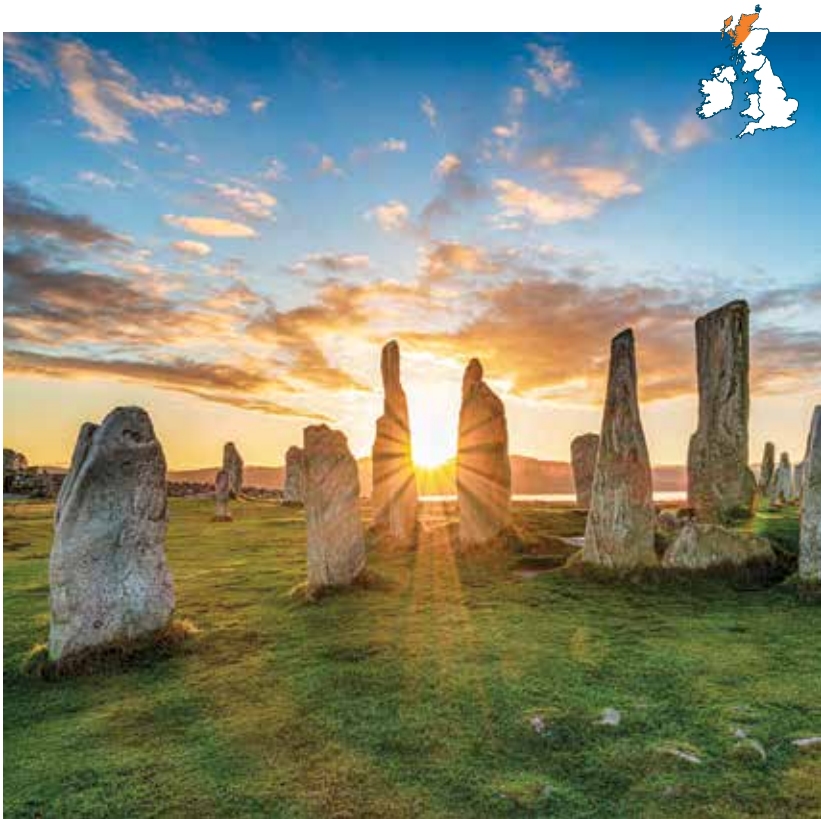


Chapter 11

THE NORTHERN
HIGHLANDS AND
THE WESTERN ISLES

11

Updated by
Joseph Reaney



 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 here ranges from the lush, undulating hills and coastal tracks of Sleat to the deep glens and saw-toothed peaks of the Cuillin Mountains to geological features like the Old Man of Storr and Kilt Rock.

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

★ **Coastal walks:** Enjoy an invigorating coastal walk on the islands of the Uists, Lewis, and Harris, where vast swaths of golden sand contrast with blue bays, and giant waves often crash against the rocks.

★ **Wildlife viewing:** The region is rife with seals, deer, otters, dolphins, and birdlife. Don't miss a boating foray to the Handa Island bird reserve off Scourie. Feeling extra adventurous? Visit the remote peninsula of St. Kilda, surrounded by marine life and home to a seabird colony and unique species of field mice, wren, and sheep.

1 Dingwall. A pleasant first stop when heading north.

2 Dornoch. Known for its legendary links golf course.

3 Helmsdale. A fishing village shaped by Vikings.

4 Wick. Famed for its silver (herring) and gold (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 village surrounded by nature.

9 Scourie. An ideal base for visiting Handa Island.

10 Kylesku. A fishing hamlet close to Britain's highest waterfall.

11 Lochinver. A pretty shoreside community.

12 Ullapool. A big town with ferries to Lewis and Harris.

13 Gairloch. Peaceful, pretty, and pleasantly warm.

14 Shildaig. A lovely lochside village.

15 Kyle of Lochalsh. The gateway to Skye.

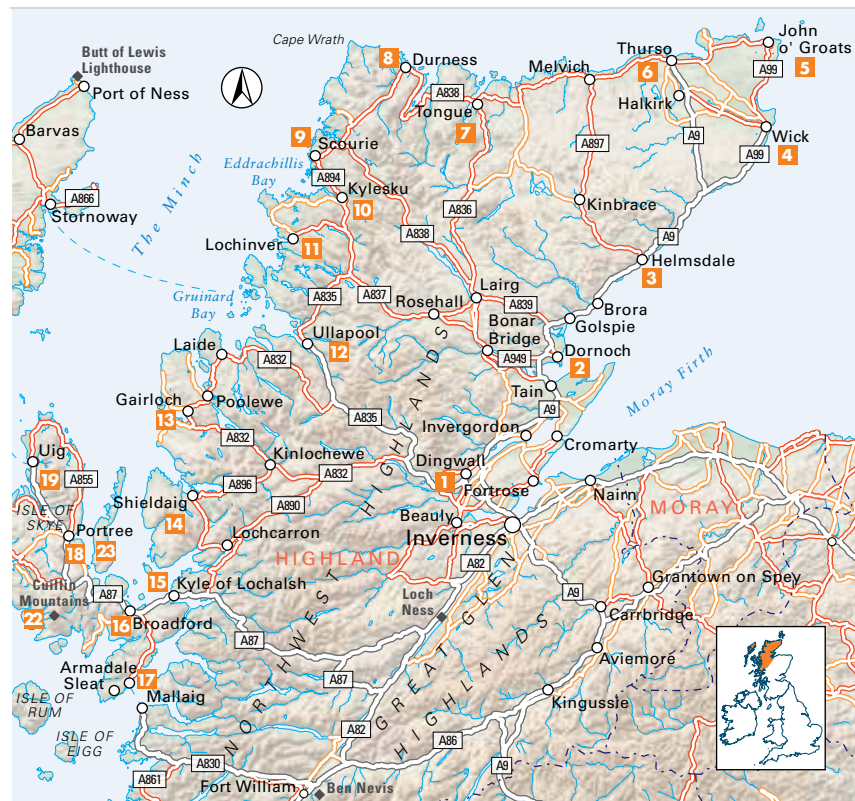
16 Broadford. One of Skye's main towns.



17 Armadale. The ferry gateway to Sleat, Skye's southernmost peninsula.

18 Portree. Skye's main town with a pretty harbor.

19 Trotternish Peninsula. Skye's dramatic north, with Quiraing, Kilt Rock, and the Old Man of Storr.



20 Watnish Peninsula. Off Skye's northwest, home to crofting communities and coastal views.

21 Glendale. A rocky coastline with dramatic castles and Skye's best restaurant.

22 Glen Brittle and the Cuillin Mountains. An impossibly green valley.

23 Isle of Raasay. Skye's little brother with striking scenery and great whisky.

24 Isle of Lewis. Bronze Age standing stones, Iron Age towers, and Victorian blackhouses.

25 Isle of Harris. Known for spectacular beaches and handwoven tweed.

26 St. Kilda. A unique day trip to see colossal cliffs and swooping seabirds.

27 North Uist. A hidden gem with remarkable birdlife and historic ruins.

28 South Uist. An island steeped in royal history.

Wild and remote, the Northern Highlands and the Western Isles have a timeless grandeur. Dramatic cliffs, long beaches, and craggy mountains that rise from moorland like islands in a sea all 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, a historic county that stretched from Dornoch up to Durness and the northwest coast, 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 islands of Lewis and Harris lay 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. And then there’s Glen Torridon, with its brooding peaks, mirrorlike lochs, and tantalizing glimpses across to the Isle of Skye.

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.

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 Watnish and Trotternish. You can take a day trip to Skye, but try to spend a few days exploring its shores.

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 (no giggling) south to Barra Head, 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 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). The island has some fine historic attractions, including the Calanais Standing Stones—which offer 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 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 those in some island hotels, so make dinner plans in advance.

Planning

When to Go

The Northern Highlands and islands, as this region is sometimes called, 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 means these aren't 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 terrain, 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 Skye and the other islands. Although they attract hordes of tourists (for good reason), 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, Dublin, and Amsterdam.

The main airport for the Northern Highlands is Inverness. Loganair has direct air service from Belfast, Birmingham, and Manchester. 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 Benbecula and Lewis and Harris in the Outer Hebrides.

AIRPORT CONTACTS **Inverness Airport.**

✉ **Dalcross** ☎ 01667/464000 🌐 www.hial.co.uk/inverness-airport.

BOAT AND FERRY

Ferry services are generally reliable, weather permitting. Car and passenger vessels run from Ullapool to Stornoway (Lewis and Harris), Oban to Castlebay (Barra), Mallaig to Lochboisdale (South Uist), and Uig (Skye) to Tarbert (Lewis and Harris) and Lochmaddy (North Uist). The Hopscotch route tickets offered by Caledonian MacBrayne (known locally as CalMac) give considerable reductions on interisland fares. Call ahead and ask for the best route plan.

BOAT AND FERRY CONTACTS **Caledonian MacBrayne.**

(CalMac) ✉ **Ullapool** ☎ 0800/066-5000 🌐 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.**

✉ **Inverness** ☎ 0871/266-3333 🌐 www.citylink.co.uk. **Stagecoach.** ☎ 01463/233371 🌐 www.stagecoachbus.com. **Traveline Scotland.** ✉ **Inverness** ☎ 0871/200-2233 🌐 www.travelinescotland.com.

