

# NORTH COAST 500 ESCAPE & THE ORKNEY ISLANDS

## ITINERARY

 DAY  
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### DAY 1: ARRIVAL IN EDINBURGH

Make your way into **Edinburgh** city centre where your hotel will be located. Many travellers opt to take a taxi or use public transport, but for a more direct and comfortable ride, we will be happy to organise a private airport transfer for you. For those arriving early in the day, we recommend spending the afternoon walking through the city, strolling along the **Royal Mile** and exploring the **Old Town** and **New Town**, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. There are also plenty of museums and landmarks to visit within the city centre, including the majestic **Edinburgh Castle**.

Spend the night in Edinburgh.

**Attractions:** Calton Hill, Edinburgh, Edinburgh Castle, Edinburgh New Town, Edinburgh Old Town, The Grassmarket, The Royal Mile & St Giles Cathedral

 DAY  
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### DAY 2: INTO THE HIGHLANDS

Start your road trip driving up into the majestic Highlands. You'll have many notable highlights to see and visit along the way. Stop by the quaint village of **Dunkeld** and take a walk through the Hermitage Forest to view the romantic Black Linn Falls and Ossian's Hall of Mirrors. Continue to **Pitlochry** where you'll find plenty of pubs and cafés for a delicious break.

You'll then be travelling north into the Cairngorms National Park. If time allows you could stop at Scotland's highest whisky distillery, Dalwhinnie, or to visit the Highland Folk Museum in Newtonmore.

Spend the night in the Inverness area.

*Driving distance: 251 km/156 miles*

**Attractions:** Cairngorms National Park, Dunkeld, Forth Railway Bridge, Highland Folk Museum, Inverness, Pitlochry, The Hermitage

 DAY  
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### DAY 3: EXPLORE THE HISTORY OF THE INVERNESS AREA

Inverness and its surroundings mark the true start of the **North Coast 500**. Today, take the time to explore the area and its fantastic highlights. Visit the famous **Battlefield of Culloden Moor** and roam the Bronze-age cemetery **Clava Cairns**. Pass by Cawdor Castle for some history or walk along a golden sand beach.

Or drive south to marvel at the famous **Loch Ness** and look out for Nessie. You might wish to take a boat tour to admire the views of the loch or visit the nearby **Urquhart Castle** ruins.

Spend another night in the Inverness area.

*Included: Entrance to Urquhart Castle*

*Driving distance: 66 km/41 miles*

**Attractions:** Clava Cairns, Culloden Battlefield & Visitor Centre, Inverness, Loch Ness, North Coast 500, Urquhart Castle



DAY

4

## DAY 4: JOURNEY TO ORKNEY

Today your drive will take you north, across the **Black Isle Peninsula**, all the way to the north coast. We recommend making a stop on the way at the fairytale **Dunrobin Castle**. In the early afternoon, you'll catch a ferry to Stromness on **Orkney**, a beautiful 1.5-hour journey across the Pentland Firth with spectacular views of the Old Man of Hoy. Once you've reached mainland Orkney, drive to the capital, **Kirkwall**, a former Viking stronghold. Here you can explore the city centre and the magnificent 12th-century St Magnus Cathedral.

Spend the night in the Kirkwall area.

*Ferry from Gills Bay or Scrabster to Orkney: 1.5 hours*

*Driving distance: 205 km/ 130 miles*

**Attractions:** Black Isle, Dunrobin Castle, Kirkwall, Moray Firth, Orkney Islands

DAY

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## DAY 5: THE WONDERS OF ORKNEY

You have the whole day to discover the highlights of Orkney, admire its stunning scenery and explore ruins dating back millennia to the Stone Ages. The jewel of Orkney is the "Heart of Neolithic Orkney", a UNESCO World Heritage Site area that comprises a group of Neolithic monuments. This includes the 5,000-year-old prehistoric village of **Skara Brae**, the mysterious **Ring of Brodgar** stone circle, the huge megaliths at the **Standing Stones of Stenness** and the chambered cairn of **Maeshowe**, where 12th-century Vikings left one of the largest collections of Norse runic inscriptions.

Spend another night in the Kirkwall area.

*Included: Entrances to Skara Brae & Maeshowe*

*Driving distance: 56 km / 35 miles*

**Attractions:** Orkney Islands

DAY

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## DAY 6: FERRY BACK TO THE MAINLAND

This morning you have a little more time to explore Orkney before taking the ferry back to the mainland. Then you have the rest of the day to discover the many gems of this corner of Scotland. Take a short drive south to descend the 330 stone steps of Whaligoe down to the sea. You could explore John O'Groats and, if there is time, take a walk along the nearby sea cliffs to admire the Duncansby Stacks.

We also recommend passing by Dunnet Point, the most northerly point of mainland Scotland and Britain. In the area, you could visit Castle of Mey, once owned by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth The Queen Mother.

Spend the night in the Thurso area.

