

The North Highlands



A scenic tour along the North Coast 500 route through Wester Ross, Assynt, Sutherland, Caithness and Easter Ross.

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The road to Glencarron on the iconic North Coast 500 Route



Sango Bay, Durness



Ardreck Castle, Assynt



Dunrobin Castle, Sutherland

Ideas to inspire

Uncover 500 miles of stunning scenery and fascinating history in the North Highlands along the iconic North Coast 500 route, which is set to become Scotland's answer to the USA's Route 66.

This 500 mile journey of a lifetime boasts some of the most magnificent scenery in Europe - wild mountains and lochs, foaming salmon rivers, rugged coastlines with mighty sea cliffs and secluded sandy bays, traditional crofts and large farms, fishing villages and bustling towns and a fine selection of visitor attractions.

On your first day, visit Wester Ross and take in the striking mountains of Torridon and the sea lochs that cut into this stunning part of the Highlands. Make the epic road journey to Applecross and, further north, visit the splendid Inverewe Garden at Poolewe. Look out for wildcats, sea eagles and pine martens at the Beinn Eighe National Nature Reserve, on the shores of beautiful Loch Maree.

On your second day, journey north to Cape Wrath lighthouse through breathtaking Assynt scenery. You'll always remember the brilliant moment when you first gazed across the 3,000 million year old landscape of the North West Highlands Geopark. See the grand peaks of Suilven and Stac Pollaidh and be amazed by the rugged terrain of the far north west as you revel in this true wilderness.

Travel further east and discover the Pictish and Viking mysteries of Caithness or some archaeological gems along the Strathnaver Trail. Reach the most northerly point of the British mainland at Dunnet Head and witness the remarkable Stacks of Duncansby.

On your last day, discover beautiful Easter Ross, an area full of wonderful castles and distilleries. Follow the Highland Pictish Trail from Inverness to Dunrobin Castle. Don't forget to stop for a refreshment at the Glenmorangie Distillery or the Black Isle Brewery.

Brilliant events in the North Highlands:

January - Hogmanay, across the Highlands

Join in street parties in many towns together with ceilidh dancing, music and fireworks. Hotels also organise special ceilidhs, dinners and dances for your group to welcome in the New Year.

April - Northern Nashville Caithness Country Music Festival, Halkirk Riding Centre

Be part of this three-day, five-show extravaganza of live country music, which brings together stars from Scotland, Ireland, Europe and the USA.

May - September - Highland Games, across the Highlands

These truly Highland events uniquely combine traditional 'heavy' sporting events of caber tossing and hammer throwing, with traditional competitions for piping and Highland dancing, with musical competitions for piping or dancing.

August - Black Isle Show, Muir of Ord, near Inverness

An agricultural show with something for everyone – from sheep shearing to daring motorbike displays, a local food and craft festival and a colourful flower show.

August - Summer Isles Festival, Achiltibuie, Assynt

A great opportunity to enjoy some superb music and Highland culture in a unique west coast setting, with delicious food, arts and crafts and musical workshops.

September - The Wild North Festival, various locations, North Highlands

Three wild weekends of outdoor fun in the Highlands, including forest walks, archaeology, whale and dolphin watching and fossil hunting.

September - Blas Festival, various venues across the Highlands

Be part of a huge international celebration of Highlands music, dance and Gaelic language, with concerts and performances right across the region.

For more ideas, contacts and suggested itineraries, go to visitscotlandtraveltrade.com or email us at traveltrade@visitscotland.com

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Day 1 – Wester Ross & Assynt



1
BEINN EIGHE NATIONAL NATURE RESERVE – With a cluster of mountain peaks, ancient pinewoods, secretive crossbills and soaring golden eagles, Beinn Eighe is Britain's oldest National Nature Reserve. Situated just outside Kinlochewe, facilities include a small visitor centre, a picnic site, toilets and parking, great trails for all abilities, interpretive panels and a fabulous viewpoint overlooking stunning Loch Maree.



2
HEBRIDEAN WHALE CRUISES – Take your group on a wildlife cruise from Gairloch, on Scotland's spectacular north west coast. You might spot whales, dolphins, porpoises, basking sharks - the great creatures of the sea and seals and otters on the shoreline. Two boats operate daily whale and wildlife cruises: offshore in the open waters of the North Minch and inshore around Loch Gairloch.



3
INVEREWE GARDEN – This is one of the most beautiful places in Scotland. Helped by the warm currents of the Gulf Stream, Inverewe Garden is an oasis of exotic plants bursting with vibrant colour on a latitude more northerly than that of Moscow. Marked footpaths provide access to the wider estate with its lochside wildlife hide and opportunities to spot all kind of birds and wildlife throughout the year.



4
CORRIESHALLOCH GORGE AND FALLS OF MEASACH – Situated south east of Ullapool, this spectacular mile-long gorge is one of the finest examples in Britain of a box canyon and provides a great stop for your group. A suspension bridge a little way downstream gives you views down into this spectacular, steep-sided gorge. Further downstream, a viewing platform provides an excellent vantage point.



Optional extras
HIGHLAND STONEWARE – Highland Stoneware has built an international reputation for quality and innovation since 1974. From making its own clay to the finished pot, each piece is handmade by a dedicated team of craftspeople. Visitors are welcome to watch items being individually hand painted and designed by talented artists and potters at the workshops in Lochinver and Ullapool.

