

EXPLORE!

TRIP NOTES



Wild Scotland - M/V Polar Pioneer (PPWS 2017)



TRIP DURATION
11
DAYS



Tour Style: Classic
Tour Pace: Relaxed

Tour Type: Small Groups
Accommodation
Grade: Premium

Trip Code: PPWS

Trip Highlights - Wild Scotland - M/V Polar Pioneer

- ✓ Explore by Zodiac, and have whales and dolphins swim alongside you
- ✓ Photograph some of the world's largest sea bird colonies; including cute little puffins
- ✓ Discover picturesque villages and medieval hamlets on some of Scotland's least-visited tiny islands
- ✓ Sail with otters and seals
- ✓ Uncover the rugged and wild side of Scotland

Trip Essentials

Accommodation:
Included Meals: 10 breakfasts, 9 lunches, 10 dinners
Start Point: Join trip: Oban
End Point: Trip ends: Aberdeen
Transport: Zodiac, Polar Pioneer
Countries: United Kingdom

Wild Scotland - M/V Polar Pioneer

Explore Scotland's wild islands, home to some of the world's largest seabird colonies, including adorable puffins and noisy Arctic terns. The Scottish isles are a bird watcher's paradise with species such as fulmars, kittiwakes, guillemots, gannets and shags, too. Your ship will get you as close to the highlights as possible, but you can also take to the water in Zodiacs and kayaks to really get the most out of your wildlife experiences - seals will frolic near to you, and whales and dolphins will swim around you. Back on land, discover ancient sites, huge monoliths and remote, picturesque villages in the Hebrides, Shetlands and little-visited, tiny isles surrounding the mainland. This is a diverse exploration of rugged and remote Scottish islands from a unique vantage point.

Ship Description

Polar Pioneer is a Finnish ex-research vessel, refurbished to provide an adventurous journey in the polar regions; its ice class means it has excellent manoeuvrability. The vessel accommodates only 54 passengers, meaning more time with the experts and a friendly on-board experience. Informed crew and experts will ensure you learn about how a polar expedition runs, your unique surroundings and the wildlife; Zodiacs will take you to shore for close encounters.



Suitability

We've given each of our tours a comfort rating and a tour pace, walking or cycling grade to give you a general idea about the level of activity on each tour and the standard of accommodation you will be staying in at the end of your day's adventure.

Often you'll stay in different styles of accommodation during your tour; so we make an average rating across the entire tour. For more information on where you'll stay each night, please refer to the day by day tour itinerary.

Accommodation Grade: Premium

Our comfortable accommodation is hand-picked and chosen for its character, location or local importance. These properties have excellent facilities and a higher level of comfort and service.

Tour Style: Classic

Packed with adventure, these tours offer inspiring destinations and authentic travel experiences at a reasonable price. Using all kinds of transport and accommodation, we'll take you off the beaten track to discover the true heart of the people and places you visit.

Tour Pace: Relaxed

Easy paced tours with plenty of time to relax and absorb the sights and immerse yourself in the local surroundings.



Your trip itinerary

Tour itinerary notes

While our intention is to adhere to the day-by-day itinerary as printed below, a degree of flexibility is built in. Overnight stops may vary from those suggested.


DAY 1 Set sail from Oban

Board the Polar Pioneer around mid-afternoon in Oban and, after settling in, set sail in the evening.

 **Included Meals:** Dinner


DAY 2 Isle of Skye, Barra, Rum and Iona

From golden beaches to jagged peaks, bleak moors and heather clad hills, and from abandoned settlements to picturesque villages, your days in the Hebrides will be packed with variety. You'll explore remote lochs beneath some of Britain's most untamed mountains, wander between the bizarre rock formations of Skye's Quiraing, watch for whales, dolphins, otters and seals, or land at an island reserve that is home to red deer and white-tailed sea eagles.

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner


DAY 3 Isle of Skye, Barra, Rum and Iona

You may have the chance to sample single malt whisky at a distillery, or marvel at Fingal's Cave, where the melodious sound of waves crashing against towering basalt pillars inspired Mendelssohn's Hebridean Overture. The rugged island of Skye, named after the Norse word for cloud, is a hiker's paradise. It is a centre of Gaelic culture, and some islanders still speak the language. Hopefully, there will also be the time and right conditions to explore options on other, smaller islands to the west of Scotland, such as Barra, the Isle of Rum and Iona. It may also be possible to visit some fascinating spots along the coast of the Scottish mainland.

