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## 12 DAYS BRITISH ISLES & ICELAND LUXURY CRUISE - EDINBURGH TO REYKJAVIK

Take the path less travelled on a northerly adventure, from Scotland's island nature reserves to the Orkney and Shetland Islands. Journey beyond the British Isles to the sharp green cliffs of the Faroe Islands, before reaching the Land of Fire and Ice. In Iceland, discover fjords, black sand beaches, and spot whales and puffins along the coast. Visit the tumbling Dynjandi waterfalls and conclude in Reykjavik, Iceland's compact and colourful capital.



### ITINERARY

#### Day 1 - Edinburgh (Leith)

Edinburgh is to London as poetry is to prose, as Charlotte Bronte once wrote. One of the world's stateliest cities and proudest capitals, it's built--like Rome--on seven hills, making it a striking backdrop for the ancient pageant of history. In a skyline of sheer drama, Edinburgh Castle watches over the capital city, frowning down on Princes Street's glamour and glitz. But despite its rich



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past, the city's famous festivals, excellent museums and galleries, as well as the modern Scottish Parliament, are reminders that Edinburgh has its feet firmly in the 21st century. Nearly everywhere in Edinburgh (the burgh is always pronounced burra in Scotland) there are spectacular buildings, whose Doric, Ionic, and Corinthian pillars add touches of neoclassical grandeur to the largely Presbyterian backdrop. Large gardens are a strong feature of central Edinburgh, where the city council is one of the most stridently conservationist in Europe. Arthur's Seat, a mountain of bright green and yellow furze, rears up behind the spires of the Old Town. This child-size mountain jutting 822 feet above its surroundings has steep slopes and little crags, like a miniature Highlands set down in the middle of the busy city. Appropriately, these theatrical elements match Edinburgh's character--after all, the city has been a stage that has seen its fair share of romance, violence, tragedy, and triumph. Modern Edinburgh has become a cultural capital, staging the Edinburgh International Festival and the Fringe Festival in every possible venue each August. The stunning Museum of Scotland complements the city's wealth of galleries and artsy hangouts. Add Edinburgh's growing reputation for food and nightlife and you have one of the world's most beguiling cities. Today the city is the second most important financial center in the United Kingdom, and the fifth most important in Europe. The city regularly is ranked near the top in quality-of-life surveys. Accordingly, New Town apartments on fashionable streets sell for considerable sums. In some senses the city is showy and materialistic, but Edinburgh still supports learned societies, some of which have their roots in the Scottish Enlightenment. The Royal Society of Edinburgh, for example, established in 1783 "for the advancement of learning and useful knowledge," remains an important forum for

interdisciplinary activities. Even as Edinburgh moves through the 21st century, its tall guardian castle remains the focal point of the city and its venerable history. Take time to explore the streets--peopled by the spirits of Mary, Queen of Scots; Sir Walter Scott; and Robert Louis Stevenson--and pay your respects to the world's best-loved terrier, Greyfriars Bobby. In the evenings you can enjoy candlelit restaurants or a folk ceilidh (pronounced kay-lee, a traditional Scottish dance with music), though you should remember that you haven't earned your porridge until you've climbed Arthur's Seat. Should you wander around a corner, say, on George Street, you might see not an endless cityscape, but blue sea and a patchwork of fields. This is the county of Fife, beyond the inlet of the North Sea called the Firth of Forth--a reminder, like the mountains to the northwest that can be glimpsed from Edinburgh's highest points, that the rest of Scotland lies within easy reach.

#### Day 2 - Isle of May

The Isle of May in Scotland is owned and managed by Scottish Natural Heritage as a National Nature Reserve and is an important breeding ground for approximately one-quarter of a million seabirds. In fact, over 40,000 puffin burrows have been counted as occupied. Not only kittiwakes, shags, eiders, and guillemots but also Razorbills, Arctic Terns, Sandwich Terns and Common Terns, Lesser Gulls, Herring Gulls and Great Black-backed Gulls nest here. The island is located roughly four nautical miles off the coast of mainland Scotland and is used by biologists for surveying migrating passerines and for ringing breeding seabirds to better study their movements and breeding success. While hosting an impressive array and quantity of seabirds, the island itself is small at only 1.8 kilometers (1.1 miles) long, and less than half a kilometer (one-third of a mile) wide.