CAR

Because of infrequent bus and train services, a car is by far the best way to explore this region. 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. 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.

Drivers always wave, as a courtesy and as a genuine greeting. 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) 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. Never park in passing places.

Cars driving uphill have priority, and small cars tend to yield to large commercial vehicles. On bad days you can encounter trucks at the most awkward of spots, but on good days single-track driving can be relaxing, with a lovely pace of stopping, waving, moving on.

TRAIN

The main railway station in this area is Inverness, with lines running north to Thurso (with connections to Wick). There's direct service from London to Inverness and connecting service from Edinburgh and Glasgow. On the west coast, you will find stations at Kyle of Lochalsh (for Skye) and Oban (for ferries to Barra and the Uists).

TRAIN CONTACTS **National Rail.**

✉ **Inverness** ☎ 03457/484950 🌐 www.nationalrail.co.uk. **ScotRail.** ✉ **Inverness** ☎ 0344/811-0141 🌐 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 good 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. Most accommodations book 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), 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. 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

\$ \$\$ \$\$\$ \$\$\$\$

RESTAURANTS

under £15	£15-£19	£20-£25	over £25
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HOTELS

under £125	£125– £200	£201– £300	over £300
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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-seat minibuses. ☒ *Inverness* ☎ 0131/226-3133 🌐 www.rabbies.com 📄 From £39.

Visitor Information

The number of VisitScotland iCentres in the Northern Highlands and the Western Isles has dwindled to just four: in Inverness and Ullapool (Northern Highlands), Portree (Skye), and Stornoway (Lewis). They're open daily in 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.

Dingwall

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

This pretty market town and royal burgh (a Scottish town granted a royal charter) is 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, it has an excellent museum and a historic center that's replete with alluring architecture, charming cafés, and quaint little shops. 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

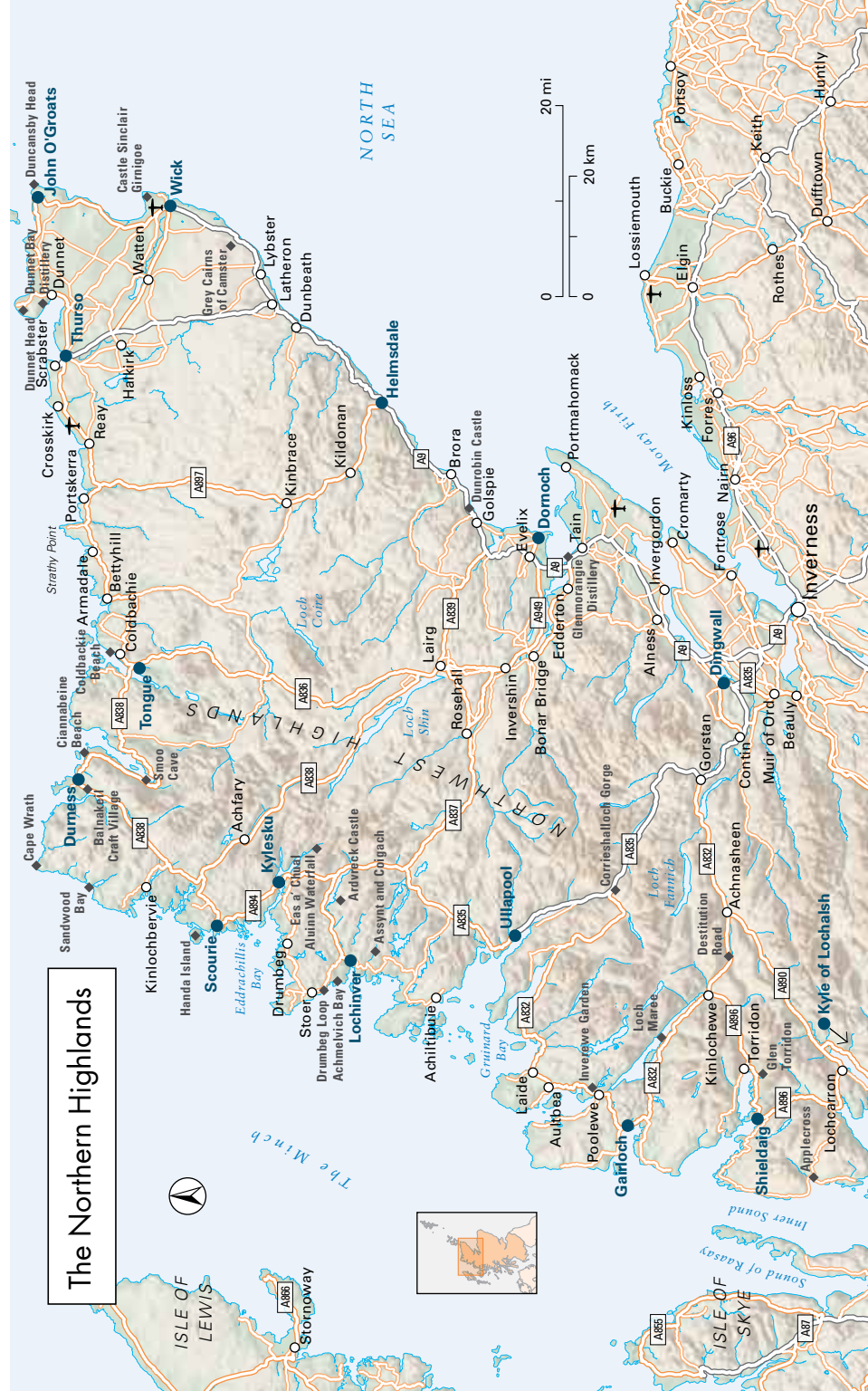
From Inverness take the A9 north to Dingwall, turning off onto the A835 at Tore.



Dingwall Museum

HISTORY 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.info 📄 *Free (donations welcome)*
🕒 *Closed Oct–mid-May.*



Hotels

Coul House Hotel

\$\$\$ | **HOTEL** | Situated in the countryside 8 miles west of Dingwall, this magnificent Georgian manor offers stylish rooms with mountain views, comfortable lounges with log fireplaces, and an excellent restaurant that's open all day. **Pros:** outdoor dining when sunny; family-run and family-friendly; free golf practice court. **Cons:** expensive in high season; a little off the beaten path; hunting portraits not to all tastes. 📞 *Rooms from: £215* ☎ *Off A835, Contin* 📞 *01997/421487* 🌐 *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:** good breakfasts; characterful accommodations; comfy beds and arm-chairs. **Cons:** very expensive; thin walls and creaking floorboards; a whiff of faded glory. 📞 *Rooms from: £230* ☎ *Tulloch Castle Dr., Dingwall* 📞 *01349/861325* 🌐 *bespokehotels.com/tullochcastlehotel* ➡ *22 rooms* 🍳 *Free 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, 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. ☎ *Argyle St., Dornoch* 📞 *07341/284405* 🌐 *www.visitdornoch.com.*

Sights

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 falconry demonstrations and Versailles-inspired gardens. Head upstairs in the house for fine views over the garden and out to sea. 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* 🍷 *£12.50* ☹ *Closed Nov.–Apr.*

★ Glenmorangie Distillery

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 town across Dornoch Forth, offers fascinating tastings that reveal how the taste is achieved (the secret's in the exceedingly tall stills). The Classic Tasting (£15) includes three drams, and the Innovator Tasting (£40) offers a chance to sample four of their most prized bottles. ☎ *Off A9, Tain* 📞 *01862/892477* 🌐 *www.glenmorangie.com* 🗺 *Tours from £8.50.*



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

Restaurants

Sutherland House

\$ | **BRITISH** | Just off Dornoch's main square, Sutherland House restaurant has a feeling of intimacy in its two separate rooms—a feeling that's reinforced by the enthusiastic reception and the delicious food. The menu is imaginative, with some unusual combinations dreamed up by the chef. **Known for:** friendly service; imaginative seafood; chicken in Glenmorangie sauce. 📞 *Average main: £14* ☎ *Argyle St., Dornoch* 📞 *01862/811023* 🌐 *www.sutherland-house.net.*

Hotels

★ Glenmorangie House

\$\$\$\$ | **RESORT** | Situated 8½ miles southeast from the distillery, Glenmorangie House offers luxurious but casual stays in a spectacular 17th-century country home. **Pros:** extensive whisky collection; wonderfully rural location; superb service. **Cons:** extremely expensive; need a car to get here; puny showers take a while to

heat up. 📞 *Rooms from: £370* ☎ *Fearn by Tain, Tain* 📞 *01862/871671* 🌐 *www.theglenmorangiehouse.com* ➡ *9 rooms* 🍳 *Free Breakfast.*

Royal Golf Hotel Dornoch

\$\$\$ | **HOTEL** | Set on the edge of the town's famous golf course but run independently, this historic Highland hotel offers comfortable and modern rooms, an excellent restaurant with golf course views, and a cozy bar lounge with an open log fire (and nonstop golf on the TV). **Pros:** great dining (try the sticky toffee pudding); historic property; many rooms have golf course views. **Cons:** no elevator; public lounges showing some wear and tear; single rooms are quite small. 📞 *Rooms from: £219* ☎ *The First Tee, Dornoch* 📞 *01862/810283* 🌐 *www.royalgolfhoteldornoch.com* ➡ *14 rooms* 🍳 *Free Breakfast.*

Shopping




Jail Dornoch

MIXED CLOTHING | It's rare for people to voluntarily walk into jail, but this place is the exception: it's an old prison that has been converted into a popular fashion store. The one-time cells now contain 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 St., Dornoch* ☎ 01862/810555  *jail-dornoch.com*.

