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COPENHAGEN TO DUBLIN - THE BRITISH ISLES AND NORWAY LUXURY EXPEDITION CRUISE

The British Isles and Norway are delightful in the summer when hidden gems can be seen in all their finery. Embark from Copenhagen and witness the fjords of Norway during the season of the Midnight Sun. Explore the Shetland and Orkney Islands, home to rare birdlife. Visit iconic Dublin and venture into Iceland to savour an array of contrasting landscapes. Discover Iona and Northern Ireland's Belfast before arrival in Dublin.



ITINERARY

DAY 0 Pre Cruise

Private Executive Transfers, International flights - Economy class or Business Class upgrade at reduced rates, Airport transfers

Day 01 Copenhagen

Effortlessly cool and down to earth, Copenhagen is a



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contemporary, clean and classy highlight of Scandinavia. A city built to be liveable, Copenhagen has refused to compromise, resulting in a forward-thinking metropolis that's green and clean. Swim in the waters of Havnebadet Islands during summer, or shelter from winter's bite by snuggling in beside a roaring open fire during winter. You can even hop on a train to Sweden, traversing the famous span of a Nordic Noir star - the Öresund Bridge. It takes just a touch over half an hour to step off the train in Malmö. There's only one way to truly explore Copenhagen and that's on two wheels. Easy bike hire schemes will get you moving across this flat city, designed with bikes at the forefront of the mind. Choose a model with electronic assistance to take the strain out of any journey, giving you the freedom to whizz around and explore the modern angular architecture of the centre, and the pastoral colours of Nyhavn waterfront. Head out to the Little Mermaid statue, inspired by Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tale - the strikingly-restrained statue is the perfect landmark for Copenhagen; unshowy, self-assured and utterly irresistible. The Danish concept of hygge is very much alive here, and you'll feel that warm cosy feeling as you visit cafes illuminated by the warm glow of hanging filament bulbs, and stuffed to the brim with thick, dusty books. Home to mega-brewer Carlsberg, Copenhagen is also a city for hop enthusiasts, and there is a thriving craft brewing scene to sample. Danish Smørrebrød sandwiches are a must try, or for something a little more substantial, settle in for a culinary voyage and try a taster menu - the city's restaurants are littered with Michelin stars.

Day 02 Day at sea

Days at sea are the perfect opportunity to relax, unwind and

catch up with what you've been meaning to do. So whether that is going to the gym, visiting the spa, whale watching, catching up on your reading or simply topping up your tan, these blue sea days are the perfect balance to busy days spent exploring shore side.

Day 03 Cruise Lysefjord

East of Stavanger, Lysefjord is the southernmost of Norway's biggest fjords. The ship will enter the narrow 42 kilometer long fjord between Forsand and Oanes and will then pass under Lysefjordbrua, the only bridge connecting the northern and southern sides. Bergsholmen and the adjacent islet with Forsand lighthouse are the only obstacles in the fjord which in some parts is as deep as the mountain cliffs on its side. The light granitic rocks on both sides of the fjord are said to have given it its name "Light Fjord". The fjord's cliffs, waterfalls and hardy trees are reflected in the calm waters, yet while cruising through the fjord, hardly any houses will be seen, as the shore provides only very limited farm area and the cliffs are just too steep. Two of Norway's famous viewpoints will be passed: on Lysefjord's northern shore is the 604 meters vertical cliff of Preikestollen, while the southern shore shows Kjerak, a mountain with a height of 1,100 meters. Kjerak has the famous Kjerakbolten, a boulder stuck 894 meters above sea level in a mountain crevasse. Before reaching Kjerak and eventually the end at Lysebotn, an old hydroelectric plant is passed at Florli -its main attraction today is to climb one of the longest wooden staircases in the world with more than 4400 steps running parallel to the tubes which formerly brought down the water.

