

Goigach and Assynt

Scotland's isolated mountain realm

6 - 13 November 2022

7 nights £2500



with the Beavers

A vibrant rainbow arches across a cloudy sky, positioned on the left side of the frame. Below the sky, a rugged landscape of rolling hills and mountains is visible, with a prominent peak on the right. The overall scene is atmospheric and scenic.

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This is a place where people come...
then lose the will to leave.



THE RETREAT

FOOD AND PHOTOGRAPHY RETREATS are for people who enjoy a house-party style of holiday in a lovely setting where they can immerse themselves totally in photography, mix with like-minded guests, and eat very well too. We're free of the restrictions of hotels and work mealtimes around photography, rather than vice-versa. If you're weary

of being herded from one "photo-opportunity" to another and want the time and space to make your own work, then our Retreats are for you.

We are excited to be running our first ever Retreat to Coigach and Assynt in the far northwest Highlands of Scotland. We've worked in the area many times in the past and regard it

as Scotland's most enchanting mountain landscape, with the extra dimension of a wild coastline.

Our priority is *your* photography and with 30 years in the business, we have a wealth of experience to draw upon and share. We make plenty of time to look at and discuss your work, and demonstrate new ways to help

you to extend your creative practice once the Retreat is over.

This is your holiday. You take the pictures...and we'll take care of the rest.



WHAT'S ON OFFER

IF YOU'RE INTERESTED in learning one of the [particular skills](#) Niall is known for (including field studio photography, "Colour Transects" or "Chocolate Bars"), take an eLearning class before the Retreat and have a chance to practise what you've learned in the field with him. During the Retreat, Niall will suggest and demonstrate edits on some of your photographs. Locations we will work with include:

- Several locations around Achiltibuie for big vistas of Coigach
- Stac Pollaidh, for astonishing views of the area
- Lochinver and surrounding area for views of Suilven
- The 20m Falls of Kirkaig- especially after heavy rain or with ice
- The turquoise waters of Achnahaird beach
- ...and those of Achmelvich
- Loch Oscaig, with mountain reflections
- Pebble beach near Achiltibuie
- Ardvreck castle, Loch Assynt.

“ *This is an unashamedly landscape-focused Retreat—but there’s nowhere else in the United Kingdom with these arresting landforms.* ”



ACCOMMODATION AND MEALS

WE WILL BE STAYING in a large, modern self-catering house on the outskirts of Lochinver. This provides a well-appointed base for our travels as well as a relaxing venue for eating, talking and sleeping. We're close to the shore too. There are five bedrooms with three bathrooms. There is no single room supplement for those travelling alone.

Good food is at the heart of our Retreats, from breakfast through to after-dinner chocolates, all made by Charlotte. We take the view that even a good day is made better by the prospect of a lovely meal at the end of it. We eat largely vegetarian food at home but the range broadens to encompass all tastes on Retreat. She uses local ingredients, when they are available, in dishes that are delicious and imaginative without being fussy. Food allergies and intolerances are catered for sensitively when notified in advance on the booking form. Expect to eat well, for breakfast, lunch and dinner. And in between times too.

While we don't provide wine spirits or beer, you will have opportunity to shop in local stores should wish to have something to accompany dinner.



from the kitchen of
Charlotte

MENU

New season asparagus salad with
herbed crème fraîche



Herb-stuffed side of salmon with
new potatoes, roasted vine
tomatoes and fresh greens



Seasonal fruit crumbles with
vanilla ice cream bouffe



Tea or coffee and chocolates



COIGACH AND ASSYNT

I FIRST TRAVELLED TO COIGACH and Assynt almost 40 years ago to visit Inchnadamph, a site fabled amongst UK botanists as that rarest of things in the Highlands- an extensive outcrop of limestone, with all the exciting plants that accompany it. I was struck then by the peculiar landscape- essentially a rolling moorland studded with sparkling lochans punctuated every so often by a mountain rising suddenly and dramatically from its surroundings. Some years later I learned that these mountains were in fact inselbergs, the product of erosion over a billion years which has gnawed away the previously enormous blanket of

ancient sediments to reveal the underlying Lewisian gneiss, leaving these remnant mountains as reminders of the depth of the Torridonian sandstones once piled on top of the gneiss.

