



EXPLORE!

Wild Scotland - M/V Polar Pioneer
11 days

Arctic, United Kingdom - Trip code PPWS

Wild Scotland - M/V Polar Pioneer

Explore Scotland's wild islands, home to some of the world's largest seabird colonies, including adorable puffins and noisy Arctic terns. The Scottish isles are a bird watcher's paradise with species such as fulmars, kittiwakes, guillemots, gannets and shags too. Your ship will get you as close to these sightings as possible, but you can also take to the water in Zodiacs and kayaks to really get the most out of your wildlife experiences. Seals will frolic close to you and you may encounter whales and dolphins swimming around you. Back on land, discover ancient sites, huge monoliths and remote, picturesque villages in the Hebrides, Shetlands and little-visited tiny isles surrounding the mainland. This is a diverse exploration of rugged and remote Scottish islands, from a unique vantage point.

Trip highlights

- ★ **Photograph** - some of the world's largest sea bird colonies
- ★ **Incredible birlife** - including puffins
- ★ **Discover picturesque villages and medieval hamlets** - on some of Scotland's least-visited islands
- ★ **Sail** - with otters and seals
- ★ **Explore by Zodiac** - with whales and dolphins swimming alongside you
- ★ **Uncover** - the rugged and wild side of Scotland

ACCOMMODATION GRADE:

Premium

Our premium accommodation is hand-picked and chosen for its character, location or local importance. These properties have excellent facilities and a higher level of comfort and service. They provide the perfect wind down after an active day.

TRIP PACE:

Relaxed

You can enjoy easy-going activities and experiences on these Relaxed pace tours, with opportunities to absorb the sights and immerse yourself in the local surroundings, but still come home feeling relaxed and refreshed.

Itinerary

Itineraries on some departure dates may differ, please select the itinerary that you wish to explore.

DAY 1 - Set sail from Oban

Board the Polar Pioneer around mid-afternoon in Oban and, after settling in, set sail in the evening.



Accommodation: M/V Polar Pioneer (or similar)



Premium Boat



Single room available



Meals Provided: Dinner

DAY 2 - Isle of Skye, Barra, Rum and Iona

From golden beaches to jagged peaks, bleak moors and heather clad hills, and from abandoned settlements to picturesque villages, your days in the Hebrides will be packed with variety.

You'll explore remote lochs beneath some of Britain's most untamed mountains, wander between the bizarre rock formations of Skye's Quiraing, watch for whales, dolphins, otters and seals, or land at an island reserve that is home to red deer and white-tailed sea eagles.



Accommodation: M/V Polar Pioneer (or similar)



Premium Boat



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast, Lunch & Dinner

DAY 3 - Isle of Skye, Barra, Rum and Iona

You may have the chance to sample single malt whisky at a distillery, or marvel at Fingal's Cave, where the melodious sound of waves crashing against towering basalt pillars inspired Mendelssohn's Hebridean Overture.

The rugged island of Skye, named after the Norse word for cloud, is a hiker's paradise. It is a centre of Gaelic culture, and some islanders still speak the language. Hopefully, there will also be the time and right conditions to explore options on other, smaller islands to the west of Scotland, such as Barra, the Isle of Rum and Iona. It may also be possible to visit some fascinating spots along the coast of the Scottish mainland.



Accommodation: M/V Polar Pioneer (or similar)



Premium Boat



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast, Lunch & Dinner

DAY 4 - Saint Kilda and surrounding islands

Island hopping north and east, we aim to visit tiny specks of land that bear the brunt of ferocious Atlantic storms. If weather and seas permit, you will be able to explore Saint Kilda, a World Heritage Site, where derelict crofts bear testament to the fortitude of hardy islanders that once dried seabirds for winter food. On Lewis, there's the chance to visit Carloway Broch, and stroll among a mini Stonehenge at Callanais. Home to breeding seals and vast seabird colonies, Flannan, North Rona and Foula boast spectacular cliffs, fantastic rock stacks, hidden beaches and luxuriant heaths where sheep once grazed.



