

SCOTLAND – THE NORTHERN HIGHLAND WAY

9-day / 8-night **SELF-GUIDED** inn-to-inn walk - the far north of Scotland with John O' Groats & Orkney



Scotland's Northern Highland Way is a moderate walk on the wild side, taking you through some of the most scenic and remote landscapes in the far north of Scotland. This 120km trail begins in Thurso, the northernmost town on the British mainland, and allows you to take in stunning yet extreme backdrops from white sandy beaches to awe inspiring coastal cliffs, where the Atlantic Ocean meets the North Sea. This is your opportunity to see a wide variety of wildlife including magnificent puffin bird colonies; to walk to the iconic Cape Wrath, named by the Vikings as the Norse for "turning point" and to visit the lighthouse built there in 1828. This is your chance to see the fascinating and historical Orkney Islands, to visit the picturesque harbour at Scrabster and to walk across the golden sand beaches at Torrisdale Bay.

Stay in welcoming B&Bs, inns and guesthouses where walkers are well looked after, with a hearty Scottish breakfast each morning perhaps including a traditional porridge, tattie scones, black pudding square and sausage, all local fare. Carry only a daypack as your luggage is transferred for you. Accommodation on the Northern Highland Way is in high demand and is limited especially in the small villages along the way.

Early booking is essential especially if you plan to travel in the popular months of May or September.

Departs: Daily from April to September

Cost from: \$1415 per person twin share Single supplement limited and on request

Starts: Thurso **Ends:** Durness.

Includes: 8 nights' accommodation in quality B&Bs, guesthouses and inns, with en-suite where available; full Scottish breakfast daily; luggage transfers (1 bag per person up to 18kg); one-way transfer from Thurso to John O' Groats on Day 2; one-way transfer from Thurso to Reay or Strathy on Day 4; route notes and maps; emergency support.

Not included: Lunches, dinners, drinks, personal expenses, optional day trip to Orkney, travel to the start of and from the end of some walks and some bus and ferry costs (allow £40 – £60 per person).

Walk grading: Moderate with average daily distances of 21km (4-5 hours of walking) and some longer days of 24km (6-7 hours of walking). The track is generally good underfoot, with boggy areas, steep or rocky slopes, narrow trails and gravel or occasional tarmac roads. Adverse weather can make this trail seem challenging. The walk does not follow a continuous waymarked trail and bus / ferry transfers are required at various stages.

Call OUTDOOR TRAVEL on 1800 331 582 for details & reservations



Suggested Itinerary:

Day 1: Arrive Thurso

The North Highland Way begins at Thurso, the most northerly town on the British mainland, located approximately 300 miles from the main industrial area of Central Scotland and the cities of Glasgow and Edinburgh. Thurso is the birthplace of Sir William Alexander Smith (1854 – 1914), the founder of the Boys' Brigade, who was born in Pennyland House, the same place you will spend the first three days of your tour.

Day 2: Duncansby Head or Orkney Islands

Transfer to John O' Groats with our knowledgeable local representative, who can answer any questions you have about the North Highland Way. On arrival, walk out to Duncansby Head Lighthouse and The Stacks, spend the day around town or walk back on tarmac roads and coastal path towards Gills Bay before taking the public service bus back to Thurso.

Alternatively, join the 10.30am ferry crossing for a day on the Orkney Islands (from 1st June to 31st August). The bus tour visits Skara Brae, Churchill Barriers, Scapa Flow, Ring of Brodgar, Standing Stones of Stenness, the Italian Chapel and Kirkwall with its magnificent 12th Century Cathedral. The price is approx. £64, paid locally, for return ferry crossings and coach tour (does not include entry fees or lunch). Returns at @ 6.00pm in time to catch the bus back to Thurso.

