

# Isle of Mull, Scotland

6<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> May, 2022

7 nights, £2300



FOOD AND  
PHOTOGRAPHY™  
RETREATS

*with the Bennevis*



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*Seabirds and shores*

## THE RETREAT

**F**OOD 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 meal times 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.

The Isle of Mull, at the heart of Scotland's Inner Hebrides, has a wonderfully diverse landscape and wild coastline. In recent years, thanks to TV exposure, it has entered the public mind as the home of sea eagles, surrounded by seas bustling with dolphins and larger whales. Indeed, eco-tourism contributes over £8 million to the island's economy each year. But it is a big island and it's easy to leave the crowds behind and find your own wild corner to explore and photograph.

Mull has an ancient volcanic backbone rising to over 900 metres. It is also deeply indented by seaweed-strewn sea lochs where otters and herons live by the tides and which are grazed along their margins by Highland cattle. The weather is "Atlantic" and never stays the same for long so the light is often divine.



*A very old, wind-twisted sessile oak woodland along the shores of Loch na Keal.*

## 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 with him, in the field. Subjects we can work with will include:

- Old boats, which we will "light paint" at dusk
- Mossy, Atlantic oak forests shaped by the wind
- Highland cattle and lambs in a coastal setting
- Waterfalls
- Puffins, shags, fulmars, guillemots and razorbills
- Chance encounters with sea eagles and otters
- Rugged shorelines with mountains backdrops
- The Isle of Iona with its white sand beach and Abbey
- Shoreline macro photography
- Seascapes.



## ACCOMMODATION AND MEALS

WE WILL HAVE the exclusive use of the lovely, centrally-located [Killiechronan House](#) at the head of Loch na Keal. It is a comfortable, rather grand old country house, within easy walking distance of the loch and adjacent woodlands. Each room has its own bathroom. There is no charge for single room occupancy, but if we run short of rooms, we will offer a discount to those willing to share.

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 most things are made better by the prospect of a lovely meal at the end of the day. We eat largely vegetarian food at home but the range broadens to encompass all tastes on Retreat. You can see a sample menu on the next page. Charlotte 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.

We do, however, fit meals around the photography and as a result we may sometimes eat on location (especially if we're far from base), or at slightly odd times. While we don't provide wine or other alcohol, you will have the opportunity to shop for your own in local stores.



from the kitchen of  
*Charlotte*

Charlotte's surprise from the kitchen

Salmon with creamy horseradish lentils, over-  
roasted cherry tomatoes and greens

or  
Butternut squash and nut roast served with  
a rich tomato passatta sauce and green beans (v)

Orange and ricotta tarte with creme fraiche,  
accompanied by a shot of Montbazillac

Charlotte's chocolates and tea or coffee



## MULL AND AROUND

**T**EMPERATE RAINFOREST - a rare habitat in world-wide terms, is found in a few corners of Mull where mosses, lichens and liverworts festoon the low, gnarled oaks, freshly leafed out for our arrival. This is the ideal place to slow down and look closely, even just to listen to the rain slapping on the leaves above.

There's another benefit of the rain: plenty of waterfalls that lure us into narrow ravines where the peat-stained water spills and splashes and sparkles.

In Scottish terms, Mull is quite a big island and if you were to drive from Tobermory at the top to Fionnphort

in the south west, it would take around 2 hours (sheep-on-the-road permitting). That's big enough to accommodate a wide range of landforms and habitats. But whether you're in a forest or village or on a mountain, the influence of the Atlantic is all around, a thread that is woven into every one of your photographs.

One of the highlights of the week, weather permitting, is the day trip to the island of Lunga, one of the Treshnish group of islands that includes Staffa. We normally make a short stop there en-route to visit the basalt columns of Fingal's Cave. The sea birds on Lunga are unusually confiding, earning the island its reputation as "Scotland's Galapagos". Recently-arrived puffins are courting and flying around actively while prehistoric-looking shags are already on their nests.

Mull's sea lochs offer up all sorts of interest to the photographer. They are rich in colours and textures and it's easy to lose oneself for an hour photographing the variety of seaweeds and rock pool life. If we are lucky (and we know some good spots)—and quiet—we *might* get close enough to otters to photograph them. They are active throughout the day on Mull, their schedule determined by the tides.

We plan to take a day trip to the isle of Iona, famous as the landing place of the early Christian apostle, St Columba, and its 9<sup>th</sup> century Abbey, one of the most important early Christian sites in Europe. But the wild side of Iona, it's colourful granite rocks and white sand beach will offer other opportunities too.







# GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT THE RETREAT

**Price: GBP 2300, 6<sup>th</sup>- 13<sup>th</sup> May 2022**

## What's included:

- 7 nights' accommodation at [Killiechronan House](#), Isle of Mull PA72 6JU
- All meals during the Retreat, from dinner on the 6<sup>th</sup> to breakfast on the 13<sup>th</sup>.
- Transfers from and to Craignure Ferry Terminal, Isle of Mull, where the Retreat begins and ends. The ferry for Craignure sails from and to Oban on the mainland
- Transportation during the Retreat, including the ferry fare to Iona.

## What's not included:

- Your travel to and from Mull
- Alcoholic drinks
- Travel insurance

- Iona Abbey admission
- Day-trip to Lunga (around €110)
- Any statutory COVID tests.

## Where we will go

Most of our photography will be done on Mull but we plan to make a day trip to Iona, weather permitting. We have also chartered a sailing to Lunga which will run with six or more guests and good sea conditions. We have not built this price into the Retreat in case we have to cancel—but it would be a first. Drive times on narrow roads can be longer than usual and some locations are quite distant. Journeys between locations are rarely more than one hour. Most of the walking is relatively easy, under 3 km. Iona involves a little more, albeit flat, hiking. Some locations are near the roadside. The focus will be on landscape, macro, cultural sites and, as we come across it, wildlife:

- Salen pier at dusk for light

painting

- Abandoned boats at Salen
- Old trees, Loch Spelve and Croggan
- Oak woods and shoreline, Loch na Keal
- Waterfalls at Eas fors
- Island of Lunga, arguably the best location in the UK to photograph several seabird species, including puffins. We have between 4 and 5 hours on the island, into the evening
- Beach at Fidden for rock and foreshore details
- Iona Abbey and the white sands of the Bay at the Back of the Ocean
- Falls and lava rocks at Gribun
- Falls and woodland at Aros

- Bluebell woods near our base.

## The daily routine

Whatever we are shooting, it tends to look better in the early morning or late afternoon when low-angled light shows relief and colours better. With dawn at around 05:00 and dusk around 20:00, it's potentially a long day but if we do a dawn shoot, you'll be given the chance of some rest during the day. Sometimes, we'll eat breakfast in, sometimes Charlotte will bring it to us in the field, and when we visit Lunga we will take lunch and dinner with us.

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.

We've learned over the years just how much guests value being able

to discuss the work they are creating, with the leader and other guests and to this end, we'd urge you to bring a laptop. While the emphasis is on photography and review, Niall will advise on post-production too. Light painting takes place around half an hour after sunset.

### **Safety**

We take your safety seriously during our Retreats. At locations with known risks, such as drop-offs, tree-roots, muddy shores, busy roads (although not on Mull...) 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 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 equipment other than tripods in our vehicle overnight. While there is uneven ground to cross, the distances we cover are quite short (100m - 5km, exceptionally) so even if you are only moderately fit, you won't find this Retreat too taxing.

### **COVID**

Each guest is required to have completed a course of vaccinations and have a booster at least two weeks before the start of the Retreat. Depending on the progression of the pandemic at that time, we may ask you to wear a mask when we are travelling in the vehicle. We will provide hand sanitiser at entry points to our accommodation but you should bring your own for use in between times.

### **Travel**

Our pick-up and return point for guests is Craignure Ferry Terminal, Mull, sailing from Oban Ferry Ter-

minal on the mainland. You will be advised of ferry sailing times closer to departure. If you are travelling to Oban by car, we would recommend that you bring it over to Mull where it can be safely parked outside the house. There is no long stay parking provision in Oban.

### **Spending money**

There are several cash machines on the island, should 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. Closer to departure we strongly recommend you check for any COVID related mandates on the Scottish Govern-

ment website and are aware of your insurance company's COVID policy.

### **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.

### **Language**

While some Gaelic is spoken on the island, English prevails.

### **Climate**

Mull enjoys the usual dynamic west coast weather of wind, sun, rain and calm all within the space of a day. It's also possible to have completely settled weather for the week as May tends to have the best conditions. But don't rely on it!

## Clothing

It's best to plan for the worst and bring your waterproof gear (including trousers) and warm clothes, even although it is May. In addition:

- Walking boots are fine but a pair of wellingtons is useful too for shore work. You can buy some locally if bringing a pair isn't practical;
- A warm hat for when we're sailing;
- Slippers for the house;
- A sun hat: you never know!

## Photographic equipment

Bring as much of your photographic equipment as practical. You could end up using any of it, although realistically, a wide-angle, a macro lens and telephoto between 300 and 500 mm will receive most use. A 70-200 mm is adequate for Lunga.

*In addition, you will need:*

- A laptop with Lightroom/PS or Affinity Photo
- A tripod: there's no avoiding it!
- A remote release
- A means of backing up your images, such as a large capacity memory stick
- A head torch for dusk work.

## 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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