Day 2 - Assynt and the North West



1
SUMMER QUEEN CRUISES – Summer Queen is the only boat from Ullapool that cruises through all the Summer Isles and lands on the main island Tanera Mhor for 45 minutes. Four hour morning and two hour afternoon cruises take in the beauty of Loch Broom and the Summer Isles, with stunning scenery, geological and historical points of interest and close wildlife encounters. Vessel seats 45 persons.



2
KNOCKAN CRAG – Unlock the mysteries of one of the oldest landscapes in Europe. At Knockan Crag National Nature Reserve, Scotland's story of ancient oceans, vast deserts and ice sheets, crashing continents and epic journey from pole to pole is told through poetry, sculpture and interactive exhibitions. Facilities include a car park, toilets, interpretative centre and trails ranging from easy to strenuous.



3
FARRAID HEAD & BALNAKEIL BEACH – North from Durness lies the rocky headland of Farraid Head projecting two miles straight out into the Pentland Firth offering a magnificent walk. On the western side of the neck of land leading to it are the magnificent beaches and dunes of Balnakeil Bay. The beach is wide and white, and is backed to the east by a huge expanse of tall dunes covered in marram grass.



4
SMOO CAVE – This dramatic and spectacular limestone sea-cave near Durness in Sutherland boasts one of the largest entrances to any sea cave in Britain at 50 ft high and is floodlit inside. It was formed by a burn that runs down into the rear chamber, as well as erosion caused by the sea. A stepped path leads down from the car park and there is a walkway through the cave. The cave can be explored by boat in summer time.



Optional extras
DURNESS GOLF CLUB – Interesting and testing 9-hole course in the idyllic surroundings of Sutherland that will appeal to all golf enthusiasts. The course has 9 greens, but the construction of 18 tees means variety and a very different challenge over the closing holes. Its final hole involves a 155 yard drive across the Atlantic, and another hole involves a local rule to give way to anglers on an inland loch.

Day 3 - Sutherland and Caithness



1
STRATHNAVER MUSEUM AND TRAIL – Journey through Strathnaver's mystical past, from the emergence of the Clan Mackay to the tragedy of the Highland Clearances. The Museum has a wide range of fascinating exhibits. Take a stroll along the Strathnaver Trail and discover the remains of Neolithic horned chamber cairns, Bronze Age cairns, Iron Age brochs and Pictish carved stones.



2
THE CASTLE AND GARDENS OF MEY – Visit the Castle and Gardens of Mey, east of Thurso. The Scottish residence of the late Queen Mother, this is also the most northerly inhabited castle on the British mainland. Have a delicious snack in the tearoom, browse in the shop and check out the animal centre or just wander in the grounds and gardens and view the magnificent scenery across the Pentland Firth to the Orkney Islands.



3
CAITHNESS HORIZONS – This magnificently restored building in Thurso houses a fascinating museum with exhibitions about the history and natural heritage of northern Scotland. The collection includes Pictish stones, fossils, military memorabilia and reconstructions of granny's kitchen and living room. In addition, you will find a gallery, a gift shop and a café which serves delicious home-baking.



4
THE OLD PULTENEY DISTILLERY – The Old Pulteney Distillery near Wick's historic harbour is the most northerly on the mainland and continues to make malt whisky using traditional methods nearly two centuries after its opening. Take a group guided tour, sample a complimentary dram and visit the excellent visitor centre, with a full range of souvenirs and products available in the shop.



Optional extras
THE GREY CAIRNS OF CAMSTER – Visit those enormous prehistoric burial chambers which are over 4,000 years old. The cairns demonstrate the complexity of Neolithic architecture, with central burial chambers accessed through narrow passages from the outside. Excavated and restored by Historic Scotland in the late 20th century, they are now open to the public.

Day 4 - Sutherland and Easter Ross



1
TIMESPAN HERITAGE CENTRE & ART GALLERY – Visit this museum of social and natural history, contemporary art gallery, archive, gift shop, garden and café in a beautiful riverside location in Helmsdale. The museum provides the visitor with a wealth of information about past ways of life and some of the more turbulent events in Sutherland's history combined with local stories and folklore from the past and present.



2
DUNROBIN CASTLE – Dunrobin is the most northerly of Scotland's great houses and one of Britain's oldest continuously inhabited castles, dating back to the early 1300s. Dunrobin is also known for its formal gardens, where daily falconry displays involving Highland birds such as peregrine falcons and golden eagles take place. Don't miss the fascinating Garden Museum and the Castle Tea Room which offers light meals and snacks.



3
ROYAL DORNOCH – Dornoch is home to an outstanding championship golf course and a magnificent 13th century cathedral. The links of the famous Royal Dornoch Golf Club stand as one of the great outposts of world golf and one of the finest of all golf courses. Remoteness is part of its charm and the only reason that this magnificent links remains out of the mainstream of major championship golf.



4
GLENMORANGIE DISTILLERY – Glenmorangie Distillery has been producing its Single Highland Malt Scotch Whisky in Tain since 1843. Take a guided tour and watch the skilled mashmen, stillmen and warehousemen as they go about their daily work. You will experience all stages of the whisky making process from mashing and fermenting to distilling and maturing - all culminating in a dram or two of your choice.



Optional extras
HUGH MILLER'S BIRTHPLACE COTTAGE – This museum in picturesque Gromarty celebrates prominent 19th-century Highland geologist and writer Hugh Miller. Today the Georgian villa, Miller House, is a museum which presents his life and work, while the thatched fisherman's cottage beside it was his birthplace and early home. A peaceful garden and picturesque courtyard completes the visitor experience.