

TOOLKIT

The chapters in this section cover the most important topics you'll need to know about in Scotland's Highlands and islands. They're full of nuts-and-bolts information and valuable insights to help you understand and navigate Scotland's Highlands and islands and get the most out of your trip.



Arriving
p220



Getting Around
p221



Money
p222



Accommodation
p223



Family Travel
p224



**Health & Safe
Travel**
p225



**Food, Drink
& Nightlife**
p226



**Responsible
Travel**
p228



**LGBTIQ+
Travellers**
p230



**Accessible
Travel**
p231



Nuts & Bolts
p232

Skara Brae (p198)

FRANCESCO BONINO/SHUTTERSTOCK ©

219



Arriving



Most visitors to the region will touch down in Edinburgh or Glasgow and then continue north by car, train or bus. Alternatively, the international airport in Inverness offers more direct (though typically more expensive) access to the Central and Northern Highlands. For the islands, come by ferry from the mainland or by domestic Loganair flight.



Visas

Citizens of the European Union, the USA, Canada, New Zealand, Australia, Singapore and around 50 other countries can visit the UK for up to six months without a visa. Check the latest rules: gov.uk/check-uk-visa



Duty Free

When leaving Scotland for any non-UK destination, passengers are able to purchase duty-free shopping. You'll find shops in most international airports and ferry ports. Check the limits in your destination.



Customs

Border checks in the UK are typically quick and pain-free (with ePassport gates for EU citizens). You must declare if you're bringing in more than 200 cigarettes, four litres of spirits or £10,000 in cash.



ATMs

While Scotland is increasingly cash-free, the Highlands and islands still have many cash-only shops, bars and even B&Bs. You'll find free-to-use ATMs in most villages and towns, but airport ATMs may charge a fee.

Travel from Inverness Airport to City Centre



TRAIN

25 mins
(incl walk)
£3.40



BUS

35 mins
£6.50



TAXI

20 mins
£30

ARRIVING WITH CHILDREN

Border Force has a legal obligation to protect children entering the UK. If you are travelling with a child under the age of 18 and you are not their parent or legal guardian – or you don't appear to be (for example, you have different surnames) – staff will ask questions to ascertain your relationship. Therefore, it's best to always carry documents that outline your relationship to the child, such as a birth or adoption certificate, or a letter from the child's parent/s (containing their contact details and a statement affirming you have the authority to travel with their child).



Getting Around

The Southern Highlands are well connected by reliable trains and buses. But the further north (or off the mainland) you go, the less you can rely on public transport.

TRAVEL COSTS



Car rental
From £25/day



Petrol
**About £1.50/
litre**



Train from
Edinburgh to Fort
William
About £50



Car

The easiest way to explore the Highlands and islands, and to stop at regular intervals to soak up the views, is by having your own wheels. Roads are generally well maintained, though expect single-track country lanes with passing points in the Northern Highlands and beyond. Most island ferries will allow you to take on a car for an extra fee.

Rail

Most rail services in Scotland are run by ScotRail, which has clean and comfortable trains. Lines head up the west coast (to Oban, Fort William and Mallaig) and through the centre of the Highlands (to Pitlochry, Inverness and Wick). However, the far northwest of the country and the islands have no rail service.

RENTING BIKES

The Highlands and islands are home to some of the UK's most spectacular cycling routes. However, bicycle rental options can be limited. The best option is to pick up a rental bike at your point of entry to Scotland.



Air

The airport at Inverness offers connections to other parts of the UK, via airlines including British Airways, easyJet and KLM. Island airports, like Kirkwall (Orkney), Sumburgh (Shetland) and Stornoway (Lewis and Harris), are almost exclusively served by Scottish regional airline Loganair, with connections to Edinburgh and Glasgow. These flights can be very expensive; book early for the best rates.

Bus

Regional bus services fill many of the gaps between train lines, while long-distance buses (called coaches) connect the big cities and towns – often at a fraction of the price of trains. Each region has its own bus operator, but you can see routes and plan journeys with Traveline Scotland. The biggest coach operator in the Highlands is Megabus.



Ferry

Caledonian MacBrayne (known as CalMac) connects the west coast of Scotland and Skye with the Hebridean islands, including Lewis and Harris, Mull, Iona, Barra, Coll, Tiree and the Small Isles. NorthLink Ferries connect Scrabster to Orkney and Shetland, while other regional operators, including Western Ferries, Orkney Ferries and Shetland Ferries, connect the islands to one another.