Activities

GOLF

★ Royal Dornoch Golf Club

GOLF | The legendary Championship Course, laid out by Tom Morris in 1886, is still regularly voted one of the world's best golf courses. It challenges even the most skilled golfers with its fast, raised greens, while inspiring 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 Rd., Dornoch* ☎ 01862/810219  *royaldornoch.com*  *Championship: £210 Apr.–Oct., £115 Nov.–Mar.; Struie: £50 Apr.–Oct., £35 Nov.–Mar.* 🏌️ *Championship: 18 holes, 6754 yards, par 70; Struie: 18 holes, 6265 yards, par 71.*

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 from Dornoch.

Sights

Timespan

HISTORY 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 St., Helmsdale* ☎ 01431/821327  *timespan.org.uk*  *£4* ☺ *Closed Mon.–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 A9 north, then stay on the A99.

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.*

Grey Cairns of Camster

RUINS | 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 beyond Lybster on the A99, look out for the brown signposts pointing the way.  *Off A99, Wick*  *www.historicenvironment.scot.*

★ Pulteney Distillery

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 a lingering, butterscotch-sweet finish. Or, for £25, experience all this plus additional

tastings of three older expressions.

 *Huddart St., Wick* ☎ 01955/602371  *www.oldpulteney.com*  *Tours from £10* ☺ *Closed weekends.*

Wick Heritage Museum

HISTORY 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, Wick* ☎ 01955/605393  *www.wick-heritage.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's charms include a row of colorful wooden houses, a small brewery, and a crafts center with high-quality shops selling knitwear, candles, and other gifts. In between these, however, are some very tacky tourist stores. Note that parking here costs £2.

GETTING HERE AND AROUND

From Wick, head north on the coast-hugging A99.

TOURS

John O'Groats Ferries

BOAT TOURS | 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 £20 and are available daily at 2:30 between June and August. The company also offers a day tour of Orkney between May and September. It leaves at 8:45 am and costs £79. ☎ *John O'Groats* ☎ 01955/611353 🌐 www.jogferry.co.uk 🚢 *Tours from £20.*

Sights

Duncansby Head

LIGHTHOUSE | 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 here, or you can walk (about 30 minutes) from the main road. ☎ *John O'Groats* 🌐 www.nlb.org.uk/lighthouses/duncansby-head.

Hotels

★ John O'Groats by Together Travel

\$\$ | **APARTMENT** | Local landmarks 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:** natural light all day long; very comfy beds; good Wi-Fi (a rarity here). **Cons:** a little expensive; some lodges are two nights minimum in high season; can feel understaffed. 📺 *Rooms from: £150* ☎ *John O'Groats* ☎ 01625/416430 🌐 www.togethertravel.co.uk 🚗 23 lodges 🍽️ *No Meals.*

Performing Arts

Lyth Arts Centre

ARTS CENTERS | Housed in a Victorian-era school building with a modern interior, the Lyth Arts Centre serves as a cultural hub for the region. From April to November, professional music and theater companies fill the schedule, and locals fill the seats. There are also exhibitions of contemporary fine art. Lyth is 11 miles southwest of John O'Groats. ☎ *Lyth* ☎ 01955/641434 🌐 lytharts.org.uk.

Thurso

19 miles west of John O'Groats.

The town of Thurso is quite substantial for a community so far north. In-town attractions include Old St. Peter's Kirk, which dates from the 12th century; nearby attractions include the fine Dunnet Bay beach and great seabird-spotting at Dunnet Head.

GETTING HERE AND AROUND

From John O'Groats simply follow the A836 west. Local buses travel the same route but take twice as long as driving yourself.

Sights

★ Dunnet Bay Distillery

DISTILLERY | This small north coast distillery proves that Scotland's craft-spirits boom has stretched to the very edges of the mainland. Run by husband and wife team Martin and Claire Murray, Dunnet Bay Distillery has gained plaudits and prizes galore for its Rock Rose gin—notable for its use of sea buckthorn, rhodiola rosea (the eponymous “rock rose”), and other coastal botanicals. The distillery also produces a superb vodka called Holy Grass. As well as selling the spirits neat, there are also fun, seasonal cocktail releases, from the gingerbread espresso martini to the winter-spiced negroni.

You can tour the “wee” distillery all year round, including taking a stroll around the herb garden and greenhouse (lean down to sniff the deliciously citrusy lemon verbena). ■ **TIP→ Children younger than 18 are allowed to visit and are admitted on the tour free of charge with an accompanying adult.** ☎ *Off A836, Thurso* ☎ 01847/851287 🌐 www.dunnetbaydistillers.co.uk 🚗 *Tours £15* ☺ *Closed Sun.*

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. ☎ *Thurso.*

Old St. Peter's Kirk

RELIGIOUS BUILDING | This roofless, ruined parish church on the banks of the River Thurso was once the principal place of worship in northeast Scotland. Dating from (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 St., Thurso.*

Hotels

★ Forss House

\$\$\$ | **B&B/INN** | This historic country house, 5 miles west of Thurso, offers a mix of beautiful bedrooms in the main building and super-luxurious suite-apartments on the expansive grounds—treat yourself with a stay in the spectacular Mill House. **Pros:** lots of outdoor activities; large guest rooms and stunning suites; the best restaurant for miles. **Cons:** expensive option; short outdoor walk from suites to the restaurant; creaky floorboards and squeaky old doors. 📺 *Rooms from: £215*

☎ *Forss, Thurso* ☎ 01847/861201 🌐 www.forsshouseshotel.co.uk 🚗 14 rooms 🍽️ *Free Breakfast.*

Activities

The Bike Shop

BIKING | 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., Thurso* ☎ 01847/895385 🌐 [facebook.com/thebikeshophurso](https://www.facebook.com/thebikeshophurso) ☺ *Closed Sun. and Mon.*

Tongue

43 miles west of Thurso.

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

GETTING HERE AND AROUND

From Thurso, simply head west along the A836, which turns 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.*

Beaches

★ Coldbackie Beach

BEACH | This windswept bay, 3 miles north of Tongue just off the road from Thurso, 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 A836.*

Hotels

Garvault House

\$\$ | **HOTEL** | Billed as mainland Britain's most remote hotel (Tongue, its nearest town, is 28 miles and an hour's drive away), the charmingly rustic and almost entirely off-grid Garvault House offers a classic countryside escape in the heart of the Highlands. **Pros:** fishing and hill walking galore; beautiful panoramas; communal meals around a mahogany table. **Cons:** no amenities for miles; limited Wi-Fi and phone signal; a little fusty in places. ☎ *Rooms from: £130* ☑ *Off B871* ☎ *07596/202171* 🌐 *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:** deliciously creamy porridge at breakfast; warm and friendly staff; beautiful location with stunning views. **Cons:** food is hit and miss; TV sets from the '80s; Wi-Fi only in public areas. ☎ *Rooms from: £120* ☑ *A838, Tongue* ☎ *01847/611206* 🌐 *tonguehotel.co.uk* ☺ *Closed late Dec.–mid-Feb.* ➔ *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 acidic 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

MARKET | Artisans sell pottery, leather, weavings, paintings, chocolate, and more from their studios at Balnakeil Craft Village. It's 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. ☎ *Craft Village, Balnakeil, Durness* ☎ *01971/511713* Nicola Poole's Wee Gallery 🌐 *balnakeilcraftvillage.weebly.com.*

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



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

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 round-trip* ☺ *No boat mid-Oct.–mid-Apr.*

Lotte Glob Sculpture Croft

ART GALLERY | 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 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, including a library of ceramic books, en route. 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, Durness* ☎ *01971/511727* 🌐 *www.lotteglob.co.uk* ☺ *Only open by appointment Oct.–mid-May.*

★ Smoo Cave

CAVE | This atmospheric cavern, hallowed out of the limestone by rushing water, feels like something from a fantasy novel. Located a mile east of Durness, the combined sea-and-fresh-water cave, complete with gushing waterfall, can be reached via a steep cliff stairway from the Smoo Cave parking lot. But don't start your descent before reading the explanatory boards at the top of the stairs: they tell the history of those who lived and used the caves in much earlier times. From April through October, 20-minute boat trips (£10) into the cave's inner chamber are available. Once you've climbed back up to the parking area, cross the road for a view down into the cavern from atop the waterfall. ☑ *Off A838, Durness.*

Beaches

★ Ciannabeine Beach

BEACH | Situated 10 miles east of Durness, between Rispond and Sangobeg, 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 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, Durness.*

★ Sandwood Bay

BEACH | 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, and while it's not quite the hidden gem it once was, leave early and you're still likely to have the 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. Plan for a four-hour trip in all, including a good amount of time on the beach. **Amenities:** parking (no fee). **Best for:** solitude; walking. ☒ *Durness.*

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:** friendly service; sublime chocolate truffles; homemade hot chocolate. § *Average main: £5 ☒ Balnakeil Craft Village, Balnakeil, Durness ☎ 01971/511233* 🌐 *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, continuing onto the A894 just after Laxford Bridge.

