

Chapter 11

THE NORTHERN  
HIGHLANDS AND  
THE WESTERN ISLES

11

Updated by  
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 Sights

★★★★☆

 Restaurants

★★★★☆

 Hotels

★★★★☆

 Shopping

★★★★☆

 Nightlife

★★★★☆

# WELCOME TO THE NORTHERN HIGHLANDS AND THE WESTERN ISLES

## TOP REASONS TO GO

★ **Isle of Skye:** Scotland in miniature, the landscape of Skye ranges from the lush, undulating hills and coastal tracks of Sleat to the deep glens and saw-toothed peaks of the Cuillin Mountains. Farther north are stunning geological features like the Old Man of Storr and Kilt Rock.

★ **Seafood:** Sample fresh seafood like Bracadale crab, Dunvegan Bay langoustines, and Sconser king scallops, as well as the local smoked salmon, lobster, and oysters.

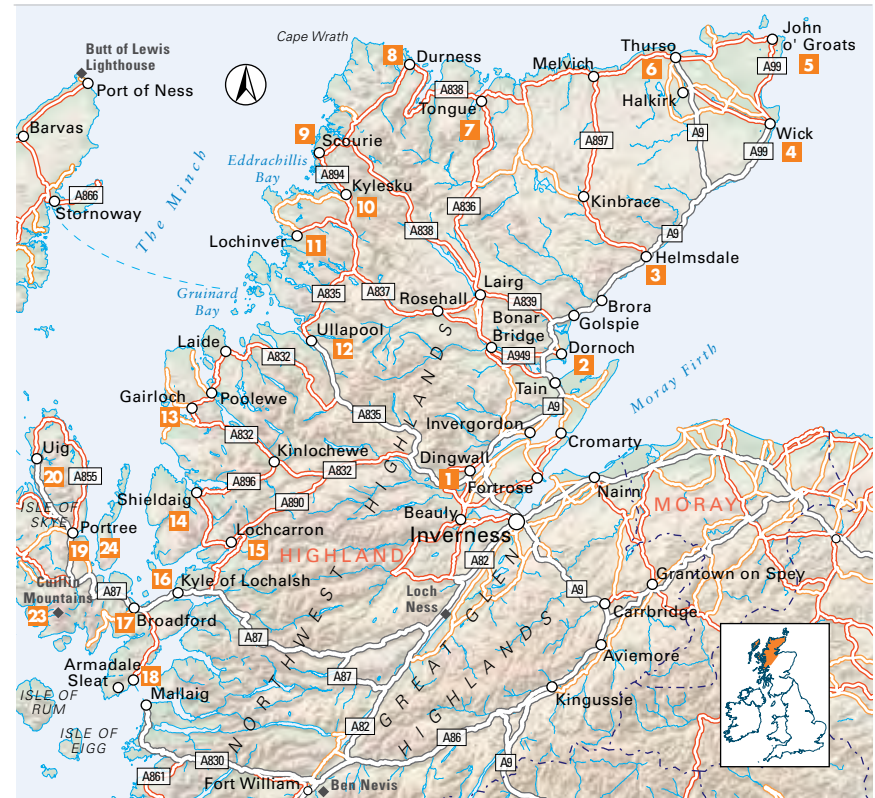
★ **Coastal walks:** There are no wilder places in Britain to enjoy an invigorating coastal walk than on the islands of the Uists, Lewis, and Harris. Expect vast swaths of golden sand set against blue bays, or—when the weather is rough—giant waves crashing against the rocks.

★ **Wildlife viewing:** Seals, deer, otters, dolphins, and an abundance of birdlife can be seen throughout the Northern Highlands and Western Isles. Don't miss a boating foray to the Handa Island bird reserve, off Scourie.

- 1 Dingwall.** A common first stop on any journey north.
- 2 Dornoch.** Famed for its golf courses.
- 3 Helmsdale.** A fishing village shaped by Vikings.
- 4 Wick.** Famed for its herring and whisky.
- 5 John O'Groats.** Britain's northeastern tip.
- 6 Thurso.** The north coast's biggest town.
- 7 Tongue.** Home to a dramatic ruined castle.
- 8 Durness.** A remote village.
- 9 Scourie.** An ideal base for exploring Handa Island.
- 10 Kylesku.** A tiny fishing hamlet with Britain's highest waterfall.
- 11 Lochinver.** A pretty shoreside community.
- 12 Ullapool.** A charming base for ferrying to Lewis and Harris.
- 13 Gairloch.** Peaceful, picturesque, and pleasantly warm.
- 14 Shieldaig.** A lovely lochside village.
- 15 Lochcarron.** Lush green mountains and a shimmering blue loch.
- 16 Kyle of Lochalsh.** The gateway to Skye.



- 17 Broadford.** One of Skye's main towns.
- 18 Armadale.** The ferry gateway to Sleat, Skye's southernmost peninsula.
- 19 Portree.** Skye's main hub.
- 20 Trotternish Peninsula.** Skye's dramatic north, home to Quiraing, Kilt Rock, and the Old Man of Storr.



- 21 Watnish Peninsula.** Skye's northwestern corner, home to crofting communities and coastal views.
- 22 Glendale.** A rocky coastline with dramatic castles and Skye's best restaurant.
- 23 Glen Brittle and the Cuillin Mountains.** An impossibly green, fairy tale valley.
- 24 Isle of Raasay.** Skye's little brother with striking scenery.
- 25 Isle of Lewis.** Home to Bronze Age standing stones, Iron Age towers, and Victorian blackhouses.
- 26 Isle of Harris.** Known for spectacular beaches and handwoven tweed.
- 27 St. Kilda.** A unique day trip to experience colossal cliffs and swooping seabirds.
- 28 North Uist.** A hidden gem with remarkable birdlife and historic ruins.
- 29 South Uist.** An island steeped in royal history.

## Wild and remote, the Northern Highlands and the Western Isles of Scotland have a timeless grandeur. Dramatic cliffs, long beaches, and craggy mountains that rise up out of moorland like islands in a sea heighten the romance and mystery.

Well-preserved Eilean Donan Castle marks a kind of gateway to the Isle of Skye, famous for the brooding Cuillin Mountains and forever associated with Bonnie Prince Charlie. Jurassic-era sites, prehistoric ruins, crumbling castles, and abandoned crofts (small farms) compress the whole span of history in the islands.

The Northern Highlands is a region where roads hug the coast, dipping down toward beaches and back up for stunning views over the clear ocean, across to the dramatic mountains, or along stunning heather moorland. These twisted, undulating roads—many of them single-track—demand that you shift down a gear, pause to let others pass, and take the time to do less and experience more of the rough-hewn beauty. If you're lucky, you may see a puffin fishing below the cliffs, an eagle swooping for a hare, or perhaps even a pod of dolphins or whales swimming off the coast. Adorable Highland coos (cows) are sure to make an appearance, too.

Sutherland was once the southern land belonging to the Vikings, and some names reflect this. Cape Wrath got its name from the Viking word *hvarth*, meaning “turning point,” and Suilven translates as “pillar.” The Isle of Skye and the Outer Hebrides are referred to as the Western Isles, and remain the stronghold of the

Gaelic language. Skye is often called Scotland in miniature because the terrain shifts from lush valleys in the south to the rugged girdle of the Cuillin Mountains and then to the steep cliffs that define the northern coast. A short ferry journey away, the moody island of Lewis and Harris lays claim to the brilliant golden sands of Luskentyre and incredible prehistoric sites, from the lunar-aligned Calanais Standing Stones to the Iron Age Doune Broch.

Depending on the weather, a trip to the Northern Highlands and the Western Isles can feel like a tropical getaway or a blustery, rain-drenched holiday. Just remember: “There’s no such thing as bad weather, just inappropriate clothing.”

### MAJOR REGIONS

**The Northern Landscapes.** The northernmost part of Scotland, from Inverness all the way up to John O’Groats in the east and Cape Wrath in the west, has some of the most distinctive mountain profiles and coastal stretches in all of Scotland. The rim roads around the wilds of Durness overlook rocky shores, and the long beaches are as dramatic as the awe-inspiring and desolate cross-country routes like Destitution Road in Wester Ross. To explore these landscapes most thoroughly, you should travel by car. You’ll want to explore Stoer Point Lighthouse,

the beaches north of Lochinver, and spectacular islandlike hills such as Suilven. Follow the North Coast 500 loop from Inverness to see the very best of the region. If you head counterclockwise up the east coast, along the north coast, and down the west coast, the spectacular landscape gets more and more dramatic at every turn. Travel clockwise, and you might find the east coast down from John O’Groats feels a bit anticlimactic.

**Torricon.** Located far to the west of Scotland, Torricon has a grand, rugged, and wild air that feels especially remote, yet it is only an hour’s drive from Inverness before you reach Kinlochewe, near the east end of Glen Torricon. It has cool glens, mirrorlike lochs, impressive mountains, and tantalizing glimpses across to the Isle of Skye. The western side is equally spectacular, with walking trails and mountain panoramas galore. Torricon is a wonderful place to visit if you want to tackle one of the legendary peaks here—Beinn Alligin, Liathach, and Beinn Eighe—or if you enjoy outdoor activities like kayaking, climbing, or mountain biking. The A890, which runs from the A832 into the heart of Torricon, is a single-lane road in some stretches, with plenty of open vistas across the deserted heart of northern Scotland. Other single-track roads lead to Glen Torricon and to light-houses on sea-lashed headlands.

**Isle of Skye.** Scotland’s most famous island is home to the 11 peaks of the Cuillin Mountains, the quiet gardens of Sleat, and the dramatic peninsulas of Waternish and Trotternish. You can take a day trip to Skye, but it’s worth spending a few days exploring its shores if you can.

**The Outer Hebrides.** The Outer Hebrides—the Western Isles in common parlance—stretch about 130 miles from end to end and lie roughly 50 miles from the Scottish mainland. This splintered archipelago extends from the Butt of Lewis in the north (no giggling) to Barra Head in the south, whose lighthouse has

the greatest arc of visibility in the world. In the Hebrides clouds cling to the hills, and rain comes in squalls. Any trip here requires protection from the weather and a conviction that a great holiday does not require constant sunshine.

It may contain two areas called isles, but it is just one single island that makes up the isles of Lewis and Harris. The island is the third largest in the United Kingdom, in fact, after Britain and Ireland. Lewis and Harris is the term to describe the island as a whole, but people also talk about the isles individually. Lewis by itself refers to the northern two-thirds of the island, while Harris represents the southern third. The island’s only major town, Stornoway, is on a nearly landlocked harbor on the east coast of Lewis, and is the most convenient starting point for a driving tour of Lewis and Harris (assuming you arrive, like most visitors, by ferry from the mainland or by plane). The island has some fine historic attractions, including the Calanais Standing Stones—a truly magical glimpse of an ancient civilization—as well as an abundance of natural beauty. It’s also the jumping-off point for a day trip to the unique isolated archipelago of St. Kilda.

Just south of the Sound of Harris is the Isle of North Uist, rich in monoliths, chambered cairns, and other reminders of a prehistoric past. Benbecula, sandwiched between North and South Uist, is in fact less bare and neglected-looking than its bigger neighbors to the north. The Isle of South Uist, once a refuge of the old Catholic faith, is dotted with ruined forts and chapels; in summer its wild gardens burst with alpine and rock plants. Eriskay Island and a scattering of islets almost block the 6-mile strait between South Uist and Barra, an island you can walk across in an hour. Harris tweed is available at many outlets on the islands, including some of the weavers’ homes; keep an eye out for signs directing you to weavers’ workshops. Sunday



on the islands is observed as a day of rest, and nearly all shops and visitor attractions are closed. This includes most restaurants, with the exception of some island hotels, so make dinner plans in advance.

## Planning

### When to Go

The Northern Highlands and islands are best seen from May to September. The earlier in the spring or later in the fall you go, the greater the chances of your encountering the elements in their extreme form, and the fewer attractions and accommodations you will find open (even Skye closes down almost completely by the end of October). Then again, you'll also find fewer tourists. Winter is best avoided altogether, unless taking a ferry in a relentless gale is your idea of fun.

### Planning Your Time

The rough landscape of the Highlands and islands, as this region is sometimes called, means this isn't a place you can rush through. It could take eight busy days to do a coastal loop and also see some islands. Single-lane roadways, undulating landscapes, and eye-popping views will slow you down. You can base yourself in a town like Ullapool or Portree, or choose a B&B or hotel (of which there are many) tucked into the hills or sitting at the edge of a sea loch. If you have only a couple of days, head directly to the Isle of Skye and the other islands off the coast. They attract hordes of tourists, and for good reason, yet you don't have to walk far to find yourself in the wilderness. Sunday is a day of minimal activity here; restaurants, bars, and shops are closed, as are many sites.

You could combine a trip to the Northern Highlands with forays into the Great Glen (including Inverness and Loch Ness) or up to Orkney (there are day trips from John O'Groats) and the Shetland Islands.

## Getting Here and Around

### AIR

On a map this area may seem far from major urban centers, but it's easy to reach. Inverness has an airport with direct links to London, Edinburgh, Glasgow, and Amsterdam.

The main airports for the Northern Highlands are Inverness and Wick (both on the mainland). Loganair has direct air service from Glasgow to Inverness and from Edinburgh to Wick. You can fly from London Gatwick, London Luton, or Bristol to Inverness on one of the daily easyJet flights. British Airways also has a service from London Heathrow. Loganair operates flights to and among the islands of Barra, Benbecula, and Lewis and Harris in the Outer Hebrides.

### AIRPORT CONTACTS Inverness Airport.

☎ 01667/464000 🌐 [www.invernessairport.co.uk](http://www.invernessairport.co.uk)

### BOAT AND FERRY

Ferry services are generally reliable, weather permitting. Car and passenger ferries run from Ullapool to Stornoway (Lewis and Harris), from Oban to Castlebay (Barra), from Mallaig to Lochboisdale (South Uist), and from Uig (Skye) to Tarbert (Lewis and Harris) and Lochmaddy (North Uist). The Hopscotch planned-route ticket by Caledonian MacBrayne (known locally as CalMac) gives considerable reductions on interisland ferry fares; it is worth calling ahead and asking for the best route plan.

### BOAT AND FERRY CONTACTS Caledonian MacBrayne.

(CalMac) ☎ 0800/066-5000

🌐 [www.calmac.co.uk](http://www.calmac.co.uk)

### BUS

Scottish Citylink runs two main routes in the Northern Highlands; one heading west from Inverness to Ullapool and the other up the east coast to Scrabster (via Dornoch, Wick, and Thurso). It also has a route across the Isle of Skye to Uig. These buses can be a good way to see the region, but they don't run frequently.

Once you're in the Northern Highlands, Stagecoach has some routes up the east coast of the mainland to Brora. It also has regular services on Skye. In the Outer Hebrides, several small operators run regular routes to most towns and villages. Traveline Scotland, a handy website, provides timetables and a journey planner to help you navigate around Scotland. There's an app, too.

### BUS CONTACTS Scottish Citylink.

☎ 0871/266-3333 🌐 [www.citylink.co.uk](http://www.citylink.co.uk)

**Stagecoach.** ☎ 01463/233371 🌐 [www.stagecoachbus.com](http://www.stagecoachbus.com)

**Traveline Scotland.**

☎ 0871/200-2233 🌐 [www.travelinescotland.com](http://www.travelinescotland.com)

### CAR

Because of infrequent bus and train services, a car is definitely the best way to explore this region. The winding single-lane roads demand a degree of driving dexterity, however. Local rules of the road require that when two cars meet, whichever driver is the first to reach a passing place (a pullout, or extra patch of pavement to the side of the lane, often marked by a diamond-shaped sign), he must stop and allow the oncoming car to continue (this may entail a bit of backing up). You can also pull into passing places to allow traffic behind you to pass. Drivers always wave, as a courtesy and as a genuine greeting. Cars driving uphill have priority, and small cars tend to yield to large commercial vehicles. Never park in passing places. On bad days you can encounter trucks at the most awkward of spots. On good days single-track driving can be relaxing, with a lovely pace of stopping, waving, moving on.