I think that when I describe the area in these geological terms, it fails to convey the excitement it's easy to feel here as a photographer. Because it's not only the element of dramatic surprise the mountains provide that makes Coigach and Assynt so special; it's their interplay with weather systems fresh in from the Atlantic; the skies that can easily match the

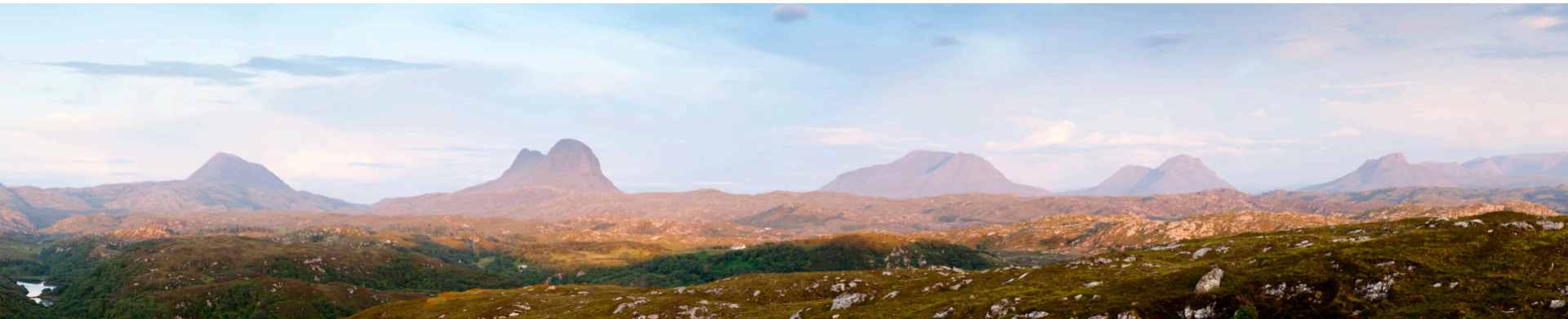
drama of the mountains. And we can expect some "Highland variability" in the weather. It's never dull.

In contrast to the high notes struck by the mountains, the numerous lochans, some still strewn with the remains of the summer's water lilies, sound more introspective chords.

In such an exposed area, we might not expect to encounter much in the way of native woodland. Yet, in sheltered ravines and shallow valleys we can find remnants of one of the rarest habitats in the world, Atlantic

oak forest, dominated by sessile oak and hazel and many, many ferns, lichens and mosses. By this time, the leaves will be colourful and the understorey verdant thanks to autumn rains.

Finally, let's not forget the coastline here. It would be worth visiting for that alone, never mind the mountains and lochs and lichen-festooned oak trees. From rugged shorelines to white sand beaches, saltmarshes to cliffs, the coastline is as varied as it is empty in November. It's all here for photographers. And as you can see, the light is often just sublime.





GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT THE RETREAT

Price: GBP 2500, 6th- 13th November 2022.

What's included:

- 7 nights' accommodation at the Lochinver
- Transfers from and to Inverness (airport and railway station)- c 2.5 hours. Alternatively, you can drive straight to our accommodation
- All meals during the Retreat from dinner on Sunday 6th November until breakfast on Sunday 13th November
- Tuition from Niall.

What's not included:

- Your travel to and from Inverness/ Lochinver
- Alcoholic drinks
- Travel insurance

- Admissions
- Online learning before the Retreat.

Travelling to and from the Retreat

You can drive directly to Lochinver or you can arrange in advance with us to be collected (by mid-afternoon on Sunday 6th November) from Inverness airport or Inverness railway station. The Retreat starts with dinner on the 6th and finishes after breakfast on the 13th at which point we return you to your railway station or airport. Drivers are free to leave later if they wish but rooms need to be vacated by 10:00.

Where we will go

We've detailed earlier in this brochure some of the locations we have available to choose from. We avoid hopping from location to location, preferring instead to work a good one thoroughly and give it the time it deserves. Good photography is often more time than location

dependent and locations often deserve a second visit to refine what you did the first time.

The daily routine

Whatever we are shooting, it tends to look more attractive in the early morning or late afternoon when low-angled light shows relief and colours better. With dawn at around 07:40 hrs and dusk around 16:20, it's quite a short day but the light is sympathetic for much of it. Sometimes, we'll eat breakfast in, sometimes we'll take it with us to eat in the field, depending on how far we are from our base at the time.

The plan for the next day is published at dinner, outlining the weather forecast, the locations and ideas for the next day, drive times, walking distances, where and when we'll eat and what gear you'll probably need. Experience has taught that it's more productive—and satisfactory for you—to have a plan to

follow than make things up as we go along.