Day 04 Rosendal



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Rosendal, with its mountains and waterfalls, is one of Norway's more romantic villages. Cut off from the rest of the world by high mountains and the Folgefonna National Park, and home to just 800 year round inhabitants, to say the village is in a little world of its own is no exaggeration! While Rosendal might lack for urban excitement, you certainly couldn't want to find a more beautiful setting. Soaring mountains peaks, narrow winding fjords, impressive waterfalls and the third largest glacier in Norway are all par for the norm here, as are breathtaking glacier views and some of the freshest air you'll ever experience. The village was famously a wedding present to Ludvig Holgersen Rosenkrantz's daughter in 1658. Rosenkrantz was the wealthiest man in the country at the time, owning over 500 farms all over western Norway. The great manor house built shortly after the wedding still stands, along with beautifully maintained gardens that were added 300 years later. The house is a wonderful reflection of the different periods styles of the various illustrious owners and restoration has been painstakingly carried out. The oldest rooms are still decorated as they were in the early 19th century while the library is the only 17th century room in Norway kept in its entirety, complete with the original rich French tapestry from the 1660's. No visit to this little village would be complete without a taste of local life. Pop into a tea shop for a traditional griddlecake, enjoyed amid splendid waterfront views.

Day 05 Bekkjarvik

Sail back through time to the quaint charm of Bekkjarvik, a former fishing village home to an inn worthy of royalty. Nestled among picturesque fjords and idyllic islands, historical warehouses, quays, and factories have been sensitively restored

and repurposed, creating a town of nostalgic flair and a sense of living history. Located on the island of Selbjørn in the Austevoll archipelago, just 25 miles south of Bergen, Bekkjarvik boasts beautiful scenery and royal lodgings. The renowned guesthouse, commissioned by King Christian IV of Denmark, was initially intended to provide a suitable rest stop for travelers after a half day of sailing along the splintered coastline. The immaculate, white-timbered walls of Bekkjarvik Gjestgiveri have warmly welcomed sea-faring travelers since the 17th century, offering guests refined gastronomic experiences with high-quality ingredients sourced from across the region. Delve further into the fractured archipelago by cycling along bridges that loop and weave along stunning cycle tracks, or relax and watch as pleasure boats glide peacefully through the waters. For those who prefer hiking, a steep stone staircase leads to breathtaking panoramic views of the fjords and archipelago unfurling before you.

Day 06 Lerwick, Shetland Islands, Scotland & Noss, 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



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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 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.

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 07 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 08 Shiant Islands, Scotland & Loch Ewe

Cliffs of tall hexagonal columns create a sensational landscape at the Shiant Islands, especially when viewed from the sea. The cliffs of six-sided rock columns look like the cross-section of an enormous honeycomb. The rock formations were formed when molten volcanic magma cooled very slowly underground. Millions of years of erosion has exposed the six-sided columns to the sea, and to us. The tallest of these formations is 120



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metres (390 feet) high. During spring and summer, flights of seabirds near the Shiant Islands catch the eye. Many long-winged seabirds wheel and soar gracefully. Others are more shaped for underwater swimming and fly in direct lines, beating stubby wings to resemble flying potatoes. Some birds nest in burrows while others, like Black-legged Kittiwakes, nest on cliffs. Rather than build nests, guillemots lay eggs on bare rock ledges. The pointed shape of the eggs ensures they roll in a tight circle, not off the ledge to the sea below. The Shiant Islands are part of the Outer Hebrides and located between the Isles of Lewis and Skye. Historically, they have supported families of sheep grazers who could tolerate a lonely island outpost. The Shiants were known as the last place in Britain where the Black Rat occurred in substantial numbers. Originally introduced to Britain from Asia in Roman times these rodents caused problems, eating eggs and chicks of seabirds. A successful eradication program eliminated the rats in 2016, giving the seabird colonies well-earned peace.

Loch Ewe is the only north facing Loch in Scotland, with an interesting history and a fine scenic landscape this area has a true natural beauty. During WW2 the loch was a convoy collecting point with a strong naval presence; it was therefore protected by light and heavy aircraft guns, a boom net and mine defence system helped to shield this precious settlement. Loch Ewe is a natural deep water sea loch that links to the Atlantic Ocean with a relatively small mouth giving the loch a vast amount of protection from the weather. Nearby Inver Ewe gardens thrive on the warm currents of the North Atlantic Drift to create an oasis of colour and fertility where exotic plants from many countries flourish on latitude more northerly than Moscow,

giving an almost continual display of colour throughout the year.

