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## SCOTLAND IN DEPTH: AN EXCLUSIVE WILD EARTH CHARTER

The Scottish Isles, the edge of Europe, west and north there is nothing more till the shores of America, these isles are ours to discover in depth. Scotland is one of our favourite destinations combining ruggedly beautiful wilderness and abundant wildlife with a long and rich history. Its welcoming people, great culture and of course its world renowned whiskey distilleries, gardens and golf courses mean that there really is nowhere else quite like Scotland. Wild Earth General Manager Aaron Russ has led many expeditions around Scotland's beautiful shores and you are invited to join him and Wild Earth on an exclusively chartered voyage around Scotland featuring the Inner and Outer Hebrides, St Kilda, The Orkney and Shetland Islands aboard the *Serenissima*. We start from Glasgow before boarding our ship in Oban and setting sail through the islands before disembarking in Edinburgh. Explore Scotland's heartland harbours, villages and islands. Immerse yourself in the history of ages past, whilst making your own history viewing ancient brochs, standing stones and rings. Visit isles where the wildlife is in abundance. A land where the people are waiting to welcome you to their unique culture - a culture which may reflect threads of your own heritage.



### ITINERARY

#### Day 1: Glasgow

Scotland's largest city, Glasgow, which means green hollow, was the crucible of Scottish industry. Today this contemporary city features modern architecture beside Italianate steeples, neo-gothic towers and the Art Nouveau designs of Glasgow's own Charles Rennie Mackintosh. Take the time to explore the Willow Tea Rooms and the Glasgow School of Art, cruise the Clyde to the Riverside Museum, enjoy the Clyde walkway, visit the modern Glasgow Science Centre or visit the Kelvingrove Art



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Gallery - your options are as diverse as the city. Overnight at our centrally located hotel where we meet for dinner and an introduction to our programme as we commence our discovery of Scotland in Depth.

### Day 2: Glasgow & Oban

Travelling north from Glasgow the famed shores of Loch Lomond call us. This freshwater Scottish loch is the largest inland stretch of water in Great Britain by surface area. Ben Lomond, a munro, rising to 974 m (3196ft) flanks the eastern shores whilst the highway pushes northwards on the western shores. At Inveraray Castle we connect with Clan Campbell as we walk around the beautiful grounds and explore the castle. Your first view of Oban, it is one you will truly never forget as you come down the hill towards the bay the view opens before you. McCaigs Tower on Battery Hill provides a fitting overview across the western isles of Mull. We join our expedition ship MV Serenissima, its welcome aboard with time to settle in before we steam out of the harbour.

### Day 3: Gigha & Islay

The southernmost isle of the Southern Hebrides, Gigha is one of the smallest populated Islands in the Hebrides. Meaning Good or God Island, the highest mountain is Creag Breahn at 100 metres it is a white, sacred rock. Nestled in woodland and extensive gardens Achamore House was built in 1884 for Lt-Col William James Scarlet - the 3rd Lord Abinger. Charles Rennie Macintosh was an apprentice here - many features of the house are believed to be from him. One of the warmest places in Scotland, the gardens of Achamore House were purchased by the people of Gigha in 2002. Operated as a Trust they represent the plant collectors love and the garden designers eye. To the southwest of the gardens there is 13th century Kilchattan Chapel ruins and an ogam stone, the only one of its kind in the

west of Scotland. The earliest documented record of distilling in Scotland occurred as long ago as 1494, in the tax records of the day, the Exchequer Rolls. The entry lists 'Eight bolls of malt to Friar John Cor wherewith to make aqua vitae' (water of life). This afternoon we will share a dram of whisky, the water of life ashore at one of Islay's historic distilleries.

