

Walk the Great Glen & stay on a barge



Highlights

The Caledonian Canal stretches the 66 miles between Fort William and Inverness, incorporating six lochs (including Ness and Lochy). Traversing the length of canal in a large holiday barge is quite possibly the best way to experience the waterways and the Great Glen surrounding them.

When you think of the Highlands of Scotland, images of staggering mountains, vast green valleys and serene lakes spring to mind. Well, you're not wrong in your fanciful imaginings - Scotland offers an amazing setting for those of us who love natural beauty. This customisable boating holiday is a great way to see the best parts and can cater to a variety of interests including music, walking and wildlife activities.

The Great Glen is born of a 400 million year old fault line which bisects the country diagonally, resulting in an unparalleled geographic marvel which attracts scores of tourists from around the world. Riding on the Fingal of Caledonia, a converted barge, will take you down the length of the Caledonian Canal. There are a range of packages to choose from - walking the Great Glen is a popular option, taking you 76 miles at your own pace (and without having to lug your belongings, since the Fingal will tow everything behind you!) Alternatively you may wish to add a wildlife focus to the journey with a local expert, or get on board with a resident musician for an entertaining week of music (own instruments welcome.)

Is it for me?

There's something for everyone here since the itinerary is customisable depending on your interests and what you'd like to get out of the holiday. There are four main 'packages' - Walking (a 76 mile hike walking alongside the canal), Wildlife (a nature tour of the Caledonian with a resident expert), Music (a week of partying with a local musician) or the 'Classic tour' (a free-for-all with a variety of activities.) Each of these broad themes can be fine-tuned and you're welcome to organise your schedule as you see fit. As a side note, unless you'd like to rent the whole barge you'll undoubtedly end up mingling closely with the other guests. Although the rooms are spacious, this probably isn't for you if you're the type of person who doesn't like mixing with strangers.

Accommodation

The Fingal barge offers en suite twin cabins decked out with all the mod-cons - hot water, a powerful shower, electricity for shavers and hairdryers, reading lights and cupboards. The food is included full board (alcoholic drinks to be bought extra) and cooked fresh on the barge, which consists of a variety of local cuisine and traditional British dishes. Any and all dietary requirements are taken into account and should be mentioned on booking.

Itinerary

Cruises vary between 3 to 6 days and travel between Banavie and Inverness (and vice versa). Guests board the Fingal barge at 2pm on Day One and disembark at 11am on Day Six.

Classic Cruise

The Classic Caledonian Canal cruise journeys along the length of the Caledonian Canal. There is no set itinerary

Prices from

395 GBP (4 days) per person

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so you have plenty of time to sit and admire the stunning Highlands scenery or get active. Activities available include sailing, windsurfing, mountain biking and canoeing, not to forget the copious opportunities to don your hiking boots and go for a good walk! RYA qualified instructors are on hand for the watersports so you can have a go even if you are a beginner. A sample itinerary for the Banavie to Inverness route is:

Saturday: Arrival at 1400 and cruise to Gairloch
Guests arrive around 1400, the barge departs Banavie and cruises to Gairloch in time for dinner. Guests can choose to walk or cycle or relax on board.

Sunday: Cruise to Bunarkaig Bay, Loch Lochy.
Guests can relax on board or choose to walk or cycle. Morning walking, cycling, canoeing, sailing at Bunarkaig. Afternoon cruise to Laggan Locks. Guests can choose to walk, cycle or relax on board. Lie alongside pontoon overnight (occasionally may anchor in Ceann Loch).

Monday: Barge ascends Laggan Locks & cruises through Laggan Avenue.
Guests can choose to walk, cycle (or sometimes canoe) or relax on board. Afternoon walking, cycling, canoeing, sailing in Invergarry Castle Bay Loch Oich where we anchor overnight.

Tuesday: Activities and cruise to Fort Augustus
Morning walking, cycling, canoeing, sailing in Loch Oich, depart after lunch cruising through Aberchalder Bridge, Culloch & Kytra Locks during the afternoon and on to Fort Augustus. Guests can choose to walk, cycle or relax on board. The guided hill walk ascends Meall a Cholumain. Berth at Fort Augustus overnight.

Wednesday: The Fort Augustus staircase
Descend the Fort Augustus staircase of 5 locks during morning. Guests can visit the shops & places of interest or take local walks. Depart around lunchtime cruising to Foyers Pier. Guests can choose to cycle or relax on board.

Thursday: Activities and cruise to Dochgarroch
Morning walking, cycling, canoeing, sailing at Foyers (Loch Ness) departing around lunchtime. Guests can relax on board for the cruise to Dochgarroch or possibly choose to cycle.

Friday: Muirtown Basin morning cruise to Inverness. Guests can choose to walk, cycle or relax on board. At Muirtown we descend staircase of 4 locks to lie alongside Muirtown Wharf. Guests depart 1100.

Walk The Great Glen Cruise

The Great Glen Way traverses 76 miles of tow paths and woodland tracks between Fort William and Inverness. On this walking holiday you are accompanied by a fully catered barge with en-suite cabins - so there is always the option to cheat a little if the 76 miles becomes a little too much. You don't even need to pack and unpack each day as you would with any other walking holiday. There are five full days and two part days of walking the Great Glen Way. Barge stops are planned to suit the walking stages with daily distances of between 10 and 14 miles (although you can opt for longer or shorter options depending on your inclination!) Rougher sections of the Great Glen Way are guided by one of the crew. The focus is on walking the Great Glen Way, but it isn't compulsory cycling, sailing, canoeing and windsurfing are also available.

Mini Cruise

This shorter four day cruise journeys the full length of the Caledonian Canal at a faster rate so is more appropriate for those looking to enjoy the cruise rather than the activities (which are still available).

Saturday: Arrive at 1400 and cruise to Loch Lochy
Guests arrive around 1400 and the barge departs Banavie to Gairloch and on to Bunarkaig Bay, Loch Lochy where she anchors overnight.

Sunday: Activities and cruise to Fort Augustus
Morning cycling, walking, sailing, windsurfing and canoeing in Bunarkaig. Lunchtime cruise to Laggan Locks, ascend Locks then along Laggan Avenue, Loch Oich and through Aberchalder Bridge, Culloch & Kytra Locks during afternoon. Berth at Fort Augustus overnight.

Monday: Loch Ness
Descend Fort Augustus Locks in morning then possibly morning cycling, walking, sailing, windsurfing and canoeing on Loch Ness. Afternoon cruise up the whole of Loch Ness, berthing at Dochgarroch for the night.

Tuesday: Dochgarroch to Muirtown
From Dochgarroch cruise to Muirtown via Tomnahurich. The barge generally turns around before berthing and guests departing at around 1100.

Ceilidhs and Music Weeks

Special music weeks with a resident musician on board. Essentially the same as the Classi Cruise, with the wide choice of activities during the day. During the evening you can enjoy the live music and if you are up to it, bring your own instrument and join in.

Canoe the Great Glen

A new offering allowing you to canoe sections of the Caledonian Canal with the support of a fully catered barge.

Details

Getting there

The barge leaves from either Banavie or Inverness (alternative weeks). The latter is serviceable by both plane

and train, Banavie is easiest reached by rail.

Price includes

Full board accommodation with breakfast, packed lunches and dinner included. Tour guides and instruction/use of bikes, canoes and other equipment also included.

Comfort level

Reasonably comfortable (Inns, B&Bs, luxury camping etc.)

Experience required

A reasonable level of fitness and interest is all that is needed