Sights

★ Handa Island

NATURE PRESERVE | **FAMILY** | Just off the coast of Scourie is Handa Island, a sanctuary that shelters huge seabird colonies, especially impressive at nesting time. On the dramatic cliffs you can gaze at more than 200,000 nesting birds, 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. Get there on the Handa Ferry (🌐 *www.handa-ferry.com*)—in reality, a small open boat—from Tarbet, 3 miles north of Scourie. It runs Monday to Saturday and costs £20 per person. 🌐 *scottishwildlifetrust.org.uk* ☹ *Closed Oct.–Mar.*

Restaurants

★ Shorehouse Restaurant

\$\$ | **SEAFOOD** | If you're feeling peckish after a trip to Handa Island, stop at this exceptional 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:** friendly and attentive service; spectacular seafood; gorgeous views. § *Average main: £17 ☒ Tigh Na Mara, Tarbet, Scourie ☎ 01971/502251* 🌐 *www.shorehousetarbet.co.uk* ☹ *Closed Sun. and Oct.–Easter.*

Hotels

★ Eddrachilles Hotel

\$\$ | **B&B/INN** | With one of the most spectacular vistas—out toward the picturesque islands of Badcall Bay—of any hotel in Scotland, Eddrachilles sits on a huge plot of private moorland just south of the Handa Island bird sanctuary. **Pros:** close to bird sanctuary; attractive garden; stunning shoreline nearby. **Cons:** set menus only; Wi-Fi limited to public areas; needs a lick of paint. § *Rooms from: £145 ☒ Off A894, Scourie ☎ 01971/502080* 🌐 *www.eddrachilles.com* ☹ *Closed Nov.–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, simply 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 coastal 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 at least an hour without stops—but plan on longer, because you'll definitely want to stop. Highlights include the stunning sweep of sand at Clashnessie Bay, the beautiful Stoer Point Lighthouse, and the red-sandstone sea stack known as the Old Man of Stoer (not to be confused with the Old Man of Storr on Skye). The latter two are just off the Drumbeg Loop; turn right onto the small, signposted road between Clashnessie and Stoer. 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.

Eas a' Chual Aluinn Waterfall

WATERFALL | 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 parking area off the A894, on the bend of the road 4 miles south of Kylesku, just before you reach Loch na Gainmhich. ☒ *Off A894, Lochinver.*

Hotels

Kylesku Hotel

\$\$\$ | **HOTEL** | This charming hotel, looking out over Loch Glendhu and toward Eas a' Chual Aluinn (Scotland's highest waterfall), has great service, a warm and relaxed atmosphere, and the region's best restaurant. **Pros:** excellent restaurant (try the fresh oysters and lobster); stunning loch views; stylish and understated decor. **Cons:** expensive for the area;

two tiny (but cheap) attic rooms; some old-building quirks. 📞 *Rooms from: £230* 📠 *Off A894, Scourie* 📞 *01971/502231* 🌐 *www.kyleskuhotel.co.uk* ➡️ *11 rooms* 🍳 *Free 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.

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—the journey takes around 75 minutes.

Sights

Ardvreck Castle

CASTLE/PALACE | Beside Loch Assynt, 11 miles east of Lochinver on the fast road to Ullapool, stands the striking Ardvreck Castle. A onetime Clan MacLeod stronghold built in the late 1500s, this atmospheric ruin sits on an outcrop with perfect views the length of the loch in both directions. You’ll find a parking area directly opposite the ruins. From there, you can take the muddy path down to a stony beach and then walk along to the castle. 📠 *Off A837, Lochinver* 🌐 *www.undiscoveredscotland.co.uk.*

★ Assynt and Coigach

NATURE SIGHT | To the east and south of Lochinver 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.

Beaches

Achmelvich Bay

BEACH | This beautiful white-sand beach, 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.” In summer, expect a bit of a traffic jam to reach the beach, then a fight for a parking space. The beach is considerably quieter outside of peak season. **Amenities:** parking (no fee); water sports. **Best for:** walking; wind-surfing 📠 *Off B869, Lochinver.*

Restaurants

An Cala Café

🇬🇧 **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 house baking. The specials often include fish freshly delivered from the harbor. **Known for:** cozy 14-bed bunkhouse on site; delicious house-made soup; great fish-and-chips. 📞 *Average main: £9* 📠 *Culag Park, Lochinver* 📞 *01571/844598* 🌐 *www.ancalacafeand-bunkhouse.co.uk* ☺ *Closed Sun.–Tues.*

Hotels

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 have traditional mahogany furniture. **Pros:** great fishing nearby; cozy public room with a fireplace; refreshing sauna. **Cons:** expensive for the area; not good for families with children; slightly drab exterior. 📞 *Rooms from: £300* 📠 *lolaire Rd., Lochinver* 📞 *01571/844496* 🌐 *www.inverlodge.com* ☺ *Closed Nov.–Mar.* ➡️ *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:** delicious breakfast; welcoming hosts; fantastic views. **Cons:** small TVs in rooms; beds can be creaky; Munro room has no view. 📞 *Rooms from: £140* 📠 *Off A837, Lochinver* 📞 *01571/844588* 🌐 *www.tighnasith.com* ➡️ *3 rooms* 🍳 *Free Breakfast.*

Shopping

Highland Stoneware

CERAMICS | 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, there’s a second Highland Stoneware store in Ullapool. 📠 *Baddidarroch, Lochinver* 📞 *01571/844376* 🌐 *www.highlandstoneware.com.*

Ullapool

30 miles south of Lochinver, 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

To reach Ullapool from Lochinver, either head east on the A837 along Loch Assynt then south on the A835 (1 hour), or head directly south on the windier A837 via Stac Pollaidh (1 hour 15 minutes). From Inverness, a desolate but well-maintained stretch of the A835 takes you to Ullapool via the Falls of Measach.

ESSENTIALS

VISITOR INFORMATION VisitScotland

Ullapool iCentre. 📠 *Argyle St., Ullapool* 📞 *01854/612486* 🌐 *www.visitscotland.com.*

Sights

The Ceilidh Place

ARTS CENTER | Ullapool’s cultural focal point is 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., Ullapool ☎ 01854/612103 🌐 www.theceilidhplace.com.

Corrieshalloch Gorge

WATERFALL | 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

HISTORY MUSEUM | Films, photographs, and audiovisual displays tell the story of Ullapool and the local area, from the Ice Age to modern times. There's a particularly fascinating display on the the "klondyking" period between 1970 and 1990, when foreign boats, mainly from the Eastern Bloc, filled the loch to fish the mackerel. The historic church building that houses the museum was designed by Thomas Telford and dates from the early 19th century. ☒ 7–8 W. Argyle St., Ullapool ☎ 01854/612987 🌐 www.ullapoolmuseum.co.uk ☎ £5 ☹ Closed Sun. and Nov.–Mar.

🍴 Restaurants

The Arch Inn

§ | **BRITISH** | This restaurant's simple pub-style menu of sausages-and-mash and fish-and-chips hardly pushes the envelope, but its use of local ingredients, its pretty presentation of dishes, and its appealing waterside seating make it a favorite dining spot among locals. Book in advance if you can, especially if you're visiting on a weekend. **Known for:** always busy; fresh and tasty pub grub; waterside seating. ☎ Average main: £14 ☒ 10–11 W. Shore St., Ullapool ☎ 01854/612454 🌐 www.thearchinn.co.uk.

★ West Coast Delicatessen

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

🏨 Hotels

★ The Dipping Lugger

\$\$\$\$ | **HOTEL** | This pretty whitewashed house on Ullapool's waterfront, dating from the late 1700s, is home to the town's most luxurious boutique hotel—and perhaps its finest restaurant, too. **Pros:** appealing lounge area; lavish rooms with Loch Broom views; delicious dinner included in room rate. **Cons:** very expensive for Ullapool; bedroom windows only open part way; only open on weekends. ☎ Rooms from: £390 ☒ 4 W. Shore St., Ullapool ☎ 01854/613344 🌐 thedippinglugger.co.uk ☹ Closed Mon.–Wed. ➔ 3 rooms 🏠 All-Inclusive.

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:** fast and reliable Wi-Fi; truly unique property; beautiful setting. **Cons:** a little remote; some fusty decor; steep drive down to the house. ☎ Rooms from: £99 ☒ Off A835, Ullapool ☎ 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 different natural features and cozy

common rooms stuffed with comfy armchairs, colorful cushions, and off-the-wall artworks. **Pros:** great location; wonderfully whimsical decor; superfriendly owners. **Cons:** some low ceilings; sea views limited; TVs are small. ☎ Rooms from: £120 ☒ 2 Market St., Ullapool ☎ 01854/612594 🌐 www.westlea-ullapool.co.uk ➔ 5 rooms 🏠 Free Breakfast.

🛒 Shopping

Highland Liquor Co.

WINE/SPIRITS | This small bottle shop sells the up-and-coming local producer's signature Seven Crofts gin, along with limited edition bottlings like the Ullapool Gin. You'll also find hand-picked craft beers, wines, and soft drinks for sale. ☒ 26 W. Argyle St., Ullapool 🌐 facebook.com/HLCBottleShop.

