometimes known as "sea hearts".

Again, these appear to have a special place in our folklore, with reports of witches using them for spells. In one account from Shetland, an accused witch was reported to have been carrying a sea bean on her person when she was convicted of witchcraft in the 17th century.

When walking along the shoreline, you're never sure what you're going to find. Sometimes finds can be dangerous; perhaps explosive relics of war and conflict are discovered. As a rule of thumb, if it's military green and metal, avoid it and notify the coastguard.

On other occasions, beautiful objects are unearthed, carefully untangled from the slippery fronds of kelp and bladderwrack. And that's the beauty of these gifts from the sea: they capture the imagination and lead us to ask searching questions, opening our minds to wonder like a child. They make us consider the journey these treasures took to reach our shores and ask about the people who owned them and what their lives looked like. They root us to a time and place, and that's the real magic.



St Ninian's Cave



GEORGE BROWN & SONS ENGINEERS (ELECTRO LTD)

# Industrial Revolution

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*Brown's of Leith is leading the continued regeneration of the Shore in Edinburgh's Leith with a collaborative community for food, drink and the arts.*

Words: Rosie Steer // Photography: Paula Szturc & Richard Gaston

Leith's Shore was once a thriving industrial centre of Edinburgh. Fast forward to 2026, and it is now a bustling creative hub. At the heart of this is what Gunnar Groves-Raines, Creative Director of architecture and design practice GRAS, refers to as the "Custom Lane ecosystem", established in 2016 with a mission to support local creative practice. Custom Lane consists of several historical buildings that house thriving studios, galleries and event spaces, with notable residents including eclectic Scottish craft and design shop and gallery Bard and Edinburgh coffee stalwarts Williams & Johnson Coffee Co.

The latest addition to that ecosystem is Brown's of Leith, known by locals until now as George Brown & Sons Engineers, with its iconic blue doors. 'We always looked across the water to the Brown's

building and, like many architects, designers and artists, dreamt of what could be possible there – never really thinking we would have the opportunity to acquire the building,' says Groves-Raines.

For over 100 years the Brown family ran the metalworks there until they relocated to East Lothian in late 2024. 'Many people, including us, were sorry to see the last functioning industrial building on the Shore close its doors and we felt a deep responsibility to ensure that whatever happened next, it remained a place for making and production,' explains Groves-Raines. 'The first thing we did was convert spaces on the first floor for makers, including textile artist Hayley McCrerrick, jewellers Gina Burgess, Balint Samad and Madeleine Holloway, product designer and artist Alistair Byars and artist and architect Tim Taylor.'



Visitors will be immediately struck by the sheer scale of Brown's. 'The building has such beautiful space and light and it has been a joy to place things within a setting that can feel gallery-like or cathedral-like at times,' says Groves-Raines. Although vast, the space is warm and inviting. Overhead infrared panels cleverly circulate heat and swathes of tactile linen soften acoustics.

With an incredible history of engineering everything from bikes to wind turbine components, the building still proudly displays many markers of its industrial past. Groves-Raines describes the concrete floor throughout the main space as 'reminiscent of a Jackson Pollock painting', telling the story of years of welding, cutting and more. Other features have been left in situ, for example the (fully functional) crane above the large communal table in the main space. Groves-Raines describes the approach as 'deliberately light-touch', ensuring the building is comfortable and intimate while celebrating its story by offsetting original details with modern touches inspired by that past, such as new stainless-steel elements made in collaboration with Ritual Works. He continues: 'Many people were concerned

that this character would be lost and the building overdeveloped, so there is a sense of relief that we love the building for what it is and will protect as much of that as possible going forward.'

Although Brown's is very much intended as a multi-functional creative space, it has quickly become known for food and drink. Groves-Raines explains the rationale: 'Good food and drink are so often adjacent to ambitious creative practice – literally fuelling good conversation – so it felt like a very natural first step.'