Accommodation: M/V Polar Pioneer (or similar)



Premium Boat



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast, Lunch & Dinner

DAY 5 - Saint Kilda and surrounding islands

Exposed to the full ferocity of Atlantic gales, the inhospitable volcanic stacks of Saint Kilda boast Britain's highest sea cliff (430 metres tall), and were once home to one of Britain's most remote communities. The settlement's last 36 residents were evacuated to the Scottish mainland in 1930, when the Scottish Office ceased to subsidise the community. The islanders had eaten seabird eggs, dried gannets and fulmars for winter food, and used their feathers, oil, bones and skins for fuel, tools and shoes.



Accommodation: M/V Polar Pioneer (or similar)



Premium Boat



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast, Lunch & Dinner

DAY 6 - Saint Kilda and surrounding islands

In favourable sea conditions it's possible to land on Hirta, the largest island (3.2 kilometres by 1.6 kilometres), to visit derelict crofts and the ancient chape. One of Europe's most significant seabird breeding colonies, with over 200,000 breeding pairs of all species, Saint Kilda is home to Britain's largest colonies of gannets, fulmars and puffins. It remains home to Soay sheep, perhaps brought here by Stone Age man over 5000 years ago.



Accommodation: M/V Polar Pioneer (or similar)



Premium Boat



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast, Lunch & Dinner

DAY 7 - Shetland Islands

Britain's most northerly islands lie almost 160 kilometres north of the Scottish mainland, at a similar latitude to the southern tip of Greenland, or Bergen in Norway. Kept relatively warm by the Gulf Stream, Shetland's 100 islands experience almost 24 hours of daylight in summer. They abound with nature reserves and archaeological sites, and offer a taste of traditional island life.



Accommodation: M/V Polar Pioneer (or similar)



Premium Boat



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast, Lunch & Dinner

DAY 8 - Shetland Islands

We plan to visit some of Shetland's best preserved and most complex archaeological sites of brochs, or fortified Iron Age towers, as well as some of the world's largest colonies of sea birds.



Accommodation: M/V Polar Pioneer (or similar)



Premium Boat



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast, Lunch & Dinner

DAY 9 - Orkney Islands

Mid way between Orkney and Shetland, Fair Isle houses a major European ornithological research station, and is also famous for knitwear and historic shipwrecks. About 4.8 kilometres by 3.2 kilometres, it is surrounded by impressive cliffs. The 70 or so islanders mostly live in traditional crofts on the more fertile low-lying southern part of the island.

A bird watcher's paradise, Fair Isle lies on the intersection of major flight-paths from Scandinavia, Iceland and Faroe. It attracts common species and also eastern rarities such as the lanceolated warbler. In summer, the cliffs teem with breeding fulmars, kittiwakes, guillemots, gannets, shags and puffins, and it is an excellent place to view seabirds at close range, especially puffins. The island also has over 250 species of flowering plants, including wetland flowers, rare orchids, alpine species and common wildflowers. You'll be welcomed by the hospitable villagers and may take a hike or visit the museum.



Accommodation: M/V Polar Pioneer (or similar)



Premium Boat



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast, Lunch & Dinner

DAY 10 - Orkney Islands

Among Orkney's archipelago of 70 windswept islands, lying 9.6 kilometres north of the Scottish mainland, a rich tapestry of archaeology, history and wildlife awaits. You follow the passage of time - from 5000 year old World Heritage neolithic sites, past relics from wandering Vikings and reminders of World War II occupation, to present day crofting communities. Imposing sea cliffs teem with seabirds and cliff top paths and bleak moors beckon keen hikers.



Accommodation: M/V Polar Pioneer (or similar)



Premium Boat



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast, Lunch & Dinner

DAY 11 - Aberdeen

Upon arrival in Aberdeen, disembark and continue homewards.

