

# SKYE & THE OUTER HEBRIDES

HISTORY | HIKING | BEACHES



Experience  
Skye &  
the Outer  
Hebrides  
online



- **Hiking Trotternish**  
(p186)
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# SKYE & THE OUTER HEBRIDES

## Trip Builder

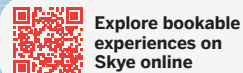
Adventure awaits off the west coast of Scotland. Skye's jaw-dropping landscapes, time-honoured castles and fine-dining options are popular tourist draws, while those seeking solitude – along with ancient standing stones and stunning sandy beaches – head for the Outer Hebrides.

See soaring sea cliffs and rare birdlife on remote **St Kilda** (p194)  
🕒 1–2 days



Hop between gorgeous **South Harris beaches** like Luskentyre and Seilebost (p197)  
🕒 1 day

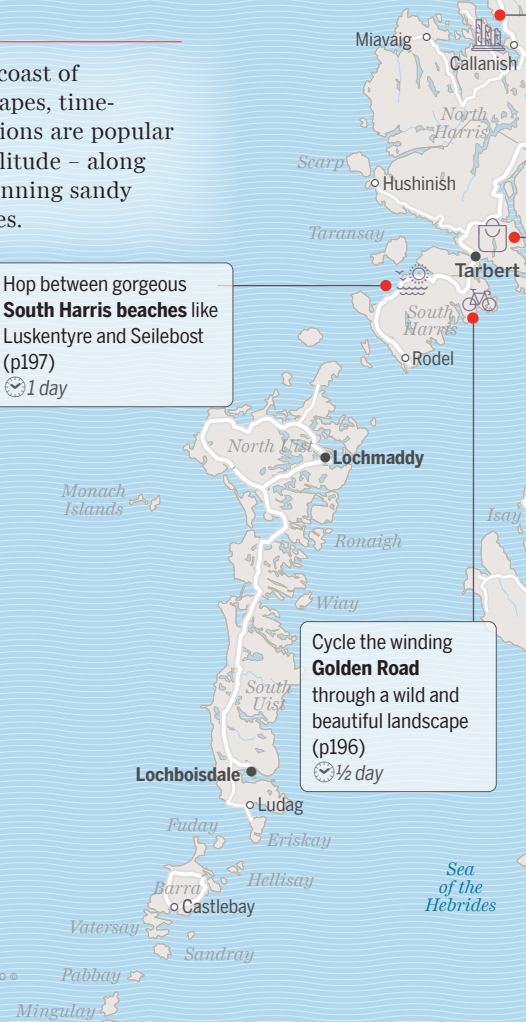
Cycle the winding **Golden Road** through a wild and beautiful landscape (p196)  
🕒 ½ day



Explore bookable experiences on Skye online

0 25 miles 50 km

AP-PHOTO/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO © KACA SKOKANOVA/SHUTTERSTOCK © ALLAN WRIGHT/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO ©



# Practicalities



MIND SURRALLA/SHUTTERSTOCK ©

## ARRIVING

**Skye** Easily reached by bridge from the mainland. Come by car, by train (to Kyle of Lochalsh followed by a local Stagecoach bus service) or by coach tour.

**The Outer Hebrides** Connected to the mainland, Skye and each other by regular car ferry services run by CalMac. There's also an airport in Stornoway on Lewis – Loganair flights connect to Edinburgh, Glasgow and Inverness – as well as a small airport on Barra.

## WHEN TO GO



### JAN - MAR

Expect chilly and wet conditions, with many attractions closed.



### APR - JUN

Ideal time to travel with mild weather and fewer crowds than in summer.



### JUL - SEP

Bright but busy. Skye gets very crowded; the Outer Hebrides less so.



### OCT - DEC

Wrap up warm against bracing conditions to enjoy sights all to yourself.

## HOW MUCH FOR A



**Fish & chips**  
£6.50



**Distillery tour**  
£12



**Wildlife boat trip**  
£40

## GETTING AROUND



**Car** The easiest and most convenient way to get around the islands is by car. This allows you to visit hard-to-reach spots and stop whenever you like to admire the frequently spectacular scenery. Rent a car on the mainland, in Tarbert (Skye) or in Stornoway (Lewis).



