An in-depth exploration of the remote islands of Scotland
18th to 27th May 2018

WILD SCOTLAND

Noble Caledonia
Ocean Nova at St Kilda

enjoying a more comprehensive and peaceful experience. With just over eighty travelling companions, the atmosphere is more akin to a private yacht trip and ashore with our appreciation of this unique corner of the kingdom. With our naturalists and local guides we will explore the isles, and with our agile Zodiac craft be able to reach some of the most remote and untouched places. There is no better way to explore this endlessly fascinating and beautiful region that will cast its spell on you whether your interest lies in wildlife, photography, ancient history or simply an appreciation of this unique corner of the kingdom. With just over eighty travelling companions, the atmosphere is more akin to a private yacht trip and ashore with our local experts and expedition members we will divide into small groups thereby enjoying a more comprehensive and peaceful experience.

What to Expect

Flexibility is the key to an expedition cruise; sometimes the whole day’s schedule may be changed to maximise your experience based on weather or wildlife sightings, something that would not be possible on a large cruise ship. Each day holds something new and below is an extract from a log from a previous voyage in this region which will provide you with an idea of what to expect should you choose to join our Scottish adventure;

23rd May — Papa Stour and Foula, Shetland:
This day started at Papa Stour, an island in the west of Shetland. This island is the remains of a strato-volcano and layers of lava and volcanic ash could clearly be seen. Our aim for today however was not to land on the island, rather to Zodiac cruise amongst this extraordinary geology. The volcanic rocks are riddled with faults and the sea has exploited these to make a whole series of caves and tunnels which were we able to drive the Zoildics through. The first of such tunnels was right at the landing site. All the Zoildics passed in and out of the tunnels and caves it was amazing! Just as we were moving on from this site the cry of ‘Orca!’ sounded on the staff’s radios from the bridge. Mel, one of the gangway-men had spied killer whales close to the ship. Immediately the Zoildics took off after them. The Orca didn’t want to hang about but never the less many of us got great views of them. After the killer whales moved off we continued around the south of the island to the west coast. Many seals were seen and countless sea birds. There were several other caves to be visited but the highlight was Cristie’s Hole. This long tunnel had a cave with sky light at the end with small waterfalls pouring into it, it was a really incredible sight! We were all back on board for lunch and the ship proceeded out to Foula. This is a very remote Shetland island in the west. The Zoildics came in to the harbour where it was possible to see the local ferry that had been craned out of the water and an inquisite Great Skua or Bonxie that was standing on the wall right next to us. We were then divided into three different walking groups. A long one took off for the cliffs on the north side of the island, a medium walk that went to investigate the peat cutting and birldife and a pondering group that visited the school amongst other things. At the school we met the only pupil, Jack, and we were able to buy local crafts.

OUR VIEW

“Few cruise ships offer the chance to explore in detail the islands off the northern coast of Scotland. Due to popular demand, we are repeating this unique expedition which includes the remote, uninhabited outposts of St Kilda and North Rona with the inhabited island of Foula and the northernmost point of the United Kingdom at Unst. Such a trip would be almost impossible to arrange independently and requires a small ship with the expeditionary qualities of the Ocean Nova to deliver. With our fleet of Zodiacs and our experienced expedition team we can make safe landings on remote beaches and visit islands and communities far off the traditional tourist routes. As we go ashore in our small groups we know we also will not swamp the islands when we arrive and can appreciate the isolation and wilderness of these special places.”

The Itinerary

Day 1 Oban. Embark the Ocean Nova in the afternoon. Transfers will be provided from Glasgow Central Railway Station and Glasgow International Airport at a fixed time. Enjoy Welcome Drinks and Dinner as we sail this evening.