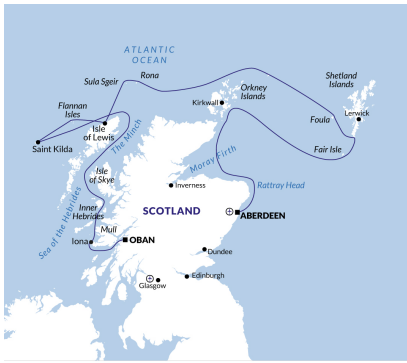


Meals Provided: Breakfast

Polar information

Ship information

The M/V Polar Pioneer is a Finnish ex-research vessel, refurbished to provide an adventurous journey in the polar regions; its ice class means it has excellent manoeuvrability. The vessel accommodates only 54 passengers, meaning more time with the experts and a friendly on-board experience. Informed crew and experts will ensure you learn about how a polar expedition runs, your unique surroundings and the wildlife; Zodiacs will take you to shore for close encounters.



What's included?



Included meals

Breakfast: 10
Lunch: 9
Dinner: 10



Transport

M/V Polar Pioneer
Zodiac



Trip staff

Expedition Crew
Naturalist(s)



Accommodation

10 nights premium boat

Trip information

Country information

Arctic

United Kingdom Holidays & Tours

Climate

The UK has a temperate but very variable climate. In general the summers are warm with July and August being the warmest. The winters are cool and the lowest temperatures are recorded during January and February. Whatever the season it is advisable to be prepared for rain!

Time difference to GMT

0

Plugs

3 Pin Flat

Religion

Christian

Language

English

Budgeting and packing

Optional activities

The following excursions and/or activities are usually available and may be arranged locally. Estimated costs are provided below for guidance only, are on a per person basis unless shown otherwise, and may depend on the number of participants. Prices quoted are correct as of the date these tour notes were originally issued but may change at any time due to currency fluctuations. Please note: These activities are booked and paid for direct with the supplier and do not form part of your Explore holiday contract.

Whilst landings are included in the cost of your trip as per the outline itinerary, some departures aboard the Polar Pioneer have additional optional excursions which can be pre-booked with the ship operator directly. These will be charged at an additional fee, depending on the excursion and we recommend booking these in advance, to ensure availability. Please speak to a member of our Polar team who will advise you on the booking process.

Clothing

Parkas

A complimentary parka is provided for you on board the ship and is yours to keep after the voyage. It has a comfortable wind-resistant inner jacket, which is detachable from the waterproof outer shell, and is designed to be worn over your essential base layers.

Gloves

Keeping your hands warm and dry can be a challenge. Thin polypropylene gloves can be worn underneath warm outergloves. This allows you some protection from the cold when removing your gloves to operate your camera etc. We strongly recommend that you bring more than one pair of gloves, in case one gets wet (or lost).

Hat/Cap

Warm, woollen hat/cap to protect your ears, as well as a scarf, neck gaiter or other face protection, such as a balaclava.

Trousers

Water-resistant trousers of coated nylon or, even better, Gore-Tex® are essential for your comfort. They can be worn over your regular clothes to keep you warm and dry. We suggest that you purchase trousers a few sizes larger than you normally wear as you will be wearing them over other clothing. Gore-Tex® or similar fabrics are excellent for keeping out wind and water without trapping excess heat. Rain gear and Gore-Tex® products can be found in any outdoor sport clothing store. In addition to your waterproof trousers, warm ski pants are suggested if you have them. Warm trousers such as jeans, corduroys etc are also good.

Socks

Warm wool socks worn over a thin pair of silk, polypropylene socks should provide enough warmth and insulation for your feet. Bring several pairs of socks, since you will inevitably get your feet wet.

Outer Clothing Woollen, knit or cotton sweaters/tops, polar fleece tops (medium weight), several cotton turtlenecks and T-shirts for layering on and off the ship.

Underclothing

Thermal underwear is highly recommended as it will keep you warm without adding bulk. Most polar travellers prefer a lightweight version.