Note that in this sparsely populated area distances between gas stations can be considerable, so it is wise to fill your tank when you see one. You can reach Inverness (the natural starting point for an exploration of the Northern Highlands) in 3½ hours from Edinburgh or Glasgow; it's around 4½ hours to Skye.

### TRAIN

Main railway stations in the area include Oban (for ferries to Barra and the Uists) and Kyle of Lochalsh (for Skye) on the west coast, as well as Inverness (for points north to Thurso and Wick). There's direct service from London to Inverness and connecting service from Edinburgh and Glasgow. For information contact National Rail or ScotRail.

### TRAIN CONTACTS National Rail.

☎ 03457/484950 🌐 [www.nationalrail.co.uk](http://www.nationalrail.co.uk)

**ScotRail.** ☎ 0344/811-0141

🌐 [www.scotrail.co.uk](http://www.scotrail.co.uk)

## Restaurants

Northern Scotland has many fine restaurants, where talented chefs use locally grown produce. Most country-house inns and pubs serve reliable, hearty seafood and tasty meat-and-potatoes meals. The Isle of Skye has the most—and the most expensive—restaurants, many of them exceptionally good, but you can find tasty meals almost everywhere. In remote regions you may just have to drive some distance to find them. Remember that locals eat early, so most restaurants stop serving dinner at 9.

## Hotels

Charming B&Bs, inexpensive inns, and a few excellent luxury hotels are all here to welcome you after a day touring the Highlands. Much of the available accommodation books up far in advance in high season, when some require a minimum two-day stay.



In the more remote parts of Scotland, your best lodging option may be to rent a cottage or house. Besides allowing you to make your own meals and to come and go as you please, it can also be less expensive. VisitScotland (🌐 [www.visitscotland.com](http://www.visitscotland.com)), the official tourism agency, lists many cottages and even rates them with stars, just like hotels.

*Restaurant and hotel reviews have been shortened. For full information, visit [Fodors.com](http://Fodors.com). Restaurant prices are the average cost of a main course at dinner or, if dinner is not served, at lunch. Hotel prices are the lowest cost of a standard double room in high season, including 20% V.A.T.*

### WHAT IT COSTS in Pounds

\$	\$\$	\$\$\$	\$\$\$\$
<b>RESTAURANTS</b>			
under £15	£15–£19	£20–£25	over £25
<b>HOTELS</b>			
under £125	£125–£200	£201–£300	over £300

## Tours

There are fascinating boat tours from a number of places around the coast, including seal- and bird-watching trips. Inland bus tours of castles, distilleries, fishing lochs, and hill-walking routes are available locally.

### Rabbie's

**BUS TOURS** | This popular tour operator organizes tours of various lengths throughout the Highlands, from half-day trips to 17-day epics. Tours start from Edinburgh, Glasgow, Aberdeen, or Inverness, and travel is in comfortable 16-seater minibuses. 📞 0131/226-3133 🌐 [www.rabbies.com](http://www.rabbies.com) 🗺️ From £19.

### Scotland Tours

**BUS TOURS** | Choose from a wide range of bus tours for a wide range of budgets, taking anywhere from one to eight days. The company is Highland-owned, and the guides know their region well. 📞 0131/226-1414 🌐 [www.scotlandtours.com](http://www.scotlandtours.com) 🗺️ From £42.

## Visitor Information

There has been a significant reduction in the number of VisitScotland iCentres in the Northern Highlands and the Western Isles. From nine visitor information centers a few years ago, only four remain, in Inverness and Ullapool (Northern Highlands), Portree (Skye), and Stornoway (Lewis). They're open every day during July and August but closed the rest of the year. Some towns in the region also have independently run visitor centers.

### CONTACTS VisitScotland Inverness iCentre.

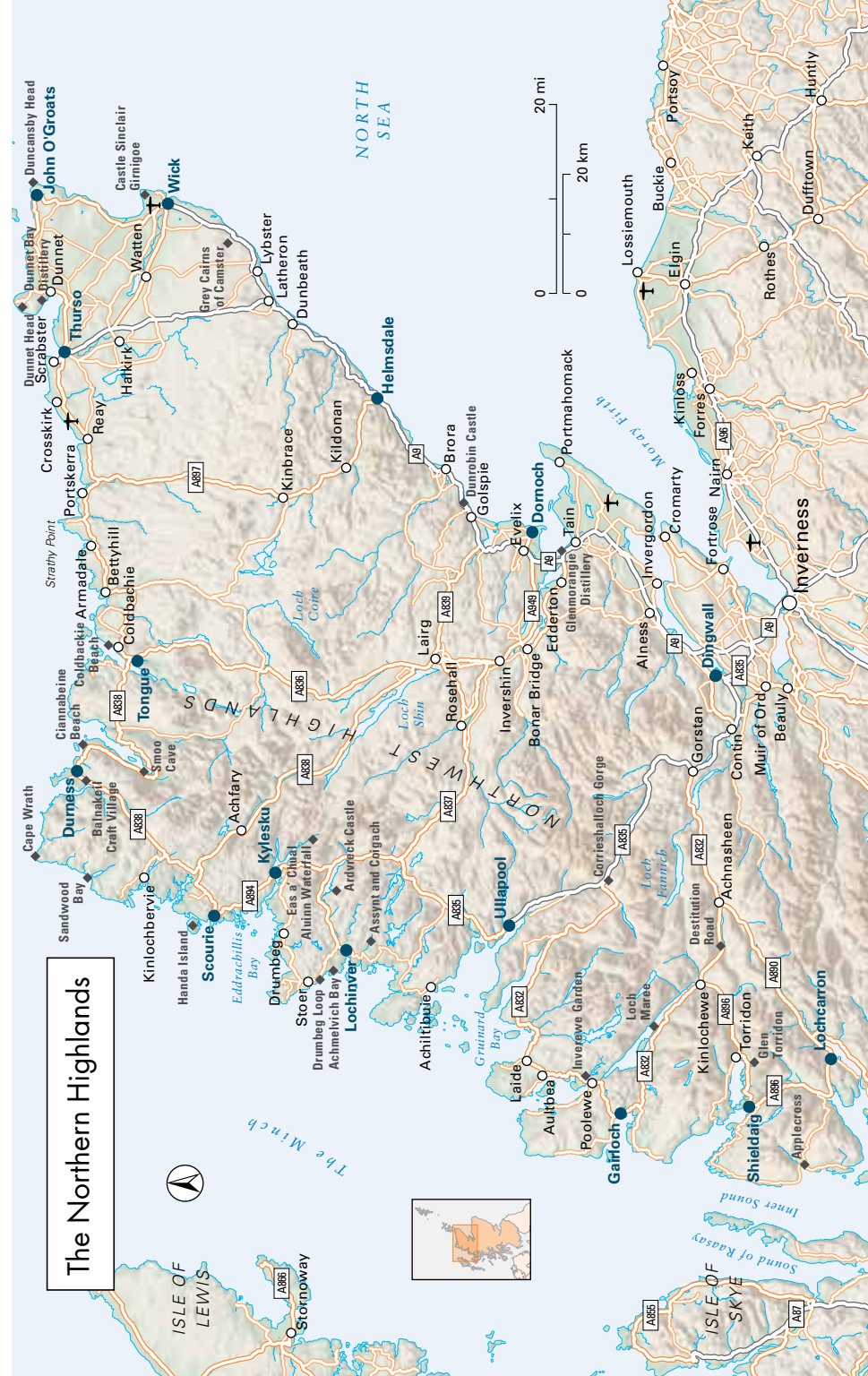
📍 36 High St., Inverness 📞 01463/252401

🌐 [www.visitscotland.com](http://www.visitscotland.com).

## Dingwall

10 miles northwest of Inverness, 180 miles north of Glasgow.

This pretty market town and royal burgh (a Scottish town granted a royal charter) makes for a very pleasant stop if you're heading north from Inverness. Although it may not have the headline-grabbing attractions of some other Northern Highland towns—notwithstanding its excellent museum—Dingwall's historic center, replete with alluring architecture, charming cafés, and quaint little shops, makes it well worth a stop. What's more, it's a convenient place to stock up on fuel and supplies before venturing farther up the east coast; opportunities become scarcer after this point.



## GETTING HERE AND AROUND

From Inverness take the A9 north to Dingwall, turning off onto the A835. From the north take the A9 south, turning off onto the A862.



### Dingwall Museum

**MUSEUM** | Set inside the old town council building, topped by the pretty Townhouse Tower, this small museum offers real insight into local life throughout the 20th century. Exhibits include reproductions of a 1920s kitchen and a local *smiddy* (blacksmiths), a section on military life in the town, and details of historical crimes and punishments. Upstairs has a re-creation of a town council meeting with information on the walls, though the creepy mannequins around the table may make you wary of turning your back. ☎ *Town House, 65 High St., Inverness* ☎ 01349/865366 🌐 [www.dingwallmuseum.co.uk](http://www.dingwallmuseum.co.uk) 📧 Free (donations welcome) ☺ Closed Sat. and Sun. and Oct.–mid-May.



### Coul House Hotel

\$\$ | **HOTEL** | Situated in the countryside 8 miles west of Dingwall, this magnificent Georgian manor house offers stylish rooms with mountain views, comfortable lounges with log fireplaces, and an excellent restaurant that's open all day. **Pros:** family-run and family-friendly; free golf practice court; outdoor dining when sunny. **Cons:** hunting portraits not to all tastes; a little off the beaten path; expensive in high season. [5] *Rooms from: £175* ☎ Off A835, Contin ☎ 01997/421487 🌐 [www.coulhousehotel.com](http://www.coulhousehotel.com) ➡ 21 rooms ☺ Free Breakfast.

### Tulloch Castle Hotel

\$\$\$ | **HOTEL** | For hundreds of years, Tulloch Castle has watched over the town of Dingwall and the Cromarty Firth, first as the home of the Bain family and Clan

Davidson, now as a grand, historic hotel.

**Pros:** characterful accommodations; comfy beds and armchairs; good breakfasts. **Cons:** a whiff of faded glory; thin walls and creaking floorboards; very expensive. [5] *Rooms from: £235* ☎ Tulloch Castle Dr., Inverness ☎ 0844/815-9833 🌐 [www.bespokehotels.com](http://www.bespokehotels.com) ➡ 20 rooms ☺ Breakfast.

## Dornoch

33 miles northeast of Dingwall.

A town of sandstone houses, tiny rose-filled gardens, and a 13th-century cathedral with stunning traditional and modern stained-glass windows, Dornoch is well worth a visit. It's noted for golf (you may hear it referred to as the "St. Andrews of the North"), but because of the town's location so far north, the golf courses here are delightfully uncrowded. Royal Dornoch is the jewel in its crown, praised by the world's top golfers.

## GETTING HERE AND AROUND

From Dingwall or Inverness, take the A9 north to Dornoch. Note that this stretch of the road can get busy with ferry traffic.

## ESSENTIALS

### VISITOR INFORMATION Dornoch Visitors

**Centre.** ☎ *The Carnegie Courthouse, Castle St.* ☎ 01862/810594 🌐 [www.visitdornoch.com](http://www.visitdornoch.com).



### ★ Glenmorangie Distillery

**WINERY/DISTILLERY** | The light color and delicate floral taste of the Speyside whiskies is exemplified in Glenmorangie, one of the best known of the Highland whiskies. The picturesque distillery in Tain, 8 miles south of Dornoch, offers fascinating tours that reveal how the taste is achieved (the secret's in the exceedingly tall stills). The Original Tour includes a dram, and the Signet Tour (£35) offers a chance to sample the rare, chocolatey Glenmorangie

Signet in a unique audio tasting experience. ☎ Off A9, Tain ☎ 01862/892477 🌐 [www.glenmorangie.com](http://www.glenmorangie.com) 📧 Tours from £8.

### Dunrobin Castle

**CASTLE/PALACE** | **FAMILY** | Situated 12 miles north of Dornoch, flamboyant Dunrobin Castle is an ancient seat that became the home of the dukes of Sutherland, at which point it was transformed into the 19th-century white-turreted behemoth you see today. As well as its grand palatial facade and lavish interiors, the property also has summer falconry demonstrations and Versailles-inspired gardens. The first duke, who was fascinated by trains, built his own railroad in the park and staffed it with his servants. Yet for all this frivolity, the duke has a controversial legacy; he was responsible for the Sutherland Clearances of 1810 to 1820, when people were forcibly removed from their farms to make room for sheep to graze. ☎ Off A9, Golspie ☎ 01408/633177 🌐 [www.dunrobincastle.co.uk](http://www.dunrobincastle.co.uk) ☎ £12 ☺ Closed Nov.–Mar.



### ★ Mac and Wild at Falls of Shin

\$ | **BRITISH** | This upmarket café-restaurant, located 19 miles west of Dornoch in a modish wood-and-glass (and subtly salmon-shaped) building, serves deliciously meaty dishes, often using venison from deer hunted at the co-owner's nearby estate. It's also a two-minute stroll from the Falls of Shin, one of the Highlands' best spots to see wild salmon leaping upstream in the summer. **Known for:** fresh local produce; award-winning burgers; venison roast dinners. [5] *Average main: £13* ☎ Achany Glen ☎ 01549/402888 🌐 [www.macandwild.com](http://www.macandwild.com).

### Sutherland House

\$ | **BRITISH** | Just off Dornoch's main square, Sutherland House restaurant has a feeling of intimacy in its two separate

rooms, reinforced by the enthusiastic reception and delicious food. The menu is imaginative, with some unusual combinations dreamed up by the chef. **Known for:** imaginative seafood; chicken in Glenmorangie sauce; friendly service. [5] *Average main: £14* ☎ Argyle St. ☎ 01862/811023 🌐 [www.sutherland-house.net](http://www.sutherland-house.net).



### ★ Glenmorangie House

\$\$\$\$ | **RESORT** | Situated 10 miles south-east from the distillery, Glenmorangie House offers luxurious but casual stays in a spectacular 17th-century country home. **Pros:** wonderfully rural location; superb service; extensive whisky collection. **Cons:** puny showers take a while to heat up; need a car to get here; extremely expensive. [5] *Rooms from: £405* ☎ Fearn by Tain, Tain ☎ 01862/871671 🌐 [www.theglenmorangiehouse.com](http://www.theglenmorangiehouse.com) ➡ 9 rooms ☺ Some meals.

### Strathview Lodge

\$ | **B&B/INN** | A few miles north of Dornoch, this B&B sits high above the road with a wonderful view of Loch Fleet. **Pros:** beautiful location; comfortable and warm rooms; great value. **Cons:** a little way out of Dornoch; unappealing exterior; no on-site restaurant. [5] *Rooms from: £84* ☎ Cambusavie ☎ 01408/634286 🌐 [www.strathview-dornoch.co.uk](http://www.strathview-dornoch.co.uk) ➡ 3 rooms ☺ Breakfast.



### Jail Dornoch

**CLOTHING** | It's rare for people to voluntarily walk into jail, but this place is the exception, as an old prison has been converted in a popular fashion store. The one-time cells are now home to a range of elegant clothes and accessories, toiletries, housewares, and interesting gifts. It's so popular that there's now a second outlet at Inverness Airport. ☎ Castle Street ☎ 01862/810555 🌐 [www.jail-dornoch.com](http://www.jail-dornoch.com).





