



SCOTLAND OFF THE BEATEN TRACK

LOCH NESS • 1 DAY ITINERARY

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Cover photo Loch Ness from Fort Augustus



GENERAL INTRO

Loch Ness is Scotland's largest loch by volume, extending 23 miles southwest from near Inverness, and containing more water than all of the lakes in England and Wales combined. This is one of the most popular destinations in the Highlands. Why? Mostly because of the Loch Ness Monster which (probably...) inhabits the deeps here, and reputedly contributes £41 million to the Scottish economy each year. Whether or not you catch a glimpse of Nessie doesn't matter, as a varied set of visitor attractions and beauty spots encircle the loch, often irritatingly crowded in peak season.

ITINERARY INTRO

The dimensions of Loch Ness make a circuit of the banks an ideal day's driving tour from Inverness, starting with Drumnadrochit on the busier west bank. The slightly quieter eastern shoreline provides welcome contrast later in the day. In winter it gets dark before the suggested end time – consider omitting at least one stop (perhaps the Loch Ness Centre).

With a famous castle ruin, museum, waterfall, miniature hill walk and plenty of photo stops, this itinerary provides a good mix of history and scenery.

SCHEDULE

- ① Loch Ness Centre
- ② Urquhart Castle
- ③ Fort Augustus
- 🍽️ Lunch • somewhere in Fort Augustus
- ④ Carn an t-Suidhe
- ⑤ Falls of Foyers
- ⑥ Dores

💡 NEED TO KNOW

Mode of travel • **Self drive** (total distance 65 mi). The outward leg uses a good A-road, but the east bank return involves quite a lot of single-track road with passing places. Most sights involve walking – particularly in the afternoon where some paths are quite steep.

You need • Detailed road atlas (with a good navigator in the passenger seat) or hands-free sat-nav. If possible, download Offline Mapping in case of gaps in network coverage. Sturdy footwear and suitable clothing for Scotland's changeable climate!

Budget • Just over £20 per person for the Loch Ness Centre and Urquhart Castle (in total); other sites are free. £8-15 for lunch in a cafe / restaurant.

Start / finish • Inverness.

Suggested start / finish time • 9.15am / 6pm

🔑 KEY

- ★★★★★ unmissable ★★★★★ one of the best
- ★★★★ very interesting ★★ interesting
- ★ minor site



Nessie sculpture, Fort Augustus



Loch Ness at Dores

SCOTLAND OFF THE BEATEN TRACK – THE ONLINE GUIDE

There isn't space here to include everything Scotland has to offer. For further inspiration, browse our free online travel guide to Scotland at sobt.co.uk, covering over 1,900 places throughout the country. With hundreds of walking routes, the most famous highlights and hidden gems, there's something for everyone!

30 min drive (14 mi) • Sat-nav coordinates: 57.337406, -4.477978. Leave Inverness by the A82 to the southwest, signposted for Fort William. At one point the road follows an embankment between two segments of Loch Dochfour, before coming along side Loch Ness itself (a layby soon provides a viewpoint). Drumnadrochit is the first village of any size; the Loch Ness Centre is signposted on the right.

① LOCH NESS CENTRE ★★★★★

£ Paid attraction • (10am) This is a marmite attraction – we are of the view that it’s the best Nessie-related destination apart from the loch itself, though perhaps a tad dated. A surprisingly technical audio-visual exhibition examines the history of sightings and the environmental science behind them rather than simply taking the famous legend at face value. Ardent believers might want to give this one a miss!

🕒 Allow at least 1 hour. Times & prices: lochness.com



Urquhart Castle

5 min drive (2 mi) • Sat-nav coordinates: 57.324914, -4.445096. Continue on the A82 towards Fort William. Urquhart Castle is signposted on the left about a mile after leaving Drumnadrochit village.

② URQUHART CASTLE ★★★★★

£ Paid attraction • (11.30am) Urquhart Castle is a true Scottish icon. A great fortress once surrounded by an enormous curtain wall, the romantic location overlooking Loch Ness was of course also a strategic one, allowing early sightings of marauders and resupply by boat during times of siege. The castle was taken by Edward I in 1296, passing back and forth between Scottish and English hands throughout the Wars of Independence. The MacDonald Lords of the Isles later posed a threat from the west, before in the 16th century, James IV instructed the Grant family to strengthen the castle’s defences – with the main tower being built during this period.

