

WONDERS OF WALES & THE SCOTTISH ISLES

17 MAY 2020 - 10 JUNE 2020

Tour Cost (\$AUD): From \$21,550 (Based on Standard Stateroom - limited availability) | Cabin upgrades POA
Single Supplement (\$AUD): \$2,750 (Land) | POA (Expedition Cruise)

Tour Duration: 25 days



OVERVIEW

The latest addition to our 'Undiscovered Europe' portfolio is an in-depth discovery of Wales and Scotland, revealing the wealth of magnificent scenery and cultural heritage of these two ancient Celtic nations.

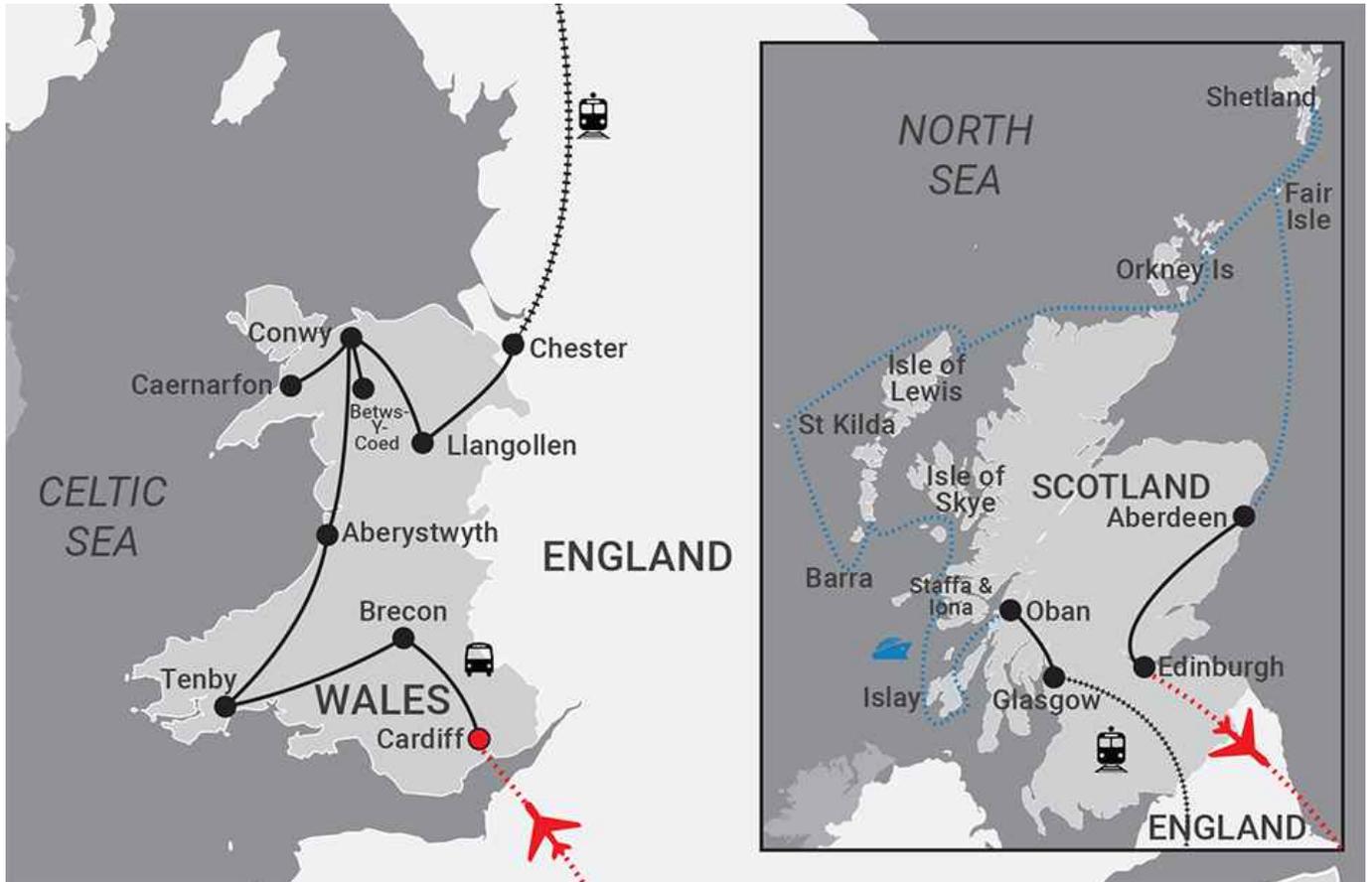
The tour begins with a 10-day exploration of some of the truly hidden gems of Wales, from the vibrant capital, Cardiff, to the Brecon Beacons, Pembrokeshire Coast, and the old walled town of Conwy in the north. Along the way we visit the largest castle in Wales – Caerphilly Castle, discover the Welsh mining culture with a visit to an underground mine, and take a trip on a horse-drawn narrow boat across the magnificent Pontcysyllte Aqueduct that soars high above the River Dee. In Scotland we get right off the beaten track with a 10-night expedition aboard MS Serenissima, which takes us on a remarkable journey to the ruggedly beautiful wilderness, rich history and abundant wildlife of the Scottish Isles. Our voyage takes us to the Inner and Outer Hebrides, St Kilda and the Orkney and Shetland Islands where we immerse ourselves in the history of ages past as we visit ancient brochs, standing stones and stone circles. This is a land where the people are waiting to welcome you to their unique culture and heritage which has evolved in isolation from the mainland over thousands of years. Finally we make landfall at Aberdeen and continue on to the exciting Scottish capital, Edinburgh where we conclude our momentous tour. Join us on a memorable journey to the 'Wonders of Wales & the Scottish Isles'!

