



# Wanderlust

your definitive travel guide

by Robin McKelvie



## Wish you were here? Let me show you the way

Travel writer **Robin McKelvie** is joining the Weekend team. Here he shares his love of exploring new places— at home and abroad

**H**ello everyone. If you enjoy nothing more than heading off on holiday, or even just grabbing an occasional night or two away, we are going to get on well.

Maybe you are looking to ease off for a weekend in the Trossachs or sample the high life in one of Scotland's cities. Perhaps you want to savour a week in the Algarve sun, or take a long haul adventure to somewhere like Hong Kong or Australia. Whatever your travel plans, I'm here to help – and hopefully inspire you too. So strap in now and make yourself comfortable, as I introduce myself and my new travel column for The Courier.

I've been travelling for most of my life. As a wee boy my dad used to take me "doon the watter" in the Easter and autumn holidays to Ardmaleish boatyard on the Isle of Bute to paint his yacht Sisu. Every summer also brought the sheer joy of family holidays on Arran.

So I'm with Scottish writer Robert Louis Stevenson on the subject. "I travel not to go anywhere, but to go," he wrote. "I travel for travel's sake. The great affair is to move."

That's the sentiment I felt on those CalMac ferries and on our regular trips to Princes Street Gardens in Edinburgh where I could happily have spent hours watching the trains heading to distant places I could only imagine, such as London and Plymouth.

I didn't finally fly until I was 20 but I've spent the years since making up for it, having now been to more than 100 countries. I make 30-40 trips a year these days, more than half of them around Scotland but to all other parts of the world too.

And over the years, the writing I've enjoyed since the days of my childhood

travel diaries has morphed into a career that has led to my work being published across the UK – and on another four continents. I've written guidebooks too, more than 30 on destinations as diverse as Scotland, Croatia, Slovenia and Bermuda, and I regularly talk travel on BBC Radio.

Despite all my global adventures the question I get asked most often – "What is your favourite country?" – has always been easy to answer. The top destination for me is Scotland. Seriously.

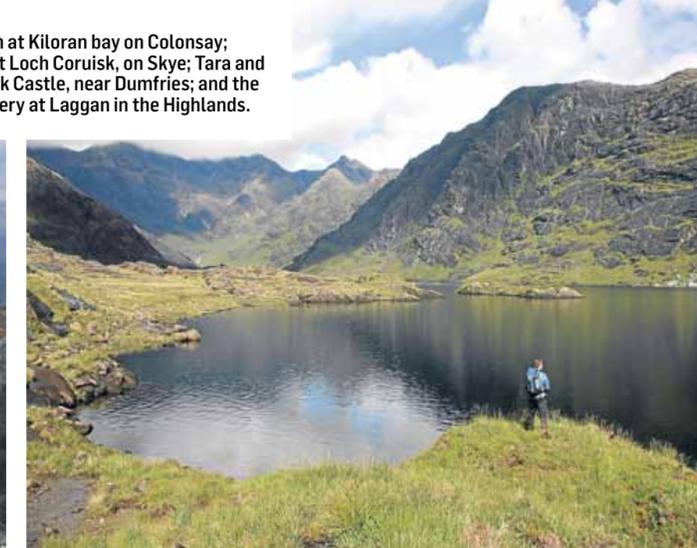
When Rough Guides named it the world's second top destination to visit this year I was invited on to the radio to defend this lofty award against a London based travel writer, who insisted Scotland didn't deserve its ranking. I had to agree with her on one point – it was ridiculous that Scotland was number two because I knew from my own experience that it firmly deserved to be number one.

Scotland for me is one of the best kept secrets in Europe, even among many of the people who live here. And until I researched my National Geographic Guide to Scotland I admit I didn't realise we had more than 800 islands. Then there's our coastline – even without those islands it's three times larger than England's and twice the size of both the French and Spanish littorals. In fact, Scotland's coastline makes up more than 10% of Europe's total.

I sometimes tease friends by telling them about a travel experience I've had, such as savouring the Northern Lights from a kayak, swooping off on the world's shortest scheduled flight and its only scheduled beach landing, or sailing alongside a killer whale. When I tell them I did all these things in one country they are intrigued. When I reveal I did all these amazing things right here



Clockwise from far left: Robin at Kiloran bay on Colonsay; taking in the views on Skye; at Loch Coruisk, on Skye; Tara and Emma on Harris; Caerlaverock Castle, near Dumfries; and the family try their hands at archery at Laggan in the Highlands.



in Scotland, I enjoy watching their faces ripple with surprise but the truth is you can savour all of these epic experiences and far, far more in this impressively diverse country.

