

# Stopover Sheet: Inverness Area

Although recently awarded city status, Inverness is still just a town in size. It is, however, one of the fastest growing towns in Scotland and it is certainly the capital of the Highlands. The town centre is a confused collection of different periods of architecture and it cannot be described as a particularly pretty town. In some side streets you will find traditional houses dating back to the 1700's, but then you turn a corner and find a square concrete office block from the 1970's.

Inverness is a vibrant and busy tourist town as it is a focal point for visitors to Loch Ness, Culloden and the Northern Highlands. On Friday and Saturday nights it also becomes the focus for the social scene in the Highlands, and the town's bars get busy with locals on their weekend nights out. For a quieter pace of life you may prefer to stay on the nearby Black Isle, which is not an island, but a peninsula between the Moray and Cromarty estuaries.

## Historic Sites & Castles:

- **Cawdor Castle** - A privately owned castle with attractive gardens and historical links to the Macbeth's made infamous by Shakespeare.
- **Culloden Battlefield** – The site of the last major Battle on UK soil has been preserved to appear much as it would have done on the tragic day of 16<sup>th</sup> April 1746.
- **Clava Cairns** – Near to Culloden Battlefield are the curious and carefully arranged circles of stones that are believed to have been used for ancient burial rituals. An atmospheric place.
- **Fort George** – An impressive fortress that was carefully designed for defense by artillery, Fort George has exhibits that tell the story of how Highlanders were recruited into the British Army to then become their most respected soldiers.
- **Urquhart Castle** – Famous as one of the most frequent sites for Nessie appearances. We recommend that you don't pay to enter the castle as it is over-priced for a visit to a ruin and you can get good photos from the car park.
- **Elgin Cathedral** – This was the second largest cathedral in Scotland and one of the most impressive, but fires, raiders and post-Reformation neglect have resulted in the ruin you see today. Still impressive, but you need to use some imagination to picture its past glory.
- **Dunrobin Castle** – This is a castle with real WOW factor. You don't expect to find castles like this in the Scottish Highlands and we strongly recommend this attraction. The entrance hall could be a scene from a Harry Potter film.
- **Spynie Palace** – The once grand residence of the Bishops of Moray, but now a ruin. One of the palace's buildings has been re-roofed and there is an internal walkway giving access to the roof.
- **Pluscarden Abbey** – founded in 1230 by Alexander II for French Benedictine monks, it is a unique example in Britain of a medieval Abbey still inhabited by monks. Set in the countryside South West of Elgin, it is a fascinating place to visit, and you can learn about how the monks live and what they do.
- **Brodie Castle** – Originally a defensive tower house, this castle was extended over the years to become a luxurious residence. The castle is still fully furnished and there is a lot to see.

## Scenic Spots:

- **Black Isle** – The Black Isle has several attractive villages on it, but the most distinctive and charismatic village is Cromarty. Narrow streets and traditional east coast houses by the sea.
- **Chanonry Point** – Signposted from Fortrose, drive through the Golf Course to this attractive lighthouse on a peninsula in the Moray Firth. A famous spot for dolphin watching.
- **Findhorn** – A pretty village on the coast north of Forres. Near the village there are long stretches of golden sand beaches and attractive forests of Scot's Pine trees at Roseisle.
- **Cullen Bay** – A well known sandy beach about 21 miles / 34km east of Elgin on the A98.

- **Reelig Glen** – An attractive woodland with paths and picnic spots. From Inverness, take the A862 west towards Beauly and after 8 miles, turn left onto a small road signposted to Reelig and Moniack. Continue for ~ 1 mile and arrive at a Forestry Commission car park.
- **Falls of Shin** – A waterfall that is famous as a good spot for watching salmon leaping. There is also an upmarket shop, café and adventure playground for kids here.

### Tourist Attractions & Wet Day Activities:

- **Glenmorangie Distillery**, Tain – The favourite malt whisky of the Scots. The distillery is easily found from the A9 just north of Tain. About 1 hour from Inverness.
- **Loch Ness 2000 Monster Exhibition** – not to be confused with the Original Loch Ness Visitor Centre which is to be avoided. Loch Ness 2000 is a very informative sound and light attraction about the sightings of the monster and the research that followed in the Loch.
- **Loch Ness Trail** – There is a route that circumnavigates the loch via roads along the north and south shores. If you are driving around the shores of Loch Ness don't just look for the monster. Keep an eye out for an old van near Dores with "Nessie-serry Independent Research" written on its side. This is the home of full time Nessie Hunter Steve Feltham who quit a job in England to dedicate his life to the search for the Loch Ness monster.
- **Moniack Wines**, nr Beauly – Tours of the winery in Moniack Castle where wines are fermented from berries, flowers and tree sap!
- **Aquadome**, Inverness – A 25m swimming pool with a variety of water rides to keep the kids entertained. Signposted from the A82 as it heads out of Inverness towards Fort William.
- **Baxters Highland Village**, Forres – A visitor centre to learn about the story of the Baxter family and their famous food company. Visitors can sample the foods & buy gifts in the several shops.
- **Strathspey Railway** – Steam trains and nostalgia can be experienced on this short train service between Aviemore and Boat of Garten (near the West end of A95). Don't confuse this attraction with the railway between Dufftown and Keith which doesn't feature steam trains. See the website for details [www.strathspeyrailway.co.uk](http://www.strathspeyrailway.co.uk)

**Speyside Whisky Trail:** There are many more distilleries in Speyside, but these are the ones that we rate highest for their visitor centres and tours. The drive from Inverness to Grantown-on-Spey and through the Spey Valley to Keith is about 75 miles long and 2 hours of driving.