We've learned over the years, too, just how much guests value being able to discuss the work they are creating, with Niall and other guests and to this end, we'd urge you to bring a laptop. While the emphasis is on review, Niall will advise on post-production too. We have a follow up Zoom meeting a couple of weeks after the Retreat and Niall will post your five favourite pictures from the Retreat in a private gallery on our Photoshelter site for the other participants to see.

Safety

We take your safety seriously during our Retreats. At locations with known risks—such as drop-offs, tree-roots, muddy shores, busy roads etc.—we will draw your attention to them before we leave the vehicle. Thereafter, you are responsible for your own safety. We provide guests with

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a hi-vis. vest to attach to their camera pack—it makes you, and it, easier to locate. We also issue each guest with a two-way radio in order that we all may keep in touch in town or in other areas where the group scatters. This also makes it easier to access help or guidance from Niall. We do not recommend leaving any equipment in our vehicle overnight. We can accommodate various levels of fitness. With the exception of the walks up on to Stac Pollaidh and to the Falls of Kirkaig, most of our photography will be done within a few hundred yards of our vehicle.

COVID

Each guest is required to have completed a course of vaccinations and to have had a booster if it is recommended or mandated by the UK government. We may ask you to wear a mask when we are travelling in the vehicle but only if there are any vulnerable guests. We will

provide hand sanitiser at entry points to our accommodation.

Spending money

There is a cash machine in Lochinver, if you need some.

Insurance

It is a requirement of booking that guests provide evidence of personal travel insurance to cover cancellation and curtailment, medical and emergency expenses (including repatriation), personal accident, injury and death in addition to loss of/damage to luggage and possessions, personal possessions and flight cancellations/ delays.

Passport and visa requirements

A passport valid for at least six months beyond the length of the stay is required for non-UK visitors. EU citizens should check on the latest requirements for travelling to the UK, including the possibility of an

international driving permit. You should check your insurance in respect of COVID-related claims.

Language

English is spoken in the Scottish Highlands!

Climate

While snow in November is less common than it used to be, it's always a possibility, even in the valleys. The early mornings are likely to be cold but on sunny days, the temperatures could reach double figures. We are likely to encounter some rain, but with it comes the possibility of rainbows!

Clothing

Prepare for cold weather, although the possibility of snow is nowadays remote. You should have: proper walking boots; waterproof trousers; a waterproof shell; a down jacket or fleeces; and thermals. A windproof

hat and fold-down mitt/ liners combination will keep head and hands warm. The longest walk we anticipate, on to Stac Pollaidh if group fitness permits, is about 5 km, although many of our forays will be much shorter. If you're travelling by car, pack rubber boots. You might not need them but they could be useful. You may want something smarter for the evenings. We ask that guests wear slippers or indoor shoes at the accommodation.

Equipment

If you are travelling by air, you may be concerned about carry-on luggage restrictions. The way round this Niall has used for many years is to pack as much gear as you reasonably can into a photographer's waistcoat. This counts as a garment, not hand luggage, and you can still take your carry-on allowance in to the cabin. Equipment you'll need during the Retreat:

- If possible, please bring a laptop

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with Lightroom/PS or Affinity Photo

- You could use any lens between 16 mm and 500 mm but a macro lens, a mid-range zoom and a moderate wide-angle will get most use
- You'll need a tripod, especially for work at dusk
- Please pack a head torch, for safety and navigation
- A walking pole or staff is useful in the mountains
- Bring all the chargers, cards, batteries and backup media you need, plus UK power adaptor if you're travelling from abroad
- A polarizing filter and graduated ND's—only if you have them
- Hand warmers—which help to prolong your battery's life. And make your work more

comfortable.

About us

After many years leading tours and workshops for other companies at home and abroad, Niall and Charlotte Benvie established Food and Photography Retreats in 2018. Our offer combines cultivating your photography in attractive locations with great hospitality, conversation and food.

Niall has been a professional photographer, writer designer and guide for 29 years with a massive publication record including six books and hundreds of articles. He has been involved in founding and running several of the biggest outdoor photographic initiatives of the last decade, including Meet Your Neighbours, Wild Wonders of Europe and 2020VISION and is widely recognised for the innovative nature of his work—and capacity for re-invention.

For 28 years, **Charlotte** combined a career in the Civil Service with freelance catering and hosting roles before coming to work with husband, Niall. Guests value not only her expertise in the kitchen and dining room but her attention to detail and her warmth. She has a keen eye for a picture too and can also assist with Lightroom processing. She is a trained chocolatiere.

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