

Outer Hebrides and St Kilda

Sun 2nd Jul to Thurs 13th Jul 2023

The Outer Hebrides has been named the best place to live in the UK. We cycle the length of the Outer Hebrides over 12 days in mid-summer, with countless golden sandy beaches and quiet roads, so you can form your own opinion. Many of the roads are single track with passing places. There are only 26,500 people spread over the 130 mile length of the islands, and the biggest town of Stornoway has just 7,000. Optional day trip to St Kilda, Britain's only mixed natural and cultural UNESCO World Heritage Site, is an absolute must for bird watchers.

There are two long days of cycling, but the ascent is modest.

Grade 5

Itinerary

Sun 2nd July - Meet in Oban and Ferry to Barra

Meet at the ferry terminal in Oban, and sail out on the Sound of Mull (between Mull and Ardnamurchan) then over the open seas to Castlebay on Barra

- No cycling
- Accommodation: Hotel

Mon 3rd July - Circular ride round Barra

Cycling south and over our first causeway to Vatersay. Here there are beautiful sandy beaches and a community café.

- Route distance: 35.0 km
- Route altitude gain: 437 m
- Accommodation: Hotel
- Meals: (B)

Tues 4th July - Eriskay and the Uists

Cycle 14k north up the west coast on Barra from Castlebay to the ferry. The ferry takes us to Eriskay and we cross to the other islands using causeways. The cycle from Eriskay to Lochmaddy is 92k but it has a maximum elevation of 53m and a total ascent of 546m. It is possible to take a more direct route and reduce the distance by 14k.

- Route distance: 106.0 km
- Route altitude gain: 758.0 m
- Accommodation: Hotel
- Meals: (B)

Wed 5th July Berneray

Visit lovely Berneray with several beautiful beaches and time to explore. This is just 49k but there is the option of adding a circular ride of north Uist which would bring the total to 88k.

- Route distance: 48.0 km
- Route altitude gain: 376.0 m
- Accommodation: Hotel
- Meals: (B)

Thurs 6th July Lochmaddy to Harris

We take the ferry to Leverburgh on Harris, and cycle the west coast route to Tarbert.

- Route distance: 52.0 km
- Route altitude gain: 800.0 m
- Accommodation: Hotel
- Meals: (B)

Fri 7th July ST KILDA

St Kilda is very highly recommended and we have a few hours on the main island of Hirta, See the web site kildacruises.co.uk for lots of fab photos, a short history of the islands and tour details. Travel to and from Leverburgh by bus is included. The trip is weather permitting, but we have Saturday as a reserve day!

There is a cycle to Huisinis as an alternative, please see details for the cycle below.

- Route distance: 52.0 km
- Route altitude gain: 961.0 m
- Accommodation: Hotel
- Meals: (B)

Sat 8th July Luskentyre

This is planned as an easier day with an 18k cycle out to Luskentyre beach. If anyone is seeking a bigger day of cycling then I recommend adding on a self-guided trip to Scalpay.

- Route distance: 84.0 km
- Route altitude gain: 1211.0 m
- Accommodation: Hotel
- Meals: (B)

Sun 9th July Stornoway

Crossing the hills that separate Harris and Lewis.

- Route distance: 68.0 km
- Route altitude gain: 827.0 m
- Accommodation: Hotel
- Meals: (B, D)

Mon 10th July Tourist day

Circular day trip to see the standing stones at Calanais, the broch at Carloway and the coastal crofting village of Gearrannan.

- Route distance: 78.0 km
- Route altitude gain: 731.0 m
- Accommodation: Hotel
- Meals: (B, D)

Tues 11th July Ullapool

Optional morning cycle along the east coast, and afternoon ferry to Ullapool.

- Route distance: 48.0 km
- Route altitude gain: 569.0 m
- Accommodation: Hotel
- Meals: (B, D)

Wed 12th July Tain

This route avoids the main road (A835 to Inverness) and offers a mixture of quieter and very quiet roads. This will be a long day of cycling, but there are no delays for ferries, and we should all have built up cycle fitness by this stage.

