

The Colours of the Celts cruise takes in the Isle of Rum



The Trust's Fyvie Castle will be a highlight of the Northern Delights cruise

COAST to COAST



The comfortable MV Berlin

The Trust's Cultural Cruising programme for 2017 is more inspiring than ever, taking in Scotland and Ireland as well as the mesmerising sea fjords of Norway. Travel writer Robin McKelvie recalls some favourite experiences along these routes

I'm with James Boswell when it comes to Scotland's coastline and its myriad isles: they make me want to dance a jig of delight – just as the 18th-century biographer famously did when he reached the top of Dun Caan on Raasay. I'm with Felix Mendelssohn, too: the composer's spirit soared so much on Staffa that he was inspired to pen his famous *Hebrides Overture*. As a writer, I've been cruising, hiking and roving around Scotland's wildly beautiful

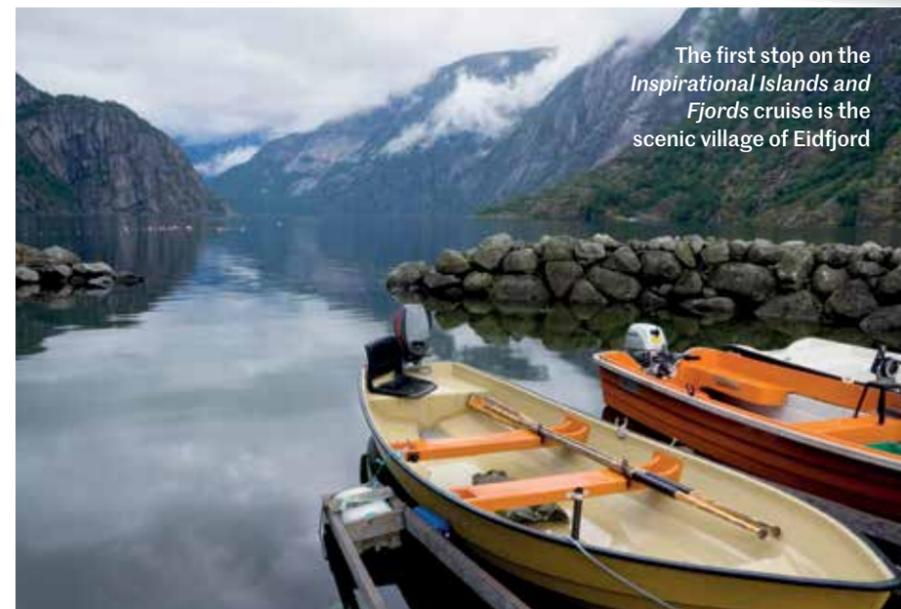


Robin in St Kilda

coast for two decades and this oasis, awash with Viking and Celtic ghosts, a land of mountain and sea, of sea eagles and whales, remains a constant source of both joy and endlessly surprised wonder.

My earliest forays around the Scottish coast came on my dad's yacht *Sisu*. I've now visited over 100 countries as a travel writer, but my heart still leaps when cruising out of a Scottish port as I start scanning the horizon for dolphins, and dreaming of isles that are no longer impossibly remote.

Until I researched my book, *National Geographic*



The first stop on the Inspirational Islands and Fjords cruise is the scenic village of Eidfjord

Traveller: Scotland, I wasn't aware of the full extent of what Scotland's littoral offers – that there are more than 800 islands, for example, or that even without these islands, Scotland's coast is three times larger than England's. Indeed, unfurl Argyll's coast alone and it is longer than that of France.

This vast wildscape is full of promise and adventure. If I were to recall every jaw-dropping experience, I could fill this entire magazine. There was the time I arrived in Tobermory on Mull with a dozen Londoners who'd never been to Scotland before. In the very first pub we

wandered into, the legendary Vatersay Boys were playing an impromptu session. After a toe-tapping, breathless, reeling night, we eased back to the ship by moonlight, accompanied by a brace of porpoises breaking the ice-flat waters as the Northern Lights danced above. Quite an introduction.

The people you meet, some of whom proudly claim direct lineage to the Celts and Vikings, are an essential draw of this magnificent coastline. Their rich stories are backed up by genuinely world-class wildlife, and I am left puzzled by friends flying to the other end of the world in search of exotic creatures. I have never enjoyed better sightings of the UK's largest land mammal, the red deer, than hiking on Rum, or had better viewing of whales and dolphins than off Mull. On Knoydart, I once spent a

There's a chance to visit the sweeping sands of the Uists on the *Colours of the Celts* cruise



Left: A standard outside cabin on the *Pearl II*



SUSAN BAIN

NTS Western Isles Manager

'I'm very excited about seeing the Lofoten Islands in Norway again – it's a fascinating place with jaw-dropping scenery. Even when I sail on an NTS cruise as a speaker, I always learn so many new things!'

memorable afternoon watching a pair of sea eagles hunt by the water's edge and scrap with other birds for territory. And then, swimming off the Uists, a large fin appeared just metres away – the perfectly innocent bulk of a basking shark.