TIP

There are significant savings to be made by booking long-distance train tickets early (avoid buying on the day).



DRIVING ESSENTIALS



Drive on the left.

Speed limits range from 20–30mph (urban areas) to 60–70mph (single/dual-lane motorways).

The driving age in the UK is 17, but you need to be 23 to rent a car.

.02

Blood alcohol limit is 50mg per 100ml.



Money

CURRENCY: POUND STERLING (£)



TOOLKIT

MONEY



Card Payments

Credit and debit cards are widely accepted in Scotland, with many places in the big cities now card only (no cash). Most payments are taken contactless, often with phone. However, some of the smaller businesses in the Highlands and islands may not take card, so it's worth carrying cash too.



Cash Withdrawals

Most towns and even villages in the region will have ATMs, but the more remote ones may charge a fee. It's therefore worth withdrawing cash from the free bank ATMs when you're in bigger towns and cities. Avoid airport ATMs as they often have both fees and poor exchange rates.

Tipping Etiquette

Tipping is appreciated, but not essential. Adding 10% to 12.5% to a restaurant bill will be appreciated (and is increasingly added as standard). When ordering from the counter at a bar or cafe, tipping isn't expected. For taxis, simply round up the fee to the nearest pound or two.

HOW MUCH FOR...



Museum entry
Usually free



Heritage sight entry
Free-£12.50



Regional bus day ticket
Approx £9



Loch Ness cruise **£20**

HOW TO...

Save Money

You can

save by topping up on supplies like petrol and groceries, and taking out cash from ATMs, while in bigger cities and towns. Book as much of your transport and accommodation as possible in advance, as this can result in significant savings. And build an itinerary around the region's many excellent free attractions, from the Calanais Standing Stones (p170) to the Shetland Museum (p207).



BANKNOTES

Don't panic if your banknotes don't match. The Bank of Scotland, Royal Bank of Scotland and Clydesdale Bank all issue their own banknotes, while Bank of England notes are also accepted.

THE PRICE OF SECLUSION

When venturing out of the big cities and into the more rural corners of the Highlands and islands, expect prices to rise significantly. The logistical costs of getting goods to these remote

spots, as well as the fact that many of the outlets are independently run, means visitors should expect to pay more for things like petrol and groceries. The higher north you go, or the further an island lies from

the mainland, the greater the price increase. Accommodation costs can also be higher here in peak season, when demand often outstrips supply.





Accommodation

Historic Stays

Scotland's history is everywhere, and you can sleep among it too. Castles are the most sought-after accommodation options, and there are many to choose from: luxury spa hotels, modern apartments, traditional B&Bs or even exclusive use. Less expensive are the historic inns with connections to famous characters through the centuries. Most old buildings will claim stories of ghostly sightings.

Find a Local B&B

Expect warm welcomes, personal recommendations, thoughtful extras and a home-cooked start to the day, which will most likely be a steaming bowl of porridge or a hearty 'full Scottish' breakfast. Staying with a local host or family reaps many rewards; experience the best hospitality and the comforts of a home away from home, while supporting a small business.

Go Glamping

Cute, quirky and often close to nature, glamping (glamorous camping) offers a unique escape without the effort involved in camping. Experiences range from basic pods, one step up from pitching a tent, to luxurious hideaways with hot tubs, which can be more expensive than a B&B. Rest your head in a shepherd's hut, hobbit house, geodome, safari tent, treehouse or yurt.

Mountain Bothies

These old stone dwellings in remote Highland spots provide basic shelter for hill walkers: a hearth to light a fire; wooden platforms or a floor to sleep on; no lights, water or toilet facilities. The bothies are maintained by volunteers at the Mountain Bothies Association. Always abide by the 'Bothy Code' by sharing whatever you bring: food, whisky, musical talent...



HOW MUCH FOR A NIGHT IN A...



B&B
£120



Shepherd's hut
£150



Hostel dorm
£25

Budget-Friendly

The Highlands and islands have a huge range of hostels and bunkhouses, offering dorms, and private and family rooms. Independently owned or managed by Hostelling Scotland, the standard is typically high: clean and comfortable. Don't be deterred by the 'youth' hostel title: all ages and backgrounds are welcome and it's the perfect way to meet like-minded explorers and share travel tips.

