

## *A short guide to motorhome travel in Scotland, v1.0*

Welcome to Scotland! I have lived here for 32 years and in that time I've visited every part of the country. I hope that you will find something useful here. I've tried to give my honest opinions rather than something more generic that you could find through official tourist information channels.

The route that I suggest below takes in every destination that I recommend in this guide. It covers about 950 miles including the journey back to Edinburgh, which would require roughly three full tanks of diesel to complete and can be done in seven days. You will find images of the places mentioned on pages 6-9.

Throughout this document I will refer to parking locations etc. using [what3words.com](http://what3words.com), a service that converts GPS coordinates to three-word URLs.



## Edinburgh

Although it is Scotland's capital city, Edinburgh can feel more like a village to those of us who live here. As in all small communities, one of the key aspects of fitting in is knowing which rules you can break! So, I would recommend driving up Calton Hill<sup>i</sup> for the spectacular views. There is a sign at the entrance ([under.remove.grand](#)) warning that no unauthorised vehicle access is permitted, but this can safely be ignored as it is not enforced.

If you plan to walk into town for a longer visit, the best place to park is nearby on Regent Road ([take.cloud.sums](#)), facing West, where the spaces are large enough to accommodate the van. You'll pay around £3 per hour for this.

If you want to eat something traditionally Scottish, head to Cafe Piccante (19 Broughton Street) for a deep-fried Mars bar and an Irn-Bru 1901. In truth we don't really eat haggis etc. More of it is actually consumed in England, and more still in America (because it's popular with ex-pats and try-hards).

Scotland's second city, Glasgow, is an hour away along the M8. It's not as tourist friendly, and there's nowhere I know of to park such a large vehicle in the centre. If you're into nightlife and live music, you might even prefer it to Edinburgh, which doesn't really cater for that scene.

## Whisky

It's worth doing a distillery tour during your visit. Unlike haggis, Scottish people in Scotland do consume a lot of whisky. I have personally enjoyed Blair Atholl (tours from £17 per person), which has 1) an otter on its logo because they live in the river which supplies the distillery and 2) a "mellow deep-toned aroma, a strong fruity flavour and a smooth finish". The car park ([custard.power.earplugs](#)) has space for coaches, which I have used with no problems.

Deanston distillery ([young.rationed.fillers](#)) also offers a very good tour (sans otter merch) for £15 per person. The advantage of this one is that it's more conveniently located if you plan to visit the rest of the places in this guide. This whisky is "unpeated, smooth and sweet with honey and heather notes". I personally struggle to tell the difference between them, but if you go on a whisky tasting experience (I enjoyed the one at the Whiski Rooms on North Bank Street in Edinburgh) the subtle differences will be explained to you in a way that does actually make sense at the time.

## **The Three Sisters Viewpoint, Glencoe<sup>ii</sup> ([hairstyle.shuttle.encoded](#))**

One of the most beautiful views of one of the most beautiful parts of the country! You don't need to leave the vehicle to enjoy this one, though there are pools you can swim in along the river.

## **Steall Falls<sup>iii</sup>**

The road from Fort William to the car park ([result.legend.prospers](#)) becomes very narrow towards the end, so drive slowly. At some points there will only be a few inches (~10cm for you Europeans!) of clearance on either side of the wing mirrors. The walk takes about 45 minutes and is usually assessed as an easy/moderate difficulty grade. The views along the route are stunning, as is the waterfall at the end of it. Near the waterfall there is also a rope bridge you can use to cross the river.

## **The Isle of Iona<sup>iv</sup>**

Leave the motorhome in the free car park ([examples.motoring.wiggling](#)) at Fionnphort and take the passenger ferry (£3.70 return per passenger, departs every 20 minutes or so) to Iona. You can walk around the entire island in one afternoon. I particularly recommend seeing the white beach ([shredding.farmland.situated](#)). Getting here involves first crossing over to the Isle of Mull, which you can do from Oban (busy, expensive, long journeys and wait times) or Lochaline (quiet, cheap, short journeys and wait times).

