

# Islay & Jura

## Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

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### Outline itinerary

**Day 1** Meet Glasgow; transfer Islay

**Day 2/6** Islay & Jura

**Day 7** Return to Glasgow

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### Departs

October

### Focus

Birds with some mammals

### Grading

A. Easy day walks only.

### Dates and Prices

See website (tour code GBR10)

### Highlights:

- Up to 40,000 Barnacle Geese, plus possibility of rarities such as Snow Goose
- About 10,000 Greenland White-fronted Geese, the world's largest wintering population
- Dusk & dawn vigil at a goose roost site is an unforgettable experience
- Great Northern & Black-throated Divers, Slavonian Grebe & Purple Sandpiper
- Red-billed Chough & small flocks of Snow Bunting, Islay
- Opportunity to taste world-famous whiskies
- Jura has 5,000+ Red Deer & only 250 people!
- There's a pair of Otter for every 3 miles of coastline on Jura
- Led by an expert naturalist guide



From top: Grey Seal, Barnacle Geese, Golden Eagle (images courtesy of Shutterstock)



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## Introduction

This is a wonderfully scenic tour, taking you on a 7-day trip to some of the best wildlife destinations in the UK. The two small islands of Islay and Jura situated in the Western Islands of Scotland, give you a real chance to get away from the rush of everyday life and enjoy the open beaches, hills and fresh air.

Spending time on each island, we shall look for Choughs, Barnacle, Greylag, Pink-footed and White-



fronted Geese (which are traditionally seen in large numbers), Whooper Swans, a host of waterfowl including Scaup, Great Northern and Red-throated Divers plus raptors such as Golden Eagle, Buzzard, Peregrine, Merlin and Hen Harrier. Otter, Red Deer, Roe Deer, Grey Seal, Common Seal and Brown Hare are amongst the mammals we hope to see.

In respect of its birdlife, the island of Islay was described by the late Sir Peter Scott as "the most important place in the British Isles for wild geese, and one of the most important in Europe". It is the most southerly island of the Inner Hebrides and boasts a very varied landscape of moorland, woods and farmland.

Jura, by contrast to Islay, is notable for its rugged grandeur, its sandy beaches leading to shingle teeming with wildfowl, its dramatic whirlpool in the gulf of Corryvreckan, great herds of Red Deer, and a remarkable variety of raptors. It is also one of the best places in Europe to observe Otters.

As the population of the island is less than 250 people, it provides an unspoilt remote setting for enjoying natural history. There are classic examples of glaciation effects to be seen within the lochs, hills and glens. Many rare species of plants can be found on this tour.

The tour starts and ends in Glasgow, where we will be pleased to meet you at either Paisley Gilmour Street Station or Glasgow Airport.

## Itinerary

*Please note that the itinerary below offers our planned programme of excursions. However, adverse weather & other local considerations can necessitate some re-ordering of the programme during the course of the tour, though this will always be done to maximise best use of the time and weather conditions available.*

### Day 1

### Arrive Glasgow, transfer Islay

We depart from Paisley Gilmour Street Station or Glasgow Airport in the early afternoon (see joining instructions below) and drive to Kennacraig, where we depart by ferry around 1800hrs for the two-hour crossing to Islay. A feature of our trips is that they begin on a day of the week with a late ferry,

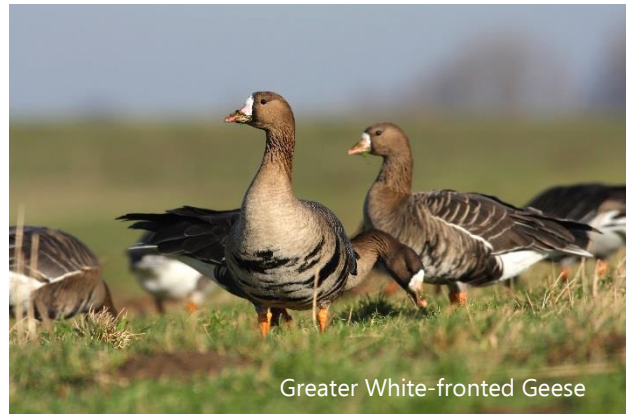
allowing people to travel from nearly every corner of the UK the same day, without needing an overnight en route. The evening meal will be taken on the ferry at your own expense.

