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LISBON TO REYKJAVIK - 29 DAY SPAIN, PORTUGAL, FRANCE & SCOTLAND LUXURY CRUISE

Scattered along spectacular Atlantic coastline, Western Europe's marvels await. Trade Lisbon's bustling energy for quaint Normandy harbours where succulent mussels are drenched in wine and garlic. The UK's storied shores invite you to counterpoint London's frenetic tempo with natural wonders of the far-north - like the windswept Hebrides and Scotland's tranquil lochs. Finally, Iceland's lava-sculpted lands beckon.



ITINERARY

Day 1 Pre Cruise

Day 2 Lisbon

A glorious mosaic of beauty, freedom and authenticity, Portugal's capital is a stirring artwork of a city. Known for the seven hills it spreads across, and its stirring fado music, Lisbon is a pastel-coloured blend of houses and beautiful tile artworks -



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and this creative city strikes a perfect harmony between natural and manmade beauty. Stroll along Alfama's steep, cobbled streets as you explore one of the city's oldest neighbourhoods - where each house and door could be its own photograph. Look for the decorative tiles, with the distinctive blues and whites of Azulejo ceramics, and visit the dedicated museum to learn more. Afterwards, wind up to São Jorge Castle, where views out across Lisbon's red rooftops unravel. Just one of many majestic viewpoints, you can also seek out Miradouro da Graça for perhaps Lisbon's finest panorama, with the copper-coloured suspension bridge stretching over sparkling water beyond the sea of buildings. The elegant Tower of Belém rises in the Tagus estuary and is a historic defender of these shores. The grand, carved cloisters of Jerónimos Monastery spread out close by, and there's another UNESCO recognised location close by at Sintra, where a colourful town is set amid thick gardens and towering mountains - capped by the royal Pena Palace. Later, relax and take a quick break to drink Ginjinha, a cherry liqueur made from chocolate cups instead of coffee. Lisboetas have a sweet tooth, and the famous Pastel de Nata's crumbling pastry and caramelised-custard topping is the essential accompaniment to any coffee stop.

Day 3 Oporto (Leixões)

Steep, stacked banks of evocative buildings and cobbled streets perch scenically over the River Douro, in this authentic, atmospheric Portuguese city. Famed for its wine and bright azulejo tiles - which turn streets into art galleries - Oporto is a charming taste of the real Portugal. Wander the uneven paths of the country's second-largest city, which are soaked with history, tradition and eye-catching details. Start in the gorgeous, historic Ribeira neighbourhood at the River Douro, and walk up through

tiny alleys and narrow streets lined with restaurants and cafes. Catch your breath with a coffee, and be sure to try the famous pastel de nata pastry as a sweet accompaniment. Enjoy views of the colourful city from the skeletal Ponte de Dom Luis I bridge. Its design might ring a bell - the structure was created by a student of Gustav Eiffel, and has a similar aesthetic to his famous tower creation. Porto Cathedral sits on a rise of steps, towering above the city and offering spectacular views down. The cloisters are a highlight - with beautiful mosaics of the renowned blue and white tiles gleaming. If you're hungry, the indulgent Francesinha sandwich will fill you up for days. A Portuguese take on French toast - it's packed full of ham and slathered in cheese, egg and sauce. Or settle in for a feast on some of Portugal's ubiquitous salted cod, Bacalhau. The climate nurtures the revered vineyards, which surround the city, helping to produce harvests of perfect grapes. Head out to landscapes coated in vineyards from the Douro Valley to try some of the finest local wines.

Day 4 Vigo (Galicia)

Located in in Galicia, in the northwest of Spain on the Portuguese border, Vigo is perhaps the country's most underrated destination. Considered by many as "just" an industrial fishing port (meaning the seafood rarely travels further than a mile to your plate), Vigo seduces everyone with its cuisine, landscape and warm Spanish welcomes. Like many of Galicia's coastal towns, life in Vigo has been dictated by the ocean. The city dates back to Roman times and Romanesque architecture such as the churches of Santa María de Castrelos, Santiago de Bembrive, San Salvador de Coruxo can be found all over the city. From the 16th-18th centuries it became alive with commercial trade and buccaneers looking for sunken treasure.



