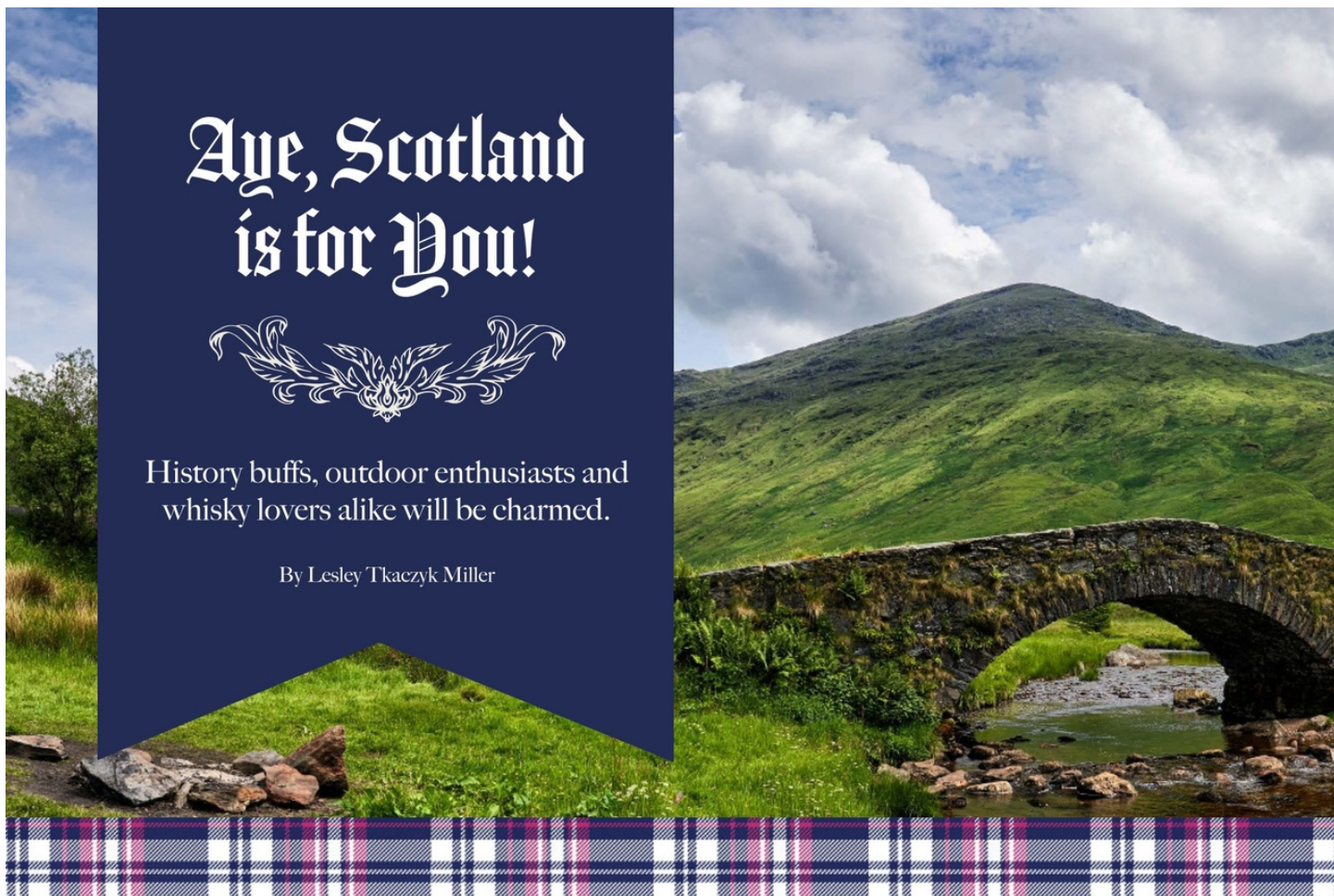


Aye, Scotland is for You!



History buffs, outdoor enthusiasts and
whisky lovers alike will be charmed.

By Lesley Tkaczyk Miller



Spectacular castles, even better whisky and stories of mythical creatures like the Loch Ness monster are often mentioned when someone speaks about their travels to Scotland. Even better than what you can see there, however, is what Scotland makes you *feel*. Venturing through the rugged, beautiful terrain of this history-steeped country brings feelings of peace and awe. It's as if the warmth of the people just seeps into you and stays there, stubbornly. The more you see and the more people you meet, the less you want to leave. It's no wonder that Scots are superstitious. Perhaps the wee fairies of folklore are real after all.

Legends of those fairies, stories of historic battles and tales of epic romances are what bring to life the ancient landmarks all over the country. Significant sites are hidden in plain sight within bustling cities. The smell of coconut at Culloden Battlefield is a mystery until it's explained that's the scent of the yellow gorse all around the moor. Everywhere you go there is more to know, which is why having an expert guide you is so very valuable here. Brendan Vacations offers a variety of guided tours through

the country that reveal both Scotland's known highlights and its secret gems, while making your vacation care free.

If you've already done your research, or simply like more independence, Brendan Vacations also offers self-drive vacations. This gives you the freedom to explore your passions at your pace. Spend hours getting lost in ancient castles and cobblestone streets. Hiking enthusiasts could go Munro bagging, climbing as many peaks as you can. (There are 282 Munros, a Scottish mountain higher than 3,000 feet, to choose from!) Whisky connoisseurs can choose to travel a distillery trail, or tea lovers could linger in impeccable tea houses. If you're heading to Scotland to explore your ancestry, being able to drive off the beaten path to where your family may have originated is particularly special. While Brendan Vacations does offer recommended itineraries for self-drives, you can customize your own to fit your budget and interests.