We will be staying in a comfortable hotel on Islay, where all the rooms are en-suite.

## Day 2- 6

## Islay & Jura

We will spend several days exploring this diverse island. Islay is very fertile compared with many of the Western Isles - it used to be called the "Queen of the Hebrides" - and this is reflected in the great numbers of geese wintering there. These islands are fine places for breeding birds in the summer; but it is from October that Islay truly come into its own. During this month geese start to arrive in tens of thousands from the north and by late October Islay is heaving with wildfowl. The most numerous is the Barnacle Goose of the Greenland race, which has been known to number up to 30,000. This handsome cleanly-marked goose is a delight to watch, whether on the fields of the RSPB reserve, the salt flats at the head of Loch Indaal, or flighting to night roosts.



Greater White-fronted Geese

The Greenland White-fronted Goose, is the next most numerous species. This goose - with its slip-slap black belly marks as though applied by a creosote brush - is less numerous than the Barnacle but nevertheless numbers many thousands. A particularly pleasant feature of Islay is that the two dominant species of geese are not in a huge clump, as in some other goose wintering areas - they are widely distributed round the island and there are few corners where you won't find at least a small flock of one or the other. At least a score of Greylags are usually present during our visits, as are several Pale-bellied Brent Geese, these latter usually by the sea. A few Pink-footed Geese may be seen, sometimes just a solitary individual attached forlornly to a large flock of another species. In past winters there have been occasional single Snow Geese present, usually white phase birds but blue phase have also been seen. Amongst the Barnacle Geese we may find a small race Canada Goose, a genuine vagrant from North America. We usually see five species of geese on this tour,



Brent Geese

and on one memorable visit we even managed seven!

Geese are not the only wildfowl seen. Goldeneye, Eider, Long-tailed duck, Red-breasted Merganser, Teal, Tufted Duck and Mallard are commonly observed, as are several hundred Scaup. Common Scoter are usually seen in small numbers and the odd Pintail and Shoveler may put in an

appearance. Great Northern Diver are always present, especially on the ferry crossing where up to 50 may be counted. Red-throated and Black-throated Divers are also seen from time to time.

The two long sea bays, Lochs Indaal and Gruinart, are the winter home of many waders, both migratory and resident. Bar-tailed Godwit, Dunlin, Knot, Redshank, Curlew, Lapwing and Oystercatcher are commonly seen.



Common Redshank

Three species of deer are found in Islay - Red, Roe and Fallow - and we usually manage to get good views of them although the last of these can be elusive. Both Common and Grey Seals are not uncommon and there is a stretch of road on Islay where, looking landward and seaward, we have seen all five of these animals. There can be few places in the British Isles where you can see five species of large mammals in as many miles! The Brown Hare is also very numerous on Islay, and of a distinctive slightly reddish hue.

The south-west peninsulas of Islay usually yield Chough and frequently Golden Eagle and Peregrine, sometimes Merlin. Hen Harrier and Buzzard may be observed in many parts of the island.

On at least one of the days we will make our way across to Jura. Jura offers a sharp contrast to the rolling fields and moors of Islay and some visitors viewing its brooding mound across the water decide not to go there, missing out on its wonderful wildlife. The island is home to 5,000 Red Deer, many of them remarkably insouciant as vehicles pass, giving a 'safari in Scotland' feel, especially in the many areas where the road is unfenced. The name of the island is said to come from Viking times and as long as 1000 years ago, the island was known as Dy Oer - meaning Deer Island. Small wild goats can be found on the west



Red Deer

coast along with Grey Seals and Otters, the latter of which there are said to be a pair of otters for every three miles of coastline.

For most naturalists, it is probably the unrivalled views of European Otter which will be the highlight of the holiday. Client comments from previous tours highlight what a feature of the holiday they can be: "Otter taking 45 minutes to eat a Flounder, just 23 yards from our bus"; "mother Otter and two kits on water and on land, for over half-an-hour"; "hungry Otter swimming from skerry to skerry, emerging on each with a fresh crab to be rapidly demolished". Sadly, despite the good numbers of



European Otters

Otters on the islands they are rarely predictable and whilst we hope for similar encounters we can never guarantee that the animals will oblige!!