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The town still enjoys its status as having sunken treasure in its waters, and debates about who would own this if ever discovered periodically colour local conversations. The old town and fishermen's quarter are worth exploring, although unfortunately with the port's rapid expansion in the 20th century, many of the original fishermen's houses were demolished. However, remnants of the city's Medieval past are still visible and a trip along the Spanish-Portuguese border will reward you with the beautiful walled Medieval city of Tui and the Velansa Fortress. The 13th century fortress offers a splendid view of the fortified Cathedral of Tui on the opposite side of the River Miño. Mount Castro, a castle fortress actually in the city, commands a magnificent view of Vigo and the bay.

Day 5 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 6 Belle Ile & Quiberon

Lovely Belle Ile – or Belle Ile en Mer to give it its full title – carries its name well. Set 14 km off the coast of mainland Brittany, the “beautiful island in the sea” is an undiscovered marvel. Tourists are few and far on Belle Ile. And with reason – it's impossible to get to except by ship and even then it is pretty tortuous: the island is a six-hour car ride from Paris to the tiny port town of Quiberon, and is then followed by a 30-minute ferry ride. But it is well worth it. Pretty white fishermen's cottages welcome you, rocky creeks with waters worthy of the Caribbean (although not the same temperature) beckon you and sailing

boats rock gently in their moorings. Le Palais, the island's main town, boasts a 16th-century citadel standing guard near the harbour. Monet painted the village of Sauzon in 1886 and Sarah Bernhart once owned a home on the island. The island's rich history dates back as far as 6,000 BC, when it was separated from mainland France. Over the years Belle Ile has fallen prey to many invasions, primary due to inadequate defences. That all changed when Louis XIV commissioned Vauban to fortify the island and entrusted its management to the States of Brittany. After a short occupation of the island by the English (1761-1763), the island's land was divided up among all of its inhabitants. The French Revolution would further change things, and once Belle Ile was released from the king's domaine, the island prospered with the development of agriculture, fishing, and ship building. Quiberon is a peninsula of contrasting natural beauty, from its wild, unspoilt western coastline to the sheltered, sandy beaches of the eponymous bay to the east. Visitors flock to the charming fishing villages that serve as popular summertime resorts, coloured with art galleries and alive with the hum of restaurants that serve freshly caught fish. Connected to the mainland by a narrow tombolo, which is guarded by the formidable Penthièvre Fort, the Quiberon Peninsula stretches south for approximately 9 kilometres (6 miles) forming the western border of Quiberon Bay. In 1759 this bay was the site of a decisive battle in the 7 Years' War, when the British Royal Navy gained supremacy over its French counterpart. In the following century Port Maria at the very southern tip, rose to prominence as France's leading sardine harbour, thanks to the development of preserving food in sealed and cooked bottles, later tin cans. The peninsula's earlier history is still very much evident, with numerous menhirs and stone alignments present along its length, hinting at the significance of

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the area in megalithic times. Perhaps this was partly a reflection on the peninsula's natural beauty, but also on the dominant force of the Atlantic Ocean that sculpted it. The result is known locally as the "Wild Coast", with caves, arches and rocky coves making for a sublime and breathtakingly beautiful spectacle. Overflowing with history, culture and natural beauty, no wonder Quiberon is known as the "Peninsula of Dreams".

Day 7 Concarneau & Iles des Glénan

Fishing has dominated the Brittany town of Concarneau from its beginning. Starting as a safe harbour for local fishing boats it expanded to become an important port and fish processing base for a deepwater tuna fishing fleet. A museum highlights the rich fishing history, and other reminders of fishing both past and present are all around. The harbour shores have walking tracks, beaches and smaller villages to explore. Listen out for the Breton language of Brittany being spoken. The main town today is large and bustling and occupies the mainland of the harbour. The original old part of town, known as the Ville Close, is a different story. It was built on an island in the harbour for safety. A defensive wall around the town was constructed in the 14th century and upgraded in the 17th century. You can still patrol the ramparts of the wall today. The strategic safe harbour and town was fought over several times. One famous battle was in 1373 during the 100-year War when the Breton knight Bertrand du Guesclin, "The Eagle of Brittany", drove the English from the town. The inside of Ville Close is a jumble of timbered and gabled houses, often decorated with flowers, crowding cobbled streets. It is a tight fit, as the town is only 350 metres (1150 feet) by 100 metres (330 feet) in size. We can understand why the town overflowed to nearby shores. As you cross the bridge to Ville Close you leave much of the modern world and pass an old

