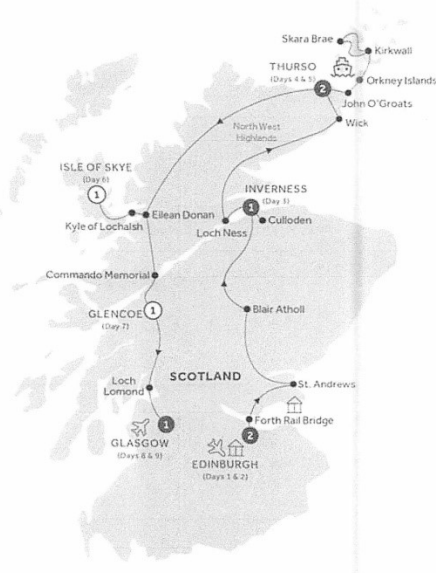


**Scotland Trip – Insight Vacations (Tour Radar) – October 1 – 9, 2022
(Carey & Donna Beamesderfer)**

Our Country Roads of Scotland trip was originally scheduled in October 2019. It was cancelled twice due to COVID restrictions; however, we finally made it this year. It was a great trip, with a highly educated, well-traveled tour guide – Greg Colgin, and 12 other like-minded people in our group. The bus we travelled on was driven by Arthur and had the Insight Vacations slogan on it which read “The Art of Traveling in Style.” The unique thing about Arthur was that he dressed in a coat and tie everyday while do an outstanding job, driving us through countless narrow streets and one lane roads throughout our journey. Our interest in wanting to visit Scotland was driven by several factors: 1) We watched the Outlander series and had an interest in seeing the Highlands area where the series was filmed. 2) Donna has always liked learning more about the Royal Family and the recent publicity surrounding the death of Queen Elizabeth piqued our curiosity about travel in the United Kingdom. 3) We’ve always liked the sound of bagpipes and wanted to try haggis (a Scottish dish consisting of a sheep's or calf's offal mixed with suet, oatmeal, and seasoning and boiled in a bag, traditionally one made from the animal's stomach) and sample some Scotch whiskey.

Scotland is a beautiful country well known for its dramatic scenery of mountains and valleys, rolling hills, green fields and forests, and rugged coastline. While everyone knows the Highlands for this, Scotland is as beautiful in the Lowlands, islands, and the flat lands of the North-East as well. It is the second largest of the constituent nations of the United Kingdom; has a sixty mile land border with England to the south, and is separated from Northern Ireland by the North Channel of the Irish Sea. The capital is Edinburgh and the largest city is Glasgow. We visited both cities. Scotland is surrounded by the bracing waters of the North Sea to the east, and the North Atlantic Ocean to the west and north. There are over 700 islands, mostly in groups to the west (the Inner Hebrides and Outer Hebrides) and north (Orkney Islands and Shetland Islands). Our “Country Roads of Scotland” tour is shown on the map below.



We flew on United Airlines from El Paso to Chicago, then to Washington DC, arriving in Edinburgh at 10:45am on Sat. Oct. 1. We met our guide Greg at the Starbucks in the Edinburgh airport who then transported us to the Malmaison Hotel. →



Immediately upon arrival we walked to the Royal Yacht - Britannia which we toured for about an hour or so.



Britannia was launched from the John Brown & Company shipyard in Clydebank, Scotland, on April 16, 1953. For over 44 years the Royal Yacht served the Royal Family, travelling more than a million nautical miles to become one of the most famous ships in the world. To Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, Britannia provided the perfect Royal residence for glittering state visits, official receptions, Royal honeymoons, and relaxing family holidays. For Great Britain, she was a majestic symbol of the Commonwealth and a proud ambassador generating billions of pounds in trade deals. For the Royal Family and 220 dedicated crew of Royal Yachtsmen, she was home. Today, Britannia is a five-star visitor attraction and exclusive evening events venue in Edinburgh.

Later we walked back to our hotel and prepared for our welcome dinner at the Barologist restaurant. We both had soup, steak pie and cheesecake for dessert. This was our first event with our new travel companions.



Our Barologist



Our Travel Companions



Steak Pie

On day 2 – Sunday – Oct. 2 we had an early departure for Edinburgh Castle which we toured for about two hours, before heading to the Palace of Holyroodhouse.