Footwear

Complimentary waterproof boots will be supplied on-board. However, if you have extra small or large feet, you are advised to bring your own.

Also ensure you take good walking boots and trainers for relaxing.

Luggage

20kg

Luggage: On tour

One main piece of baggage and daypack. Remember you are expected to carry your own luggage so don't overload yourself.

Equipment

Sunglasses and sun cream
Insect repellent
Personal toiletries
A refillable water bottle
Books/reading material
Camera and memory cards
Seasickness remedy
Walking poles

Tipping

Local crew

Tipping is of considerable significance to the people who will take care of you during your travels. It is an expression of satisfaction. The suggested amount is USD \$10 - 12 per person per day spent on board. Of course, tipping is a personal choice and the suggested amount is set only as a guideline.

Country Information

Arctic

Food and drink

The costs for meals may vary depending upon location, type of restaurant and number of courses eaten and so the prices given are an average guide. Local restaurants located off the beaten track may be less expensive, whereas an upmarket restaurant located in the centre of a major city may charge more.

Foreign Exchange

United Kingdom Holidays & Tours

Food and drink

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Lunch price

£10

Dinner price

£18

Beer price

£4

Water price

£0.8

Foreign Exchange

Local currency

Pounds Sterling.

Recommended Currency For Exchange

Carry a combination of UK Sterling cash, ATM and credit cards.

Where To Exchange

Your tour leader will advise you on arrival.

ATM Availability

ATM's are widely available in main towns.

Credit Card Acceptance

Widely accepted.

Travellers Cheques

Can be exchanged at most banks and post offices.

Transport, Accommodation & Meals

Transport Information

M/V Polar Pioneer, Zodiac

Ship description

The M/V Polar Pioneer is a Finnish ex-research vessel, refurbished to provide an adventurous journey in the polar regions; its ice class means it has excellent manoeuvrability. The vessel accommodates only 54 passengers, meaning more time with the experts and a friendly on-board experience. Informed crew and experts will ensure you learn about how a polar expedition runs, your unique surroundings and the wildlife; Zodiacs will take you to shore for close encounters.

Cabins

Prices are based on the use of outward facing, category one cabins on the main deck. Category one cabins are based on triple share. They are comfortable, with two lower bunks and one upper bunk. The cabin has a desk, a small washbasin, a sofa and a porthole. Showers and toilets are close by and shared with other main deck cabins. The Polar Pioneer has a number of different cabin categories, all are outside facing and most cabins have two beds (suites have double beds.) Most cabins have en suite facilities and some have larger windows, rather than portholes. Single occupancy is an option on board, subject to availability. Call us for details on the cabin choice to fit your requirements.

Ship dining

Onboard the expedition ship you'll find a diversity of international cuisine prepared and catered by professional chefs; all meals are included in the price of your expedition. Dining is casual in one of two dining rooms. There is always a selection of different meals available, and vegetarians will find plenty of options. Special dietary requirements can be accommodated with advance notice, please advise us at time of confirmation. Coffee, tea and water are all provided free of charge. All other beverages, alcoholic and non-alcoholic, are not included and can be purchased in the bar.

Essential Information

FCO Advice

We strongly recommend that you check your government's travel advisory for up-to-date information and advice about your destination: safety and security, entry requirements, health, local laws and customs. For UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office advice [click here](#).

For more information from Explore about travel advice, [click here](#)

Under 18 immigration guidance

Please note that some countries require proof of parental consent when travelling overseas with under 18s. Please check requirements with the relevant embassy or consular office well in advance of travel if this applies to your party.

Price Guarantee

Once your booking has been confirmed we guarantee the price will not increase, whatever the circumstances. Before booking please ensure you have read our important tour pricing information. [Booking Conditions](#)

Visa and Passport Information

United Kingdom: Visas are not required by Australian, New Zealand, US and Canadian citizens. Other nationalities should consult their local embassy or consular office.