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#### Day 3 - Kirkwall, Orkney Islands, Scotland

Scattered just off the northern tip of Scotland, Kirkwall is the capital of the Orkney Islands - a scenic archipelago of fascinating, dual heritage. The Viking influence is deep, while a prehistoric past and World War history adds to the endless stories that these dramatic islands have to tell. Sparse and beautiful, let the sweeping seascapes of frothing waves, and dance of the northern lights, enchant you as you explore. Windswept beaches are inhabited by whooping swans, while grassy cliffs hide puffins amid their wavy embrace. Sea caves and crumbling castles - and the dramatic meeting of the North Sea and the Atlantic Ocean add to the romantic beauty of these lands, which may be physically close to the UK, but feel an entire world away. The sandstone St. Magnus Cathedral is the centrepiece of Orkney's main town - a place of winding lanes and atmospheric walks - and Britain's northernmost cathedral is a masterpiece that took 300 years to complete. Started in 1137, the beautiful cathedral is adorned with mesmerising stain-glass windows and has been evocatively named as the Light of the North. Look down over the ruined Bishop's and Earl's Palaces nearby from the tip of the cathedral's tower. Or, test out the islands' history-rich distilleries, which produce smokey single malts - said to be the best in the world. You can also venture out to Europe's best-preserved Stone Age Village, at the extraordinary World Heritage Site of Skara Brae, which offers an unparalleled vision into prehistoric life.

#### Day 4 - Fair Isle, Scotland

Lying mid-way between Shetland and the Orkney islands, Fair Isle is a tiny jewel in the sea. Famous for birds, knitwear and historic shipwrecks, the island offers a warm and friendly welcome to visitors. With a population of only around 70 people this island is truly a beautiful setting and is one of Britain's most

successful communities. View the cloudy light turquoise water as it drifts out to sea beneath the breath-taking Sheep Rock, rising over 100 metres, which is almost an isle of its own. Fair Isles oceanic climate brings stormy but fairly mild winters, in summer, you can expect rapid changes in the weather, sparkling sunshine can be followed by a thick blanket of mist and fog, and this makes the isle a truly inspiring area. Over the centuries the island has changed hands many times and was named the island of peace by Norse settlers. The isle has been a useful landmark for shipping but in storms and fog it is highly dangerous creating over 100 known shipwrecks such as the Spanish armada flag ship "El Gran Grifon".

#### Day 5 - Lerwick, Shetland Islands, Scotland

Adrift between the Scottish and Norwegian coasts, the craggy Shetland Islands form the most northerly point of the British Isles. Sprawling across 100 islands, connected by sandy bridges and crisscrossing ferries, explore the highlights of this scenic archipelago outpost. With incredible Neolithic history, spanning 5,000 years of human heritage, these islands, which sit just shy of the Arctic Circle, are an isolated and immense treasure trove of history and thrilling scenery. Look out over dramatic coastline from atmospheric Iron Age towers. Sweeping, windswept beaches and wisps of sand connect islands and rugged cliffs - stand back as the sounds of the waves smashing against the shore and calling gulls fills the air. The islands are also home to some of the most adorable four-legged creatures you'll ever meet, the diminutive and wavy-fringed, Shetland Ponies who roam the hills and reach a maximum size of 42 inches. Don't be fooled, though, they are amongst the strongest and toughest of all breeds. Their existence here points to Viking history, as local horses bred with ponies brought ashore by



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Norse settlers, creating the lovable crossbreed that is an icon of these islands today. The towering Broch of Mousa is perhaps Europe's best-preserved Iron Age building - and one of the Shetland's finest brochs - a series of round, stone towers, believed to have been constructed around 100 BC. Seals and birdlife ensure that the isolated islands are always well-populated with life - and you can embark on hikes to discover their coastal homes. Lerwick is the islands' capital, and there's a charming welcome on offer, as you arrive before the waterfront of stone buildings, which cascade down to the shore.

#### Day 5 - Noss, Scotland

Exploring the sandstone cliff faces of the Isle of Noss will reveal ledges loaded with gannets, puffins, guillemots, shags, kittiwakes, Razorbills, fulmars and Great Skuas. The island was recognized as a National Nature Reserve in 1955, and has one of Europe's largest and most diverse seabird colonies. Sheep have grazed the inland hillsides of Noss since the late 1800s and early 1900s when around twenty people lived on the island to manage the sheep farm. Along with the sheep, shaggy Shetland ponies graze the windblown slopes of Noss.