One of the most treasured properties in the Highlands, Glenmorangie House sits grandly amid expansive manicured grounds.

## Activities

### ★ Royal Dornoch Golf Club

**GOLF** | The legendary Championship Course, laid out by Tom Morris in 1886, challenges even the very best golfers with its fast, raised greens. It also inspires them with views of white sandy beaches and tall mountains carpeted in wild yellow gorse each spring. The Struie Course provides even more sea views and demanding golf for players of every level. ☎ *Golf Road* ☎ 01862/810219 🌐 [www.royaldornoch.com](http://www.royaldornoch.com) 🚗 *Championship: £180; Struie: £50* 🏇 *Championship: 18 holes, 6748 yards, par 70; Struie: 18 holes, 6265 yards, par 71* 📞 *Reservations essential.*

## Helmsdale

28 miles northeast of Dornoch.

Helmsdale is a fascinating fishing village with a checkered past. It was once a busy Viking settlement, later became the

scene of an aristocratic poisoning plot, and then was transformed into a Victorian village, used to house some of the poor souls removed from their land to make way for sheep. These “clearances,” perpetrated by the Duke of Sutherland, were among the Highlands’ most inhumane.

### GETTING HERE AND AROUND

Helmsdale is one of the few towns on this part of the coast that has direct train services from Inverness (four a day). But a car will allow you to see more in the surrounding area. Get here via the coastal A9 in each direction, or the inland A897.

## Sights

### Timespan

**MUSEUM | FAMILY** | This thought-provoking mix of displays, artifacts, and audiovisual materials portrays the history of the area, from the Stone Age to the 1869 gold rush in the Strath of Kildonan. There’s a geology exhibit in the garden and a tour of the Kildonan gold-rush site. The complex

also includes a café and an art gallery that often hosts visiting artists and changing exhibitions. ☎ *Dunrobin Street* ☎ 01431/821327 🌐 [www.timespan.org.uk](http://www.timespan.org.uk) 🚗 £4 🕒 *Closed Mon. and Tue.–Fri. in Nov.–mid-Mar.*

## Wick

35 miles northeast of Helmsdale.

Wick is a substantial town that was built on its fishing industry. The town itself is not especially noteworthy, but it does have a handful of worthwhile sights.

### GETTING HERE AND AROUND

From Helmsdale follow the A99 north. From Thurso take the A9 south, then the A882 that cuts diagonally southwest.

## Sights

### Castle Sinclair Girnigoe

**CASTLE/PALACE** | Dramatically perched on the edge of the cliff, this ruined castle—or rather, castles—is a spectacular sight. Situated 3 miles north of Wick, this site comprises the remains of the 15th-century Castle Girnigoe and the 17th-century Castle Sinclair, set among stunning scenery. The precipitous location, with old walls teetering inches from the cliff edge, means it has a limited lifespan, so go take a look while you can. ☎ *Wick* 🚗 *Free.*

### Grey Cairns of Camster

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE** | The remarkable Grey Cairns of Camster, two Neolithic chambers made of rough stones, were built more than 5,000 years ago and are among the best preserved in Britain.

**Camster Round Cairn** is 20 yards in diameter and 13 yards high, while **Camster Long Cairn** stretches an extraordinary 77 yards. Some 19th-century excavations revealed skeletons, pottery, and flint tools in the round cairn’s internal chamber. They are in an isolated location, around 8 miles southwest of Wick and without a visitor center in sight, so if you feel adventurous

and don’t mind dirty knees, you can crawl into the chambers (the metal grills over the entrances mean they appear locked, but they aren’t). To get here, you’ll need to drive 5 miles along the unnamed road from Occumster to Watten; when you’re just north of Lybster on the A99, look out for the brown signposts pointing the way. ☎ *Off A9* 🌐 [www.historicenvironment.scot](http://www.historicenvironment.scot) 🚗 *Free.*

### ★ Pulteney Distillery

**WINERY/DISTILLERY** | Unusually for a distillery, Pulteney is situated very close to the town center, and it has been for almost 200 years. The spirit produced here, known as “gold,” was once in the shadow of the town’s other big “silver” industry—herring fishing. But, despite a hairy period of prohibition, it has easily outlasted its competition. The brooding brick distillery is open for tours and tastings, so join the standard one-hour tour (£10) for a behind-the-scenes look at the facilities and a taste of the award-winning 12-year-old Old Pulteney—famed for its smooth, faintly briny character with lingering butterscotch sweet finish. Or, for £25, experience all this plus additional tastings of three older expressions. ☎ *Huddart Street* ☎ 01955/602371 🌐 [www.old-pulteney.com](http://www.old-pulteney.com) 🚗 *Tours from £10* 🕒 *Closed Sun. May–Sept. and weekends Oct.–Apr.*

### Wick Heritage Museum

**MUSEUM** | The locals who run this lovely town museum are real enthusiasts, and they will take you through Wick’s history from its founding by the Vikings to its heyday in the 1860s as a leading herring port. The collection includes everything from ancient fossils and a 19th-century cooperage to the Johnston Photographic Collection, a set of 40,000 images that show more than a century of life in Wick through one local family’s eyes. There’s also an art gallery and lovely terraced gardens that overlook the town. ☎ *18–27 Bank Row* ☎ 01955/605393 🌐 [www.wickheritage.org](http://www.wickheritage.org) 🚗 £4 🕒 *Closed Sun. and Nov.–Easter.*



## John O'Groats

16 miles north of Wick.

The windswept little outpost of John O'Groats is usually taken to be the northernmost point on the Scottish mainland, though that is not strictly true, as a short drive to Dunnet Head will reveal. From the harbor you can take a boat to see the dolphins and seals that live beneath the coastal cliffs—or head farther afield with a ferry to Orkney. The little town has charms of its own, including a row of colorful wooden houses (part of the Inn at John O' Groats) and a crafts center with high-quality shops selling knitwear, candles, and gifts.

### GETTING HERE AND AROUND

Traveling north from Wick, take the A99. From the east, take the coast-hugging A836.

### TOURS

#### John O'Groats Ferries

**TOUR—SIGHT** | Sailing from John O'Groats Harbor, this company offers 90-minute wildlife cruises past spectacular cliff scenery and birdlife into the Pentland Firth, to Duncansby Stacks, and to the island of Stroma. Trips cost £19 and are available daily at 2:30 between mid-June and August. The company also offers a Maxi Day tour of Orkney between May and September. It leaves at 8:45 am and costs £68. ☎ *Ferry Office, County Road, John O'Groats* ☎ 01955/611353 🌐 [www.jogferry.co.uk](http://www.jogferry.co.uk) 🚗 *Tours from £19.*

### Sights

#### Duncansby Head

**VIEWPOINT** | Head to this lighthouse for spectacular views of cliffs and sea stacks, as well as seabirds like guillemots and (if you're lucky) puffins. It's on the coastal road east of town. There are a few parking spaces there, or you can walk (about 30 minutes) from the main

road. ☎ *John O'Groats* 🌐 [www.nlb.org.uk/lighthouses/duncansby-head](http://www.nlb.org.uk/lighthouses/duncansby-head) 🚗 *Free.*

### Hotels

#### ★ John O'Groats by Together Travel

\$\$\$ | **RENTAL** | A local landmark in their own right, the brightly colored lodges here are the region's best self-catering accommodations—not to mention the most photogenic—and they provide stunning views out to sea (on a clear day, all the way to Orkney). **Pros:** very comfy beds; good Wi-Fi (a rarity here); natural light all day long. **Cons:** can feel understaffed; two nights minimum in high season; a little expensive. 📄 *Rooms from: £210* ☎ *John O'Groats* ➔ *West of ferry terminal* ☎ 01625/416430 🌐 [www.togethertravel.co.uk/destinations/scotland/john-ogroats](http://www.togethertravel.co.uk/destinations/scotland/john-ogroats) 🚗 *23 lodges* 🍽️ *No meals.*

## Thurso

19 miles west of John O'Groats.

The town of Thurso is quite substantial for a community so far north. Attractions in the town include Old St. Peter's Kirk, which dates back to the 12th century; fine nearby beaches, particularly at Dunnet Bay; and great seabird spotting at Dunnet Head.

### GETTING HERE AND AROUND

A car remains the best way to see this region, although local buses run most days. From John O'Groats simply follow the A836 west.

### Sights

#### Dunnet Bay Distillery

**WINERY/DISTILLERY** | This small north coast distillery proves that Scotland's craft distilling boom has stretched to the very edges of the mainland. It also proves that Scotland has far more to offer than just whisky. Dunnet Bay Distillery has gained

plaudits and prizes galore for its Rock Rose gin (notable for its use of sea buckthorn and other coastal botanicals), and it also produces a superb vodka called Holy Grass. You can tour the "wee" distillery every summer; reservations are advised. *Children younger than 18 are allowed to visit and are admitted on the tour free of charge with an accompanying adult.* ☎ *Off A836* ☎ 01847/851287 🌐 [www.dunnetbaydistillers.co.uk](http://www.dunnetbaydistillers.co.uk) 🚗 *Tours £15* 🕒 *Closed Dec.–mid-Mar.*

#### Dunnet Head

**VIEWPOINT** | Most people make the trip to Dunnet Head to stand at the northernmost point of mainland Britain. But it's also worth a visit for the pretty Dunnet Head Lighthouse (built 1831), the dramatic sea cliffs, and the fine views over the water to Orkney. The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds also runs a nature reserve here, due to the number of seabirds nesting in the cliffs. ☎ *Brough* 🌐 [www.dunnethead.co.uk](http://www.dunnethead.co.uk) 🚗 *Free.*

#### Old St. Peter's Kirk

**RELIGIOUS SITE** | This roofless, ruined parish church on the banks of the River Thurso was once the principal place of worship in northeast Scotland. Dating back to (at least) the early 1100s, the church is known for its decorative window carved from a single slab of stone, as well as its atmospheric graveyard. Look for headstone emblems that represent the trade of the person buried beneath. ☎ *Back Shore Street.*

### Hotels

#### ★ Forss House

\$\$\$ | **B&B/INN** | Don't be fooled by the stark exterior, as this house dating from 1810 is a charming place to stay, offering beautiful bedrooms, expansive grounds, and the area's finest dining option. **Pros:** large guest rooms; lots of outdoor activities; deliciously hearty meals. **Cons:** heavy old doors make a racket; River House lacking the charm of main

house; expensive option. 📄 *Rooms from: £215* ☎ *Forss* ➔ *4 miles west of Thurso* ☎ 01847/861201 🌐 [www.forsshousehotel.co.uk](http://www.forsshousehotel.co.uk) 🚗 *14 rooms* 🍽️ *Breakfast.*

### Activities

#### The Bike Shop

**BICYCLING** | This cycle-repair shop has a friendly staff and a handful of hybrid bikes to rent. You can also get advice on the best local routes. ☎ *35 High St.* ☎ 01847/895385.

## Tongue

43 miles west of Thurso.

A popular pit stop between Thurso and Durness, Tongue has some worthwhile sights and good accommodations options.

### GETTING HERE AND AROUND

From Thurso simply head west along the A836, which will turn into A838 just before you reach Tongue.

### Sights

#### ★ Castle Varrich

**CASTLE/PALACE** | Standing on a high rocky outcrop, overlooking both the town and the Kyle of Tongue, Castle Varrich (or Bharrich) was built by Clan Mackay in the 14th century—but possibly not from scratch. It's believed an old Norse fort may have previously occupied the site. Today a steel staircase and viewing platform make it easily accessible to visitors, who can walk from Tongue and back in less than an hour. The clearly signposted path gets a little steep in parts, but the climb is worth it for the spectacular views. ☎ *Tongue.*

#### ★ Coldbackie Beach

**BEACH—SIGHT** | This windswept bay, 3 miles north of Tongue, is a well-kept secret, offering powder-white sands, spectacular island views, and perfect

peace and quiet—so long as you don't arrive when surf's up. To get here simply park in Coldbackie and walk. **Amenities:** parking (no fee); water sports. **Best for:** solitude; surfing; walking. ☒ *Coldbackie, Tongue* ⇄ *Off A838.*

## Hotels

### Garvault House

§ | **HOTEL** | Billed as mainland Britain's most remote hotel (Tongue, its nearest town, is 50 minutes' drive away), the charmingly rustic and almost entirely off-grid Garvault House offers a classic countryside escape in the heart of the Highlands. **Pros:** beautiful panoramic views; dinner included; fishing and hill walking galore. **Cons:** a little fusty in places; patchy Wi-Fi; no amenities for miles. 📞 *Rooms from: £110* ☒ *Off B871* ☎ *07596/202171* 🌐 *www.garvaulthouse.uk* ☹ *Closed Dec.–Mar.* ➡ *8 rooms* 🍳 *Free Breakfast.*

### The Tongue Hotel

§ | **HOTEL** | With open fireplaces, tartan rugs, and floral wallpaper, this traditional Highland hotel is a great base for exploring the northern coast of the Scottish mainland. **Pros:** warm and friendly staff; beautiful location with stunning views; deliciously creamy porridge at breakfast. **Cons:** Wi-Fi only in public areas; TV sets from the '80s; food is hit and miss. 📞 *Rooms from: £115* ☒ *Tongue* ☎ *01847/611206* 🌐 *www.tonguehotel.co.uk* ➡ *19 rooms* 🍳 *Free breakfast.*

## Durness

29 miles west of Tongue.

The sudden patches of green surrounding the village of Durness, on the north coast, are caused by the richer limestone outcrops among the acid moorlands. The town is the jumping-off point for several natural highlights, from a beautiful sandy beach to the country's highest cliff.

## GETTING HERE AND AROUND

From Tongue simply head west along the A838.

## Sights

### Balnakeil Craft Village

**CRAFTS** | Artisans sell pottery, leather, weavings, paintings, and more from their studios at Balnakeil Craft Village. It is a charmingly odd place consisting of rows of shabby former military buildings located on an unnamed road running northwest from Durness and framed by dramatic views of Balnakeil Bay. The village is open during the summer, with most shops open daily from 10 to 5. ☒ *Balnakeil* ☎ *01971/511713 Nicola Poole's Wee Gallery* 🌐 *www.balnakeilcraftvillage.weebly.com* ☹ *Closed Nov.–Mar.*

### Cape Wrath

**VIEWPOINT** | If you've made it this far north, you'll probably want to go all the way to Cape Wrath, a rugged headland at the northwest tip of Scotland. The white-sand beaches, impressive dunes covered in marram grass, and crashing seas of nearby Balnakeil Bay make it an exhilarating place to visit. As this land is owned by the Ministry of Defence (it is listed as an area for air force training), you can't drive your own vehicle. From May through September, a small boat ferries people here from Keoldale, 2 miles outside Durness. En route look out for Clo Mor; at 920 feet, they're the highest sea cliffs in mainland Britain. Once you're across the sea inlet, a minibus will take you to the lighthouse. Call ahead or check departure times on the board at the jetty. ☎ *01971/511284* 🌐 *www.visitcapewrath.com* ➡ *£20.50 boat/bus return* ☹ *No boat mid-Oct.–mid-Apr.*

### Ciannabeine Beach

**BEACH—SIGHT** | Situated 10 miles east of Durness, Ciannabeine is one of Scotland's most achingly beautiful beaches, a spectacular sweep of sand caught in the embrace of 10,000-year-old rocks. There



The dramatic Smoo Cave has one of the largest entrances to any sea cave in Britain.

is a car park opposite and a path down to the beach itself. You will recognize it by the white house just beyond, once the village school. **Amenities:** parking (no fee). **Best for:** swimming; walking. ☒ *Off A838* ⇄ *Between Rispond and Sangobeg.*

### ★ Sandwood Bay

**BEACH—SIGHT** | The very definition of *off the beaten path*, Sandwood Bay is one of Scotland's most spectacular—and most isolated—beaches. The only way to reach it is to walk 4 miles each way across sheep fields and sand dunes. It's a lovely, fairly easy walk, which may just end with you having a long, sandy beach, with its dramatic sea stack Am Buachaille, all to yourself. To get here turn off the A838 onto the B801 at Rhiconich (14 miles southwest of Durness), then turn off at Kinlochbervie to Balchrack. Just before you reach the latter, look for a tiny white sign to "Sandwood," then follow this single-track lane to its end, where you can park and start walking. **Amenities:** parking (no fee). **Best for:** solitude; walking. ☒ *Durness.*

### ★ Sculpture Croft

**ART GALLERIES** | This odd garden of delights provokes a double-take from most drivers traveling along the A838, thanks to its incongruous ceramic-topped gates. Park opposite and take a stroll down into Danish artist Lotte Glob's pottery wonderland, where ceramic and metal sculptures are scattered across the gardens. Several paths lead down to the coast, and there are hundreds of pieces en route, including a library of ceramic books. Her work reflects and adds to the landscape, using natural shapes and forms and building patterns into the rocks themselves. End your visit with a trip to the studio and pottery shop. ☒ *105 Laid* ☎ *01971/511727* 🌐 *www.lottoglob.co.uk* ☹ *Only open by appointment Oct.–mid-May.*

### ★ Smoo Cave

**CAVE** | This atmospheric cavern, hollowed out of the limestone by rushing water, feels like something out of a fantasy novel. The combined sea-and-freshwater cave, complete with gushing waterfall,

can be reached via a steep cliff stairway from the Smoo Cave car park. But don't start your descent before reading the explanatory boards at the top of the stairs, which tell the history of those who lived and used the caves in much earlier times. ☒ Off A838 ☒ Free.