### Day 4: Staffa & Iona

Our visit to Staffa features the hexagonal basalt cliffs which culminate in 'Fingal's Cave'- a spectacular natural feature named by the Celts as Uamh-Binh or "the Cave of Melody". Fingal's Cave is the inspiration for Mendelssohn's Hebridean overture and the artist Turner's "Staffa". Abundant puffins, gannets, razorbills and guillemots use the island for breeding, accessing the surrounding rich marine environment. This afternoon we visit Iona. Remote today, Iona was the centre of Celtic world. In 563 AD, the Irish missionary St. Columba went into exile and established a small monastic community there, its basic layout is known through the writings of Abbot Adomnan in the 600s. Driven out of Iona by Viking raids, most of the monastic community moved to Kells in Ireland around 800. In more peaceful times, around 1200, a Benedictine abbey and nunnery were established on the site. It is these buildings (heavily restored) that we see today. Iona Abbey was dissolved at the Reformation with the main reconstruction by Lord George MacLeod in the 1930- 60s having founded the ecumenical Iona Community in 1938.

### Day 5: Loch Coruisk & Rum

Isle of Skye's southern coast is remote, mainly uninhabited and home to the Cuillin Mountains. Loch Coruisk is nestled securely in the landscapes folds of the Cuillin Ridge. Loch Coruisk, which is freshwater, is separated from the sea by the River Scavaig



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known as one of the shortest rivers in the UK. Our walk along this river gives access to the Loch, or the adventurous can take the opportunity to explore the Loch further. Later in the quiet Isle of Rum, Kinloch Castle greets us. Built of Isle of Arran sandstone the Castle took three years and upwards of 300 craftsmen to build. One craftsman was unique for the time - an electrician - this was the first private residence in Scotland to have electricity, derived from a hydro dam constructed on the Coire Dubh Burn. An exceptional Castle needed an exceptional garden - 250,000 tons of soil was imported for a walled garden, greenhouses, water features and bridges. Now under the care of the Scottish Natural Heritage it's restoration is a work in progress.

### Day 6: Mingulay & Barra

At the southern tip of the Outer Hebrides, Mingulay is home to puffins, guillemots, kittiwakes, shags, fulmars and razorbills. Sightings of eagles and peregrine falcons are possible here. This island provided the inspiration for the noted tune "Mingulay Boat Song". Leaving only the foundations of their village, the last inhabitants left to neighbouring Vatersay in 1912, Mingulay is now owned by the National Trust of Scotland. Barra is the ancestral island of Clan MacNeil whose chiefs were based at Kisimul Castle. The Castle sits just offshore from Castlebay village, on a natural rock outcrop guarding the access to Barra. Alexander, Lord of the Isles, granted the MacNeils the island in 1427. A succession claim to chieftainship was legally established in 1915 - and Kisimul restoration began with the assistance of numerous MacNeils from throughout the world. Everyone who visits feels the power of the Castle, none more so than those named MacNeil. This evening we share in local culture with music from Barra's resident musicians.

### Day 7: St Kilda

Remote, battered by the Atlantic seas, St Kilda, is a near mystical island with dual World Heritage site status for its natural and cultural significance. St Kilda is deemed Europe's most important seabird colony - with abundant puffins, fulmars and the largest colony of gannets in Britain. Grazing the island are Soay sheep, unique survivors of primitive breeds dating back to the Bronze Age. Inhabited till 1930, the 19th century village layout remains allowing us to envisage life on this island where the bird life provided sustenance for the villagers. To visit St Kilda is a privilege.

### Day 8: Isle Of Lewis: Stornoway

Stornoway is the main town on the Isle of Lewis with just over 6,000 people, about a third of the Islands total population. Home to a mix of traditional businesses like fishing, Harris Tweed and farming, its sheltered harbour was named Steering Bay by visiting Vikings. Arriving at Stornoway we land in this Gaelic heartland to explore the Stone Age "Callanish", the primordial configuration of standing stones. Crossing the gentle troughs and rounded tops of the landscape we explore the cultural Gearrannan Blackhouse Village and meet the people of this area. As we stroll the alleyways of Stornoway, check out the local tweed or wander the pathways of Lewis Castle gardens we are sure to discover the secret of timelessness in the Hebrides.