- Route distance: 100.0 km
- Route altitude gain: 1257.0 m
- Accommodation: Hotel
- Meals: (B, D)

Thurs 13th July Inverness

Small ferry across the Cromarty Firth onto the Black Isle, and visit the coastal villages of Rosemarkie and Fortrose, then the bridge across the Beauly Firth to finish in Inverness. We

expect to arrive in Inverness mid-afternoon, so recommend not booking onward transport earlier than 3.30pm.

- Route distance: 64.0 km
- Route altitude gain: 681.0 m
- Accommodation: none
- Meals: (B)

Dates and Prices

Cost

- Land only price: £1570.0

Payment Schedule

A deposit of £200 per person is payable to complete a booking, with the final balance of £1,370 per person to be paid by Friday 28th April 2023. For St Kilda a deposit of £100 is required on booking and final balance of £175 is required by Friday 28th April 2023.

Price includes:

- Ferry costs
- Luggage transfer
- 11 nights accommodation and breakfast
- dinner on 4 nights

Price does not include:

- Travel to and from the start / end points
- lunch, café stops, drinks
- Dinner on 7 nights
- Any other personal expenses
- Travel Insurance

Cancellations

Written Notice Received: Cancellation Charge: Tour + St Kilda day trip

- before Friday 28th April 2023: £200 tour Deposit + £100 St Kilda deposit
- after Friday 28th April 2023: £1,540 tour costs plus St Kilda costs £275

Holiday Information

Area covered by the holiday

- Most of the tour is in the Outer Hebrides which are very sparsely populated, but the start and end days are on the Scottish mainland. The mainland roads may be more busy than on the islands, but probably quiet compared with most of the UK. In addition, where possible, minor roads have been planned.

Travel

- The tour starts from Oban, and ends in Inverness, so travel by train is recommended. At the end of the tour you may catch a train later in the day, or extend your holiday for another night.

Accommodation

- Hotel accommodation, but possibility of B&B in one location

Rooms

- Accommodation on a shared room basis (due to lack of space to offer single occupancy).

Luggage transfer

- A car will be provided for luggage transfer (up to 8-10kg), but in case of a medical priority or breakdown, it may be necessary to carry your own luggage.

Rest Day

- All of the days when we are not moving on are optional rest days. In particular, the first day on Harris and the last day on Lewis would be most suited for a rest.

Roads used

- The holiday is classified as grade 5 (medium)
The holiday is for 12 days and has no formal rest days.
This is a moving on holiday staying for 2 or more nights at 4 locations, and the rest will be a different location each night. So, if anybody needs a rest and repair day, they can sit out on one of the days that we are not moving on. No-one is obliged to ride those days. Most of the roads are minor (some single track) and used by rural/tourist traffic and are hilly in parts. Though we may need to use some busier roads at times, we avoid them as much as possible.
Detailed route notes will be provided before the tour, along with GPS tracks for those who want them.
Most of each day will be spent cycling. People will be expected to ride at their own pace and often in loose groups, at around 10-12 mph on the flat, slower up hills, usually meeting up at cafes for lunch and refreshment breaks. You will be notified of recommended refreshment stops each day.
It is expected that you may want to stop for photographs, look at the view or explore some local point of interest and this is okay. You are on holiday.

Inevitably, parts of the route are hilly, so you do need to be fit to get the most out of this tour. It is essential to get out on your bike and do some 50-mile rides before the tour starts. There are some steep descents too, so you should be able to negotiate these safely.

On days where we are catching a ferry, it is important that we meet up on time. The route is planned to allow time for cycling at modest speeds and still be on time for the ferry. For the big ferries (to Barra and to Ullapool) we need to meet up at least 1 hour beforehand (to load any luggage onto the car). For all other smaller ferries we need to meet up 30 minutes before in order to allow time for any punctures etc.

Please note it may not always be possible to follow the itinerary exactly due to road works or weather etc, as things do not always go as planned. In these circumstances, you will be advised of alternative arrangements.

The Leader and Deputy will share the luggage transfer and ride leadership between them. Often with one ahead and the other behind. They will not always be at the front of the group but may be anywhere within it, as circumstances require, so you will need to be aware of the route each day. This information will be given to you before, or at the beginning of the holiday, and again at daily briefings

Weather and Clothing

- Like the rest of the UK the weather in Scotland is very variable. Please bring sun screen and waterproofs, as you might need to use both on the same day.

