



Scottish Highlands Tour Sample Itinerary

Most trips last from 1 to 7 days

This is a 2 week tour departing from Edinburgh, or a predetermined pickup place.

Day 1

Pick up at 9.00am, and leave Edinburgh, heading towards Stirling. There should be enough time to visit the Wallace Monument and Stirling Castle, before we continue to Loch Lomond, and follow its western shoreline to Crianlarich and Tyndrum, where we will then make a diversion to cross Rannoch Moor, the biggest desert (wet!) in Britain.

If time permits, we can do a detour to Glen Etive, before arriving at the Atlantic after descending through Glencoe. A short drive to Oban from here, with spectacular views of islands and mountains as we progress, and, if the tide is active...we will get a glimpse of the "Falls of Lora"

Day 2

There are a number of options for a day spent around Oban, and we can be flexible over your choice depending on weather etc. Just a couple of suggestions...

Take one of many boat trips which operate from Oban. Staffa and Fingal's Cave are possibly the biggest attractions as far as this type of trip is concerned...Staffa is spectacular, with the same hexagonal basalt columns as the Giants Causeway in Northern Ireland, which is very close at this point. This could also be an option for the day on Mull.

There are also a number of wildlife cruises in speedboats, one of these could also get you a look at the Corryvreckan Whirlpool, which is the second biggest in the world, and is an exciting sea journey with potential views of seals, whales, dolphins, otters....and more seabirds than you can count!

Drive to Seil island via the "Bridge over the Atlantic". This is a lovely drive with a short ferry ride to Easdale island at the end. Easdale is a thriving community of artisans, craftspeople etc, who bought the island a few decades ago, and are now enjoying an (periodic) idyllic existence! This is a fascinating place, the traditional industry here was slate quarrying, from the rock which the island is made of. This has left huge, deep, and now sea filled pools between the cliffs, with beautiful views out to sea. There is also an excellent pub serving great seafood en route for lunch, right next to the very picturesque bridge which spans a narrow channel of the Atlantic, entitling Seil to be an island!

There are also an infinite amount of walks within the area, and I'm quite happy to spend the day on foot, and the duration/steepness etc, is entirely up to you both!

Lots of seafood restaurants with great menus in Oban...perfect for dinner!

Day 3

Reasonably early crossing to Craignure Bay on Mull. This is a relatively short trip of around 45 mins, and will put us on the southern coast of Mull, which means there are a number of possibilities before we arrive at Glengorm Castle, which is on the northern tip of the island.

We could drive to Fionnphort and visit Iona....I'm sure this is already on your radar, so the other option is to save this for the following day, we could walk around the island, which has a beautiful coastline in addition to visiting the Abbey. Iona is only about a mile and a half across and 3 miles in length, with lots of amazing beaches and wildlife to explore.

We could also visit Ulva, which is another easily accessible island with lots of wildlife, including red deer, and potentially otters, sea eagles, golden eagles, seals, dolphins, etc etc.

If you were feeling particularly energetic, we could climb Ben More, which is the highest point on Mull. At 3192', it is the only "Munro" on any of the islands apart from Skye..

Other options include a look at some of Mull's beautiful coastline, from stunning beaches, to a rugged cliff walk to a brilliant example of a fossilised tree, set in the volcanic cliffs.

Or... a leisurely drive to Tobermory for lunch, taking in the scenery, with an exploration of the extremely pretty town and its immediate surroundings, before heading to Glengorm Castle (which I'm dying to get a sneaky look at!)

Day 4

I don't want to be too definitive over this day, as obviously all of the options for the previous day are applicable. Beyond those which I have already mentioned there are lots more, so it's probably more important to decide what type of day you would like...eg. if we climbed Ben More on day 3 you may opt for a slightly more relaxing day!

If the weather was good, you might like a boat trip from Tobermory, these would include wildlife safaris, trips to other islands etc.

Walking options will always exist where we are staying more than one night, on Mull this could be coastal walking or reasonably flat walking, as well as the more challenging variety.

Finally, I think it's worth pointing out that Mull is all about its stunning coastline and scenery, and is a very wild island, so if you wanted to spend all day exploring various areas of the island, with multiple stops for photography etc, then that's fine too!