On entering the building, visitors to Brown's first meet Haze, from the team behind Montrose and Michelin-starred Timberyard, with coffee from Edinburgh specialty roasters The Source, an excellent wine list and a menu inspired by the Spanish "conservas" restaurants with their artisanal seafood. 'We have been in dialogue with the Radford family for a long time, always admiring their work, and it has been a joy to collaborate closely with them to shape both the wider offering at Brown's and Haze specifically,' says Groves-Raines. 'Similarly, we have long been fans of Ewen at ShrimpWreck



ShrimpWreck, Brown's of Leith



*'Good food and drink are so often adjacent to ambitious creative practice – literally fuelling good conversation – so it felt like a very natural first step.'*








*'We felt a deep responsibility to ensure that whatever happened next, it remained a place for making and production.'*

and Michele at Civerinos, and a shared sense of vision meant that early informal conversations quickly evolved into meaningful, exciting and site-specific collaborations.' Finishing the current line-up is Woven, with what Groves-Raines describes as a 'progressive, modern approach to whisky'. He also shares that there are ambitions to make food and drink on site to complement the current offering at Brown's, from blending to roasting, baking to bottling. Leith is regarded by many as Edinburgh's true foodie centre and Brown's is set to be the jewel in its crown.

The main space has a bustling, marketplace feel. Along with the eclectic eateries, there are installations and events including by PYRUS Botanicals, Boom Saloon and Architecture Fringe. There are plans for future collaborative activities, including further studio and event spaces on the upper floors. 'At Custom Lane, our goal is to lower the barriers that prevent people from doing great creative things in Scotland and beyond,' says Groves-Raines. Brown's is at the forefront of the creative industry's revolution on the Shore, celebrating Leith's history while taking these important historical buildings into the future.



# The Isle of Rum is No Ordinary Isle

*Living on Rum has changed everything for Elle Duffy. What began as a brief visit became a leap into island life, where weather sets the pace, neighbours become family, and welcoming a baby has made this remote place feel full of belonging.*

Words: Elle Duffy // Photography: Simon Hird





It sits in the Inner Hebrides, nestled neatly between its three neighbouring Small Isles and commands the skyline with its rugged mountain peaks. It has just 42 residents and I am one of them.

Rum is often described as wild, dramatic and remote, all of which are true. The Cuillin rise sharply from the land, unapologetic and jagged, while red deer move through the glens and sea eagles dominate the sky. On a clear day, the sea is impossibly blue; on a wet one, the clouds hang low and theatrical. But beyond the postcard imagery, Rum is also deeply human. It is a place shaped by stories, by people who have visited and those who have chosen to stay.

I haven't always lived here. In fact, I'm still regarded as one of the newest to join the community, despite calling it home for almost a year and a half. Before now, I lived with my husband and cat in a tiny one-bed tenement flat in the heart of Glasgow city centre. We didn't know the dozen other people who lived in our building and didn't have much desire to chat more than a hasty "Hello" on the stairwell.

I first stepped foot on Rum in 2023, in bright white trainers and a thin green coat that betrayed both my mainland life and my optimism. I was working with the BBC at the time as a television producer and reporter, and had my sights set on this wild isle and its ambition to achieve Dark Sky status, an accreditation that recognises an area's lack of light pollution and incredible views of the world above.

That visit stayed with me, not because of anything dramatic that happened but because of how it felt. Rum lodged itself somewhere between curiosity and longing in the months that followed. I worked on my television piece for days after the trip and begged my editor for an increased duration – Rum isn't a place that can be summed up neatly in two minutes for broadcast. It demands so much more.

And so when an advert appeared looking for a couple to run the hostel on this magical island, our "what ifs" became something much louder. Within weeks we had left our jobs, our flat and the familiarity of city life behind. We packed up what we could, said our goodbyes and boarded the ferry, not entirely sure what awaited us on the other side.



In my husband's case, the first time he ventured onto Rum soil was after we'd signed our contracts and committed to the move of a lifetime.

Life on Rum quickly taught us to recalibrate our expectations. Where city life offered convenience and navigating logistics was simply done in the back of your mind, living on an island as remote as Rum demanded attention. We immediately realised that the weather – and by extension the ferry – dictates everything. A strong gust of wind in the wrong direction can leave you days without a link to the mainland. Food deliveries, doctor's appointments, visitors, our own work schedules – everything hinges on whether the ferry is running. You learn to plan carefully, keep cupboards stocked and accept that sometimes plans can unravel entirely.

And there is beauty in that, too. When so much of your day can depend on sea and sky, you are forced to slow down. To have hobbies that exist without the need for new things arriving on a boat, or to simply enjoy being present in a space where mainland amenities don't exist. Since living here, we've had storms so strong that dozens of leafy trees have come crashing to the ground, and guests who had planned just a night or two in our hostel have had to stay for almost a week instead. Not that they minded. We hunkered down, baked bread and shared life stories, all the while listening to the thunderous gales above.

