

# Wester Ross

## Snap shot

Wester Ross boasts some of the most beautiful and rugged scenery to be found anywhere in Scotland, not to mention miles of golden, sandy beaches



## Wester Ross



# Dramatic landscapes, and miles of sandy beaches

For the unsuspecting traveller, you're in luck — the main road north is unambiguously signposted "The North", with the road taking in spectacular views of the surrounding mountains. The road becomes single-track for about five miles, running high over the lochside with views that take in its entire length and Lochcarron on the opposite shore.

Lochcarron has plenty of amenities making this a good base for exploration of the surrounding area. The main road out of Lochcarron to the north quickly gains height, dropping down again to the village of Kishorn which has shops and a seafood restaurant. A few miles further on,

the road to Applecross turns off to the left — an old drove road, and one of the most dramatic and beautiful stretches of road in the country.

The Bealach Na Ba (Pass of the Cattle) road has several hairpin bends and has been described as the closest thing in this country to an Alpine pass. From its summit you can see many of the Hebridean islands. The views inland from near the summit are also spectacular. Applecross itself is a tranquil village providing a contrast to the scenery you have just travelled through.

Following the road around the coast, you find yourself on one of the most remote peninsulas in the Highlands.

The road provides an endless stream of views across to Raasay, Skye and Rona. This is single-track road all the way to Shildaig, an attractive village located just off the main road with a hotel, shops and services. However, this soon broadens out to double-track and follows the coast along the shore of Loch Torridon, eventually arriving at Torridon village.

From Torridon, there is a worthwhile nine-mile detour along a twisty road to the beautiful fishing village of Diabaig, situated on a dramatic cliff-encircled bay. Along the main road to Kinlochewe, still on the coastal trail, you pass below the towering ramparts of Liathach, then the long ridge of Beinn Eighe. These mountains seem to rise vertically from the road, ending up 3,456 ft above you with the tops often hidden in the clouds.

Much of this area is a National Nature Reserve, with the Beinn Eighe reserve rightly honoured as one of the finest in Europe. Along the south side of the A832 towards Gairloch, ancient Scots Pines cover the hillsides on your left. This is one of the rare surviving fragments of the "Great Wood of Caledon" that once clothed much of the Highlands.

Only a mile or so outside Kinlochewe, a visit to the Aultroy Visitor Centre is well worthwhile. This has walks

to suit all abilities and a fascinating exhibition explaining the natural history of the region.

Past Aultroy, you are following the shore of Loch Maree — one of the most beautiful lochs in the Highlands — the mass of Slioch filling much of the skyline on the eastern shore.

Past the wooded area of Talladale to Victoria Falls on your left, Slattadale comes into view. There are some rough tracks leading to parking and picnic areas by the lochside.

As you come closer to Gairloch, the road winds and runs past the small hydro-electric power station on your left; one of the earliest in the country.

You now arrive at one of the main centres in Wester Ross — a collection of settlements arranged around Loch Gairloch, collectively referred to as Gairloch. Continuing past the busy harbour area, you pass the golf course, bank, beach and garage. Interesting diversions out to Rhu Reidh lighthouse and Redpoint are worthwhile.

The road rises steeply from Gairloch to Poolewe, traversing a moorland plateau close to Loch Tollaidh, then drops abruptly to sea level at Poolewe — an attractive village at the head of the sheltered sea loch ▶

# Inverewe Garden and Estate

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# Loch Maree



Photograph: [www.donaldmacsween.com](http://www.donaldmacsween.com)

► of Loch Ewe — and a mile down the road is the world-famous Inverewe Garden and Estate.

Frequently described as "one of the world's great gardens", Inverewe Garden and Estate stands today as the realisation of one man's dream and, for thousands of people each year, visiting this beautiful, tranquil place is an unforgettable experience.

The setting, beside Loch Ewe, is stunning. This 50-acre garden was started by Osgood Mackenzie in 1862 and, over time, a kaleidoscope of exotic plants has been cultivated, providing a show of colour and interest throughout the year, all nurtured by the warm currents of the North Atlantic Drift. Plants from all over the world flourish here — Chinese rhododendrons, Tasmanian eucalypts, Himalayan blue poppies, New Zealand daisy bushes, Chilean lantern trees, Mediterranean rock roses and many, many more.

The garden has a network of walks leading out into the surrounding landscape, offering great opportunities to spot some of the diverse wildlife here and, of course, enjoy the spectacular views. Among these are the "pinewood trail", a 30-45-minute walk through the hillside next to the garden, and the "kernsary path", which is a low-level walk.

After exploring the garden, visitors can enjoy the

delights of the licensed restaurant, with a wide range of drinks, snacks and meals, and browse through the wide range of books, gifts and souvenirs (including plants!) in the extensive shop.