Tour Fitness Level: Active

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TOUR MAP



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ITINERARY

17/05/2020 Australia - Doha

Depart from your chosen capital city on your flight to Doha.

18/05/2020 Doha - Cardiff (D)

Depart Doha Qatar Airways QR 321, 07.25

Arrive Cardiff 12.50

Croeso i Gymru - welcome to Wales! On arrival in the Welsh capital we transfer to our hotel in the city centre. The rest of the day is at leisure to rest or take a stroll in this welcoming and vibrant city. In the evening we enjoy a welcome dinner.

Indigo Hotel

Cardiff

19/05/2020 Cardiff (BLD)

Compact, multicultural Cardiff has a wealth of cultural and historic sights and this morning we set out on foot to explore the city and surrounding areas. Our tour takes in such key landmarks as the Principality Stadium, the National Assembly of Wales and the Senedd. After lunch we visit Cardiff Castle, one of the leading heritage attractions in Wales. Located within beautiful parklands in the very heart of the city, the castle is at once a Roman fort, Norman stronghold and Victorian Gothic masterpiece, with more than 2,000 years of history concealed within its walls.

20/05/2020 Cardiff - Brecon Beacons (BLD)

Wales has 641 castles in total and today we visit the biggest of all - Caerphilly Castle, just outside Cardiff. Built by Gilbert 'the Red' de Clare in the 13th century, it is a stone behemoth, surrounded by a series of moats and watery islands. Continuing north we enter the Brecon Beacons National Park, a natural wonder and home to almost 300 monuments, as well as

rushing waterfalls and caves. Later we learn about the historic mining culture of Wales at the 'Big Pit' National Coal Museum, a World Heritage site. Here we enter a cage and descend 90 metres to the pit floor below, where we see the pit pony stables and hear stories from former colliery workers.

Brecon Castle Hotel

Brecon

21/05/2020 Brecon Beacons - Tenby (BLD)

The Pembrokeshire coast offers stunning beaches and bays including Tenby and Saundersfoot, and as we leave the Brecon Beacons behind, we discover these and more. We begin our scenic journey towards the coast, stopping en route at Jabajak Vineyard where we enjoy a tour and tasting of their award-winning wines. After lunch we continue on to Tenby, a lovely seaside town rich in history and culture, and renowned for its glorious beaches and fine Victorian houses.

Elm Grove Country House

Tenby

22/05/2020 Tenby - Aberystwyth (BLD)

Delving deeper into the Pembrokeshire National Park, we visit the smallest city in Britain - St Davids. Here we explore the wonderful cathedral which is the resting place of the patron Saint of Wales, Saint David - or Dewi Sant, as he is called in the Welsh language. Across the road from the cathedral sits the magnificent Bishop's Palace which dates back to the 6th century and is one of the most important religious sites in Wales. Continuing north we enjoy the views along the beautiful Cardigan Bay as we head to the wonderful university town of Aberystwyth. The afternoon is at leisure to explore the town and perhaps enjoy a walk along the promenade before checking into our stately accommodation for the night - a Grade-1 listed

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Georgian mansion!