**Bus** Stagecoach runs regular bus services throughout Skye. A day ticket costs £7.30. In the Outer Hebrides, various local bus services run irregularly during the day, but rarely evenings or on Sunday.



**Ferry** CalMac ferries link Skye to the Outer Hebrides – and the Hebridean islands to each other. Prices range from £3 to £15 per person and £11 to £70 per car (one way).

TOP: LUMASEE/SHUTTERSTOCK ©  
BOTTOM: GIBELLPHOTOS/SHUTTERSTOCK ©

## EATING & DRINKING

**Seafood** No trip to Scotland's western isles is complete without tasting fresh, locally caught seafood. Try everything from salmon and scallops to langoustines and lobster.

**Spirits** From smooth, smoky Talisker whisky to citrusy yet sweet Harris Gin, spirit lovers will be in their element.

**Sausages** The country's most famous blood sausage comes from Lewis. You'll find Stornoway black pudding on menus across the region, usually as part of a Full Scottish breakfast.

### Best seafood

**The Three Chimneys** (p191)

### Must-try whisky

**Isle of Raasay Single Malt** (p192)



## CONNECT

**Wi-fi** Widely available and generally reliable in hotels and restaurants throughout Skye. There's even free public wi-fi in the main town of Portree. In the Outer Hebrides, things get slower and patchier – and you can't rely on phone signal for data backup. Your best offline sources of information are the VisitScotland iCentres in Portree and Stornoway.



## PREPARE FOR RAIN

It doesn't matter when you're visiting: there is always the chance of rain (and usually with very little warning). Always carry a raincoat.

## WHERE TO STAY

Most people venture here to get closer to nature. But how close do you want to get? Choose between the comfort of a big town base and a back-to-basics rural stay.

Place	Pro/Con
Portree	Well connected with hotels, restaurants and shops. Gets very crowded in summer.
Sleat Peninsula	Skye's southern tip is green and serene, but a long drive from most of the major attractions.
Stornoway	The Outer Hebrides' main town is a convenient, comfy base, yet lacks the away-from-it-all feel.
West Coast of Harris	Stay in a B&B overlooking the spectacular sandy shoreline. Downside: hard to reach with no car.
St Kilda	Britain's most remote island is a unique option, even if it's a long journey and a basic campsite.



## MONEY

Cards are widely accepted, but carry cash to use in small businesses like cafes and independent museums.





WALTER BRIDGEMAN/SHUTTERSTOCK

# 33 Hiking TROTTERNISH



HIKING | VIEWS | DAY TRIP

Strap on your hiking boots for a day in the glorious landscapes of Skye's Trotternish peninsula. Start with the spectacular and strenuous Quiraing hike, tackle the short but steep Old Man of Storr, then warm down with the easy-going Scorrybreac circuit.



KACIA SNOOK/SHUTTERSTOCK

## The Quiraing

This epic collection of craggy cliffs, rocky stacks and grassy plateaus is one of Skye's most distinctive landscapes – and one of its most popular hikes. This challenging 4-mile, two-hour loop gets busy in summer, so start as early as possible to avoid crowds and ensure a parking spot; it's particularly spectacular at sunrise. Follow signs off the A855 at Brogaig and drive for around 2 miles to reach the Quiraing car park.

## The Prison

From opposite the car park, the hiking trail immediately leads up to a distant, jagged rock formation known as the Prison. The name comes from its resemblance to a fortress, which becomes clearer as you continue along

## How to

**Getting here** Trotternish is the northernmost peninsula of Skye. The hike starting points are easiest to reach by car (drive north on the A855 from Portree), though the infrequent 57A bus will get you close.

**When to go** Summer is the best time for hiking. Even then, the weather can turn in an instant, so dress appropriately.

**Top tip** End your day with a slap-up meal overlooking Portree Harbour at the superb **Scorrybreac Restaurant** ([scorrybreac.com](http://scorrybreac.com)).



