

EDINBURGH TO PORTSMOUTH - 15 DAY SCOTLAND, IRELAND & UK EXPEDITION CRUISE

The British Isles have many stories to tell. These rolling green lands are built on a depth of history, mystique and rural beauty like nowhere else. Bookended by cosmopolitan capitals, we'll weave north through diverse countries and an array of islands dotted with quaint lighthouses, ancient monasteries, and Atlantic puffin colonies. Our journey encompasses geological wonders, stark highlands, and the proud castles of yesteryear along the way.



ITINERARY

Day 1 Pre Cruise

Day 2 Portsmouth

Portsmouth also known as Pompey, is home to three hugely important historic ships, HMS Victory, Nelson's famous flagship at the battle of Trafalgar, HMS Warrior the first ironclad warship and the Mary Rose, Henry VIII's warship that sank in the Solent





just off of Southsea Castle. These are all housed at the Historic Dockyard, home of the Royal Navy and also home to the world's first dry dock. The Historic Dockyard is one of the top ten visitor attractions in the UK. But Portsmouth is not just about history, the city is a cosmopolitan University city, with much to offer visitors and residents alike. Portsmouth has a Premier league football team, a superb seafront area, excellent shopping and a wide range of restaurants, pubs and bars. Portsmouth UK is home to the tallest publicly accessible structure in the UK, the Spinnaker Tower built right on the edge of Portsmouth Harbour at Gunwharf Quays. Portsmouth Harbour has been used in a number of films and television programmes such as Tomorrow Never Dies (James Bond), Oscar and Lucinda, Making Waves, Silent Witness, Mr Bean and Eastenders. The local area was used extensively in the filming of Tommy, The Who's rock opera.

Day 3 Tresco, Isles of Scilly

For many visitors Tresco is the most attractive of the Isles of Scilly. This is especially due to its Abbey Garden, which is home to thousands of exotic plant species from around 80 different countries. Plant collector Augustus Smith began the gardens in the 1830s on the site of an old Benedictine Abbey by channelling the weather up and over a network of walled enclosures built around the Priory ruins. He had three terraces carved from the rocky south slope and maximised Tresco's mild Gulf Stream climate. Even in mid-winter there still are hundreds of plants flowering here. Another surprising attraction at the Abbey Garden is the collection of figureheads from ships that wrecked among the Isles of Scilly.

Day 4 Glengariff

Neighboured by mountains of elegant oak trees on one side, and the scenic Bantry Bay's waves on the other, timeless

Glengarriff is a lyrical delight. Wordsworth, Thackeray and Shaw were all inspired by the village's jaw-dropping location, and you'll soon see why, as you observe awe-inspiring peaks, sweeping valleys and glassy lakes. Pop in to quiet pubs for a pint, discover secret harbours hidden among wildflowers, and enjoy the gentle rhythm of quaint village life, in this jewel of County Cork.

Day 5 Skellig Islands & Dingle

If you think that the Skellig Islands look familiar, that's because they are. The Skelling Michal towers set the scene in episodes seven and eight of the Stars Wars franchise, and local tourism has been feeling the force ever since. Aside from being in a galaxy far, far, away, the magnificent the Skellig Michael towers have been a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 1996. The two Islands were (Great Skellig and Little Skellig) were part of a Gaelic Christian Monastic settlement from the 6th to the 12th century and the towers on Skellig Michael (Great Skellig) are a "unique example of an early religious settlement" (as well as being a final resting place for Jedis). The towers are surely the main attraction of the area and are simply fascinating. Built in a beehive shape to protect against the harsh elements, they use local stone and no mortar. Today, some 1,400 years later, they are still practically intact. There is also a graveyard on the island. Although be prepared for some walking; there are 618 steps winding up to the stone summit, which can get slippery in bad weather. However, like most things that require effort, you will be rewarded once you reach the top. The breathtaking views and photo opportunities are well worth it! Little Skelling is equally as important for birders too; the island is home to almost 30,000 pairs of gannets, the second largest colony of seabirds in the world. Guillemots, Puffins, Manx Shearwaters



and Storm Petrels also nest on the island, making up the "Skellig Big Five".

