

The Magic of Mull

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

Day 1 Meet Glasgow; transfer Mull

Day 2/6 Mull

Day 7 Return to Glasgow

Departs

June or July

Focus

Birds, mammals & general natural history

Grading

Grade A/B – day walks only.

N.B. The landing and walking on Lunga and Staffa are only suitable for those with good mobility and balance.

Dates and Prices

See website (tour code GBR16)

Highlights:

- Explore & enjoy the wildlife of Mull – one of the most scenic of the Hebridean Islands
- Probably the best place in Britain to observe Otter
- Chance to see Minke Whale, dolphins & Basking Sharks on boat excursion
- Boat trip to Lunga for nesting Puffins & seabirds
- Watch White-tailed & Golden Eagle
- Great birding, including Red-throated Diver, Hen Harrier, Short-eared Owl & Twite
- Led by expert naturalist



From top: Guillemots (Dave Pierce), Otter & Atlantic Puffins (Rob Williams)



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Introduction

Mull is the third largest of the Hebridean islands and one of the most beautiful, with a varied landscape which includes extensive forests, craggy hills and a glorious coastline. Each habitat will be explored in detail during our exciting mid-summer tour.



The population of White-tailed Sea Eagles is as dense here 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 breeding Hen Harriers & Short-eared Owls. Red-throated Divers can be seen on both freshwater and sea lochs, where Great Northern Divers also regularly linger into

the summer in their splendid breeding plumage. The same sea lochs are the home of Otters and indeed Mull must be one of the best places in Britain to observe these captivating creatures. Mull is well known for its Red Deer, which are numerous throughout the island, but there are also a few small herds of Fallow Deer, remnants from introductions many years ago. At many places around the scenic coastline, both Grey and Common Seals can be seen from the shore and we should also encounter them during a boat trip when we will search for Minke Whales and other cetaceans, as well as Basking Sharks. A highlight of the tour will be landing on the offshore island of Lunga, where we will experience the noise and smell of a teeming seabird 'city' and observe masses of Kittiwakes, Shags, Guillemots, Razorbills & posing Puffins at just a few metres range! Black Guillemots are here too with both Great & Arctic Skuas likely to be seen patrolling around the colonies. Mull is certainly a magical island and with long summer days in prospect we have ample time to savour its many attractions.

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 in Glasgow and transfer by minibus to Oban, where we will catch an afternoon ferry to Mull. There may be an opportunity for a short walk to enjoy an introductory look at some of the birds to be found in the surrounding area.

Days 2 - 6

Mull

Mull is a spectacularly rugged and picturesque island with a coastline that varies from towering sea cliffs to delightful sandy beaches worthy of the Caribbean. Ben More is the largest of the island hills and, at over 3,000', qualifies as one of the 283 'Munros' in Scotland, the focus for dedicated hill climbers from all around the world. Unlike some of the other peaks, the climb to the summit of Ben More begins at sea level so climbers have particular cause to sit for a while and enjoy the stunning views when they reach the top!

White-tailed Eagle



The magnificent White-tailed Eagle has been very successfully re-introduced to Scotland and Mull is one of the best islands to see this huge bird soaring along the coastline with a profile once described as being like 'a flying barn-door'. Observing one of these birds plunge down and snatch a fish from the sea is an unforgettable sight but they are also fond of scavenging carrion and are 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 Hooded Crows and sometimes also incur the wrath of a Hen Harrier or Peregrine resulting in some thrilling aerial tussles.

Various waders and waterfowl such as Red-breasted Mergansers will be observed around sea and fresh water lochs. Whilst on the sea lochs these could be joined by such species as Black Guillemot and Great Northern Diver, both resplendent in summer plumages. The same lochs are also home

Short-eared Owl



to Otters as well as both Mountain Hare and Red Deer which range from the shoreline to the highest ridges. Whilst the hares and deer are conspicuous enough, one always requires a degree of luck to see Otters although with young mouths to feed, females are likely to be busily employed fishing and less wary of humans. We commence our exploration of Mull with a tour of some of the most spectacular scenery and interesting habitats around the south of the island. Several raptor species are likely, including both species of eagle, Merlin, Peregrine, Common Buzzard and Short-eared Owl. Away from the open

