



From
£9,206 GBP

Single Room

£11,009 GBP

Twin Room

£9,206 GBP

Prices valid until
30th December 2025

20 days

Duration

Scotland

Destination

Level 2 - Moderate

Activity

Scottish Islands and Shetland small group tours for seniors

May 25 2025 to Jun 13 2025

Scottish Islands and Shetland small group tours

Odyssey offers easy, convenient, and relaxed escorted small group tours across Scotland and includes the Scottish isles. We explore the Scottish isles fairy-tale natural beauty, its ancient heritage, its World Heritage Sites, and world famous islands, all with some truly spectacular scenery along the way. This and more is all waiting to be explored on one of Odyssey's small group tours of Scotland, designed for the senior traveller, and led by experienced, and enthusiastic like minded people



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<https://www.odysseytraveller.com>

30-Apr-2025

These Scottish Island tours are small group journeys, featuring the Outer Hebrides, Orkney, and Shetland Islands, specifically designed for mature-aged and senior travellers. Ideal for those seeking to explore beyond the Scottish mainland, these tours focus on the rich history and remarkable sites of the Orkney archipelago and the Outer Hebrides.

This 20-day guided journey takes you through a variety of Scottish isles, including the Shetland Isles, with three departures each year. This unique travel experience delves into the nation's rich living history, exploring not only the iconic Scottish islands but also smaller, lesser-known gems like Mousa Island. These islands offer stunning scenery and distinct charm, all navigated using the Calmac ferry network.

While many island residents lead modern lives, the region is steeped in history, with ancient sites and archaeological treasures. Highlights include the prehistoric Callanish standing stones and stone circle on Lewis and Harris, as well as other isolated monuments and breathtaking natural landscapes. Picturesque villages add to the charm of this unforgettable journey. The program also includes guided tours of the Shetland and Orkney Islands, where you'll explore the Neolithic wonders of Orkney, such as Skara Brae. To complete the experience, the tour includes a visit to a whisky distillery on the Isle of Arran.

Odyssey Traveller's escorted small group tours are specifically designed for senior and mature-aged travelers, welcoming both couples and solo adventurers from around the globe.

A Brief History of Scotland

Modern-day Scotland had its roots in the Celtic settlements during the Iron Age, and was formed by the subsequent waves of invasions and established kingdoms.

The Celts arrived in Scotland during the Iron Age (circa 500 BC). Our knowledge of this group of tribes come to us filtered through Roman eyes, as it was the Romans who first chronicled their lifestyles and

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fighting prowess.

The Romans invaded Britain in 43 AD, but they were unsuccessful in fighting the Celtic tribes in the north. Julius Agricola, a Roman governor, marched into what is now Scotland around 80 AD and spent four years trying to subdue the tribes. Emperor Hadrian decided fighting the Celts was futile and pulled back, building Hadrian's Wall around 122 AD in England to mark the northern limit of Roman Britain.

The Romans abandoned Britain around 410 AD, and the region was settled by other invading parties, such as the Vikings and the Germanic Anglo-Saxons. The Vikings and the establishment of a Viking settlement would have a long and lasting presence in certain parts of Scotland: Norse earls would rule the Hebrides until 1266, and the islands of Shetland and Orkney would remain with the Vikings until it was annexed to Scotland as part of a dowry in 1472. (Read more in our article on the Shetland Islands.)

Before the Vikings, Scotland was settled by the Picts, which the Romans referred to as the Picti, or "painted ones" perhaps due to their habit of painting dye on their bodies (though this claim is contested by modern historians). They were said to have migrated from Scythia (Scandinavia) before settling and forming powerful kingdoms in what is now northern Scotland.

The Viking invasions may have weakened the Picts' forces. While the Picts were able to thwart the Romans for many centuries, in 843 AD, Kenneth MacAlpin, crowned King Kenneth I of the Kingdom of Dál Riada (or Dalriada) crushed their resistance and also became king of the Picts.

