



Visiting Scotland

This is about visiting Scotland and has two parts:

- (1) First there are some general comments
- (2) Second there is information to help you plan a visit to Scotland

(1) Some general comments

As a Scot I am obviously biased, positively. I think it is a fascinating country. It is small and most of it is sparsely populated – it is about twice the size of Baden-Württemberg and has only half the population. It is the home of deer, the golden eagle and Dolly, of the man who pioneered television and of Sean Connery (and Ewan McGregor); it is the place where Madonna chose to get married and where people consume more of the local soft drink Irn-Bru than they do Coke (which is what we call Coca Cola); it is the place where you can walk on ground that was there 50 million years ago, or climb only a few hundred feet and see, like a bird, miles of land spread out below you.

That makes it quite difficult to decide where to go if you only have ten days or two weeks holiday.

If you can't go there at all, you can still enjoy visiting the websites below. If you are in reach of the Konstanz University library, you can print out the *bibliography*, *the film list* and the *Scottish writing list* from the Area Studies Scotland class. You will find them at www.FindYourFeet.de in the Course Materials section. You can enjoy reading the books and watching the films.

For the armchair visitor to Scotland there is the website www.rampantscotland.com

which has links to just about everything from genealogy (find out if your forefathers were Scots) to myths, legends and politics (no connection!). It also has many pages of information - "feature pages" such as a Famous Scots Quiz.

(2) Visiting Scotland

Planning

If you want to visit Scotland the best place to start planning is the following website

www.visitscotland.com

This is the official site of the Scottish Tourist Board. It is an excellent place to start planning a visit as it gives information on how to get to Scotland, accommodation including youth hostels, and the many things you can do there. If you click on the German flag you will go to:

www.visitscotland.com/de

„die offizielle Website des Schottischen Fremdenverkehrsamtes“

which is not just a German translation of the English web pages, but provides information aimed at people living in Germany e.g. how do I get to Scotland from Germany.

There are sections on:

Sehens- und Erlebenswertes; Aktivitäten und Events; Anreise und Transport vor Ort; Unterkunft; Geschichte, Kunst und Kultur, Essen, Natur.

You can also download a brochure or have it sent by post (free).

You will probably be surprised at just how much there is to see and do, from windsurfing championships on Tiree to World Piping Championships in Glasgow, or a car rally on the Island of Mull, or the Celtic Connections music festival in February

Public transport

There is lots of useful and practical information on public transport at visitscotland.com/de but if you would like more details then you can go directly to the websites given. But please remember when you are planning your stay that Scotland is not a densely populated country covered with motorways and railway tracks.

For train travel - routes, times and prices

www.scotrail.co.uk

If you are not rolling in money you should check out the prices of day returns (return tickets valid for only one day), and saver returns (valid longer than one day) and contrast them with single tickets.

For example: a single ticket for a 55-minute train trip costs £7.70; a day return ticket for a 3-hour round trip costs £15.90.

There are also Travel Passes available. See below.

By the way, Scottish trains are usually easy to get on and off, with wide low doors, and there are tea, coffee, snacks for sale, brought along on a trolley.

For long-distance bus travel – routes, times and prices

www.citylink.co.uk

Scottish Citylink runs buses all over Scotland, linking the few cities with the towns and villages. The buses are warm and comfortable. Check out the prices as for rail travel above.

For ferry travel – routes, times and prices

www.calmac.co.uk

“calmac” is an abbreviation of Caledonian MacBrayne. MacBrayne is the name of the firm which operates nearly all of the ferries in Scotland. Caledonia is another name for Scotland.

www.northlinkferries.co.uk

for ferries to the Northern Isles (Orkneys and Shetlands)

For combined travel by train, bus and boat there are special travel passes available at a fixed price for a fixed number of days. Currently there are the following:

Freedom of Scotland Travelpass

Highland Rover

Central Scotland Rover

These combined travel passes make good sense. For example you can take the train from Edinburgh or Glasgow to Inverness (north east), the bus to Ullapool on the west coast, then the ferry to Stornoway, on Lewis (one of the islands of the Outer Hebrides). Then take the bus across the islands, the ferry back to the port of Oban, and the train back to Glasgow.

There is also a Rail and Sail option for train plus ferry tickets to the Northern Isles (Orkneys and Shetlands) and the Hebrides.

For flights to the islands:

www.loganair.co.uk

They operate flights from Inverness to the Western Isles and to the Northern Isles.

Weather and clothing

Scotland's climate is neither Mediterranean nor Arctic. Temperatures are not usually as high in the summer or as low in the winter as in South Germany. In general the weather is changeable. So what you as a tourist in Scotland can do is simply accept the weather as it comes and make the most of your stay.

Clothing:

If you want to be quite independent of the weather the most suitable way to dress

at any time of year is in several light-weight layers, with the top one waterproof. The layers you don't need on a hot sunny day go into your rucksack. Waterproof trousers are much better than jeans, which just get heavier and heavier in the rain and take a long time to dry. In the summer you can walk barefoot along the beaches or on the hills where the ground is soft and wet – peaty ground (Torf) is a delight for your feet. In general, though, waterproof hiking boots are the best footwear if you are out in the country.

(One September I enjoyed four days in a row of cloudless sky and warm sun – I even got a sunburnt face! There were also days of wind and rain, which I spent travelling in warm comfortable buses, trains and boats, enjoying the spectacular weather – hills and lochs blotted out by the rain then re-appearing, disappearing again, until pale sunshine created a stunning landscape.)