FRANCESCO BONINO/SHUTTERSTOCK

## Rock & Fall

For a spectacular view without the climb, stop at the **Kilt Rock** viewpoint between the Old Man of Storr and the Quiraing. This 90m-high cliff face is made up of basalt columns that resemble the pleats of a kilt. Nearby, **Mealt Falls** elegantly plummets into the foaming ocean.

Top left The Quiraing  
Top right Hiking to the Old Man of Storr  
Left The Prison



the path, crossing a small stream and climbing a scree slope beside the structure.

### The Needle

Continue beyond the Prison and you will come to a series of column-like rock formations, including the wizened and jagged Needle. Beyond this point, the cliff-hugging path winds down into a shallow valley, then instantly climbs back up again. Luckily, the views get better and better with each step.

### A Different Way Back

Head down Trotternish's attraction-packed west coast for an alternative route back to Portree.

**Skye Museum of Island Life** A preserved village of thatched cottages offers insight into crofting life.

**Grave of Flora MacDonald** Nearby is the grave of Flora MacDonald, who helped Bonnie Prince Charlie escape capture.

**Fairy Glen** An enchantingly strange landscape of rolling green hillocks, *lochans* (ponds) and rock formations just east from the town of Uig.

**The Galley Cafe** Grab a takeaway snack and drive down to the charming ruins of Caisteal Uisdean for a lochside picnic.

### The Table

As you reach the 540m summit, the view expands into a full panorama. On a clear day, you can see beyond the islands of Raasay and Rona to the mainland. More immediately, you can look down at the Table, a flat glassy plateau that was allegedly used for centuries by locals to hide sheep and cattle from invaders. When you are done, a steep and often muddy path leads back to the car park.



Left Stone circle at Fairy Glen  
Below Skye Museum of Island Life

### The Old Man of Storr

Another popular Trotternish hike leads to the Old Man of Storr, a 50m-high shard of rock said to be the thumb of a local giant buried in the landscape. A clear gravel path curves up the hill from a car park beside Loch Leathan, just off the A855, although the path soon turns to well-worn rock and dirt. It gets steeper, rougher and muddier as it snakes up to the top, but within just 45 minutes you will be standing at the foot of the Old Man and surveying the landscape below. Head back down the same way you came (30 minutes).

### The Scorrybreac Circuit

This gentle, 45-minute shoreside loop is a fine way to round off an active day. Start at the small car park behind the Cuillin Hills Hotel. Signs will lead you past the boathouse and up the hill to the Nicolson Memorial, commemorating one of Scotland's oldest Celtic clans. A nearby viewpoint offers a lovely prospect of Portree Bay. Continue to the tidal Black Rock, a popular sunbathing spot for seabirds, and along the narrowing coastal path past a series of salmon farms. Soon enough, the path climbs inland and winds its way back to Portree.



LEFT: ANDREAS GERHARDINER/SHUTTERSTOCK ©  
RIGHT: FRANCESCO BONINO/SHUTTERSTOCK ©



# 34 Driving Skye's West COAST



WILDLIFE | WHISKY | ROAD TRIP

Skye's dramatic west coast makes for the perfect road trip, taking in stunning coastal scenery, world-famous whiskies, historic lochside castles and rarely spotted wildlife. It may only span 50 miles, but this attraction-packed route offers a whole day of adventure.