Dalriada was composed of parts of northeastern Ireland and western Scotland. The union of Dalriada and Pictish lands in northern Scotland formed the Kingdom of Alba, which became the starting point of the Scots' expansion of their territory.

The Scottish Highland and the Lowland regions diverged culturally following the Battle of Hastings that marked Norman ascendancy in

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England. The Anglo-Norman feudal system was introduced to the Lowlands, but the Dalriadan clan system persisted in the Scottish Highland. Gaelic would be spoken in the Highlands until the 19th century, and to this day Highland English displays strong influence of Gaelic in its grammar and pronunciation.

Tour of Scotland and Shetland Itinerary

This Scottish Islands and tours of Shetland islands program focuses particularly on the culture and heritage of the Scottish islanders. Because Odyssey ensures that these are small group tours of upto 16 people, we stay in comfortable family-run hotels and cruise to some of the more isolated Scottish isles. As we visit each island, we take short history tours and take in some of the most breathtaking scenery in the British Isles on the west coast that are the islands around Scotland. Our escorted tour of the Scottish Islands also includes a stop at the ancient Island of Iona. This is the point from which St. Columba took Celtic Christianity to the British Isles. Our trip also includes time on the outer Hebrides islands of Lewis and Harris. Here, our tour with a local guide features encounters with fantastic geological formations and archaeological collections of Scottish stone circles. We also make sure to visit the Isle of Skye, including the striking mountains of the Storr and the charming village of Portree.

Guided by a local tour guide, their passion for these unique islands of Scotland shines through. Whilst on this small group tour, we learn about land management today, the relationship of peat and whisky, the settlement of the islands as part of the greater exploration of the North Atlantic and the burial mounds and the unique wildlife of the Scottish Islands including puffins nesting along the cliffs and shetland ponies and maybe otters. With these trips we gain local insights on the relationship with the mainland and learn about the invasions repelled from both the North and the South. And of course the contemporary lives of this diverse collection of people who now inhabit the Islands around Scotland. It is, as we will discover, the local people today who are keeping the history and lifestyle of our destinations alive.



About our small group tours Scottish Isles

This 20-day Scottish Island tour for mature travellers starts in Glasgow on the River Clyde. The tour continues to seven terrific islands whilst passing many more as we circumnavigate the striking landscapes of the Scottish coastline from west to east.

Odyssey's tour of the Scottish Islands visits:

- The island of Arran
- Isle of Mull
- Isle of Skye
- Harris & Lewis
- Orkney Islands
- Shetland Islands

Finally, we end our tour in Edinburgh. While we only include one night in an Edinburgh hotel, you can prolong your trip to take in the major sights: the Royal Mile, Palace of Holyroodhouse, and of course, make time for another whisky distillery tour!

The Scottish Isles small group educational program is terrific for couples or solo travellers.

Typically Odyssey Traveller offers 3 departures each year of this program to the Scottish islands, in order to ensure we can keep the groups at a manageable size and offer you as many options as possible.

This tour link to a small group tour of the Faroe Islands.

For more details, click the 'Top 5' or 'Itinerary' buttons above! If you're keen to experience this tour, please call or send an email. Or, to book,



simply fill in the form on the right hand side of this page.

You can also start by reading our [country spotlight on Scotland](#).

Articles about the Scottish Isles published by Odyssey Traveller.

The following list of articles published by odyssey Traveller for mature aged and senior travellers to maximise their knowledge and enjoyment of Scotland when visiting:

- [The Scottish Isles](#)
- [Shetland Islands Discovered](#)
- [Questions about the Outer Hebrides](#)
- [How the Atlantic Ocean shaped early life in Europe](#)
- [Skara Brae](#)

For all the articles Odyssey Traveller has published for mature aged and senior travellers, click through [on this link](#).