CAMPING ETIQUETTE

Scotland's 'right to roam' affords everyone the freedom to explore and camp, on the basis that they leave no trace. Sadly, this isn't always the case. Popular beauty spots have experienced a number of issues: damage to the environment, illegal parking, litter, abandoned waste and camping gear. Local rangers are monitoring the problem and Forestry and Land Scotland now offer 'Stay the Night' motorhome parking in many of their car parks. During peak season, permits are required to wild camp within certain zones of Loch Lomond & the Trossachs National Park.



Family Travel

TOOLKIT

FAMILY TRAVEL

Visitors travelling with babies, bigger kids and teenagers can breathe a sigh of relief; this part of Scotland caters amazingly well for families. Bundles of fun are to be had in the region's adventure playgrounds, kid-focused festivals and the great outdoors. The important things are covered too: baby-changing facilities, family-friendly accommodation and restaurants, and easy-to-navigate public transport.

Free Attractions

One huge benefit of a family trip to Scotland is how many museums are free. You won't pay a penny to visit the West Highland Museum in Fort William (p130), Shetland Museum in Lerwick (p207) or dozens of others (though donations are welcome). Most prehistoric stone circles, ruined medieval castles and other alfresco artefacts are free to visit too.

Deals & Discounts

Family passes and child prices are available for most events, activities and attractions. On public transport, children under the age of five typically travel for free with a fare-paying adult, while those aged five to 15 travel at a discounted rate; some bus services offer family day tickets. Consider staying in hostels for clean and comfortable family rooms and self-catering facilities at an affordable rate.

BEST ATTRACTIONS FOR FAMILIES

Falconry at Dunrobin Castle (p186)

Catch the daily bird-of-prey displays at this spectacular chateau-style castle.

Jacobite Steam Train (p135)

Take the kids on an unforgettably scenic train journey, made famous by Harry Potter.

Boat trip on Loch Ness (p107)

Go monster hunting on the mysterious loch; sonar screens, snacks and stories on board.



Eating Out

Restaurants generally cater well for families: kids menus with fun food and dessert options (smaller portions at reduced prices); games, puzzles and pencils or crayons; high chairs and baby-changing facilities.



Activity Packs

Bookshops, attractions and gift shops sell Scotland-themed sticker books, activity packs and nature tins with puzzles and games featuring famous Scottish people, places and wildlife.

TRAVELLING WITH A BABY

Exploring with a little one brings its own particular challenges, but the Highlands and islands aim to make it as stress-free as possible.

Baby changing Most of the region's public toilets, transport hubs, hotels, cafes, tourist attractions and large supermarkets offer baby-changing facilities.

Breastfeeding The government actively encourages and promotes

breastfeeding in public places.

Look out for 'Breastfeeding Friendly Scotland' stickers at cafes and restaurants that take extra care with breastfeeding mums.

Prams Hilly countryside paths, as well as cobbles in some historic Highland towns and cities, can make things tricky with a pram or stroller. Consider a baby carrier for ease.





Health & Safe Travel

INSURANCE

Travel insurance is not mandatory to travel in Scotland, but it is strongly recommended. Look for a policy that covers you for medical care and flight cancellations. Free medical care is available to EU visitors with a valid European Health Insurance Card; a surcharge applies for those entering the UK for more than six months.



Tick Bites

Ticks are tiny bloodsucking arachnids that feed on mammals and birds and will happily attach to passing humans. A small percentage carry Lyme disease, which can cause serious illness in humans. Don't be put off exploring; just steer clear of long grass and foliage, cover up exposed skin, and check yourself thoroughly afterwards. Remove them with a 'tick hook' if necessary.



Stay Hydrated

Scotland's notoriously high rainfall is collected in lochs and rivers, providing not only the water source for whisky, but also safe, high-quality drinking water, available straight from the tap. Carry a reusable water bottle and refill at a Scottish Water 'Top Up Tap', found in streets, public parks and train stations across the country; search locations using the online map.



VACCINATIONS

No infectious disease vaccinations are required. If you fall ill while here, call 111 for medical advice. For emergencies, call 999.