Entrance to the Castle



Stairway to the Upper-Level



View from the Castle Lower Level

Edinburgh Castle is alive with exciting tales of its time as a military fortress, royal residence, and prison. Check the website for the full story of this castle: <https://www.edinburghcastle.scot/>

The Palace of Holyroodhouse was the official residence of Queen Elizabeth II when she was in Scotland. It is steeped in history. <https://palaceofholyroodhouse.co.uk/> We were not permitted to take pictures inside the residence.



Palace as seen from a distance



Main entrance to the palace



View from the courtyard

The day ended with a driving tour of Edinburgh followed by dinner show – “The Spirit of Scotland,” which was outstanding. The show is a rip-roaring evening of traditional Scottish song and dance accompanied by a great selection of quality Scottish food and drink.



On day 3 – Monday - Oct. 3 we left the hotel around 8 am and stopped for a few hours at St. Andrews to visit the world-famous St. Andrews Golf Club, along with the historic ruins of St. Andrews cathedral.



Entrance to St. Andrews Golf Club



The ruins of St. Andrews Cathedral and cemetery



This was followed by a tour of Blair Castle and later an “afternoon tea” at the nearby Bothy Bar in the Atoll Arms hotel.



Blair Castle has been the home of the Atholl family for over seven centuries. The castle has had a diverse history, witnessing both turbulent and peaceful times, enlarged and adapted over 750 years. Home to politicians, soldiers, agriculturalists and entrepreneurs, the family history is brought to life against a backdrop of fine 18th century interiors and Scots Baronial architecture, in 30 different rooms.



Afternoon “tea” with small sandwiches – a traditional Scottish (British) tradition

Traditional afternoon tea consists of a selection of dainty sandwiches (including of course thinly sliced cucumber sandwiches), scones served with clotted cream and preserves.

On day 4 – Tuesday – Oct. 4 we visited Loch Ness, a large freshwater lake in the Scottish Highlands extending for approximately 23 miles southwest of Inverness. It takes its name from the River Ness, which flows from the northern end. Loch Ness is best known for alleged sightings of the cryptozoological Loch Ness Monster, also known affectionately as "Nessie." It is one of a series of interconnected, murky bodies of water in Scotland; its water visibility is exceptionally low due to a high peat content in the surrounding soil. We took some pictures but, unfortunately did not see "Nessie."



Our next stop was the Culloden Battlefield. The **Battle of Culloden** was the final confrontation of the Jacobite rising of 1745. On April 16, 1746, the Jacobite army of Charles Edward Stuart (Bonne Prince Charlie) was decisively defeated by a British government force under Prince William Augustus, Duke of Cumberland, on Drum Mossie Moor near Inverness in the Scottish Highlands. It was the last pitched battle fought on British soil. (Note: This is the primary end theme of the TV series *Outlander*.) **Outlander** is a historical drama television series based on the ongoing novel series of the same name by Diana Gabaldon. The show premiered on August 9, 2014, on Starz. It stars Caitriona Balfe as Claire Randall, a former Second World War military nurse in Scotland who, in 1945, finds herself transported back in time to 1743. There she encounters, falls in love with, and marries a dashing Highland warrior named Jamie Fraser (Sam Heughan), a Tacksman of Gabaldon's fictionalized version of Clan Fraser of Lovat, and becomes embroiled in the Jacobite rising.



Culloden Battlefield is the historic site of the last battle on British soil in 1746. This battle is frequently referred to as one of the most important for Scotland, as it marked the end of the clan system in the highlands. It was a cold and rainy day for us this day, however we "held our ground" and enjoyed the tour.

In the afternoon we were treated to a tour of the Old Pitney whiskey distillery.



We ended the day with a visit to a local pub (Old Smiddy Inn) and were entertained by a bagpipe playing duo and stories (Scottish legends) and songs by the proprietor.



This was a very festive and enjoyable occasion. It really helped us feel like we were part of the traditional Scottish culture. Also, I forgot to mention that we had “fish and chips” for lunch at La Mirage restaurant in the town of Helmsdale before our distillery tour and the visit to the Old Smiddy Inn. We ended the day with dinner at the Pentland Hotel where we ate prawns, chicken and pudding.

On day 5 – Wednesday – Oct 5 – We boarded the Pentland Ferry to the Orkney Islands where our first stop was at The Italian Chapel, a highly ornate Catholic chapel on Lamb Holm in the Orkney Islands. It was built during World War II by Italian prisoners of war, who were housed on the previously uninhabited island while they constructed the Churchill Barriers to the east of Scapa Flow. Only the concrete foundations of the other buildings of the prisoner-of-war camp survive. The chapel was not completed until after the end of the war and was restored in the 1960s and again in the 1990s.