#### Day 6 - Tórshavn (Faroe Islands)

Titanic scenery, mist-whipped mountains and staggering oceanic vistas await you here in the Faroe Islands - a far-flung archipelago of immense natural beauty. This remote and isolated gathering of 18 islands - adrift in the far North Atlantic Ocean - is a self-governing part of the Kingdom of Denmark, and colourful Torshavn bustles up against the seafront, forming one of the tiniest capital cities in the world. Wander between pretty, half-timbered houses and visit one of the world's oldest parliament buildings, during your time here. With Viking history swirling too, Torshavn is a quaint, charming and heritage-rich

city. Surrounded by thrilling landscapes, and cosy Scandi culture, the Faroe Islands are an envy-inducing, off-the-beaten-track destination. From Torshavn, scatter to your choice of island destinations, or spend time soaking in the storybook appeal and clarity of air in the scenic old town. Pop into local shops or head for restaurants - where you can taste local foods like salt-cured fish and hunks of lamb. See waterfalls plummeting directly into the ocean from vertical cliffs, along with emerald-green carpeted fjords, as you explore these extraordinary, lost islands. Puffins and sea birds relish the island's craggy sea cliffs and coastline - visit the island of Mykines to see the birds burrowing deep into the steep cliffs to nest. Strap on your hiking boots to rise to the challenge of the mesmerising scenery. Fjords etch into the coastline, and you can encounter peaceful lakes and massive valleys dug out by glaciers. Off-shore, sea stacks totter up out of the swelling, frothy waves.

#### Day 7 - Vestmanna (Faroe Islands)

Surrounded by the mountains of Haegstafjall, Økslin, Loysingafjall, and Moskurfjall, Vestmanna sits quietly on the banks of Streymoy, on the North Atlantic Ocean. With 1,200 inhabitants, the colourful little village itself is lovely; a few shops and cafes selling locally made cakes and handicrafts, as well as the island's native seafood soup dish. While those wishing to stretch their legs will enjoy the surrounding area for its stunning countryside, Vestmanna's main attraction is beyond any doubt its bird cliffs. You don't have to be a birder to appreciate these magnificent cliffs, although if you are the cliffs are the stuff of dreams. At almost 700-metres high (and six kilometres long), the cliffs rise steeply out of the water and are covered with tens of thousands of seabirds, zooming through the air, swooping



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into the water and nesting in the crevices. The near vertical cliffs are home to numerous species including kittiwakes, Common Guillemots, Black Guillemots and the oh so charismatic Atlantic Puffin. Visually, they are stunning: waterfalls thunder into the sea, cliff tops cut jagged lines into horizon and the whole landscape seems straight out of Jurassic Park. Dressed in a cloak of mist and emerald green moss, to say that the feeling is otherworldly is an understatement. To gage the true beauty of the region, one must take to the sea. The experience of sailing under the cacophonic cliffs, juxtaposed by the silence of calm caves is simply unforgettable.

#### Day 8 - Seydisfjordur

A world of tumbling waterfalls and colourful creativity, Seydisfjordur is Iceland at its most epic and eccentric. A spectacular fjord lends the town its name, and the structures are dwarfed by this majestic setting, as they huddle around its glassy waters. Sail around the fjord, head out on a kayak amid the scenery, or venture to meet Puffins and other nesting birds settled on sharp cliffs. Encounter sea lions, or try some fishing as you immerse yourself in this highlight of the wild and wonderful Eastfjords. Herring fishing sustained this settlement founded by Norwegians in 1848, leading to a town of colourful wooden buildings, which gleam white against the moody scenery's palette, providing a spirit-lifting splash of colour during the harsh winter months. A rainbow pathway leads to a pretty, pastel-blue church and there's more local art and culture to unravel at Skaftfell, which displays bright and bold contemporary art. Its bistro also serves up a perfect caffeine hit and refreshments. Waiting on the open jaws of the Seydisfjordur, this is a gloriously picturesque town, and the steep fjord banks reflect beautifully on the smooth waters

below. The snow-capped Bjolfur mountain stands above the town and invites you to crunch along hiking trails amid untouched nature - rewarding with mesmerising views across the fjord and town below. These hills can literally sing thanks to a unique sculpture - which resonates with a traditional five-tone harmony. The remote and gorgeous Skalanes Nature reserve is a major draw, with 47 bird species resting on its dramatic bird cliff, along with countless plant varieties.

#### Day 9 - Bakkagerdi

With their dazzlingly colourful beaks and smart black and white attire - attractive and charismatic puffins are always a delight to encounter. Iceland is home to many colonies of these adorable birds, but the 10,000 pairs that breed among the remote Borgarfjorður Eystri fjord, close to the small fishing village of Bakkagerdi, are some of the most abundant and accessible you will find. As one of the easternmost points in Iceland, it offers some of the best opportunities in the country for viewing the charming seabirds away from the crowds. Birdwatchers can also look out for nesting gulls, fulmars, and kittiwakes during their explorations. The fjord, surrounded by the Dyrfjoll Mountains, takes its name from the distinctive formation of Álfaborg, or Elf Rock. Folklore swirls in this enchantingly beautiful location, as the locals say that this hill, close to the village of Bakkagerdi, is the home of the Icelandic elf-queen. Wonderful panoramic hiking trails snake off into the surrounding landscapes and hills, and you can soak in more of the scenery of eastern Iceland from the Zodiacs. Bakkagerdi is the largest village in the Borgarfjorður Eystri fjord area - with approximately 100 residents - and the low-profile, jauntily painted houses are almost lost against the dramatic mountains and waters. The village's most famous former resident was Iceland's renowned and beloved painter,



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Johannes Kjarval. His artwork adorns the small church's altarpiece, which dates back to 1914.

