

North West Skye

Snap shot

The impressive flat-topped mountains, MacLeod's Tables, offer exhilarating climbs and fantastic views

North West Skye



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For an eagle's-eye view of the north west of Skye let's imagine we are on the summit of one of MacLeod's Tables, Healabhal Mhor and Healabhal Bheag, twin flat-topped basalt hills which dominate the skyline of this most dramatic corner of Skye.

From this lofty viewing point, the eye can wander over quiet crofting

townships which have changed little over many generations. There's the rugged splendour of Dunvegan Castle on its rock by the seashore on Loch Dunvegan. Mighty Loch Bracadale, Loch Dunvegan and Loch Snizort, which cut their way into the landscape of north west Skye, create the most dramatic vista of land and sea to be found anywhere in the British Isles. The jagged Cuillin ridge to the south, the hills of Trotternish to the east and out across the Minch to the west the islands of Lewis, Harris and the Uists all add to the splendour.

But let's descend and explore the places of interest.

On to the most westerly point in Skye, Neist Point and its lighthouse.

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Here can be seen some of the most magnificent cliffs in the Hebrides, towering to over 1,000 feet and home of the golden eagle and many varied species of seabird.

On the other side of the peninsula is Borreraig, where the famed MacCrimmon pipers had their piping school from about 1500 to 1800. Here there is a memorial cairn to the MacCrimmons, who were pipers to the chiefs of Clan MacLeod.

Also worth a visit is Borreraig Park museum and croft shop, where you can see a huge range of locally-made knitwear and crafts goods. For music lovers, it also has a stock of Highland bagpipes and chanters, as well as tapes and CDs.

Looking over Loch Dunvegan to the north you will see at Clagain one of the few beaches on Skye, the Coral Beach with its creamy white coral sand — perfect for a warm summer's day.

Onward then to Dunvegan and its castle, ancient home of the Clan MacLeod for over 700 years. Visit Dunvegan Castle and enjoy woodland walks and the castle gardens.

The Watnish peninsula on the north side of Loch Dunvegan, overlooking the Minch and the Outer Isles, is perhaps the best place to enjoy a west-coast sunset. Stein village boasts the oldest pub on Skye. Further on there's Trumpan Church which the MacDonalds of Uist set on fire, burning within the MacLeod congregation.

There are many sites of historical interest throughout the area, the most accessible being the broch at Struan — a fortified round tower built in the Iron Age, and many of which were still in use when the Norsemen began their Hebridean raids.

The visitor to the area will find

friendly bed-and-breakfast available in many of the croft houses. There are good hotels, camping sites, self-catering accommodation, restaurants and many fine craft and woollen shops. So spend a few days among the villages and people of north west Skye and enjoy the hospitality you will find here. ●

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Sample the magic of the Waternish peninsula

The Waternish peninsula offers something special for every visitor to Skye who ventures off the main Portree-Dunvegan road. Passing magical Fairy Bridge, views quickly open out across the wee islands of Loch Dunvegan and beyond to vistas of the Outer Hebrides, the Atlantic surf and the wide open sky. Work up an appetite with a stroll from one of the many self-catering establishments or bed and breakfasts to sample local fare and craic at the Stein Inn, the oldest inn on Skye at the heart of the community, and don't miss the world-famous Lochbay Seafood Restaurant. Five-star visitor attraction Skyeskyns offers free guided tours of their traditional exhibition tannery and showroom and Shilasdair shop and dye-

house provides another fascinating experience.

Brae Fasach and Dandelion Designs are among the galleries you'll find exhibiting paintings, photography, ceramics, print works and crafts on hand. For a little inspiration, try the pop-up quirky antiques shop or step into an artist's life on a local painting workshop.

Visitors can walk forestry and coastal trails, see the legendary Annat's Temple, the Boy's Cairn, Trumpan Church, the ancient fort of Dun Hallin or trek to the lighthouse at panoramic Waternish Point. Keep watch for our regularly-sighted white-tailed sea eagles as you go.

Step aboard a Diver's Eye boat trip for the chance to see basking sharks and

whales or take a romantic evening cruise and watch the sky flame in all its watercolour glory from this unforgettable spot, voted by Traveller magazine as having the best sunset views in the world!

As the skies fade into pitch darkness, try one of our three Dark Sky discovery points for the ultimate star-gazing experience — and if you're here in autumn or winter you might just spot the shimmering aurora borealis. Luxury accommodation, first-rate hospitality, unique visitor attractions and an abundance of outdoor activities make this area a strategically-located base for your island visit. Let this peninsula rich in wildlife and steeped in history capture your heart. ●



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Wealth of clan history to be found at Dunvegan Castle

Nowadays Dunvegan Castle and Gardens is still the official home of the MacLeod chief and is said to be one of the oldest inhabited castles in Scotland. However, instead of repelling invaders the fortress is now open to visitors and, being one of Skye's most famous landmarks, it proves very popular.

The present chief, Hugh MacLeod of MacLeod, is the 30th chief of clan MacLeod and still resides in the home of his ancestors. There is a 12-minute audio-visual programme presenting an insight into the history of Dunvegan Castle and the clan.

The video is a good starting point to the wealth of clan history offered on display at Dunvegan Castle. There are pieces dating from the 15th century through to artefacts associated with Charles Edward Stuart by way of hunting trophies, and all manner of weapons and curiosities.

Among the prize exhibits is the famous Fairy Flag, the sacred banner of the Clan MacLeod. It is surrounded by legends of victory and the

prophecy that it will be unfurled again to bring victory in the MacLeod clan's darkest hour. Also on display is the MacLeod drinking horn which each successive chief must drain in one gulp to inherit the title.

Keeping alive the romanticism of the 1745 rebellion and the Bonnie Prince, the castle has on display artefacts associated with Charles Edward Stuart. There are the glasses worn by Donald MacLeod of Galtrigill, who piloted the boat that took Charles on island-hopping flights from the Redcoats; a pin cushion belonging to Flora MacDonald embroidered with the names of some who suffered in the 1745 rebellion; there is even a lock of hair said to be clipped from the Prince's head by Flora MacDonald as a keepsake and, to this day, preserved in a locket.

Even the more ordinary contents of the castle built up over the centuries are of interest. There are many fine oil paintings and antiques, and the library contains many rare historical books.

Outside the castle itself visitors can enjoy a walk in the extensive gardens or take a boat trip through Loch Dunvegan to observe a seal colony at close quarters, or charter one of their traditional clinker boats for a loch cruise or fishing expedition.

Souvenirs, crafts, jewellery and books can be purchased from either of the craft shops in the car park or in the castle which are open from 10am to 5.30pm (last entry 5pm). Food and drink, from snacks to a substantial meal, can be enjoyed at the MacLeod's Table Cafe at the castle or at any of the hotels and restaurants in Dunvegan village and the surrounding area. ●



Don't miss North West Skye

1 DUNVEGAN CASTLE The ancestral home of the chieftains of the Clan MacLeod, the castle can trace its history back to around 1200AD. It is one of the most popular tourist attractions on the island.

2 MACLEOD'S TABLES Two impressive flat-topped mountains, Healabhal Beag and Healabhal Mor, which offer an exhilarating climb and fantastic views.

3 NEIST POINT Skye's most westerly point and home to Neist Point Lighthouse.

4 STEIN VILLAGE Home of Skye's oldest inn, lovely shoreside walks and a range of watersports.

5 TRUMPAN CHURCH Scene of a bloody massacre of the MacLeod clan by the MacDonalds in the middle of the 16th century.

6 CORAL BEACH One of the few beaches on Skye, with great views of the highest sea cliffs in Skye, Dunvegan Head.