Urquhart became a government garrison during the Jacobite uprisings. When the troops finally left in 1692, they blew up the castle to prevent it ever again falling into the wrong hands. The main tower survives reasonably intact along with a few other foundations, and there’s an excellent visitor centre and theatre. 🕒 Allow 1.5 hours. Times & prices: historicalenvironment.scot/visit-a-place/places/urquhart-castle



Urquhart Castle

30 min drive (17 mi) • Sat-nav coordinates: 57.146652, -4.681668. Continue south on the A82 along the loch, passing through Invermoriston after about 10 miles. If you have time to spare, Highland cows can sometimes be seen from the village car park, on the inside of a sharp left bend; there are also attractive waterfalls down a short path from here. Back on the road, Fort Augustus is about 6 miles further and the next settlement of note. There is a large pay and display car park, and a little free street parking.

③ FORT AUGUSTUS ★★★★★

Village • (1.30pm) Touristy, but surprisingly nice... is our verdict for Fort Augustus: the village at the southern extremity of Loch Ness. Traffic converges here from all directions and the place fills up in summer as visitors stop in search of toilets and souvenirs. Fortunately the village offers a little bit more than that! A pretty flight of locks on the Caledonian Canal is the photogenic centrepiece, with benches making a perfect place to picnic while watching boats struggle through the narrow staircase. A wire sculpture of a rather friendly looking Nessie stands outside the Caledonian Canal Centre, which contains a small, free exhibition and sumptuous-looking cakes. It’s also well worth wandering along the canal in the other direction for beautiful views along the full length of Loch Ness. 🕒 Allow 1 hour 45 mins including lunch.

🕒 LUNCH TIME

(1.30pm) Choose a place in Fort Augustus.



Fort Augustus

15 min drive (5 mi) • Sat-nav coordinates: 57.159376, -4.564879. Continue on the A82 for a very short distance before – still within the village – forking left onto the B862 signposted for Whitebridge. The single track road wiggles up into the hills, running alongside Loch Tarff. Follow the side of a broad glen; Carn an t-Suidhe (the next objective) is the low hill on the left. The tarmac climbs to a crest with grand views; park in the large layby.

4 CARN AN T-SUIDHE ★★★

30 min walk • (3.30pm) This hillock isn't notable for its height or dramatic terrain, but there's a good path, decent summit views, and it's less than a mile's round trip. Therefore, if you're passing by in good weather then the quick wander up is well worth the small effort required. The first summit is a false one, with the true high point a little further along the ridge.

📍 *More info: sobt.co.uk/carn-an-t-suidhe*



Carn an t-Suidhe

15 min drive (8 mi) • Sat-nav coordinates: 57.250040, -4.490348. Continue ahead, descending into Stratherrick. A mile after tiny Whitebridge village (hotel and not much else), turn left onto the B852, signposted for Foyers. The road becomes somewhat tortuous as it comes close to the River Foyers. The often busy car park for the Falls of Foyers is signposted on the right after about 3 miles.

5 FALLS OF FOYERS ★★★★★

30 min walk • (4.15pm) The superb Falls of Foyers are a breathtaking sight, plunging 140 feet towards the Loch Ness fjord. A short walk downhill from the car park leads to the main viewpoints (paths descend further into the gorge if you have time for a route extension). The scenery seems almost North American in character, with trees towering high above a seemingly bottomless chasm, filled with mist when the river's in spate. 📍 *Best after heavy rain. Map & photo guide for extended route at sobt.co.uk/walk-falls-of-foyers*



Falls of Foyers

20 min drive (11 mi) • Continue north on the B852 to Dores. There are several roadside viewpoints – do not block passing places.

6 DORES ★★

Photo stop • (5.15pm) Dores is little more than a viewpoint and an excellent pub – the outlook over Loch Ness is particularly beautiful at sunset. A camper van / kiosk on the beach belongs to Steve Feltham, full time Nessie hunter – someone give that man a medal! 📍 *Allow 20 mins.*



View from Dores

⌚ TIME'S UP!

15 min drive (8 mi) • From Dores, continue north on the now wider B862 to return to Inverness.