Day 3: Dunnet to Thurso

walking @ 15 miles / 24km

Take the local bus to Brough for a coastline walk to Lighthouse Point at Dunnet Head, the most northerly point on the British mainland, then take a gentle walk around the sandy beach at Dunnet Bay to Castletown. Follow the coastline past Murkle Bay and finish at Kirk End, at the River Thurso on the eastern edge of the town.

Day 4: Thurso to Strathy

walking @ 8 miles / 12km

Begin the day with a morning visit to the picturesque harbour at Scrabster and onward walk out to Holborn Head before returning to Thurso for a transfer to Reay and walk to Strathy, or direct transfer to Strathy if preferred. Between May and August take an evening walk to visit the puffin colonies on the local cliffs.

Alternatively, take a mid-morning private transfer to Reay and walk around Fresgoe Bay, following the coastline past Melvich Bay and the seasonal puffin colony past Bighouse and Portskerra to reach Strathy Bay. Overnight at Strathy.

Day 5: Strathy to Bettyhill

walking @ 13 miles / 20km

A coastal walk out to Strathy Point and onward round Armadale Bay on the headlands of Ardmore, Kirtomy and Farr Points past beautiful Farr Bay which was the main settlement in the area before the Highland Clearances between 1811 and 1821. Continue on to Bettyhill where you stay overnight.

Day 6: Bettyhill to Tongue

walking @ 14 miles / 23km

Commence your walk by crossing the golden sands at Torrisdale Bay before heading out along the coastline to Skerry with views to the Rabbit Islands. The route continues along the coast past Coldbachie to end on the eastern side of the Kyle of Tongue. Overnight at Tongue.

Day 7: Tongue to Durness

walking @ 13 miles / 20km

Start with a transfer (travelling with your bags) – you will be dropped off near Polla for a good day's walking along the western side of Loch Eribol to reach Smoo Cave and Durness. Overnight at Durness.

Day 8: Durness to Cape Wrath

walking @ 10 miles / 16km

Early morning transfer to the Kyle of Durness for ferry and onward minibus transfer to the lighthouse at Cape Wrath, the most north-westerly point on the British mainland. As its landscape is largely untouched by humans, Cape Wrath has a wide diversity of wildlife, including red deer, fulmar, hooded crow, rock pipit, golden eagle, cormorant and gannet. The Category A-listed lighthouse was built in 1828 by Robert Stevenson, father of the author Robert Louis Stevenson. It was manned until 1998, then converted to automatic. Walk back to the ferry landing for return ferry across the Kyle and transfer to Durness, where you stay another night.

Day 9: Departure day

Tour arrangements end today after breakfast at your Durness hotel. Travel southwards by morning public bus to Lairg, then change to rail service for Inverness. At Inverness you can make onward connections by rail to Edinburgh, Glasgow and the overnight sleeper to London.

About this walk: Departures are offered in April but note the weather can be unpredictable, with strong winds and rain, and the days are still fairly short. May and September are the most popular months to walk in Scotland, with the colours of spring flowers or autumn leaves and the heather-covered moorlands a wonderful backdrop, so book early to avoid disappointment. The journey time from Central Scotland to the north coast is around 9 hours (by train) so consider rest days / extra nights (at additional cost) before starting the walk – compensated by some of the most beautiful scenery in the world.



Outdoor Travel offers guided walks in small groups or self-guided inn-to-inn walks with luggage transfers and meals in many areas of the UK and Europe including Wainwright's challenging and spectacular **Coast to Coast** trail, the **South Downs Way**, **Cotswolds Way**, **Cornish Coastal Track**, the **Great Glen Way** from Fort William to Inverness or the popular **West Highland Way** from near Glasgow to Fort William. In Europe we offer the **Tour du Mont Blanc** in the Alps, the pilgrim's **Way of St James** or **Camino de Santiago** from Le Puy in France to Santiago de Compostela in Spain or the **Via Francigena**, the pilgrims 'road to Rome' in Italy and many other guided or self-guided walks.

Contact Outdoor Travel for more itinerary details and reservations

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