For fans of the *Outlander* novels by Diana Gabaldon, Brendan Vacations even offers a 13-day guided "Highland Trail inspired by *Outlander*" tour that allows you to explore locations



Photos from Left to Right: Butter Bridge; Doune Castle; Inverness

important to the story. It also includes many filming locations for the *Outlander* TV series, such as Doune Castle, the Highland Folk Museum and Linlithgow Palace, among others.

No matter how you choose to explore the stunning scenery and captivating history of Scotland, you will not want to go home. Give yourself plenty of time to soak it all in. You may even consider extending your time there by combining travel styles — perhaps a guided tour to give you context followed by a self-drive vacation to linger longer in your favorite places and explore new ones.

Edinburgh

From the moment you arrive in Edinburgh you will be captivated by the castle. Elevated above this bustling city where ancient meets modern, the castle is like a beacon begging you to come inside its fortified walls and explore the ornate rooms of its varied buildings. A visit to the fortress provides a visual feast outside, too, with panoramic views of the city below. You'll see narrow

cobblestone streets, historic monuments, botanic gardens and modern features providing endless options to explore. Take time to meander down the Royal Mile and duck into a few shops, pubs and closes (tucked away courtyards or alleyways accessed by narrow entries off the main street). For the adventurous, take a tour of the city's underground labyrinth of vaults and chambers.

Inverness

In the Highlands of northern Scotland, charming Inverness sits along the lovely River Ness. This small city is believed to be one of the oldest in Scotland. It's now an impressive blend of urban and country, though parts of it still feel much like a simple market town, like the Old Town's Victorian Market. Walking the small city's historic trail, beginning at Inverness Castle, where views of the river are striking, is a great way to get acquainted with the area.

A stroll from the city center down along the river brings you to footbridges where you can start the serene Ness Island Walk.



Necropolis, Glasgow



Scottish dancers



If you do one thing in Inverness, make it this. Walking through the small islands in the middle of the river reveals quiet, wooded paths with plenty of little openings along the water where benches (some ornately carved) entice you to sit and watch the birds dancing along the surface of the water. This soothing diversion into nature is just one illustration of the city's charm.

Nearby are a plethora of other historic sites to explore. These include prehistoric Clava Cairns, a 4,000-year-old burial site, and the Beaulieu Priory ruin. Beaulieu Priory, a surprisingly well-preserved church ruin, was a burial ground for the chiefs of Clan Lovat (Fraser), making it a site of interest for *Outlander* fans. Most famous of all is Loch Ness, where the Loch Ness monster of lore is said to live. By volume, it's the largest body of fresh water in all of Britain, however, so it would take quite a lot of luck to spot Nessie.

Culloden

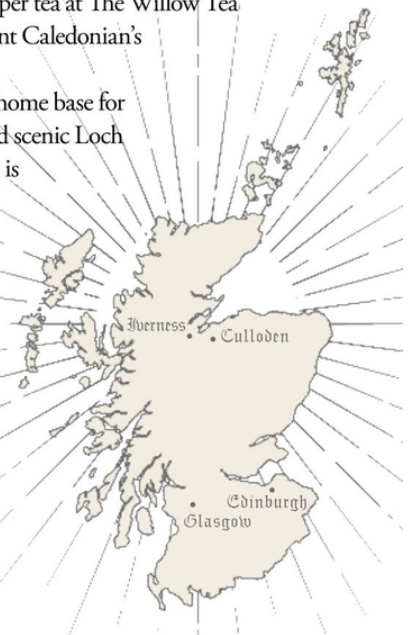
Just east of Inverness is Culloden Battlefield, the site of the 1746 battle where the Jacobite rising met its tragic end. The visitor's center brings the story of the rising to life in powerful ways that make then exploring the area particularly emotional. At first glance, the moor betrays little of the extreme violence that occurred here where over 1,500 men were killed in the battle's single hour. But scattered by the paths are old, weathered stones identifying only the name of the clan whose men rest forever under this field in mass graves. A visit to Culloden provides one of the richest perspectives on the history of Scotland. It's truly a testament to the stubborn nature of the Scots and their

traditions that this vibrant culture was able to survive the prolonged effort to extinguish their way of life.

Glasgow

While Edinburgh naturally feels like a mature city, Glasgow feels like its fun younger brother. The city still drips with history, but it is brilliantly blended with modern features. For example take Oran Mor, a church in Glasgow's West End that has been converted into an arts venue with two bars, two restaurants and an acclaimed music venue. Glasgow's well-known attractions, including George Square and the Necropolis, are must-sees, but be sure to leave time to savor proper tea at The Willow Tea Rooms and take a tour at Tennent Caledonian's Wellpark Brewery.

Glasgow is also a wonderful home base for nearby excursions. Sprawling and scenic Loch Lomond is well worth a drive, as is the exertion to climb one of the trails there for absolutely spectacular views. Or, journey through the Scottish countryside to Stirling Castle where you can walk the castle's extensive walls for views of the famous William Wallace monument. Plus, don't miss stopping at Glengoyne Whisky Distillery for a dram to toast the many delights of Scotland. **T**



Brendan Vacations offers a variety of Scotland itineraries. Visit AAA.com/Travel for more details and booking information.

