

Grampian Highlands



Front cover: Drum Castle, west of Peterculter
This page: River Dee

The picturesque valleys of the Dee and Don rivers form the centrepiece of this wonderfully rewarding holiday location. The very mention of Deeside evokes images of Royal heritage, grand country houses and outdoor pursuits, while neighbouring Donside is the heart of Scotland's 'Castle Country'. Pristine villages offer perfect havens from which to explore the rolling hills and forests of the north-east, a destination fit for a queen!

welcome

EXTEND YOUR TRIP: VISIT ABERDEEN

Aberdeen is Scotland's third city and 13-times winner of 'Britain in Bloom'. **Old Aberdeen**, a quaint, cobbled area north of the city centre, was an independent burgh as recently as 1891. Highlights including the university's magnificent centrepiece, **King's College** and the 15th-century **St Machar's Cathedral**, overlooking beautiful Seaton Park and the River Don. From its days as a lively fishing port to its current status as Europe's North Sea oil capital, the city's historic relationship with the sea unfolds at the five-star **Aberdeen Maritime Museum**. The **Gordon Highlanders Museum** is the definitive experience for those interested in one of the Army's most esteemed regiments.

IDEAL FOR

- Castles
- Gardens
- Walking

BASE YOURSELF IN

- Alford
- Ballater
- Banchory
- Braemar

To find out more about accommodation in these areas, call 0845 22 55 121 or click on visitscotland.com

LOCATION MAP



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FCS: Forestry Commission Scotland
NTS: National Trust for Scotland
HS: Historic Scotland

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- ! DON'T MISS
- £ Paid Entry
- \$ Seasonal
- ♿ Disabled Access
- 🐕 Dogs Allowed
- ☕ Tea-Room
- 🛍 Gift Shop
- WC WC



- 1. Castle Fraser** is, for many, the Scottish citadel par excellence, its turrets commanding the scene as visitors approach down the Broad Walk. Built between 1575 and 1636, the stronghold of the Fraser clan was not spared any expense, and the gardens and estate also pay testament to the wealth of the family. The castle itself houses many quirky artefacts and some fine portrait paintings, while the strikingly simple Great Hall comes as a surprise to many. (NTS)
- 2. Loch Muick** – Located a few miles off the South Deeside Road, near the former spa resort of Ballater, Glen Muick is a nature reserve and renowned destination for walkers, cyclists and car tourers. The centrepiece of the reserve is Loch Muick, a favourite haunt of Queen Victoria, set amid the glorious Grampian mountains and home to a multitude of wildlife, including some notoriously curious red deer!
- 3. The Braemar Gathering** – Held on the first Saturday of September, Braemar's Highland Games are notable both for their scale and for their unique chieftain, none other than Her Majesty The Queen. Royalty is always in attendance, presiding over a programme of events that includes tossing the caber, Highland dancing, throwing the hammer and piping.
- Scottish home of the Royal Family since the mid-19th century, **Balmoral Castle** is a grand granite pile in the midst of spectacular Deeside scenery. Seasonal opening hours allow visitors to see the ballroom – the castle's largest room – in addition to the formal and vegetable gardens. An audio visual presentation provides the historical background since it was purchased for Queen Victoria by Prince Albert.
- 5. Grampian Transport Museum & Alford Valley Railway** – A short drive north from Deeside is the country town of Alford, home to all things transport-related. The Grampian Transport Museum has a number of fascinating exhibits, including the world's oldest Sentinel Steam Wagon. Nearby, Alford Valley Railway travels a short but scenic journey from the restored station to Haughton Country Park.



HERITAGE & GARDENS

While visiting the Grampian Highlands, step back in time through the last millennium of the country's heritage on Scotland's only Castle Trail. Thirteen properties in all make up the trail, with a selection outlined below, from numbers 6 to 10.



6. Drum Castle is one of the three oldest surviving tower houses in Scotland. The oldest section of the castle, the High Hall, remains in its original medieval state and can be accessed through the narrow newel stair. Climb to the top of the battlements for magnificent views, including those of the extensive gardens. (NTS) £ \$ ♿ 📖 🚽

7. Built in the second half of the 16th-century, **Crathes Castle** is a splendid example of the tower house style of the time, and retains many of its original interior features. Perhaps the best reason to visit, however, is the 1½ hectare walled garden, complete with herbaceous borders and a stunning array of unusual plants. Crathes can be found 3 miles east of the town of Banchory. (NTS) £ \$ ♿ 📖 🚽

8. Fairytale **Craigievar Castle**, amongst the finest examples of Scottish Baronial architecture, appears almost to have grown naturally out of the stunning hillsides of Aberdeenshire. The Great Tower stands just as it did when completed by 'Danzig Willie', (so called due to his Baltic money-making schemes) in 1626. (NTS) £ \$ 📖 🚽

9. Ruined **Kildrummy Castle** is a 13th-century stone courtyard castle which was largely dismantled after the first Jacobite rising in 1715. The hall, kitchen and chapel are still intact. Described as the noblest of northern castles, it was a stronghold of the Earls of Mar. The nearby Black Den of Kildrummy (the quarry from which the castle was built), is now converted into an attractive garden. (HS) £ \$ ♿ 📖 🚽

10. Leith Hall is the reputedly haunted former home of the Leith-Hay family, built over three centuries beginning in 1650. The house contains many fine paintings and furnishings, but the real draw is the extensive garden which offers year-round interest. There are also spectacular views of the surrounding hills, while three waymarked walks lead through mixed woodland, taking in the unique 18th-century stables and an icehouse. (NTS) £ \$ ♿ 📖 🚽