As someone who thrived on routine on the mainland, the day-to-day adjustment took a while. There is no supermarket dash after work, no same-day delivery, no anonymity. Instead, there are shared tools, borrowed ingredients and conversations that happen because you bump into the same people repeatedly.

It was within this slower, more deliberate rhythm that we began talking about having a baby. On paper, an island with limited services and a population you can rhyme off without a second thought might not seem like the obvious place to start a family. But Rum offered something we hadn't found elsewhere: time, space and a community of friends who made it seem possible.

*"The island reminds you that those around you matter and that, for me and those who live here, beauty and peace often lie in simplicity."*





Pregnancy on the island required planning and trust in a system we had never navigated before. We fell pregnant at the tail end of February, and I spent my first busy summer season with a slight waddle and months of morning sickness. I would drive my midwife to our house for appointments to hear my baby's heartbeat and attend GP appointments aboard a tiny boat when the waves were choppy and the skies grey. Friends checked in, passed down mountains of clothes, shared advice and quietly filled gaps before we even knew they existed. There was never a sense of doing this alone. When our baby arrived, they were welcomed not just into our family but into the life of the island.

It's odd now, three months into new parenthood, thinking back to a time when our lives looked entirely different. Day-to-day life has changed dramatically, which I am sure is a truth universally experienced

by new parents no matter where they live. But for us, coupled with the continued novelty of living somewhere like Rum, it feels otherworldly. Our days begin slowly, often at 5am and after a broken, fitful sleep. And it's in those sleepy hours that I feel the island's landscape comes into its own for those of us who live here. We feed with the backdrop of vast hills out our living room window and walk by the moonlight when no amount of shushing will lull a disgruntled baby to sleep.

This is an island that asks for presence, not productivity. Life here is shaped by landscape and weather, by shared effort and community. The island reminds you that those around you matter and that, for me and those who live here, beauty and peace often lie in simplicity. It is not an easy place, but it is an honest one. And it has my heart, forever.



## WHAT TO DO ON RUM?

Part of Rum's beauty and charm comes from the way it's enjoyed by people from across the world. It's not a box-ticking exercise but a chance to explore a rugged landscape that oozes community and nature at every turn. The island is renowned for its walks, from coastal routes to challenging hill days in the rugged Rum Cuillin. Red deer wander freely across the landscape, and it's common to see golden eagles circling overhead, making even a short walk feel like a proper wilderness experience. I tend to recommend a hidden sandy slipway for swimming in the bay or, for those seeking proper Hebridean shores, the beaches at Kilmory are not to be missed.

To the south-west, Harris offers crashing waves and vast ocean views, and my current project – the renovation of an old hunting lodge. At night, the island comes into its own, offering unparalleled views of the Milky Way and stars as Scotland's only Dark Sky Sanctuary. For those seeking a place to relax amongst people, the village shop doesn't just sell food, drinks and delicious coffee, but offers a warming space to meet, drink and feel part of this tiny community.

*Elle and her husband own Rum Bunkhouse. If you're looking for a place to stay on Rum, check out [rumbunkhouse.com](http://rumbunkhouse.com)*



WALKER SLATER

[www.walkerslater.com](http://www.walkerslater.com)

# New Auld Alliance

*World-famous Viennoiserie from Lannan Bakery and provisions from Lannan Pantry bring a wee slice of France to Edinburgh's New Town.*

On a cobbled street corner in Stockbridge, Edinburgh, the mouthwatering scent of freshly baked pastries wafts from beneath a brick-red awning. The pastries are so good that they won a prestigious La Liste World Pastry Award and have earned a cult global following. Lannan Bakery and Pantry is the brainchild of Darcie Maher, who was born and raised in the Scottish Borders and says the baking scene here is part of her culture: 'I've been baking here all my life. Despite focusing on French techniques, I love making my own version of classic Scottish pastries – it's comforting and nostalgic.'

The focus is Viennoiserie, complemented by beautiful cakes, sandwiches and breads, with seasonality at the core of Maher's baked creations: 'I always start by choosing my main flavour then work my way out from there. As a rule, I'll have my star ingredient then two supporting flavours.' In spring and summer, Lannan's counter is replete with bakes filled with sunshine, such as Maher's Morello cherry, woodruff and sheep's yoghurt St Honoré choux pastry. Maher explains the careful balance of elements that make up a beautiful dessert: 'creaminess, texture, something aromatic and something acidic.'