WILDLIFE ROAD SIGNS



Deer Risk
Slow Down



Caution
Red Squirrels
Crossing



Caution
Otters Crossing



Caution
Sheep Crossing

Solo Travel

Scotland is a welcoming and inclusive destination for solo travel; an easy country to navigate with friendly locals, where women and LGBTIQ+ solo travellers tend to feel safe. Muggings and harassment are rare, but like anywhere, common sense applies if you are out after dark. If you are solo hiking or wild swimming, let someone know your plans.

DEER IN HEADLIGHTS

Every year, when young deer are on the move during May and June, or when daylight hours slip away over autumn and winter, there is an increase in the number of road accidents involving deer. Most occur after sunset. Look out for deer up ahead and by the roadside, drive slowly and report any collisions to the police.



Food, Drink & Nightlife

TOOLKIT

FOOD, DRINK & NIGHTLIFE

When to Eat

Breakfast (8am to 11am) Can be as light or as heavy as you like; locals love a cooked breakfast.

Lunch (noon to 2.30pm) Set-priced lunch menus are available at nice restaurants and are excellent value, or go for casual comfort food.

Dinner (5pm to 9pm) More extensive and expensive menus are available at this time, but there are also budget options.

Where to Eat

Cafes Open during the day, serving breakfast, lunch and hot drinks. Go for a 'full Scottish' breakfast, or a bowl of soup.

Pubs Reasonably priced hearty food can be found in most of Scotland's pubs. Think Sunday roast or fish and chips.

Restaurants Covering a broad spectrum of experiences and cuisines to suit every taste and budget.

Bakeries Sweet and savoury home-baking; perfect for a cheap lunch or picnic.

Markets Local markets with street-food stalls are held weekly in certain locations.



MENU DECODER

Cullen skink This thick, creamy soup, made from smoked haddock, potatoes and onions, is a North Scotland speciality.

Scotch pie A double-crust meat pie filled with minced mutton, lamb or beef.

Full Scottish A fried breakfast featuring bacon, sausages (either regular 'link' or square 'Lorne' sausages), eggs, black pudding (blood sausage), haggis (minced offal with oatmeal and spices), mushrooms, tomatoes, tattie scones (potato bread) and toast.

Sunday lunch Roast beef, lamb or pork, accompanied by roast potatoes, vegetables, Yorkshire puddings (savoury treats made from pancake batter) and gravy.

Sticky toffee pudding This sumptuously sweet dessert is a moist sponge made from dates, covered in toffee sauce and served with ice cream.

Cranachan A distinctly Scottish dessert consisting of cream, fresh raspberries, oats and whisky.

HOW TO...

Use an Honesty Box

They say honesty is the best policy, and this is certainly the case when

it comes to rural Scotland's heartwarming honesty system. When you're driving or out walking, keep an eye out for novelty honesty boxes by the roadside. Honesty boxes come in many forms: brightly painted wooden cupboards and cabinets, classic red telephone boxes, old fridges (not plugged in, of course), cooler boxes and full-sized, walk-in sheds. The real surprise, however, is what lies within. It all started with fresh eggs from nearby farms, but now you'll find all sorts of wonderful treats: cakes, brownies, scones, fudge, tablet (a Scottish sweet), pies, pastries, jam and mustard; all homemade by locals. Select your goodies, check the price list or suggested donation, then simply post your cash in the tin provided. While some honesty boxes now provide online payment details, it always pays to carry cash.

FROM LEFT: HALEYFAYE/SHUTTERSTOCK ©, BILLY WATKINS/SHUTTERSTOCK ©



HOW MUCH FOR A...



Supermarket lunch meal deal
£3.50



Tea or coffee
£4



Dram of whisky (12yo)
£4.50



Pint of beer
£5



Bowl of cullen skink
£8



Takeaway fish and chips
£11



Haggis, neeps and tatties
£16



Fresh seafood platter for two
£100

HOW TO... Drink Whisky

No trip to the Highlands and islands is complete without trying some local whisky (not 'whiskey' with an 'e', nor 'Scotch').

To qualify as whisky in Scotland, the spirit must be aged in barrels for a minimum of three years and a day – though it's usually longer – and be at least 40% ABV at the end of the process. Yet each whisky has its own unique flavour profile.

Newbies may wish to start with a blended whisky. These bottles contain whiskies from more than one distillery, making for a smoother and softer sip. Famous Scottish whisky blends include Johnnie Walker, Grant's and Chivas Regal, but there are plenty of smaller whisky blenders.

More experienced whisky drinkers should gravitate towards a single malt.