Day 10 - Grimsey island, Drangsnes

Day 10 - Holmavik

Set amid the bewitching landscapes of Iceland's Westfjords, Holmavik is a sleepy fishing village with an unexpected history. Dig beneath the scenic surface, and you'll discover a land of murky legends, mountain trolls, and a rich vein of magic and mythology. Holmavik is particularly notorious for a spate of witch-hunting trials that were sparked here during the 17th century, leading to several men being burned alive as witches. Today, Holmavik hosts two institutions dedicated to Iceland's distinctive and deep-rooted folklore: the Museum of Icelandic Sorcery and Witchcraft, and a folklore research centre affiliated with the University of Iceland. The museum's most macabre claim to fame is the only existing pair of necropants - a gruesome garment from folklore, said to be made from the flayed skin of the lower half of a human and thought to bring wealth to the wearer. Thankfully for the squeamish, the example on display is a (very) detailed recreation. The giants of Iceland aren't confined to the mountains; humpback whales and occasional orcas also grace the nearby waters, sometimes visible breaching the surface from the shore. Small and sturdy Icelandic horses clip-clop along serene, scenic trails, adding to the area's quiet charm. The bright and modern Holmavikurkirkja church offers a tranquil setting for respite and reflection along with glorious views of the beautiful Steingrimsfjorður fjord.

Day 11 - Dynjandi Waterfalls

Iceland is well-known for its spectacular waterfalls. The iconic Dynjandi waterfall, located in the Westfjords region, is regarded

as one of Iceland's most impressive and majestic waterfalls. At the top, the cascading water is roughly 100 feet wide and tumbles down about 330 feet into the fjord. Its name Dynjandi means, "the thundering one" and its vast size, enormous sound, and sheer force is overwhelming. It has also been nicknamed, 'The Bridal Veil' because of the way the water sprays and spreads over the rocks.

Day 12 - Reykjavik

The capital of Iceland's land of ice, fire and natural wonder, Reykjavik is a city like no other - blossoming among some of the world's most vibrant and violent scenery. Home to two-thirds of Iceland's population, Reykjavik is the island's only real city, and a welcoming and walkable place - full of bicycles gliding along boulevards or battling the wind when it rears up. Fresh licks of paint brighten the streets, and an artistic and creative atmosphere embraces studios and galleries - as well as the kitchens where an exciting culinary scene is burgeoning. Plot your adventures in the city's hip bars and cosy cafes, or waste no time in venturing out to Iceland's outdoor adventures. Reykjavik's buildings stand together - below the whip of winter's winds - together with the magnificent Hallgrímskirkja church, with its bell tower rising resolutely over the city. Iceland's largest church's design echoes the lava flows that have shaped this remote land and boasts a clean and elegant interior. The Harpa Concert Hall's sheer glass facade helps it to assimilate into the landscape, mirroring back the city and harbour. Its LED lights shimmer in honour of Iceland's greatest illuminated performance - the northern lights. Walk in the crusts between continents, feel the spray from bursts of geysers and witness the enduring power of Iceland's massive waterfalls. Whether you want to sizzle away in the earth-heated geothermal pools, or



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hike to your heart's content, you can do it all from Reykjavik - the colourful capital of this astonishing outdoor country.

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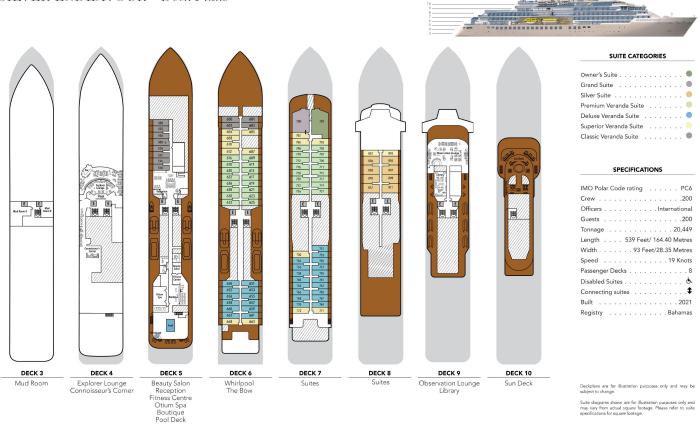


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