

NCR&R

A unique experience of the North Coast
of Scotland by road and rail





Welcome

One-of-a-kind journey by road and rail on two of Scotland's Great Scenic Rail Journeys around the north of Scotland.

Following much of the same route as the world-famous NC500 (but with the added advantage of traveling through unique wilderness areas only accessible by train), relax and savour the splendour of this unique landscape without the worries of driving on winding, single track roads in one of the most remote areas left in Europe.

Your journey starts (and finishes) in Inverness, the capital of the Highlands and a perfect base for day trips to nearby Loch Ness or Culloden battlefield—site of Bonnie Prince Charlie's defeat in 1746.

Spend some time in this friendly city discovering its history and enjoying a stroll along the banks of the river to the Ness Islands, a group of islets spanning the river connected by Victorian suspension bridges. The many bars and restaurants are the perfect place to enjoy highland hospitality, live music and great food after a day of exploring.

- **5 day tour, starting/finishing in Inverness**
- **Sustainable and responsible travel**
- **1 day self-guided (train), 4 days guided (minicoach)**
- **16 person minicoach**
- **Reserved seating on scheduled ScotRail services**



Provisional Schedule

DAY 1 | Monday
Inverness to Wick (train)

DAY 2 | Tuesday
0830–1730 Wick to Tongue (minicoach)

DAY 3 | Wednesday
0830–1730 Tongue to Ullapool (minicoach)

DAY 4 | Thursday
0830–1730 Ullapool to Kinlochewe (minicoach)

DAY 5 | Friday
0830–1200 Kinlochewe to Inverness (minicoach/train)

DAY 1 | Friday
Inverness to Kinlochewe (train/minicoach)

DAY 2 | Saturday
1300–1730 Kinlochewe to Ullapool (minicoach)

DAY 3 | Sunday
0830–1730 Ullapool to Tongue (mini-coach)

DAY 4 | Monday
0830–1730 Tongue to Wick (minicoach)

DAY 5 | Tuesday
Wick to Inverness (train)

Inverness to Wick

Departing from Inverness, relax on board your train for the first leg of your journey on the Far North Line.

As you leave the city, you'll cross the northern entrance of the Caledonian Canal and skirt the Beaully Firth heading towards Muir of Ord on the Black Isle peninsula. The massive ridge of Ben Wyvis looms on the left. At Dingwall the line forks, travelling along the shores of the Cromarty Firth with magnificent views back towards the Black Isle.

Running alongside the Kyle of Sutherland, look out for the magnificent Carbisdale Castle on the left. The train heads inland now for a spell but soon enough travels back out towards the coast again and the North Sea spreads out before you. Then, straight out of a fairytale, appears Dunrobin Castle, the historic home of the Earls and Dukes of Sutherland. The earliest part of the building dates from around 1275 and it commands superb clifftop views of both the gardens and the sea.

Alight at the castle's own railway station and follow the short walk along the tree-lined driveway to the castle itself. Here you will enjoy lunch and then have time to visit the castle, Victorian museum and formal gardens.

Retrace your footsteps to Dunrobin Castle station and board the train, continuing your journey north. You will follow the coast again with views out to the North Sea before cutting back inland along the Kildonan Glen, referred to as Scotland's Klondike as it was the scene of the Scottish gold rush in 1868.

You're now approaching one of the UK's great natural assets; the Flow Country. The rail track straddles this proposed World Heritage Site and one of the largest areas of blanket bog anywhere in the world. This globally rare habitat includes a wide range of peatland vegetation, bog pools and a selection of rare and endangered bird and insect species.

The highland landscape has now transformed into the more lowland Caithness. At Georgemas Junction the line divides and you'll first travel north to Thurso, before retracing your journey and heading east to your first night's destination; the county town and former herring port of Wick.

Overnight: Thurso or Wick (Accommodation: various, e.g. Mackays/ Pentland Hotels)

Things to do: Old Pulteney Distillery, Wick Heritage Museum

Schedule	
1041	Dep. Inverness Station
1248	Arr. Dunrobin Castle Station
1612	Dep. Dunrobin Castle Station
1822	Arr. Wick (or alternatively; 1753 Thurso)



Image: Dunrobin Castle, Tony Hardley / Scotphoto



Image: Varrich Castle Ruins, Kyle of Tongue, Tony Hardley / Scotphoto

DAY TWO | 90 MILES | 2½ HOURS

Wick to Tongue

After being collected by your luxury minicoach (your transport mode for the next three days), you will head along Scotland’s northern coastline and visit the most northerly point in mainland Britain.

First stop is John O’Groats, the most northerly town on the UK mainland, with views over the Pentland Firth to the Orkney Islands. Be sure to take a picture at the famous John O’Groats sign. We then follow the north coast and head west to our next stop, the Castle of Mey. Once owned by the Queen Mother (and now by Prince Charles) you can tour the castle, and its grounds. and there There is a good cafe and shop in the Visitor Centre.

Further along the coast we come to Dunnet Bay Distillery – a must for any Gin lovers – and the nearby Dunnet Head, home to an RSPB wildlife reserve and the most northerly point in mainland Britain. The town of Bettyhill is also worth a stop for the silver sands and crystal blue waters of Torrisdale beach, and the Strathnaver Museum. This is a lovely little museum which tells the history of the Scottish Highlands, including the clan systems and the tragic tale of the Highland clearances. There are also Pictish standing stones in the old kirkyard.