Unblended with other grains or malts, this is the most refined kind of whisky. The distilling process has a big impact on flavour, as do the barrels the whisky is aged in. Single malts can taste smoky, earthy or fruity, so pick your poison accordingly. Don't add ice if possible, as it subdues the taste, though a drop of room-temperature water may open up some flavours.

The Highland and islands are particularly renowned for peated whiskies, from Old Pulteney (Wick) to Talisker (Skye), Ledaig (Mull) to Highland Park (Orkney). Lovers of smoky malts should head to the distillery-dotted Islay, home to world-famous producers including Ardbeg, Bowmore, Caol Ila, Lagavulin and Laphroaig.



Ask for a Dram

When ordering a whisky at a bar, ask for a 'dram'. This is an old imperial measurement that's a fraction of a fluid ounce, though the standardisation of measures means you'll get precisely 35ml today.

DEEP-FRIED DARE

Scotland is no stranger to deep-fried food. Chippies (fish and chip shops) have been serving up savoury deep-fried delicacies for decades, from classic cod and chips to the artery-tightening 'pizza crunch'. Deep-fried chocolate, however, was one step too far...until 1995.

The story begins in a small chippie in Stonehaven, close to Aberdeen, where two local schoolboys were on their lunch break. John Davie dared his pal Brian McDonald to eat a deep-fried Mars Bar, if it were possible to craft such a thing. Behind the counter, Evelyne Balgowan curiously obliged, coating the chocolate bar in batter and submerging it in the hot, bubbly oil. The first deep-fried Mars Bar

was born. Little did they know, their creation was destined for global fame.

News quickly got around, from local murmurs to international press. Soon the trend was set and the rest, as they say, is history. To this day, tourists still embark on a pilgrimage to the Aberdeenshire coast to visit the Carron Fish Bar (formerly the Haven Chip Bar), where the deep-fried dessert was invented. If you're not willing to travel that far, find a local chippie wherever you are in the Highlands and islands. Is it worth trying? Sure. Golden, crispy batter filled with melted chocolate and caramel isn't as offensive as it sounds. Sickly, yes. A potential health hazard? Affirmative.



Responsible Travel

Climate Change & Travel

It's impossible to ignore the impact we have when travelling; Lonely Planet urges all travellers to engage with their travel carbon footprint, which will mainly come from air travel. While there often isn't an alternative, travellers can look to minimise the number of flights they take, opt for newer aircrafts and use cleaner ground transport, such as trains. One proposed solution – purchasing carbon offsets – unfortunately does not cancel out the impact of individual flights. While most destinations will depend on air travel for the foreseeable future, for now, pursuing ground-based travel where possible is the best course of action.

The **UN Carbon Offset Calculator** shows how flying impacts a household's emissions:



The **ICAO's carbon emissions calculator** allows visitors to analyse the CO₂ generated by point-to-point journeys:



Leave No Trace

Freely explore Scotland's epic outdoors, from countryside and coastline to mountaintops and lochs, with the Right to Roam; carry extra bags for your litter and leave the environment exactly as you found it.

Public Transport

Relax into your seat on the train or bus and eagerly anticipate the scenic journey ahead. Large swathes of the Highlands are a dream to travel on public transport, reducing both emissions and traffic congestion.



Wander through the unusual, colourful **Findhorn Ecovillage**, a spiritual, sustainable settlement on the Moray coast.



Explore the **Flow Country**, a blanket bog that joined the UNESCO World Heritage list in 2024.



ECOSTAYS

Rest your head somewhere quirky, cosy, eccentric and, best of all, sustainable, from the Cairngorms' Saorsa 1875 (p141), the UK's first vegan hotel, to the remote Loch Ossian Youth Hostel near Fort William.



GO FORAGING

Get in touch with Highlands and islands nature by foraging. Winter's best for blackberries and chestnuts, spring has wild garlic and strawberries, summer serves up honeysuckle and sea buckthorns, and autumn offers hazelnuts and raspberries.

Shoulder Season

Experience the explosion of autumnal amber on the trees, magical, snow-glazed wintry scenes, or the quilt of spring wildflowers across the land...all while supporting tourism businesses year-round and reducing crowds during peak season.

Gifts & Crafts

Source unique, lovingly handmade gifts and souvenirs from small independent retailers, honesty boxes, and directly from local artists and makers. Check out Scottish Island Gifts (scottishislandgifts.com), a social enterprise promoting the islands' creative communities.