Day 09 Lunga

The stunning Isle of Lunga is the largest island in the Treshnish archipelago. With volcanic origin the isle was populated until the 19th Century, and remains of black houses can be seen around this magnificent coastal jewel. Abundant plant life and exotic birdlife are now the main inhabitants of the area. Fortunate visitors view the magnificent array of birds, especially the great puffins that breed on the islands plateau. One can sit within just a few feet away without disturbing the avian ambassador's peace. The 81 hectare island is home to many rare and endangered plants such as, primroses and orchids. Views over the landscape and across the ocean can be seen from the 300 foot high cliffs.

Day 10 Dublin

Atmospheric cobbled streets, with buskers scraping fiddles and characterful pubs inviting passersby inside, is Dublin in a snapshot. A city of irrepressible energy and lust for life, Ireland's capital is as welcoming a place as you'll find. Horse-drawn carriages plod along cobbled centuries-old streets, blending with an easy-going, cosmopolitan outlook. Known for its fun-filled gathering of pubs, any excuse works to enjoy a celebratory toast and chat among good company. Home to perhaps the world's most famous beer - slurp perfect pourings of thick, dark Guinness - cranked out for the city's thirsty punters. Learn more of the humble pint's journey at the Guinness Storehouse. Dublin has come along way since the Vikings established a trading port here, back in the 9th Century. In the time since, the city became the British Empire's defacto



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second city, and the Georgian imprint still adds oodles of historic character. Learn of 1916's Easter Uprising, when the Irish rebelled and established their independence here, as you visit the infamous, haunting Kilmainham Gaol. The uprising's leaders were tried and executed in these dark confines. Dublin's St. Patrick's Cathedral has immense history below its steep spire, which dates back to 1191. There's rich literary heritage to leaf through too, and the city's streets were rendered vividly in James Joyce's classic Ulysses. The Museum of Literature celebrates the full scope of Dublin's lyrical talents. Trinity College also has a prestigious roll-call of alumni - visit to see the Book of Kells, a beautifully illustrated bible of the medieval era.

Day 11 Lunga

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Day 12 St. Kilda & Boreray Island cruising

Gloriously remote, St. Kilda is an archipelago 50 miles off the Isle of Harris. Although the four islands are uninhabited by humans, thousands of seas birds call these craggy cliffs home,

clinging to the sheer faces as if by magic. Not only is St. Kilda home to the UK's largest colony of Atlantic Puffin (almost 1 million), but also the world largest colony Gannets nests on Boreray island and its sea stacks. The islands also home decedents of the world's original Soay sheep as well as having a breed of eponymously named mice. The extremely rare St. Kilda wren unsurprisingly hails from St. Kilda, so birders should visit with notebook, binoculars and camera to hand. While endemic animal species is rife on the island, St. Kilda has not been peopled since 1930 after the last inhabitants voted that human life was unsustainable. However, permanent habitation had been possible in the Medieval Ages, and a vast National Trust for Scotland project to restore the dwellings is currently being undertaken. The islands even enjoyed a status as being an ideal holiday destination in the 19th century. Today, the only humans living on the islands are passionate history, science and conservation scholars. One of the caretakers even acts as shopkeeper and postmaster for any visitors who might like to send a postcard home from St. Kilda. It should be noted that St. Kilda is the UKs only (and just one of 39 in the world) dual World Heritage status from UNESCO in recognition of its Natural Heritage and cultural significance.