With such delicious pastries, it's no wonder there's often a queue down the street! Luckily, you can now also place orders in advance and collect them from Lannan Pantry next door. 'We opened Lannan Pantry with the main goal of having somewhere that our customers could collect pre-ordered pastries. It's important to me that people who can't

physically queue can still access our pastries, too.' Maher's passion for this latest project is clear: 'I've always wanted to open a little delicatessen and provisions store to fill with things I love using at home. My partner Theo manages Lannan Pantry and we've worked hard to source and create things that you can't buy anywhere else in Edinburgh.' Edible wares include house-made pâté en croûte, terrine and hot raclette, French saucisson and a selection of cheeses you won't find anywhere else in Edinburgh.

Lannan Pantry also stocks all manner of practical but beautiful homewares curated with care. Maher's favourite is their selection of exclusive Savoyard Hermann pottery, which comes from a tiny pottery in the French Alps near where Theo spent his childhood: 'Hermann no longer sells his pottery wholesale as he's unable to produce as much now he's older. This makes us the only shop in the world, apart from his own, that sells his adored work.'

Maher's unique eye carries over into Lannan's award-winning interior design (she won a Gold Award in the Scottish Design Awards for the bakery's interior design). 'When I designed Lannan I chose things that I love and that have meaning to me,' she says. 'The bakery is filled with my mother's artwork and my grandmother's china sits proudly on the shelf above the ovens.' In a fast-paced world with changing food trends, Lannan feels the antithesis, capturing an authentic feeling of delicious cosiness that visitors won't forget.



# Spelt Jammies

I love these biscuits. This is a recipe I often make at home. Despite being very quick and easy, they always look beautiful. The whipped shortbread is tender and the jam looks like a glossy little jewel in the centre. For this recipe I've used my raspberry and cardamom jam, but you can use any flavour you like.

## Ingredients

*Makes 20 biscuits*

250g butter, very soft  
70g icing sugar, sifted  
200g plain flour  
25g spelt flour  
25g cornflour  
5g salt  
5g vanilla paste  
100g raspberry and cardamom jam, or jam of your choice

## Method

Preheat the oven to 180°C (fan).

Beat the butter and icing sugar in a stand mixer with the paddle attachment until very light and fluffy.

Add the remaining ingredients and mix until fully incorporated.

Place the mixture in a piping bag fitted with a medium French tip nozzle.

Pipe onto a tray lined with parchment paper into 5cm discs, making sure there's no hole in the middle and leaving space between them as they'll spread slightly.

Using a melon baller, dip it into boiling water and make a small indentation in the centre of each biscuit, dipping and drying it between each biscuit. If you don't have a melon baller, you can dip your finger in cold water instead.

Fill the indentation with jam.

Bake for 20 minutes, until the edges are lightly golden brown.

Allow the biscuits to cool fully before eating.



# Pressed Flower Photo Frame

with Rosie Steer, author of *Slow Seasons*

Preserve the essence of spring and summer with this pressed flower craft

Pressing flowers is a simple but effective way to preserve the beauty of nature in spring and summer and enjoy your favourite blooms all year round. Choose flowers to complement the colours and mood of the photo you are framing. Provided you have the landowner's permission, you could even press flowers or foliage gathered sparingly from the same location as the photograph. Flat or delicate flowers such as violas and daisies or foliage such as ferns lend themselves best to pressing. The aim is to remove the moisture from the flower to preserve it, so bear in mind the more moisture in the flower and the thicker its petals, the longer it will take to dry.





### Equipment

Gathered flowers  
Stack of heavy books or a flower press  
Greaseproof paper or kitchen paper  
Newspaper or a tea towel  
10 x 15cm photo frame with photo mount  
Photograph or artwork  
Acid-free glue (matt finish)  
Paintbrush

### Method

First, press your flowers. Either follow the instructions on your flower press or open your first book roughly in the middle, place a sheet of greaseproof or kitchen paper on the right-hand page, then place the flowers face down on top of the paper. Make sure they do not overlap.