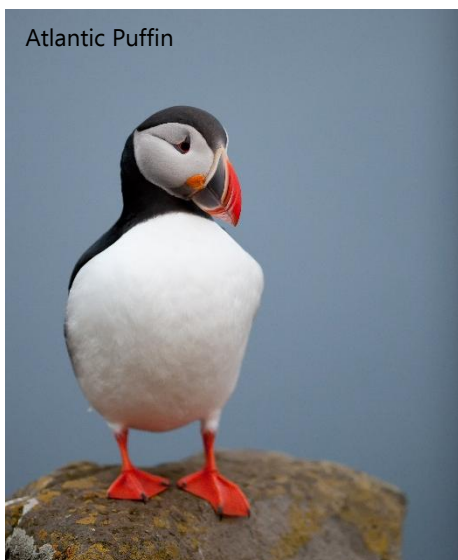
moorlands and hills, there are patches of forest to investigate and here we may find such nesting species as Wood Warbler, Common Redstart, Spotted Flycatcher and Treecreeper. Swift flowing streams could yield Dipper, Grey Wagtail and Common Sandpipers, all no doubt safeguarding young at this time of year. Although primarily a bird watching tour, there is a rich feast of natural history to enjoy on Mull and interesting summer flora includes Early Marsh and Northern Marsh, Fragrant, Greater and Lesser Butterfly Orchids as well as many other northern specialties. Butterflies

are also well represented with particular interest in the local populations of Scotch Argus and Marsh Fritillary.

One day we will sail out to the uninhabited Treshnish Isles, which at this time of year are home to thousands of breeding seabirds. The largest colony is on Lunga and we land on this island to observe the packed ledges containing Guillemots, Razorbills, Kittiwakes and Shags amongst others, whilst nearby, everyone will be enchanted by the islands ultra-confiding Puffins as they come and go around their nesting burrows. The constant traffic of birds from sea to nests and the almost deafening chorus of calls from the various species create a superb visual and auditory experience, and the olfactory sense is not neglected either with the distinctive pungent odours of the colony!



Also on Lunga are the ruined remains of seven blackhouses, once home to around 20 people. These are traditional dwellings of the Scottish Highlands, usually consisting of double walled drystone packed with earth, timber rafters and a thatched roof. There was no chimney so the interiors often got fairly smoky!



We shall also visit the solitary island of Staffa, which has breeding seabirds including Puffins, though it is more noted for its interesting geology with basalt columns and the famous Fingal's Cave immortalized in Mendelssohn's Hebrides Overture. Staffa is small island is only half a mile long by a quarter of a mile wide, and is a dedicated National Nature Reserve in its entirety. Naturalist, Sir Joseph Banks wrote:

"Compared to this what are the cathedrals and palaces built by men! Mere models of playthings, imitations as his works will always be when compared to those of nature."

Sea conditions permitting, we will land on both Staffa and Lunga Islands. On the way we will look for a variety of seabirds and keep our eyes peeled for the resident pods of both Bottlenose Dolphins and harbour porpoise which are frequently sighted in this area, and White-beaked Dolphin may be possible.

N.B. Landings & walking on Staffa and Lunga are only suitable for those with good mobility and balance. Walking boots are recommended for this day. Walking poles may also be useful.

Another day we will explore the northern part of mainland Mull. The hills are not as high as those further south but no less interesting in appearance and wildlife. Hen Harriers and Short-eared Owls share this moorland habitat, while Red-throated Divers frequent the lochs. Amongst the smaller passerines Wheatears, Stonechats and Meadow Pipits are common, with both Whinchat and Twite are likely to be encountered. The largest crow, the Raven is frequently seen and heard and their habit of mobbing eagles as well as other birds of prey make them a useful indicator of the presence of one of the large raptors.

European Stonechat



Our second boat excursion of the tour will take us around the north coast of Mull where we will probably head to the more open waters between mainland Scotland's Ardnamurchan peninsula and the island of Coll. Here with our experienced crew, we will search for such cetaceans as Harbour

Common Dolphin



Porpoise, Common Dolphin and Minke Whale, though others are possible, as are Basking Sharks. Of course, we will also be keeping a watch out for sea birds, with Gannets, Manx Shearwaters, petrels and skuas possible.

Back on shore we will continue our daily explorations, visiting some new areas as well as returning to others. One of the delights of Mull are various little secluded coves and beaches which invite closer inspection and often contain interesting wildlife including seals and feeding shorebirds. With over 300 miles of coastline there is no shortage of choice in places to visit.

Our last full day on mainland Mull will give us the chance to visit a new area on the island perhaps or seek out a species which has so far eluded us, or we may revisit a particularly favourite location in response to an earlier special wildlife experience. Today could also be an opportunity to explore the islands picturesque capital, Tobermory, if we haven't already done so, with the chance to maybe purchase a souvenir. Perhaps best known to the wider world as the setting for the children's TV series Balamory, the small, but busy port of Tobermory is a delightful place to visit, with brightly painted buildings adding colour to the waterfront area and wooded hills rising behind the town.