clock tower that perhaps symbolises a step back to a medieval time. White sand beaches and a turquoise sea attracts visitors to the Glénan Islands. A cluster of nine low islands and many rocky outcrops surrounds a central lagoon of protected waters. All the islands are tiny, with a total area of only 5000 hectares (12,000 acres). The islands are all visible at once from a high vantage such as a ship. The stunning white sands are produced from the break-up of Maërl, a calcareous marine alga, which makes the beaches look like a tropical coral shoreline. The islands are treeless, so there is little shade, but there are brightly coloured flowers such as the blue Borage and the rare Narcissus of Glénan. The Narcissus is a beautiful white flower related to daffodils. It produces a stunning mass display in spring, with a few flowers persisting to summer. As it is only found naturally on the Glénan islands, parts of the islands are a Nature Reserve to protect it. So please don't pick the flowers! Day trippers reach the main island of Saint Nicolas from the mainland of western Brittany 16 kilometres (10 miles) away by ferry or yacht. There are few facilities on the islands and visitors only flock to the island in summer weather. Visible from all points of Glénan is a lighthouse on Ile de Penfret, and Cigogne, a fort built on an isle by the French in 1756. The fort could hold 80 troops and was installed to protect the region from English pirates and prevent them using the lagoon as shelter. From our point of view today, it does not look like a hardship posting.

Day 8 Douarnenez

The idyllic town of Douarnenez has been a favourite of artists for 200 years, and continues to colour people's memory. It's impossible not to fall in love with the narrow streets, quaint harbours and the legend of the lost city of Ys, said to lie beneath the waters of the bay. Douarnenez developed as a prosperous



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port in the 16th century, through the export of fine cloth and sails, that were made in the nearby village of Locronan (voted one of the most beautiful villages in France), a trade that was only surpassed in the 19th century by the sardine fishery. Taking the "Sardine Trail" is one of the best ways to explore the town - it consists of 17 information panels that explain the key points of interest: start (or finish) at the maritime museum at Port-Rhu, where you can play skipper on 5 different boats in the harbour. Narrow cobbled streets with traditional fishermen's houses and their workshops add immeasurable charm to the town. Many of these have been given a new lease of life as craft shops, galleries, cafes and restaurants - why not linger over a glass of cider or give in to temptation and try the local cake, Kouign-amann (described in the New York Times as "the fattiest pastry in all of Europe"). To walk off those calories, head up to the cliffs and to the village of Les Plomarch, a favourite spot of artists and also where you can see the remains of Roman era garum vats - tanks to make a fermented fish sauce - before letting the last of your cares dissolve away at the beach of Le Ris.

Day 9 Roscoff & Batz Island

Roscoff is regarded as "the most British of Brittany's ports", and is steeped in charm and character to enchant travellers and prolong their stay. Well-built houses of cut-stone granite reveal the prosperity of former times when the town's mainstay was cross-Channel maritime trade. Their characteristic dormer windows look like extra eyes that peer out and survey the activity of the harbour, while the sloped cellar entrances prompt images of smugglers hurriedly storing their goods on thick foggy nights. The strangely named Onion Johnny Museum celebrates the cross-Channel trade link, and is well-worth a visit. Onion

Johnnies were Bretons who crossed seasonally to the UK and sold their distinctive pink onions door to door from strings on their bicycles (in the early 19th century it was easier to sail to the UK than to take the roads to Paris). Other notable attractions around the town are the Jardin Exotique which contains over 3000 exotic plants, the ornately decorated church of Notre-Dame-de-Croas-Batz, and the contrastingly simple 17th century Chapel of Sainte-Barbe perched atop a cliff. For pure relaxation and pampering then why not indulge with a visit to one of the saltwater spa hotels. Roscoff became France's first thalassotherapy resort in 1899, using saltwater to treat rheumatism and other ailments. Nowadays many hotels offer relaxation treatments based around hot saltwater pools, Jacuzzis and steam rooms, and is the perfect way to finish your Breton experience. "Let the towering, grey-scale lighthouse guide you ashore to this small, seahorse-shaped island, which packs a gentle punch of rugged Breton beauty. Sitting just offshore from Roscoff, where Brittany stretches out into the rolling waves of the Atlantic, Batz Island is one of the pretty chain of islands called the Iles du Ponant. It is populated with characterful old houses, gorgeous coastal walks and a generous bounty of hidden coves and beaches. It is possible to wander the entire perimeter of the entire island at leisure - or various shorter loops - picking out monuments, or making your way to pearly white sand beaches, where glorious blue water sparkles and shimmers on sunny days. Handsome sea views constantly unveil themselves here, however you choose to familiarise yourself with the island. Walk, or cycle quiet, idyllic roads to cut through farms and fields besides little trundling tractors. Of course, the seafood is something to savour too. Dine on the freshest local mussels, swimming in delicious garlic concoctions at your pick of the island's pretty restaurants. Or share a relaxing seaside