🚶 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. To get to Stac Pollaidh, take the A835 to Drumrunie, then a minor road off to the west (there's a sign for "Achiltibuie"). Five miles along the road on the left is a parking area; start your walk from here. ☒ Off A835, Dornie.

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 permits for you.

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 for around 12 miles. From there, signs for "Corrieshalloch Gorge" lead you west onto the winding A832—also known as "Destitution Road".

👁 Sights

Destitution Road

SCENIC DRIVE | The road south between Corrieshalloch Gorge 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 | FAMILY | 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. The garden, located 6 miles north of Gairloch, is also a haven for wildlife, with Scotland's Big 5 (the red squirrel, red deer, otter, seal, and golden eagle) all found around here. ☎ *Off A832, Poolewe* ☎ 01445/712952 🌐 www.nts.org.uk 📞 £13 ☺ Closed Nov.–Mar.

★ 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

★ Shieldaig Lodge

\$\$\$ | **HOTEL** | Located 4 miles southwest of Gairloch in the tiny hamlet of Shieldaig (not to be confused with the relative metropolis just down the coast), this spectacular Victorian hunting-lodge-turned-luxury hotel sits on a gorgeous, secluded bay. **Pros:** top-drawer restaurant; activities include on-site falconry; remote location with bay views. **Cons:** heavy curtains require some wrangling; poor Wi-Fi; dining is expensive (but worth it). ☎ *Rooms from: £215* ☎ *Bad-achro, Gairloch* ☎ 01445/741333 🌐 www.shieldaiglodge.com ➡ 12 rooms 🌞 Free Breakfast.

Activities

GOLF

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 (which have 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, Gairloch* ☎ 01445/712407 🌐 gairlochgolfclub.co.uk 📞 £15 for 9 holes, £25 for 18 holes 🏌️ 9 holes, 2137 yards, par 31.

Shieldaig

36 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 namesake loch of its own. 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 16½ 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 corkscrews 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

SCENIC DRIVE | 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.

Restaurants

The Bealach Cafe and Gallery

\$ | **CAFÉ** | At the eastern edge of the Bealach na Ba, the steepest road ascent in Britain, this lovely café offers sandwiches, soups, and fine house baking against a stunning mountain backdrop. Enjoy the view through the café's large

windows or from the outside deck, if weather allows. **Known for:** views to die for; lovely house-baked cakes; friendly hosts. ☎ *Average main: £9* ☎ A896, *Lochcarron* ☎ 01520/733436 🌐 www.thebealach.co.uk ☺ Closed Mon. and Tues. No dinner.

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:** two restaurants and a bar with more than 300 malts; wonderful countryside location; center for outdoor activities. **Cons:** activities must be booked in advance; 6 miles out of town; very pricey. ☎ *Rooms from: £595* ☎ *Off A896, Shieldaig* ☎ 01445/791242 🌐 www.thetorridon.com ➡ 18 rooms 🌞 Free Breakfast.

Shopping

Lochcarron Weavers

MIXED CLOTHING | 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. The store is 16½ miles southeast of Shieldaig; follow the A896 to Lochcarron, then turn south onto Church Street. ☎ *Lochcarron* ☎ 01520/722212 🌐 www.lochcarron.co.uk ☺ Closed Sun.

Kyle of Lochalsh

38 miles south of Shieldaig, 78 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 here transformed not only travel to Skye but the very seascape

itself. The area's most notable (and most photographed) attraction, Eilean Donan Castle, is 8 miles east of town.

GETTING HERE AND AROUND

From Shildaig, head south on the A896, then join the A890 arriving from Inverness. There are also four direct trains a day from Inverness. From the south, you'll arrive by the A87.

Sights

Attadale Gardens

GARDEN | FAMILY | A little over halfway between Shildaig and Kyle of Lochalsh, this 20-acre estate centered around a striking 18th-century house makes for an energizing break. Highlights here include the historic Sunken Garden, the atmospheric Old Wood, and the peaceful Japanese Garden. Kids will also enjoy following the sculpture trail, with a range of eclectic animal figures by artists from around the world; look out for the distinctive wild-cat pointer on the sundial. Climb the steps up from the Old Rhododendron Walk for stunning views of the estate and beyond—on a clear day you can see the Cuillin Hills of Skye—then grab a drink and snack in the DIY tearoom. You can also reach Attadale by train from Kyle of Lochalsh or Inverness; the station is just outside. ☎ *Off A890, Attadale, Kyle of Lochalsh* ☎ 01520/722603 🌐 www.attadalegardens.com 🚗 £10 ☺ Closed Nov.–Mar.

★ 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 gift shop and a coffeehouse for the many visitors. The castle lies 8½ miles east of Kyle Lochalsh; you'll pass it if you're coming from the south. ☎ *Off A87, Dornie* ☎ 01599/555202 🌐 www.eileandonancastle.com 🚗 £10 ☺ Closed Jan.–Feb.

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 house-made 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:** unbeatable castle views; delicious baked goods; superior tea and coffee. ☎ *Average main: £5* ☎ *Off A87, Kyle of Lochalsh* ☎ 01599/555221 🌐 www.allthegoodness.co.uk ☺ Closed Mon. and Tues. No dinner.



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.

Hotels

★ Duncraig Castle

\$\$\$ | **HOTEL** | Built high on a cliff-top overlooking Plockton, this striking 19th-century castle recently opened as a hotel—and instantly became the region's go-to luxury retreat. **Pros:** free kids sweets and dog treats; beautiful rooms with modern bathrooms; spectacular views over Loch Carron. **Cons:** access road is rough and potholed; taxidermy animals—including a polar bear—will repel some; no meals except breakfast. ☎ *Rooms from: £275* ☎ *Plockton, Kyle of Lochalsh* ☎ 0599/544295 🌐 duncraigcastle.co.uk ☺ Closed Oct.–Mar. 🚗 12 rooms 🍷 Free Breakfast.

Isle of Skye

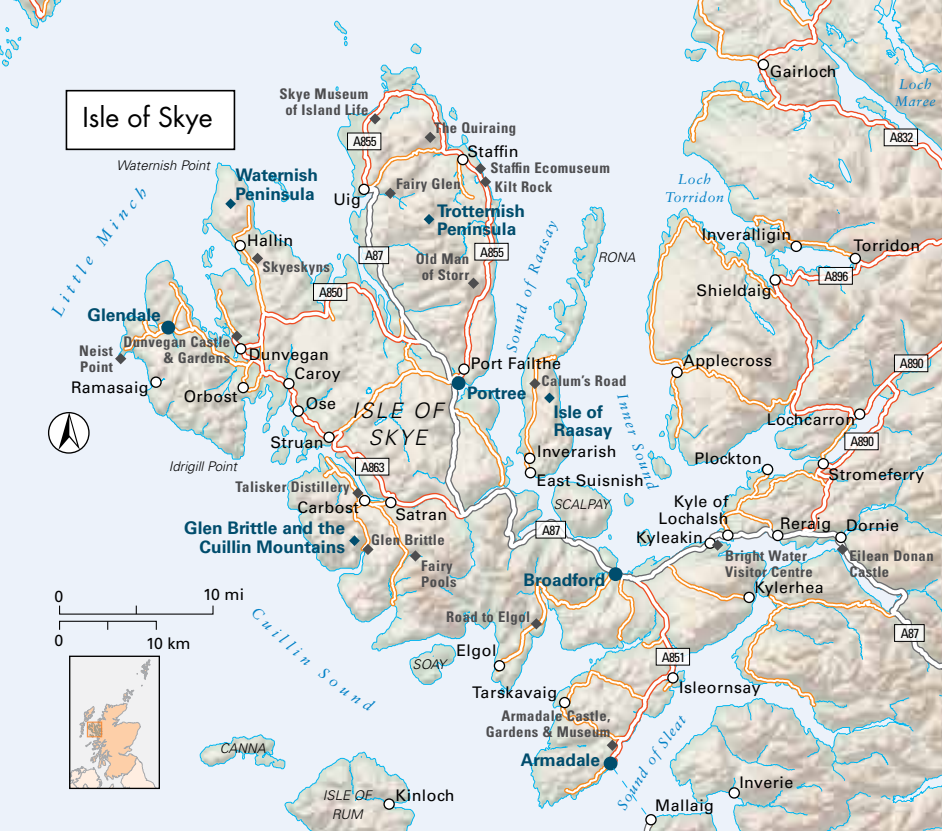
The misty Isle of Skye is awash with romance and myth, lush green gardens, and steep, magnetic mountains. Its extraordinary natural beauty and royal connections see it rank highly on most

must-see lists, and its proximity to the mainland makes it one of Scotland's most accessible islands.

Adding to Skye's scenic drama are sunsets that linger brilliantly until late at night, and otherworldly mists that roll gently through valleys. Much photographed are the old crofts, one or two of which are still inhabited. The island also has an impressive range of accommodations, as well as restaurants that showcase the best local produce and culinary talent.

To reach Skye, cross the bridge over the narrow channel of Kyleakin from Kyle of Lochalsh on the mainland. Or, if you're visiting in the summer, take a romantic boat trip between Mallaig and Armadale or Glenelg and Kylerhea. You can tour the island readily in two or three days but staying a bit longer will afford time to hike or sea kayak.