I'm sure you've done loads of research and have got some good ideas already, check out <http://www.isle-of-mull.net/attractions/beaches/kilvickeon-beach/> and <http://www.welcometoiona.com/iona-activities/beaches/>

Day 5

Hopefully an early start today, as we have a lot to fit in before we reach the ferry at Mallaig. We take the smaller ferry from Tobermory to the Ardnamurchan peninsular, which is the most westerly point on the British mainland. We will take a quick look at the lighthouse, and also stunning Sanna Bay with its beautiful beach, before backtracking and heading east, to take us along the shores of Loch Sunart to Salen, and then north through the Morven region, with fantastic views of Eigg, Rhum and Skye throughout. Photo stops abound through this journey, so we will need a fair while to get to Mallaig.

We should dive inland at Lochailort, to visit Glenfinnan, where Bonnie Prince Charlie raised his Standard at the onset of the '45 rebellion.... and where the "Harry Potter" viaduct is located!

Returning to the coast, the last stretch to Mallaig will take us past some of the most amazing white sand beaches you will see anywhere outside the Caribbean, with spectacular views out to sea. This area of the west coast is justifiably famed for its sunsets, often framed by one of the islands. We will also pass Morar, which has the deepest freshwater lake (loch) in Europe,

connected to the Atlantic by Britain's shortest river, which cascades into the river estuary which is surrounded by blinding white quartzite sand and a turquoise sea....

On to Mallaig for the 4pm ferry, which takes around 45 mins to reach Armadale on Skye. The journey through Skye to Portree is spectacular, and will whet your appetite for the next couple of days. The Sleat peninsular, where we land, is the most gentle and wooded part of the island, it has a bedrock which includes limestone, so provides a more lush and sheltered aspect...it's known as the "garden of Skye"

Once we approach Broadford however, everything changes, and the stunning views of both the Red and Black Cuillin start to dominate the skyline, and once past Broadford, the scenery turns to naked rock, spectacular mountains and waterfalls inland, and continuous views of sea and islands in the other direction, as we head north to Portree.

Days 6 and 7

As far as the next two days are concerned, I would say that the best approach is simply to see as much as possible, and be guided by the weather as to which of the million places to see become your priority. I think I've said this to you before, the huge amount of publicity, photos and marketing Skye receives has produced a self-supporting list of iconic places and views to visit which tend to be positioned along the few main roads, and are therefore accessible to tour buses....

That said, there are plenty of these places which are definitely worth a visit, especially in October when the mass tourism has died back a bit, and you don't have to photograph the back of people's heads!

So....I have no doubt that you have already formed a fair idea of some of the "must see" locations, which is absolutely fine, I'm sure we can pick most, if not all of them off.

Generally, it's probably best to split the two days into the northern and southern parts of the island, though we will have time to look at the route from Portree to Kyleakin in a bit more detail on our way to Plockton...or pick off anything you have missed.

Possibilities and options are many and various, and range from some of the most challenging mountain hikes in Britain, to coastal clifftop walks, Dunvegan Castle and grounds, pretty little wooded glens, huge waterfalls, various walks of all lengths around the Old man of Storr and the Quiraing....Talisker distillery, wildlife spotting....etc. etc, all set in spectacular volcanic scenery with photo opportunities around every corner!

If you want me to go into more detail about anywhere you may have read about, then let me know, but I think I can guarantee a packed itinerary on both these days!

Day 8

This morning is an opportunity to look at anything still outstanding on your wishlist on the way to Kyleakin and the Skye Bridge, which replaced the ferry service 20 odd years ago.

Interestingly, the bridge actually goes across a small island in the middle of the crossing, which is Eilean Ban, or White Island. It was bought by a man called Gavin Maxwell, with the intention of turning it into a native wildlife sanctuary. If you want to see some of the local scenery and get some atmosphere of the area, see if you can locate the film and the book "Ring of Bright Water", written by Maxwell, and documenting his autobiography about the years he moved into an isolated cottage on the remote west coast with a pet otter....and his story of befriending and studying the wild otter population of the area. If this perks your interest, we can actually stop on the island, which has been turned into a museum of Maxwell's life.

On to the iconic Eilean Donan Castle, probably the most photographed castle in the whole of Scotland, and then to Plockton, which is one of the prettiest traditional fishing villages in the Western Highlands. Beautifully situated, with stunning views across Loch Carron, a great place to stay, and the hotel serves excellent fresh seafood!

