25 Places Tourists Miss in Scotland

Off the Main Tourist Trail

Quiet glens, ruined castles, remote islands and empty beaches - 25 places most visitors drive straight past, because there is no signpost, no bus or no big car park.

A Free Guide from Love Scotland

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Introduction

Scotland draws millions of visitors every year, and rightly so. Edinburgh Castle, Loch Ness, and the Isle of Skye are world-famous. But the places locals love most - the quiet glens, the empty coastlines, the small ruins off the main road - are easy to miss.

This guide lists the Scotland most visitors never see. These 25 places rarely appear on tour itineraries. Some require a ferry crossing. Others are simply overlooked because nobody thought to mention them. All of them are real places you can visit.

We have organised them by region so you can build them into your own trip. Whether you are planning your first visit or your fifteenth, we hope this guide leads you somewhere new.

Happy exploring,
The Love Scotland Team

The Highlands

1. Sandwood Bay

Sutherland

One of the most remote beaches in Britain. A four-mile walk from the nearest road leads to a vast sweep of pink-white sand, a sea stack called Am Buachaille, and often not another soul in sight. The area is rich in legend - locals speak of a ghostly sailor.

Official information: johnmuirtrust.org

2. Corrieshalloch Gorge

Wester Ross

A 60-metre deep box canyon with a Victorian suspension bridge spanning the falls of Measach. The gorge is a national nature reserve, thick with ferns and ancient trees, and the viewpoint above the falls is genuinely vertigo-inducing.

Official website: nts.org.uk

3. Plodda Falls

Glen Affric

A 46-metre waterfall hidden deep in Glen Affric, surrounded by ancient Caledonian pine forest. A viewing platform extends out over the drop. In autumn, the forest blazes with colour and the walk in feels like stepping into another century.

Official website: forestryandland.gov.scot

4. Badbea Clearance Village

Caithness

A clifftop village abandoned during the Highland Clearances, where families had to tether their children and livestock to rocks to stop them being blown off the cliffs. The foundations remain, along with a memorial stone that silences every visitor.

Official information: [trove.scot]

5. Smoo Cave

Durness

A vast sea cave with a freshwater waterfall cascading into its inner chamber. The outer cave is the largest entrance to any sea cave in Britain. Boat trips take you into the flooded inner chambers where archaeology dates human use to the Iron Age.

Official website: [smoocavetours.com]

The Islands

6. St Kilda (from the mainland)

Outer Hebrides

While landing on St Kilda requires a boat charter, the archipelago is visible from certain Outer Hebrides viewpoints on clear days. The world's most remote British island group, evacuated in 1930, is a UNESCO dual World Heritage Site.

Official website: [nts.org.uk]

7. Isle of Kerrera

Argyll

A short ferry ride from Oban, this tiny island has a ruined castle, a bothy tearoom, and stunning views of Mull. Almost no tourists make the crossing, despite it taking just five minutes. The walk around the island takes half a day.

Official website: [isleofkerrera.org]

8. Jura

Inner Hebrides

Home to 200 people, 6,000 red deer, and one road. George Orwell wrote Nineteen Eighty-Four here. The Paps of Jura dominate the skyline, and the Corryvreckan whirlpool off the northern tip is the third largest in the world.

Official website: [isleofjura.scot]

9. Papa Westray

Orkney

One of Orkney's smallest inhabited islands, home to the Knap of Howar - the oldest preserved stone house in northern Europe, dating to 3700 BC. The island also holds the record for the world's shortest scheduled flight: two minutes to Westray.

Official website: [papawestray.co.uk]

Knap of Howar (Historic Environment Scotland): [historicenvironment.scot]

10. Isle of Eigg

Small Isles

A community-owned island with a dramatic pitchstone ridge called An Sgurr, singing sands that squeak underfoot, and a dark history involving a cave where an entire clan was massacred. The island runs entirely on renewable energy.

Official website: isleofeigg.org

The Borders & Lowlands

11. Grey Mare's Tail

Dumfries & Galloway

Scotland's fifth highest waterfall plunges 60 metres into a glacial valley. The path to Loch Skeen above reveals one of southern Scotland's wildest landscapes - home to peregrine falcons and feral goats.