External articles to assist you on your visit to Scotland

- [A Long Love Affair With the Scottish Isles, in Pictures](#)
- [The hidden history of Scotland's Small Isles](#)
- [10 things you \(probably\) didn't know about Scottish history](#)

The rest of our Scotland-related articles can be found [here](#).

Tour Notes

- CalmaFerry routes and schedules are subject to change so, although we will include all elements in the tour, the order/nights

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may change

- Many of the hotels used on this tour are small or in heritage buildings. Lifts and/or portorage may not be available.
- Maximum of 16 participants.

Published May 2016. Latest update Sept 2024.

Tour Notes

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Highlights

1. Meet hard working people busy at the crafts that occupied the lives of their ancestors at the Orkney and Shetland Islands.
2. Experience Scotland in miniature on the Isle of Arran.
3. Explore the outer Hebridean Islands of Lewis and Harris with their fantastic geological formations, standing stones, and Broch.
4. See Iona, the tiny island from which St. Columba took Celtic Christianity to the British Isles.
5. Visit the western Isles of the Hebrides where our ferry takes us to the Isle of Skye.

Itinerary

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Day 1

Locations: Glasgow

Overview:

After arriving into Glasgow, make your own arrangements for transfer to the hotel. We meet the tour leader at 1:30pm at the hotel lobby for a brief introduction followed by a walking tour of Glasgow.

Later in the afternoon we have a Welcome Meeting with an overview of our program before dinner at a local restaurant.

Accommodation:

1 night at Moxy Glasgow or similar.

Day 2-3

Locations: Glasgow - Arran

Overview:

In the morning we will have a guided tour of Glasgow, visiting the main sights of the city including the [River Clyde shipbuilding area](#). From Ayrshire, we cross the Firth of Clyde to the [Island of Arran](#). With its rugged granite mountain peaks in the north and green rolling hills and pretty villages in the south, it is believed that Arran has been populated since the end of the last Ice Age. The island boasts a number of [Neolithic burial tombs and the Bronze Age stone circle](#). The island was purchased from the Vikings after the Battle of Largs and it is said that Robert the Bruce received the signal to re-invade Scotland while his followers were harassing the English garrison at Brodick Castle. We will have a chance to see this 13th century castle. The island is now best known for outdoor activities and its [distillery](#) producing whisky, and local producers of cheese, and oatcakes.

Accommodation:

2 nights at the Auchrannie Hotel or similar.



Day 4

Locations: Oban

Overview:

From Arran we take a ferry to the strangely-shaped Scottish peninsula of Kintyre, traversing magnificent scenery and visiting fine gardens such as Arduaine, noted for its spectacular displays of rhododendrons and azaleas.

Accommodation:

1 night at Muthu Dalmally Hotel or similar.

Day 5-6

Locations: Mull

Overview:

We will explore the outstanding scenery of [Mull](#), one of the larger of the Inner Hebridean islands. Mull offers rough moorlands, the rocky peak of Ben More, and a stunning coastline. The 13th century Duart Castle, home of the chief of the Maclean clan, is our next stop. We will visit the pretty fishing village of Tobermory and see the brightly coloured buildings lining the harbour.

We will see the burial place of Lachlan Macquarie, one of the first [governors of Australia](#) who was a native of Mull. We will make our pilgrimage to the tranquil [islet of Iona](#), which is the birthplace of Celtic Christianity in Britain. A restored abbey stands on the site where Irish Saint Columba began his crusade in 563 and where 48 Scottish kings are said to be buried. Though not covered within the tour cost, there may also be time, – weather and ferry timing permitting – to make the trip to Fingal's cave on the Isle of Staffa, one of Scotland's natural wonders and inspiration for Mendelssohn's "Hebrides Overture." *Note: the landing on Staffa can be very hazardous, due to the slippery basalt stones and tide levels.*

Accommodation:

2 nights at Western Isles Hotel or similar.