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 single-lane stretches, but, for careful drivers, these shouldn't pose a problem.

Broadford

8½ 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 from Kyle of Lochalsh up to Portree and beyond.

TOURS

★ Misty Isle Boat Trips

BOAT TOURS | FAMILY | Explore some of the most remote corners of Skye's Cuillin Mountains with a boat trip to Loch Coruisk. The scenery around here is some of the most expansive in Scotland, and the wildlife is equally spectacular: look out for seals, basking sharks, red deer, golden eagles, and more. Round-trip journeys depart from the town of Elgol, 15 miles southwest of Broadford, and booking ahead is essential. Wildlife tours to the Small Isles are also available. ☒ *Elgol jetty, Sealladh na Mara, Elgol* ☎ 01471/866288 🌐 www.mistyisleboat-trips.co.uk ☎ From £28 ☹ Closed Sun. and Nov.–Mar.

Sights

Bright Water Visitor Centre

VISITOR CENTER | FAMILY | Discover *Ring of Bright Water*, Gavin Maxwell's much-loved account of his work with otters on the island of Eilean Ban, at this center just across the bridge from Kyle of Lochalsh, 8 miles east of Broadford. There's an interesting exhibit illustrating Maxwell's work, as well as displays on local history—including, most obviously, a 70-foot-tall, 165-year-old lighthouse designed by Robert Louis Stevenson's father. The center also offers wildlife tours that promise otters, seals, and birdlife. ☒ *The Pier, Kyleakin* ☎ 01599/530040 🌐 www.eileanban.org ☹ Closed Oct.–Easter and weekends.

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 it 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, and 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*.

Restaurants

Deli Gasta

£ | **CAFÉ** | This rustic little deli-café, in an old mill on the edge of Broadford, serves delicious coffee, cakes, and savory snacks ranging from toasted sandwiches and baked potatoes to soups and salads. Come early for the Eggs Royale made with locally smoked Scottish salmon.

Known for: delicious coffee from an artisan roastery; tasty sandwiches and bagels; charming stone-wall interior. ☎ *Average main:* £6 ☒ *The Old Mill, Broadford* ☎ 01471/822646 🌐 www.deligasta.co.uk ☹ No dinner.

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:** Drambuie-colored tartan; quintessentially Scottish; convenient location. **Cons:** breakfast underwhelming; poorly lit public areas; no elevator. ☎ *Rooms from:* £195 ☒ *Torrin Rd., Broadford* ☎ 01471/822204 🌐 www.broadfordhotel.co.uk ☎ 11 rooms 🍷 Free Breakfast.

Armadale

5 miles southeast of Broadford, 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 spectacular southernmost peninsula.

GETTING HERE AND AROUND

From Broadford, the A851 heads south down the Sleat Peninsula, following its stunning coast to Armadale (smaller roads continue even farther south). You can also arrive directly into Sleat on the Mallaig-Armadale ferry.

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, Armadale ☎ 01471/844305 🌐 www.armadalecastle.com 📞 £9 🕒 Closed Nov.–Mar.

★ Torabhaig Distillery

DISTILLERY | Opened in 2017 as Skye's second-ever licensed distillery, Torabhaig debuted its single malt four years later. And just like those from Skye's first distillery, Talisker, the whisky is smooth, rich, and wonderfully peaty. Come for a tasting in the comfort of the beautiful courtyard, flanked by the old stone farmhouses where the magic happens. You can also join a guided tour of the distillery, though note that it's a small operation; don't expect photo ops in barrel-filled warehouses. If you have time, stroll from the distillery down to the pretty, ruined Knock Castle, a former stronghold of the Macdonalds. ☒ Off A851, Teangue, Armadale ☎ 01471/833447 🌐 www.torabhaig.com 📞 £10 🕒 Closed weekends and Jan.–Mar.

Hotels

Duisdale House Hotel

\$\$\$\$ | **HOTEL** | Sea views and a lovely hillside location amid 35 acres of mature woodlands and gardens are highlights of this former mansion, which is boutique chic at its very best. **Pros:** expansive views; finely furnished rooms and lodges; delicious cooked breakfasts. **Cons:** very expensive in summer; three-course dinner is pricey; unappealing carpets in many rooms. 📞 Rooms from: £329 ☒ Off A851, Isleornsay ☎ 01471/833202 🌐 skyehotel.co.uk/duisdale ➡ 21 rooms 🕒 Free Breakfast.

★ Kinloch Lodge

\$\$\$\$ | **HOTEL** | An upscale hotel with an excellent restaurant, Kinloch Lodge peacefully overlooks the tidal Loch na Dal. The buildings date from the 17th century, although the best views are from the newer South House, which was built from the ground up with comfort and relaxation in mind. **Pros:** historic and characterful property; beautiful lochside setting; top-drawer dining. **Cons:** far from amenities; noisy bathroom fans; expensive stay. 📞 Rooms from: £420 ☒ Off A851, Isleornsay ☎ 01471/833333 🌐 kinloch-lodge.co.uk ➡ 19 rooms 🕒 Free Breakfast.

Shopping

★ Ragamuffin

MIXED CLOTHING | This well-stocked shop specializes in designer knitwear and has some of the nicest staff you could hope to meet. On cold winter days, they might make you coffee while you browse, then mail your purchases back home for you. ☒ Armadale Pier, Off A851, Armadale ☎ 01471/844217 🌐 www.ragamuffin-store.com.

Portree

30 miles northwest of Sleat Peninsula.

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

From the Sleat Peninsula, follow the A851 north to join the A87, which continues up to Portree. As the biggest town on Skye, Portree is also reachable by local buses from Broadford or Kyle of Lochalsh.

Clans and Tartans



The Scottish clans have a long and varied history. Some claim Norman roots and later married into Celtic society; others were of Norse origin, the product of Viking raids on Scotland; while still others may have been descended from Pictish tribes. Whatever their origins, by the 13th century, the clans were 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 transformed

forever. Many Highlanders, and especially islanders, began to emigrate in the 1750s. 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.

Sights

Aros

ARTS CENTER | 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.

VISITOR INFORMATION

VisitScotland Portree iCentre. ☒ Bayfield House, Bayfield Rd., Portree ☎ 01478/612992 🌐 www.visitscotland.com.

☒ Viewfield Rd., Portree ☎ 01478/613649
 🌐 www.aros.co.uk.

🍴 Restaurants

Café Arriba

£ | **BRITISH** | Up a steep flight of stairs, this laid-back café has window seats with great views over Portree Harbour. It uses only local produce (whatever is “fresh, local, and available”) and is a good no-frills option for hearty breakfasts, as well as lunchtime favorites—from locally caught scallops to creamy summer risotto. **Known for:** expect long lines; delicious house-made cakes; mildly treacherous stairs. ☎ *Average main:* £9 ☎ Quay Brae, Quay St., Portree ☎ 01478/611830 🌐 www.cafearriba.co.uk ☹ Closed Mon.

Scurrybreac Restaurant

\$\$\$\$ | **BRITISH** | It may be tiny, but this upscale, 20-seater restaurant is packed every night of the week. The vibe is relaxed and informal, while the cooking is imaginative and varied, with unexpected marriages such as coffee-crust ed venison or hake with coconut. **Known for:** very expensive for Portree; inventive dishes; gorgeous bay views. ☎ *Average main:* £75 ☎ 7 Bosville Terr., Portree ☎ 01478/612069 🌐 www.scurrybreac.com ☹ Closed Sun. and 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:** attentive service; a short stroll from Portree; good breakfast menu. **Cons:** no elevator; restaurant can be full; rooms at back overpriced. ☎ *Rooms from:* £295 ☎ Off A855, Portree ☎ 01478/612003 🌐 www.cuillinhills-hotel-skye.co.uk ➡ 34 rooms 🏠 Free Breakfast.

The Skye Inn

\$\$ | **B&B/INN** | Clean and comfortable rooms, a quiet but convenient location, and a wonderful communal space makes this a popular base for exploring Portree and the Trotternish Peninsula. **Pros:** appealing lounge area with roaring fire; friendly above-and-beyond service; free parking. **Cons:** not as good value in high-season; may be too “dog-friendly” for some; food could be better. ☎ *Rooms from:* £175 ☎ Springfield Rd., Portree ☎ 01478/612282 🌐 theskyeinns.com ➡ 24 rooms 🏠 No Meals.

🛍 Shopping

Isle of Skye Soap Company

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 Sq., Portree* ☎ 01478/611350 🌐 www.skye-soap.co.uk ☹ Closed Sun.

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 up the east coast. If you want head back to Portree a different way, or continue straight on to the Waternish Peninsula, follow the A87 on the west coast.

👁 Sights

Fairy Glen

NATURE SIGHT | What was once a hidden gem is now just another stop on the ever-expanding Skye tourist trail. Still, if you come early or late and avoid the crowds, the Fairy Glen remains magical—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.

