

Scottish Islands

Information Cards



Scottish Islands Information Cards

Scotland has over 790 islands, although only around 95 are inhabited. Most of these islands are found in four groups:

- the Shetland Islands
- the Orkney Islands
- the Inner Hebrides
- and the Outer Hebrides.

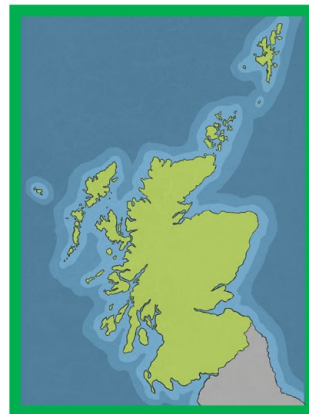
There are also islands in the Firth of Clyde, the Firth of Forth and the Solway Firth. Many Scottish lochs have islands too.

Scottish Islands Information Cards

The Scottish islands are considered by many to be some of the most beautiful areas in Europe.

Here are the names of some of them. Can you find them on a map of Scotland?

1. Unst
2. South Ronaldsay
3. Lewis and Harris
4. Skye
5. Mull
6. Iona
7. Islay
8. Arran
9. The Fair Isle
10. St. Kilda



Scottish Islands Information Cards

Unst

Unst is the most northerly inhabited island in the UK with a population of around 700. It is the third largest Shetland island, with an area of 120km². The main village on Unst is Baltasound, which was once a herring fishing port.

Evidence of the Vikings on Unst exists in around 60 known longhouses on the island, 3 of which have been excavated.

Norse-style cross-shaped gravestones can also be found in burial grounds on the island and rare keelstone burial markers (shaped like the main beam of a ship's hull; the keel) survive on the island.

The Muckle Flugga lighthouse, just off the far north of Unst, is the most northerly lighthouse in the UK.

It was designed by the uncle and father of the author Robert Louis Stevenson. Stevenson visited Unst and the island was perhaps the basis for the map of his fictional book *Treasure Island*. However, this claim is also made about another Scottish island.

South Ronaldsay

South Ronaldsay is one of the fourth largest Orkney islands, with an area of almost 50 km². It is linked to the Orkney mainland by the Churchill Barriers and you can travel here by ferry from the Scottish mainland. The Churchill Barriers were built during WW2 as naval defences to protect ships at anchor in the natural harbour of Scapa Flow. They now provide a road link across some of the Orkney islands.

The main village in South Ronaldsay is St Margaret's Hope, which may be named after Margaret, Maid of Norway, who died in Orkney in 1290 at the age of seven. She was on her way to Scotland from Norway to become Queen of Scotland following the death of her grandfather King Alexander III.

The island has evidence of Neolithic inhabitants and one of the most impressive places to visit is the Isbister Chambered Cairn, known as the Tomb of the Eagles. It was discovered in 1958 with 16,000 human bones and 725 bird bones, mostly from the white-tailed sea eagle.

Lewis and Harris

Lewis and Harris can be found in the Outer Hebrides. Although they have different names, Lewis and Harris are part of the same island. It is the largest island in Scotland, with an area of 2179km². Lewis is the North and Harris is the South. The main town on Lewis is Stornaway. The airport can be found here and it is also where the ferry arrives from Ullapool on the Scottish mainland. The main town on Harris is Tarbert.

This island has probably been inhabited by man since Neolithic times. Evidence of past inhabitants include the standing stones at Calanais, thought to be around 5000 years old.

Industries in Lewis and Harris are tourism, farming, fishing and forestry. Harris Tweed is a popular material made on the island from pure wool which is dyed and spun in the Outer Hebrides and hand-woven by the islanders.

The Gaelic language is spoken in Lewis and Harris, with street signs and place names written in Gaelic. Harris is also well known for its beautiful white beaches, such as the one at Luskenytre.

Isle of Skye

The name Skye comes from the Norse words Ski meaning cloud and Ey meaning island; cloud island. Skye is found off the West Coast of Scotland. It is the largest island of the Inner Hebrides and has an area of 1656 km². The landscape of the island consist of moors, lochs and mountains. The biggest mountain range is the Cuillin.

You can drive across the Skye Bridge to reach Skye from the mainland. Boats and ferries run from the island to some of the other Hebridean islands and the mainland. Portree is the largest town on the island.

The main industries on Skye are tourism, agriculture, fishing and forestry. Tourists come to see places such as the Fairy Pools and the Quiraing. The scenery of Skye has been used as a backdrop in many television programmes and films.

Skye is also a great place for wildlife watching. The white-tailed sea eagle can be spotted along with otters, whales, dolphins and red deer.

All of these features add up to making the Isle of Skye one of Scotland's most popular tourist destinations, alongside Edinburgh and Loch Ness.

Mull

Mull is the second largest island of the Inner Hebrides, with an area of around 875km². It lies off the West Coast of Scotland. Ben More is the highest mountain on the Isle of Mull. Today, most of Mull's population live in Tobermory. Tobermory is known for its brightly painted buildings along the main street at the sea front. The harbour here is busy with fishing boats and the ferry to Kilchoan on the Scottish mainland sails from Tobermory.

It is thought that people have been living on Mull since the last Ice Age. Evidence for this is the Lochbuie Stone Circle, which is a prehistoric stone circle, made originally of 9 granite standing stones.

The islanders of Mull tell a story that a Spanish galleon lies in the waters off Tobermory. The ship was believed to be trying to escape the fleet of Queen Elizabeth I after the Spanish Armada was defeated in 1588. The ship may have been carrying £300,000 worth of gold! The ship has never been found, although artefacts have been found. Many divers and treasure hunters visit the island and explore its waters but none have struck gold so far!