There is a possibility of both heat waves and cold, wet weather, so be prepared for all possibilities. The temperature in July is likely to be between 10 and 16 degrees. On average some rainfall can be expected on 5 days of the tour with an average total of 30 mm of rain. Summer is also the least windy season.

Lightweight clothing, suitable for a range of temperatures, is needed and possibly smarter clothing for the more up-market hotels (though they seem to be very relaxed about what people wear).

Lightweight waterproofs/windproofs will be needed and also warmer clothing for the evenings.

Cycling clothes. Two sets of clothing are recommended as you can wash each evening; two short sleeved tops, a long sleeved top, or arm warmers, shorts, longs or leg warmers, two pairs of socks, a cap or helmet cover and two pairs of short gloves with a pair of finger gloves for rain and cold. Helmet and cycling shoes. Clear riding glasses. Sun cream, lip balm and sun glasses are recommended along with insect bite cream. Evening Dress. You will not need too much; Two T-shirts/shirts, one pair lightweight trousers, maybe a pair of shorts, two sets of underwear, two pairs of socks, light pullover/top and lightweight shoes. The lightweight cycling windproof top can be used in the evening if extra warmth is required. Swimwear if you would like the chance of a swim in the sea, average water temperature 13.5 degrees.

Toiletries; These can be kept to a minimum by bringing very small toothpaste tubes, shampoo bottles etc. A very basic first aid kit of plasters and pain killers etc are always

recommended. Some places supply shampoo, but not guaranteed, and a small hotel size bottle is always useful to take and use for clothes washing, which can be done whilst showering. Shaving can also be done using shampoo, as can face washing. A piece of string is useful for hanging washing in the absence of coat hangers.

Cycles / Equipement

- A touring cycle, hybrid, tandem, recumbent or lightweight road bike would all be suitable for this holiday, since we will endeavour to avoid tracks if possible. You should ensure your cycle is well maintained, paying particular attention to wheels, tyres and brakes. A low bottom gear (eg. small chainring the same size or smaller than the largest cog on your rear wheel) is recommended; if unsure about gears, please talk to the Bikexplore Leader about them. Mudguards are optional but demonstrate respect to those who are following you in wet weather. Lights are recommended in case of arriving back late, and are useful if walking outdoors at night. A bell is advised and bring a bike lock for security. Water bottles are required to ensure you are hydrated at all times. You will be expected to carry sufficient spares and tools to deal with punctures and minor repairs, including two inner tubes, a spare gear cable, split link and spare brake pads. There are very few bike shops on the route, and if so they are never when you need them. You are advised to use 28mm tyres, or larger, to suit the variable terrain. You will not need to carry luggage except in case of car breakdown or medical priority. It is suggested that the car luggage weight should be no more than 8kg. A rack-top pack or bar bag will be useful for carrying wet weather gear, spare clothing needed for the day, camera, emergency rations and a map.

Maps & GPS

- Philip's Red Map of the Outer Hebrides covers all of the islands on one map - ISBN 978-1-84907-010-2. For the mainland I recommend bringing a paper backup in the form of relevant pages from an old car road atlas. GPS maps for each day will be provided in advance of the tour.

Fitness and Health

- Please ensure that you are fit and healthy enough to cycle the distances (and ascents) planned for the tour. Use of an electric bike can help enable cyclists to complete long rides.

Travel Insurance

- Travel insurance is highly recommended.

Tour Leader Details

- I led my first tour in 2014, and since then have run tours every year (except one - guess which) and all in Scotland. Visiting almost every one of the larger islands. Originally tours were through CTC Holidays, but now with Bikexplore. My style is to help people enjoy their holiday and visit the many beautiful remote parts of my home country. In fact, one of my greatest pleasures is in sharing the wonderful quiet Scottish roads and scenery. On tour, my partner Diane shares the ride leadership and luggage transfer. Typically people do not cycle all together, but split into small groups of similar speed / interest and we meet at cafes and leap frog along the route. My other great pleasure from running tours is the social aspect: seeing people form friendships that transcend the duration of the tour.

Tour Leader Contact Details

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