## **Glenfinnan Viaduct**

Harry Potter fans: you can see the "Hogwarts Express" pass over the bridge, every day between 10 and 11am, and again between 2 and 3pm. Paid parking is available ([outlawing.encodes.optimists](#)) but there are also free spaces on the road nearby on a first come, first served basis. The walk to the viewpoint takes about twenty minutes.

## **Eilean Donan Castle ([officer.restrict.daydreams](#))**

This is literally the castle they put on shortbread tins. Though it's not very old, and there isn't much of historical interest here, it is very beautiful. £10 per person to visit.

## **The Isle of Skye**

Skye is probably the most motorhome friendly part of Scotland, where visitor attractions have large car parks and, in one case, (the storr -

[blesses.photo.beauty](#) - as pictured on the back of the van!) facilities to empty the WC and refill water. I also recommend visiting the Quiraing<sup>v</sup> ([daredevil.grain.ascendant](#)) and seeing the dinosaur footprints at Staffin Bay ([cheetahs.epic.slime](#)), though be aware that in summer the beach car park can be extremely busy. The fairy pools<sup>vi</sup> are conveniently located on your way back off the island ([pram.apes.registry](#)). I would recommend spending at least two days on Skye to do all of that. Starting early will pay off; car parks tend to fill up from 8am onwards. You'll find supermarkets and any other supplies you need in Portree. Park on the wide residential streets (e.g. [prancing.backlog.saints](#)) on the outskirts of the town and walk in to the centre – it's a very small place and you're unlikely to find yourself more than ten minutes away from the main shopping streets.

### **Oldshoremore Beach<sup>vii</sup>**

On a clear day Oldshoremore looks more like it belongs in the Caribbean than North-West Scotland. Possibly best avoided when it's misty and horizontal rain is coming down (coming side?). The car park ([shout.classic.workbook](#)) is usually very quiet, with plenty of space for Deborah, and only a five minute walk from the beach.

### **Smoo Cave, Durness**

The cave ([snores.sparkle.thatched](#)) is an interesting diversion if you plan to drive the NC500, a 516 mile route around the northern tip of Scotland. Beatles fans can also visit the nearby John Lennon memorial garden (he enjoyed several holidays in the area). If the car park is full there are usually spaces available further east on the street.

### **Dunnet Head**

The northernmost part of Scotland. Feels like the edge of the world. The skies are also remarkably dark at night – I was once able to see the whole arc of the milky way when “wild camping” in this car park ([basics.meaning.brightens](#)). Although I would usually recommend using campsites, it is huge and very remote, so you're unlikely to bother anyone by staying here overnight.

### **General tips/advice**

In my experience most visitors to Scotland are disappointed by Loch Ness. It's not very scenic and the road hugs it tightly from all sides, so it can be difficult to access the water and to get away from the sound of traffic. I would

recommend almost any alternative, but particularly: Loch Fyne, Loch Shiel, Loch Etive, Loch Rannoch.

Between May and September, it's midge season in the highlands. They will show you no mercy. They gather in clouds which can descend at random from a clear blue sky. The mesh netting that covers all of the doors and windows in the van will keep them out. If you're going for a walk, I would recommend wearing long sleeves and trousers, taking bug spray, and having a hat with a face net. This advice might sound overbearing, but you'll thank me for it if you experience the full force of an attack.

Wild camping in the motorhome is possible, particularly in low season. But tourism in Scotland has boomed so much in the last decade that there are parts of the country where every single layby is occupied every night. It can be difficult to find a place to park, and if you do it's possible that the police or park rangers will wake you up and ask you to move on. If you are determined to wild camp there are some locations I can point you towards, but in general you'll be much more comfortable at campsites, with access to fresh water, drainage, electricity and a flat surface to park on.

I.



II.



III.



IV.



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VI.





VII.



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