## Restaurants

### Cocoa Mountain

\$ | CAFÉ | A must for those with a sweet tooth, this "chocolate bar" within the Balnakeil Craft Village serves world-class truffles and stunningly rich hot chocolate made in its specialist "chocolate factory," which sources the beans from around the world. There are also sandwiches, cakes, and coffee available. **Known for:** sublime chocolate truffles; homemade hot chocolate; friendly service. 📍 *Average main: £12* ☒ Balnakeil Craft Village, Balnakeil ☎ 01971/511233 🌐 [www.cocoamountain.co.uk](http://www.cocoamountain.co.uk).

## Scourie

25 miles southwest of Durness.

Scourie is a small coastal settlement catering to visitors—particularly fisherfolk—with a good range of accommodations. The bayside town makes a good base for a trip to the bird sanctuary on Handa Island.

### GETTING HERE AND AROUND

From Durness head south on the A838, turning onto the A894.

## Sights

### ★ Handa Island

ISLAND | Just off the coast of Scourie is Handa Island, a bird sanctuary that shelters huge seabird colonies, especially impressive at nesting time. You can gaze at more than 200,000 birds nesting on dramatic cliffs here, including guillemots,

razorbills, great skuas, kittiwakes, and, of course, crowd-pleasingly colorful puffins. Sturdy boots, a waterproof jacket, and a degree of fitness are needed to walk the path around the island. This remarkable reserve, administered by the Scottish Wildlife Trust, is open only in spring and summer, and can be reached by a small open boat from Tarbert; contact the Assynt Visitor Centre in Lochinver for details. ■ **TIP** → Note that ferries don't run on Sunday. 🌐 [scottishwildlifetrust.org.uk](http://scottishwildlifetrust.org.uk) ☺ Closed Oct.–Mar.

## Restaurants

### ★ Shorehouse Restaurant

\$\$ | SEAFOOD | If you're feeling peckish after a trip to Handa Island, make a stop at this exceptional seafood restaurant overlooking Tarbet Harbor. It serves freshly caught seafood specialties, from hand-dived scallops and hot smoked mackerel to whole lobsters, in a quaint, maritime-themed setting. **Known for:** spectacular seafood; gorgeous views; friendly and attentive service. 📍 *Average main: £17* ☒ Tigh Na Mara, Tarbet ☎ 01971/502251 ☺ Closed Sun. and Oct.–Easter.

## Hotels

### ★ Eddrachilles Hotel

\$\$ | B&B/INN | With one of the most spectacular vistas of any hotel in Scotland—out toward the picturesque islands of Badcall Bay—Eddrachilles sits on a huge plot of private moorland just south of the Handa Island bird sanctuary. **Pros:** attractive garden; stunning shoreline nearby; close to bird sanctuary. **Cons:** needs a lick of paint; Wi-Fi limited to public areas; set menus only. 📍 *Rooms from: £145* ☒ Off A894 ☎ 01971/502080 🌐 [www.eddrachilles.com](http://www.eddrachilles.com) ☺ Closed Nov.–mid-Mar. ➔ 10 rooms 🍷 Free breakfast.

## Kylesku

10 miles southeast of Scourie.

This tiny settlement once served as a ferry crossing, before being usurped by the (incredibly photogenic) Kylesku Bridge. Today it's a lovely stop for lunch, a boat trip along Loch Glendhu and Loch Glencoul, or even an overnight stay.

### GETTING HERE AND AROUND

From Scourie head south on the A894.

## Sights

### ★ Drumbeg Loop

SCENIC DRIVE | Bold souls journeying from Kylesku to Lochinver may enjoy taking the interesting single-track B869 Drumbeg Loop. It has several challenging hairpin turns along with breathtaking views. Head 2 miles south of Kylesku on the A894 and hang a right when you see the brown sign to "An Druim Beag." Although it's only 20 miles to Lochinver, it will take around an hour without stops—but plan on longer, because you'll definitely want to stop. Just before the scattered community of Stoer, a road leads west to **Stoer Point Lighthouse**. If you're an energetic walker, you can hike across the short turf and heather along the cliff top for fine views west toward Lewis and Harris. There's also a red-sandstone sea stack: the **Old Man of Stoer** (not to be confused with the Old Man of Storr on Skye). This makes a pleasant excursion on a long summer evening.

### Eas a' Chual Aluinn Waterfall

BODY OF WATER | With a drop of 685 feet, this is the longest waterfall in the United Kingdom. A rugged hike leads to the falls, which are at the head of Loch Glencoul. Start from the car park off the A894, on the bend of the road 4 miles south of Kylesku, just before you reach Loch na Gainmhich. Alternatively, between April and September, cruises from Kylesku Old

Ferry Pier offer a less-taxing alternative (£30). ☒ Off A894, Lochinver.

## Hotels

### Kylesku Hotel

\$\$ | HOTEL | This charming hotel, looking out over Loch Glendhu and toward Eas Coul Aulin (Scotland's highest waterfall), has great service, excellent food, and a warm, relaxed atmosphere. **Pros:** stunning views; great staff; delicious food. **Cons:** some old-building quirks; two tiny (but cheap) attic rooms; 20-minute drive from Scourie. 📍 *Rooms from: £130* ☒ Off A894 ➔ 10 miles south of Scourie ☎ 01971/502231 🌐 [www.kyleskuhotel.co.uk](http://www.kyleskuhotel.co.uk) ➔ 11 rooms 🍷 Breakfast.

## Lochinver

18 miles southwest of Kylesku.

Lochinver is a pretty, quiet, shoreside community of whitewashed cottages overlooked by soaring Suilven mountain. There are lovely beaches to the north, a harbor used by the west-coast fishing fleet, and some good dining and lodging options, making it an ideal base for exploring Sutherland. Take the cul-de-sac, **Baddidarroch Road**, for scenery that makes for great photo opportunities.

### GETTING HERE AND AROUND

To get to Lochinver from Kylesku in roughly 30 minutes, head south on the A894, then turn west onto the A837. If you prefer to take your time, opt for the scenic B869 (known as the "Drumbeg Loop") instead.

### ESSENTIALS

#### VISITOR INFORMATION Assynt

Visitor Centre. ☒ Culag New Pier ☎ 01571/844123 🌐 [www.discoverassynt.co.uk](http://www.discoverassynt.co.uk).





### Achmelvich Bay

**BEACH—SIGHT** | This beautiful white-sand beach, located 4 miles northwest of Lochinver, is a popular summer spot with water babies, from kayakers to windsurfers, as well as landlubbers who delight in the surrounding hiking trails and climbing opportunities. It's also a favorite of fishers, dog walkers, and "rockpoolers." The beach is considerably quieter outside of peak season. **Amenities:** parking (no fee); water sports. **Best for:** walking; windsurfing. *Achmelvich Beach Car Park, Off B869.*

### Ardreck Castle

**CASTLE/PALACE** | Beside Loch Assynt, 11 miles east of Lochinver, stands the striking ruined Ardreck Castle, a onetime Clan MacLeod stronghold built in the late 1500s. Still highly atmospheric, it sits on an outcrop with perfect views the length of the loch in both directions. Located off the A837, just over half a mile south of the junction with the A894, it's visible as you approach from either direction. You'll find a car park located directly opposite the ruins; you can park, take the muddy path down to a stony beach, and then walk along to the castle. *Off A837* *www.undiscoveredscotland.co.uk* *Free.*

### ★ Assynt and Coigach

**NATURE PRESERVE** | To the east and south of Lochinver, on the way to Ullapool, lies a different kind of landscape: a vast region of brooding mountains and languid lochs, where peaks punch their way out of heathered terrain and appear to constantly shift positions. Even their names have a more mysterious air than those of the *bens* (mountain peaks or hills) elsewhere: Cul Mor, Cul Beag, Stac Pollaidh, Canisp, Suilven. Some hark back to Norse rather than to Gaelic—a reminder that Vikings used to sail this northern shore. The highlight of the region is the eerily pretty Loch Assynt, peppered

with tiny wooded isles, but the Coigach peninsula northwest of Ullapool is equally dramatic.



### Lochinver Mission Cafe

**\$ | BRITISH** | An abandoned fishermen's mission (a place where fishermen stayed while in port), situated at the far end of town near the harbor, now houses this pleasant café serving lunch, soup, sandwiches, and home baking. The specials often include fish freshly delivered from the harbor. **Known for:** delicious home-made soup; great fish-and-chips; cash only. *Average main: £9* *Culag Park* *01571/844324* *www.lochinvermission.org.uk* *No credit cards* *Closed Sun.*



### Inver Lodge Hotel

**\$\$\$ | HOTEL** | In a commanding location on a hillside above Lochinver, this modern luxury hotel has stunning views of the coast, as well as smart guest rooms that are decorated in contemporary colors and traditional mahogany furniture. **Pros:** cozy public room with a fireplace; refreshing sauna; great fishing nearby. **Cons:** slightly drab exterior; not good for families with children; extremely expensive. *Rooms from: £300* *lolaire Road* *01571/844496* *www.inverlodge.com* *21 rooms* *Free breakfast.*

### Tigh Na Sith

**\$\$ | B&B/INN** | Set just above the bay at Lochinver, this family-run B&B wins rave reviews for its warm welcome. **Pros:** welcoming hosts; fantastic views; delicious breakfast. **Cons:** room at back has no view; beds can be creaky; room rates have risen significantly. *Rooms from: £125* *Off A837* *01571/844588* *www.tighnasith.com* *3 rooms* *Breakfast.*



### Highland Stoneware

**HOUSEHOLD ITEMS/FURNITURE** | The huge sofa and television composed entirely of broken crockery are a witty introduction to the beautiful ceramic works of art made at Highland Stoneware. The potters and decorators busy themselves in a studio behind the shop, and visitors are encouraged to watch as they create pieces incorporating Highland themes. If you miss this one, know that there's a second Highland Stoneware store in Ullapool. *Baddidarroch* *01571/844376* *www.highlandstoneware.com.*

## Ullapool

*36 miles south of Lochinver, 223 miles north of Glasgow, 58 miles northwest of Inverness.*

Ullapool is an ideal base for hiking throughout Sutherland and taking wildlife and nature cruises, especially to the Summer Isles. By the shores of salty Loch Broom, the town was founded in 1788 as a fishing station to exploit the local herring stocks. There's still a smattering of fishing vessels, as well as visiting yachts and foreign ships. When their crews fill the pubs, Ullapool has a surprisingly cosmopolitan feel. The harbor area comes to life when the Lewis and Harris ferry arrives and departs.

### GETTING HERE AND AROUND

A desolate but well-maintained stretch of the A835 takes you from Inverness to Ullapool, with a connection to Torridon via the A832.

### ESSENTIALS

**VISITOR INFORMATION** **VisitScotland Ullapool iCentre.** *Argyle Street* *01854/612486.*



### The Ceilidh Place

**ARTS VENUE** | Ullapool's cultural focal point is The Ceilidh Place, an excellent venue for concerts and other events all through the year (*ceilidh* is a Scottish social gathering with traditional music and dance). It started out as a small café, but over the years it has added space for local performers, an excellent bookshop specializing in Scottish writing, and a handful of comfortable rooms (as well as a basic bunkhouse) for those who want to spend the night. It's a great place for afternoon coffee or a wee dram in the evening. *14 W. Argyle St.* *01854/612103* *www.theceilidhplace.com.*

### Corrieshalloch Gorge

**BODY OF WATER** | For a thrilling touch of vertigo, don't miss Corrieshalloch Gorge, 12 miles south of Ullapool, just off the A835. Draining the high moors, the Falls of Measach plunge into a 200-foot-deep, thickly wooded gorge. There's a suspension-bridge viewpoint and a heady atmosphere of romantic grandeur, like an old Scottish print come to life. A short walk leads from a parking area to the viewpoint. *www.nts.org.uk.*

### Ullapool Museum

**MUSEUM** | Films, photographs, and audiovisual displays tell the story of the area from the Ice Age to modern times, including the "klondyking" period between 1970 and 1990, when foreign boats filled the loch to fish the mackerel. There's an ongoing exhibition on weather, climate change, and the environment. The building was designed by Thomas Telford and dates from the early 19th century. *7–8 W. Argyle St.* *01854/612987* *www.ullapoolmuseum.co.uk* *£4* *Closed Sun. and Nov.–Mar.*

## Restaurants

### The Arch Inn

§ | **BRITISH** | On the face of it, this popular restaurant isn't doing anything particularly remarkable; its simple pub-style menu of steaks, burgers, and fish-and-chips hardly pushes the envelope. But its use of fresh, local ingredients, its pretty presentation of dishes, and its appealing waterside seating make it a favorite dining spot among locals. **Known for:** fresh and tasty pub grub; waterside seating; always busy. ☑ *Average main: £14* ☑ *10–11 W. Shore St.* ☎ *01854/612454* 🌐 *www.thearchinn.co.uk.*

### ★ The West Coast Delicatessen

§ | **CAFÉ** | This charming family-run deli serves delicious homemade sandwiches, pies, soups, salads, and hummus to a long line of locals and tourists. It also has great cakes and baked goods. **Known for:** great homemade soups; excellent coffee; an array of artisanal products. ☑ *Average main: £8* ☑ *5 Argyle St.* ☎ *01854/613450* 🌐 *www.westcoastdeli.co.uk* ☹ *Closed Sun. No dinner.*

## Hotels

### Tanglewood House

§ | **B&B/INN** | Sitting on a headland above a rocky beach, with spectacular views across Loch Broom toward Ullapool, one of Scotland's most unique and appealing B&Bs feels wonderfully remote while only being a short drive (or even a walk) into town. **Pros:** truly unique property; beautiful setting; fast and reliable Wi-Fi. **Cons:** steep drive down to the house; some fusty decor; a little remote. ☑ *Rooms from: £99* ☑ *Off A835* ☎ *01854/612059* 🌐 *www.tanglewoodhouse.co.uk* ➔ *3 rooms* 🍳 *Free breakfast.*

### ★ Westlea House

§ | **B&B/INN** | This quaint, quirky boutique B&B is one of Ullapool's undoubted gems, with bedrooms themed around

## Fishing in the Highlands



The possibilities for fishing are endless in Sutherland, as a glance at the loch-covered map suggests. Brown trout and salmon are abundant. You can fish from the banks of Loch Garve, 33 miles southeast of Ullapool, or Loch Assynt, 6 miles east of Lochinver, from March to October. Boat fishing is popular on Loch Maree, southeast of Gairloch and north of Poolewe, from May to October. Fishing permits are available at local post offices and shops; some hotels have their own fishing rights but most will arrange fishing permits for you.

different natural features and cozy common rooms stuffed with comfy armchairs, colorful cushions, and off-the-wall artworks. **Pros:** wonderfully whimsical decor; superfriendly owners; great location. **Cons:** TVs are small; sea views limited; some low ceilings. ☑ *Rooms from: £85* ☑ *2 Market St.* ☎ *01854/612594* 🌐 *www.westlea-ullapool.co.uk* ➔ *5 rooms.*

## Activities

### Stac Pollaidh

**HIKING/WALKING** | For a great afternoon of walking, ascend the dramatic hill of Stac Pollaidh (pronounced "stack polly"), about 14 miles north of Ullapool. The clearly marked path climbs for a bit and then curves around to the right and takes you on a loop with incredible views over Sutherland, north to Suilven, and west to the Summer Isles. About halfway around the hill, a steeper path takes you to the start of the ridge. ⚠ **Only very experienced rock climbers should continue from here, as the route requires rock climbing**

in very exposed conditions. But not to worry, because from the west side of the looped path, you can see the pinnacled pitch of Stac Pollaidh. To get here take the A835 to Drumrunie, then a minor road off to the west (there's a sign for "Achiltibuie"). Five miles along the road, there's a car park; start your walk from here. ☑ *Off A835, Dornie.*

## Gairloch

*55 miles southwest of Ullapool.*

Aside from its restaurants and lodgings, peaceful Gairloch has one further advantage: it often escapes the rain clouds that can cling to the high summits. You can enjoy a round of golf here and perhaps stay dry, even when the nearby Torridon Hills are deluged.