### Day 9: Kirkwall and Orkney Islands

From Bronze Age man, Iron Age people, Vikings and World Wars - time has left its mark on the Orkney Islands, the green isles. Kirkwall, the capital of the Orkneys is a Viking town, founded in 1040 around an ancient church, today its heart is the red sandstone St Magnus Cathedral, with its namesake, the Viking martyr, St Magnus buried in its walls. Next to the cathedral is



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the Bishop's and Earl's palaces, administrative buildings from the Viking days. Our visit ashore includes Kirkwall, Skara Brae, the Ring of Brodgar and traverses Scarpa Flow, infamous through WW2, with your chance to visit the Highland Distillery as an option. In the winter of 1850, a great storm battered Orkney, the grass was stripped from a large mound, then known as "Skerrabra". The outline of a number of stone buildings was revealed—something that intrigued the local laird, William Watt of Skaill, he embarked on an excavation of the site. Today, Skara Brae, as it has become known — survives as eight dwellings, linked together by a series of low, covered passages. The Ring of Brodgar Stone Circle and Henge is an enormous ceremonial site dating back to the 3rd millennium BC. A massive stone circle, originally consisting of 60 stones - 36 survive today with at least 13 prehistoric burial mounds. The Ring of Brodgar is part of the Heart of Neolithic Orkney World Heritage Site, a series of important domestic and ritual monuments built 5000 years ago in the Orkney Islands.

### Day 10: Lerwick and Shetland Islands

Lerwick is the Shetland Islands capital. Its cobblestone streets once filled with the rush created by fishing and shipbuilding, today this port town charms as you wander the same streets of the town and waterfront. To the south of Lerwick is Jarlshof where we delve into more than 4,000 years of human settlement in the same location. Neolithic people first settled this site in Shetland around 2700 BC, and it remained in use until the AD 1600s. Discoveries made here include oval-shaped Bronze Age houses, an Iron Age broch and wheelhouses, Norse long houses, a medieval farmstead, and a laird's house dating from the 1500s. Enjoy the site's dramatic location on a headland overlooking the West Voe of Sumburgh. This afternoon

we land at Mousa Broch, standing 13m high, it is Scotland's most impressive and best surviving Iron Age tower or broch. Today we know that brochs were built in Shetland around 400-200BC, the quality of stone, the workmanship and overall size of Mousa are all believed to contribute to why it has so survived so well.

### Day 11: Fair Isle

Famous for birds, knitwear and historic shipwrecks, Fair Isle is a tiny jewel of an island lying half-way between Orkney and Shetland. The islanders offer a warm and friendly welcome to visitors. Owned by the National Trust for Scotland, it's one of Britain's most successful small communities, pioneering projects in wildlife tourism, windpower and sustainable management of the environment. The island is an internationally important seabird breeding site. From April to August the cliffs are busy with the sound (and smell!) of thousands of fulmars, kittiwakes, razorbills, guillemots, gannets, shags and puffins, while skuas and terns fiercely defend their nests on the moorland. Fair Isle is one of the best places in Europe to view seabirds at close range, especially puffins which will waddle to within feet of a quiet observer. The 70 or so islanders mostly live in traditional crofts on the more fertile and low-lying southern third of the island. The northern part is largely rough grazing and rocky moorland, rising to the 217 metre Ward Hill.

### Day 12: Aberdeen and Edinburgh

On arrival to Aberdeen we will continue our exploration over land, departing south to historic Dunottar Castle, before visiting an Aberdeen Angus stud farm and the iconic township of St Andrews to wander the ruins. Later we dine together in Edinburgh as we complete our exploration of Scotland in Depth. Overnight accommodation and breakfast the following morning





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included.

Day 13: Edinburgh

After breakfast and final farewells we travel on with our arrangements, whether that be more time in Edinburgh, south to England, further afield or directly homeward bound.



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## PRICING

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