- **Aberlour Distillery**, Aberlour - Tours need to be pre-booked as they involve a thorough connoisseur's tasting session.
- **Glenlivet Distillery**, nr Tomintoul - The distillery has an excellent visitor centre with café.
- **Strathisla Distillery**, Keith - Arguably the prettiest distillery in Speyside.
- **Macallan Distillery**, nr Craigellachie - One of the most celebrated and prestigious whiskies.
- **Glen Grant Distillery**, Rothes - A distillery with an impressive woodland garden for visitors.
- **Speyside Cooperage**, Craigellachie - Just outside of Craigellachie you can visit this factory where the whisky barrels are made.

### Outdoor Activities:

- **Dolphin Watching Boat Trips**, Cromarty – 2 hour boat trips in the Moray Firth. Quite expensive and pre-booking recommended. See website for details [www.ecoventures.co.uk](http://www.ecoventures.co.uk)
- **Loch Ness Boat Trips** – two companies offer cruises on the Loch.
  - ✓ **Loch Ness Cruises** in Drumnadrochit does hour long cruises starting on the hour from the Original Loch Ness Monster Visitor Centre
  - ✓ **Jacobite Cruises** have a range of cruises and tours starting at Tomnahurich Bridge in Inverness.
- **Cairngorm Mountain Railway** – A funicular railway that climbs 460m up the Cairngorm Mountains to the Ptarmigan visitor centre where there is a restaurant, exhibition and viewing areas. In summer, access to the mountain from the visitor centre is not permitted for

environmental reasons. Take the A9 to Aviemore and then follow the road to Coylumbridge and the signposts to the Cairngorm Railway.

- **Landmark Theme Park**, Carrbridge – A variety of outdoor activities and rides to keep all ages of children entertained. Take the A9 to Carrbridge and the Landmark Centre is on the B9153 road that heads south from Carrbridge.
- **Speyside Way** – The full length of this walking route runs from Buckie to Aviemore, but there is a gentle section that closely follows the River Spey from Craigellachie to Ballindalloch.

### Events:

- **Spirit of Speyside Whisky Festival** – A celebration of whisky and music usually held in May & September. [www.spiritofspeyside.com](http://www.spiritofspeyside.com)
- **Glen Urquhart Highland Games**, Drumnadrochit – Held on the last Saturday of August. See the website for details [www.glenurquhart-highland-games.co.uk](http://www.glenurquhart-highland-games.co.uk)
- **Blas Highland Music Festival** – A celebration of Highland music with events throughout the Highlands and Inverness. See the website for details [www.blas-festival.com](http://www.blas-festival.com)
- **The Northern Meeting** – A major competition for bagpipe musicians that usually takes place over 2 days in early September. See the website for details [www.northern-meeting.org](http://www.northern-meeting.org)
- **Highland Feast** – A variety of food and drink events in and around the Inverness area. Held in late September - October. See website for details [www.highlandfeast.co.uk](http://www.highlandfeast.co.uk)

### Where to Eat & Drink:

Eating out in Inverness is relatively expensive so we recommend that you try to get to a restaurant between 5pm – 6:30pm as most restaurants offer a more reasonable pre-Theatre menu. A word of warning though, the pre-Theatre menu at the “Contrast” restaurant is not good value. The portions are ludicrously small and the food we chose was bland. It is, however, a lovely location for a riverside coffee or a cool drink on a sunny afternoon.

**River Café**, Inverness – an informal restaurant beside the river that always seems to be busy, a good sign! Dinner main courses from £9 upwards. Tel: 01463 714884

**Mustard Seed**, Inverness – Great riverside location, nice stylish atmosphere & Franco-Scottish cuisine. Balcony area overlooks the river. Dinner main course ~£12+. Pre-booking advised as this is a popular restaurant. Tel: 01463 220220

**Waterfront Bar**, Inverness – On west shore of River Ness. Simple Pub food, but good value. Tel: 01463 223870

**Café 1**, Inverness – Funky décor and an eclectic menu with dinner main courses starting at £9. Situated below Castle on Castle Street. Tel: 01463 226200

**Culbokie Inn**, Culbokie – An unpretentious village inn offering excellent food, friendly service and a very good pint of beer. Tel: 01349 877280

**The Anderson**, Fortrose – A vast choice of whiskys and a menu that constantly changes to make use of the best fresh local produce. Reasonably priced. Tel: 01381 620236

**Plough Inn**, Rosemarkie – Long standing hostelry in the quiet village of Rosemarkie. Seems to change owners quite frequently, but has had a good reputation for food recently. Tel: 01381 620164

**Sutor Creek**, Cromarty – Traditional freshly made pizzas in an unassuming restaurant near the harbour in Cromarty. Good choice of pizzas and a daily changing choice of meat and fish options too. Tel: 01381 600855