DALE KELLY/SHUTTERSTOCK ©

## Trip Notes

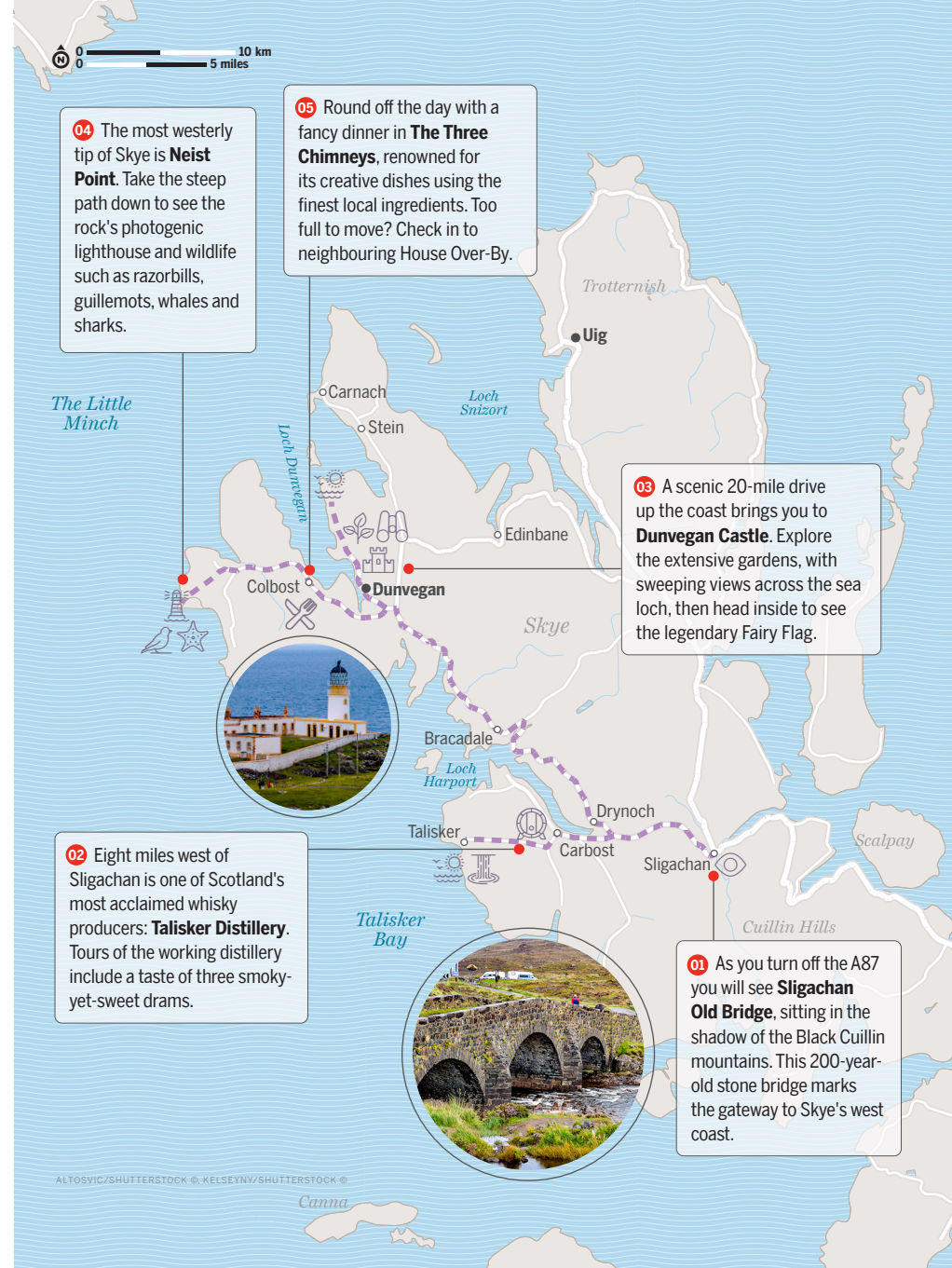
**Getting here** Follow the A87 over Skye Bridge from the mainland. After around 25 miles, you will see signs to Dunvegan (A863): this is the starting point for the driving tour.

**When to go** Summer offers the best chance of sunshine but also the biggest crowds. If possible, aim for the shoulder months: May or September.

**Lunch stop** Pick up a seafood snack at the Dunvegan Prawn & Mussel Bar.

## Beautiful Beaches

This west-coast route passes several lovely stretches of shoreline. Top picks are **Coral Beach**, an eye-catching arc of dazzling white sand dotted with coralline algae, and **Talisker Bay Beach**, a quiet sand-and-stone bay hugged by dramatic cliffs and a tumbling waterfall.



ALTOSVIC/SHUTTERSTOCK ©, KELSEYNY/SHUTTERSTOCK ©



# 35 Skye's Secret SISTER



CROWD-FREE | WHISKY | HIKING

A quick ferry ride from Skye but a world away from its crowds, the Isle of Raasay remains a relatively unexplored Hebridean outpost. But this rugged, 10-mile-long island offers far more than just respite – it's also home to fascinating local history, hilltop hikes, castle ruins, spectacular coastal scenery and one of Scotland's most modern distilleries. Come for a day or stay overnight.