Erupting out of the Atlantic waters like a mythical beast, Boreray Island captivates all those who lay eyes upon it. As we approach, listen out for sharp intakes of breath - the abrasive and immense form of this staggering island never fails to astound. Few locations command such awe as uninhabited Boreray, left to the seabirds since the last residents of the St Kilda Islands departed in 1930. Watch as vast numbers of Northern Gannets glide overhead before attempting skilful



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landings at tucked-away nest sites or plunge into the sea, seeking food for their new chicks. Northern Fulmars also make their homes on the volcanic cliffs, while Atlantic Puffins dart in and out of burrows on the slopes. The rugged, rocky island is also well known for the hardy sheep who cling to its shores. You might be able to pick out the rare Boreray Sheep, unique to the island, grazing on the hilly slopes as we cruise alongside the island and the attendant rock stacks that stand tall against the Atlantic onslaught. Boreray forms a part of the dramatic St Kilda World Heritage Site and is a rare example of a site recognised for both its outstanding natural and cultural values.

Day 13 Day at sea

Days at sea are the perfect opportunity to relax, unwind and catch up with what you've been meaning to do. So whether that is going to the gym, visiting the spa, whale watching, catching up on your reading or simply topping up your tan, these blue sea days are the perfect balance to busy days spent exploring shore side.

Day 14 Djupivogur

Slow the pace and discover the refreshing approach to life that Djupivogur has made its trademark. You can leave your phone behind as you step out into this Icelandic town, which has won awards celebrating its leisurely outlook and stubborn rebellion against the frenetic pace of modern life. After all, who needs emails and notifications when you have some of the most humbling monochrome scenery and gashed fjords, waiting on your doorstep? Sitting on a peninsula to the south-east of Iceland, the glacial approach to life here wins many hearts. A place where hammers knock on metal in workshops, artists

ladle paint onto canvases, and where you might spot a few Icelandic horses roaming across mountains, Djupivogur is an uninhibited artistic hub - full of makers and creatives. The most expansive project is the 34 egg sculptures that dot the coastline, created by the Icelandic artist, Sigurður Guðmundsson. Each egg represents a different native bird species. Fishing remains the primary industry, and you can savour the soft fruits of the labour in restaurants serving up smoked trout and fish soup within their cosy confines. Wander the surrounding landscapes, where snow-freckled mountains rise, and lazy seals lie on dark rock beaches, to feel Djupivogur's natural inspiration seeping under your skin. Alive with greens and golds in summer, further ventures reveal glaciers and the sprawling waterfalls of Vatnajokull National Park. The cliff-hugging puffins of Papey Island are a must see, while Bulandstindur Mountain's pyramid shape is a stand out even among these fairy-tale landscapes.

Day 15 Tumavik & Raufarhofn

Connect with an authentic way of life amid the achingly beautiful landscapes of Iceland's north. As you delve into this raw and secluded environment, the volcanic beaches, moss-covered tundra expanses and rich blue Atlantic waters form a stunning visual palette. Setting foot ashore onto the region's stark and scenic sands, you will learn fascinating stories of life and land at this far-northerly latitude. Connect with the warm locals who reside at this remote location and have many stories to share spanning generations. Relax amid the glorious grandeur of the landscape, breathing in the crisp, northerly air - or join a hike to tread spectacular trails across landscapes framed by salt-and-pepper mountains in the distance. On the dark,



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volcanic beaches, you may witness adorable Icelandic horses cantering along, their hooves splashing through the gentle waves as they roll in. Keep your eyes peeled to spot Iceland's diverse birdlife and other wildlife during your time in Tumavik; new encounters are never too far away.

Located in the very northernmost reaches of Iceland, Raufarhofn sits within touching distance of the Arctic Circle. This small, unassuming town, known as the Arctic Circle Village, was once a bustling hub of the herring trade until its decline in the 1970s. This proximity to the Arctic Circle - just a few miles offshore - provides Raufarhofn with long summer days, dark winters, and intense prolonged sunsets and sunrises. This ethereal setting is the ideal location for an ode to Iceland's rich folk traditions. Just outside the town, the Arctic Henge, a colossal modern monument inspired by ancient pagan traditions, awaits. The brainchild of a local visionary Erlingur Thoroddsen, the stone circle here was designed by Icelandic artist Haukur Halldorsson. The series of tapering archways and concentric stone circles span 52 metres in diameter and carefully integrates inspirations from the Eddic poem Voluspa and Norse mythology. Composed of vast basalt stones, the henge aligns with celestial events and dramatically frames the midnight sun's majesty, serving as a pagan calendar. A truly unique site in Iceland; it's hard not to feel a profound sense of awe at this latitude as the stone circle glows in honeyed daylight, casting beautiful shadows all around.