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner


DAY 4 Saint Kilda and surrounding islands

Island hopping north and east, we aim to visit tiny specks of land that bear the brunt of ferocious Atlantic storms. If weather and seas permit, you will be able to explore Saint Kilda, a World Heritage Site, where derelict crofts bear testament to the fortitude of hardy islanders that once dried seabirds for winter food. On Lewis, there's the chance to visit Carloway Broch, and stroll among a mini Stonehenge at Callanais. Home to breeding seals and vast seabird colonies, Flannan, North Rona and Foula boast spectacular cliffs, fantastic rock stacks, hidden beaches and luxuriant heaths where sheep once grazed.

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner


DAY 5 Saint Kilda and surrounding islands

Exposed to the full ferocity of Atlantic gales, the inhospitable volcanic stacks of Saint Kilda boast Britain's highest sea cliff (430 metres tall), and were once home to one of Britain's most remote communities. The settlement's last 36 residents were evacuated to the Scottish mainland in 1930, when the Scottish Office ceased to subsidise the community. The islanders had eaten seabird eggs, dried gannets and fulmars for winter food, and used their feathers, oil, bones and skins for fuel, tools and shoes.

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner


DAY 6 Saint Kilda and surrounding islands

In favourable sea conditions it's possible to land on Hirta, the largest island (3.2 kilometres by 1.6 kilometres), to visit derelict crofts and the ancient chape. One of Europe's most significant seabird breeding colonies, with over 200,000 breeding pairs of all species, Saint Kilda is home to Britain's largest colonies of gannets, fulmars and puffins. It remains home to Soay sheep, perhaps brought here by Stone Age man over 5000 years ago.

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner


DAY 7 Shetland Islands

Britain's most northerly islands lie almost 160 kilometres north of the Scottish mainland, at a similar latitude to the southern tip of Greenland, or Bergen in Norway. Kept relatively warm by the Gulf Stream, Shetland's 100 islands experience almost 24 hours of daylight in summer. They abound with nature reserves and archaeological sites, and offer a taste of traditional island life.

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner


DAY 8 Shetland Islands

We plan to visit some of Shetland's best preserved and most complex archaeological sites of brochs, or fortified Iron Age towers, as well as some of the world's largest colonies of sea birds.

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner


DAY 9 Orkney Islands

Mid way between Orkney and Shetland, Fair Isle houses a major European ornithological research station, and is also famous for knitwear and historic shipwrecks. About 4.8 kilometres by 3.2 kilometres, it is surrounded by impressive cliffs. The 70 or so islanders mostly live in traditional crofts on the more fertile low-lying southern part of the island. A bird watcher's paradise, Fair Isle lies on the intersection of major flight-paths from Scandinavia, Iceland and Faroe. It attracts common species and also eastern rarities such as the lanceolated warbler. In summer, the cliffs teem with breeding fulmars, kittiwakes, guillemots, gannets, shags and puffins, and it is an excellent place to view seabirds at close range, especially puffins. The island also has over 250 species of flowering plants, including wetland flowers, rare orchids, alpine species and common wildflowers. You'll be welcomed by the hospitable villagers and may take a hike or visit the museum.

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

DAY 10 Orkney Islands

Among Orkney's archipelago of 70 windswept islands, lying 9.6 kilometres north of the Scottish mainland, a rich tapestry of archaeology, history and wildlife awaits. You follow the passage of time - from 5000 year old World Heritage neolithic sites, past relics from wandering Vikings and reminders of World War II occupation, to present day crofting communities. Imposing sea cliffs teem with seabirds and cliff top paths and bleak moors beckon keen hikers.

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

DAY 11 Aberdeen

Upon arrival in Aberdeen, disembark and continue homewards.

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast

Accommodation and Meals

Food & Drink

Included meals: 10 breakfasts, 9 lunches, 10 dinners included in the price of this trip. Please be prepared to pay for non-included meals. Please note that costs for drinks and meals can vary depending on location.

Cabins

Prices are based on the use of outward facing, category one cabins on the main deck. Category one cabins are based on triple share. They are comfortable, with two lower bunks and one upper bunk. The cabin has a desk, a small washbasin, a sofa and a porthole. Showers and toilets are close by and shared with other main deck cabins. The Polar Pioneer has a number of different cabin categories, all are outside facing and most cabins have two beds (suites have double beds.) Most cabins have en suite facilities and some have larger windows, rather than portholes. Single occupancy is an option on board, subject to availability. Call us for details on the cabin choice to fit your requirements.

