

The Scottish Highlands: Along the North Coast 500 [B2]

Il modo migliore per scoprire l'indomito paesaggio, la storia e la cultura delle Terre Alte scozzesi è quello di percorrere gli oltre ottocento chilometri della North Coast 500, seguendo l'orlo dell'estremo settentrionale della Gran Bretagna.



The North Coast 500 is a [driving route](#) around the Scottish Highlands in the far north of Britain. Inaugurated in 2015, it follows a [dramatic](#) coastline of infinite variety and then [circles around](#). The 516-mile [830 kilometres], route [passes](#) [sandy beaches](#), [sea cliffs](#), caves, castles, [lighthouses](#) and [lochs](#). It guides visitors around a region rich in wildlife, history and with a unique local culture, whose Pict, Celt and Norse influences survive through its language, place names and lifestyle. Just over 234,000 people live in the 26,000 square kilometres of the Highland region, and three main languages are spoken there: Gaelic, Scots and English.

HIGHLAND CAPITAL

The North Coast 500 begins and ends in Inverness, the Highlands' capital. Located 155 miles [250 kilometres] northeast of Edinburgh and 560 miles [900 kilometres] from London, Inverness is dominated by its 19th-century castle, built of pink [sandstone](#), which stands on the [banks](#) of the River Ness. The route [head](#) west out of the city and then north along the edge of the Black Isle, so named for its rich, dark [soil](#). The attractive port of Cromarty is home to some fine Georgian architecture. Its deep natural [harbour](#) acts as a vast [storage](#) site for wind turbines and [oil rigs](#) awaiting repair and servicing. They share the waters with a wide range of wildlife, including dolphins, seals and whales.

END OF THE WORLD

The route continues past [low-lying farmland](#) and long beaches towards Wick. [Inland](#) is Flow Country: its name meaning '[marshy land](#)' in old Norse. This expanse of rare [blanket bog](#) is home to some of Britain's rarest flora and fauna. Located at the northeastern-most tip of Britain, John o'Groats is iconic as an end of the road location, and is a famous tourist destination. Here visitors pose for photos in front of its mile marker (Land's End 874 miles; New York 3,230 miles). However, the most northerly point on the British mainland actually [lies](#) twenty kilometres west, at Dunnet Head. Here, it really feels like the end of the world, with waves [battering](#) the [steep](#) cliffs, seabirds [wheeling](#) above the lighthouse and the sea stretching into the horizon.

WHISKY

Further west, Thurso has a thriving surf culture thanks to the impressive waves that rise above the offshore [slabs](#) and [reefs](#). The port town was an ancient [settlement](#), and where ferries now depart for Orkney, Viking ships once sailed to Scandinavia. The nearby Wolfburn Distillery produces award-winning single malts from the cold, clear waters of the Wolf Burn, a small [stream](#) running from a subterranean [source](#). Whisky plays a major role in

the Highland economy: some fifty distilleries support seven thousand jobs and make a large contribution to Scotland's [£4.9bn-worth](#) of whisky exports. The North Coast 500 [passes](#) by many award-winning distilleries, as well as fine local restaurants where [seafood](#) and [venison](#) are particular highlights.

TIMELESS

[Two hours further west](#), Smoo Cave in Durness has been [carved out](#) of [limestone](#) cliffs by rain and sea water. Once a [smugglers' stronghold](#), the echoing rock amphitheatre can be explored by foot or boat, with expert guiding the way through a cave system alternately [floodlit](#) and [eerily](#) dark. The Highlands west coast feels a long way from modern urban life. The route [winds](#) through mountains dating back to [primeval](#) times, and the landscape contains some of the oldest rock in Britain: Lewisian gneiss is a [suite](#) of metamorphic rocks that date back some three thousand million years. Located on the shore of Loch Broom, Ullapool offers the best of the northwest: good food, live music, [arts and crafts](#), a small museum, and boat trips to the Summer Isles. It's a ninety-minute drive southwest to Poolewe, where Inverewe Gardens takes full advantage of the Gulf Stream, which brings [milder](#) weather to this isolated peninsula. It creates perfect conditions for the exotic and temperate plants that grow here all [year-round](#).

HOMeward BOUND

The mountains of the Beinn Eighe National Nature Reserve and Torridon [rise up](#) on both sides of the North Coast 500 route and are excellent for hill walking. Woodland trails offer less demanding [hikes](#) through rare Caledonian pine forests. It's possible to spot golden eagles, [pine martens](#) or even wildcats here. As the road [weaves](#) around the Applecross Peninsula, views open up to the islands of the [Inner Hebrides](#): Raasay, Scalpay and Skye. If the [sharp bends](#) of the Bealach Na Ba [pass](#) seem too [daunting](#), it's possible to [detour](#) to an easier route, via Shieldaig to Lochcarron. Feelings of sadness and satisfaction combine as the route finally turns [homeward](#), towards Beaulieu and the last 25 kilometres back to Inverness. Every mile of

the way, the North Coast 500 justifies its reputation as Britain's ultimate road trip. Top 5 Scottish Castles

Glossary

- **sandstone** = arenaria
- **blanket bog** = torbiera
- **daunting** = ardue, impegnative
- **low-lying** = pianeggianti
- **Inland** = entroterra
- **marshy land** = terreno paludoso
- **rise up** = innalzarsi
- **weaves** = intrecciarsi
- **sea cliffs** = scogliera sul mare
- **slabs** = lastroni
- **battering** = sbattere
- **source** = sorgente
- **hikes** = escursioni
- **pine martens** = martore
- **homeward** = di rientro (lett. ritorno a casa)
- **sandy beaches** = spiagge sabbiose
- **head** = dirigersi
- **soil** = terreno
- **wheeling** = roteare
- **Two hours further west** = due ore a ovest (in auto)
- **sharp bends** = curve strette
- **lies** = trovarsi
- **settlement** = insediamento
- **seafood** = frutti di mare
- **venison** = selvaggina
- **smugglers'** = contrabbandieri
- **suite** = insieme
- **year-round** = tutto l'anno
- **dramatic** = spettacolare
- **carved out** = scolpire (lett. ritagliare)
- **eerily** = sinistramente
- **Inner Hebrides** = Ebridi Interne
- **detour** = fare una deviazione

- **harbour** = porto
- **oil rigs** = piattaforme petrolifere
- **£4.9bn-worth** = del valore di 4,9 miliardi di sterline
- **reefs** = scogliere
- **stream** = corrente
- **winds** = serpenteare
- **arts and crafts** = artigianato
- **storage** = immagazzinamento
- **steep** = ripide
- **milder** = più mite
- **driving route** = rotta, percorso di guida
- **circles around** = girare intorno, chiudere il cerchio
- **lighthouses** = fari
- **lochs** = laghi
- **farmland** = terreni agricoli
- **floodlit** = illuminato a giorno
- **primeval** = primordiale
- **banks** = sponde
- **limestone** = pietra calcarea
- **stronghold**, = fortezza
- **pass** = valico