Official website: nts.org.uk

12. Rosslyn Chapel

Midlothian

Made famous by The Da Vinci Code but worth visiting for the genuine artistry. The 15th-century carvings are the most elaborate in Scotland, including depictions of maize and aloe vera - plants unknown in Europe when it was built.

Official website: rosslynchapel.com

13. St Abbs Head

Berwickshire

A volcanic headland with dramatic cliffs, a marine reserve, and one of the best seabird colonies on the east coast. In spring, the clifftops are alive with guillemots, razorbills, and puffins. The village below is worth the stop.

Official website: nts.org.uk

14. Cramond Island

Edinburgh

A tidal island in the Firth of Forth accessible on foot at low tide via a concrete causeway lined with anti-submarine pylons from the Second World War. Check the tide tables before crossing - visitors regularly need rescue.

Official information: cramondheritage.org.uk

15. New Lanark

South Lanarkshire

A UNESCO World Heritage Site hidden in a gorge on the River Clyde. This 18th-century cotton mill village was a pioneering experiment in utopian socialism. The restored buildings and riverside walks are remarkable.

Official website: newlanark.org

The North-East

16. Dunnottar Castle

Aberdeenshire

A ruined medieval fortress on a rocky headland jutting into the North Sea. The Honours of Scotland were hidden here from Cromwell's troops. On a misty morning, the approach path feels like walking into a film set.

Official website: dunnottarcastle.co.uk

17. Pennan

Aberdeenshire

A single row of whitewashed cottages wedged between cliffs and the sea, made famous by the film Local Hero. The red phone box from the film is still there, and the village feels genuinely untouched by time.

Official information: visitabdn.com

18. Bullers of Buchan

Aberdeenshire

A collapsed sea cave that has formed a natural cauldron - a roofless chasm where the sea surges in through a natural arch. The clifftop walk passes some of the most dramatic coastal scenery in north-east Scotland.

Official information: visitabdn.com

19. Loch Muick

Royal Deeside

A remote loch in the Cairngorms reached by a single-track road through Glen Muick. Queen Victoria's Glas-allt-Shiel bothy sits on the shore. The circular walk takes in waterfalls, eagles, and mountain hares.

Official information: visitabdn.com

20. Findhorn

Moray

A village at the mouth of the River Findhorn with vast sand dunes, a tidal bay popular with kite surfers, and the nearby Findhorn Foundation - an intentional community and ecovillage that has been here since the 1960s.

Official website: findhorn.org

The West Coast & Central

21. Kilchurn Castle

Argyll

A ruined 15th-century castle on a peninsula at the head of Loch Awe, accessible on foot across marshy ground. On still mornings, the castle reflects perfectly in the loch. It is one of the most photographed ruins in Scotland.

Official website: historicenvironment.scot

22. Falls of Dochart

Killin

Where the River Dochart tumbles over rocks in the centre of the village of Killin, at the western end of Loch Tay. The island in the middle holds an ancient burial ground of Clan MacNab. Spectacular after heavy rain.

Official information: visitscotland.com

23. The Whangie

Stirlingshire

A hidden rock formation on Auchineden Hill in the Kilpatrick Hills, with views across to Loch Lomond - a 100-metre corridor sliced clean through the rock, just wide enough to walk through. Legend says the Devil flicked his tail and split the hill in two.

Official information: west-dunbarton.gov.uk

24. Inchcailloch Island

Loch Lomond

A wooded island on Loch Lomond accessible by ferry from Balmaha. An ancient church and burial ground sit in the woods, and the summit trail offers panoramic views across the loch to Ben Lomond. Peaceful even on busy weekends.

Official website: lochlomond-trossachs.org

25. Finnich Glen (The Devil's Pulpit)

Stirlingshire

A narrow gorge with blood-red water caused by the sandstone riverbed. Accessed by a steep set of steps through the trees, the gorge feels otherworldly. Local legend says druids once held ceremonies here. Check access before you go: the way down is steep.

Official information: visitscotland.com

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