## How to

**Getting here** A year-round CalMac ferry service runs from Sconser on Skye to Raasay in just 25 minutes, with regular services every day of the week. A return trip costs £13/4 per car/person. There's no bus service on the island so get around by car or bicycle; Raasay House Hotel offers bike rentals.

**When to go** For the best chance of good weather, come between May and September.

**Don't miss** The beautifully carved 1300-year-old Pictish Stone, a short walk from the ferry terminal.



**The whisky** The **Isle of Raasay Distillery** has perhaps the best view of any in Scotland, with its glass-covered facade looking out across to Skye's craggy Cuillin Hills. As the first legal distillery on an island once infamous for its illegal production, Raasay released its first single malt in 2021.

You can try it for yourself on a tour and tasting, and stay overnight at the distillery's luxurious Borodale House hotel.

**The road** Raasay's most famous attraction is the work of just one man. After the council repeatedly failed to provide better access to northern Raasay, crofter Calum MacLeod

**Top right** Barrels at Isle of Raasay Distillery  
**Below** Campervans beside Calum's Road, near Loch Arnish

## Skye in Miniature

The Isle of Raasay is a well-kept secret. We have all the great things that Skye is famous for: whisky, walks, fantastic food, beautiful beaches, breathtaking views and outdoor activities... But we have it all on this much smaller island, which makes it far easier to fit in everything you would like to do. I suppose you could say that Raasay is Skye's fun little sister.



Carol Anderson,  
Raasay Tourism  
Group

decided to take matters into his own hands. Over the next 10 years, using only a pickaxe and a shovel, he converted a narrow footpath into a usable, 1.75-mile-long road. Half a century on, **Calum's Road** remains as a lovely scenic drive, starting just beyond the brooding Brochel Castle.

**The hill** The island's highest peak is the flat-topped **Dùn Caan**, which can be reached with a three-hour, round-trip hike from the ferry terminal. The path winds through historic mining villages, pine forests and loch-dotted moors before zigzagging up to the 443m-high summit. The final stretch is steep and rocky, but the panoramic views from the top provide ample reward.





# 36 St Kilda: Edge of THE WORLD



ISLAND | BIRDLIFE | DAY TRIP

The tiny archipelago of St Kilda, situated around 100 miles west of the Scottish mainland, is the most remote corner of the British Isles. It is also one of the most beautiful, thanks to its soaring sea stacks, abundant birdlife and fascinating island culture. But splendid isolation doesn't come easy: you'll need money, time and a strong stomach to get here.



VINCENT LOWE/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO ©

## How to

**Getting here** Kilda Cruises and Sea Harris boats depart from Leverburgh on Harris. Alternatively, Go to St Kilda (gotostkilda.co.uk) offers cruises to/from Skye.

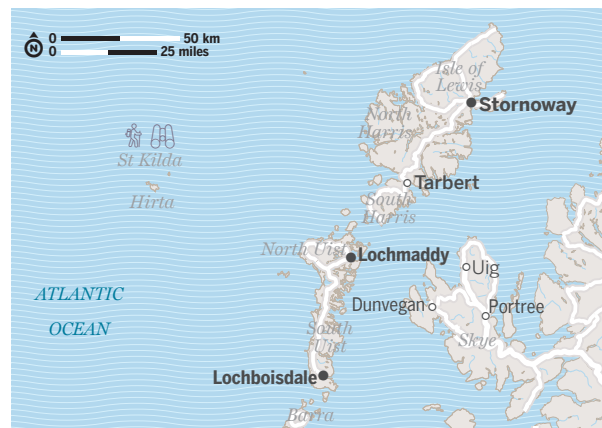
**When to go** Trips run most days between late April and September.

Even in summer, inclement weather can force last-minute cancellations; keep an extra day spare as backup.