Place another piece of paper on top, then close the book carefully. Add more books on top so the flowers are weighed down firmly, then leave them for 2–3 weeks to dry in a warm, dry place.

To decorate your frame, remove the mount from inside it. Place the mount topside up on newspaper or a tea towel to protect your work surface.

Remove the flowers from their press or stack of books, making sure they are fully dry.

Lay out your design on the photo mount, considering the different colours and sizes of the flowers – for example, alternating bigger and smaller flowers or varying colours.

Once you are happy with your design, stick your flowers in place with a little glue brushed onto their undersides, pressing each firmly into place. Once this has dried, apply a thin layer of glue over the mount using your brush to seal the design.

Allow the mount to dry fully before re-inserting it into the frame, then add your photograph or artwork and place the frame in pride of place.



### SEASONAL NOTES

*As the birdsong grows and daylight increases, the flower seasons begin in earnest in Scotland. April sees the arrival of daffodils, with primroses blooming alongside wild garlic at their peak in damp woodlands. May brings blossom and bluebells – a sight to behold in their swathes. As summer peaks with the Solstice, Litha, in late June, Scotland blooms with the scent of roses and oxeye daisies sway in meadows. By July, cosmos are in full flush and hydrangeas have started to flower, followed by the late summer show of beautiful dahlias, cheery sunflowers and bold rudbeckias in gardens as purple heather begins to fill the hillsides.*



# Go Your Own Way

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*Empowering your micro-adventure off the beaten track.*

Words: Rachel Rowley

*Adventures don't have to be extreme or adrenaline-fuelled; in fact the team at Beyond Adventure finds purpose in helping individuals, couples and groups reconnect to the natural world and enjoy more time outdoors. This might be amongst white water and remote beauty or more about taking in spectacular views and calm lochs. You can shape your adventure however you choose.*

Beyond Adventure was established in 1998 and has been a leader in paddle sports instruction, expeditions and guiding ever since. Current MD Ross Dempster took over the business in 2018 to continue this passionate and professional work, enthusing and guiding others to learn new skills, feel empowered and have more fun outdoors. His business and team do this through school trips and expeditions such as the Duke of Edinburgh programme, family e-bike outings, and sunset wildlife safaris in partnership with Perthshire Wildlife, where ospreys, kingfishers,

red deer and occasional otters and beavers can be spotted. They also run professional canoeing and coaching courses and micro-adventures. Ross is also involved with Tayside Mountain Rescue as a volunteer, Board Member of Healthiest Town, regular mountain biker and past player and current coach for Aberfeldy RFC. To say he loves his life in Big Tree Country is not an understatement!

Beyond Adventure 24-hour micro-adventures offer accessible ways to explore something new without overwhelm. They are always delivered with the assurance of a friendly and highly experienced team who will guide you to create the kind of trip you dream of but never quite get around to.

Scotland is a land of mountains and hills, rivers and lochs, big skies and big trees; exploring the variation of landscape and surroundings can happen in any county but we're going to Perthshire, the heart of the country and where Beyond Adventure is based. Getting beyond a classic road trip is so



*'We really believe everyone should have the opportunity to experience what wild beauty feels like...'*

important for a deeper connection to nature. Once outside you can feel the elements, breathe the air, see the unfiltered light and colours and witness wildlife in a truer way. In order to connect more successfully with the outdoors and yourself, the team recommends disconnecting from day to day life and ideally devices as much as possible for the 24 hours (you can leave your car and your phone safely at the base if that helps)!

Through initial conversations and questions that help the team get to know you, decisions are made together. You might opt for a river excursion – a chance to paddle, canoe or kayak the River Tay, Scotland's longest river at 117 miles long, with the largest volume of water of any river in the UK. This includes a one night camp on a secret island, a three course dinner followed by an evening of stories and stars by the fire.

Or if you prefer to be amongst the Munros, Glen Lyon is home to the classic “Glen Lyon horseshoe”



- Carn Gorm (meaning blue cairn or hill), Meall Garbh (rough rounded hill), Carn Mairg (Hill of sorrow) and Meall na Aighean (hill of the heifers). You could climb or explore Loch Daimh (loch of the stag) and realise for yourself that there is truth in Tolkien's words - "not all who wander are lost". This trip would also include a wild camp but without really having to pack or plan merely trusting your guide that everything is in its right place. Imagine breakfast (typically campfire bacon rolls, pancakes or French toast ) in the first light, cold but contented, rested and refreshed.