### GETTING HERE AND AROUND

From Ullapool, head south down the A835 and, after 12 miles (just after Corrieshalloch Gorge), turn west onto the winding A832 (also known as "Destitution Road").

## Sights

### Destitution Road

**SCENIC DRIVE** | The road south between Corrieshalloch Gorge (a very worthwhile stop) and Gairloch passes through wild woodlands around Dundonnell and Loch Broom, then takes in stunning coastal scenery with views of Gruinard Bay and its white beaches. Look out for the toothed ramparts of the mountain **An Teallach** (pronounced tyel-lack), visible on the horizon for miles. The moorland route you travel is officially called the A832, but is better (and more chillingly) known as Destitution Road; a holdover from the terrible potato famines of the 1840s.

### ★ Inverewe Garden

**GARDEN** | A highlight of the area, Inverewe Garden has lush plantings tucked away behind a dense barrier of trees and

shrubs. This is all thanks to the warm North Atlantic Drift, which takes the edge off winter frosts. Inverewe is sometimes described as subtropical, but this inaccuracy irritates the head gardener; do not expect coconuts and palm trees here. Instead, look for rarities like the blue Himalayan poppy. ☑ *Off A832, Poolewe* ➔ *6 miles northeast of Gairloch* ☎ *01445/781229* 🌐 *www.nts.org.uk* 🎫 *£12.50.*

### ★ Loch Maree

**BODY OF WATER** | Southeast of Gairloch stretches one of Scotland's most scenic lochs, Loch Maree. Its harmonious setting, with tall Scots pines and the mountain Slioch looming as a backdrop, is regularly visited by red deer, as well as the endangered pine marten (a member of the weasel family)—though they're just as likely to be hanging around the trash cans as in the trees. There are few official parking places along the loch, but these are nestled between the trees with limited views, so be prepared to park and climb to a better vantage point. ☑ *Gairloch.*

## Hotels

### The Dundonnell

§ | **HOTEL** | Located along "Destitution Road," around 30 miles from Gairloch, this lovely family-run hotel sits on the edge of Little Loch Broom, with the mountains of An Leachall rising up behind. **Pros:** fabulous scenery; plenty of outdoor activities; good dining options. **Cons:** bland exterior; some outdated rooms; Wi-Fi only in public areas. ☑ *Rooms from: £110* ☑ *A832, Dundonnell* ☎ *01854/633204* 🌐 *www.dundonnellhotel.com* ➔ *23 rooms* 🍳 *Free breakfast.*

## Activities

### Gairloch Golf Club

**GOLF** | This lovely nine-hole course is one of the few to be found on this stretch of coast, but it is the coastal location

that gives it its charm—as well as its challenges. There has been a golf club here since 1898, and local records show that putters of more than a century ago played on the golden sand dunes, long since been replaced by rolling greens. While you are waiting for your turn at the tee, take a moment to drink in fine views of the Minch and Skye. ☒ Off A832 ☎ 01445/712407 🌐 [www.gairlochgolfclub.co.uk](http://www.gairlochgolfclub.co.uk) 📄 £15 for 9 holes, £25 for 18 holes 🕒 9 holes, 2137 yards, par 31.

## Shieldaig

37 miles south of Gairloch.

Just west of the southern coast of Upper Loch Torridon is Shieldaig, a village that sits in an attractive crescent overlooking a loch of its own, Loch Shieldaig. For an atmospheric evening foray, walk north toward Loch Torridon, at the northern end of the village by the church. The path—fairly well made, though hiking shoes are recommended—leads to exquisite views and tiny, rocky beaches.

### GETTING HERE AND AROUND

From Gairloch head southeast on the A832, then turn southwest onto the A896 at Kinlochewe; Shieldaig is around 17 miles along this road.

## Sights

### ★ Applecross

**SCENIC DRIVE** | The most exciting way to reach this small community facing Skye is by a twisting, turning coastal road, which leaves the A896 just a few miles south of Shieldaig; simply follow the brown sign marked “Wester Ross Coastal Trail.” A series of hairpin bends corkscrew up the steep wall at the head of a corrie (a glacier-cut mountain valley) and over the **Bealach na Ba** (Pass of the Cattle). There are spectacular views of Raasay and Skye from the bare plateau

on top, and you can brag afterward that you’ve been on what is probably Scotland’s highest drivable road.

### ★ Glen Torridon

**VIEWPOINT** | The scenic spectacle of Glen Torridon lies east of Shieldaig; if you’re following the A896 from Kinlochewe to Shieldaig, you pass right through it. Some say that Glen Torridon has the finest mountain scenery in Scotland. It consists mainly of the long, gray, quartzite flanks of **Beinn Eighe** and **Liathach**, with its distinct ridge profile that looks like the keel of an upturned boat.

## Hotels

### The Torridon

\$\$\$ | **HOTEL** | The Victorian Gothic turrets of this former hunting lodge promise atmosphere and grandeur—and with its log fires, handsome plasterwork ceilings, mounted stag heads, and antique mahogany furniture, The Torridon doesn’t disappoint. **Pros:** wonderful location; center for outdoor activities; more than 300 malts in the bar. **Cons:** very pricey; 6 miles out of town; activities must be booked in advance. ☎ Rooms from: £400 ☒ Off A896 ☎ 01445/791242 🌐 [www.thetorridon.com](http://www.thetorridon.com) ➡ 18 rooms 🍳 Breakfast.

### Torridon Inn

\$\$ | **B&B/INN** | A more affordable option than the grand Torridon hotel, this bright and sparkling clean lodging makes a great base for exploring the area. **Pros:** pleasant wood-clad decor; eco-friendly vibe; reasonable rates. **Cons:** service sometimes erratic; can be noisy; some rooms lacking views. ☎ Rooms from: £145 ☒ Off A896 ☎ 01445/791242 🌐 [www.thetorridon.com/stay/inn](http://www.thetorridon.com/stay/inn) ➡ 12 rooms 🍳 Breakfast.

## Lochcarron

14 miles southeast of Shieldaig, 25 miles northeast of Skye, 63 miles west of Inverness.

Strung along the shore, the village of Lochcarron has some attractive croft buildings, a couple of churches (one an 18th-century ruin set in a graveyard), a golf club, and some handy shops.

### GETTING HERE AND AROUND

To drive here from Shieldaig, take the A896 southeast; the single-lane road skirts both steep mountains and lochs. From Skye take the A87 east, turn northwards onto the A890, then turn west onto the A896.

## Restaurants

### The Bealach Cafe and Gallery

\$ | **CAFÉ** | This lovely café offers sandwiches, soups, and fine home baking against a background of mountains and the steepest road ascent in Britain, the Bealach na Ba (from which it gets its name). All this can be viewed through the café’s large windows or from the outside deck, if weather allows. **Known for:** lovely home-baked cakes; friendly hosts; views to die for. ☎ Average main: £9 ☒ A896 ☎ 01520/733436 🌐 [www.thebealach.co.uk](http://www.thebealach.co.uk) ☹ Closed Mon. and Tue. No dinner.

## Shopping

### Lochcarron Weavers

**TEXTILES/SEWING** | Watch a weaver producing pure-wool tartans that can be bought here or at the company’s other outlets in the area. There’s also a nice little café. ☒ Lochcarron ☎ 01520/722212 🌐 [www.lochcarron.co.uk](http://www.lochcarron.co.uk).

## Isle of Skye

The misty Isle of Skye is awash with romance and myth, lush green gardens, and steep, magnetic mountains. Its extraordinary natural beauty and royal connections see it rank highly on most visitors’ must-see lists, while its proximity to the mainland makes it one of Scotland’s most easily accessible islands.

Skye has a dramatic, mysterious, and mountainous landscape, where sunsets linger brilliantly until late at night and otherworldly mists roll gently through the valleys. Much photographed are the old crofts, one or two of which are still inhabited today. It also has an impressive range of accommodations, and restaurants that showcase the best of the island’s produce and culinary talent.

To reach Skye, cross over the bridge spanning the narrow channel of Kyleakin, between Kyle of Lochalsh and Kyleakin. Or, if you’re visiting in the summer, take a romantic boat trip between Mallaig and Armadale or between Glenelg and Kyleheh. You can tour comfortably around the island in two or three days, but a bit longer will allow extra time for hiking or sea kayaking.

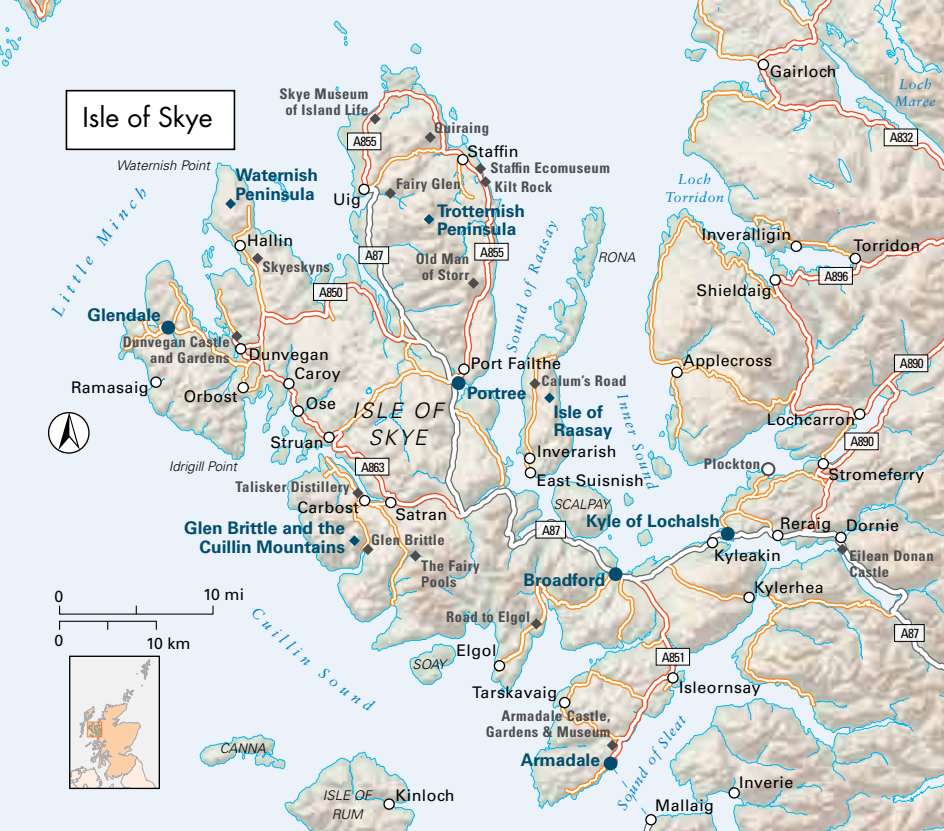
Orientation is easy: in the north, follow the roads that loop around the peninsulas of Waternish and Trotternish; in the south, enjoy the road running the length of the Sleat Peninsula. There are some stretches of single-lane road, but for careful drivers these shouldn’t pose a problem.

## Kyle of Lochalsh

80 miles west of Inverness, 180 miles northwest of Glasgow.

The little town of Kyle of Lochalsh is the mainland gateway to Skye. Opened in 1995, the bridge transformed not only





travel to Skye but the very seascape itself. The area's most notable—and most photographed—attraction is 8 miles farther east at Dornie—Eilean Donan Castle.

### GETTING HERE AND AROUND

From the north you reach Kyle of Lochalsh via the A890; from the south take the A87. There are four direct trains a day from Inverness.

## Sights

### Bright Water Visitor Centre

**INFO CENTER | FAMILY |** Discover *Ring of Bright Water*, Gavin Maxwell's much-loved account of his work with otters on the island of Eilean Ban. This center, in Kyleakin at the northern tip of Skye, has an exhibit illustrating his work; wildlife tours that promise otters, seals, and birdlife; and a whole host of

interactive activities. The center itself is just over the bridge from Kyle of Lochalsh, and includes a 155-year-old lighthouse designed by Robert Louis Stevenson's father. ☒ *The Pier*, Kyleakin ☎ 01599/530040 🌐 [www.eileanban.org](http://www.eileanban.org) ☎ Free ☺ Closed Oct.–Easter and weekends.

### ★ Eilean Donan Castle

**CASTLE/PALACE |** Guarding the confluence of lochs Long, Alsh, and Duich stands the most picturesque of all Scottish fortifications. Eilean Donan Castle, perched on an islet connected to the mainland by a stone-arched bridge, dates from the 14th century and has all the dramatic stone walls, timber ceilings, and winding stairs you could possibly desire. Empty and neglected for years after being bombarded by frigates of the Royal Navy during an abortive Spanish-Jacobite

landing in 1719, this romantic Scottish icon was almost entirely rebuilt from a ruin in the early 20th century. The kitchen re-creates the busy scene before a grand banquet, and the upper floors show how the castle was transformed into a grand house. The picturesque cover of a thousand travel brochures, Eilean Donan has also appeared in a number of Hollywood movies and TV shows, from *The Wicker Man* to *Highlander*. There's a shop and a coffeehouse for the many visitors. ☒ Off A87, Dornie ☎ 01599/555202 🌐 [www.eileandonancastle.com](http://www.eileandonancastle.com) ☎ £10 ☺ Closed Jan.

### Plockton

**TOWN |** Once a fishing and crofting center, Plockton today attracts visitors for its natural beauty and its warm microclimate, which allows palms to grow all along the main Harbour Street. Situated just 6 miles northeast of Kyle of Lochalsh, its natural bay is an ideal space for the small yachts that make their leisurely way to the coast and beyond, where gray seals can often be seen. Park at the car park at the entrance to the village and stroll along the main street, ideally with an ice cream as your companion. ☒ *Kyle of Lochalsh*.