**How much** £220 to £260, depending on the operator you go with. Deposits are required for advance bookings.



ANDY SUTTON/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO ©



**A rocky ride** Every St Kilda experience begins with a rough, three-hour boat ride across empty ocean. But stomachs soon settle when **Hirta**, the archipelago's main island, appears over the horizon. It feels like arriving at the edge of the world so it's a surprise when you pull into a quaint little village.

**Island life** Despite its isolation, St Kilda was home to a tiny community for around 2000 years. Most of those were spent entirely cut off from the rest of civilisation, with islanders sustained by a diet of seabirds. Today you can explore the historic village at the heart of Hirta, as well as the surrounding *cleitean*, stone storage huts built to cure prime cuts of seabird by utilising the reliably strong winds.

**Stunning scenery** Without doubt, Hirta's biggest draw is its unspoilt nature. Hike along the southern coast to **Ruival** or climb **Conachair** in the north to take in its many varied landscapes, from lush green pastures grazed by rare Soay sheep to sky-scraping cliffs engulfed by screeching clouds of seabirds.

**Nesting gannets** From glowering grey-brown great skuas to playful orange-beaked puffins, Hirta's birds are a sight to behold. But save some camera memory for the boat journey back, when you will skirt close to St Kilda's colossal sea stacks, swarming with thousands of yellow-headed gannets (and their pungent guano).

Top left Cottages in Hirta  
Below Hikers ascending Conachair

## Stay on St Kilda

If one day isn't enough, consider camping on Hirta. A small campsite managed by the National Trust for Scotland offers space for six people along with basic toilets, showers and drinking water. There is no guaranteed electricity supply, wi-fi or mobile-phone signal, and you'll need to bring your own camping stove and food; pack a little extra in case your departure is delayed. It costs £20 per person per night, and you should book as far in advance as possible due to limited space. Email [stkildainfo@nts.org.uk](mailto:stkildainfo@nts.org.uk) or call 01463 732635 to find out current availability.

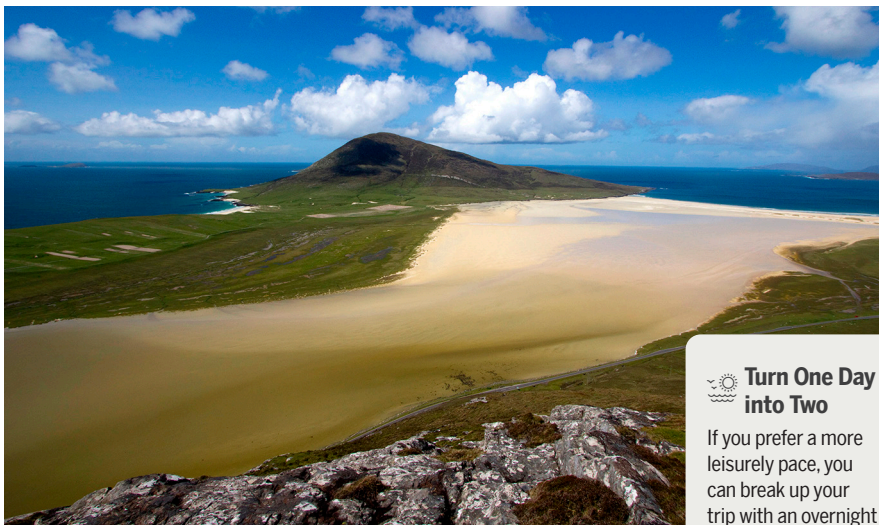


## 37

Cycling South  
**HARRIS**

BEACHES | BIKING | VIEWS

South Harris is home to some of Scotland's most jaw-dropping coastal scenery. Spend a whole day exploring every inch of it, from the picture-perfect white-sand beaches of the west coast to the heather-dotted lunar landscape of the east.

COLIN PALMER PHOTOGRAPHY/  
ALAMY STOCK PHOTO ©

**Turn One Day into Two**

If you prefer a more leisurely pace, you can break up your trip with an overnight stay. Picture-perfect Scarista Beach, which lies just under halfway along this route (3 miles beyond MacLeod's Stone), is lined with charming B&B options. It also makes an ideal base for hiking Chaipaval.