11. The railway originally came to Ballater in 1866, when Deeside Railway built its terminus here. In its heyday, many famous people – including the Tsar of Russia – used **Ballater Station**. Today, the building has been lovingly restored and hosts an exhibition on its amazing history. £ ♿

12. Bennachie is a prominent landmark amidst the north-east's rolling farmlands. The on-site remains of a Roman fort are often attributed to the battle of Mons Graupius in 84AD, which in fact became a massacre when 10,000 Caledonians were slaughtered by Roman invaders. ♿ 📖 🚽

13. Designed to bring the past to life, award-winning **Archaeolink Prehistory Park** near the village of Insh allows you to travel 10,000 years in one day! With exhibitions, demonstrations, hands-on activities and guided tours – both inside and out – there is plenty to interest all age ranges. £ ♿ 📖 🚽

14. Pitmedden Garden, near Ellon, has at its heart, a formal walled garden originally laid out by Sir Alexander Seaton in 1675 which the National Trust for Scotland has lovingly recreated. With 5 miles of box hedging forming six parterres, containing in total 40,000 plants, herbaceous borders, fountains, topiary, sundials and a glorious herb garden, along with over 80 varieties of apple tree command, this is gardening on a grand scale. (NTS) ♿ 📖 🚽



WALKS

15. Cambus O' May Forest welcomes walkers of all abilities to this Highland wood near Ballater. Areas of native Scots pine and a variety of classic Scottish wildlife, such as red squirrels and crossbills, make this a pleasant and engaging stroll. A number of paths wind their way around the woodland, some offering spectacular views of the Dee valley below. (FCS) ♿ 🚽



16. Bennachie Forest Walks – From the Bennachie Centre near Chapel of Garioch, a fabulous array of woodland walks are available, most offering an opportunity to view sculptures and wildlife from the path. Red squirrels, roe deer and crossbills are present in good numbers, while any of Bennachie's summits offer sightings of moorland species such as grouse, pippets and buzzards. (FCS) ♿ 📖 🚽

17. The Scottish Wildlife Trust reserve at **Gight Woods** – Start at the Forestry Gate car park on B9005 Methlick to Fyvie road, 27 miles north of Aberdeen. Follow the forestry track down through Badiebeth Woods through the first kissing gate. Cross the field towards ruins of Gight Castle (Byron's ancestral home) and into Gight Woods. Go through the reserve kissing gate bearing right and follow the footpath. The route passes a number of interesting ruins and you can spot red squirrels. It is up to 3 miles, depending on how far you walk, and requires some care under foot.

FOOD & DRINK

18. Located close to Balmoral Castle, **Royal Lochnagar Distillery** added the 'Royal' after Queen Victoria and Prince Albert visited following its opening. Many age-old traditions and forms of craftsmanship are still used, creating one of Scotland's most exclusive whiskies. £ ♿ 📖 🚽



19. Balgonie Country House Hotel's restaurant truly is the spirit of the entire hotel. Aberdeen Angus beef, Dee salmon, excellent local game and seafood fresh from the east coast and Orkney all feature on the four course *table d'hôte* menu.

20. The Falls of Feugh Restaurant and Tea Room – Nestled on the banks of the River Feugh, just outside Banchory, this lovely little tearoom provides a welcome rest for those exploring the river or watching the salmon leaping. Only the finest ingredients are used in their food, which is all prepared freshly and to order.

21. Ideal for a stop off on the Castle Trail, the **Fjord Inn** at Fisherford, not far from Kirktown of Auchterless on the B992, promises a warm welcome and the best in local produce. So why not settle in the comfy bar and make a night of it?

ROYAL CONNECTIONS

The Royal Family's summer home at Balmoral Castle means that Deeside is steeped in regal heritage. Queen Victoria laid the foundation stone at nearby Crathie Kirk, built in 1895, where the Royal Family continues to swell the congregation during their annual summer stay. Among the gravestones is that of John Brown, Queen Victoria's servant and subject of the popular film *Mrs Brown*.

Walk the circular route that Queen Victoria often followed in her carriage, whilst dispensing money to any children she encountered. South of Braemar towards Glenshee, take signs for Queen's Drive and Lion's Face for superlative forest and loch scenery.

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River Dee near Ballater

OUTSTANDING VIEWS

22. Those who walk around the eastern shore of Loch Muick are rewarded with a fabulous view across to **Glas-allt-Shiel** ('the shieling of the grey burn'), a bothy-cum-hunting lodge much favoured by Queen Victoria. The house nestles spectacularly in forest below a gushing waterfall and craggy slopes leading up to Prince Charles' beloved mountain, Lochnagar.

23. Nearing Braemar from the east, the A93 crosses the River Dee for the only time at Invercauld Bridge. From here, look back towards the old **Brig o' Dee**, framed by the South Deeside hills. Originally constructed for military purposes, the Brig o' Dee is now a source of inspiration for many artists and photographers.

24. The **Queen's View** is one of the most picturesque views in all of the north-east and can be found midway between Lumphanan and Tarland on the B9119. The view west is dominated by the bulk of Morven (871m) and also takes in the woods and farmlands of the Howe of Cromar. Southwards lies Royal Deeside, with the hills of the Mounth beyond.

25. About 4 miles north of Inverurie on the B9001, take the second turn towards Daviot. A short distance down this road, the stone circle at **Loanhead of Daviot** provides a spectacular foreground for a vista that takes in rolling hills and farmland as far as the eye can see. The circle dates from the later Neolithic period and has the remains of ring cairn 54 feet wide at its centre.

Nearly every shop in the village of Ballater displays a 'By Royal Appointment' sign above the door. Its proximity to Balmoral means that there are more Royal Warrants in evidence here than anywhere other than London.



Brig o' Dee