Ross says: "The main idea behind a micro-adventure is to really encourage people to stop talking and get outside and do it. We often lose our innate sense of confidence and adventure as we grow older. Many clients have seen something "epic" on YouTube or shared a reel with a friend on Instagram, momentarily picturing themselves there. We can make it happen. We manage expectations, plan and organise the details, pack the kit and guide our guests so all they have to do is show up, relax and have fun!"

The word bespoke is overused, but Team Beyond Adventure takes time to listen, get to know you and create a trip accordingly. Sometimes doing less is the key to enhancing confidence and enjoyment especially when trying something new. For any Beyond Adventure trips there is an element of true wilderness but in an accessible and safe way which feels exciting but never daunting. This doesn't mean it's never challenging but you decide and as your guide will be with you, their experience allows them full flexibility to shape the time according to any variables from weather to whim.

Ross continues: "Our trips are manageable and created without compromise. We really believe everyone should have the opportunity to experience what wild beauty feels like and in Scotland we are blessed that this is never really more than a couple of hours away and often less than that. Getting out on the water or up a hill should be possible for most of us and we're satisfied it's a job well done when folk

feel confident enough to take future adventures on their own or with their families (though they often come back for more). We want to share everything an adventure can be and make it really easy. You'll be looked after every step of the way, we'll pack, drive, guide, cook so your focus isn't on the stress of getting there, car Jenga or family dynamics but firmly on having the best experience."

Beyondadventure.co.uk

Instagram @beyondadventureuk

## THE KEY TO OUTDOOR ADVENTURE SUCCESS

### Safety first

*A constant process but lots of this is in the planning and preparation. An experienced guide can help until you establish confidence.*

### Learning and knowledge

*Often this looks like new skills from hill navigation to tandem paddle skills or bushcraft but sometimes by osmosis - our guests and guides share local and professional knowledge throughout their time together.*

### Fun and enjoyment over endurance

*Smiles whatever the weather!*

Hidden Scotland Recommends

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PLACES TO STAY  
*this spring & summer*

Lundies House, photography by Fran Mart

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Fife  
[lindores.co.uk](http://lindores.co.uk)

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Argyll  
[stormhouse.uk](http://stormhouse.uk)

**Dun Aluinn**  
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[the-lodge-scotland.com](http://the-lodge-scotland.com)

**Love Pittenweem**  
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**The Black Shed**  
Isle of Skye  
[blackshed.co.uk](http://blackshed.co.uk)

**The Dunvegan**  
Isle of Skye  
[thedunvegan.com](http://thedunvegan.com)

**Newhall Mains**  
Black Isle  
[newhall-mains.com](http://newhall-mains.com)

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**Airdit**  
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[airdit.co.uk](http://airdit.co.uk)

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[glenhurichlodge.com](http://glenhurichlodge.com)

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**Darroch Learg**  
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**The Scullery**  
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**Boath Cabin**  
Nairn  
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**Whitehill Farm House**  
Perthshire  
[whitehillfarmhouse.co.uk](http://whitehillfarmhouse.co.uk)

**Borradill**  
Ardrnamurchan  
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**A Highland Life**  
Perthshire  
[ahighlandlife.com](http://ahighlandlife.com)

**Atholl Estates**  
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**The Hollies**  
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**Rhuroin**  
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[rhuroin.com](http://rhuroin.com)



Whitehill Farm House



Gairnshiel Lodge



Dun Aluinn



The Lookout

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Ayrshire  
[tallihouse.com](http://tallihouse.com)

**The Drury**  
Oban  
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**Tigh an Tobair**  
Isle of Skye  
[boutique-retreats.co.uk](http://boutique-retreats.co.uk)

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Near Glasgow  
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Wester Ross  
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**The Scott Hotel**  
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[uoecollection.com](http://uoecollection.com)

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**Mayen Estate**  
Banffshire  
[mayenestate.com](http://mayenestate.com)