The Tobermory Distillery is one of the oldest whisky distilleries in Scotland and was established in 1798.

Scottish Islands Information Cards

Iona

The island of Iona is a small island with an area of almost 9km². Iona is off the coast of Mull in the Inner Hebrides. It has a population of only around 120 permanent residents, however around 130,000 visitors come to the island each year!

Bird watchers can spot many different species on Iona. Oyster catchers, sandpipers, redshanks, plovers, curlews and greylag geese may be spotted on the shoreline. The endangered corncrake also lives on the island. The main village in Iona is Baile Mor. Work on Iona is divided between crofting, farming and tourism.

Evidence that humans have been here for thousands of years include flint tools, Bronze Age burial sites and an Iron Age dun or hill fort. The island is probably most famous for Saint Columba and his works.

In AD563, Columba and his 12 disciples arrived from Ireland and founded a monastery. They then went on to spread Christianity in Scotland and Northern England. Since then, Iona has been a place of pilgrimage for Christians.

Iona Abbey is one of Scotland's most historic and sacred sites. A small cemetery next to the Abbey is said to be the burial place of 48 kings of Scotland, including Macbeth.

vinkl.co.uk

Scottish Islands Information Cards

Islay

Islay is the southernmost island of the Inner Hebrides and it is the fifth largest Scottish island, with an area of around 619km².

There have probably been people on Islay from as early as 8000BC. Evidence of these island dwellers can be seen in the Museum of Islay Life in Port Charlotte.

Today there are about 3300 people living on the island, most of them in Bowmore and Port Ellen. Islay also has an airport with daily flights from Glasgow.

Tourists are also attracted by the scenery and the large population of birds. There are more than 200 different species of birds here.

Along the coast you can find wading birds, oystercatchers, gannets, terns, gulls, ducks and cormorants. Aside from birds, dolphins, seals and sometimes Basking sharks can be spotted from the coastal areas or from boats.

Around 50% of the people on Islay speak Gaelic. Islay's main industries are farming, fishing and tourism. It is also famous for its whisky distilleries. There are 8 working distilleries on the island.

vinkl.co.uk

Scottish Islands Information Cards

St. Kilda

St. Kilda is the most remote part of the British Isles and is classed as a World Heritage Site. It is a group of islands in the Atlantic Ocean, containing the westernmost islands of the Outer Hebrides.

St Kilda is made up of four islands; Hirta (which is the largest island), Soay, Boreray and Dun. St Kilda was at one time home to a community who survived here for thousands of years. However, the final 36 people were evacuated in 1930 due to illness and the First World War. Today, the only residents are workers from three organisations: The National Trust for Scotland, Scottish Natural Heritage and the Ministry of Defence, who work together to ensure the care and protection of these islands.

The islands of St Kilda hold over half a million breeding seabirds. St Kilda is one of the most important seabird breeding areas in north west Europe. Wildlife on St Kilda includes two different sheep breeds that have survived on these remote islands; the Soay and the Boreray sheep. The St Kilda field mouse and the St Kilda wren can also be seen here.

vinkl.co.uk

Scottish Islands Information Cards

Arran

Arran is the seventh largest Scottish island, with an area 432 km². Sitting in the Firth of Clyde, Arran is one of the most southerly Scottish islands.

Arran's history dates back as far as the Stone Age, perhaps as far as 7000BC. Evidence of this can still be seen around the island.

Machrie Moor has six stone circles and some of the stones are over 5 metres tall! In the 6th century, a monastery was founded by Saint Brendan at Kilpatrick. As the years passed, Arran fell into the hands of Viking invaders, the Celts, the English, and the Stewart and MacDonald Clans.

The main town of Arran is Brodick and it is here the ferry sails into from Ardrossan on the mainland. The largest town on Arran is Lamlash and more people live here than in Brodick.

Arran has always had a small population, but the Highland Clearances in the 1800s meant that many islanders set sail to North America in search of a better life. Now, around 4500 people live on Arran. The main industry on the island is tourism.

vinkl.co.uk

Scottish Islands Information Cards

Fair Isle

Fair Isle is owned by the National Trust. This island lies halfway between mainland Shetland and the Orkney Islands. Fair Isle can be reached from the Shetland mainland either by boat or by small aircraft.

People have lived on Fair Isle since the Bronze Age. Today, around 60 people live on the southern half of the island, where crofting and fishing are the main occupations, alongside a traditional crafts industry of boat-building, spinning, weaving and knitting. Fair Isle designs in knitwear originated here and this is still the only place in the world producing the genuine article.

Like all of the Scottish islands, the wildlife here is varied. 350 species of bird have been recorded here including fulmars, kittiwakes, guillemots, gannets, puffins, skuas and terns.

In the waters surrounding Fair Isle, grey and common seals can be seen all year round. Harbour porpoises are mostly sighted in summer.

winkl.co.uk

Scottish Islands Information Cards

Unst



Photo courtesy of Pete - SeaPaddler (@flickr.com) - granted under creative commons licence - attribution

winkl.co.uk

Scottish Islands Information Cards

South Ronaldsay



Photo courtesy of Rodtuc (@flickr.com) - granted under creative commons licence - attribution

winkl.co.uk

Scottish Islands Information Cards

Lewis and Harris



Photo courtesy of ashtanga2004 (@flickr.com) - granted under creative commons licence - attribution

winkl.co.uk

Skye



Mull



Iona



Islay



Arran



The Fair Isle



Photo courtesy of Captain Oates (@flickr.com) - granted under creative commons licence - attribution

St. Kilda



Photo courtesy of gajtalbot (@flickr.com) - granted under creative commons licence - attribution