Kilt Rock

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

Old Man of Storr

NATURE SIGHT | Along the dramatic road around the Trotternish Peninsula, a gate beside a parking area 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. Give yourself at least three hours to explore and enjoy the spectacular views from the top. **■ TIP → The weather here changes very quickly, so be prepared.** ☎ *Off A855.*

★ The Quiraing

MOUNTAIN | A spectacular geological formation of rocky crags and towering stacks, Quiraing dominates the horizon of the Trotternish Peninsula. It's 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. ☎ *Quiraing Car Park.*

Skye Ecomuseum

MUSEUM VILLAGE | **FAMILY** | Billed as “a museum without walls,” this collection of 13 open-air, geological and social exhibits dots 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. ☎ *Staffin Community Trust, 3 Ellishadder, Staffin* ☎ 01470/562464 🌐 skyeecomuseum.com.

Skye Museum of Island Life

HISTORY MUSEUM | **FAMILY** | Discover the old crofting ways of the local population at this museum close to the tip of the Trotternish Peninsula. Informative displays and exhibits, from reconstructed interiors with traditional implements to historical photographs and documents, show life as it was on the island merely a century ago. ☎ *Off A855, Kilmuir* ☎ 01470/552206 🌐 www.skyemuseum.co.uk ➡ £5 ☹ Closed Sun. and Oct.–Easter.

Staffin Dinosaur Museum

OTHER MUSEUM | **FAMILY** | Built on the foundations of an 1840s schoolhouse, this single-room museum is a labor of love of builder Dugald Ross, who first saw the fossilized dinosaur prints as a boy and as an adult saved them from rough seas. You'll also find objects saved from shipwrecks, agricultural implements, and some old photographs. It is highly individual and perhaps slightly eccentric, but fascinating. ☎ *6 Ellishadder, Staffin* ☎ 01470/562321 🌐 www.staffindinosaur-museum.com ➡ £4 ☹ Closed weekends.

Hotels

The Flodigaray Hotel

\$\$\$ | **HOTEL** | With spectacular coastal views and antique furnishings throughout, the Flodigaray retains the feel of a grand country manor. **Pros:** great seafood restaurant; spectacular views; a good base for walking. **Cons:** a long way from anywhere; expensive rooms; steep road down.  **Rooms from:** £240  **Off A855, Staffin**  01470/552203  www.hotelintheskye.co.uk  18 rooms  **Free Breakfast.**

Skeabost House Hotel

\$\$\$\$ | **HOTEL** | Set at the foot of Loch Snizort, this 19th-century hunting-lodge-turned-luxury hotel offers charming, traditionally furnished rooms; a pleasant lounge with a roaring fire; a cozy little cocktail bar; and a conservatory restaurant that's one of the area's best, with Scottish specialties such as smoked salmon, spiced monkfish, and 28-day-aged prime fillet steak. **Pros:** free-to-use 9-hole golf course; modern and accessible Garden rooms; beautiful lochside setting. **Cons:** expensive option; service is hit and miss; not close to any one particular attraction.  **Rooms from:** £350  **Skeabost Bridge, Portree**  01470/532202  skyehotel.co.uk/skeabost  20 rooms  **Free Breakfast.**

Waternish Peninsula

17 miles west of Trotternish.

Jutting like a beckoning finger from the northwest of Skye, the Waternish Peninsula 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 the Trotternish Peninsula, head west on the A850 from Borve (around 4 miles northwest of Portree). Then, after

14 miles, turn right onto the B886, which travels up the west coast of the Waternish Peninsula.

Sights

Skyeskyns

FACTORY | A 15-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 tenter-hooks" and "stretched to the limits," and you can buy sheepskins from the on-site shop (there's another outlet in Portree). In summer, there's also a lovely little yurt café around the back.  17 Lochbay, Waternish  01470/592237  www.skyeskyns.co.uk  **Tour £5.**





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:** impeccable service; sublime yet simple seafood; beautiful bay views.  **Average main:** £110  1 Macleods Terr., Stein  01470/592235  www.lochbay-restaurant.co.uk  **Closed Sun.–Tues. and Jan.–Mar. No lunch.**

Shopping

Edinbane Pottery

CERAMICS | Specializing in quirky handmade ceramics and watercolors of local wildlife, this 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  **Closed weekends.**

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 lies just across the water from the region's eastern edge.

GETTING HERE AND AROUND

From the Waternish Peninsula, take the A850 southwest to Dunvegan. From here, turn left onto the A863, then right onto the twisty, turny B884, which runs west along the coast. It can feel rather isolated in bad weather or after dark.



Sights

Dunvegan Castle & Gardens

CASTLE/PALACE | In a commanding position 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 features, fern house, walled garden, and various viewing points. There's a café beside the parking lot. Boat trips from the castle to the nearby seal colony run April through September. The castle lies a mile north of the A850/A863 junction between Waternish and Glendale.  **Dunvegan**  01470/521206  www.dunvegan-castle.com  **Castle and gardens £14; gardens only £12; seal trips £10**  **Closed mid-Oct.–Mar.**

Neist Point

LIGHTHOUSE | Skye's westernmost point is famed for its steep sea cliffs and picturesque, early-20th century lighthouse,

designed by David Alan Stevenson (cousin of *Treasure Island* author Robert Louis Stevenson). The Neist Point Trail begins at the cliff-top parking area, from which it's a short but steep walk down to the lighthouse.  **Neist Point Car Park, Waterstein, Colbost**  **Turn west off the B884 between Borrodale and Milovaig, following the signs to Waterstein.**

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. Head chef Scott Davies's belief in quality Scottish ingredients is evident in every dish, from the locally sourced game to the sublime Scottish seafood, with most dishes available as part of a multicourse meal or à la carte. **Known for:** faultless service; inventive seafood dishes; delicious oysters and sublime scallops.  **Average main:** £32  **B884, Colbost**  01470/511258  www.threechimneys.co.uk  **Closed mid-Dec.–mid-Jan.**  **No children under eight at dinner.**

Hotels

★ Carter's Rest

\$\$ | **B&B/INN** | This brilliant little B&B offers three large, comfortable rooms with modern bathrooms and a host of thoughtful extras, like mini fridges with water and snacks, pod coffee machines, and US two-pin plug sockets. **Pros:** stunning coastal views; modern and spacious bathrooms; walkable to Neist Point. **Cons:** minimum two-night stay; showers a little slow to heat up; no alcohol license so BYOB.  **Rooms from:** £180  **8–9 Upper Milovaig, Colbost**  01470/517143  www.cartersrestskye.co.uk  2 rooms  **Free Breakfast.**



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.

Shopping

Skye Silver

JEWELRY & WATCHES | 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 landscapes of sea and countryside, with motifs of island wildlife. ☎ *The Old School, B884, Colbost* 📞 01470/511263 🌐 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 (and well-equipped) mountaineers.

GETTING HERE AND AROUND

From Glendale, follow the B884 east to Lonmore, turn south onto the A863, then, after 16 miles (at the junction with the scarecrow sculpture), 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. If you're willing to climb to the upper pools, you can even find some seclusion

at peak hours. ☒ *Fairy Pools Car Park, Glenbrittle* 🆓 *Free; parking £5 a day.*

Glen Brittle

MOUNTAIN | Enjoy spectacular mountain scenery in Glen Brittle, including some unforgettable views of the Cuillin Mountains. Note: these are not for the casual walker, due to steep and dangerous cliff faces. The drive from Carlost along a single-track road (follow signs off the B8009) is one of the most dramatic in Scotland and draws outdoorsy types from across the globe. At the southern end of the glen, around 4 miles beyond the Fairy Pools, is one of Britain's most scenic campsites, overlooking a beautiful, dog-friendly beach and flanked by gentle foothills that were made for strolling. ☒ *Off A863 and B8009.*

Talisker Distillery

DISTILLERY | It may no longer be the only distillery on the Isle of Skye (since the opening of Torabhaig Distillery in 2017), but it remains 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 very proud of it. Classic tours here take about 45 minutes, while tasting tours (available weekdays) take between 90 and 120 minutes. 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 up-and-coming distillery.

GETTING HERE AND AROUND

There are regular ferries to Raasay from Sconser on Skye (on the A87, roughly halfway between Broadford and Portree) every day of the week, all year-round.

Sights

Calum's Road

STREET | An extraordinary feat of human endeavor, this single-track, 2-mile road was conceived and constructed by one 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 it ends at Arnish. ☒ *Near Brochel, Isle of Raasay.*

Hotels

★ Isle of Raasay Distillery

\$\$\$ | **HOTEL** | As well as being Raasay's first legal distillery, which released its first single-malt Scotch in 2021, this stunning building—a modern glass-and-steel structure wrapped around a Victorian-era villa—also happens to be the island's most luxurious place to stay. **Pros:** breathtaking views of Skye; chic minimalist design; comfy lounge with honesty bar. **Cons:** a little pricey in summer; some rooms are small; no dinner (try nearby Raasay House). 📞 *Rooms from: £225* ☒ *Borodale House, Isle of Raasay* 📞 01478/470178 🌐 raasaydistillery.com 🕒 *Closed Nov.–Feb.* 🚗 *6 rooms* 🍳 *Free Breakfast.*

The Outer Hebrides



Isle of Lewis

50 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 (an early diversion onto the B895 takes you to stunning Traigh Mhòr beach); and the A858 leads west, looping up and round to meet the A857 near Brue.

Stornoway

2¾-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 makes a good base for exploring. Watch for seals bobbing about in the harbor.