Give Back

If you have time to spare, get out in the fresh (sea) air and meet new people, helping remove plastic and litter on an organised beach clean with Keep Scotland Beautiful or the Marine Conservation Society.

Sustainable Food

Feast on delicious fresh ingredients and traceable, seasonal produce with very few 'food miles'. Look out for menus featuring freshly caught sustainable shellfish, wild Highland venison, and homegrown or locally sourced fruit and veg.

Slow Travel

Rather than zooming along the North Coast 500 in a car or frantically island-hopping by ferry, consider focusing on a small corner of the Highlands and islands and exploring it thoroughly by bike or on foot.



Tour an organic, forward-thinking, independent whisky distillery on the wonderfully quiet Morvern peninsula. In 2022, **Nc'nean Distillery** became the first distillery anywhere in the UK to achieve net zero emissions.



Comb the coast on a tutored seaweed-foraging course in Moidart with **Wildwood Bushcraft**, or go foraging in the Cairngorms with local expert Natasha Lloyd from five-star hotel **The Fife Arms**.

In 2022, renewable energy technologies generated the equivalent of **113%** of Scotland's overall electricity consumption. With several new wind and wave projects in the pipeline, this is expected to grow significantly over the next decade.

RESOURCES

keepscotlandbeautiful.org

For volunteering opportunities around reducing litter.

outdooraccess-scotland.scot

Guidance on enjoying the outdoors responsibly and respectfully.

scottishwildlifetrust.org.uk

Learn about the charity's conservation projects and locate wildlife reserves.





LGBTIQ+ Travellers

Scotland is a progressive and inclusive nation, where LGBTIQ+ rights are protected by law and the first same-sex marriages were celebrated in December 2014. Like anywhere, prejudice still exists, and perhaps more in the rural Highlands and islands than in the big cities, but overall the community is thriving and LGBTIQ+ travellers generally feel safe and welcome.

Scottish Pride

While the country's largest Pride events are held in Edinburgh and Glasgow, there are similar gatherings across the Highlands and islands. Most take place in June, when you can join annual celebrations of love, diversity and equality in Arran (arranpride.com), Inverness (highlandpride.org) and Lerwick (shetlandpride.co.uk), among others, but the odd event takes place later in summer, such as August's Oban Pride (obanpride.com). Expect streets to erupt into a fun and flamboyant display of costumes and rainbow flags, with the party continuing on at various pubs and clubs.

There are few dedicated gay bars in the Highlands and islands, but some host regular gay nights. In Inverness, the **Pentahotel** (p140) organises weekly LGBTIQ+/Queer socials through meetup.com, while the Nip Inn and the Gellions Bar are both popular with LGBTIQ+ locals. Most restaurants, bars and hotels are gay-friendly and an increasing number display rainbow flags or mark themselves as 'LGBTIQ+ friendly' on Google Maps.

25 Years of Pride

Watch *Oor Pride* on YouTube, a short film covering the history of Pride in Scotland and how it has evolved over the years. Produced by filmmaker Lisa Emily Petersen, the story is brought to life through personal experiences shared by voices within the LGBTIQ+ community.

RESOURCES

Stay up to date with local LGBTIQ+ news and projects through charity **Stonewall Scotland** (stonewallscotland.org.uk). **LGBT Youth** (lgbtyouth.org.uk) is Scotland's national charity for 13- to 25-year-olds, delivering the LGBT Charter to schools, organisations and businesses to ensure inclusivity. **LGBT Health & Wellbeing** (lgbthealth.org.uk) offers mental health support, operates the LGBT helpline and organises social events. **Scottish Trans** (scottishtrans.org) supports those who are trans or exploring their gender.

ATTITUDES & MINDSETS

While Scotland is widely considered to be an LGBTIQ+-friendly destination, there are still a small number of individuals who may display rude or unkind behaviour. And this is perhaps more common in the rural and traditional Highlands and islands.

Oban Lesbian Weekend

This inclusive September weekend launched in 2022 and has taken place in Oban every year since. Organiser Maz Gordon cites the similarly-sized Hebden Bridge in the north of England (widely considered to be the lesbian capital of the UK) as her inspiration.



