

Mull's Otters & Eagles – A Photography Tour

Naturetrek Wildlife Photography Tour

Outline itinerary

Day 1	Meet Glasgow; transfer Mull
Day 2/5	Photography excursions on Mull
Day 6	Return to Glasgow

Departs

April

Focus

Wildlife photography, including birds, mammals and landscape

Grading

A/B. Easy to moderate day walks.

NB. The boat tours are only suitable for those with good balance & mobility.

Dates and Prices

See website (tour code GBR65)

Highlights:

- Explore & enjoy the wildlife of Mull – one of the most scenic of the Hebridean Islands
- Time dedicated to finding & photographing Otter
- Boat trip to Staffa for seabirds
- Hen Harrier & Short-eared Owl possible
- Photograph White-tailed Eagle on specialist boat tours
- Based in a comfortable, delightfully situated hotel
- Led by expert photographer



From top: Otter, White-tailed Eagle (Shutterstock)



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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. The population of White-tailed Sea Eagles is as dense here as anywhere else in Scotland, and coupled with good numbers of Golden Eagle, we can expect plenty of opportunities to photograph these magnificent birds. Many other birds of prey inhabit the island, including breeding Hen Harrier and Short-eared Owl, and both Great Northern and Red-throated Divers can often be seen on both freshwater and sea lochs. The same sea lochs are home to endearing Otters, and indeed Mull is one of the best places in Britain to observe these captivating creatures. Mull is also well known for its Red Deer, which are numerous throughout the island, and there are also a few small herds of Fallow Deer which are remnants from introductions many years ago.



Sound of Mull

Both Grey and Common Seals can be seen from the shore at numerous points around the scenic coastline, and we should also encounter them during a boat trip when we hope to see some cetaceans as well. Weather permitting, we will land on the offshore island of Lunga, where we will observe the sea cliffs that later become home to thousands of noisy seabirds during the summer months. If we are enjoying a good spring there may be a number of early returning birds, getting a head start on the short breeding season. Mull is certainly a magical island, and we will make the most of our time here, enjoying and photographing 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 at around lunchtime and transfer by minibus to Oban, where we will catch an afternoon ferry to Mull. Depending on how long our journey takes, it might be possible to do some seabird photography around Oban prior to the departure of the ferry.

Once at our hotel for the next 5 nights, there may be an opportunity for a short walk before the introductory presentation on photographic techniques for birds and mammals.

Day 2

Otter & Eagle Photography

As the best time to look for Otters is first thing in the morning, we aim to make an early start today to go and look for these charming creatures as they forage amongst the seaweed and shallow waters along the island's coastline. Once we've found the right spot, we plan to take our time to enjoy both watching and photographing these endearing mammals.



White-tailed Eagle

Our other key photography target today is the magnificent White-tailed Eagle. This species has been very successfully re-introduced to its native habitat in Scotland, and Mull is one of the best islands to see this huge bird soaring along the coastline with a profile described as '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 lookout for the remains of a seal or deer. To allow us the best chance of photographing them, we will join a specialist cruise off the west coast of Mull, which departs from Ulva. This trip is specifically designed for those who wish to experience, and photograph, the power of these majestic birds first hand. Taking to the water allows us to get closer to the fishing eagles, when they are less wary of the presence of people.

Depending on how we get on today, and the weather, there may be the opportunity to return to look for Otters again this evening.