From there we drove to the Ring of Brodgar and to the famous Skara Brae neolithic site.



The Ring of Brodgar (above) has never been fully excavated, or scientifically dated, the monument's actual age remains uncertain. However, it is generally assumed to have been erected between 2500 BC and 2000 BC, and was, therefore, the last of the great Neolithic monuments built on the Ness.



Skara Brae (photos above and below) is a stone-built Neolithic settlement, located on the Bay of Skall on the west coast of Mainland, the largest island in the Orkney archipelago of Scotland. Consisting of ten clustered houses, made of flagstones, in earthen dams that provided support for the walls; the houses included stone hearths, beds, and cupboards.^[1] A primitive sewer system, with "toilets" and drains in each house, carried effluent to the ocean. (Water was used to flush waste into a drain.) Long before Stonehenge or even the Egyptian pyramids were built, Skara Brae was a thriving village. As we stepped back 5,000 years in time we were able to explore the best-preserved Neolithic settlement in Western Europe. Skara Brae became part of the UNESCO World Heritage Site known as the Heart of Neolithic Orkney in 1999.



Uncovered remains are known to exist immediately adjacent to the ancient monument in areas presently covered by fields, and others, of uncertain date, can be seen eroding out of the cliff edge a little to the south of the enclosed area.

During our visit in the Orkney Islands, we also made time to stop at St. Magnus Cathedral, Earl's Palace and the Bishop's Palace.



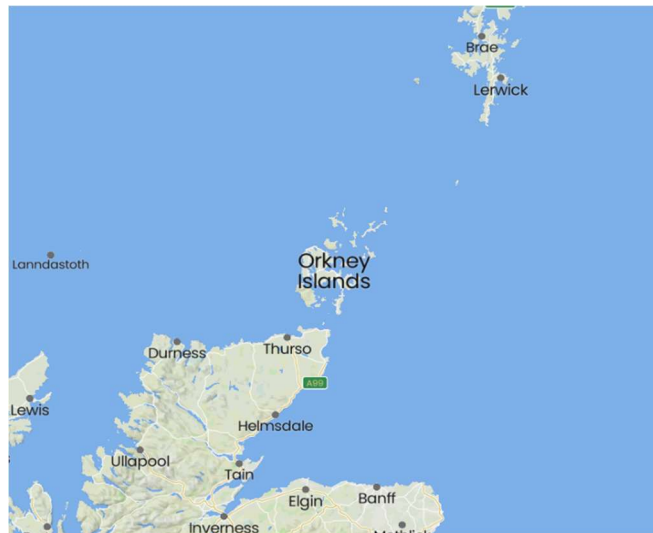
St. Magnus Cathedral
<https://www.stmagnus.org/>



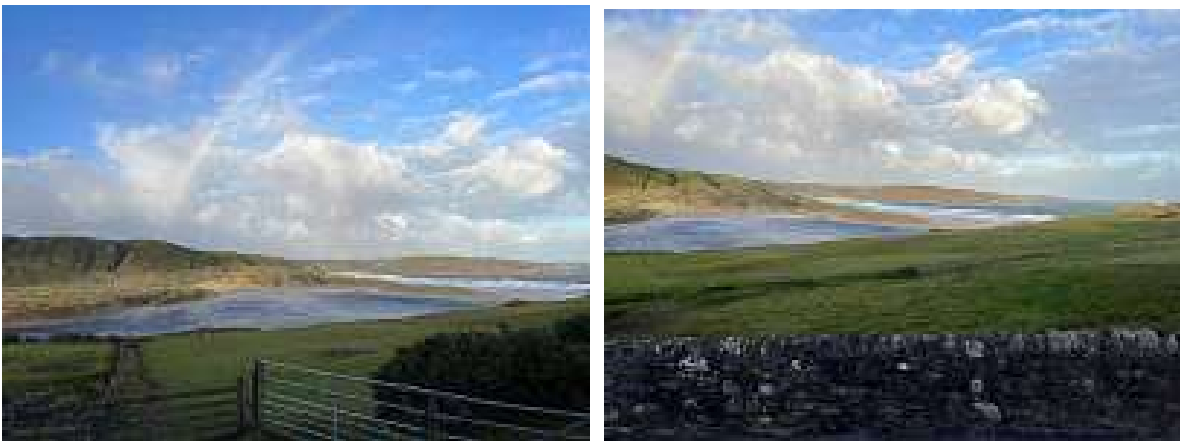
Earl's Palace
<https://www.orkney.com/listings/bishops-palace-earls>