Day 2 Mingulay, Berneray & Pabbay. This promises to be a most memorable day as we circumnavigate the uninhabited islands at the very tip of South Uist. Making good use of our Zodiacs we will explore the islands and make beach landings. These islands are a nature reserve with important breeding populations of razorbills, guillemots, black guillemots, puffins, fulmars and shags. There are also five species of gull, all the seabirds being attracted by the cliffs and caves which offer safe nesting sites. The islands also have significant historical sites with there being a continuous population on Mingulay for at least two thousand years before evacuation began in 1907 and the island was completely abandoned in 1912. Ruins of the village remain close to the shore which we will explore on a guided walk.

Day 3 St Kilda. Arrive at first light in St Kilda, a remarkable uninhabited archipelago some fifty miles beyond the Outer Hebrides. Dominated by the highest cliffs and sea stacks in Britain, Hirta, St Kilda’s main island was occupied on and off for at least two thousand years, with the last 36 Gaelic
speaking inhabitants evacuated at their own request in 1930. Immediately after the evacuation, the island was bought by the Marquess of Bute to protect the island's thousands of seabirds including puffin and fulmars, and in 1957 it was bequeathed to The National Trust for Scotland. St Kilda is one of only two dozen UNESCO World Heritage Sites with dual status reflecting its natural and cultural significance. The local ranger will join us on board before our expedition staff lead a number of guided walks on the island. Later, cruise past two of the largest gannetries in the world at Stac Lee and Boreraig. These impressive stacks rise 170 metres from the sea and are home to up to 60,000 breeding pairs of northern gannet. Tonight we will sail past the Flannan Isles where we hope to see the famous lighthouse.

Day 4 North Rona & Sula Sgeir. Spend the day around North Rona, an isolated island some fifty miles north of Cape Wrath. The last islanders left North Rona in 1844 and today it is home to thirteen species of breeding seabirds including large colonies of great black-backed gulls, great skuas and puffins. There is also a large population of grey seals which we hope to observe on a Zodiac cruise. If weather permits we will also visit the gannet colony on Sula Sgeir, home to over 5,000 breeding pairs and renowned as the least visited national nature reserve in Britain.

Day 5 Foula & Papa Stour, Shetland Islands. This morning we visit Foula, one of Britain's most remote inhabited islands. Apart from a narrow coastal strip of more fertile croftland, Foula is an expanse of peat and moorland rising steeply to five dramatic peaks. In the long midsummer days, Foula's wildflowers provide a glorious burst of colour. The world's largest colony of great skuas compete fiercely with many parasitic jaegers for breeding territories. Over lunch we will sail the short distance to Papa Stour where we will use our Zodiaks to explore the stunning cliff scenery, sea stacks, arches, blowholes and coastal caves.

Day 6 Unst & Fetlar, Shetland Islands. We continue our exploration of Shetland in the northern islands of Unst and Fetlar. Unst is Britain's most northerly inhabited island and at the Heritage Centre we will learn about the islanders struggles over the centuries and the industries that have prospered whilst the Unst Boat Haven is dedicated to the history of the island. We also visit Saxa Vord with views over Hermaness National Nature Reserve and Muckle Flugga stacks and home to thousands of gannets and puffins as well as rare arctic-alpine plants. Over lunch we sail to Fetlar, inhabited for over 5,000 years the island lays claim to being the first Norse landing site in the Shetlands. Known as the most fertile of the Shetland Islands the wildflowers bring colour to the landscape whilst the birdlife on the island is prolific. Our expedition team will lead walks ashore and at the Fetlar Interpretative Centre and Museum we will learn about the wildlife and archaeological history of the island.

Day 7 Lerwick. Spend the day in the Shetland capital of Lerwick. This morning enjoy a visit to the remarkable archaeological site of Jarlshof which was uncovered by a violent storm in the winter of 1896, revealing an extraordinary settlement site embracing at least 5,000 years of human history. The site contains a remarkable sequence of stone structures – late Neolithic houses, a Bronze-Age village, an Iron-Age broch and wheelhouses, several Norse longhouses, a Medieval farmstead, and the 16th century laird's house. Return to the ship for lunch and enjoy a free afternoon to explore this historic port. Perhaps wander through its narrow stone lanes and maybe visit the excellent Shetland Museum, containing historical artefacts from shipwrecks and the whaling era. This evening we will be entertained by local musicians on board the ship as we moor overnight.