## Restaurants

### ★ All the Goodness

☎ CAFÉ | This excellent little bakery-café serves homemade cakes, tray bakes, and pastries, along with artisan coffee and an array of tempting foodie gifts and souvenirs—all to be enjoyed with a stunning vista of Eilean Donan Castle. In summer the café also displays evocative works by local artist Lorraine Tolmie. **Known for:** delicious baked goods; superior tea and coffee; unbeatable castle views. ☎ Average main: £5 ☒ Off A87 ➔ 8 miles east of Kyle of Lochalsh ☎ 01599/555221 🌐 [www.allthegoodness.co.uk](http://www.allthegoodness.co.uk) ☺ Closed Mon.–Tues. No dinner.

## Broadford

8 miles west of Kyle of Lochalsh via Skye Bridge.

One of the larger of Skye's settlements, Broadford lies along the shore of Broadford Bay, which has been known to welcome whales to its sheltered waters.

### GETTING HERE AND AROUND

Broadford is on the A87, the main road crossing the Isle of Skye.

### TOURS

#### ★ Misty Isle Boat Trips

**TOUR—SIGHT | FAMILY |** For fantastic views of the Cuillin Mountains and the Inner Hebrides, book a place on one of the Misty Isle Boat Trips. The expansive scenery around Loch Coruisk is some of the most spectacular in Scotland. Round-trip journeys depart from the town of Elgol, 15 miles southwest of Broadford, and booking ahead is essential. Prices vary, but a cruise to a seal colony costs £25. Private charters are also available. ☒ *Elgol jetty*, Sealladh na Mara, Elgol ☎ 01471/866288 🌐 [www.mistyisle-boattrips.co.uk](http://www.mistyisle-boattrips.co.uk) ☎ From £14 ☺ Closed Nov.–Mar.

## Sights

### Road to Elgol

**SCENIC DRIVE |** The B8083 leads from Broadford to one of the finest vistas anywhere in Scotland. This road passes by **Strath Suardal** and little **Loch Cill Chriosd** (Kilchrist), and also takes in breathtaking views of the mountain **Bla Bheinn** en route. As you near Elgol, look out for a gathering of traditional crofts that descends to a pier, then admire the heart-stopping profile of the Cuillin peaks from the shore. Seek out the path, around halfway down the hill, that leads across rough grasslands into the mountains. ☒ *Elgol*.



Just a glimpse at Eilean Donan Castle from a distance makes it clear why this is one of the most photographed castles in all of Scotland.

## Restaurants

### ★ Creelers of Skye

\$\$ | SEAFOOD | Don't be fooled by its humble appearance; Creelers is a celebrated French seafood restaurant. From its pan-roasted sea bass to its seafood gumbo, it is a compulsory stop for all passing gourmands. **Known for:** excellent bouillabaisse; stunning sea views; tasty desserts. ☎ *Average main: £19* ☎ *Lower Harrapool* ☎ 01471/822281 ☎ [www.skye-seafood-restaurant.co.uk](http://www.skye-seafood-restaurant.co.uk) ☺ *Closed Sun.*

## Hotels

### Broadford Hotel

\$\$\$ | HOTEL | Watch over Broadford Bay in comfort and style with a stay at this well-appointed hotel, which takes pride in being the place where Drambuie was invented. **Pros:** quintessentially Scottish; convenient location; Drambuie-colored tartan. **Cons:** no elevator; poorly lit public areas; breakfast underwhelming.

☎ *Rooms from: £205* ☎ *Torrin Road* ☎ 01471/822204 ☎ [www.broadfordhotel.co.uk](http://www.broadfordhotel.co.uk) ➡ 11 rooms 🍷 *Free breakfast.*

## Armadale

*16 miles south of Broadford, 42 miles south of Portree, 5 miles (ferry crossing) west of Mallaig.*

Rolling moorlands, scattered with rivers and lochans, give way to enchanting hidden coves and scattered waterside communities. Welcome to **Sleat**, Skye's southernmost peninsula.

### GETTING HERE AND AROUND

The Mallaig-Armadale ferry arrives here. There's a short (and beautiful) road to the southwest, while the main road heads east following the stunning coast.

## Sights

### Armadale Castle, Gardens & Museum

**CASTLE/PALACE** | As the name suggests, this attraction has three distinct strings to its bow: a romantic, ruined castle; a lush, flower-filled estate; and a fascinating museum of local island history. The castle is a windswept 17th-century mansion house built by the influential Clan Donald, while the extensive gardens cover 40 acres, offering magnificent views across the Sound of Sleat to Knoydart and the Mallaig Peninsula. The highlight, however, is the fascinating museum, which tells the story of the clan and its proud title, the Lords of the Isles, with the help of an excellent audiovisual presentation. There's a gift shop, restaurant, library, and center for genealogy research. Also on the grounds are high-quality accommodations in the form of seven cottages, complete with kitchen facilities. Access is from Armadale Pier, where signs indicate the different forest walks that are available. ☎ *Off A851* ☎ 01471/844305 ☎ [www.armadalecastle.com](http://www.armadalecastle.com) 🍷 £8.75 ☺ *Closed Weekends in Nov.–Mar.*

## Hotels

### Duisdale House Hotel

\$\$\$ | HOTEL | Set in 35 acres of mature woodlands and gardens, this former mansion with a lovely hillside location and ocean views is boutique chic at its very best. **Pros:** finely furnished rooms; expansive views; attentive staff. **Cons:** nautical decor is an acquired taste; meals are expensive; some rooms are noisy. ☎ *Rooms from: £295* ☎ *Off A851, Isleornsay* ☎ 01471/833202 ☎ [www.duisdale.com](http://www.duisdale.com) ➡ 18 rooms 🍷 *Breakfast.*

### Hotel Eilean Iarmain

\$\$\$ | HOTEL | Built on a small peninsula dotted by a quiet lighthouse, this hotel has an unforgettable location and an enchanting collection of wood paneling, chintz fabrics, and country-style antiques. **Pros:** spectacular waterfront

location; plenty of sporting activities; excellent wine list. **Cons:** temperamental Wi-Fi; service can be mixed; food a little underwhelming. ☎ *Rooms from: £235* ☎ *Off A851, Isleornsay* ☎ 01471/833332 ☎ [www.eileaniarmain.co.uk](http://www.eileaniarmain.co.uk) ➡ 16 rooms 🍷 *Free breakfast.*

### ★ Kinloch Lodge

\$\$\$\$ | HOTEL | An upmarket hotel with an equally upmarket restaurant, Kinloch Lodge peacefully overlooks the tidal Loch na Dal. The historic buildings date from the 17th century, while the newer South House has the best views, built from the ground up with comfort and relaxation in mind. **Pros:** historic property; characterful interior; sublime afternoon tea. **Cons:** expensive dining; far from amenities; some of the old porcelain is stained. ☎ *Rooms from: £380* ☎ *Off A851, Isleornsay* ☎ 01471/833333 ☎ [www.kinloch-lodge.co.uk](http://www.kinloch-lodge.co.uk) ➡ 19 rooms 🍷 *Breakfast.*

## Portree

*42 miles northwest of Armadale.*

Portree, the population center of the island, is a pleasant place clustered around a small and sheltered bay. Although not overburdened by historical features, it's a fine touring base with a number of good shops.

### GETTING HERE AND AROUND

The biggest town on Skye, Portree is well served by local buses and by a well-maintained road, the A87.

### VISITOR INFORMATION VisitScotland

**Portree iCentre.** ☎ *Bayfield House, Bayfield Road* ☎ 01478/612992 ☎ [www.visitscotland.com/info/services/portree-icentre-p333111](http://www.visitscotland.com/info/services/portree-icentre-p333111).



## Sights

### Aros

**ARTS VENUE** | On the outskirts of town, Aros is a community center that screens films, exhibits artworks, and hosts live music, dance, and theater productions. It's the cultural hub of the Isle of Skye.  
 ☒ Viewfield Road ☎ 01478/613649  
 🌐 www.aros.co.uk 🆓 Free.

## Restaurants

### Café Arriba

\$ | **BRITISH** | Up a steep flight of stairs, the laid-back café has window seats with great views over Portree Harbour. Using only local produce (whatever is “fresh, local, and available”), this is a good option for no-frills eating. **Known for:** delicious homemade cakes; mildly treacherous stairs; there are lines. ☑ *Average main: £9* ☒ Quay Brae, Quay Street ☎ 01478/611830 🌐 www.cafearriba.co.uk.

### Scurrybreac Restaurant

\$\$\$\$ | **BRITISH** | It may be tiny, but this 20-seater restaurant has made big waves since opening in 2013. The vibe is relaxed and informal, while the cooking is imaginative and varied, creating unexpected marriages such as coffee-crustened venison or hake with coconut. **Known for:** intimate dining; inventive dishes; gorgeous bay views. ☑ *Average main: £42* ☒ 7 Bosville Terr. ☎ 01478/612069 🌐 www.scurrybreac.com ☺ Closed Sun.–Mon. No lunch.

## Hotels

### Cuillin Hills Hotel

\$\$\$ | **HOTEL** | This delightful Victorian-era hunting lodge looks down on Portree and the brightly painted houses around the harbor. **Pros:** a short stroll from Portree; good breakfast menu; attentive service. **Cons:** rooms at back overpriced; restaurant can be full; no elevator. ☑ *Rooms from: £245* ☒ Off A855 ☎ 01478/612003 🌐 www.cuillinhills-hotel-skye.co.uk 🚗 34 rooms 🍳 Free breakfast.

## Shopping

### Isle of Skye Soap Company

**PERFUME/COSMETICS** | This charming little shop handcrafts its own soaps, aromatherapy oils, candles, and other pleasingly fragranced gifts. Founder (and soap maker in chief) Fiona is an aromatherapist. ☒ Somerled Square ☎ 01478/611350 🌐 www.skye-soap.co.uk.

## Trotternish Peninsula

5 miles north of Portree.

Travel north from Portree on the A855 and you'll see cliffs rising to the left. These are the closest edge of an ancient lava flow, set back from the road and running the length of the peninsula. Fossilized dinosaur bones have been uncovered at the base of these cliffs, while overhead you might just spot a sea eagle, identifiable by the flash of its white tail.

### GETTING HERE AND AROUND

From Portree take the twisting, undulating A855 as it follows the coast.

## Sights

### ★ Fairy Glen

**NATURE SITE** | What was once a hidden gem has now become just another stop on the ever-expanding Skye tourist trail. Still, come early or late to avoid the crowds and the Fairy Glen remains a magical place—an enchanting, otherworldly valley of strange green hillocks, eerily still pools, crumbling cottages, and roaming sheep. To get here, take a small road just south of Uig signed “Sheader and Balnaknock” and drive for a little over a mile. 🆓 Free

### Kilt Rock

**NATURE SITE** | No drive between Portree and Staffin is complete without a sojourn at Skye's most famous sea cliff. Named for the shape of its sheer rock face,

## Clans and Tartans

The Scottish clans have a long and varied history. Some clans claim Norman roots and later married into Celtic society; others were of Norse origin, the product of Viking raids on Scotland; while others still may have been descended from Pictish tribes. Whatever their origins, by the 13th century the clan system was at the heart of Gaelic tribal culture. By the 15th century clan chiefs of the Scottish Highlands were even a threat to the authority of the Stewart monarchs. The word *clann* means “family” or “children” in Gaelic, and it was customary for clan chiefs to board out their sons among nearby families, a practice that helped to bond the clan unit and create strong allegiances.

### The Clan System

Gradually, by the 18th century, increasing knowledge of Lowland agricultural improvements, and better roads into the Highlands that improved communication of ideas and “southern” ways, began to weaken the clan system. The Battle of Culloden marked the death of the clan system, as the victorious English armies banned the kilt and the pipes and claimed the land of the rebellious clan chiefs. And when the new landowners introduced the hardy Cheviot breed of sheep and changed farming activity, the Highlands were

which is ridged like a pleated kilt and swoops out to sea at the “hem,” soaring Kilt Rock (and its gushing waterfall) can be seen from a specially built viewing platform. ☒ Off A855, Staffin ↗ 1½ miles south of Staffin.

transformed forever. Many Highlanders, and especially islanders, began to emigrate in the 1750s, and by the 1820s, landowners were paying people to leave.

### Tartan Revival

Tartan's own origins as a part of the clan system are disputed; the Gaelic word for striped cloth is *breacan*—piebald or spotted—so even the word itself is not Highland. Nevertheless, when cloth was locally spun, woven, and dyed using plant derivatives, each neighborhood would use different colorings. In this way combinations of colors and favorite patterns of the local weavers could become associated with an area and therefore its dominant clans. Between 1746 and 1782 the wearing of tartan was generally prohibited, and by the time the ban was lifted, many recipes for dyes and weaving patterns had been forgotten.

It took the influence of Sir Walter Scott, with his romantic (and fashionable) view of Highland history, to create the “modern myth” of clans and tartan. Sir Walter engineered George IV's visit to Scotland in 1822, which turned into a tartan extravaganza. The idea of one tartan or group of tartans “belonging” to one particular clan was created at this time—literally created, with new patterns dreamed up and “assigned” to particular clans.

### Old Man of Storr

**NATURE SITE** | Along the dramatic road around the Trotternish Peninsula, a gate beside a car park marks the beginning of the climb to the Old Man of Storr, one of Skye's most iconic landmarks. At 2,000 feet, this volcanic pinnacle is the highest point on the peninsula, so give yourself at



least three hours to explore and enjoy the spectacular views from the top. **▲ The weather here changes very quickly, so be prepared.** ☒ Off A855.

### ★ Quiraing

**NATURE SITE** | A spectacular geological formation of rocky crags and towering stacks, Quiraing dominates the horizon of the Trotternish Peninsula. It is situated about 5 miles beyond Kilt Rock, so for a closer look, make a left onto a small road at Brogaig by Staffin Bay. There's a parking lot near the point where this road breaches the ever-present cliff line. The road is very narrow and rough, so drive cautiously. The rambler's trail is on uneven, stony ground, and it's a steep scramble up to the rock formations. In ages past, stolen cattle were hidden deep within the Quiraing's rocky jaws.

### Skye Museum of Island Life

**MUSEUM** | Discover the old crofting ways of the local population at this museum, situated close to the tip of the Trotternish Peninsula. Informative displays and exhibits show life as it was on the island merely a century ago, from reconstructed interiors with traditional tools and implements to historical photographs and documents. ☒ Off A855, Kilmuir ☎ 01470/552206 🌐 [www.skyemuseum.co.uk](http://www.skyemuseum.co.uk) 🚗 £3 🕒 Closed Sun. and Oct.–Easter.

### Staffin Ecomuseum

**MUSEUM VILLAGE** | **FAMILY** | Billed as “a museum without walls,” the Staffin Ecomuseum is a collection of 13 open-air geological and social exhibits dotted along the landscape of the peninsula. Follow the map along the coastal route and you will discover dinosaur footprints, a healing well, a deserted village, and more. This is not to be confused with Staffin Museum, Dugald Ross's nearby exhibition. ☒ Staffin Community Trust, 3 Elishadder, Staffin 🌐 [www.skyecomuseum.co.uk](http://www.skyecomuseum.co.uk).

## Hotels

### Corran House

£ | **B&B/INN** | Set back off the A87 near Kingsburgh, this cozy B&B is a convenient, good-value stay at the base of the Trotternish Peninsula, 8 miles northwest of Portree. **Pros:** great location between sights; splendid views; good value. **Cons:** not close to any one particular attraction; easy to miss; more expensive than it used to be. ☎ Rooms from: £100 ☎ 1 Eyre, Portree ➔ Set back from the road; look out for the small white sign ☎ 01470/532699 🌐 [www.corran-houseskye.co.uk](http://www.corran-houseskye.co.uk) 🚗 6 rooms 🕒 Free breakfast.