Day 6 Inisheer, Aran Islands & Kilronan, Aaran Islands

The smallest of the Aran Islands, Inisheer, is a quaint and idyllic low-lying island steeped in rich Irish culture. It's a gorgeous place of rustic stone walls, green fields stretching out beneath racing skies, and expansive Atlantic views. The authentic Aran Island way of life is well preserved here, and you can eavesdrop on cheerful conversations in the Gaelic language, admire local weaving, or tap your foot to lively music performances in local drinking holes while sharing a friendly pint of the black stuff. Hike or cycle through this preserved vision of old, sepia-toned Ireland. There are plenty of stories and tall tales to discover scour the small island for its black and white lighthouse, Bronze Age history, crumbling castle ruins, and buried churches. Or simply soak in the peace and tranquillity during quiet island rambles. You're sure to come across the rusty red hull of the Plassey ship. Over six decades have now passed since the ill-fated cargo vessel ran aground here. Fortunately, thanks to the bravery of the locals, all sailors were saved. The aged shipwreck now lies dramatically perched ashore above the waters. If you have ever wanted to imbibe in the Celtic legends of your past, then Kilronan is the answer to your prayers. Situated on the isle of Inishmore in the Aran Islands in County Galway, Cill Rónáin - the official Gaelic spelling - is all about history, spirituality and the kind of rejuvenation that can only be found on Irish soil. The first thing you should know about the Aran Isles is that they are exceptionally beautiful. National Geographic called them "one of the world's top island destinations" and they are universally recognised as being the "islands of saints and scholars". Windswept moors and craggy

cliffs akin to a Victorian novel flank rolling seas that are Dantesque in their raw power. This is where nature comes home to roost (not to mention the 60,000 seabirds that call the islands their home). Inishmore (Inis Mor) is the biggest island of the archipelago, and as such has the most interesting Celtic history. Over 50 Celtic, Christian and pre-Christian sites are on Inishmore alone (with others on the other two islands that make up the rest of the archipelago). The most important of these site is perhaps the prehistoric fort of Dún Aonghasa, "the most magnificent barbaric monument extant in Europe". Perched precariously on a 100-metre-high cliff, the fort dates back 3,000 years and is one of Ireland's most ancient and sacred sites. Little is known of the history of Dún Aonghasa, not who Dún Aonghasa may have been, but a placing so close to the sea edge suggests ritualistic significance.

Day 7 Killybegs

An all-encompassing, all-Irish, genuine warm welcome awaits those who visit Killybegs. Set in the Republic of Ireland's Wild Atlantic Way, Killibegs is a hidden gem of a town that is often overshadowed by Dublin and Galway. But, as the privileged position on the north west coast proves, Killibegs is worth discovering. Be prepared to be overwhelmed by the beauty of the area. The spectacular Slieve League Cliffs, around 45-minutes through the rolling Donegal countryside, are said to be much more dramatic than the Cliffs of Mohr, so those who want to see some of Mother Nature's finest work will want to head straight for here. At a height of approximately 1,968 feet (about 600 metres) above sea level, the Cliffs are believed to be Europe's highest sea cliffs, and boast an unspoilt natural landscape. Admire the views from either above, looking down on the rolling waters beyond, or from below, gazing up at the



folding cliffs towering before you. Don't forget your camera! A stroll through Killybegs is rewarding in a tranquil way. The quiet fishing village is lulled by the salty sea breeze and the streets are pretty in a way that only authentic fishing villages can be. The image of soft light bouncing off the harbour walls, reflecting on the waters is something that is truly lovely and will not be forgotten in a hurry. The little town centre is well worth a visit, and can take all day if you get chatting to a local. Cosy little pubs, white sandy beaches and a rich, local history bring up the rear.