**Trip Notes**

**Getting here and around** In summer, there are daily ferries to Tarbert from Uig on Skye. Timetables are on the CalMac website. There's no bike hire in Tarbert, but you can rent one at Bike Hebrides in Stornoway on Lewis or bring your own bike on the ferry for free.

**When to go** Stick to summer for milder weather.

**Summary** Distance: 52 miles. Difficulty: medium to hard (expect climbs in and out of Tarbert).



**01** Start with a short detour to **Luskentyre Beach** for chalk-white sands, peacock-blue waters and grass-carpeted dunes – you'll usually get them all to yourself.

**05** Your journey ends where it began: in **Tarbert**. If you arrive in time, visit the **Isle of Harris Distillery** for a tour and tasting of its sublime, sugar kelp-infused gin.

**02** Six miles southwest of Luskentyre is the lonely **MacLeod's Stone**. This 5000-year-old standing stone lies amid spectacular stretches of sandy shoreline, making it a perfect picnic spot.



**03** Cycle through Leverburgh, the island's second-largest village, to get to the striking pre-Reformation **St Clement's Church**. Step inside to admire the 16th-century tomb of Alasdair Crotach MacLeod.

**04** Head north from Rodel to join the **east-coast road**, which twists through desolately beautiful rocky terrain, before turning (just after Aird Mhige) onto the wild loch-strewn **Golden Road**.

0 5 km  
0 2.5 miles

COLIN PALMER PHOTOGRAPHY/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO ©  
MARKFERGUSON/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO ©



# 38 History on LEWIS



HISTORY | CULTURE | DAY TRIP

As the largest island of the Outer Hebrides, Lewis is bursting at the seams with history – and three of its most fascinating historical attractions are within easy reach of the capital, Stornoway. Start with a Neolithic stone circle, take in a fascinating Iron Age fortress, then explore a traditional 19th-century island dwelling.

## How to

**Getting here and around** Stornoway can be reached by air (its small airport is served by Loganair) and sea (regular CalMac ferries arrive from Ullapool on the mainland). Getting around is easiest by car, but there is a limited bus service (W2) that stops at Callanish, Carloway and Arnol.

**When to go** Sights are open year-round; since most are outside, dress weather-appropriately in the wet winter months.

**How much** Arnol Blackhouse: £6. Callanish and Carloway: free.

**Standing stones** Travel west from Stornoway for around 17 miles and you'll come to one of Britain's most important prehistoric sights. The

**Callanish Standing Stones** comprise 13 large stones laid out in a circle around a central monolith. From here, another 40 smaller stones radiate out in a cruciform. Erected between 3000 and 1500 BCE,

Callanish is older than Stonehenge and it offers a better view, overlooking pretty Loch Roag and Bernera island.

**Robust roundhouse** A little further up the coast lies another ancient site. **Dun Carloway** is an unusually well-preserved Iron Age broch, a type of fortified building unique to Scotland. Built around 200 BCE to protect against seaborne



Top right Callanish Standing Stones  
Bottom right Dun Carloway broch



## Lewis Chess Pieces

Discovered on the island in 1831, the Lewis Chess Pieces are a set of medieval gaming pieces made from walrus ivory and sperm whale tooth. Their facial expressions are full of character and a testament to the extraordinary skill of their carver(s). See them at the National Museum of Scotland in Edinburgh and the British Museum in London, as well as on long-term loan at the Museum nan Eilean (p200) in Lewis.

**Lydia Prosser**,  
Curator of Medieval Archaeology and History, National Museum of Scotland  
@NtMuseumScot

raiders, parts of its rounded, drystone walls still stand at 9m high, close to its original height. Pop into the nearby visitor centre to learn more about the history and cultural significance of the structure.

**Hebridean home** Nine miles further north (and 2000 years into the future) is Arnol and its famous **Blackhouse**. This type of dwelling, where a family and its animals lived together under one thatched roof, was commonly used until as recently as the mid-20th century. Step inside to smell the smoke coming off the peat hearth; it's the years of accumulated soot that give the Blackhouse its name. From here, it's just 15 miles back to Stornoway.