### The Flodigarry Hotel

\$\$\$ | **HOTEL** | With spectacular coastal views and antique furnishings throughout, the Flodigarry Hotel retains the feel of a grand country manor. **Pros:** spectacular views; a good base for walking; free Wi-Fi. **Cons:** steep road down; expensive rooms; a long way from anywhere. ☎ Rooms from: £260 ☒ Off A855, Staffin ☎ 01470/552203 🌐 [www.hotelintheskye.co.uk](http://www.hotelintheskye.co.uk) 🚗 18 rooms 🕒 Free breakfast.

## Waternish Peninsula

20 miles northwest of Portree.

The northwest corner of Skye has scattered crofting communities and magnificent coastal views. In the Hallin area look westward for a sea loch with small cliffs rising from the water like miniature models of full-size islands.

### GETTING HERE AND AROUND

From Portree follow the A87 north, then head west on the A850 to the Waternish Peninsula.

## Sights

### Skyeskyns

**FACTORY** | A 10-minute tour of this working tannery gives visitors excellent insight into the process of salting, washing, and preparing sheepskins. You'll learn the source of such phrases as “on tenterhooks” and “stretched to the limits,” and you can buy sheepskins from the on-site shop. ☒ 17 Lochbay, Waternish ☎ 01470/592237 🌐 [www.skyeskyns.co.uk](http://www.skyeskyns.co.uk) 🕒 Free.

## Restaurants

### Loch Bay Restaurant

\$\$\$\$ | **SEAFOOD** | Situated right on the waterfront, this distinctive black-and-white restaurant, where the island's top chefs come to unwind on their nights off, is a Skye foodie favorite. The seafood is freshly caught and simply prepared by renowned chef Michael Smith, with the aim of enhancing the natural flavors of the ingredients rather than overwhelming them with superfluous sauces. **Known for:** sublime yet simple seafood; beautiful bay views; impeccable service. ☎ Average main: £29.50 ☒ 1 Macleods Terr., Stein ☎ 01470/592235 🌐 [www.lochbay-restaurant.co.uk](http://www.lochbay-restaurant.co.uk) 🕒 Closed Mon. Closed Jan. and Feb. No dinner Tues. Mar.–Oct. and Sun. Mar.–Dec. No lunch in Nov. and Dec. and Tues., Wed., and Sat. Mar.–Oct.

## Shopping

### Edinbane Pottery

**ART GALLERIES** | This store, which specializes in quirky handmade ceramics and watercolors of local wildlife, is a great place to pick up a distinctive souvenir from your time on Skye. ☒ Off A850, Edinbane ☎ 01470/582234 🌐 [www.edinbane-pottery.co.uk](http://www.edinbane-pottery.co.uk).

## Glendale

14 miles southwest of Waternish.

Glendale is a region rich in flora and fauna: otters, seals, and dolphins can be spotted off its rocky coast, while white-tailed sea eagles soar overhead. Dunvegan Castle is just at the region's eastern edge.

### GETTING HERE AND AROUND

From the Waternish Peninsula, take the A850 southwest, turn onto the A863 southeast at Dunvegan, then follow the twisty, turny B884 west along the coast. It can feel rather isolated in bad weather or after dark.

## Sights

### Dunvegan Castle and Gardens







**CASTLE/PALACE** | In a commanding position looming over a sea loch, Dunvegan Castle has been the seat of the chiefs of Clan MacLeod for more than 700 years. Today it's a popular (if overpriced) tourist attraction. Step inside and into the clan's illustrious past through plush interiors, fascinating photos, and, most notably, the Fairy Flag—a silk banner, thought to be originally from Rhodes or Syria, which is credited with protecting the clan from danger. And make time to explore the gardens, with their water garden and falls, fern house, walled garden, and various viewing points. There's a café beside the car park. Boat trips from the castle to the nearby seal colony run April through September. ☒ Junction of A850 and A863, Dunvegan ☎ 01470/521206 🌐 [www.dunvegancastle.com](http://www.dunvegancastle.com) 🚗 Castle and gardens £14; gardens only £12; seal trips £9.50.

## Restaurants

### ★ Three Chimneys

\$\$\$\$ | MODERN BRITISH | Perhaps the Isle of Skye's biggest culinary draw, this old stone-walled restaurant on the banks of Loch Dunvegan serves consistently daring, well-crafted food. The chef's belief in quality Scottish ingredients is evident in every dish, from the locally sourced game to the sublime Scottish seafood, and when aligned with the chic, minimalist interior—all crisp white walls and exposed brickwork—it makes for a luxury dining experience you won't soon forget.

**Known for:** inventive seafood dishes; sublime haddock ravioli; faultless service.

 Average main: £69  B884, Colbost  01470/511258  www.threechimneys.co.uk  Closed mid-Dec.–mid-Jan.  No children under eight at dinner.

## Shopping

### Skye Silver

**JEWELRY/ACCESSORIES** | Distinctive gold and silver jewelry with Celtic themes is the bread and butter of Skye Silver. From pendants to rings, bracelets to earrings, the unique pieces here are inspired by the surrounding natural landscapes of sea and countryside, with motifs of island wildlife.  The Old School, B884, Colbost  01470/511263  www.skyesilver.com.

## Glen Brittle and the Cuillin Mountains

32 miles southeast of Glendale.



The gentle slopes of this valley are a gateway to the dramatic peaks and ridges of the Cuillin Mountains. Glen Brittle's lower slopes are fine for walkers and weekend climbers, but the higher ridges are strictly for serious mountaineers.

### GETTING HERE AND AROUND


From Glendale follow the B884 east to Lonmore, turn south onto the A863, then after 16 miles head west on the B8009. Glen Brittle extends from here to cover the southwest corner of the island.

## Sights

### ★ Fairy Pools

**BODY OF WATER** | One of the most magical sights in Scotland, the Fairy Pools are a spectacularly beautiful collection of waterfalls and plunge pools in the midst of Glen Brittle. The rocky gray landscape contrasts with the vivid blue-green of the pools, the colorful plant life, and visiting wildlife (including, occasionally, red deer) to give the environment a fairy-tale feel. You can walk to the pools from a parking lot 20 minutes away. Come at sunrise or sunset for smaller crowds and the opportunity for a truly enchanting swim—just don't expect the water to be warm.  Glenbrittle  Free.

### Glen Brittle





**MOUNTAIN—SIGHT** | Enjoy spectacular mountain scenery in Glen Brittle, including some unforgettable views of the Cuillin Mountains (these are not for the casual walker, due to steep and dangerous cliff faces). The drive from Carlost along a single-track road is one of the most dramatic in Scotland and draws outdoorsy types from across the globe. At the southern end of the glen is a murky-colored beach, a campground, and gentle foothills that were made for strolling.  Off A863 and B8009.

### Talisker Distillery

**WINERY/DISTILLERY** | The only distillery on the Isle of Skye is one of the best in Scotland. Talisker produces a sweet, light single malt that has the distinctive peaty aroma of island whiskies, yet with less intensity—making it a great introductory dram for newcomers to Scotch. Robert Louis Stevenson called Talisker “the king of drinks,” and the inhabitants of Skye are



The Isle of Skye's most magical walk is to the Fairy Pools, rock pools of spring water fed by waterfalls from the Cuillin Mountains.

very proud of it. Classic tours here take about 45 minutes, while tasting tours (available weekdays) take between one-and-a-half and two hours. Book ahead, as tours are very popular.  B8009, Carlost  01478/614308  www.malts.com  Tours from £10.

## Isle of Raasay

17 miles northeast of Glenbrittle.


This beautiful and rugged isle lies a few miles off Skye's east coast and offers a pleasant escape from its tourist hordes. Although only 10 miles long, it's home to some fine coastal walks, a brooding castle ruin and an inventive, up-and-coming distillery.

### GETTING HERE AND AROUND

There are regular ferries to Raasay from Sconser on Skye (20 minutes south of Portree) every day of the week, all year-round.

## Sights

### Calum's Road

**LOCAL INTEREST** | An extraordinary feat of human endeavor, this single-track, 2-mile road was conceived and constructed by a single man—local crofter Calum MacLeod. Following several failed petitions to the local council, requesting them to improve access to northern Raasay by transforming a narrow footpath into a usable road, MacLeod decided to take matters into his own hands. Using only a pick-axe, shovel, and wheelbarrow, he began laying the road in 1964. Ten years later it was finally complete. The road would later be officially adopted and surfaced by the council, and named “Calum's Road” in MacLeod's honor. It begins just beyond the atmospheric, 16th-century ruins of Brochel Castle on the northeast coast of Raasay, and ends at Arnish.  Near Brochel, Isle of Raasay.

## The Outer Hebrides



## Hotels

### ★ Isle of Raasay Distillery

\$\$ | HOTEL | More than just Raasay's first legal distillery (look out for its single-malt Scotch launch in late 2020), this stunning building—a modern glass-and-steel structure wrapped around a Victorian-era villa—also happens to be the island's most luxurious accommodations option.

**Pros:** chic minimalist design; comfy lounge with honesty bar; breathtaking views of Skye. **Cons:** no kitchen (meals at nearby Raasay House); no family rooms; whisky still in progress. [5] Rooms from: £155 [5] Borodale House, Isle of Raasay [5] 01478/470178 [5] www.raasaydistillery.com [5] 6 rooms [5] Free Breakfast.

## Isle of Lewis

53 miles from Ullapool via ferry.

The history of Lewis stretches back 5,000 years, as archaeological sites scattered across the island attest. Here the Highland past persists in the Gaelic that is spoken everywhere, and most of its inhabitants still bear clan names. The main town on Lewis is Stornoway.

### GETTING HERE AND AROUND

Three main routes radiate from Stornoway to give access to the rest of the island. The A859 leads south all the way to Harris; the A857 leads north to Port of Ness, the island's northernmost point; and the A858 leads west, looping up and round to meet the A857 near Brue.

## Stornoway

2½-hour ferry trip from Ullapool.

The port capital for the Outer Hebrides is Stornoway, the only major town on Lewis. As the island's cultural center, it has a few interesting attractions and an increasing number of good restaurants.

Keep an eye out for seals bobbing about in the harbor.

The ferry docks at Stornoway, and there's an airport within easy reach of the center. It's best to have a car to explore the island, but there are also infrequent local buses to attractions including the Calanais Standing Stones and the Blackhouse at Arnol.

### AIRPORT CONTACTS Stornoway Airport.

[5] A866, Stornoway [5] 01851/702256 [5] www.hial.co.uk.

### VISITOR INFORMATION Stornoway

VisitScotland iCentre. [5] 26 Cromwell St., Stornoway [5] 01851/703088 [5] www.visitscotland.com.

## Sights

### An Lanntair

**ARTS VENUE** | This fabulous arts center hosts exhibitions of contemporary and traditional art and frequent traditional musical and theatrical events in the impressive auditorium. There's also a cinema, a gift shop, and a café-bar serving coffee and snacks alongside fine international and Scottish fare. [5] Kenneth St., Stornoway [5] 01851/708480 [5] www.lanntair.com [5] Closed Sun.

## Restaurants








### ★ Digby Chick

\$\$\$ | MODERN BRITISH | Lewis's best seafood restaurant, this informal local favorite is an ideal destination for a rainy evening's meal. The solid wood floors and white tablecloths are guaranteed to brighten your outlook, while the sublime seasonal food will lighten the spirits. **Known for:** inventive seafood dishes; informal atmosphere; reservations by phone only. [5] Average main: £23 [5] 5 Bank St., Stornoway [5] 01851/700026 [5] www.digbychick.co.uk [5] Closed Sun.






## Hotels

### Broad Bay House

\$\$ | B&B/INN | It may be a little out of town, but the view alone makes Broad Bay House a worthwhile detour—and it's an added bonus that the hotel is also meticulously designed and constructed. **Pros:** stunning views; great coastal walks; fine evening meals. **Cons:** no kids under 12; car required; expensive for the area.  Rooms from: £189  B895, Stornoway  7 miles north of Stornoway  01851/820990  www.broadbayhouse.co.uk  4 rooms  Breakfast.

## Activities

### BICYCLING

**Alex Dan's Cycle Centre** (AD Cycle Centre) **BICYCLING** | With a range of bikes to hire, AD Cycle Centre is also a place to pick up valuable advice on where to ride, including a route to Tolsta that takes in five stunning beaches before reaching the edge of moorland. Bike rental is £5 per hour or £20 for 24 hours.  67 Kenneth St., Stornoway  01851/704025  www.ad-cycles.co.uk.

## Port of Ness

27 miles north of Stornoway.




The stark, windswept community of Port of Ness cradles a small harbor squeezed in among the rocks.

From Stornoway drive up the A857 or take bus W1.

## Sights

### Butt of Lewis Lighthouse

**LIGHTHOUSE** | At the northernmost point of Lewis stands the Butt of Lewis Lighthouse, which was first illuminated in 1862. Designed by David and Thomas Stevenson, it's one of many Scottish lighthouses built by the prominent Stevenson engineering family, whose

best-known member was not an engineer at all but novelist Robert Louis Stevenson. The adjacent cliffs provide a good vantage point for viewing seabirds, whales, and porpoises.  Off A857, Port of Ness  3 miles northwest of Port of Ness  www.undiscoveredscotland.co.uk.

## Shopping

### Borgh Pottery

**CERAMICS/GLASSWARE** | Pick up a range of attractive hand-thrown studio pottery made on the premises, including lamps, vases, mugs, and dishes. It's open only on Saturdays from November through Easter.  Fivepenny House, Off A857, Borve  01851/850345  www.borgh-pottery.co.uk.

## Carloway and Callanish

17 miles west of Stornoway.






The old crofting town of Carloway is surrounded by historic sights that give real insight into island life, including the mysterious arrangement of ancient stones at Callanish; Lewis's top attraction.

Travel west on the A858 to reach Carloway directly, or take the looping A859 to get there via Callanish. The W2 bus from Stornoway stops at both Carloway and Callanish.





## Sights

### ★ The Blackhouse



**MUSEUM VILLAGE** | In the small community of Arnol, the Blackhouse is a well-preserved example of an increasingly rare type of traditional Hebridean home. Common throughout the islands as recently as the mid-20th century, these dwellings were built without mortar and thatched on a timber framework without eaves. Other characteristic features include an open central peat hearth and the absence of a chimney (hence

"blackhouse," from all the soot). Inside you'll find half the house designated for family life, complete with many original furnishings, and the other half a stable for animals. Opposite is the White House, built later when houses were no longer allowed to accommodate humans and animals together.  Off A858, Arnol  01851/710395  www.historicenvironment.scot  £6  Closed Sun. Also closed Wed. Oct.–Mar.

### ★ Calanais Standing Stones (Callanish Stones)

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE** | The west coast of Lewis is rich in prehistoric sites, and the most famous of these is the Calanais Standing Stones. Believed to have been positioned in several stages between 3000 BC and 1500 BC, this arrangement consists of an avenue of 19 monoliths extending northward from a circle of 13 stones, with other rows leading south, east, and west. Ruins of a cairn sit within the circle on the east side. Researchers believe they may have been used for astronomical observations, but you're free to cook up your own theories. The visitor center has an interesting exhibit on the stones, a very pleasant tearoom, and a gift shop.  Callanish  01851/621422  www.historicenvironment.scot  Free.