Day 8 Mousa & Fair Isle. At dawn we sail the short distance to the island of Mousa where we will see the forty-foot defensive tower built by the Picts more than 2,000 years ago and the tallest, best preserved example of an Iron Age broch (tower) in Britain. Spend the morning walking around this fascinating site before we return to the ship and sail to Fair Isle arriving in the early afternoon. Here the tiny population of sixty or so islanders always extend us a warm welcome. This afternoon enjoy a walk across the island, visit the Bird Observatory or meet the local community and maybe purchase some of the famous knitwear. Return to the ship for dinner as we sail this evening.

Day 9 Papa Westray, Orkney Islands. Spend the morning on the Orkney Island of Papa Westray. Here you have time to stretch your legs on a number of island walks or maybe meet up with the local residents at the nearby community centre. You can choose to visit the 3,500 year old Knap of Howar, a Neolithic farm building that claims to be the oldest standing house in Europe and the 12th century St Boniface Kirk. In the north of the island is the 16th century laird’s house. Return to the ship for lunch and enjoy an afternoon on sea at sea as we sail back to mainland Scotland.

Day 10 Aberdeen. Disembark this morning. Transfers will be provided to Aberdeen airport and train station at a fixed time.

PRICES PER PERSON
Based on double occupancy

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Price Includes: Nine nights aboard Ocean Nova on a full board basis, shore excursions, expedition team, gratuities, transfers, port taxes.
Not Included: Travel insurance.
Ocean Nova

We have chartered the expedition ship, the Ocean Nova for our unique island hopping expedition. The vessel was built in Denmark in 1992 with high ice class to serve Greenland’s west coast. In 2006 she was completely refurbished and now has a career as a small and comfortable expedition ship.

**Your Cabin**
The Ocean Nova accommodates just 84 passengers. Cabins are spread over two decks and include cabins for the single traveller, double and triple cabins, all with sea-view and private facilities. The double cabins have either two lower beds or upper and lower beds. The triple cabins have upper and lower beds. In your cabin you will also find a desk with chair and ample storage space for clothes and equipment. They are well designed with typical Scandinavian light woods.

**Your Space**
The Panorama Lounge located on the Top Deck affords excellent views and is the main meeting place where you can enjoy a drink with a breathtaking view of the surrounding landscape. It is here that our expedition team will entertain and educate you with lectures on biology, history, geology or ornithology with daily briefings. There is also a library with panoramic views and a good selection of books on the area you are visiting. On board there is a satellite phone, small gym and medical doctor. Passengers are welcome on the Bridge and there is always something to see or search for from the spacious observation decks.

**Your Dining**
The comfortable dining room seats all passengers in a single sitting and offers delicious hearty meals with a mixture of table service and buffet. It is comfortable and spacious enough to accommodate all passengers and expedition staff in one seating, and the portholes allow you to take in your surroundings as you dine. The informal dining arrangement adds to the friendly atmosphere on board and meals are a great chance to discuss all you have seen with your fellow travellers, and for the expedition team to share their knowledge.

**Life On Board & Exploring Ashore**
The atmosphere on board is informal and time on board is often spent out on deck keeping watch for wildlife or admiring the spectacular view. The schedule can change due to weather conditions or unexpected wildlife sightings which adds to the adventure. Daily briefings from our expedition team will prepare you for each day’s activities and experts in subjects such as ornithology or marine biology will give talks and accompany us ashore.

Please note that this is an expedition cruise and Zodiacs will be used regularly to make landings ashore. Due to the rugged nature of the islands and the lack of transportation, on many of the islands our exploration will be on foot and to make the most of this fascinating trip participants should be prepared for walks, often over uneven surfaces.