Day 7-8

Locations: Isle of Skye

Overview:

The [Isle of Skye](#), renowned for its rugged and dramatic scenery, has enjoyed a turbulent geological history and is the largest island of the Inner Hebrides. Its abandoned crofts pay testament to the brutal Highland Clearances which followed the battle of Culloden and it is historically significant as the Island that provided refuge to Bonnie Prince Charlie after the battle.

We will explore from the rugged volcanic plateau of the north to the peaks of the Cuillins. We are never far from the sea and will experience numerous sea-lochs, limestone grasslands dotted with sheep and cattle, and crofts abandoned during the Highland Clearances, when landowners demanded rent instead of military service from their tenants. Thousands of tenants were evicted and emigrated when they were unable to afford the impost. We learn about clan heritage and see the castle at Dunvegan. We will also visit Armadale Castle, which houses the Clan Donald Visitors' Centre, and experience the local whisky.

Accommodation:

2 nights at The Ardvasar or similar.

Day 9-11

Locations: Lewis & Harris

Overview:

We explore the islands of Lewis and Harris, which are separated by a narrow isthmus, with the [ancient Standing Stones](#) of Callanish and the ruins of Carloway Broch providing testament to long habitation here. We also visit the bustling harbour of Stornoway, view the [rolling peat moors of Lewis](#), and the mountains of Harris. For centuries, the peat bogs of the eastern shores have provided islanders with fuel and man has been here for 6,000 years living off the sea and the thin turf. However, abandoned monuments attest to the difficulties faced in commercializing the islanders' traditional skills such as the tough [Harris Tweed](#), known throughout the world. Gaelic, part of an enduring culture, is still spoken on the islands. We learn more about the recent past at Arnol's Black



House Museum, a showcase of crofting life, and there is chance to experience the local producers of cheese, smoked fish, and tweed.

Accommodation:

2 nights at Royal Hotel and 1 night at Arch Inn or similar.

Day 12

Locations: Thurso

Overview:

We board our early morning ferry for our return to mainland Scotland where we visit Dunnett Head, the most northerly point on mainland Britain. On a clear day it commands extensive views which include the [Orkney Islands](#) to the north, and the length of the north coast of Scotland from Duncansby Head to the east, and to Cape Wrath, in the west. We will drive via Kylesku to a small, remote fishing village, and visit Durness, where we explore Dunnet Head.

Accommodation:

1 night at The Portland Lybster or similar.

Day 13-14

Locations: Orkney

Overview:

On [Orkney small group tours](#) we will experience some of the most beautiful scenery in the British isles. On the Orkney mainland we learn on our Orkney tour about some of the prehistoric, Celtic, and [Viking](#) influences on the island peoples, visit some of the picturesque small towns and villages, and catch a glimpse of some of the island's seals, otters, and colonies of sea birds while we search for historical treasures in its great collection of ancient sites. After lunch the Orkney tour visits the Standing Stones of Stenness, the Ring of Brodga, and the prehistoric village of [Skara Brae](#). We will also learn about the wartime history of the island as we view the Churchill Barriers and Italian Chapel, the St Magnus Cathedral.

Both Orkney and Shetland have close links to the Nordic countries through language, lifestyle, and history, despite the fact that the Orkney

Islands are within 10 kilometres of mainland Scotland. The Orkney isles differs from the Shetland isle in that it has flat and undulating islands with rich soil, which makes the grass green and nurtures summer crops of grain. Shetlanders are fishermen with farms while Orcadians are farmers with boats. Orkney is, however, still known for its dramatic coastal scenery, abundant marine bird life, and islands which contain the densest concentration of prehistoric and ancient sites in Britain, testifying to their long history of settlement. Eighteen of the 67 Orkney island are inhabited.

Accommodation:

2 nights at Orkney Hotel or similar.