Accessible Travel

Scotland is constantly making advances for accessibility in tourism, particularly in modern attractions, accommodation and modes of transport. Historic buildings, cobbled streets, and small B&Bs and guesthouses, on the other hand, can still be problematic. There are always improvements to be made.

Festivals & Events

Most of the region's Highland Games have accessible parking, toilets and seating areas, and some offer accessible buses too. The same is true of Lerwick's Tall Ships Races; get there in an accessible NorthLink Ferries cabin.



Airport

Scottish airports offer special assistance for passengers with reduced mobility; prebook with your airline 48 hours before departure. Hidden disabilities sunflower lanyards are available at Inverness Airport.



Accommodation

There is a growing number of accessible accommodation options in Scotland, but old buildings can prove challenging and information is sometimes vague. It is always worth contacting the host or hotel in advance for full details.

FERRIES

Ferries to the islands can have steep stairs and boarding via the vehicle deck. Contact the CalMac Customer Services Team 48 hours in advance to request assistance, lift access and/or extra vehicle space.

CITY STREETS

Hills and cobbled streets can be tricky for visitors with reduced mobility, particularly in historic areas. Mobility scooter hire is available in Aviemore and Inverness with Highland Mobility Scooter Hire (highlandmobilityscooterhire.co.uk).

Public Transport

ScotRail offers special assistance: prebook via the online booking form at least two hours in advance. Wheelchair-adapted taxis are available but limited in number.

Theatre

Eden Court Inverness is wheelchair accessible with disabled parking bays, and offers audio-described, BSL-interpreted and captioned performances, plus touch tours. Fort Williams' Highland Cinema has wheelchair spaces, subtitled and audio-described performances.

RESOURCES

Euan's Guide

(evansguide.com)
This award-winning disabled access charity works to review and rate accessibility for attractions, hotels and restaurants across Scotland (and beyond).

Visit Britain

(visitbritain.com)
This extensive Britain-wide tourist information site includes an accessible guide to the Scottish Highlands and another to the Scottish islands.

Limitless Travel

(limitlesstravel.org)
This accessible tour agency provides a specialist, disabled-friendly, six-day Scottish Highlands Experience.

Scotland's beautiful stretches of sand should be enjoyed by all, and there are several Highlands and islands-based charities making that happen. Dornoch Beach Wheelchairs (facebook.com/dornochwheelchairs) provides free, off-road wheelchairs for hitting the beach, as does the Tiree Ranger Service (isleoftiree.com).



Nuts & Bolts

OPENING HOURS

This may vary throughout the year, especially in rural areas of the Highlands and islands. But generally, here's what you can expect:

Banks 9.30am–4/5pm Monday to Friday (some are also open until 1pm Saturday)

Pubs and bars Noon–11pm Monday to Thursday, until midnight/1am Friday and Saturday (especially in Scotland), 12.30–11pm Sunday

Restaurants Lunch noon–3pm, dinner 6–9/10pm (later in cities). However, many restaurants open earlier for breakfast/brunch and don't close between lunch and dinner, especially chains

Shops 9am–5.30pm (6pm in cities) Monday to Saturday, 11am–5pm Sunday; big-city shopping malls open later and convenience stores open 24/7

GOOD TO KNOW



Time zone

UTC (late Oct–Mar),
UTC+1 (Apr–late Oct)



Country code

+44



Emergency number

999



Population (Scotland)

5.5 million

PUBLIC HOLIDAYS

There are nine legally recognised 'bank holidays' in Scotland but not all are acknowledged as public holidays, like they are elsewhere in the UK. Public holidays vary from one local authority to another and the dates can change each year. These are the general public holidays that may affect opening hours for business and nonessential services (note that if the date falls on a weekend, a substitute weekday – usually the following Monday – becomes a holiday instead).

New Year's Day 1 January

Good Friday March or April

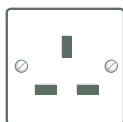
St Andrew's Day
30 November

Christmas Day
25 December

Boxing Day 26 December

Electricity

230V/50Hz



Type G
230V/50Hz



Smoking

Smoking, plus the use of e-cigarettes, is prohibited in all enclosed public places in Scotland, including airports, train stations and sports stadiums. Some bars and clubs have outdoor smoking areas.



Toilets

Public toilets aren't always easy to find, but most are free while others charge a small fee or request a donation.



Tap Water

Scotland has exceptionally clean tap water that's safe to drink – and nowhere more so than in the Highlands and islands.