Nanteos Mansion

Aberystwyth

23/05/2020 Aberystwyth – Conwy (BLD)

Today we travel on one of the 'Great Little Trains of Wales' – the Vale of Rheidol Railway. A narrow-gauge steam locomotive takes us 19 km up the beautiful Rheidol Valley, clinging to the mountainside as we cross through lush valleys to the remarkable Devil's Bridge. We learn the story of the three bridges and then take a leisurely walk around the waterfalls. After lunch we enter the magnificent Snowdonia National Park, home to the largest mountain in England and Wales – Snowdon – as we continue north to the delightful walled town of Conwy.

Caer Rhun Hall

Conwy

24/05/2020 Conwy – Caernarfon – Conwy (BLD)

The busy market town of Caernarfon, just half an hour's drive from Conwy, awaits us this morning. We explore the imposing medieval castle which dominates the town and boasts eight towers, two twin-towered gateways and a well-deserved UNESCO World Heritage status. Later we cross the Menai Strait to the island of Anglesey, an area of outstanding natural beauty, where we delve deep into the past with a visit to the Iron Age and Celtic sites for which it is famous.

25/05/2020 Conwy – Betws-Y-Coed – Conwy (BLD)

Conwy is one of Europe's finest surviving medieval towns and this morning we explore two of its remarkable 'houses'. Conwy Castle is Edward I's most striking and powerful fortress, and perhaps the most impressive of all the Welsh castles. After our exploration here we visit the tiny Quay House, reputed to be the smallest house in Great Britain, at

just 1.8m wide and 3.1m high. Later we drive to Betws-Y-Coed, where we walk along woodland trails to a series of waterfalls and the famous Swallow Falls. After our visit here we return to Conwy.

26/05/2020 Conwy – Llangollen – Chester (BLD)

Leaving Conwy we head east to the town of Llangollen, famous for hosting the International Eisteddfod. Another claim to fame for the town is Thomas Telford's famous Pontcysyllte Aqueduct, that takes the Llangollen canal soaring above the valley of the River Dee. And what better way to see this engineering marvel and the surrounding countryside than by a horse-drawn boat ride across the aqueduct? After our short canal cruise we leave Wales behind and head to England's Roman city of Chester. Chester's city walls are the most complete city walls in Britain, with some sections still intact from 120AD. From here we see great views of this beautiful city and the adjacent landscapes, and later visit the ruins of the Roman amphitheatre just outside the city.

Grosvenor Pulford Hotel

Chester

27/05/2020 Chester – Glasgow (BD)

After breakfast this morning we transfer to the railway station for our journey to Glasgow.

Depart Chester by train, 09.21

Arrive Glasgow 12.59

On arrival in Glasgow we make the short walk to our hotel. The afternoon is at leisure to explore Scotland's second city which features modern architecture beside Italianate steeples, neo-gothic towers and Art Nouveau designs. Early evening we meet for dinner at our hotel where we will be given an introduction to our expedition programme as we commence our discovery of 'Scotland in Depth'.

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Grand Central Hotel

Glasgow

28/05/2020 Glasgow – Oban – Board Ship (BLD)

Travelling north from Glasgow the famed shores of Loch Lomond call us. This freshwater Scottish loch is the largest inland stretch of water in Great Britain by surface area. Ben Lomond, a munro, rising to 974m (3196ft) flanks the eastern shores whilst the highway pushes northwards on the western shores. At Lochawe is Kilchurn Castle, where we connect with the Campbells of Glenorchy, as we walk to the castle ruins, scenically nestled on shore and accessed by a narrow isthmus. Our first view of Oban is unforgettable as we come down the hill towards the bay and the view opens up before us. McCaigs Tower on Battery Hill provides a fitting overview across the western isles of Mull. We are welcomed aboard our expedition ship MS Serenissima, with time to settle in before we steam out of the harbour.