Suitable clothing is absolutely necessary if you want to go climbing. Read carefully what it says in the hikers' and climbers' guide books and follow the advice. The mountains are not high, but the terrain can be treacherous, and the weather conditions can change fast.

Attitude:

No town or city looks its best in the rain (neither San Francisco nor Cairns nor Ottawa), but tearooms, cafes, pubs, exhibitions, shops, museums etc. offer warmth and a chance to dry. (Many museums and art galleries in Scotland are free, and have good cafes, with excellent coffee, perhaps because Scotland is now an officially recognised 'Fair Trade Nation'.)

Out in the country, rain and wind are dramatic and can be enjoyed as much as sunshine – provided you are dressed properly. The changing weather is part of Scotland, so just accept it. And be glad it's not worse – the one half-day of strong wind I experienced in 2004 was just the tail end of Hurricane Ivan in the Caribbean.

Time

There is a great deal you can do in Scotland – there are museums and art galleries to go to, castles to visit, monuments to see, concerts, Highland Games and Festivals to enjoy, whisky to drink, but if you want to get a real feeling for Scotland, make sure you take some time to just be there. Walk slowly along an empty beach, or across a moor, let the peace and the sense of timelessness sink in. Forget your watch.

Language

“That's a ca-uh gri“, said the busdriver to the tourists as he drove us across the island of Mull. Bump, rumble, went the bus, and I realised what he was telling us.

We had just driven over a “cattle grid“, metal bars set in the road to stop cattle from going any further. Buses make quite a noise going over them and tourists might think the bus is falling apart.

“Ca-uh gri“ is not a strange Scottish dialect or Gaelic, the other language of Scotland, but the natural English of the busdriver who was a Londoner!

So if there’s something you haven’t understood, just ask.

If your English is good and if you really like languages and love listening for different accents then you will have a very interesting time in Scotland. There are a lot of incomers in Scotland who have kept their own non-Scottish accent but who have settled down completely (like the Londoner above). There are also many young people doing summer jobs in Scotland: I was served in the tearoom at Duart Castle on Mull (where part of the film “Entrapment“ (Verlockende Falle) with Sean Connery and Catherine Zeta-Jones was filmed) by an Australian girl, and on the island of Iona by a New Zealander.

There is also a wide variety of accents within Scottish English, from cities and regions – there’s Glasgow, Edinburgh, Aberdeen, Ayrshire, Perthshire, Argyllshire, the accents of the Western Isles and the Northern Isles and so on. On the ferry from Oban to Craignure on Mull there is one captain who makes the announcements first in the soft West Highland accent of a Gaelic-English bilingual, then in Gaelic.

Food

Try Scottish cheese –the most common is Scottish cheddar but there is a big variety, made all over Scotland, with a slightly different taste. If you like a stronger tasting cheese then look for “mature“ on the label. Cheddar is eaten in chunks, in slices on bread or rolls, and grated on pasta.

Go to any baker’s or the bakery section of a big supermarket and you will find a very big selection of baked goods. Try scones, pancakes, crumpets, and if you have a sweet tooth try all the cakes for cutting like Gingerbread or Sultana cake.

You’ll find that we make good use of oats (Hafer) in baking and cooking. Fresh herring coated in oatmeal and fried in the frying pan is delicious. The oatmeal has a nutty taste, different from Haferflocken. Oatcakes are very simple flat biscuits made of oatmeal, slightly salty, wonderful with cheddar cheese. If you’re going on a long hike, put a packet of oatcakes, some Cheddar cheese and an apple in your rucksack – better than sandwiches.

Fish and shellfish (Muscheln) are good in Scotland, but a lot is exported for sale in Spain! Fish and chips is our fast food number one. Some harbour towns also have small stands at the pier where they sell fresh local fish in rolls or sandwiches.

Scottish sweets (Bonbons) are sugar bombs! Scotland used to import sugar cane from the Caribbean plantations and became very inventive with recipes using sugar, spices, butter, and cream to make fudge, toffee, tablet.

Scottish desserts are also luscious! Some use the local soft fruit (strawberries, raspberries), others use the raisins, sultanas and spices that were introduced to Scotland from the colonies. Try sticky toffee pudding.

Try drinking tea, even if you are not a tea fan at home. It tastes as different from tea in Germany as Gingerbread does from Gewürzkuchen. Order a pot of tea and some scones or pancakes.

For a lunchtime snack try soup – Scotch broth, carrot and coriander, pea, ham and lentil are all popular.

If you have some money spare and want to have a really good meal in a really good restaurant, ask the local people what they would recommend. Some of the very best restaurants in Scotland are out in the country, in little old cottages, with thick white walls, red roof. Small, cosy, friendly inside. In one of my favourites the owner/chef is a German.

A little extra about Glasgow

There is so much to do and see in Glasgow that you could spend an entire holiday there: Kelvingrove Museum and Art Gallery, The Burrell Collection, Glasgow Cathedral, the Gallery of Modern Art (GOMA), the City Halls (all free); the architecture of the whole city centre (also free, you just need to look up at it); and there is shopping :-)) and lots of pubs with live music ...

Glasgow is the home of three universities and the Royal Concert Hall, and is twinned with Nürnberg. You can find some interesting material on this from 'das Amt für Internationale Beziehungen Nürnberg' at:

www.nuernberg.de/internet/international

Enjoy the planning and enjoy your trip!

Once you get there you will find there are very good Tourist Information Centres, set up to really help the visitor. The centre in Oban for example is located in what used to be a church, near the station and harbour, and provides all the information and assistance any visitor could possibly want, from the week's weather forecast to accommodation bookings anywhere in Scotland.

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