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coffee, watching the fishing boats as they trawl out to sea. If you're feeling energetic, take a deep breath and clamber up the many steps to the top of the lighthouse, to be rewarded with spectacular sweeping views of the breathtaking Brittany coastline. You might also wander to globetrotting gardens, which bloom with evocative colour and tall palm trees, landscaped before spectacular coastal views.

Day 10 Saint Malo (Brittany)

Ship sails flutter in the breeze, at the natural port of Saint-Malo - a historic and resilient walled city, which watches out over golden sands and island fortresses. Strung tenuously to the mainland, Saint Malo was the historic home of a rowdy mix of skilled sailors and new world explorers - as well as the plunderers who earned the place its 'Pirate City' title. Some of history's great voyages have launched from here - including Jacques Cartier's, which led to the settlement of New France and modern-day Quebec. Founded by a Welsh monk, who made his way here in the 6th century, Saint Malo's castle is forged from sheer granite, and its steep defensive ramparts arise defiantly. The atmospheric walled town turns its back to the mainland and gazes out longingly into the sea. Explore streets that breathe with maritime tales and medieval charm - restored from the intense damage sustained during the Second World War. Cathédrale de St Malo rises above the tight paths, offering views of the peppered islands and fortifications. Boatloads of fresh oysters and scallops are heaved ashore - savour them or grab savoury crepes galettes, stuffed with cheese and ham. Wash Saint Malo's foods down with a Brittany cider, which challenges wine as the indulgence of choice in these parts. A highly tidal region, the pocket-sized islands of Petit Bé and Grand Bé join the mainland, and you can explore at leisure as

the tide recedes. The incredible island of Mont Saint Michel also looms in the estuary of the Couesnon River nearby, hovering like a cinematic mirage above high tide's waters. Elsewhere, Cap Fréhel's lush green peninsula juts out from the emerald coast towards Jersey, tempting with rich coastal hiking trails.

Day 11 Le Havre

Le Havre is a captivating mix of industrial and natural grandeur with an amazing feeling of space and light. Having been virtually destroyed in World War II, only a handful of historic buildings in the city centre survived. It was rebuilt and reborn by a very forward thinking architect, Auguste Perret. With little resources available Perret's solution was to use concrete in a new way, playing with the colours, textures and shapes. His modernist vision earned him the nickname, The Poet of Concrete and later his buildings UNESCO World Heritage status. Landmark building St Joseph's church, with its soaring spire of over 100 metres tall, acts as a lighthouse, visible from out to sea, guiding ships back to port. The imposing concrete church is unadorned but lit by over 6000 pieces of stained glass, an austere masterpiece. There are other architectural wonders in this fascinating city. The Museum of Modern Art, (MUMA), Le Volcan arts centre, shaped like two volcanos and the more recent Bain des Docks, a state-of-the-art aquatic centre inspired by Roman baths. Le Havre has long been associated with innovation, in 1872 Claude Monet, painted the sunrising through industrial chimneys of Le Havre, "Impression, Sunrise". It was panned by critics, one of whom scornfully coined the term "Impressionism". Later it became the world's most famous art movement. The MUMA Museum has a wonderful collection of Impressionist paintings. Le Havre is a city with bold and grand plans, looking firmly forward.



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Day 12 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.

Days 13 - 15 London (Tower Bridge)