Ship Dining

Onboard the expedition ship you'll find a diversity of international cuisine prepared and catered by professional chefs; all meals are included in the price of your expedition. Dining is casual in one of two dining rooms. There is always a selection of different meals

available, and vegetarians will find plenty of options. Special dietary requirements can be accommodated with advance notice, please advise us at time of confirmation. Coffee, tea and water are all provided free of charge. All other beverages, alcoholic and non-alcoholic, are not included and can be purchased in the bar.

Budgeting for your Trip

You will need some extra money to cover meals and drinks not included in the trip price, any optional sightseeing, souvenirs and items of a personal nature such as laundry.

Food

The costs for meals may vary depending upon location, type of restaurant and number of courses eaten and so the prices given are an average guide. Local restaurants located off the beaten track may be less expensive, whereas an upmarket restaurant located in the centre of a major city may charge more.

United Kingdom

Lunch £: 10.00

Dinner £: 18.00

Drink

The prices for drinks can vary greatly depending upon location and the prices detailed below are an average guide. In general you would expect that drinks purchased in a supermarket or local bar to be less expensive, whilst drinks in an upmarket bar or restaurant may be more expensive.

United Kingdom

Bottle of Beer £: 4.00

Water £: 0.80

Tipping - Local Crew

Tipping is of considerable significance to the people who will take care of you during your travels. It is an expression of satisfaction. The suggested amount is USD \$10 - 12 per person per day spent on board. Of course, tipping is a personal choice and the suggested amount is set only as a guideline.

Foreign Exchange

United Kingdom

ATM Availability: ATM's are widely available in main towns.

Credit Card Acceptance: Widely accepted.

Travellers Cheques: Can be exchanged at most banks and post offices.

Local Currency: Pounds Sterling.

Recommended Currency for Exchange: Carry a combination of UK Sterling cash, ATM and credit cards.

Where to Exchange: Your tour leader will advise you on arrival.

Joining your Trip

Flight Information

You are able to book this tour on a 'land only' basis or as a 'flight inclusive' package. Your flight inclusive package will be fully protected by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) ATOL protection scheme.

Booking a land only package with Explore

Customers who have chosen to book on the 'Land Only' arrangements of our tour, please ensure that you have checked your tour specific 'Joining Instructions' prior to booking your own travel arrangements. Your joining instructions can be found on our website at www.explore.co.uk, in the tour specific dates and prices section.

You may also be eligible for the Free Explore Transfer. For more information please refer to <https://www.explore.co.uk/transfers>.

Joining Tour Abroad

Customers booked on the 'Land Only' arrangements will now receive a Free Transfer, provided you arrive and depart on the tour only itinerary start and end dates. The transfers will be from the Explore designated airport or train station to the joining point of your tour, and then back from the ending point to the designated airport or train station. The exception to this rule is customers who are booked on a tour where the joining and ending point is at the designated airport or train station.

Free transfers are not available for Self-Guided, Tailormade or Tours for Churches customers.

If you are not eligible for the Free Transfer then you will need to make your own way through to the joining and ending point. On a majority of our tours Explore will be able to provide a private transfer at an additional cost. Please ask for a quote at the time of booking.

For more information regarding the Explore Free Transfer please refer to <https://www.explore.co.uk/transfers>.

Booking a flight inclusive package with Explore

We have a good selection of flights not only from London but from many regional airports around the UK allowing us to compare fares between scheduled carriers as well as low cost and charter airlines. Our dedicated flights team will match the best flight options to your arrival and departure airport.

On our website we display a UK flight inclusive package guide price which is generally based on a London departure. To avoid paying supplements or to secure your preferred flight option, we recommend booking as early as possible, especially for peak travel dates.

Important Information

Travel Insurance

It is a condition of booking with Explore that you have adequate valid travel insurance. It is your responsibility to arrange appropriate travel insurance and ensure you have read and understood the full terms and conditions of your travel insurance policy to ensure that you are covered for all activities you intend to undertake whilst on the tour, including all optional activities. Your Insurance Policy must fully cover you for medical expenses and emergency repatriation to your home country. Please ensure your policy includes medical emergency helicopter evacuation in the event of illness or injury and covers the entire duration of your holiday. If you are trekking at altitude please ensure that there is no upper altitude limit which may limit or exclude cover for your trip. Medical and repatriation insurance cover is not mandatory for UK residents who are travelling on trips within the United Kingdom.

EXPLORE!
The Adventure Travel Experts

CAMPBELL IRVINE
DIRECT TRAVEL INSURANCE



Travel Insurance is essential. If you have not already arranged cover, please contact our recommended Travel Insurance providers www.campbellirvinedirect.com/Explore who offer Travel Insurance specifically designed to cover travel with Explore or call **Campbell Irvine Direct** on Tel: 020 7938 1734

Explore Worldwide is an Introducing Appointed Representative of Campbell Irvine Ltd who are authorised and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority.