Day 8 Londonderry, N. Ireland

Nestled behind lofty city walls, Londonderry is a fascinating destination, boasting an increasingly envied reputation as a cultural and artistic heavyweight. The UK's City of Culture in 2013, its preserved city walls encircle a tapestry of history, while a sparkly new waterfront has kept Northern Ireland's second city feeling fresh and vibrant. These 400-year-old walls were besieged during 1688's Siege of Derry - when King James's forces attacked, causing mass starvation and suffering over 105 days of stalemate. Still standing tall, you can walk their circumference in roughly one hour, ticking off each of the seven gates as you do so. You'll wander beside the mighty cannons that boomed during the siege - including the famous Roaring Meg. St. Columb's Cathedral dates back to 1633, and is one of Londonderry's most significant historic sites, towering over the city. The dreamy spire contains Ireland's oldest set of bells which can be heard peeling out melodies every hour. The Tower Museum is a five-floored space and a walk back through Londonderry's layered past. Divisions have run deep here over the years, and the Troubles began in Derry, when the city was scarred by battles and Bloody Sunday during the period of unrest. The Peace Bridge now stands as an inspiring symbol of hope and reconciliation, sweeping across the River Foyle's waters to poignantly unite the two sides. At night it glows beautifully below the stars.

Day 9 Iona & Lunga

If tiny islands that resonate with peace and tranquillity are your idea of travel heaven, then welcome to Iona. Almost 200 miles east of Edinburgh, set in Scotland's Inner Hebrides, this magical island has a spiritual reputation that precedes it. And luckily, more than lives up to. The island is miniscule. Just three miles long and only one and a half miles wide, this is not a place that hums with urban attractions. 120 people call lona home (this number rises significantly if the gull, tern and Kittiwake population is added), although residential numbers do go up (to a whopping 175) in summer. The beautiful coastline is lapped by the gulf stream and gives the island a warm climate with sandy beaches that look more Mediterranean than Scottish! Add to that a green field landscape that is just beautiful, and you'll find that lona is a place that stays with you long after you leave. Iona's main attraction is of course its abbey. Built in 563 by Saint Columbia and his monks, the abbey is the reason why lona is called the cradle of Christianity. Not only is the abbey (today an ecumenical church) one of the best - if not the best example of ecclesiastical architecture dating from the Middle Ages, but it also serves as an important site of spiritual pilgrimage. St. Martin's Cross, a 9th century Celtic cross that stands outside the abbey, is considered as the finest example of Celtic crosses in the British Isles. Rèilig Odhrain, or the cemetery, allegedly contains the remains of many Scottish kings. The stunning Isle of Lunga is the largest island in the Treshnish archipelago. With volcanic origin the isle was



populated until the 19th Century, and remains of black houses can be seen around this magnificent coastal jewel. Abundant plant life and exotic birdlife are now the main inhabitants of the area. Fortunate visitors view the magnificent array of birds, especially the great puffins that breed on the islands plateau. One can sit within just a few feet away without disturbing the avian ambassador's peace. The 81 hectare island is home to many rare and endangered plants such as, primroses and orchids. Views over the landscape and across the ocean can be seen from the 300 foot high cliffs.

Day 10 Fort William, Scotland

Flanked by the UK's tallest mountain on one side and Loch Linnae on the other, Fort William - or "Bill" to the locals - is what you imagine when it comes to Scottish Highland towns. Verdant moors stretch as far as the eye can see, pastel painted houses front the water and it is not unusual to see pipers in kilts on street corners. But while Fort William may play to certain critics' idea of a cliché, the pretty town goes far beyond tartan cushions and wee drams of Scotch (although there is a fair amount of this too!). Fort William has everything you could possibly want while in the Highlands. The High Street has plenty to keep you occupied with its good range of shops, cafes and restaurants - a lunch of locally caught seafood or the iconic haggis, neeps and tatties is a must. Because of its privileged location sitting in the shadow of the mighty Ben Nevis (standing a proud 1,345 metres high) outdoor enthusiasts are especially well catered for. Unsurprisingly so, as Fort William is considered the UK's outdoor capital. But it's not all high adrenaline sports. Certainly, those who want to climb up a rock or hurtle down white water rapids will find their nirvana, but if gentle fishing, a quiet county walk or curling up in cosy pubs warmed by an open

fire are more your glass of whiskey then you're catered for. The West Highland Museum in the centre of the town is excellent, while St Andrew's Church, towards the north end of the main street, has a very attractive interior. Also well worth a look is St Mary's Catholic Church, on Belford Road, and no visit should be considered complete without a look at the Old Fort, almost invisible to passing traffic. Add a wildlife cruise amid stunning scenery and the steam train that took Harry to Hogwarts and you can easily spend a day in this lovely port.