The southern part of Jura is dominated by the Paps, three dramatic rounded hills. None of the Paps exceeds 2,500ft, but the fact they rise from close to the sea, in a fairly narrow island, makes them more impressive than they might seem if they were close to mightier companions.

Jura has most raptors commonly found in Scotland: Golden Eagle, Buzzard, Hen Harrier, Sparrowhawk, Kestrel, Merlin, and Peregrine. We may have seen many of these already on Islay, but are even more likely to see them here together with a few White-tailed Eagles which have extended their range south from the breeding area on Mull.

The west coast is home to many caves and raised beaches which have been formed by the land lifting up after the great weight of the ice sheets retreated. The beautiful beaches are quiet and unspoilt and as the climate is warmed by the Gulf Stream such exotic looking plants as fuchsias and palm trees can be seen.



Hen Harrier

## Day 7

## Return to Glasgow

We depart by ferry this morning, returning to Kennacraig about noon. We are normally back in Glasgow by 1600hrs.

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## Tour grading

This trip is graded 'A' (easy) and in fact you can normally see most of the wildlife on our list without even leaving the vehicle! Walks of one to three miles are available most days; some of these are on hard, dry paths, but some may be wet. If you are planning to do all the walks, then you should have adequate footwear.

## Focus

The main focus of the tour will be birds, with some mammals.

## Arrival / departure details

### By Train

We meet you at Paisley Gilmour Street Station at 1315hrs at the beginning of the trip (further details will be given in joining instructions sent before the tour) Do not worry if our bus is a few minutes late, parking is difficult in the station and it is easier for us if we are sure everyone is together. Unfortunately, because of the afternoon timetable it is regretted that we cannot wait beyond 1315. At the end of the trip, we normally have you back at the station by 1600hrs. Most trains from the south come into Central Station and there are numerous connections from here to Paisley Gilmour Street. If you arrive at Queen Street Station, there is a shuttle bus which runs regularly to Central Station, or you could take the airport bus and meet the group there instead.

### By Bus

If you arrive by bus at Buchanan Bus Station, you can either take the airport bus from there, getting off at the airport, or at Central Station and connecting through by train to Paisley Gilmour Street; or walk the short distance to Queen Street Rail Station, and get the shuttle bus to Central Station, mentioned above. (Passengers without a train ticket will be charged for this journey) This shuttle bus, incidentally, leaves from the West George Street side - that is, south side - of Queen Street Station.

### By Air

We can meet you at Glasgow Airport at 1320hrs; please make your way to the dropping off point at the front of the airport terminal. The vehicle will normally pull into area B or C.

You can also fly to Islay from Glasgow if you wish. If you are in a hurry at the end of the trip, we do suggest an air journey to Glasgow as it saves several hours travelling.

### By Car

If you come by car, you may drive directly to the ferry terminal at Kennacraig. Clients have left their cars there in the past with little trouble. However, if you prefer more security, we suggest you may spend the night before your trip at the Stonefield Castle Hotel, a beautiful hotel situated in extensive and attractive grounds. (This hotel will normally let you leave your car with them for the week if you stay a night with them - but check when you book.) Stonefield Castle Hotel lies a little north of Kennacraig; we would normally meet you there about 1600hrs on the first day of the trip. Telephone: 01880 820836. [www.bespokehotels.com/stonefieldcastle](http://www.bespokehotels.com/stonefieldcastle)

In Glasgow secure overnight parking is available at Cambridge Street car park, about 10-15min walk from Central Station. For weekly parking we suggest that you contact the car park to get information on the best available rate- 0141 276 1830 or [carparkinfo@cityparkingglasgow.co.uk](mailto:carparkinfo@cityparkingglasgow.co.uk) . Information is also available on the website [www.cityparkingglasgow.co.uk](http://www.cityparkingglasgow.co.uk) Alternatively you could use one of the airport car parks and meet at the airport instead.

