

Wild Scotland

Edinburgh, United Kingdom, Europe to Aberdeen, United Kingdom, Europe (SCO)

Day 1 Arrive in Edinburgh

Having made your way to Edinburgh, you will be met by a representative of Aurora Expeditions and transferred to our group hotel. Upon arrival at your included hotel, please visit the Aurora Expeditions hospitality desk to collect your luggage cabin tags and to speak with our ground operations team, who may have information to share with you about pre-embarkation or to provide you with information about where to dine, withdraw cash or purchase last minute items from a local pharmacy or supermarket. The remainder of your time is at leisure. All meals today are at your own expense. Accommodation: Courtyard by Marriott Edinburgh Hotel



Day 2 Embark in Troon

After breakfast, check-out and bring your luggage to the foyer. Please place any items required today in your hand luggage as your main bag will be transferred to the ship. Edinburgh awaits us this morning as our local guide welcomes us with stories of Scotland's capital city. Stretching just over one mile, five cobblestoned streets make up the walking precinct of the Royal Mile. Starting at The Palace of Holyroodhouse, the official residence of the British monarch in Scotland, we'll step back in time to hear tales of princes, poets, and politicians as we stroll past some of Edinburgh's most iconic buildings including the Church of Canongate and Scotland's own parliament house. Perched atop an extinct volcano, Edinburgh Castle dominates the capital city's skyline just as it has dominated Scotland's long and colourful history. This instantly recognisable fortress is a powerful national symbol, and part of

Edinburgh's World Heritage Site. Note: entry to the castle is not guaranteed (tickets not available until closer to departure). You'll have time to explore the castle precinct and Royal Mile which are scattered with friendly pubs and charismatic restaurants (lunch own expense). Our two-hour transfer takes us to the west coast port of Troon where our expedition team will welcome you aboard the Greg Mortimer in the late afternoon. Once onboard, settle into your cabin before our important briefings. We will set sail along Scotland's northwest coast in the evening and meet your expedition team and crew.

Days 3-4 Inner Hebrides

From golden beaches to jagged peaks, bleak moors and heather clad hills; from abandoned settlements to picturesque villages, our days in the Hebrides archipelago will be packed with variety. We may explore remote lochs beneath some of Britain's most untamed mountains and wander between unusual rock formations. We may watch for whales, dolphins, otters, seals, and the increasingly rare basking sharks. Possibly we will land at an island reserve that is home to red deer and white-tailed sea eagles. Kayakers will be introduced to their craft and will be briefed for their adventures, before picking up paddles to circumnavigate tiny islets or glide into narrow waterways that intertwine the islands. Hikers may opt for panoramic views from summits and ridges. Early the next morning we will aim for the tiny island of Iona. Barely 5 kilometres (3 miles) long, Iona is renowned as the birthplace of Christianity in Britain. It is also a burial ground of early Scottish Kings. The Irish monk, St Columba and twelve disciples, landed here and founded a monastery in 563 CE. From this base, St Columba set about converting Scotland and much of Northern England to Christianity. On Staffa, we hope to have the chance to explore Fingals Cave, where the melodious sound of waves crashing against towering basalt pillars inspired Mendelssohn's Hebridean Overture. We may enter the cave in Zodiacs, or clamber ashore to walk into the mouth of the cave. On shore we will also find Puffins in abundance. We plan to land on remote Isle of Eigg just south of the rugged Isle of Skye for wonderful hikes among stunning wildflowers. The wildlife, history, geology and beautiful scenery make it one of our favourite islands to explore. We hope to make the following landings: The Cuillin Hills have earned a reputation as Britain's most untamed and challenging mountains. The rocky jagged Black Cuillins attract rock climbers. The smoother conical granite peaks of the Red Cuillins are crowned with heather. We may land at Loch Scavaig in the heart of the Cuillins and take a short hike, perhaps to Loch Coruisk, for spectacular views and get a glimpse of the range's grandeur. Keener

hikers may be able to venture further afield, weather permitting. Meanwhile kayakers may paddle around Loch Scavaig, into Loch Coruisk. They may explore the island of Soay and an abandoned shark fishing station – all against the backdrop of classic views of the Cuillins.