I want to share my travels – and my family's experiences on the road – with you but I also want to provide you with genuinely useful information so you can plan and book your own trips. And I'd like to help inspire you to dream of visiting exotic places – the kind you might have to save up for – while you enjoy those little local breaks away too.

My family will be very much part of my columns. There is Jenny, my well-travelled wife, who is also a travel writer and the co-author of many of my guidebooks, including the National Geographic Guide to Scotland.

Then there is nine-year-old Tara, who has stayed at more than 300 hotels across 12 countries, and last (but certainly not least) wee Emma, who at six has stayed at more than 200 hotels across seven countries.

I like to keep in touch with my readers so I would love to hear your feedback on the columns. You will find I'm all ears too when it comes to places you think I should check out so feel free to get in touch with me at The Courier. You can also keep up with my travels live if you have access to Twitter or Instagram. On

the former my handle is simply @robinmckelvie and on the latter it's @robinmckelvietravels, while my website is www.robinmckelvie.com.

My columns will appear every fortnight and each one will be different. Next time I'll be returning to that beguiling southern charmer, Dumfries and Galloway, with my family. I'm actually on the way there as I write this, the Southern Uplands starting to rise temptingly in the distance, as we ease south towards this epic land of ruined abbeys, sweeping beaches and trim towns and villages for an escape alive with the ghosts of both Rabbie Burns and Robert the Bruce.

In the coming weeks and months I will be taking you around plenty of other parts of Scotland and further afield to help you plan your own trips. I won't just be travelling to single destinations; there'll be a few handy round-ups too, including a look at my favourite islands in Scotland and practical information on things to see and do while you're there.

I will also be heading much further afield with a couple of articles about Australia in May. While I'm down under, I intend to take in the delights of the eastern side of the country, including the Gold Coast, as it gears up to accept the baton from Glasgow and host the 2018 Commonwealth Games.

I'm also looking forward to taking the Indian Pacific all the way across this vast country from Sydney to Perth and checking out the winelands of Margaret River.

As well as the main travel article every fortnight, I'll be bringing you two more practical suggestions.

The first will be my Hotel of the Fortnight, which will feature a place I've recently stayed at that I really like. I say hotel, but it won't always be an expensive city grand dame – it could be a wee B&B, a family friendly self-catering escape or something really unusual like a gypsy caravan or a glamping (posh camping) hideaway.

My second piece of advice will be my Travel Tip – any little nugget that I think you will find useful, from new airline routes through to festivals you might not have heard of before.

Whatever your own tastes – whether you prefer comfortable hotels and fancy restaurants, or something more low key, getting active in the great outdoors or exploring shops or museums – there will be plenty of practical information and ideas for you.

I'm really looking forward to having you along as a companion on my travels and to sharing them with you. So I'll see you in a fortnight. And until then, bon voyage!



### Hotel of the fortnight

Village Hotel Glasgow – It's great to see the massive SSE Hydro in Glasgow staging so many successful concerts these days.

If you're through for a gig, why not avoid all the hassle of finding parking and driving home late by staying over?

The new Village Hotel is handily located for the Hydro, just across the Clyde with views back towards it (if you book a river view room). I love that there's a full 20m swimming pool with hot tub, sauna and steam room. There is also a bar/restaurant and a Starbucks to refuel in before the concert or show. Doubles from £85. [www.village-hotels.co.uk/hotels/glasgow](http://www.village-hotels.co.uk/hotels/glasgow)

### Robin's travel tip

Mercifully long gone are the days when Scottish travellers flying east long haul had to transit London's airports.

Emirates led the way, launching a Glasgow-Dubai service back in 2004. More recently I've been impressed with Etihad's Edinburgh-Abu Dhabi route, which started in 2015.

I'm using it again in May to get to Brisbane and come back from Perth. The fare is not bad either, coming in at under £600 for all four legs, including all taxes, which was cheaper than flying via London.

If you're planning a trip anywhere east beyond Turkey I'd look seriously at avoiding the capital if you can. [www.etihad.com](http://www.etihad.com).