

## Top 5: Scottish Castles [B2]

Questa che vi presentiamo è una tra le tante possibili selezioni di castelli scozzesi. Di alcuni di loro restano ormai solo le rovine, anche a causa del clima inclemente, mentre altri sono stati restaurati, contribuendo alla fama di una nazione che fu scenario di cruenti scontri politici e religiosi.



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Scotland has an estimated two thousand to three thousand castles. Many were built during the medieval period, when Scotland was in near-constant conflict with England. They were constructed to defend against invaders, and to control the local population. Some were used as royal residences, some as administrative centres. Many are now in ruins, but others have been restored as visitor attractions or even places to stay. Here is a selection of the finest castles in Scotland:

### 1. \*\*\*\*DUNNOTTAR

Located on a [rocky headland](#) on the northeastern coast, Dunnottar Castle is a ruined medieval fortress that has played a significant role in Scottish history. A popular tourist destination for its dramatic views over the North Sea, the castle ruins are spread out over 1.4 hectares and surrounded by

[steep cliffs](#) on three sides. The site can be accessed via a 790-metre [stepped footpath](#) from the coastal road, or via a 3km [cliff top walk](#) from the town of Stonehaven. It is believed that the Picts settled in the area in around 5000 BC. In around 400 AD, early Christian missionary Saint Ninian established a [place of worship](#) here, converting the Picts to Christianity. The first stone castle dates to the late 14th century and was rebuilt and extended over the next two centuries. Dunnottar played a significant role in the War of Three Kingdoms, a conflict between Scotland, England and Ireland that took place in the mid-1640s. It was here that the Scottish Crown Jewels, known as the Honours of Scotland, were protected from Oliver Cromwell's invading army. The castle fell into subsequent decline, but was restored in the 20th century. A unique [feature](#) of this historical site is the Whigs [Vault](#), a small chamber built into the cliffs below the castle. In the late 17th century the vault was used to hold prisoners associated with an anti-Royalist group called The Whigs, who refused to take an [oath of allegiance](#) to the new king, Charles II. The conditions in the vault were terrible, with [scant](#) light, ventilation and space. Many prisoners died there due to the harsh conditions.

## **2. \*\*\*\*SINCLAIR GIRNIGOE**

Of the many castle ruins [scattered](#) around the Highlands, Sinclair Girnigoe Castle is one of the most impressive on the North Coast 500 route. Located three miles north of Wick on the east coast of Caithness, the castle is a ten-minute walk from the car park along a well-maintained [track](#) it shares with the lighthouse. The large fortress has stunning [scenery](#) with a [sheer drop](#) on both sides down to the rocks and sea below. This medieval structure was the historic [seat](#) of the Sinclair family and comprises two parts: the older structure, known as Castle Girnigoe was built in the 1470s, while the more recent extension, known as Castle Sinclair, dates back to the early 17th century. Damaged during a battle and [siege](#), the castle has been uninhabited since 1690. It is the only Scottish castle listed by the World Monuments Fund.

### 3. DUNROBIN

With its fairy tale turrets and blend of baronial and Renaissance styles, this castle is more like a French chateau than a Scottish castle. The extensive gardens and views overlooking the Moray Firth are alone worth the visit. Unlike any other castle you will see on the North Coast 500 route, Dunrobin even has its own railway line! Located just north of Golspie, the castle dates back to 1275 and was home to the Dukes of Sutherland, once one of the country's most powerful families. The largest of Scotland's great houses in the northern Highlands, with 189 rooms, much of today's design was added between 1845 and 1850 by the architect Sir Charles Barry, who designed the Houses of Parliament in London. While Dunrobin was being undergoing improvement in the 18th and 19th centuries, thousands of local families were being [evicted](#) from the estate to [make way](#) for [sheep farming](#) during the notorious Highland Clearances.

### 4. \*\*\*\*CASTLE OF MEY

The British Royal Family have long associations with Scotland and the Highlands. The Castle of Mey, owned and restored by the late [Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother](#), is also a favourite holiday residence of King Charles III and Camilla, Queen Consort. Located ten kilometres west of John o'Groats, it dates back to 1566 and is the most northerly castle in mainland Britain. Originally owned by the Sinclair family, the Castle of Mey was in poor condition when the Queen Mother [purchased](#) it in 1952 and [set about](#) restoring and renovating the buildings and grounds. In 1996, ownership passed to the Queen Elizabeth Castle of Mey [Trust](#), which runs the property to this day. Built on a [z-plan](#) with towers and turrets, the castle has large walled gardens, a tearoom packed with tasty delights, and impressive views across the Pentland Firth towards Orkney. Guests can book a luxury [B&B](#) stay here in the ten-bedroom [granary](#).

## 5. \*\*\*\***ARDVRECK**

One of the most photogenic and [haunting](#) sites of the North Coast 500 (and the only castle on the west side of the route), the ruins of Ardvreck Castle stand at the east end of Loch Assynt, near Lochinver. Surrounded by a cinematic landscape of mountains and lochs ('Ardvreck' means '[speckled](#) headland' in Gaelic), the castle dates back to the 16th century and has a history of battles, [bloodshed](#) and [betrayals](#). Originally a large and imposing structure with a walled garden and a formal [courtyard](#), Ardvreck Castle was built by the Macleods around 1590. It was [seized](#) by the Mackenzies in 1726 but abandoned for a [lavish](#) new home nearby called Calda House, which was built using stones from the castle. Sold to the [Earl](#) of Sutherland in 1737, the house mysteriously burned to the ground and was abandoned, along with the castle.

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# Glossary

- **z-plan** = castello a Z
- **place of worship** = luogo di culto
- **drop** = caduta
- **evicted** = espellere
- **courtyard** = cortile
- **stepped** = dotato di scale
- **Vault** = cripta
- **scenery** = panorama
- **B&B** = ostello (bed & breakfast)
- **haunting** = affascinanti
- **betrayals** = tradimento
- **seized** = impadronirsi
- **Earl** = conte
- **steep cliffs** = scogliere ripide
- **seat** = sede
- **Trust** = fondazione
- **bloodshed** = spargimento di sangue
- **footpath** = sentiero
- **scattered** = sparsi
- **sheer** = a strapiombo
- **lavish** = sontuoso
- **feature** = caratteristica
- **scant** = scarsa
- **set about** = accingersi
- **granary** = fienile
- **oath of allegiance** = giuramento di fedeltà
- **track** = pista
- **siege** = assedio
- **make way** = fare spazio
- **sheep farming** = allevamento di pecore
- **Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother** = Elisabetta, la Regina Madre (madre della Regina Elisabetta II)
- **purchased** = comprare

- **rocky headland** = promontorio roccioso
- **speckled** = maculato, macchiato
- **clifftop walk** = passeggiata sulla scogliera