### Dun Carloway Broch (Doune Broch)

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE** | Discover one of the country's best-preserved Iron Age *brochs* (circular stone towers). These fortified residences are exclusive to Scotland, and Dun Carloway Broch dominates the scattered community of the same name. The mysterious tower was probably built around 2,000 years ago as protection against seaborne raiders; the nearby visitor center explains all about the broch, its history, and its setting.  Off A858, Carloway  Free.

### Gearranan Blackhouse Village (Garenin)

**MUSEUM VILLAGE** | Situated at the end of a side road north from Carloway, Gearranan is an old coastal crofting village that

has been brought back to life as a living museum with excellent guided tours evoking its past. You can rent one of the restored blackhouses here if you want a unique self-catering cottage stay. There is also a small gift shop and café.  5a Gearranan, Carloway  01851/643416  www.gearranan.com  Free.

## Isle of Harris

36 miles southwest of Stornoway.

For most people Harris is forever linked to tweed. Woven here and on nearby islands, the tweed has colors that echo the tones of the landscape. The dramatic mountains of the northern part of Harris give way in the south to *machairs*, grassy plains typical of this region, and a series of spectacular sandy beaches.

### GETTING HERE AND AROUND

The A859 is the main artery through Harris. From Tarbert you can follow the A859 south to Leverburgh (21 miles), where you can take a boat to St. Kilda or a ferry to North Uist. The single-track road down the east coast is known as the Golden Road.

## Tarbert

38 miles south of Calanais.

The main port of Harris, Tarbert has some good shops and a few worthwhile sights. **Traigh Luskentyre**, roughly 5 miles southwest of Tarbert, is a spectacular example of a Harris beach—2 miles of pristine white sand flanked by dunes. Across the bay lies another beautiful beach, **Traigh Seilebost**; both of these would be crowded with holidaymakers if in warmer climes. The narrow Golden Road, which runs along the east coast, offers some glorious views of a rocky, otherworldly landscape.

The ferry from Uig on the Isle of Skye arrives at Tarbert once or twice daily.



At Gearrannan Blackhouse Village, you can experience traditional Scottish crofting life via the many blackhouses scattered throughout the living museum.

Having a car makes travel on Harris much easier, but with careful planning and plenty of patience, it's possible to see the area with local buses.

## Sights

### ★ Isle of Harris Distillery

**WINERY/DISTILLERY** | Opened in 2015, this island distillery rapidly gained a reputation for its distinctive gin, infused with coastal botanicals including sugar kelp. Its first malt whisky, called The Hearach (the Gaelic term for an inhabitant of Harris), is currently maturing in bourbon barrels. The distillery holds guided tours (£10) every weekday from March to October—call to book in advance. ☎ *Tarbert* 01859/502212 🌐 [www.harrisdistillery.com](http://www.harrisdistillery.com) 📄 Free; tours £10.

### ★ Traigh Luskentyre

**BEACH—SIGHT** | One of Scotland's most spectacular beaches, Traigh Luskentyre is flanked by rolling sand dunes on one side and the shimmering sea on the other. Add in the distant peaks, the lush

grassland, and the rocky islets and there are few better places on Lewis and Harris for a windswept walk. To reach the beach, drive 8 miles south of Tarbert on the A859, then turn right at the sign to "Losgaintir" (Gaelic for Luskentyre).

**Amenities:** parking (no fee); toilets. **Best for:** solitude; sunset; walking. ☎ *Off A859, Tarbert.*

## Restaurants

### Skoon Art Café

☎ | **CAFÉ** | This renovated croft house café, which is tucked just off the twisting Golden Road running south from Tarbert to Leverburgh, has a simple, delicious menu that changes daily. It has everything from filling homemade soups to sumptuous smoked salmon to mouthwatering cakes. **Known for:** simple but delicious fare; good tea and coffee; wonderfully remote.

☎ *Average main: £8* ☎ 4 *Geocrab, Tarbert* 01859/530268 🌐 [www.skoon.com](http://www.skoon.com) ☺ *Closed Sun. and Mon. No dinner* ☹ *No credit cards.*

## Hotels

### Scarista House

\$\$\$ | **HOTEL** | This lovingly converted Georgian *manse* (minister's residence) offers large and comfortable bedrooms, a peaceful location with spectacular views over a pristine 3-mile-long sandy beach, and a dining experience that's unmatched anywhere else on Harris. **Pros:** magnificent setting and views; delicious food (try the *tarte Tatin*); friendly and attentive service. **Cons:** patchy Wi-Fi; some oppressively floral wallpaper; very expensive for Harris. ☎ *Rooms from: £230* ☎ *Off A859, Borve* 01859/550238 🌐 [www.scaristahouse.com](http://www.scaristahouse.com) ➡ 6 *rooms* ☺ *Free Breakfast.*

### Hotel Hebrides

\$\$ | **HOTEL** | A welcoming hotel with lovely gardens and views across the loch and harbor, Hotel Hebrides is an oasis of luxury in unassuming Tarbert. **Pros:** wonderful location; comfortable bedrooms; parking on the street right outside. **Cons:** some rooms small; sea views only from some rooms; noises from the bar can drift up. ☎ *Rooms from: £155* ☎ *Pier Road, Tarbert* 01859/502364 🌐 [www.hotel-hebrides.com](http://www.hotel-hebrides.com) ➡ 21 *rooms* ☺ *Breakfast.*

## Shopping

### Essence of Harris

**PERFUME/COSMETICS** | This popular pierside store specializes in candles, bath products, and reed diffusers with wonderful fragrances inspired by the island. The black pomegranate Seilebost hand cream is particularly popular. ☎ *The Pier, Tarbert* 01859/502768 🌐 [www.essenceofharris.co.uk](http://www.essenceofharris.co.uk).

## Leverburgh

21 miles south of Tarbert.

Named after Lord Leverhulme, who bought Lewis and Harris in 1917 with an eye to developing its local industries,

Leverburgh is now the departure and arrival port for North Uist ferries, as well as day-tripping boats to St. Kilda. Nearby Northton and Rodel have several attractions, with St. Clement's Church a particular highlight.

Leverburgh is on the A859 between Tarbert and Rodel.

## Sights

### Seallam! Visitor Centre and Co Leis Thu Genealogical Research Centre

**LIBRARY** | Learn more about life in the Western Isles and trace your Hebridean ancestry at this informative visitor center. Photographs and interpretive signs reveal the long and turbulent history of Harris and its residents, with the owners organizing guided walks and cultural evenings every week between May and September. ☎ *Off A859, Northton* 01859/520258 🌐 [www.hebridespeople.com](http://www.hebridespeople.com) ☎ £2.50 ☺ *Closed Sat. and Sun. in summer and Sat.–Tue. in winter.*

★ **St. Clement's Church** (*Eaglais Roghadail*) **RELIGIOUS SITE** | At the southernmost point of Harris, in the village of Rodel, lies St. Clement's Church—the most impressive pre-Reformation House of God in the Outer Hebrides. The large cruciform church, which sits atop a small hillock, was built around 1500. Head inside to see the magnificently sculpted 16th-century wall tomb of the church's builder, clan chief Alasdair Crotach MacLeod of Dunvegan Castle. ☎ *A859, Rodel* ➡ 3 *miles southeast of Leverburgh* 🌐 [www.historicenvironment.scot](http://www.historicenvironment.scot) 📄 Free.

## Restaurants

### Anchorage Restaurant

\$\$ | **MODERN BRITISH** | Along the southern coast of Harris, looking across the Sea of Hebrides toward North Uist, this lively restaurant is a great place to grab a bite before hopping aboard the ferry. The menu ranges from burgers, sandwiches,





The Isle of Harris is home to many spectacular landscapes, like this one with St. Clement's Church in the distance.

and fish-and-chips to quality local sea-food. **Known for:** cheap and tasty dishes; open until fairly late; handy harborside location. **☎ Average main:** £18 **☎ The Pier, Ferry Road, Leverburgh** ☎ 01859/520225 **🌐** [www.anchoragerestaurant.co.uk](http://www.anchoragerestaurant.co.uk) **☺ Closed Sun.**

## **Hotels**

### **Pairst an t-Srath Guest House**

**\$ | B&B/INN** | Set back from the main road and with splendid views of the beach, this rural B&B is comfortable and quirky, with elegant and unpretentious rooms.

**Pros:** lovely views of the coast; very good breakfasts; convenient location off main road. **Cons:** rooms quite small; overkill with the animal statues; no à la carte dinner option. **☎ Rooms from:** £108 **☎ Off A859, Borve** ☎ 01859/550386 **🌐** [www.pairstant-srath.co.uk](http://www.pairstant-srath.co.uk) **🚗 4 rooms** **🍳 Breakfast.**

## **St. Kilda**

57 miles west of Leverburgh.

The most distant corner of the British Isles, this archipelago of five islands has double World Heritage status, recognized for both its natural and cultural significance. The natural highlights are immediately obvious, with Eiffel Tower-sized cliffs, colossal sea stacks, and soaring seabirds in abundance; make the most of main island Hirta's natural highlights with a hike to Ruival in the south of the island, or to Conachair (the island's highest point) in the north. The human impact is more subtle yet equally captivating, with hillside *cleits* (stone storage huts) and a 19th-century village offering insight into the lives of the people who, until recently, called this inhospitable environment home.

### **GETTING HERE AND AROUND**

You can get to Hirta, St. Kilda's main island, on a private tour boat from Leverburgh on Harris or from Stein on

Skye. Tours are operated by Kilda Cruises (**🌐** [www.kildacruises.co.uk](http://www.kildacruises.co.uk)) and Sea Harris (**🌐** [www.seaharris.co.uk](http://www.seaharris.co.uk)) from Harris, and by Go to St. Kilda (**🌐** [www.seaharris.co.uk](http://www.seaharris.co.uk)) from Skye.

### **TOURS**

#### **Kilda Cruises**

**BOAT TOURS** | This popular tour operator organizes day trips to St. Kilda three times a week (allowing some leeway in case of bad weather.) Tours leave from Leverburgh on Harris and include 4½ hours on Hirta island, as well as a cruise around the archipelago's dizzyingly high cliffs and sea stacks. **✉ Pier Road, Tarbert** ☎ 01859/502060 **🌐** [www.kildacruises.co.uk](http://www.kildacruises.co.uk).

## **Sights**

### **St. Kilda Village**

**TOWN** | This crumbling, wind-ravaged village is the last remaining evidence of the community that lived on Hirta for thousands of years. For most of that time, the St. Kildans lived in utter isolation, with the abundant birdlife providing the bulk of their diet. But in the 1830s, visiting missionary Reverend Neil Mackenzie decided to improve living conditions on the island and raised funds for the construction of this street of Hebridean blackhouses, along with a church, *manse* (minister's residence), and school. Today visitors to St. Kilda can walk in and around the village buildings, with one house containing an informative museum telling the incredible story of island life through pottery, textiles, and photographs. **🌐** [www.nts.org.uk](http://www.nts.org.uk).

## **North Uist**

7 miles southwest of Leverburgh.

Stunning coastal scenery and ancient ruins are the main draws on North Uist. There are lochs everywhere you look, and a surprising number of public artworks,

too, from the ends of roads to the top of hills to the edge of the coast.

### **GETTING HERE AND AROUND**

You can get to North Uist by ferry from Leverburgh on Harris and from Uig on the Isle of Skye, or you can drive from South Uist and Benbecula on the A865. Public transport is infrequent, so a car (or a bike) is the most reliable way to get around.

## **Sights**

### **Balrinald Nature Reserve**

**NATURE PRESERVE** | Run by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), the Balrinald Nature Reserve shelters large numbers of waders and seabirds who inhabit the rock foreshore and marshland. Listen for corncrakes, whose distinctive rasping cry sounds not unlike a plastic drink lid being unscrewed. **✉ Hougharry** **➔ 3 miles northwest of Bayhead** ☎ 01876/560287 **🌐** [www.rspb.org.uk](http://www.rspb.org.uk) **🆓 Free.**

### **Barpa Langass**

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE** | Dating back around 5,000 years, Barpa Langass is a chambered cairn (a Neolithic burial monument), the only one in the Western Isles to retain a fully intact inner chamber. You can peek inside, but don't venture too far without a light. You'll find Barpa Langass just off the A867, two-thirds of the way between Lochmaddy and Clacheny. **☎ Off A867, Lochmaddy.**

### **Dun an Sticir**

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE** | Near Port nan Long in the very north of North Uist stands the remains of Dun an Sticir, reputed to have been the last inhabited broch on the island. This defensive tower, reached by a causeway over the loch, was built in the Iron Age but abandoned when the Vikings arrived in the 9th century. In 1602 it was reoccupied by Hugh Macdonald, a descendant of Macdonald of Sleat, but since he reached an unpleasant end (starved to death in a castle dungeon on the Isle of Skye), it has been slowly



crumbling into the sea. ☒ *Off B893*  
🚗 *Free.*

### Taigh Chearsabhagh

**MUSEUM** | Set right on the shore in Lochmaddy, the well-run Taigh Chearsabhagh is an informative museum and arts center, complete with two exhibition spaces, a working printshop, and a permanent exhibition that reveals what life is really like on North Uist. The café serves a selection of cakes and soup, as well as excellent French-press coffee. ☒ *Lochmaddy* 📞 01870/603970 🌐 *www.taigh-chearsabhagh.org* 🏠 £3 museum; galleries free ☺ *Closed Sun.*

## South Uist

*12 miles south of Carinish (on North Uist) via Grimsay, Benbecula, and three causeways.*

Carpets of wildflowers in spring and early summer, superb deserted beaches, and historical connections to Flora Macdonald and Bonnie Prince Charlie head the list of reasons to visit this island.

### GETTING HERE AND AROUND

You can travel the length of South Uist along the A865, making short treks off this main road on your way to Lochboisdale in the southeast. At Lochboisdale you can catch ferries to Barra, the southernmost of the Outer Hebrides' main islands, or to Oban on the mainland.

### Sights

#### Kildonan Museum

**MUSEUM** | This small museum has a number of interesting artifacts on the Uists and their people. The small details, like how locals filled their mattresses or the names for the tools they used in their houses, are what make this place interesting. There is also a craft shop and an excellent café renowned for its filled baked potatoes and homemade

cakes. ☒ *A865, Kildonan* 📞 01878/710343 🌐 *www.kildonanmuseum.co.uk* 🏠 £3 ☺ *Closed Nov.–Mar.*

### Our Lady of the Isles

**PUBLIC ART** | This 30-foot-high granite statue of the Madonna and child is a symbol of island resistance. In the 1950s the Ministry of Defense proposed building a missile-testing facility on South Uist, but islanders opposed the plans, fearing it would destroy their way of life, culture, and language. So they raised the funds for this ambitious work of art and erected it on land earmarked for development by the MOD. Today it is a listed monument, making any future building proposals even less likely to succeed. ☒ *Off A865.*

### Hotels

#### Polochar Inn

\$ | **B&B/INN** | Set within a 300-year-old property, this secluded inn at the southern end of South Uist offers basic but pleasant rooms with sea views, as well as a good seafood restaurant. **Pros:** reasonable rates; good food and drink; free and reliable Wi-Fi. **Cons:** some small rooms; remote location; a little old-fashioned. 💰 *Rooms from: £90* ☒ *Off B888, Lochboisdale* 📞 01878/700215 🌐 *www.polocharinn.com* 🚗 11 rooms 🕒 *Breakfast.*

### Shopping

#### Hebridean Jewellery

**JEWELRY/ACCESSORIES** | Handcrafted Celtic-influenced silver and gold earrings, brooches, and pendants are the order of the day at Hebridean Jewellery. Come for a tour of the workshop and stay for an espresso and cake in the on-site café. ☒ *Bualadubh, lochdar* 📞 01870/610288 🌐 *www.hebrideanjewellery.co.uk.*