Day 16 Hofsos & Malmey Island & Drangey Island

Enjoy a rejuvenating glimpse into northern Iceland's immense beauty. Sitting on the Skagafjorður Fjord's eastern edge, Hofsos

was one of Iceland's oldest trading stations, and the colourful village has successfully retained its unique historical charm. The scenic fjord's waters are punctuated by a trio of stark islands, which beckon birdwatchers and folklore enthusiasts alike - spot puffins and seabird colonies amid the artfully sculpted rock formations and cathedral-like cliffs. The Hofsos swimming pool is one of Iceland's most beautiful opportunities for a dip. Sink into the warm pool waters and drift toward the infinity edge, where it appears as though you could swim out into the breathtaking fjord waters towards the distant mountain border. Close to the pool is a set of basalt rock columns stacked up like natural organ pipes. Dry off ahead of a visit to Hofsos's thoughtful museum, which details the stories of the thousands of Icelanders who emigrated to North America in the 1800s, seeking an escape from the challenging life at the time, which was wrought by a cycle of volcanic eruptions and perilous famines. Nearby, you can also find a small, almost camouflaged surprise blending into the surrounding mountains - the oldest church in Iceland. The stunning setting and turf-clad wooden chapel propose a peaceful moment of contemplation and tranquillity.

Emerging from the tranquil waters of Skagafjorður in northern Iceland, Malmey Island is a striking s-shaped strip of land, its perspective constantly shifting as you sail alongside. In combination with its sister islands - the steep-sided Drangey and the puffin-populated Lundey - Malmey forms a distinctive trio, each contributing intrigue to the scenic fjord. Spanning just over two miles in length and less than a mile in width, Malmey Island is a captivating feature of Skagafjorður, surrounded by the remote beauty of the Icelandic wilderness and undulating



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mountain valleys. At the island's southern tip stands a solitary orange lighthouse, overseeing an area rich in mystery, history, and intriguing folklore. Legend has it that the island bears curses, foretelling doom for any family that dares to inhabit it for over twenty years. Whispers say that any housewife who dares to test this is doomed to a grim fate of madness and disappearance, while another legend states that horses and mice cannot remain on the island. The island has lain uninhabited since a devastating fire wiped out a small farming community of 14 people in 1950 - aside from the abundant birdlife, which can be spotted on the cliffs and swirling above the waters. Massive breaching whales and lazy seals are also regular visitors to these waters.

Drangey Island, famed as the refuge of Iceland's most notorious outlaw - Grettir the Strong - stands as a commanding fortress of rock in the tranquil waters of Skagafjorður. A stark interruption to the expansive, open views of the fjord, this natural citadel is also a stronghold for dozens of nesting seabird colonies. This dramatic island, which towers 180 metres high, is a lasting remnant of a 700,000-year-old volcano - although Icelandic folklore dictates that the island formed when two trolls and their cow were petrified by the morning sun's rays while attempting to traverse the fjord. The island's lore runs deep, and Drangey is intrinsically intertwined with tales from the 'Grettis Saga'. Drangey Island was Grettir's last escape, and he spent his final three years in exile here alongside his brother Illugi before finally succumbing to his enemies. Today, the only outlaws to be found running amok are the hordes of curious puffins and other seabirds, such as white-bellied guillemots and diving gannets, which thrive on the steep, sheer cliffs. Below, in the deep fjord

waters, the sounds of whalesong reverberate, and gentle giants like humpbacks and minkes frequent these waters.