29/05/2020 Gigha & Islay (BLD)

The southernmost isle of the Southern Hebrides, Gigha is one of the smallest populated Islands in the Hebrides. Meaning Good or God Island, the highest mountain is Creag Breahn, a white, sacred rock that stands 100m high. Nestled in woodland and extensive gardens, Achamore House was built in 1884 for Lt-Col William James Scarlet – the 3rd Lord Abinger: the gardens of Achamore House were purchased by the people of Gigha in 2002. To the southwest of the gardens lies 13th century Kilchattan Chapel ruins and an ogam stone, the only one of its kind in the west of Scotland. The earliest documented record of distilling in Scotland occurred as long ago as 1494, in the tax records of the day, the Exchequer Rolls. The entry lists 'Eight bolls of malt to Friar John Cor wherewith to make aqua vitae' (water of life). This afternoon we share a dram of whisky, the water of life, ashore at one of Islay's historic distilleries.

30/05/2020 Staffa & Iona (BLD)

Our visit to Staffa features the hexagonal basalt cliffs which culminate in 'Fingal's Cave' – a spectacular natural feature named by the Celts as Uamh-Binh or 'the Cave of Melody'. Fingal's Cave is the inspiration for Mendelssohn's Hebridean overture and the artist Turner's 'Staffa'. Abundant puffins, gannets, razorbills and guillemots use the island for breeding, accessing the surrounding rich marine environment. This afternoon we visit Iona. Remote today, Iona was once the centre of the Celtic world: in 563 AD, the Irish missionary St. Columba went into exile and established a small monastic community here. However, driven out of Iona by Viking raids, most of the monastic community moved to Kells in Ireland around 800. In more peaceful times, around 1200, a Benedictine abbey and nunnery were established on the site and it is these heavily restored buildings that we see today.

31/05/2020 Loch Courisk & Rum (BLD)

Isle of Skye's southern coast is remote, mainly uninhabited and home to the Cuillin Mountains. Loch Courisk is nestled securely in the landscape's folds of the Cuillin Ridge. A freshwater lake, Loch Courisk is separated from the sea by the River Scavaig known as one of the shortest rivers in the UK. Our walk along this river gives access to the Loch, or the adventurous can take the opportunity to explore the Loch further. Later in the quiet Isle of Rum, Kinloch Castle greets us. Built of Isle of Arran sandstone the castle took three years and upwards of 300 craftsmen to build. One craftsman was unique for the time – an electrician – as this was the first private residence in Scotland to have electricity, derived from a hydro dam constructed on the Coire Dubh Burn. An exceptional castle needed an exceptional garden – 250,000 tons of soil were imported for a walled garden, greenhouses, water features and bridges. Now under the care of the Scottish Natural Heritage its restoration is a work in progress.

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01/06/2020 Mingulay & Barra (BLD)

At the southern tip of the Outer Hebrides, Mingulay is home to puffins, guillemots, kittiwakes, shags, fulmars and razorbills. Sightings of eagles and peregrine falcons are also possible here. The last inhabitants left in 1912, leaving only the foundations of their village, and today Mingulay is owned by the National Trust of Scotland. Barra is the ancestral island of Clan MacNeil whose chiefs were based at Kisimul Castle. The Castle sits just offshore from Castlebay village, on a natural rock outcrop guarding the access to Barra. Alexander, Lord of the Isles, granted the MacNeils the island in 1427. A succession claim to chieftainship was legally established in 1915 – and Kisimul restoration began with the assistance of numerous MacNeils from throughout the world. Everyone who visits feels the power of the Castle, none more so than those named MacNeil. This evening we share in local culture with music from Barra's resident musicians.

02/06/2020 St Kilda (BLD)

Remote and battered by the Atlantic seas, St Kilda, is a near mystical island with dual World Heritage site status for its natural and cultural significance. St Kilda is deemed Europe's most important seabird colony – with abundant puffins, fulmars and the largest colony of gannets in Britain. Grazing the island are Soay sheep, unique survivors of primitive breeds dating back to the Bronze Age. Inhabited till 1930, the 19th century village layout remains allowing us to envisage life on this island where the bird life provided sustenance for the villagers. To visit St Kilda is a very special experience.