Days 5-6 Outer Hebrides

From the Inner Hebrides we make our way to the Outer Hebrides – also known as the Western Isles – that stretch for 209 kilometres (128 miles) and look out on their western side to the Atlantic Ocean. Our first stop is at the Isle of Lewis, the largest and northern-most island in the Outer Hebrides. We plan to make a stop at Callanais, where archaeology buffs will be keen to see the fascinating group of Standing Stones, dating from around 3,000 BCE. Weather permitting, we plan to land at the isolated archipelago (and World Heritage site) of St Kilda, where derelict crofts bear testament to the fortitude of islanders who once tended the unique Soay sheep and harvested seabirds for food—and to pay their rent in the form of wool, meat and feathers. The isles hold Europe's most important seabird colony and is home to Britain's highest sea stacks.

Days 7 Kirkwall

Discover the rich history in Kirkwall, capital of the Orkney Islands. Initial impressions are misleading, as the harbour area looks modern, but the narrow winding streets and lanes of the old town, which have remained relatively unchanged over the centuries are appealing. Everything west of Kirkwall is known as West Mainland, an area of rich farmland, rolling hills and moorland, with dramatic cliffs along the Atlantic coastline. Some of the main archaeological attractions we may see include the standing Stones of Stenness, the Ring of Brodgar, and the chambered tombs of Maes Howes that to this day still have unresolved mysteries. Personalise your expedition with our included 'Your Choice' experiences that best suits your interests and level of fitness. Option 1: Orkney Treasures - Skara Brae (Duration: 4 hours / Level of difficulty: Easy-Moderate) Embark on a journey through the serene countryside, venturing into the World Heritage heartland of the Orkney's, celebrated for its abundance of prehistoric archaeology. Traverse past the awe-inspiring Standing Stones of Stenness and make a pause at the Ring of Brodgar—an immense ceremonial stone circle with roots reaching back nearly 5000 years. Continue your exploration to the ancient village of Skara Brae, a settlement that has withstood the test of time for

5000 years. Delve into its rich history, thoughtfully interpreted at the visitor centre, and witness the remarkable dwellings unveiled from beneath the sand dunes by storms a mere 150 years ago. A short 200-meter stroll leads to Skaill House, a distinguished manor and Orkney's finest.

Constructed in 1620 by Bishop George Graham on the grounds of a farmstead believed to date back to the Norse period, Skaill House boasts a 400-year legacy. All 12 of its Lairds throughout history are interconnected, each contributing to the house's storied history and impressive collection.

Immerse yourself in the captivating tales and artifacts within the walls of this historic manor, a testament to the enduring heritage of Orkney.

Option 2: The Heart of Neolithic Orkney (Duration: 3.45 hours / Level of difficulty: Easy-Moderate) Pass through the gentle rolling landscape and into the Neolithic Heartland of Orkney, an area designated as a World Heritage Site due to its wealth of pre-historic archaeology. Stop at the Ring of Brodgar, a huge ceremonial circle of stones dating back almost 5000 years. Next take a short coach journey to marvel at the smaller, yet taller and more ancient Standing Stones of Stenness, currently the oldest known stone circle in Europe. Ponder upon its creation and hear of folk tales and traditions inspired by its mysterious and elusive magnificence. Wander along to Barnhouse, an ancient Neolithic village and part of Orkney's UNESCO World Heritage Site. Walk among the houses and learn about everyday lives of the Neolithic people who built these structures. Pause to appreciate the serene bird hide nestled along Harray Loch, offering a tranquil interlude in nature. Conclude your day with a visit to St Magnus Cathedral, a testament to the Vikings' architectural prowess during their 500-year reign over the islands. This unique tour promises a fresh perspective, unveiling the lesser-explored facets of Orkney's Neolithic legacy and inviting you to connect with its mysterious and enduring history.