GETTING HERE AND AROUND

The ferry docks at Stornoway terminal, 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. ☎ A866, Stornoway
☎ 01851/702256 🌐 www.hial.co.uk.

VISITOR INFORMATION

VisitScotland Stornoway iCentre
☎ 26 Cromwell St., Stornoway
☎ 01851/703088 🌐 www.visitscotland.com.

Sights

An Lanntair

ARTS CENTER | 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. ☎ *Kenneth St., Stornoway* ☎ 01851/708480 🌐 lanntair.com ☹ Closed Sun. and Mon.

Lewis Castle

CASTLE/PALACE | This Victorian-era castle—well, neo-Gothic country house—houses the free Museum nan Eilean, with fascinating exhibitions on life in the Outer Hebrides, from the landscape to the language. It also displays six of the famous Lewis Chessmen, intricate 12th-century chess pieces carved from walrus ivory (the rest are in Edinburgh's National Museum of Scotland and London's British Museum). Take a stroll around the castle grounds, with its pleasant mix of woodland, parkland, and gardens overlooking Stornoway harbor. ☎ *Stornoway* ☎ 01625/416430 🌐 www.lewis-castle.co.uk ☹ Museum 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 a bonus that the hotel is also meticulously designed and constructed. **Pros:** close to beautiful Traigh Mhòr beach; stunning sea views; delicious evening meals (when available). **Cons:** expensive for the area; 7 miles outside Stornoway; no kids under 12. 💰 *Rooms from: £205* ☎ B895, Stornoway ☎ 01851/820390 🌐 www.broadbayhouse.co.uk ☹ Closed Nov.–Mar. ➔ 4 rooms 🍳 Free Breakfast.

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.

GETTING HERE AND AROUND

From Stornoway, simply drive up the A857 or take bus W1.



Sights

Butt of Lewis Lighthouse

LIGHTHOUSE | At the northernmost point of Lewis, 3 miles northwest of Port of Ness, 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* 🌐 www.nlb.org.uk.



Shopping

★ Borgh Pottery

CERAMICS | Pick up a range of attractive ceramics, including lamps, vases, and bowls, all hand-thrown on the premises by studio potter Sue Blair. There's also a lovely little garden for visitors to enjoy. Borgh Pottery is 9 miles southwest of Port of Ness, on the road from Stornoway. ☒ *Fivepenny House, Off A857, Borve* ☎ *01851/850345* 🌐 www.borghpottery.co.uk ☺ *Closed Sun. and Mon.*

Carloway and Callanish

16 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, the island's top attraction.

GETTING HERE AND AROUND

Travel west on the A858 and then Pentland Road to reach Carloway directly. To get here via Callanish, follow the A858 all the way. You can also include Arnol by taking the A858 all the way to Barvas, then joining the A857 south back to Stornoway. The W2 bus from Stornoway does the full loop (both directions) with stops at Carloway, Callanish, and Arnol.



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. in Oct.–Mar.*

★ Calanais Standing Stones

(Callanish Stones)

RUINS | 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



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

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.

Dun Carloway Broch (Doune Broch)

RUINS | 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* 🌐 www.historicenvironment.scot.

Gearrannan Blackhouse Village (Garenin)

MUSEUM VILLAGE | Situated at the end of a side road north from Carloway, Gearrannan 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 stay in one of the restored blackhouses here if you want a unique (if no-frills) stay; it's £20 a night for a hostel bunk or £65 for a family room. There is also a small gift shop and café. ☒ *5a Gearrannan, Carloway* ☎ *01851/643416* 🌐 www.gearrannan.com.

Isle of Harris

16 miles southwest of Stornoway.

For most people, Harris is forever linked to tweed. The fabric woven here and on nearby islands 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 heads south from Stornoway and becomes the main artery through Harris. From Tarbert, 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 of South Harris is known as the Golden Road.

Tarbert

45 miles south of Carloway, 36 miles southwest of Stornoway.

The main port of Harris 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 vacationers if in warmer climes. The narrow Golden Road, which runs along the east coast of South Harris, offers some glorious views of a rocky, otherworldly landscape.

GETTING HERE AND AROUND

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

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 conducts guided tours (£10) every weekday from March to October—call to book in advance. ✉ *Tarbert* 01859/502212 🌐 *harrisdistillery.com* 🚗 *Free; tours £10.*

Beaches

★ Traigh Luskentyre

BEACH | 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 wind-swept 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 serves everything from filling house-made soups to sumptuous smoked salmon to mouthwatering cakes. **Known for:** wonderfully remote; simple but delicious fare; good tea and coffee. ☎ *Average main: £8* ☎ *4 Geocrab, Tarbert* ☎ *01859/530268* 🌐 *www.skoon.com* 🚗 *No credit cards* ☺ *Closed Sun. and Mon. No dinner.*

Hotels

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:** parking on the street right outside; wonderful location; comfortable bedrooms. **Cons:** noise from the bar can drift up; sea views not guaranteed; some rooms are small. ☎ *Rooms from: £180* ☎ *Pier Rd., Tarbert* ☎ *01859/502364* 🌐 *www.hotel-hebrides.com* 🚗 *21 rooms* ☺ *Free Breakfast.*



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

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, sandy beach; and a dining experience that's unmatched on Harris. **Pros:** friendly and attentive service; magnificent setting and views; delicious food (try the tarte tatin). **Cons:** very expensive for Harris; some oppressively floral wallpaper; minimum two-night stay. ☎ *Rooms from: £245* ☎ *Off A859, Borve* ☎ *01859/550238* 🌐 *scaristahouse.com* 🚗 *6 rooms* ☺ *Free Breakfast.*

Shopping

Essence of Harris

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 and body lotion is particularly popular. ✉ *The Pier, Tarbert* ☎ *01859/502768* 🌐 *essenceofharris.co.uk* ☺ *Closed Sun.–Tues.*

Leverburgh

18 miles southwest 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 Rodal have several attractions, with St. Clement's Church a particular highlight.

GETTING HERE AND AROUND

From Tarbert, simply take the A859 south around the west coast. Or, for a longer and more dramatic drive, follow the Golden Road down the east coast.

Sights

Seallam! Visitor Centre and Co Leis Thu Genealogical Research Centre

VISITOR CENTER | 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.hebrides-people.com 🚗 £3 ☺ *Closed weekends in summer and Sat.–Tues. in winter.*

★ **St. Clement's Church** (*Eaglais Roghadail*) **RELIGIOUS BUILDING** | At the southernmost point of Harris, in the village of Rodel 3 miles southeast of Leverburgh, 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* 🌐 www.historicenvironment.scot.

🍴 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. It's open unusually late for the islands, which makes it something of a refuge, and its menu ranges from burgers, sandwiches, and fish-and-chips to quality local seafood. **Known for:** handy harbor-side location; cheap and tasty dishes; open until fairly late. 📍 *Average main: £18* ☎ *The Pier, Ferry Rd., Leverburgh* ☎ 01859/520225 🌐 www.anchorageres-restaurant.co.uk ☺ *Closed Sun. and Mon.*

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) and Sea Harris (🌐 www.seaharris.com) from Harris, and by Go to St. Kilda (🌐 www.gotostkilda.co.uk) from Skye.

TOURS Kilda Cruises

BOAT TOURS | This popular tour operator organizes day trips to St. Kilda on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday; the days in between are standbys, in case of bad weather. Tours leave from Leverburgh on Harris and include 4½ hours ashore on Hirta island, as well as a cruise around the archipelago's dizzyingly high cliffs and sea stacks. ☎ *Pier Rd., Tarbert* ☎ 01859/502060 🌐 www.kildacruises.co.uk 🚗 £245 ☺ *No sailing Sun.*

👁 Sights

★ St. Kilda Village

TOWN | This crumbling, wind-ravaged village is the last remnant 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.

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

Balranald Nature Reserve

NATURE PRESERVE | Run by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), the Balranald Nature Reserve shelters large numbers of waders and seabirds that inhabit the rock foreshore and marshland.

Listen for corncrakes, whose distinctive rasping cry sounds not unlike a plastic drink lid being unscrewed. ☎ *RSPB Balranald, Hougharry* ☎ 01876/560422 🌐 www.rspb.org.uk.

Barpa Langass

RUINS | 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 Clachan. ☎ *Off A867, Lochmaddy.*

Dun an Sticir

RUINS | 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.*

Taigh Chearsabhagh

ARTS CENTER | 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; most of the main attractions are on (or very close to) this main road. At Lochboisdale in the southeast of South Uist, you can catch ferries to Barra, the southernmost of the Outer Hebrides' main islands, or to Oban on the mainland.

Sights

Kildonan Museum

HISTORY MUSEUM | This small museum has a number of interesting artifacts related to 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 house-made cakes. ☒ A865, Kildonan ☎ 01878/710343 🌐 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:** free and reliable Wi-Fi; reasonable rates; good food and drink. **Cons:** a little old-fashioned; remote location; some small rooms. [£] Rooms from: £99 ☒ Off B888, Lochboisdale ☎ 01878/700215 🌐 www.polocharinn.com ➡ 11 rooms 🍳 Free Breakfast.

Shopping

Hebridean Jewellery

JEWELRY & WATCHES | Handcrafted, Celtic-influenced, silver or 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 ☹ Closed Sun.