Centuries-old architecture shares an instantly recognisable skyline with the modern metallic and glass shards of skyscrapers in London, a city of endless history and tradition. Arrive at the centre of it all, below the watch of one of the most famous bridges in the world, Tower Bridge. From here, you can begin a tour of iconic landmarks, and discover why England's capital is one of the most visited, adored and adulated cities. So much to see, so little time. The traditional and contemporary go hand in hand in London like nowhere else. Ascend the London Eye, for a birds-eye view of the city, before wandering across the Thames's wide flow to the Gothic architecture of the Houses of Parliament, and the rise of Big Ben's unmistakable clocktower. A hefty sprinkle of royal pageantry awaits at Buckingham Palace, where red-jacketed soldiers stomp sternly and solemnly in their duty, during ceremonies to mark the changing of the guards. Close to Tower Bridge, you'll find the Tower of London's historic fortress, palace and prison, while bustling central markets like Borough Market offer a taste of flavours from around the world. Sweeping green spaces like Hyde Park provide spacious relief from the skyscrapers, while world-class museums exhibit finely curated exhibitions from across the world, covering the entire scope of human history and invention, as well as the natural world. Greenwich's leafy parks and centres of refined study are close by, or a boat ride

along the Thames will introduce you to this megacity from the perspective of the water.

Day 16 St Peter Port

The picturesque capital of Guernsey proves that you don't have to go to the Caribbean for white sand and crystal clear water. St Peter Port is both wonderfully pretty and atmospheric, full of blooming floral displays, tiny stone churches and brightly painted boats. What's more, summers are mostly sunny and comfortable, making the weather something you don't have to worry about. As the capital of Guernsey, St. Peter Port is where the "action" is found. This mainly takes the form of strolling the cobbled streets, stopping every now and then to admire, and perhaps photograph, the stunning views. Once French (original name: St. Pierre Port), the town is at least 800 years old, with the stone castle and maze like streets to prove it. Once you have made your way up to the ancient castle, make like a local and find refreshment with a cream tea, washed down perhaps with a glass of cider! If the weather is on your side, then surely there is no more invigorating pastime than hiking up to the spectacular Guernsey cliffs, taking in stunning views of wildflowers, sandy beaches and English Channel views. For those who want to spread their wings a little further, the tiny island of Herm is just a 20-minute boat ride away, and homes no cars, one pub, a few cows, some puffins and about 50 people. Don't be fooled by St Peter Port's nostalgic exterior. The seaside town has made a name for itself as a foodie heaven, with everything from beach huts to Michelin starred restaurants offering sumptuous, locally sourced fare.

Day 17 Tresco, Isles of Scilly

For many visitors Tresco is the most attractive of the Isles of Scilly. This is especially due to its Abbey Garden, which is home

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to thousands of exotic plant species from around 80 different countries. Plant collector Augustus Smith began the gardens in the 1830s on the site of an old Benedictine Abbey by channelling the weather up and over a network of walled enclosures built around the Priory ruins. He had three terraces carved from the rocky south slope and maximised Tresco's mild Gulf Stream climate. Even in mid-winter there still are hundreds of plants flowering here. Another surprising attraction at the Abbey Garden is the collection of figureheads from ships that wrecked among the Isles of Scilly.

Day 18 Girvan, Scotland

Pretty as a postcard, located on the beautiful west coast of Scotland, welcome to Girvan! Tucked between rolling hills and stunning coastline, it's famous for its long sandy beach, stretching the length of the coast. This is the perfect spot for a leisurely stroll, admiring Ailsa Craig on the way, an uninhabited volcanic island and absolute haven for birdlife and seals. Having worked up an appetite, head for the harbour, with its colourful fishing boats and bustling waterfront. Local restaurants and cafes offer only the freshest fish and seafood, celebrated every which way, from lobster to fish and chips. Culzean Castle is a magnificent 18th century castle perched high on the Ayrshire cliffs and well worth visiting. Opulent to the extreme both inside and out, explore the incredible gardens and woods, complete with swan pond and deer park. Girvan has a vibrant local culture and hosts music festivals and Highland games, so enjoy some true Scottish hospitality.

Day 19 Helensburgh

Sitting pretty among Scotland's outdoor splendour, Helensburgh is a historic waterfront resort, which has lost none of its sheen over the years. The elegant town has a lot to offer and opens up

adventures around Loch Lomond, Argyll, or a little further along the River Clyde to Glasgow. The fancy flair of Helensburgh has made this a sought-after postcode. It's easy to see why - Scotland's staggering scenery is laid out to enjoy here in all of its glory, with bike rides aplenty and captivating walks along the Three Lochs Way, weaving between the finger-like reach of Loch Lomond, Loch Long and Loch Gare. A Victorian getaway of choice, the town is kept spick and span throughout the year and is a charmingly elegant place packed full of historical curiosities, crafty shops and cafes doling out scoops of ice cream. Enjoy the pretty cluster of waterfront buildings, manicured flower displays, and attractive tree-lined boulevards. Summer markets hum with good-natured bartering, while sailboats duel on the glistening water. Helensburgh has made its mark over the years, giving the world television through resident John Logie Baird. It was also home to Europe's original steamboat, and a former prime minister in Bonar Law. The town's unique outdoor museum breaks down walls and places Helensburgh's heritage front and centre. Eccentric architecture from Charles Rennie Mackintosh, and gorgeous views stretching out towards the submerged wreck of the Sugar Boat, all add to Helensburgh's enduring appeal.