Your final stop for today is the village of Tongue. Nestled in a A picturesque location, the village sits in the shadow of Ben Loyal, ‘the Queen of Scottish Mountains’, and on the shores of the Kyle of Tongue. If you’re feeling energetic, enjoy the 30-minute round-trip hike up to the ruins of Castle Varrich. A good path takes you up to the ancient lookout with rewarding views down the Kyle and out to Sea.

Accommodation: Tongue Hotel/Ben Loyal Hotel

Tongue to Ullapool

The first stretch of driving from Tongue to Durness is very scenic, winding and largely on single-track roads. You’ll pass some incredible white sandy beaches, and striking views before arriving into Durness for our first attraction of the day; Smoo Cave.

You can explore this large cave by foot and marvel at its impressive natural features – including a waterfall within the cave! Other highlights in Durness include the short drive to Balnakeil Craft Village (home to a wide range of lovely craft shops and cafes) and adjacent beach.

We’ve now reached the furthest north west corner of our trip and it’s time to start heading south down the west coast of Scotland. If you thought the East and North Coasts east and north coasts were unbelievable, you’re in for a real treat now. as You’re about to travel through some of the most truly stunning landscapes you’ll probably ever encounter.

There are numerous stops along the way to enjoy the peace (this is one of the last wilderness areas of Europe) and take in the jaw-dropping scenery. Kylesku Bridge, Rock Stop Café and Ardvreck Castle are regular stops. The ruins of Ardvreck Castle, on the shores of Loch Assynt, date from the 16th century and was originally built by Clan MacLeod.

From Ardvreck Castle we continue south to the Knockan Crag National Nature Reserve and Visitor Centre. A trail here takes you up onto the ridge for spectacular views. There are a series of art installations and exhibits to enjoy along the way.

Another twenty minutes by road and you’re at your final destination for day three of the tour. Ullapool is the largest town on this section of the tour and a busy ferry/ fishing port. If you’d prefer to be a bit further out, and see some more spectacular beaches and scenery, take the 30-minute detour to the village of Achiltibuie. The drive out is well worth it.

Overnight: Ullapool (various hotels) or Achiltibuie (Summer Isles Hotel).

Image: Balnakeil Bay, Tony Hardley / ScotPhoto





DAY FOUR | 140 MILES | 4½ HOURS

Ullapool to Lochcarron

From Ullapool we'll head south again along the coast. Our first attraction today is the Corrieshalloch Gorge.

This National Nature Reserve is home to a mile-long gorge which can be best viewed from the Victorian suspension bridge that crosses it. Not for the faint-hearted but well worth it for the exhilarating experience.

Further on from Aultbea we come to the National Trust for Scotland's Inverewe Gardens. This is a lovely garden to explore and spend some quality time in. Thanks to a unique microclimate, courtesy of the Gulf Stream, the Gardens are home to a wide variety of plant and animal species. Most impressive perhaps are the huge California redwoods, but you might also be lucky enough to see red squirrels, red deer, otters, seals, and golden eagles.

The tour now loops back inland offering more stunning scenery and impressive photo opportunities as we drive along the edge of Loch Maree with the mountains providing the backdrop. Now we turn on to another stunning stretch of road that winds between mountains and lochs. We'll follow the coast road around the Applecross peninsula along some narrow and snaking roads,

accompanied by fantastic views across to the Isle of Skye. The road is particularly well known as being home to the Bealach na Bà, an alpine-style road which is one of the highest roads in the UK. The view from the top of the pass is legendary – as are the curves and gradient on the way down! But we'll take our time and enjoy the views.

(NB. This road is generally considered unsuitable for larger vehicles/ motorhomes. An alternative route between Sheildaig and Ardarroch skips the Applecross peninsula.)

Overnight: Lochcarron

DAY THREE | 30 MILES | 1 HOUR DRIVING → TRAIN

Lochcarron to Kyle of Lochalsh/Inverness

We'll start the final day with a trip to the ruined Strome Castle and, a visit to Lochcarron Weavers; where you can learn all about how tartan is made – and, of course, pick up some tartan of your own.

As we round the head of Loch Carron we hug its shores as we near the end of our driving tour. However, there is still one final detour and we've kept one of the iconic views of Scotland 'til last - Eilean Donan Castle. We'll then travel on to Kyle of Lochalsh.

You can spend some time in Kyle of Lochalsh before heading back to Inverness by train.

Alternatively, if you want to extend your trip, you can travel on to the Isle of Skye.

If you choose to head back to Inverness at the end of day five, you'll be travelling on another of Scotland's Great Scenic Rail Journeys - The Kyle Line.

The railway line follows a different route to the one you arrived by road. You'll head north out of the village and follow the coast along the south side of Loch Carron. The Kyle Line travels coast to coast across Scotland and at the head of the sea loch we keep going inland and cut deep into the

dense forests and deer-haunted glens as the mountains close in.

In turn, the beautiful forest - thick with spruce, willow, birch, oak and holly - gives way to wild mountain scenery. Then we're over the summit and heading back down towards the gentle countryside around Garve. We'll continue on to Dingwall where the Kyle and Far North Lines merge, then carry on to Inverness, where the tour concludes.

ScotRail departures from Kyle of Lochalsh

1208	arr. Inverness	1442
1346	arr. Inverness	1627
1713	arr. Inverness	1953



Image: Eilean Donan Castle, Tony Hardley / Scotphoto

ScotRail publishes this guide in good faith to highlight tour opportunities. We have taken reasonable steps to ensure the information is correct at the time of publication but cannot guarantee accuracy or accept responsibility for any errors or omissions. Timetables change throughout the year so customers should always check their journey via the ScotRail website or app before travelling.