Day 11 St. Kilda & Boreray Island cruising

Gloriously remote, St. Kilda is an archipelago 50 miles off the Isle of Harris. Although the four islands are uninhabited by humans, thousands of seas birds call these craggy cliffs home, clinging to the sheer faces as if by magic. Not only is St. Kilda home to the UK's largest colony of Atlantic Puffin (almost 1 million), but also the world largest colony Gannets nests on Boreray island and its sea stacks. The islands also home decedents of the world's original Soay sheep as well as having a breed of eponymously named mice. The extremely rare St. Kilda wren unsurprisingly hails from St. Kilda, so birders should visit with notebook, binoculars and camera to hand. While endemic animal species is rife on the island, St. Kilda has not been peopled since 1930 after the last inhabitants voted that human life was unsustainable. However, permanent habitation had been possible in the Medieval Ages, and a vast National Trust for Scotland project to restore the dwellings is currently being undertaken. The islands even enjoyed a status as being an ideal holiday destination in the 19th century. Today, the only humans living on the islands are passionate history, science and conservation scholars. One of the caretakers even acts as shopkeeper and postmaster for any visitors who might like to



send a postcard home from St. Kilda. It should be noted that St. Kilda is the UKs only (and just one of 39 in the world) dual World Heritage status from UNESCO in recognition of its Natural Heritage and cultural significance. As an isolated island of the remote St Kilda Group, Boreray island is one of the most far flung and weather impacted islands of the North East Atlantic. Imagine trying to live here during stormy weather. Landing requires jumping or swimming ashore; and yet the island has been lived on or visited from Neolithic times. Collecting seabirds and their eggs, and storing them for winter, may have been even more important than raising sheep. Boreray Sheep are the rarest breed of sheep in Britain. They evolved from short-tailed sheep brought from the Scottish mainland but have been isolated long enough to have evolved into a distinctive small and horned breed. Only found on Boreray Island, they remained as a wild flock when the last people left the St Kilda Islands in 1930. The Souy are a separate and different breed of sheep found on the other St Kilda Islands. Look out for the Boreray Sheep grazing on the slopes of hilly Boreray Island. Seabirds thrive on Boreray and its two attendant rocks stacks, raising new chicks each summer. Northern Gannets glide overhead as they attempt difficult landings at nest sites. Seeing gannets plunge from a great height into the sea is an exciting way to understand the effort required to feed themselves and chicks. Northern Fulmers nest on the volcanic rock cliffs and Atlantic Puffins fly in and out of burrow-strewn slopes. Boreray is part of the St Kilda World Heritage Site, a rare example of a site recognised for both its outstanding natural and cultural values.

Day 12 Shiant Islands, Scotland

Cliffs of tall hexagonal columns create a sensational landscape at the Shiant Islands, especially when viewed from the sea. The

cliffs of six-sided rock columns look like the cross-section of an enormous honeycomb. The rock formations were formed when molten volcanic magma cooled very slowly underground. Millions of years of erosion has exposed the six-sided columns to the sea, and to us. The tallest of these formations is 120 metres (390 feet) high. During spring and summer, flights of seabirds near the Shiant Islands catch the eye. Many long-winged seabirds wheel and soar gracefully. Others are more shaped for underwater swimming and fly in direct lines, beating stubby wings to resemble flying potatoes. Some birds nest in burrows while others, like Black-legged Kittiwakes, nest on cliffs. Rather than build nests, guillemots lay eggs on bare rock ledges. The pointed shape of the eggs ensures they roll in a tight circle, not off the ledge to the sea below. The Shiant Islands are part of the Outer Hebrides and located between the Isles of Lewis and Skye. Historically, they have supported families of sheep grazers who could tolerate a lonely island outpost. The Shiants were known as the last place in Britain where the Black Rat occurred in substantial numbers. Originally introduced to Britain from Asia in Roman times these rodents caused problems, eating eggs and chicks of seabirds. A successful eradication program eliminated the rats in 2016, giving the seabird colonies well-earned peace.