*Ferry from Orkney to Gills Bay or Scrabster: 1.5 hours*

*Driving distance: 93 km/ 58 miles*

**Attractions:** Orkney Islands

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## DAY 7: DISCOVER THE TRUE NORTH COAST

Continue on the famous North Coast 500 route. Today's journey is not particularly long so you have plenty of opportunities to stop and enjoy the incredible views of rocky cliffs and gold sand beaches. A must-see is the beautiful **Smoo Cave**, the largest and most dramatic sea cave in Britain. Make sure to also stop by the pristine beaches and turquoise waters of **Durness**. If you want a taste of history and stunning views, visit Castle Varrich near the village of Tongue.

Spend the night in the Tongue/Durness area

*Driving distance: 114 km/ 71 miles*

**Attractions:** Durness, Smoo Cave

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## DAY 8: COASTAL ADVENTURES AND SCENERY

Start your day exploring the "Drumbeg Loop," one of the most scenic circuits of the northwest Highlands. Visit the Stoerhead Lighthouse, built by a close relation of author Robert Louis Stevenson. A short walk will take you by the water to marvel at the Old Man of Stoer sea stack.

You can also stop at some of Scotland's most beautiful beaches including Achmelvich and the lesser-known Clachtoll Beach. Later, stop by the 15th-century ruins of **Ardvreck Castle** before arriving at the charming and whitewashed village of **Ullapool**.

Spend the night in the Ullapool area.

*Driving distance: 183 km/ 114 miles*

**Attractions:** Ardvreck Castle, Ullapool

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## DAY 9: DAY AT LEISURE IN THE ULLAPOOL AREA

You have the option of enjoying some activities in Ullapool itself or you can travel a little further afield. For example, you could enjoy a walk at the breathtaking **Corrieshalloch Gorge**. Explore this national nature reserve, cross the suspension bridge and marvel at the plummeting Falls of Measach.

Spend another night in the Ullapool area.

*Driving distance: 21 km/ 13 miles*

**Attractions:** Corrieshalloch Gorge, Ullapool

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## DAY 10: STUNNING COASTLINE TO RUGGED HILLS

Start your day by following the scenic road along the west coast towards Gairloch. On the way, visit the town of Poolewe where you can explore the **Inverewe Garden**. It boasts some 2,500 exotic plants and flowers, which flourish here thanks to the warm currents of the Gulf Stream.

Then, continue south to the **Torridon Hills**, a spectacular mountain range. We recommend stopping by the Beinn Eithe Nature Reserve Visitor Centre for a short nature walk.

Spend the night in the Torridon area.

*Driving distance: 138 km/ 86 miles*

**Attractions:** Inverewe Garden, Torridon Hills

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## DAY 11: EXPERIENCE THE THRILLING BEALACH NA BÀ

Today you have the option to take one of Scotland's most incredible roads – the historic mountain pass known as the **Bealach na Bà**, or “Pass of the Cattle”. With tight hairpin bends, this single-track road climbs high above sea level. En route, you could stop by the quaint village of **Applecross** to enjoy some delicious seafood.

After your scenic driving adventure, you could take a detour to the charming village of **Plockton**, on the shores of Loch Carron. On your way to Fort William, take photos at the picturesque **Eilean Donan Castle**.

Spend the night in the Fort William area.

*Driving distance: 224 km/ 139 miles*

**Attractions:** Applecross, Baelach Na Bà, Fort William, Plockton

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## DAY 12: TRAVEL ALONG DRAMATIC GLENS

Today's drive through the **Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park** will take you to Scotland's largest city, **Glasgow** (you can choose to end your trip in Edinburgh in the optional activities).

Start the day with a short detour to **Glenfinnan** to visit the Glenfinnan Monument and admire the **Glenfinnan Viaduct**, featured in *Harry Potter*. You'll then journey past the magnificent **Glen Coe**, Scotland's most famous and scenic valley. For a fun photo opportunity, don't miss the **Doone Castle**, featured in *Monty Python & the Holy Grail* and *Outlander*. If time allows, you could also visit **Stirling Castle**, one of Scotland's top attractions.

This evening, round off your amazing NC500 trip in one of Glasgow's many fantastic restaurants.

Spend the night in Glasgow.

*Included: Entrance to Doone Castle & Stirling Castle*

*Driving distance: 251 km/ 156 miles*

**Attractions:** Doone Castle, Glasgow, Glen Coe, Glenfinnan, Glenfinnan Viaduct, Loch Lomond, Stirling & Stirling Castle, Trossachs National Park

## DAY 13: DEPARTURE FROM SCOTLAND

On your day of departure, make your way back to the airport. If you would like to add any additional nights to your trip or to arrange a private transfer, you can do so during the booking process. If your flight is in the afternoon, you may have time for some last-minute shopping on Buchanan Street, a visit to one of Glasgow's museums, or one last stroll through the charming West End.

**Attractions:** Glasgow

*Whatever your needs, we are here to help. If you have any questions about our packages or services, please do not hesitate to contact us.*

Nordic Visitor | Tel: +354 578 20 80 | [info@nordicvisitor.com](mailto:info@nordicvisitor.com) | [nordicvisitor.com](http://nordicvisitor.com)