Day 17 Veidileysufjordur & Djupavik

Discover northern Iceland's fantastic, outlying beauty as you cruise the majestic Veidileysufjorður. Nestled away in the scenic Westfjords, relatively few visitors reach this secluded area. Enjoy privileged access as we sail into the waters of the fjord, with its steep, bowl-like valley sides. Veidileysufjorður's serene isolation makes it an ideal locale for revelling in Iceland's grandiose natural glory, and you can admire views of snow-capped peaks contrasting sharply against the deep navy-blue hues of the North Atlantic. At the fjord's terminus, a burbling waterfall tumbles its way leisurely down the emerald hillside from above. The pristine fjord is also a place to look out for Iceland's incredible marine life; during summer, humpback whales and playful seals often frequent its inky waters. Soak in the silence and serenity, punctuated only by the calls of seabirds like Black-legged Kittiwakes and Common Guillemots, which swoop above the water's surface, their calls echoing across the still waters. Just beyond the northern mountains of Veidileysufjorður lies Djupavik fjord, which boasts its own attractive waterfall and a repurposed historic herring factory.

Almost swallowed whole by the scenic embrace of Iceland's Westfjords, tiny Djupavik enjoys a starkly beautiful location, which echoes with forgotten industry. This northwestern haven is often cut off by winter's heavy snows and reachable only by a winding road, adding to the aura of distant adventure. The ceaseless murmur of Djupavikurfoss waterfall calls visitors



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ashore to a small huddle of cherry red houses trimmed in cream beside the glistening fjord waters. Set in one of the most sparsely populated regions on the island, the shore is dominated by an incongruous, sprawling factory. When built, it was the largest concrete structure in Iceland and a state-of-the-art hub of advanced automation and entrepreneurship. Now hauntingly silent, the abandoned herring factory, which dates back to 1934, serves as an eerie reminder of the once-thriving trade that sprung up in an unlikely manner in this far-flung corner of Iceland. Explore the remains, including the rusting ship that once served as a dormitory for the factory's male workers and now rests forlornly near the water. Nowadays, the factory's shell has been carefully and creatively repurposed as an evocative art gallery and hotel. Hikers can wander amid the fjord's beautiful setting, with trails offering explorations of the tumbling waterfall behind and widescreen views of the picturesque, moody Reykjafjorður fjord scenery below.

Day 18 Husavik

There's simply nowhere better than Husavik - the European capital of whale watching - for getting up close and personal with the majestic giants of the ocean. Feel the awe as whales breach the waves around you, before gulping in air and plunging away with almighty tale flicks. Pretty Husavik is framed by the majestic Husavikurfjall mountain, which swells up behind, creating a stunning backdrop for the town's tiny wooden warehouses, cherry red houses and undulating fishing ships. The little wooden church has been a beacon of light, guiding tired fishermen back to the shores of Iceland's oldest settlement, since 1907. Let the wind rip through your hair and the sea speckle your face, as you ride waves out among the region's

almighty marine creatures, who throw their weight around so spectacularly. Sail among gentle giants in Shaky Bay, spotting humpbacks, minke whales and the world's biggest - blue whales. You may also see teams of smaller white-beaked dolphins skipping across the waves, displaying the full range of acrobatic skills. The town's whale museum is an interesting journey through Iceland's relationship with the sea giants, while its restaurants serve up local specialities - taste juicy reindeer burger and plokkfiskur, a buttery mash of local fish. Hikes into the surrounding countryside can take you up around Lake Botnsvatn, to views down from the slopes of the Husavikurfjall - where purple spired lupin flowers spill down amongst the emerald slopes. From the summit, look out over views of the bay, reaching out to the crumpled snowy peaks beyond. Or feel the full force of this land of natural power, at Dettifoss Waterfall, one of Europe's most powerful, thrashing plumes.