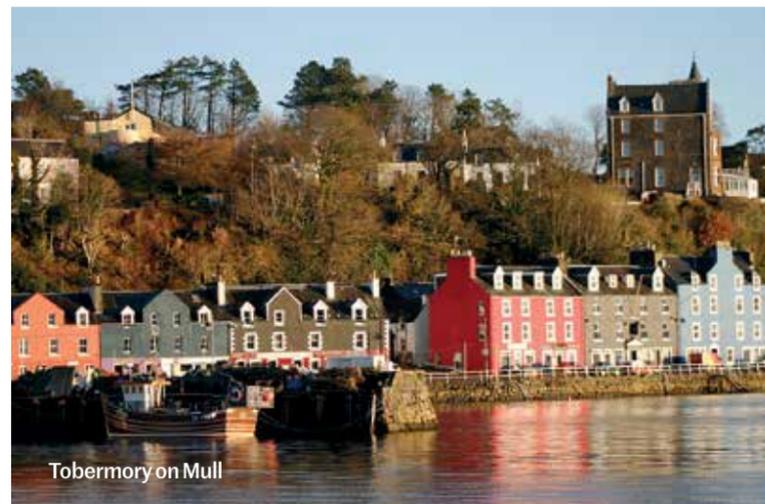
The built environment of the Scottish coast also appeals more than ever, as we approach Scotland's Year of History, Heritage and Archaeology in 2017. Orkney's Skara Brae, for me, is up there with any prehistoric site in the world, offering the chance to wander among homes once occupied by our distant ancestors 5,000 years ago. A similarly sublime experience is offered by Viking-tinged Jarlshof on Shetland. Then there is Orkney's remarkable stone circle at Brodgar. I waited patiently here on a dreich day, then marvelled as a rainbow shone bright over the ancient stone. At Maeshowe nearby, I delved inside this prehistoric burial chamber to witness the light of the winter solstice strike deep into its heart, leaving our group speechless.

Perhaps the uniqueness of the Scottish coast is that it offers human, wildlife and geographical experiences all rolled into one. The epitome of this is that most remote of archipelagos, St Kilda: so impressive that it became the first place in the UK to be recognised on UNESCO's World Heritage list

'THIS VAST WILDSCAPE IS FULL OF PROMISE AND ADVENTURE'



Robin's daughters paddle in Harris



Tobermory on Mull

ROBIN MCKELVIE



A Trust cruise is one of the best ways to visit St Kilda

‘ANY JOURNEY TO THIS UNIQUE PLACE IS ONE OF LEARNING’

twice. I love to spend time in the houses of the former residents, reading about their unique lives, before defying the skuas intent on preventing me reaching the peak of Conachair.

For me, any journey to this unique part of the world is one of learning. On each trip I learn a little more, but I also rather ruefully realise that there is so much more to learn. Here, with the salty air on your lips, you learn just by watching and speaking to local people who spare time to stop, think and share, and from experts like the illuminating guest speakers I have enjoyed listening to on a Trust cruise. Their knowledge – whether of archaeology, botany or Celtic art – can bring a journey alive.

Like the sailors, composers and naturalists before me, who struggle to describe what they’ve witnessed along Scotland’s untamed coastline, I can only hint at its beauty as best as I can. In the end, there is only one way to discover the epic delights of Scotland’s coast and islands. Your cabin awaits...



The dining room of the MV Berlin



KENNETH STEVEN

Poet and writer

‘I’m very much looking forward to next year’s *Inspirational Islands and Fjords* cruise. I used to live in the far north of Norway, and I simply never tire of the mountains and coastal scenery. It will be wonderful to be close to the heartland of the Sami people once again. Trust cruises have a unique and magical atmosphere, and it’s a privilege to be part of the team.’



DR CAROL CHRISTIANSEN

Textile expert

‘This is my first Trust cruise and I’m looking forward to hearing about everyone’s adventures! I’ll be talking about textile traditions and native sheep breeds, so I can’t wait to see St Kilda’s famous Soay sheep.’

Cultural Cruising 2017

To explore the routes in detail, download a brochure at nts.org.uk/cruises or call 0131 458 0234



Northern Delights

4-11 JUNE 2017

Next summer, the MV *Berlin* (formerly called *Spirit of Adventure*) will visit Orkney, Shetland and St Kilda, and make the Trust’s maiden trip to Fetlar – also known as ‘the Garden of Shetland’. Speakers and artistes will include textile archaeologist Dr Carol Christiansen and fiddler Bryan Gear.



Inspirational Islands and Fjords

11-25 JUNE 2017

Journeying further afield, this two-week cruise focuses on the western seaboard of Norway. You’ll cross the Arctic Circle and enjoy dramatic rail journeys, cable-car rides and boat trips. Bringing the journey alive will be poet and novelist Kenneth Steven and geographer Professor David Munro.



Colours of the Celts

10-22 SEPTEMBER 2017

In early autumn, *Pearl II* will navigate the Celtic sea paths to Ireland’s Wild Atlantic Way and trace the shores of Wester Ross, Mull, Rum, St Kilda and the Hebrides. Among your speakers will be art curator Dr Frances Fowle, while Robert Lovie, Cheryl Forbes and Wayne Robertson will all entertain.