Day 20 Arduaine, Scotland & Duart, Isle of Mull, Hebrides

It has been said that "Arduaine is a green and peaceful place, and must remain so." This describes the character and objective of the Arduaine Gardens. The gardens are located on a rocky promontory beside the Sound of Jura on the mainland of Western Scotland. The tiny hamlet of Arduaine with its small stone pier provides access to the adjacent gardens. Arduaine has a Scottish Gaelic pronunciation which requires practice and tongue dexterity. For authenticity, it is best to ask a local Scot to



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pronounce it. The climate of this region of Scotland is moderated by the warm water of the North Atlantic Drift. This allows plants to thrive which find more inland areas too cold. But it is still Scotland, where any temperature differences are relative. The garden has extra protection from the weather, with planted wind breaks and spreading Japanese Larch. The result is an oasis of mild temperate growing conditions in the middle of a Scottish landscape. The gardens were established in 1898 by James Arthur Campbell and became the responsibility of the National Trust in 1992. In the 19th century, natural history was all the rage and gardeners collected and grew exotic plant species from around the world. The Arduaine collection includes species from South America and East Asia, with magnificent Rhododendrons, glorious Blue Tibetan Poppies and giant Himalayan Lilies. One plant, a long way from its home east of the New Zealand main islands, is the Chatham Island Forget-me-not—a flower to remember. 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 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.

Day 21 Iona & Lunga

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 miniscule. 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



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stands outside the abbey, is considered as the finest example of Celtic crosses in the British Isles. Rèilig Odhrain, or the cemetery, allegedly contains the remains of many Scottish kings. 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 22 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 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 Shiant Islands 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 Inverewe 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 23 Dunvegan, Isle of Skye, Scotland

Skye epitomizes Scotland's wild celtic appeal. A turbulent geological history has given this beautiful, rugged island some of Britain's most varied and dramatic scenery. Steeped in mystery, romance and adventure, the Isle of Skye is perhaps the most well-known of Scotland's many islands. Charles Edward Stuart, better known as Bonnie Prince Charlie, escaped here from the mainland disguised as a maidservant of a woman by



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the name of Flora MacDonald. The north of the island is dominated by a rugged volcanic plateau, the south by the Cuillins mountain range, whose peaks were sculpted by the glaciers of the Ice Age. Skye is divided by numerous sea lochs allowing continuous proximity to the sea. The limestone grasslands of the south are the home of sheep and cattle. Scattered about are ruins of crofts, small holdings used for grazing; they were abandoned as their owners fell into poverty due to lack of income. Dunvegan is situated in a sheltered sea loch, or fjord, on the northwestern coast of the island on the Waternish peninsula. The small settlement is dominated by Dunvegan Castle. The oldest inhabited castle in Scotland, it has been the seat of the chiefs of the Clan MacLeod for the past 700 years. It offers insights into Scotland's clan spirit with paintings and relics from the MacLeod Clan. The gardens were originally laid out in the 18th century and are of considerable interest with the woodland glades, shimmering pools and a multitude of rhododendrons. Loch Dunvegan is home to a seal colony; the two main varieties are the brown seal and the great gray Atlantic seal. Small local boats depart from the jetty at frequent intervals throughout the day enabling close observation of these playful sea mammals.