Day 19 Eskifjordur

"Almost swallowed up by the looming forms of Eskja and Holmatindur mountains, the quiet fishing village of Eskifjordur minds its own business in the midst of some of Iceland's most extroverted natural scenery. A place where the wind's gentle whistle and the whir of fishing rods unspooling are the only sounds you hear as you stroll, Eskifjordur is a peaceful introduction to eastern Iceland's fjord lands. Get lucky, and you'll witness the scenic setting bathed in an otherworldly, achingly-beautiful light - as daylight trickles away and emerald plumes spread across the night's sky. Natural wonders abound here, whether it's the streams that gurgle, the finger-like reach of the Reyðarfjorður fjord, or the geothermal pools that bubble with warmth from the depths of the earth. Holmatindur mountain



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lends the area's scenery evocative drama, soaring from the waters like a snow-speckled pyramid. Ambitious hikers who conquer the peak will be richly rewarded with magnificent widescreen panoramas across the stunning landscape. The views are no less mesmerising from ground level, with pretty, cherry-red fishing huts adding a charming accent to the landscape. Indulge in gentler walks among the cacophony of birdlife, or take in cultural pursuits like the Maritime Museum, and exposed spar mine nearby. Fishing is a way of life here, and the glass-smooth fjord waters hold a rich bounty for keen anglers. Try for yourself - to witness first hand how the fish practically jump onto your line - or leave it to the experts and taste the produce that Eskifjordur is best known for - shark meat and pickled herring."

Day 20 Day at sea

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Day 21 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 22 Duart, Isle of Mull, Hebrides & Iona

An ancient stone castle on a remote rugged landscape evokes all sorts of fantasies, especially when approached from the sea. You can imagine mythical, romantic or historic tales as you approach or explore the Duart Castle on the Isle of Mull. The true stories may be just as good.

The Isle of Mull is the second largest of the islands of the Inner Hebrides, after the Isle of Skye. The island has a mountainous core and several radiating promontories covered in moorland. On one headland jutting into the Sound of Mull sits Duart Castle. It was originally built in the 13th century and soon



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became the ancestral home of the Clan Maclean. Control and ownership of the castle has changed hands over the centuries as broader conflicts for the Isle of Mull and Scotland played out. It was a ruin when the Maclean clan regained control by purchasing and restoring the castle in 1911. It is clan home for all the descendants of the family of Maclean spread throughout the world.

There are stories of wrecks and treasure in the waters near Duart. The most evocative must be the wreck of a Spanish galleon in Tobermory Bay. This ship was part of the Spanish Armada defeated by the English fleet and Atlantic storms, and the crew were taken to Duart Castle. The galleon is rumoured to have a treasure of gold bullion still waiting to be found. Zodiac travel may reveal other treasures. Mull is known for its European Otters and the majestic White-tailed Sea Eagle which has successfully re-colonised Mull after a long absence.

If tiny islands that resonate with peace and tranquillity are your idea of travel heaven, then welcome to Iona. Almost 200 miles east of Edinburgh, set in Scotland's Inner Hebrides, this magical island has a spiritual reputation that precedes it. And luckily, more than lives up to. The island is minuscule. Just three miles long and only one and a half miles wide, this is not a place that hums with urban attractions. 120 people call Iona home (this number rises significantly if the gull, tern and Kittiwake population is added), although residential numbers do go up (to a whopping 175) in summer. The beautiful coastline is lapped by the gulf stream and gives the island a warm climate with sandy beaches that look more Mediterranean than Scottish! Add to that a green field landscape that is just beautiful, and

you'll find that Iona is a place that stays with you long after you leave. Iona's main attraction is of course its abbey. Built in 563 by Saint Columba and his monks, the abbey is the reason why Iona is called the cradle of Christianity. Not only is the abbey (today an ecumenical church) one of the best - if not the best - example of ecclesiastical architecture dating from the Middle Ages, but it also serves as an important site of spiritual pilgrimage. St. Martin's Cross, a 9th century Celtic cross that stands outside the abbey, is considered as the finest example of Celtic crosses in the British Isles. Reilig Odhrain, or the cemetery, allegedly contains the remains of many Scottish kings.

