THE OUTER HEBRIDES

We overnight on Friday in Inverness, to give us an early start for our journey down through the Great Glen and across the Isle of Skye to Uig, before catching a ferry to Lochmaddy on North Uist.

The crossing gives us a chance to do some sea-watching, with a great diversity of seabirds to be seen as we make our way across the Minch, including Arctic Tern, Puffin, Guillemot, Razorbill, Kittiwake, Gannet, Great and Arctic Skuas, Manx Shearwaters and various cetaceans, even before we reach the islands! Arriving on North Uist the bustle of modern life seems far away.

**Dates** Sat 12 - Sun 20 June 2021

**Price** £2,215

**Deposit** £400  Single Supp £250

**Leaders** Roy Atkins and Jane Atkins

**Weather** Though usually quite dry, these islands can experience all the seasons during one trip and can be windy (5°-20°C)

**Walking** Coastal walks on uneven terrain of up to 2 miles. Walking boots recommended with trainers suitable on some occasions. Collapsible/telescopic walking poles could be useful for this trip.

**Meals** All included from dinner on Day 1 to breakfast on Day 9

**Insects** Biting insects are unlikely to be a problem

**Accom** Double, twin and single rooms all ensuite

**Group** 10 - each group 5 guests and 1 guide

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**Just some of what we hope to see:**

- Corncrake
- Golden Eagle
- Hen Harrier
- Merlin
- Short-eared Owl
- White-tailed Eagle
- Peregrine
- Long-tailed Duck
- Great Northern Diver
- Red-throated Diver
- Great Northern Diver
- Whooper Swan
- Whimbrel
- Purple Sandpiper
- Arctic Tern
- Little Tern
- Black Guillemot
- Rock Dove
- Eider
- Arctic Skua
- Great Skua
- Pomarine Skua
- Long-tailed Skua
- Manx Shearwater
- Red-necked Phalarope
- Greylag Goose
- Greenshank
- Golden Plover
- Otter
- Grey Seal
- Common Seal
- Dolphins

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**Craig Round:** Corncrake, Otter, Machair Flowers, Short-eared Owl

**Kate Mennie:** Balranald

**James Glover:** Red-throated Diver

**Chris Brookings:** Great Northern Diver

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**Corncrakes rasp from fields and Snipe drum overhead, in a watery landscape that the modern world has passed by, on these timeless low-lying islands at Britain’s Atlantic edge.**

- Successful Corncrake watching every time, on over 40 trips!
- Nesting waders in farmland that’s vanished elsewhere
- Mile after mile of unspoilt white beaches and azure seas
- Wonderful for raptors, rare skuas and Short-eared Owl
- Summer plumage Great Northern and other divers
- White-tailed Eagle, Dotterel, Pomarine Skua and Otter
- With our own two expert guides to the Western Isles

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3-7 Our hotel on North Uist has glorious views out to the west and over Baile Sear ‘machair’ dunes and meadows - formed by wind-blown shell sand and in the evenings the sunset from the hotel can be truly beautiful, with a backdrop chorus of ‘drumming’ displaying Snipe and calling Redshank overhead.

The Uists are one of the last strongholds for one of Britain’s rarest breeding birds, the Corncrake and newly arrived territorial males can be seen before the vegetation grows tall, as they give their incredible rasping calls from open cover. Here too Twite feed, Skyarks sing and Corn Bunting still give their jangling songs from rusty fences.

Cultivated ‘machair’ at Stiligarry and Rubha Ardvule, sown with oats and potatoes, is alive with waders in the spring, all vigorously displaying, including numerous Lapwing, Oystercatcher, Redshank, Ringed Plover and Dunlin. Beautiful freshwater

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**“There is nowhere quite like the Outer Hebrides in the UK. These stunning islands have a unique and breathtaking beauty all of their own. With miles of deserted shell sand beaches and incredible birdlife that has been lost from much of mainland Britain, it is like stepping back in time, on these islands on the edge. I can’t wait to get back there again!” Roy Atkins**
lochs stud the landscape. All have beds of sedge and flowering bogbean and Flag Iris alive with nesting Shoveler, Tufted Duck, Wigeon, Curlew and Redshank. A few elusive Red-necked Phalaropes arrive in mid-May and birding is always full of surprises - perhaps a summering Whooper Swan, or displaying Ruff or Wood Sandpiper.

Around the beautiful, unspoilt shell sand beaches and tidal bays, Common, Arctic and Little Tern can be seen. They also hold large numbers of passage waders bound for the Arctic. Most are in stunning summer plumage at this time of year and include Whimbrel, Dunlin, Sanderling and Purple Sandpiper; whilst closer scrutiny may reveal a hidden gem such as Curlew Sandpiper or Little Stint!

On rocky headlands there are Black Guillemot, Shag and Rock Dove, with Red-breasted Merganser, Eider, Long-tailed Duck and Great Northern Diver offshore - the latter in breeding plumage. There’s a healthy Otter population and we regularly see them, plus Grey and Common Seals and dolphin species.

Optional early morning sea-watching from Aird an Runair is renowned, but dependent on weather; for the passage of rare Pomarine and Long-tailed Skuas, plus Manx Shearwater; Gannet and Arctic and Great Skua. We have also recorded other unusual migrants including Snowy Owl, Great White Egret, Glaucous and Iceland Gull, Woodchat Shrike, Garganey, Golden Oriole, Subalpine Warbler, Grey-headed Wagtail, Hoopoe and Dotterel - the latter almost annually.

Eastward, the land sweeps up from sea level to moors, peaty pools and soaring mountains. Red-throated Divers give their mournful wail and truly wild Greylag Geese nest at Loch Druidibeg, joined by Common Sandpipers and Greenshank.

The islanders stack peats to dry, where Dunlin and Golden Plover display alongside Red Grouse and Wheatear. Golden Eagle, Buzzard, Peregrine and Raven soar together over the dramatic hills. Hen Harrier, Merlin and Short-eared Owl commonly hunt the wild moors and we have a very good chance of seeing that most magnificent of predators, White-tailed Eagle.

Our last morning gives us a chance to once more experience the sights and sounds of the ‘machair’ and wonderful coastline, before catching a midday ferry back to Inverness and making our way back to Inverness for our final overnight stay.

On Saturday morning, after breakfast, we say our goodbyes.

Outline Itinerary

Day 1  Meet in Inverness for overnight stay
   1 night at Premier Inn

Day 2  Travel down the Great Glen and across Skye before catching ferry to Lochmaddy
   and making the short journey to our hotel
   6 nights at Temple View Hotel

Days 3-7  Birdwatching and wildlife exploration around North and South Uist and Benbecula

Day 8  After morning birdwatching, we catch a ferry from Lochmaddy to Uig, journey back across Skye and make our way back to Inverness
   1 night at Premier Inn

Day 9  After breakfast we say our goodbyes