

# Autumn on Mull

## Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

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### Outline itinerary

- Day 1** Meet Glasgow; transfer Mull
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- Day 2/6** Excursions around Mull
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- Day 7** Transfer back to Glasgow via Oban
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### Departs

October or November

### Focus

Birds, mammals and other wildlife

### Grading

A/B. Easy to moderate day walks.

### Dates and Prices

See website (tour code GBR158) or brochure

### Highlights:

- Spectacular scenery.
- Raptors, including Golden and White-tailed Eagles, harriers and possible Short-eared Owl.
- A chance to watch the charismatic European Otter.
- Other mammals including Red Deer, Grey and Common Seals.
- Possibility of all three UK diver species – Great Northern, Red-throated & Black-throated.
- Visit the lovely, historic island of Iona.



From top: White-tailed Eagle, European Otters & Fionnphort, Mull. Images courtesy of Shutterstock



Naturetrek    Mingledown Barn    Wolf's Lane    Chawton    Alton    Hampshire    GU34 3HJ    UK

**T:** +44 (0)1962 733051

**E:** [info@naturetrek.co.uk](mailto:info@naturetrek.co.uk)

**W:** [www.naturetrek.co.uk](http://www.naturetrek.co.uk)

## Introduction

Mull is one of the beautiful Inner Hebridean islands whose mountains and moorlands are wild, rugged and unforgiving; the island's vast western sea lochs beloved of Otters, divers, grebes and sea duck. There is no more dramatic time to visit than in late October or early November... when glorious autumn colours are at their best and winter storms move in, enhancing skies and landscapes. For birds of prey – their numbers enhanced by summer youngsters – and other predators, the hunt begins in earnest!

Mull is the third largest of the Hebridean islands, and perhaps the most spectacular. It is rugged, dramatic and blessed with extensive forests and moorlands, high craggy summits and a glorious coastline. Here the population of White-tailed Sea Eagles is as dense as anywhere else in Scotland, although there are even more pairs of the majestic Golden Eagle to provide unique aerial comparisons. Many



other birds of prey inhabit the island, including good numbers of Hen Harriers and Short-eared Owls. All three Diver species and Slavonian Grebes can be seen on the sea lochs that are the favourite home of Otters; indeed Mull must be one of the best places in Britain to observe these captivating creatures, and it is quite possible to see half a dozen or more in a day! The island is also well known for its Red Deer, which are numerous throughout, but there are also a few small herds of Fallow Deer, remnants from introductions made in the past. At many places around the scenic coastline, both Grey and Common Seals can be seen from the shore, often accompanied by Black Guillemots. Mull is certainly a magical island and, weather permitting, we'll savour it in many moods from our comfortable, centrally located hotel!

## 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 Mull

We will meet for this holiday in Glasgow at around 1200 hours today. We will then drive for approx. 3 hours to Oban, where we depart by ferry around 1700hrs for the 50 minute crossing from Oban to Craignure on Mull. From there we'll make our way to our hotel.

## Day 2-6

## Mull

Mull is a spectacularly rugged and picturesque island with a coastline that varies from towering sea cliffs to delightful sandy beaches and rocky kelp-covered shorelines beloved of Otters. Ben More is the largest of the island's hills and at over 3,000 feet (~1,000 metres) qualifies as one of the 283 'Munros' in Scotland, the focus for dedicated hill climbers from all around the world. From the surrounding areas we will admire its slopes from below as we scan upwards for Golden Eagles, Peregrines and Ravens. In particular we will be hoping for one of the highlights of Mull – a view of the magnificent White-tailed Eagle.



White-tailed Eagle

This species has been very successfully re-introduced to Scotland and Mull is one of the best islands on which to see this huge bird soaring along the coastline or in the mountains. Often described as a 'flying barn-door', observing one of these birds plunge down and snatch a fish from the sea is an unforgettable sight. More often, however, they are to be seen scouring the hills and coastline for carrion from on high, always on the look-out for the remains of a seal or deer. Like their cousins, the resident Golden Eagles, they are constantly mobbed by the island's Hooded Crows and Ravens and sometimes also incur the wrath of a Hen Harrier or Peregrine resulting in a thrilling aerial tussle.



European Otter

On this tour we will be regularly watching the sea lochs and shoreline. All three divers may be seen on the former, with Great Northern Diver particularly common at this time of year. They, and the Slavonian Grebes that are also found on the sea lochs are likely to be sporting a range of plumages at this season, from startling summer to sombre winter dress. Red-breasted Mergansers are also common, and may be joined by such species as Black Guillemot and Shags. The same sea lochs are

also home to a large population of Otters, whilst both Mountain Hare and Red Deer, which range from the shoreline to the highest ridges, may also be seen. One generally requires a degree of luck

to see Otters, but on Mull, provided the weather is reasonable, they are more easily spotted than anywhere else – usually from coastal roads.

We will make our exploration of Mull by means of five full day excursions that take in some of the most spectacular scenery and interesting habitats around the island, ever vigilant, not just for Otters and other mammals, but also for the island's raptor species, which include both species of eagle, Merlin, Peregrine, Common Buzzard, Hen Harrier and Short-eared Owl. We will also look for wintering waders on tidal mudflats, flocks of Greylags, other geese and wild Whooper Swans on coastal pastureland, and inspect swift-flowing streams for Dippers and Grey Wagtails. In the woodland and forest areas we will listen for Crossbills, Siskins and Redpolls, and look out for incoming Bramblings, Redwings and Fieldfares arriving for the winter.