**Harlosh**  
Isle of Skye  
[harlosh.co](http://harlosh.co)

**WildLand**  
Various  
[wildland.scot](http://wildland.scot)

**Dunsinnan**  
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[dunsinnan.com](http://dunsinnan.com)

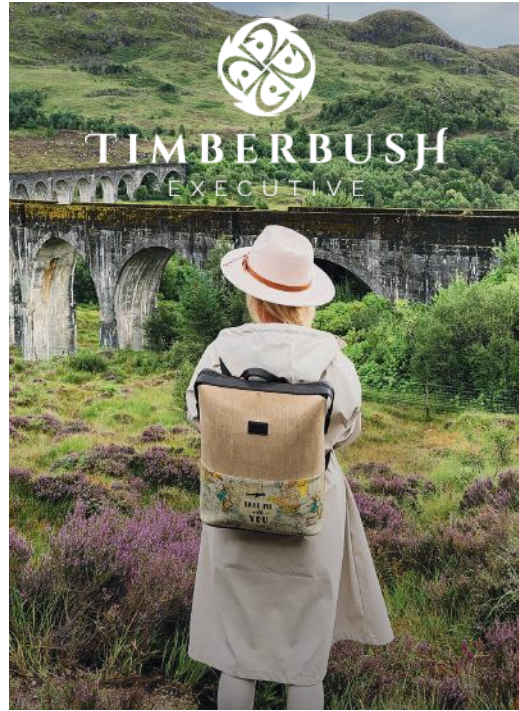
**Kinloch Lodge**  
Isle of Skye  
[kinloch-lodge.co.uk](http://kinloch-lodge.co.uk)

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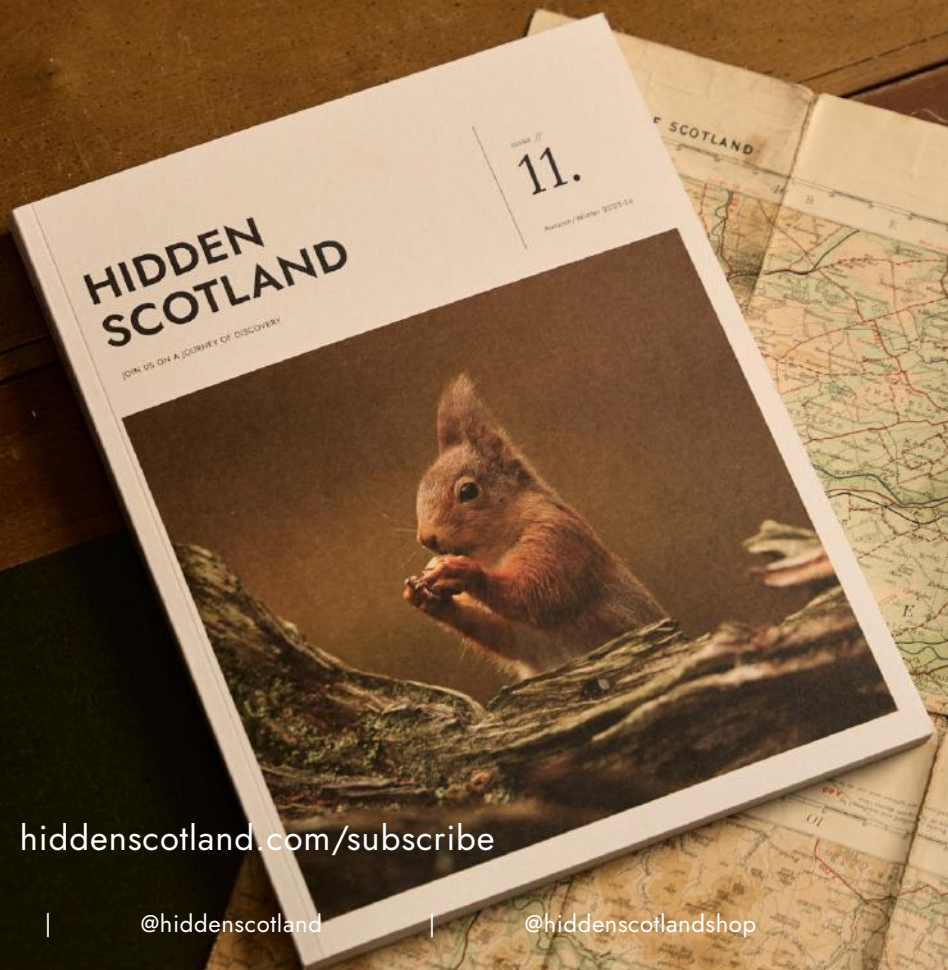


Dewar's Aberfeldy Distillery  
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