All visa information is subject to change. You should confirm all visa related questions with the relevant Embassy prior to departure.

If you do require assistance in obtaining a visa then you may consider applying through Explore's recommended visa service in the UK, Travcour. See www.travcour.com to download the relevant visa application for your trip, if applicable (UK citizens only), along with details of how to apply for your visa through Travcour. The Team at Travcour will be happy to answer specific questions relating to visa applications, please call them directly on 0208 5431846.

It is your responsibility to ensure that you are in possession of a full passport, with the correct validity for your chosen destination.

Booking conditions

Before booking your Explore trip, please ensure that you read both our [Essential Information](#) and [Booking Conditions](#).

Transfers

[Find out more about Trip Transfer Terms and Conditions before you book.](#)

Booking a land only package with Explore

Customers who have chosen to book on the 'Land Only' arrangements of our tour, please ensure that you have checked your tour specific 'Joining Instructions' prior to booking your own travel arrangements. Your joining instructions can be found below in the dates and prices information.

You may also be eligible for the Free Explore Transfer.

Joining Tour Abroad

Customers booked on the 'Land Only' arrangements will now receive a Free Transfer, provided you arrive and depart on the tour only itinerary start and end dates. The transfers will be from the Explore designated airport or train station to the joining point of your tour, and then back from the ending point to the designated airport or train station. The exception to this rule is customers who are booked on a tour where the joining and ending point is at the designated airport or train station.

Free transfers are not available for Self-Guided, Polar, Tailormade or Tours for Churches customers.

If you are not eligible for the Free Transfer then you will need to make your own way through to the joining and ending point. On a majority of our tours Explore will be able to provide a private transfer at an additional cost. Please ask for a quote at the time of booking.

For more information regarding the Explore Free Transfer [click here](#)

Insurance

It is a condition of booking with Explore that you have adequate valid travel insurance. It is your responsibility to arrange appropriate travel insurance and ensure you have read and understood the full terms and conditions of your travel insurance policy to ensure that you are covered for all activities you intend to undertake whilst on the tour, including all optional activities. Your Insurance Policy must fully cover you for medical expenses and emergency repatriation to your home country. Please ensure your policy includes medical emergency helicopter evacuation in the event of illness or injury and covers the entire duration of your holiday. If you are trekking at altitude please ensure that there is no upper altitude limit which may limit or exclude cover for your trip. The cost of many of our Polar Voyages will exceed the capped amount covered by standard insurance premiums and you will be required to pay an additional premium to cover the full value of your trip. Please ensure that you are covered for the full amount of your holiday cost, as insufficient cover could invalidate a claim under the policy. Medical and repatriation insurance cover is not mandatory for UK residents who are travelling on trips within the United Kingdom.

Read more information about what travel insurance is required.

Flight information

Explore offers a wide range of flexible flying options to make joining and leaving our trips easy. [Read more about them here.](#)

Flight Information

You are able to book this tour on a 'land only' basis or as a 'flight inclusive' package. Your flight inclusive package will be fully protected by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) ATOL protection scheme.

Booking a flight inclusive package with Explore

We have a good selection of flights not only from London but from many regional airports around the UK allowing us to compare fares between scheduled carriers as well as low cost and charter airlines. Our dedicated flights team will match the best flight options to your arrival and departure airport.

On our website we display a UK flight inclusive package guide price which is generally based on a London departure. To avoid paying supplements or to secure your preferred flight option, we recommend booking as early as possible, especially for peak travel dates.

Arctic

United Kingdom Holidays & Tours

Vaccinations

Nothing compulsory, we recommend protection against tetanus, diphtheria, polio and hepatitis A. The above is not an exhaustive list. Further information regarding vaccinations and travel health advice can be found by following the NHS and NaTHNaC links at <http://www.explore.co.uk/Travelhealth/> and from your local healthcare provider. Visa and vaccination requirements are subject to change and should be confirmed before departure.