Days 8-10 Papa Westray & Shetland Islands

At the Knap of Howar on Papa Westray lies the earliest known house in Northern Europe, occupied by Neolithic farmers over 5,000 years ago. Here we are welcomed by the friendly locals. Enjoy the lively Scottish dance and folk ensemble, "Poor Man's Corner," hailing from Papa Westray, set to grace the local pub with their spirited tunes. Mingle and enjoy a few drinks, while listening to the captivating melodies and infectious rhythms. Britain's most northerly islands lie almost 160 kilometres (99 miles) north of the Scottish mainland, at a similar latitude to the southern tip of Greenland, or Bergen in Norway. Kept relatively warm by the Gulf Stream, Shetland's 100 islands experience almost 24 hours of daylight in summer. They abound with nature reserves and archaeological sites and offer a taste of traditional

island life. We plan to explore some of the following sites: In Lerwick, learn stories of smugglers, fisherman, Vikings and fictional detectives as you walk around Shetland's bustling capital. Lerwick may mean 'muddy bay' in Old Norse but there's nothing damp or gloomy about this thriving seaport. Take a guided walking tour of the town and learn all about its history and most iconic buildings. With its mile-long seabird cliffs, the Island of Noss is a National Nature Reserve. In breeding season the sound of around 150,000 birds and chicks fills the air. Millions of years of wind and ice have honeycombed thousands of nesting ledges in sandstone cliffs almost 200-metres / 656-feet high. Resident seals and visiting otters feed in dense kelp around the shores. Jarlshof is one of Shetland's best preserved and most complex archaeological sites. It was exposed by storms in the late 19th century. The Old House of Sumburgh, built here in the 17th century, was named 'Jarlshof' by Sir Walter Scott in his novel 'The Pirate'. The record of human occupation dates from around 3,200 BCE. Jarlshof's main Bronze Age site is the house of a bronzesmith working around 800 BC. Clay moulds into which molten bronze was poured revealed that he was casting axe heads and short swords. It seems that Shetland suited early Norse settlers, for they quickly settled here and left their mark on Shetland's history for ages to come. Mousa Broch, on the small uninhabited island of Mousa, is the best preserved of Scotland's 570 brochs (fortified Iron Age towers). Storm petrels nest among its stones, which can be seen when visiting the broch at night. In daylight, a large colony of common and grey seals basks on its shores, and you may spot otter (Dratsi, in Shetland dialect).

Day 11 Fair Isle

Midway between Orkney and Shetland, Fair Isle houses a major European ornithological research station, and is also famous for knitwear and historic shipwrecks. About five kilometres by three kilometres / three miles by two miles in area, it is surrounded by impressive cliffs. The 70 or so islanders mainly live in traditional crofts on the more fertile low-lying southern part of the island. A bird watchers' paradise, Fair Isle lies on the intersection of major flight paths from Scandinavia, Iceland and Faroe. In summer, the cliffs teem with breeding fulmars, kittiwakes, guillemots, gannets, shags and puffins. The Isle is an excellent place to view seabirds, especially puffins at close range. Fair Isle also has over 250 species of flowering plants, including wetland flowers, rare orchids, alpine species and common wildflowers. We'll be welcomed by the hospitable villagers and may take a hike or visit the museum. Grey and common seals inhabit

these waters around Fair Isle, while sharp eyes may spot harbour porpoises, white-beaked dolphins, Atlantic white-sided dolphins, killer whales (orcas) and minke whales.

Day 12 Disembark in Aberdeen

During the early morning, we cruise into Aberdeen, and disembark at approximately 8.00 am. Farewell your Expedition Team and fellow passengers as we all continue our onward journeys. Transfer to Aberdeen airport. Note: At the conclusion of the voyage, we recommend booking flights departing after 12.00 pm on the day of disembarkation in case there are delays.