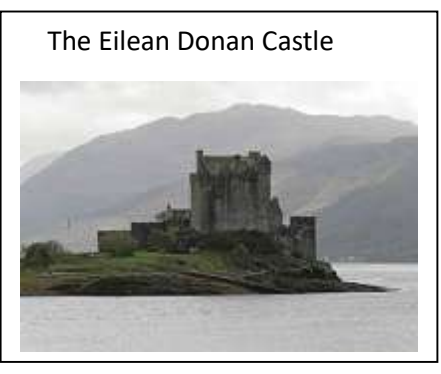
Our Ferry Boat to the Orkney Islands



On day 6 – Thursday – Oct. 6 – This was basically a travel day. Our motorcoach (bus) stopped at the Pier Café enroute for tea and scones, then continued to we reached Knockan Crag, then lunch in Ulapol where Donna had more fish and chips (I had a burger) at “The Chippy.” From there to our hotel in Dunolee. Upon arrival we did a hike (in the pouring rain) along the coastline. Knockan Crag (a National Nature Reserve) holds the key to an amazing story of colliding continents and scientific intrigue. The low cliff of Knockan exposes rocks that set the scientific world ablaze in the 19th century, with the discovery that a slice of old rock sits on top of much younger ones. At Knockan Crag, you can bridge 500 million years of history with your bare hands. You can see for yourself the marvel that allowed one of the world's greatest geological mysteries to be solved. The crag is a globally important geological site and was formed by the Moine Thrust, the force of two continents crashing together.



On day 7 – Friday – Oct. 7 – We arrived on the Isle of Skye making several stops on the way.



Enroute we stopped at the Commando Memorial dedicated to the men of the original British Commando Forces raised during World War II. This is one of Scotland's best-known monuments, both as a war memorial and as a tourist attraction.



Our final stop for the day was in Glencoe National Nature Reserve. Our visit included a detailed talk by the senior park ranger and a quick tour of the visitor center, turf house, and surrounding countryside which is the world-famous film location featured in *Harry Potter*, *Outlaw King*, *The 39 Steps*, *Braveheart*, *Rob Roy* and *Skyfall*.

No description can re-create the impact of seeing Glencoe for the first time. It has long been one of the most loved places in Scotland. What is Glencoe famous for? It's known equally for its awe-inspiring views and sorrowful past – it is a place of history, wildlife, adventure, and myth. The mountains were formed through violent volcanic eruptions, and then sculpted by massive glaciers. Fingal, the legendary Celtic hero, is said to have made his home among these towering mountains, while his poet son, Ossian, found inspiration in the landscape. On February 13, 1692, 38 men, women and children of the MacDonald clan were murdered by a regiment of soldiers (acting on behalf of the government) whom they had welcomed into their homes. The tragedy of the Glencoe Massacre still has the power to evoke powerful emotions.



Later that evening we had our tour celebration dinner at the Ballachulish hotel. Tomorrow is our last day and we made the best of it.

Day 8 – Saturday – Oct. 8 – We did a bus tour of the Isle of Skye, followed by a boat ride on the Lomond Chieftain in Loch Lomond. After that we were treated to a city tour of Glasgow. We spent the afternoon window shopping in Glasgow then dinner at the Red Onion restaurant.



Our boat tour on Loch Lomond



Walking around the city of Glasgow



On Day 9 – Sunday – Oct. 9 – We got up at 4:30am to get a taxi to the airport, flew to Heathrow in London where we had a 5 hour layover before boarding our United Airlines flight to Denver. We cleared customs in Denver and caught our flight back to El Paso arriving home around 10:30pm.

In summary, this was our first Insight Vacations tour, and it was great. Both the tour guide and the bus driver were very professional. The people we toured with were well-traveled and we enjoyed their company. We learned a lot about the country of Scotland and the weather was better than we had expected. It would rain then 15 minutes later the sun would come out, then it would rain again, and then the sun would come out. The climate and temperatures for a trip in October were exceptionally mild and the hotels and meals were all 4 star. That being said, we will probably go on another Insight Vacations tour at some point in the future.

I'll close with one of my favorite quotes: "I feel fortunate to live in a time when we finally recognize that education is not only books and tests, but also experiences and memories that shape our mind and our future."