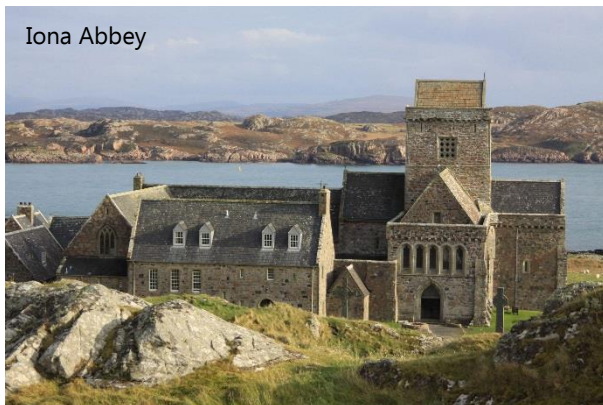


Short-eared Owl

Another of the highlights at this time of year is the magnificent spectacle of autumn colours – the golds, browns, purples and yellows of the bracken, heather, beeches, birches and larches, often highlighted by a magical autumn light, offering exceptional beauty. We may also hear or witness the rutting of the Red Deer amongst these spectacular landscapes at this time of year.

There are populations of feral goat found around the island and we may come across these during our travels.

Just off the south west of Mull lies the island of Iona, a place with many historical links and its own charms. Once home to St Columba, it has been termed the 'Cradle of Christianity' as this is where



Iona Abbey

one of the first churches in the country was built and it's believed that Christianity spread out through Scotland mainly from here. The current abbey lies on the site of the original monastery. We may be able to find more Otter along the shorelines and seals can often be seen in the Sound. White-fronted Geese join resident Greylags during the autumn and winter, while waders may be seen foraging along the tide lines. Despite being only 1.5 miles by 3 miles in

size, we're likely to only be able to visit a small proportion of the wee island.

Please note that we can't guarantee that the abbey will be open to visitors, however we will aim to make time to visit if it is.



## Day 7

## Depart Mull, transfer to Glasgow via Oban

We must leave our hotel this morning after breakfast and make our way to the ferry terminal for our crossing from there to Oban, on the mainland, then a roughly 3-hour drive back to Glasgow – a long day perhaps, but incorporating wonderful scenery. We should be back in Glasgow by 1600hrs, time enough for you to catch your return buses, flights and trains home.

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Images courtesy of Shutterstock & A. Steel

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## Tour grading

Grade A/B. We will undertake some gentle to moderate wildlife walks during the course of the holiday (with any more demanding walks always being optional). However, our activities will be weather dependant – much of the wildlife on this tour being best observed from either our vehicle or a bird hide, both of which will be invaluable should we have rain or other adverse weather. On much of this tour we will simply spend our time 'looking' and enjoying avian, and some mammalian, spectacles.

## Focus

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

## Arrival / departure details

We anticipate that the majority of the group will by train into Glasgow. Over the last few years, access to the city centre for private vehicles has been greatly reduced, so we would ask those travelling by train to take a short journey out of the city to Paisley Gilmour Street Station, where your leader(s) will meet you. There are numerous trains between Glasgow Central and Paisley Gilmour Street, and the journey can be added to most rail tickets for no/little additional cost if requested at the time of booking. We will then pick any other group members up from Glasgow Airport before travelling to catch our ferry to Mull from Oban. Exact timings will be confirmed in the tour final joining instructions, but are likely to be as follows: 1210 hours at Paisley Gilmour Street Station and 1220 hours at Glasgow Airport. At the end of the tour we expect to return to Glasgow airport by 1530 hours and Paisley Gilmour Street by 1540 hours. Those departing by air or rail from Glasgow should arrange flights or trains to depart after these times. As flight and train timings do vary from year to year, we would ask you to contact the Naturetrek office before booking travel arrangements that are unlikely to fit in with the timings mentioned above.

## By Train

We meet you at Paisley Gilmour Street Station at 1210hrs 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 1210 hours. At the end of the trip, we normally have you back at the station by 1545hrs. Most trains from the south come into Glasgow 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 Central Station; or walk the short distance to Queen Street Rail Station, and get the shuttle bus to Central, 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. There are regular connections from Central Station to Paisley Gilmour Street, where the leader(s) will meet the group.

## By Air

We can meet you at Glasgow Airport at 1220hrs; 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.

## By Car

If you come by car it is possible to meet the group in Glasgow, in Oban or on Mull. Car parking is available at the hotel on Mull or in Oban and we can recommend the following secure car park in Oban:

Stoddarts offer secured undercover parking at £8 per night or outside secure parking at £6 per night. Tel: +44 (0)1631 564176 or +44 (0)7799 692072.

Email address - [john.stoddarts@btconnect.com](mailto:john.stoddarts@btconnect.com)

We do advise booking your parking in advance of your arrival.

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 the group at the airport.

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 the 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

Accommodation, breakfast and evening meals are included in the price of this holiday, but lunches are additional. Packed lunches can often be arranged at the hotel, or we will stop at a café or shop to pick something up. We will stay in a comfortable hotel where all rooms have private facilities.

## Weather

At this time of year, the weather can range from moderately warm sunshine to wet and windy. We may get very mixed conditions on the same day! You should therefore bring a mixture of clothing including warm fleeces, jackets, hats and gloves. Walking boots, or good waterproof walking shoes, would be useful for some of the walks.

## 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
- Day pack
- Walking poles if required
- Binoculars (essential)
- 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 on a half board basis
- Transport from Glasgow
- All guiding
- Ferry tickets

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

- Lunches
- 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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