Day 24 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 UK's only (and just one of 39 in the world) dual World Heritage status from UNESCO in recognition of its Natural Heritage and cultural significance. As an isolated island of the remote St Kilda Group, Boreray island is one of the most far flung and weather impacted islands of the North East Atlantic. Imagine trying to live here during stormy weather. Landing requires jumping or swimming ashore; and yet the island has been lived on or visited from Neolithic times. Collecting seabirds and their eggs, and storing them for winter, may have been even more important than raising sheep. Boreray Sheep are the rarest breed of sheep in Britain. They evolved from short-tailed sheep brought from the Scottish mainland but have been isolated long enough to have evolved into a distinctive small and horned breed. Only found on Boreray Island, they remained as a wild flock when the last people left the St Kilda Islands in 1930. The Souy are a separate and different breed of sheep found on the other St Kilda Islands. Look out for the Boreray Sheep grazing on the slopes of hilly Boreray Island. Seabirds thrive on Boreray

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and its two attendant rocks stacks, raising new chicks each summer. Northern Gannets glide overhead as they attempt difficult landings at nest sites. Seeing gannets plunge from a great height into the sea is an exciting way to understand the effort required to feed themselves and chicks. Northern Fulmers nest on the volcanic rock cliffs and Atlantic Puffins fly in and out of burrow-strewn slopes. Boreray is part of the St Kilda World Heritage Site, a rare example of a site recognised for both its outstanding natural and cultural values.

Day 25 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 26 Vestmannaeyjar & Cruise Surtsey

The name Vestmannaeyjar refers to both a town and an archipelago off the south coast of Iceland. The largest Vestmannaeyjar island is called Heimaey. It is the only inhabited island in the group and is home to over 4000 people. The eruption of the Eldfell Volcano put Vestmannaeyjar into the international lime light in 1973. The volcano's eruption destroyed many buildings and forced an evacuation of the residents to mainland Iceland. The lava flow was stopped in its tracks by the application of billions of liters of cold sea water. Since the eruption, life on the small island outpost has returned to the natural ebb and flow of a small coastal fishing community on the edge of the chilly and wild North Atlantic. On 14 November 1963, a trawler passing the southernmost point of Iceland spotted a column of smoke rising from the sea.

Expecting to find a burning boat they were surprised to find instead, explosive volcanic eruptions. They were witnessing the birth of a new island. Columns of ash reached heights of almost 30,000 feet in the sky and could be seen on clear days as far away as Reykjavík. The eruptions continued for three and a half years, ending in June 1967. Once formed, Surtsey was 492 feet above sea level and covered an area of almost 2 square miles. The island was named after the Norse fire god Surtur. It is a perfect scientific study area used to understand the colonization process of new land by plant and animal life.

Day 27 Thorklakshofn

Thorklakshofn is a small fishing port located on the Reykjanes Peninsula, one of the few viable harbours on the south coast of Iceland. The small community is proud of its rich heritage and traditional fishing industry, which has been the lifeblood of the town for generations. Feel this connection to Iceland's sea faring past, by walking out to the Hafnarnes lighthouse, easily accessible, on the outskirts of town. It's one of over 100 dotted around the Icelandic coasts. On the way, keep an eye out for sculptures of Viking boats, inspired by an ancient Icelandic legend. The scenery is one of dramatic beauty, black volcanic sand beaches stretch as far as the eye can see. ATV tours are a popular activity, an opportunity to drive across the volcanic sands and explore further afield. The local coast with its impressive waves, offers absolute superb surfing conditions for all abilities. In the land of fire and ice why not take a tour of the nearby lava tunnel, Raufarhólshellir, one of the longest in Iceland. It's an amazing opportunity to walk where lava flowed some 5200 years ago. Back on the surface, look to the night sky, Thorklakshofn's a popular place to admire the northern lights.

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Day 28 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 hike to your heart's content, you can do it all from Reykjavik - the colourful capital of this astonishing outdoor country.

Day 29 Post Cruise

Please note:

Itineraries are subject to change.

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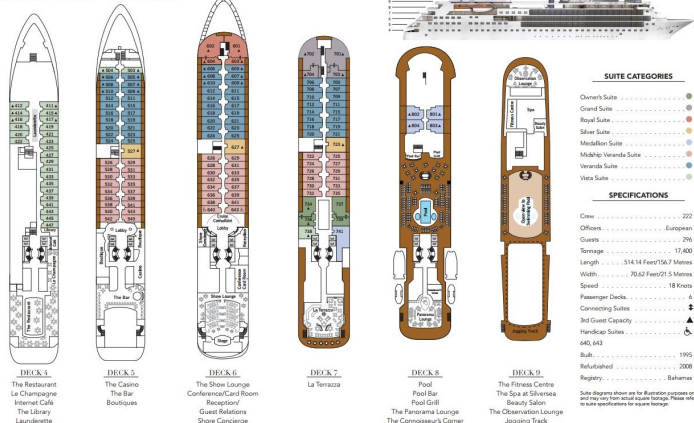
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