Day 23 Belfast

Reborn as a cool, modern city, Belfast has successfully left its troubles behind, emerging as a hotbed of culture and architecture, where the comfort of a cosy pub is never far away. Take a voyage of discovery in its maritime quarter, home to a celebrated museum dedicated to the most famous ship ever built, which was constructed right here in the city's shipyards. A walk across the Lagan Weir Footbridge brings you to Belfast's fascinating Titanic District - an area of the city devoted to its rich ship-building heritage. The state-of-the-art Titanic Museum brings the story of the doomed vessel to life, and is the largest museum dedicated to the infamously 'unsinkable' ship. Wind up a nautical-themed ramble along the Maritime Mile with a visit to SS Nomadic, the smaller cousin of the Titanic, and a ship which serves as a fascinating time capsule back to the pomp and grandeur of the Titanic, while also telling its own stories of service in both World Wars. There's just enough time to give the 10-metre long Salmon of Knowledge sculpture a quick peck for



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luck, before continuing to explore. A stark barbed wire and graffitied sheet metal barrier marks an abrupt scar through the city's residential areas. The Peace Line was constructed during the height of the Troubles, when Belfast was plagued by sectarian divisions between Protestants and Catholics. Nowadays, you can jump in a black taxi tour to see the colourful murals and living history of the walls, which stand as a stark reminder of the fragility of peace. After exploring the city's historic divisions, a reminder of Belfast's uniting creativity can be found at the Metropolitan Arts Centre - a seven-storey tall building, which invites light to gloriously cascade inside. The Cathedral Quarter is a cobbled blend of flower-adorned pubs, restaurants and theatres, and venues where music spills out onto the streets at night, and many a pint is cheerily shared.

Day 24 Dublin

Atmospheric cobbled streets, with buskers scraping fiddles and characterful pubs inviting passersby inside, is Dublin in a snapshot. A city of irrepressible energy and lust for life, Ireland's capital is as welcoming a place as you'll find. Horse-drawn carriages plod along cobbled centuries-old streets, blending with an easy-going, cosmopolitan outlook. Known for its fun-filled gathering of pubs, any excuse works to enjoy a celebratory toast and chat among good company. Home to perhaps the world's most famous beer - slurp perfect pourings of thick, dark Guinness - cranked out for the city's thirsty punters. Learn more of the humble pint's journey at the Guinness Storehouse. Dublin has come along way since the Vikings established a trading port here, back in the 9th Century. In the time since, the city became the British Empire's defacto second city, and the Georgian imprint still adds oodles of

historic character. Learn of 1916's Easter Uprising, when the Irish rebelled and established their independence here, as you visit the infamous, haunting Kilmainham Gaol. The uprising's leaders were tried and executed in these dark confines. Dublin's St. Patrick's Cathedral has immense history below its steep spire, which dates back to 1191. There's rich literary heritage to leaf through too, and the city's streets were rendered vividly in James Joyce's classic Ulysses. The Museum of Literature celebrates the full scope of Dublin's lyrical talents. Trinity College also has a prestigious roll-call of alumni - visit to see the Book of Kells, a beautifully illustrated bible of the medieval era.

Please note:

Itineraries are subject to change.



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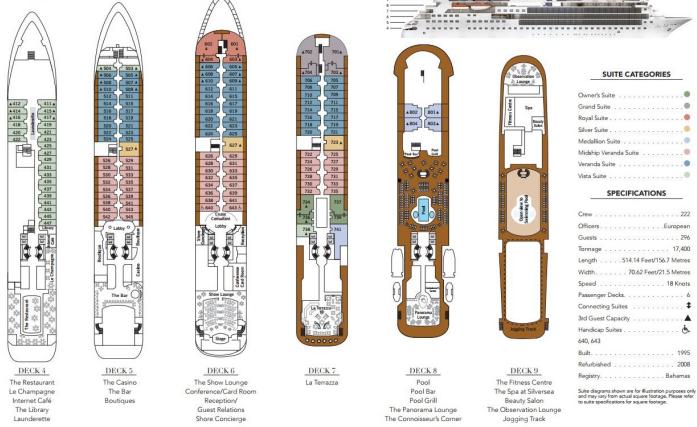


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