If you have sufficient time in Glasgow, you may wish to visit the Burrell Collection a magnificent assemblage of paintings, sculpture, furniture, tapestries, ceramics and other items of interest and beauty from three continents. It is easily reached by train from Central Station and alighting at Pollockshaws West. Even before the opening of the Burrell, Kelvinside Art Gallery was recognised as one of the finest municipal (as opposed to national) art galleries in Europe.

## Accommodation in Glasgow

If you arrive the night before the trip, or want to stay the night at the end of your trip, then we suggest the following hotels:

Convenient for city centre (5 min walk away):

### **Rennie Mackintosh Station Hotel**

59 Union Street, Glasgow, G1 3RB

0141 221 0050 [www.rmghotels.com](http://www.rmghotels.com)

### **Premier Inn City Centre – St Enoch Square or George Square**

St Enoch Square, Glasgow, G1 4AZ/ 187 George St, Glasgow, G1 1YU

0330 175 9007/ 0330 777 7294 [www.premierinn.com](http://www.premierinn.com)

### **Radisson SAS Hotel**

301 Argyle Street, Glasgow, G2 8DL

0141 204 3333 [www.radissonblu.co.uk/hotel-glasgow](http://www.radissonblu.co.uk/hotel-glasgow)

If you would prefer smaller, boutique-style accommodation then we suggest the following, which are situated about 1½ miles from the city centre:

### **The Flower House**

33 St Vincent Crescent, Glasgow, G3 8NG

0141 204 2846 <http://theflowerhouse.net/>

### **Alamo Guest House**

46 Gray Street, Glasgow G3 7SE,

0141 339 2395 [www.alamoguesthouse.com](http://www.alamoguesthouse.com)

Alternatively take a look at options on [www.tripadvisor.co.uk](http://www.tripadvisor.co.uk)

## Food & accommodation included in the price

All breakfasts and evening meals are included from breakfast on day two to breakfast on day eight. The evening meal on the first day of the trip however will be on the ferry at your own cost. The cafeterias on the ferry boats provide a choice of hot meals and sandwiches, both at reasonable prices. Packed lunches may be obtained from some hotels and charged to your room account.

Alternatively, your leader(s) will arrange a stop at a shop or café each day to pick up items for lunch. Except during particularly inclement weather, packed lunches are recommended each day to maximise time in the field as the daylight hours shorten.

All accommodation is normally in rooms with private facilities. The hotel or guesthouse will be a warm, welcoming and comfortable place in a lovely setting on Islay.

## Weather

At this time of year, the weather can range from wet, cold and windy to moderately warm sunshine, with days often having mixed conditions. You should therefore bring a mixture of clothing including warm fleeces, jackets, hats and gloves. Walking boots or good waterproof shoes are also useful to have.

## Equipment to bring

This is a list of suggested items that would help you get the most out of the tour:

- Hiking boots
- Cold weather and wet weather clothing layers, including waterproof jacket & trousers
- Warm hat and gloves
- Thermos flask and water bottle
- Walking poles if required
- Day pack
- Binoculars
- Camera
- Telescope (if you have one)
- Guide books for birds and mammals

## Inclusions / Exclusions

The following costs are included in the price of the holiday:

- Accommodation in a comfortable hotel or guesthouse on DBB basis
- Transport from Glasgow
- All guiding
- Ferry tickets

The following costs are **not** included and should be budgeted for:

- Lunches
- Dinner on ferry on first evening
- Drinks
- Discretionary tipping
- Any other personal spending e.g. souvenirs

## How to book your place

In order to book your place on this holiday, please give us a call on 01962 733051 with a credit or debit card, book online at [www.naturetrek.co.uk](http://www.naturetrek.co.uk), or alternatively complete and post the booking form at the back of our main Naturetrek brochure, together with a deposit of 20% of the holiday cost plus any room supplements if required. If you do not have a copy of the brochure, please call us on 01962 733051 or request one via our website. Please stipulate any special requirements, for example extension requests, at the time of booking.

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Barnacle Geese on Islay by Paul Marshall