Day 15

Locations: Overnight Ferry

Overview:

On the second day on Orkney small group tours we will have a morning guided tour of Kirkwall, and a visit to Bishop's and Early's Palaces, before leaving you the afternoon to further explore Orkney island. We will then have dinner at a local restaurant before boarding an overnight ferry to travel between Orkney and Shetland. Northlink Ferries have all the attributes of a mini cruise liner with en-suite cabins, restaurant, bar, and lounges. A typical local breakfast is provided during the cruise.

Accommodation:

1 night on Northlink Ferry.

Day 16-17

Locations: Shetland

Overview:

We will view the wild, untamed scenery of Shetland, where we may catch a glimpse of some of the islands' tiny ponies, colonies of sea birds, and other wildlife. We trace the ancient Celtic and Viking influences on the Shetland island peoples and their language, as we visit some of the remote villages in our search for historical treasures. We will also visit the Shetland island museum in [Lerwick](#), the harbour of

Scalloway, the Sunburgh Head, and Jarlshof, where the museum explains the sprawling sea-front ruins spanning 3,000 years. We take a short ferry to Mousa Island, and enjoy a nature walk and also visit Mousa Broch, the best preserved Iron Age tower in existence, where it is still possible to climb the staircase to marvel at the commanding view and workmanship of this 2000 year-old building.

The Shetlands are just over 300 kilometres from the Norwegian coast and were under Norse rule until 1469. About 14 of the hundred or so islands in the Shetland island group are occupied and these cliff-edged islands now form the northernmost part of Scotland. Shetlanders have a distinctive dialect derived from their long connection with Norway and nowhere on the islands is more than 8 kilometres from the sea, so that fishing and salmon farming still provide a major contribution to the economy. However, North Sea Oil has been the major source of recent revenue. Shetland too boasts some of Britain's most stunning coastal scenery, awesome colonies of sea birds, abundant marine life, and a rich pre-history

Accommodation:

2 nights at Scalloway Hotel or similar.

Day 18

Locations: Overnight Ferry

Overview:

From Shetland we again take an overnight Northlink Ferry to [Aberdeen](#) from where we travel to the Scottish capital, [Edinburgh](#). During our overnight Northlink Ferry service we stay in cabins and breakfast will be included.

Day 19

Locations: Edinburgh

Overview:

The city of Edinburgh, the capital of modern-day Scotland, is of great political, cultural, and historical interest. Located near the Firth of Forth, in the Scottish Lowlands, Edinburgh is a city of 2 halves. The old part,

with its impressive castle and the Royal Mile stretching down to Holyrood Palace, contrasts with the more recent section of garden squares and [elegant Georgian architecture](#). Princes Street is one of its best-known thoroughfares. Edinburgh is a sophisticated city with a long and rich history, gothic monuments, a royal palace, challenging museums, interesting art galleries, and many churches.

Accommodation:

1 night at Leonardo Royal, Edinburgh Haymarket or similar.

Day 20

Locations: Edinburgh

Overview:

This tour concludes in Edinburgh. If you wish to extend your stay, please contact your Educational Travel Adviser.

Inclusions / Exclusions

What's included in our Tour

- 17 nights of hotel accommodation.
- 2 nights of cabin accommodation on board a ferry (single clients may need to share depending on availability).
- 19 breakfasts and 11 dinners.
- All entry fees and services of local expert driver/guide.
- Cruises, ferry crossings, field trips, and excursions as indicated.
- Touring by comfortable and modern mini-coach.
- Services of a Tour Leader for the duration of tour.
- Gratuities and necessary tips.
- Detailed preparatory information.

What's not included in our Tour

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- Return airfare and departure taxes.
- Comprehensive travel insurance.
- Items of a personal nature, such as telephone calls and laundry.
- Porterage.
- Meals not specified in the itinerary.

Level 2 - Moderate

Participants must be able to carry their own luggage, climb and descend stairs, be in good health, mobile and able to participate in 3-5 hours of physical activity per day, the equivalent of walking/hiking up to 8 kilometres on uneven ground.

Please do not hesitate to contact us with any requests for further information about this tour or any others offered by Odyssey Travel.