Travel Aware

We strongly recommend that you check your government's travel advisory for up-to-date information and advice about your destination: safety and security, entry requirements, health, local laws and customs. For UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office Advice follow the link at www.explore.co.uk/travel-safety

We strongly advise that you register with the FCO to receive updates to the travel advice for your chosen destination. A hard copy of the current FCO Travel Advice for your chosen destination is available by contacting cr@explore.co.uk or 01252 379438.

Under 18 immigration guidance

Please note that some countries require proof of parental consent when travelling overseas with under 18s. Please check requirements with the relevant embassy or consular office well in advance of travel if this applies to your party.

Visa Information

United Kingdom: Visas are not required by Australian, New Zealand, US and Canadian citizens. Other nationalities should consult their local embassy or consular office.

All visa information is subject to change. You should confirm all visa related questions with the relevant Embassy prior to departure.

If you do require assistance in obtaining a visa then you may consider applying through Explore's recommended visa service in the UK, Travcour. See www.travcour.com to download the relevant visa application for your trip, if applicable (UK citizens only), along with details of how to apply for your visa through Travcour. The Team at Travcour will be happy to answer specific questions relating to visa applications, please call them directly on 0208 5431846.

Vaccinations & Protection

United Kingdom

Nothing compulsory, we recommend protection against tetanus, diphtheria, polio and hepatitis A. The above is not an exhaustive list. Further information regarding vaccinations and travel health advice can be found by following the NHS and NaTHNaC links at <http://www.explore.co.uk/Travelhealth/> and from your local healthcare provider. Visa and vaccination requirements are subject to change and should be confirmed before departure.

Preparing for your Trip

Climate

United Kingdom

The UK has a temperate but very variable climate. In general the summers are warm with July and August being the warmest. The winters are cool and the lowest temperatures are recorded during January and February. Whatever the season it is advisable to be prepared for rain!

Clothing

Parkas
A complimentary parka is provided for you on board the ship and is yours to keep after the voyage. It has a comfortable wind-resistant inner jacket, which is detachable from the waterproof outer shell, and is designed to be worn over your essential base layers.

Gloves
Keeping your hands warm and dry can be a challenge. Thin polypropylene gloves can be worn underneath warm outergloves. This allows you some protection from the cold when removing your gloves to operate your camera etc. We strongly recommend that you bring more than one pair of gloves, in case one gets wet (or lost).

Hat/Cap
Warm, woollen hat/cap to protect your ears, as well as a scarf, neck gaiter or other face protection, such as a balaclava.

Trousers
Water-resistant trousers of coated nylon or, even better, Gore-Tex® are essential for your comfort. They can be worn over your regular clothes to keep you warm and dry. We suggest that you purchase trousers a few sizes larger than you normally wear as you will be wearing them over other clothing. Gore-Tex® or similar fabrics are excellent for keeping out wind and water without trapping excess heat. Rain gear and Gore-Tex® products can be found in any outdoor sport clothing store. In addition to your waterproof trousers, warm ski pants are suggested if you have them. Warm trousers such as jeans, corduroys etc are also good.

Socks
Warm wool socks worn over a thin pair of silk, polypropylene socks should provide enough warmth and insulation for your feet. Bring several pairs of socks, since you will inevitably get your feet wet.

Outer Clothing Woollen, knit or cotton sweaters/tops, polar fleece tops (medium weight), several cotton turtlenecks and T-shirts for layering on and off the ship.

Underclothing
Thermal underwear is highly recommended as it will keep you warm without adding bulk. Most polar travellers prefer a lightweight version.

Equipment

There are no hairdryers aboard the Polar Pioneer.

Sunglasses and sun cream

Insect repellent

Personal toiletries

A refillable water bottle

Books/reading material

Camera and memory cards

Seasickness remedy

Walking poles

Footwear

Complimentary waterproof boots will be supplied on-board. However, if you have extra small or large feet, you are advised to bring your own.

Also ensure you take good walking boots and trainers for relaxing.

Luggage: On Tour

One main piece of baggage and daypack. Remember you are expected to carry your own luggage so don't overload yourself.

