

Outer Hebrides Tour with Hike Scotland

Introduction

Although officially part of the United Kingdom, the Outer Hebrides truly seem like a place apart. This great island chain stretching some 130 miles from The Butt of Lewis in the north to Barra Head in the south is situated on the outermost edge of Europe and possesses the UK'S finest white sand beaches, wild mountain ranges, wonderfully varied wildlife and flora, a long rich and colourful history and a unique Gaelic culture. Inhabited for over 6,000 years, these islands are littered with historical sites, both Neolithic, Bronze Age and Viking, which speak of fascinating past, whilst the people themselves demonstrate just how rich in culture each island is.

Detailed Itinerary

Meet in Glasgow the evening before the first full day for welcome meeting and briefing. (It is likely that we will take your luggage at this point for onward travel to Barra, where we will meet it the following day)

Day 1 – Flight from Glasgow International to Barra

Ready to head off to the islands, we catch the short flight to Barra, where we arrive on the sandy beach airstrip to be met by our transport and begin our first hike almost immediately by taking ourselves on a glorious coastal exploration, passing Loch Tangasdail to seek out the Iron Age Fort at Dun Ban, which is over 2,000 years old, set high on the cliffs , surrounded by crags and inlets of a coastline battered by the Atlantic; before returning over what is arguably Barra's best beach with views all the way across the wide open Atlantic to America !

5km and 2.5 hours

Depending on our flight timings (the airstrip is tidal), we then transfer the 5 minutes to our lodgings, The Castlebay Hotel

Day 2 - Vatersay beaches circuit

Vatersay is linked to Barra by a causeway (as many of the smaller islands are) and after a very short ride we begin our walk on the sparkingly beautiful island. The route explores fabulous beaches, frequented by numerous seabirds and backed by flowering machair (pronounced macca), Scottish wildflowers which bloom all along the western coast of these islands throughout the summer months and include Scottish bluebell, clover, gentians, orchids and eyebright; a truly memorable

sight. We cross the small island to visit an Iron Age Fort which contains a Bronze Age burial cairn and also a deserted village built by Vatersay land raiders.

7km and 3 hours

Overnight, The Castlebay Hotel

Day 3 – Eriskay Galore !

We depart Barra this morning and a short ferry ride takes us to the island of Eriskay where we travel in the footsteps of Bonnie Prince Charlie, who arrived for the first time on Eriskay's fabulous beaches, known as Prince's Cockleshell Strand. Eriskay is the perfect small island; glistening white sand beaches, rugged hills and tortured coastline; a little bit of heaven. We also explore the village made famous by Compton Mackenzie's book and later film "Whisky Galore", which tells the tale of the shipwrecked Politician, which carried a cargo of whisky, most of which came ashore and was liberated by the locals. We have lunch and some drinks in the local bar, which still has on display some of the original cargo.

5km and 2 hours

After lunch and a short journey across the causeway, we are on South Uist and head for Cladh Hallan Roundhouses. Excavation and archaeological discoveries undertaken from 1988 to 2002 show that between 4 and 7 houses were once here, the most important of which was occupied for some 900 years, making it one of the longest continually occupied prehistoric houses in the world. Additionally, the skeleton of a female was found here dating back to 1300 BC, (the same era as King Tutankhamun) and also two mummified bodies preserved in peat bogs, making Cladh Hallan the only site in Britain where prehistoric mummies have been found.

A short ride takes us to our lodgings for tonight at The Polochar Inn, a 17th century inn situated on the waters edge with beautiful views to Barra and Eriskay.

Day 4- South Uist beaches, castles, and wildlife

We take a short drive north on the island this morning to head out to the most westerly point of South Uist, Rubha Aird a'Mhuile, a narrow grassy peninsula with a loch and bounded by enormous white sand beaches on either side. It's best to visit early in the day to take advantage of the teeming birdlife here and also to take in the remains of the Viking settlement discovered here, thought to be the home to a Viking Lord and his clan. Artefacts discovered here come from as far away as Norway, England and ivory from Greenland, together with porphyry, thought to be from Rome indicating early Christian influence.