# Listings

## BEST OF THE REST

### Outdoor Attractions

#### Fairy Pools

This collection of enchanting blue-green plunge pools and gentle cascades is one of Skye's most magical sights. Come early or late to avoid the day-tripping crowds.

#### Armada Castle Garden

Centred around a semi-ruined 17th-century castle, these vast flower-filled gardens in southern Skye offer spectacular views across to the mainland. A ticket includes access to a fascinating museum on the Clan Donald.

#### Balrarnald Nature Reserve

With its mix of rich grassland, sand dunes and wild marshes, this rarely visited reserve on North Uist is a haven for birdlife. Keep an ear out for corncrakes and their distinctive rasping cry.

#### Our Lady of the Isles

This 9m-high granite sculpture of the Madonna and Child stands on South Uist as a symbol of resistance; it was built on land earmarked for a Ministry of Defence missile facility, scuppering the government's plans.

### Sandy Beaches

#### Traigh Mhòr

Commonly known as Tolsta Beach, this stretch of soft golden shoreline within easy reach of Stornoway is known for its grassy dunes and powerful ocean swells (ideal for surfing).

#### Traigh Seilebost

Even among the many jaw-dropping beaches of South Harris, Seilebost stands out for

its pristine, powdery sands backed by primrose-dotted machair. It also looks across to another stunning beach: Luskentyre.

#### Traigh Mhòr

Popular with hikers, this inviting white beach at the tip of Barra is also a runway. In fact, it's the only beach runway in the world to handle scheduled airline services.

### History Museums

#### Staffin Dinosaur Museum

One of Skye's most popular family attractions, this museum (founded by local dinosaur hunter Dugald Ross) has an interesting collection of dinosaur footprints and fossils.

#### Museum nan Eilean

Inside Stornoway's Lews Castle, this new exhibition space showcases various aspects of Hebridean life, from island professions to the Gaelic language. It's also home to six of the famous Lewis Chess Pieces.

#### Seallam!

Gaelic for 'Let me show you', this visitor centre just north of Leverburgh on Harris has



Armadale Castle Garden

CHRIS ALAN/SHUTTERSTOCK ©

exhibits on Western Isles history and nature. There is also a genealogy centre for those tracing their Hebridean ancestry.

#### Kildonan Museum

This small museum on South Uist has several interesting artefacts and exhibits on the Uists and the people who live there, as well as a craft shop, cafe and performing arts space.

### Island Art Galleries

#### Dandelion Designs

This charming little gallery in Stein, a crofting township on Skye's Watnish peninsula, showcases a wide range of paintings, photographs and crafts by a mix of local and invited artists.

#### Raasay Gallery

Works by local artists are featured at this purpose-built gallery space on Skye's neighbouring isle. But the best landscape of all is outside, with spectacular views across the sea to the Cuillin Hills.

#### Island Darkroom

Overlooking loch-covered moorland, this photography gallery in Lewis displays beautiful prints created in the on-site darkroom. Hands-on workshops let you try analogue film processing and printing for yourself.

#### Skoon Art Gallery

South Harris' east coast has many fine art galleries, including Mission House, Finsbay and Holmasaig. But if you have limited time, head straight for Skoon, set within a renovated croft house.

### Hebridean Handicrafts

#### Isle of Skye Candle Company

This artisan producer sells wax candles as well as reed diffusers, soaps and bubble baths. Fragrances are inspired by Scotland,



Harris Tweed jackets

ORIG BAL FOUR EVANS/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO ©

allowing you to take home the aromas of whisky, seaweed and heather.

#### Borgh Pottery

A working studio near the northern tip of Lewis selling hand-thrown ceramics inspired by the local landscape. Watch artist Sue Blair at work on her potter's wheel and take home a souvenir.

#### Tarbert Tweed Shop

No trip to the Outer Hebrides is complete without picking up some Harris Tweed. This Tarbert store has an array of tweed items, from suit jackets to soft furnishings, hats to handbags.

#### Hebridean Jewellery

Overlooking pretty lochdar Beach on the northwest coast of South Uist, this out-of-the-way jeweller specialises in handcrafted silver and gold creations incorporating traditional Pictish and Celtic designs.



Scan to find more things to do in Skye & the Outer Hebrides online