Luggage allowance on trip: 20kg

General Information

Country details

United Kingdom

Population: 62,262,000

Size of Country: 243,610 sq km

Major Language: English

Religion: Christian

Electric Supply & Plugs

United Kingdom

3 Pin Flat

Why Choose Explore

We've been creating award-winning pioneering adventure holidays for over 30 years, earning the trust of thousands of delighted customers, who feel safe in our hands. Our tour leaders have expert local knowledge and our tours are designed to take you off the beaten track to see the most exotic, inspiring and dramatic places in the world.

- With over 30 years' experience, we are passionate about what we do.
- Pioneering small group adventures, self-guided, private journeys & tailor-made holidays.
- Award-winning tour leaders who you can trust.
- Responsible travel is and always has been one of the driving principles of Explore.

Our adventure holidays are full of exciting things to see and do, exploring in small groups travelling by bus, boat, plane, rickshaw, camel, or any number of unusual forms of transport. Often you will stay in family-run hotels and village houses and enjoy authentic local cuisine. In this way, it's easy to discover the true heart of the people and the place you travel to – and make some new friends along the way. Each tour is uniquely different, so please feel free to browse through our tours to see what may whet your appetite.

Cool Earth

Explore are proud to support Cool Earth in their effort to reduce global carbon dioxide levels through the prevention of deforestation in the South America rainforest. Cool Earth focus on areas in immediate danger of deforestation, supporting local communities to be forest guardians. To date 350,000 acres of rainforest has been protected. Saving rainforest also protects rare animals and plants, allows local forest communities to maintain their way of life, and protects a major source of oxygen and fresh water. When you travel on an Explore holiday we make a donation to Cool Earth that exceeds the impact of our customers flights each year.

Earth Matters

We are passionate about sustainable travel and work hard to create tours where your holiday delivers real benefits to the local communities. We minimise our impact by travelling in small groups, respecting local cultures, reducing waste and offsetting 100% of the CO2 from our flights.

When you travel with Explore, you are directly contributing to local economies and helping empower the people you meet. We currently support a range of charities and good causes, including: Toilet Twinning (helping to flush away poverty), Lone Buffalo Foundation (a community project based in Laos providing creative skills for young people) and have recently supported women's cooperatives in Borneo and Morocco. We are a member of Tourism Concern's Ethical Tour Operator Group (www.tourismconcern.org.uk) and support their campaign for fair and ethical tourism. We also care passionately about the world's wildlife and actively support and promote the Born Free Organisation and Mahouts Elephant Foundation.

Booking Your Holiday

Peace of mind - book with confidence

You can book your Explore holiday with confidence, as all monies paid to us for your trip are fully protected. Explore is a fully bonded tour operator licensed by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) and by ABTOT.

The air holiday packages (Tours including flights) that we advertise are ATOL protected, since we hold an Air Travel Organiser's Licence granted by the Civil Aviation Authority. Our ATOL number is ATOL 2595. In addition, As a member of the Association of Bonded Travel Organisers Trust Limited (ABTOT), Explore has provided a bond to meet the requirements of the Package Travel, Package Holidays and Package Tours Regulations 1992. Please note that packages booked outside the UK are only protected when purchased directly with Explore.

Reserving your place

To reserve your place on this tour you will need to check availability on the Explore website or through our dedicated call centre based in the UK where you can. Our tours can fill up quickly so you are advised to book as early as possible. If your chosen date is 'Available' or 'Guaranteed' we will be able to provisionally hold you a space for up to 48 hours.

For Self-Guided holidays and Private Journeys simply choose your date of travel and let us know so we can confirm all ground services.

The easiest way to confirm your booking is through our website. When you are ready to book, we normally require a 10% non-refundable deposit, but for some holidays this may be more to cover such items as permit fees, internal flights or other non-refundable services. If your travel starts within 60 days of booking, full payment will be required at the time of booking

100% No Surcharge Guarantee

The price paid for our holidays is no longer subject to change. Once booked and confirmed we will guarantee the price you pay will not increase, whatever the circumstances. You will not be approached to pay fuel surcharges unlike the vast majority of other adventure tour operators. The price guarantee applies to all new bookings departing between 1st January 2016 and 31st December 2017.

Trip Itinerary Versions

Itinerary details may vary depending on departure date and alternative itineraries for this tour may exist. Please refer to the dates and prices page on our website to check which itinerary operates on each departure date.

Please ensure that you have an up-to-date copy of these tour notes immediately before you travel, as from time to time our itineraries may be amended, either for operational reasons or in response to feedback from customers. You will be informed of any major changes to your tour but small changes may just be added to these tour notes.

Please note: 2017 itinerary versions are applicable to tours departing in 2017. 2018/19 itinerary versions are applicable to tours departing from 1st January to 31st December 2018.

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