03/06/2020 Isle of Lewis: Stornoway (BLD)

Stornoway is the main town on the Isle of Lewis with just over 6,000 people – about a third of the Island's population – living here. Home to a mix of traditional businesses like fishing, Harris tweed and farming, its sheltered harbour was named Steering Bay by visiting Vikings. Arriving at Stornoway we land in this

Gaelic heartland to explore the Stone Age 'Callanish', the primordial configuration of standing stones. Crossing the gentle troughs and rounded tops of the landscape we explore the cultural Gerrarannan Blackhouse Village and meet the people of this area. As we stroll the alleyways of Stornoway, or wander the pathways of Lews Castle gardens, we discover the timelessness of the Hebrides.

04/06/2020 Kirkwall & Orkney Islands (BLD)

From Bronze Age man, Iron Age people, Vikings and World Wars – time has left its mark on the Orkney Islands. Kirkwall, the capital of the Orkneys, is a Viking town founded in 1040, and today its heart is the red sandstone St Magnus Cathedral, with its namesake, the Viking martyr St Magnus, buried in its walls. The Ring of Brodgar Stone Circle and Henge is an enormous ceremonial site in the Orkneys dating back to the 3rd millennium BC. Today 36 stones of the original 60 survive along with prehistoric burial grounds. Our visit ashore includes Kirkwall, the Ring of Brodgar and Scarpa Flow, infamous through WW2, and Skara Brae – an ancient group of stone buildings linked together by low, covered passages.

05/06/2020 Lerwick & Shetland Islands (BLD)

Lerwick is the charming capital of the Shetland Islands and today we wander the cobblestoned streets of the town and waterfront. To the south of Lerwick is Jarlshoff where we delve into more than 4,000 years of history. Neolithic people first settled this site in Shetland around 2700 BC, and it remained in use until the 1600s AD. Discoveries made here include oval-shaped Bronze Age houses, an Iron Age broch and wheelhouses, Norse long houses, a medieval farmstead, and a laird's house dating from the 1500s. This afternoon we land at Mousa Broch, Scotland's most impressive and best surviving Iron Age tower or broch, which stands 13m high. Brochs were built in Shetland around 400-200BC, and Mousa Broch is particularly well-preserved. It is thought that the quality of stone, the workmanship and overall size of Mousa have contributed to why it

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has so survived so well.

06/06/2020 Fair Isle (BLD)

Famous for birds, knitwear and historic shipwrecks, Fair Isle is a tiny jewel of an island lying half-way between Orkney and Shetland. The islanders offer a warm and friendly welcome to visitors. Owned by the National Trust for Scotland, it is one of Britain's most successful small communities, pioneering projects in wildlife tourism, wind power and sustainable management of the environment. The island is an internationally important seabird breeding site. From April to August the cliffs are busy with the sound (and smell!) of thousands of fulmars, kittiwakes, razorbills, guillemots, gannets, shags and puffins, while skuas and terns fiercely defend their nests on the moorland. Fair Isle is one of the best places in Europe to view seabirds at close range, especially puffins which will waddle to within feet of a quiet observer. The 70 or so islanders mostly live in traditional crofts on the more fertile and low-lying southern third of the island.

07/06/2020 Aberdeen - Edinburgh (BLD)

On arrival in Aberdeen we continue our exploration overland, departing south to historic Dunottar Castle, before visiting an Aberdeen Angus stud farm and the iconic township of St Andrews, where we wander the ruins. Later we continue on to Edinburgh and check in to our hotel.

Hilton Edinburgh Grosvenor

Edinburgh

08/06/2020 Edinburgh (BLD)

Today we savour the atmosphere of one of the most beautiful cities in Great Britain. Among the highlights in Scotland's grand capital are Edinburgh Castle, and the Palace of Holyroodhouse, which sit at either end of the fabulous Royal Mile. We enjoy a stroll down the Royal Mile soaking up the atmosphere and, perhaps, stopping to taste one of Scotland's greatest contributions to world civilisation - shortbread! If your palate leans towards something stronger, there are many pubs where you can taste a range of famous Scottish single malt whiskies. In the evening we enjoy a farewell dinner at the end of our momentous tour!

09/06/2020 Edinburgh (B)

This morning is at leisure. Early afternoon we transfer to the airport for our homeward flight.

Depart Edinburgh Qatar Airways QR 30, 15.40

Arrive Doha 00.40

In Doha we connect with the flight to our chosen Australian capital city.

10/06/2020 Doha - Australia

We arrive home in Australia today.