The coast road to Cove offers a scenic trip, with panoramas of almost all the hills to the north-west of Ross-shire. Loch Ewe was one of the main naval convoy assembly points during WWII, and a string of disused fortifications along the lochside testifies to its strategic importance. Towards Aultbea, the road gains height over Loch Ewe, showing the full extent of the loch with Isle Ewe at its centre. ●

Visit the Gairloch  
and Loch Ewe area



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# Beauty held in trust for the nation

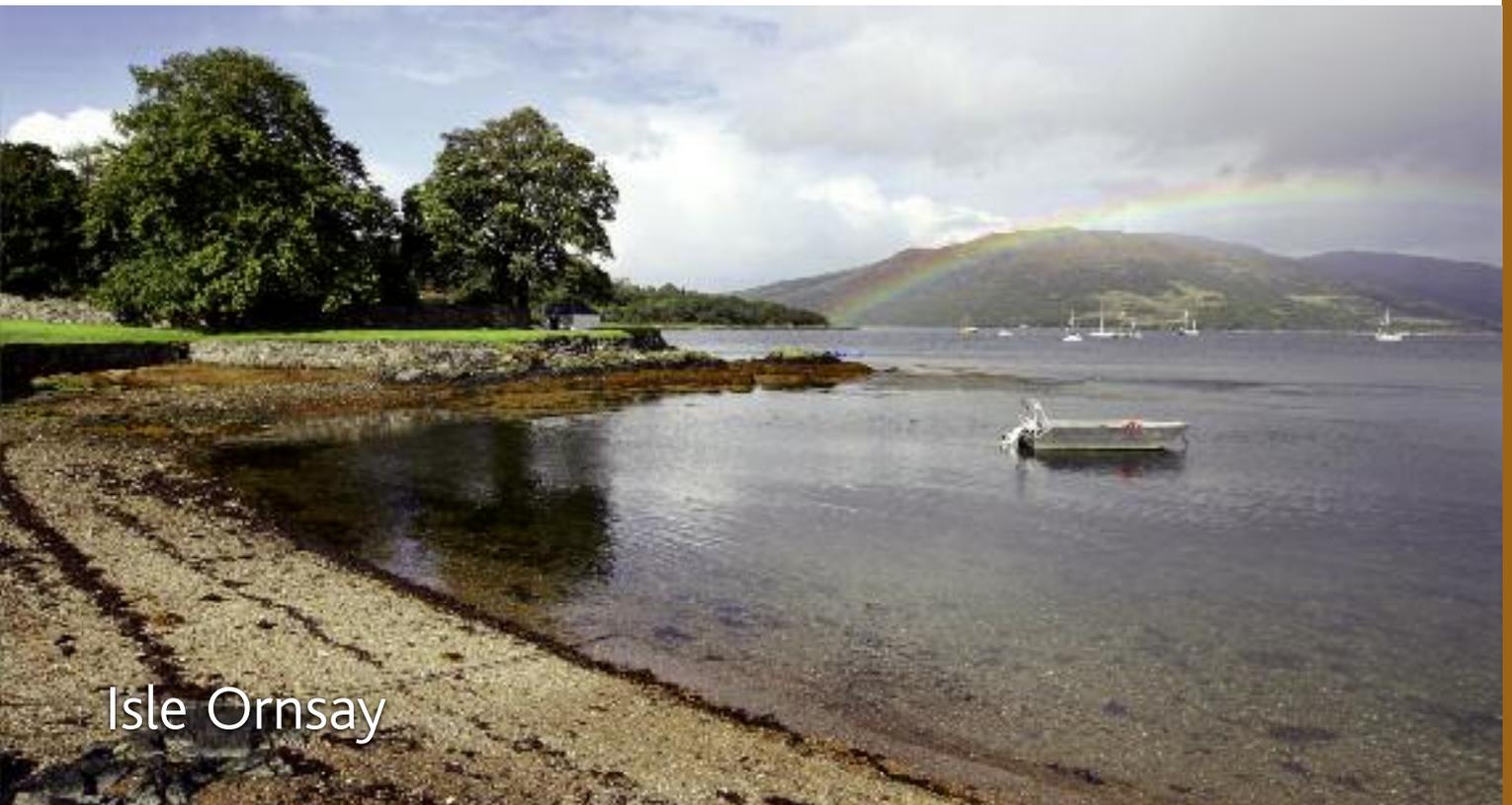
Some of the most stunning scenery in the West Highlands is in the care of the National Trust for Scotland. Many people automatically think of the Trust as a guardian of castles and historic houses, but it cares for 76,000 hectares of Scotland's finest countryside. It is, in fact, the third largest landowner in Scotland and the largest managing the land for conservation purposes. Over two million people visit the countryside properties, which include one sixth of all Munros, each year.

In the West Highlands, the magnificent stretch of scenery at Kintail provides a walkers' paradise. The area includes the Falls of Glomach and the Five Sisters of Kintail, four of which are over 915m (3,000ft). The best access point to the mountains is the Countryside Centre at Morvich Farm, just off the A87, where you can also find out more about the ranger-led events – guided walks are offered regularly and now the ranger service offers sea kayaking taster days, allowing visitors to enjoy the views from a different perspective. Further north is Torridon (north of A896), famed for its mountains composed mainly of Torridonian sandstone dating back some 750 million years. Torridon provides some

fine opportunities for wildlife watching – red deer, Highland cattle, oystercatchers, golden eagles and pine marten are among the species you might spot.

The Trust's Balmacara Estate provides opportunities for lower level walking and exploring. The estate takes in most of the Lochalsh peninsula and is criss-crossed with walking trails taking visitors through native woodland and open moorland to sheltered bays and the pretty villages of Drumbuie, Duirnish and Plockton. By the lochside, Lochalsh Woodland blends mature woodland, gardens and terraces with the natural features of the rugged coastline. Garden lovers should not miss a trip to the renowned Inverewe Garden and Estate, by Poolewe. This 50-acre garden was created by Osgood Mackenzie in 1862 and today is an oasis of exotic plants, bursting with vibrant colour, all year round, thanks to the warm currents of the Gulf Stream.

The National Trust for Scotland is a charity and each time you visit, you can help support the Trust's vital conservation work. Make sure that your visit to the area includes at least one of the Trust's properties and see the West Highlands at their very best. ●



Isle Ornsay