Day 7

Return to Glasgow

Depending upon ferry timings, we take a last look around the hotel grounds before catching the return ferry sailing to Oban at the conclusion of a splendid week in the Hebrides.

Images courtesy of Shutterstock, Dave Pierce & Rob Williams

Tour grading

Grade A/B – We will undertake some gentle to moderate wildlife walks covering up to several miles per day during the course of the holiday (with any more demanding walks always being optional), however there may be some steeper slopes on some of the islands and good footing is required for moving around the boats while at sea. You will also need to be able to get in and out of the boat on stony beaches where there may be slippery rocks. Please be aware that our activities will be weather dependent – much of the wildlife on this tour being best observed either from beside our vehicle or a bird hide, both of which will be invaluable should we have rain or other adverse weather. If wildlife is spotted from the vehicle, the aim is to find a suitable point to pull over and watch from. On much of this tour we will simply spend our time ‘looking’ and enjoying avian, and some mammalian, spectacles.

We will also be going out on small boats on two of the days and a reasonable level of balance will be required. The paths on the islands can be uneven, so walking poles may be useful.

Focus

The main focus of this tour is birds and mammals, although time will be taken to look at other wildlife too.

Arrival / departure details

We anticipate that the majority of the group will be 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: 1110 hours at Paisley Gilmour Street Station and 1120 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 1110 hours 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 the meeting time. At the end of the trip, we normally have you back in Glasgow around 1540 hours. Most trains from the south come into Central Station. If you arrive at Queen Street Station, there is a shuttle bus which runs regularly to Central Station.

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 1120 hours; please make your way to the dropping off point at the front of the airport terminal.

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:

Stoddarts offer secured undercover parking or outside secure parking at a set per night rate. Tel: +44 (0)7717 650435.

Email address - gregor.morawski@hotmail.com

The local Tesco also offers a limited number of parking spaces for multi-day use, bookable via the "YourParkingSpace" app, but please be aware that this is a public car park.

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

In Glasgow the best option is often to use an airport car park 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 <https://www.glasgowmackintoshhotel.co.uk/>

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

Radisson SAS Hotel

301 Argyle Street, Glasgow. G2 8DL

0141 204 3333 www.radissonblu.co.uk/hotel-glasgow

Grasshoppers Hotel

87 Union St, Glasgow. G1 3TA

0141 222 2666 <https://www.grasshoppersglasgow.com/>

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

Near Paisley Gilmour Street, the following options could be considered:

Ashtree House Hotel

9 Orr Square, Paisley. PA1 2DL

0141 848 6411 www.ashtreehousehotel.com/

The Hazlitt Apartments (self-catering)

27 Causeyside Street, Paisley. PA1 1UL

0141 886 5020 <https://thehazlitt.com/>

Alternatively take a look at options on www.tripadvisor.co.uk

Food & accommodation included in the price

We will stay in a comfortable, local hotel, where all rooms have en-suite facilities. Breakfasts and dinners are included in the price of the tour, however lunches are not.

Weather

Midsummer should guarantee long daylight hours and the weather should be pleasantly warm but this is Scotland and participants should be prepared for both cooler conditions and the risk of precipitation, which could be prolonged. Good waterproofs, both jacket and trousers, are therefore recommended. Warmer sweaters/layers should be worn on the sea trips as it can often be chilly on the open water. Gloves and a warm hat would also be prudent. Footwear should be stout and suitable for possible wet conditions underfoot which is always a risk in peat terrain. Midges may be a nuisance and insect repellent is recommended. We would also suggest bringing a water bottle with you that can be refilled, and a thermos flask if you would like a hot drink with lunch.

Equipment to bring

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

- Hiking boots
- Cool 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)
- Sea sickness medication for the boat trips
- Insect repellent
- Guide books for birds and mammals

Inclusions/ Exclusions

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

- Accommodation in comfortable hotels on half board basis
- Road transport from Glasgow
- All guiding
- Ferry tickets for travel in the tour vehicle
- Boat trips as detailed in the itinerary

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

- Lunches
- Drinks
- Any other personal spending e.g. souvenirs, discretionary tips etc.
- Additional activities not mentioned in the itinerary

Flight options

There are various airlines that operate flights to Glasgow International Airport. Flights are not included within the holiday cost, however we are able to book flights to Glasgow on request. The cost for these will depend on the route and how close to departure these are requested.

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, 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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