Day 13 Isle of May

The Isle of May in Scotland is owned and managed by Scottish Natural Heritage as a National Nature Reserve and is an important breeding ground for approximately one-quarter of a million seabirds. In fact, over 40,000 puffin burrows have been counted as occupied. Not only kittiwakes, shags, eiders, and guillemots but also Razorbills, Arctic Terns, Sandwich Terns and Common Terns, Lesser Gulls, Herring Gulls and Great



Black-backed Gulls nest here. The island is located roughly four nautical miles off the coast of mainland Scotland and is used by biologists for surveying migrating passerines and for ringing breeding seabirds to better study their movements and breeding success. While hosting an impressive array and quantity of seabirds, the island itself is small at only 1.8 kilometers (1.1 miles) long, and less than half a kilometer (one-third of a mile) wide.

Day 14 Edinburgh (Leith)

Edinburgh is to London as poetry is to prose, as Charlotte Brontë once wrote. One of the world's stateliest cities and proudest capitals, it's built—like Rome—on seven hills, making it a striking backdrop for the ancient pageant of history. In a skyline of sheer drama, Edinburgh Castle watches over the capital city, frowning down on Princes Street's glamour and glitz. But despite its rich past, the city's famous festivals, excellent museums and galleries, as well as the modern Scottish Parliament, are reminders that Edinburgh has its feet firmly in the 21st century. Nearly everywhere in Edinburgh (the burgh is always pronounced burra in Scotland) there are spectacular buildings, whose Doric, Ionic, and Corinthian pillars add touches of neoclassical grandeur to the largely Presbyterian backdrop. Large gardens are a strong feature of central Edinburgh, where the city council is one of the most stridently conservationist in Europe. Arthur's Seat, a mountain of bright green and yellow furze, rears up behind the spires of the Old Town. This child-size mountain jutting 822 feet above its surroundings has steep slopes and little crags, like a miniature Highlands set down in the middle of the busy city. Appropriately, these theatrical elements match Edinburgh's character-after all, the city has been a stage that has seen its fair share of romance, violence,

tragedy, and triumph. Modern Edinburgh has become a cultural capital, staging the Edinburgh International Festival and the Fringe Festival in every possible venue each August. The stunning Museum of Scotland complements the city's wealth of galleries and artsy hangouts. Add Edinburgh's growing reputation for food and nightlife and you have one of the world's most beguiling cities. Today the city is the second most important financial center in the United Kingdom, and the fifth most important in Europe. The city regularly is ranked near the top in quality-of-life surveys. Accordingly, New Town apartments on fashionable streets sell for considerable sums. In some senses the city is showy and materialistic, but Edinburgh still supports learned societies, some of which have their roots in the Scottish Enlightenment. The Royal Society of Edinburgh, for example, established in 1783 "for the advancement of learning" and useful knowledge," remains an important forum for interdisciplinary activities. Even as Edinburgh moves through the 21st century, its tall guardian castle remains the focal point of the city and its venerable history. Take time to explore the streets-peopled by the spirits of Mary, Queen of Scots; Sir Walter Scott; and Robert Louis Stevenson-and pay your respects to the world's best-loved terrier. Grevfriars Bobby, In the evenings you can enjoy candlelit restaurants or a folk ceilidh (pronounced kay-lee, a traditional Scottish dance with music), though you should remember that you haven't earned your porridge until you've climbed Arthur's Seat. Should you wander around a corner, say, on George Street, you might see not an endless cityscape, but blue sea and a patchwork of fields. This is the county of Fife, beyond the inlet of the North Sea called the Firth of Forth—a reminder, like the mountains to the northwest that can be glimpsed from Edinburgh's highest points, that the rest of Scotland lies within easy reach.



Day 15 Post Cruise

Please Note:

Itineraries are subject to change.



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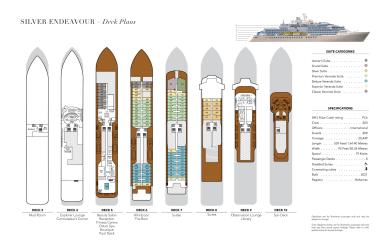




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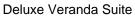




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