Day 9

Today's route to Gairloch takes us through majestic mountain and coastal scenery, with many options to get out of the car and have a walk....

After circumnavigating Loch Carron, we drive through the village of the same name (the longest in Scotland!), and then climb over the hills to Loch Kishorn, where we can go over the Bealach na Ba (Pass of the cattle), to Applecross, a pretty village on the coast, nestling under the mountains. The rock type from this point changes, so that we now have an ancient bedrock which is 3 billion years old, with mountains of horizontal layers of Torridonian sandstone rising from it...providing stunning scenery...different again!

We then continue to Shieldaig, and follow the length of Loch Torridon, a fjord which bites deep into the heart of these Torridonian mountains. We will then travel through Glen Torridon, running below Liathach and Beinn Eighe, two of Scotland's most impressive mountains.

On to the shores of Loch Maree, with its wooded islands and shores cloaked in one of the largest remaining areas of the ancient Caledonian Forest, with veteran Scots pines and other hardwood trees in a completely natural environment.

2 walks which are very achievable from here are the Nature walk or the Mountain trail (45 mins or 3-4 hours), which are set in the forest.

Just before Gairloch is the fishing village of Bادهchro, where the Bادهchro Inn serves amazing Langoustines, and where we could drive down to Red Point, a lovely beach with lovely views out to Skye and even the Outer Hebrides on a clear day.

Day 10

Today is a traverse of the North West Highlands, so we'll be starting the day on the Atlantic coast, and ending up on the North Sea. North first, again through stunning coastal and mountain scenery, stopping at the Corrieshalloch Gorge, and passing Loch Ewe and beautiful Gruinard bay, in the shadow of An Teallach, one of my favourite Scottish mountains. Additionally, Gruinard Island, just offshore, was used to test Anthrax toxins during the second world war...needless to say, it's completely safe now!

On to Ullapool, and then north again to Ledmore, with the World Geopark of Assynt and Coigach visible to the west. Then east and south to Golspie, and to Dunrobin Castle (the last entry is at 4pm, and it closes at 4.30, so we will have to be careful with the amount of time we stop en route!)

On to Inverness for the night.

Day 11

Quick look at what Inverness has to offer, and then south towards Pitlochry. This is a route with many options to stop along the way. We can visit Culloden... and the Outlander standing stones (Clava), visit Aviemore and Scotland's premier skiing resort! There is a beautiful walk around Loch an Eilean, through the biggest preserved section of the Caledonian Pine Forest, this is about 4 miles...on the flat... and gives a really good impression of what the Cairngorms are all about.

We can also drive up to the ski area, and if the weather is good, take the funicular railway to the top of Cairn Gorm and have a coffee in the highest Starbucks in Britain!! Pitlochry in time for dinner...

Day 12 and 13

The next two days will be spent in Highland Perthshire, which offers a mix of mountains, lochs, glens, rural farmland, pretty villages, gardens and big rivers. As with so much of the Highlands, your options here are likely to be conditioned by the weather, but there are lots of castles, towns, villages...and distilleries to satisfy anyone, even if it is raining! Just to name a few... Any number of achievable hills which you might like to walk up.

Some of the most interesting castles/Palaces in the Highlands, eg Blair Castle, Castle Menzies, Scone Palace, Drummond Castle).

Scenic drives to stunning viewpoints (Queen's View, Loch Tay, Glen Lyon).

Lots of amazing attractions...Fortingall (a yew tree 5000 years old, and the reputed birthplace of Pontius Pilate), Dunkeld and Birnam, setting for Macbeth and the ecclesiastical capital of Scotland in the 13th century. Dunkeld is beautiful, and deserves an hour or more.

There are lots more, including the Hermitage, Falls of Bruar,(House of Bruar!!) Birks of Aberfeldy, Pitlochry fish ladder, but we can decide on the day as everything is relatively close here.

Day 14

Return to Edinburgh via loch Leven and Falkland Palace, if you would like...I think Falkland is the best of the Royal Palaces, and has beautiful rooms and gardens. This is the favourite palace of Mary Queen of Scots, and you can see why! I would highly recommend it.

Also, we will stop at South Queensferry for the view of the 3 bridges over the Forth, which now span 3 centuries. Have dinner in the Hawes Inn, where Robert Louis Stevenson wrote "Kidnapped", before I drop you exhausted at your hotel!!