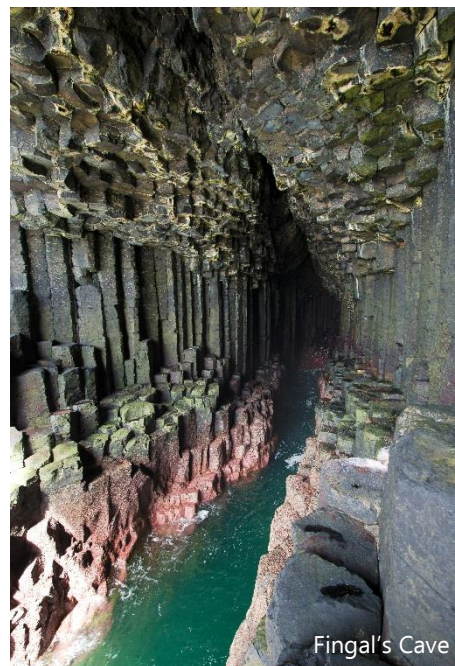
Day 3

Staffa & Treshnish Islands Boat Tour

Today, we will join one of the boat tours that journey to Staffa and the Treshnish Islands. Staffa is famous for its hexagonal rock columns, formed by volcanic eruptions many millennia ago, and Fingal's Cave, known for its amazing acoustics, the inspiration for Mendelssohn's Hebrides Overture. This 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



Fingal's Cave

Bottlenose Dolphins and harbour porpoise which are frequently sighted in this area, and White-beaked Dolphin are also possible. Our main focus on Staffa will be the fantastic geological features, but we might also encounter some seabirds starting to breed.

Lunga is part of the Treshnish Isles, a group of islands owned and managed by the Hebridean Trust. They are a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) due to the national importance of the high level shore platforms that they provide, making excellent nesting locations for thousands of seabirds, the most common of which are Kittiwake, Razorbill and Guillemot. Although it will be a little early to encounter these species in large number, there should still be some individuals around the island. We may perhaps encounter a few Shag, Puffin and Fulmar as well. 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!



White-tailed Eagle

Returning to the hotel, there will be an opportunity to review images taken by the group. Your leader will offer some advice on processing and provide a critique to assist in getting even better images of Eagles and Otters during the next sessions.

Day 4

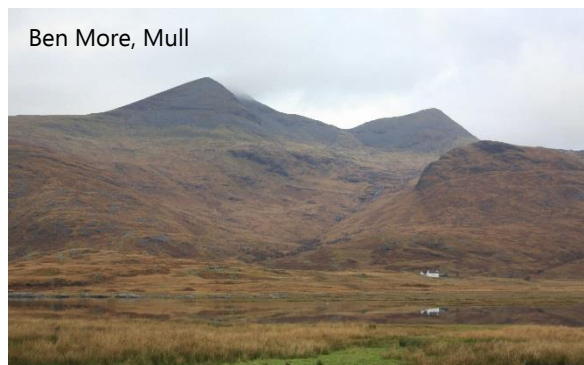
Otters & Eagles

Once again, we will split the day between Otter and Eagle photography. This day will be very similar to Day 2, giving us the chance to improve on any images taken earlier in the week.

Day 5

Iona

Today we will head for the south end of Mull, and the lovely island of Iona. This picturesque little island is best known for its abbey, but also has a number of other buildings of historical significance



Ben More, Mull

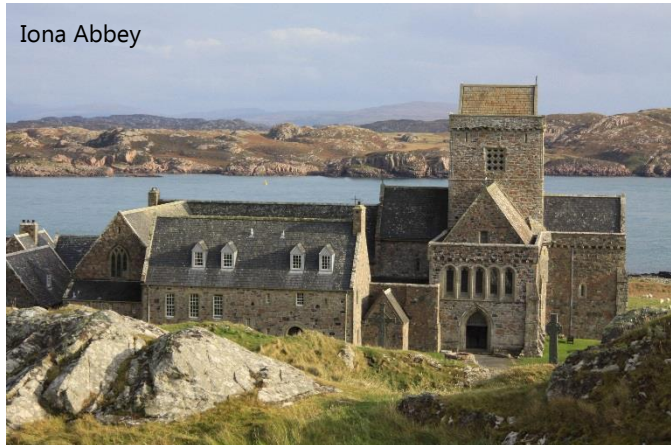
and some great beaches. Thought to be the burial place of 48 medieval kings, including Macbeth, there is a real sense of timelessness about the island.