After rounding the headland the beach beckons, where otters and dolphins are often spotted and we extend our walk northwards to along the beach before cutting inland through the wildflowers of the machair to visit Ormaclett Castle before returning to our start point.

8km and 4 hours

Overnight The Polochar Inn

Day 5- Howmore, chapels and Grenitote North Uist

We leave South Uist today and head north, stopping off at Howmore where we can see a collection of thatched cottages in this beautiful tiny hamlet, also home to Teampull Mor (St. Mary's Chapel), a 13th century chapel believed to have been the site of an important religious centre since medieval times.

Continuing north we travel across Benbecula to reach North Uist and make our way to Grenitote, where our circular walk crosses pristine white sands, sand dunes with machair ablaze with flowers and a small climb (40 metres !), which gives truly breathtaking views of the surrounding islands. We pass the ancient cemetery belonging to the Macleans of Boreray as well as a prehistoric roundhouse and views of the mountains of Harris to the north.

9km and 4 hours

Overnight Langass Lodge, North Uist

Day 6 – Berneray Explorer

Our full day walk is one where you won't be able to put your camera down. Possibly the finest 3 miles of pure white sand beach anywhere in the UK, together with some great undulating hiking across Berneray's interior and some high points and standing stones which offer brilliant views in every direction. (The beach here is so amazing that the Thai Tourist Board used photographs of it to advertise their own beaches !)

Up to 12 km (can easily be less) and 4.5 hours

Overnight Langass Lodge, North Uist

Day 7 – Macleod's Stone and the beaches of South Harris

After a hearty breakfast we make our way to the ferry and set sail for the 1 hour crossing to Harris, the most rugged and mountainous of all the Outer Isles, famous for its huge peaks as well as gorgeous sandy coves and tortured coastlines.

We begin with a short hike across Traigh Iar beach and seek out Macleods stone which is a 3m high standing stone. On a clear day, St Kilda which is some 60km further out in the Atlantic can be seen and on the equinox the sun sets exactly due west over St Kilda from the stone.

From here we continue our journey north and explore Luskentyre sands, considered by locals to be busy if more than 10 people are here at any one time, a great spot for beachcombing before we continue north to Tarbet and our lodgings for the next 2 nights.

3km and 1.5 hours and 4.5km and 2 hours

Overnight The Hebrides Hotel, Tarbet

Day 8 – Circuit of Scalpay

The tiny island of Scalpay is home to some 300 people and lies a short distance away from Harris, now joined by a bridge. We undertake a fantastic circuit of the island which is peppered with lochans, the largest of which Loch an Duin (Isle of the fort), still has the remains of an old fort in it. We make our way across the Isle to Rubh an Eorna, a tiny peninsula on the eastern shore which is home to the first ever Lighthouse built in the Outer Hebrides, Eilean Glas.

Scalpay is also home to many great Gaelic singers and psalm presenters and is well known for its use of Gaidhlig.

Completing our circumnavigation and exploring the coastline takes us a good 3 to 4 hours and following this we return to Harris for the evening and more Highland hospitality.

10km and 3 to 4 hours (all reasonably flat)

Overnight The Hebrides Hotel

Day 9 – The Great Bernera Trail and Callanish Standing Stones

Our final full day takes us to our seventh and final Island of our week, the Isle of Lewis.

We make our to the west of the island and onto the tiny island of Bernera (8th of the week), where we have the chance to see the islands at their best; rugged coastal hiking, with breathtaking sea views out to more small isles and south to North Harris and its mountains. This superb half day walk leads us up the west coast of Bernera to the postcard perfect beach at Bostadh, also home to a reconstructed roundhouse. Here our transport awaits us to take us to Callanish where we visit the 5000 year old Callanish Standing Stones, which date back to 3000BC. An emotional place for many, the Stones are set high up on a moor against a backdrop of mountains and sea. It is a fitting place in which to end our Hebridean Island Odessey.

8km and 3 hours, Stones 1 to 2 hours

From the Stones we make our way to Stornoway for our last night on the islands.

Overnight Caberfeidh Hotel, Stornoway

Day 10 – Flight from Stornoway to Glasgow International

Our journey complete we say farewell to the Islands and to each other and take home treasured memories of our time in the Outer Hebrides of Scotland.