Just a short ferry ride from Fionnphort will take us to the island. Vehicles are greatly restricted here to help preserve the island, so there is very little traffic which creates a wonderfully peaceful

atmosphere, and means that we will be doing our exploring on foot. From Iona we will be able to

look back towards Mull, and on a clear day we will be able to get good views of Ben More and the west coast of Mull. For those interested in landscape photography, the rocky shorelines and beautiful, white sand beaches offer up many possibilities for varied images. Spring flowers such as celandines, primroses and wild hyacinth or shore plants like thrift and roseroot create splashes of colour in the foreground, while the sea's ever changing hues provide an

interesting backdrop to the ancient and ruined buildings found throughout the island. The colour spectrum varies from pale turquoise where the sunlight plays over shallow, underwater sandbars, through the darkest of blue in the deeper waters, to slate grey on duller days.



Iona Abbey and the Nunnery are among the places we plan to visit during our time on the island.



The abbey has many decorative features that can look particularly striking in a black and white photograph.

Migrating waders, including Dunlin, Ringed Plover and Sanderling stop off on Iona in the spring time to refuel as they head north to their Arctic breeding grounds. These birds tend to feed along the shoreline, their position on the beach determined by the level of the tide. The challenge will be in locating a

suitable piece of shoreline that allows us to be at eye level with the scurrying birds. Early April also sees the return of the Corncrake and we may be fortunate enough to hear the first rasping call of the year during our visit.

Our plan for the day will remain flexible to allow for the weather and the interests of the group.

Day 6

Return to Glasgow

This morning we may have time for one final drive out in search of Otters. Returning to our hotel for a late breakfast, we will review and share our images with the group, before making the return journey to Glasgow, via Oban. We will aim to be back in the city in the late afternoon.

Images by Shutterstock & Alison Steel

Tour grading

Grade A/B – Easy to moderate day walks. The majority of walks on this tour will be easy walks, but there will be times when we will venture off the beaten path onto more uneven terrain. Photographing Otters at close quarters will require some scrambling over intertidal rocks which are uneven and may be slippery. For those who would rather not do this, excellent views of Otters can still be obtained using binoculars, without venturing onto the shore.

We will also be going out on small boats on two of the days and a reasonable level of balance will be required.

We travel by minibus most days, but will also spend time exploring on foot. Enjoyment of this tour, therefore, demands a reasonable level of fitness and an enjoyment of walking (or, the unfit should be prepared to feel tired at times!). All walks will be taken at a leisurely pace, and a built-in flexibility will take into account of the overall abilities of the group.

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 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 1545 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 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 parks:

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

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 . Information is also available on the website 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 city centre (5min walk away):

Rennie Mackintosh Station Hotel

59 Union Street, Glasgow, G1 3RB

0141 221 0050 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

Radisson SAS Hotel

301 Argyle Street, Glasgow, G2 8DL

0141 204 3333 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

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

Equipment to bring

- Digital single lens reflex camera capable of photographing at ISO 3200 for low-light shots early and late in the day
- Telephoto lenses (400mm or 500mm focal length) for bird and mammal photography
- Standard and wide angle zoom lenses for mountain and forest landscapes
- Camera manual
- Tripod
- Monopod
- Cable release
- Neutral density and polarising filters
- Hiking boots (good grip required for otter photography)
- Cold weather and wet weather clothing layers, including waterproof jacket & trousers
- Warm hat and gloves
- Day pack
- Water bottle & thermos flask
- Sea sickness medication for boat trips

Focus

This is a specialist photography holiday, aimed at the keen amateur wildlife photographer, and focusing on the birds, mammals and landscapes of Mull. We will travel in vehicles, by boat and on foot searching for target species, in order to provide excellent photographic opportunities.

Food & accommodation included in the price

We stay in a comfortable, local hotel, where most rooms have en-suite facilities. All food is included in the price of the tour, except for lunch on the first day.

Weather

At this time of year, the weather can range from hail showers to moderately warm sunshine. We may get both on the same day! You should therefore bring a mixture of clothing including warm fleeces, jackets, hats and gloves. Walking boots will be needed for some excursions.

Inclusions/ Exclusions

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

- Accommodation in comfortable hotels on DBB basis
- Road transport from Glasgow
- All guiding and photography tuition
- Lunches on Days 2 - 6
- Ferry tickets
- Boat trips for eagle watching and island visits

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

- Lunch on Day 1
- Drinks
- Any other personal spending e.g. souvenirs, discretionary tips etc.

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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