

# Ireland & Scotland Discovery Cruise

with Naturalist Journeys



**May 17 – June 2, 2023**  
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This fantastic cruise around the coastline and islands of Ireland and Scotland visits the very best of the British Isles with opportunities to see internationally important seabird colonies, and a wide range of other British and Irish birds as well as other wonderful wildlife. Many of the sites we visit are filled with ancient culture, historic landmarks, and grand geology, with fabulous chances to experience highland and island life.

May is one of the best months of the year to visit seabird colonies around the British Isles, which are a hive of activity with birds on cliff ledges incubating eggs while others fly back and forth to feed. The towering sea cliffs are home to Black-legged Kittiwake, Common Murre (Guillemot), and Razorbill, while island tops may contain Atlantic Puffin burrows or a white carpet of Northern Gannet. At sea there may still be Arctic breeders like jaegers still journeying north to their tundra breeding quarters as well as breeding Manx Shearwater foraging for food. A host of other British and Irish birds and wildlife can be found along the coasts, from breeding shorebirds to smaller land birds—specialties to look out for include Red-legged Chough, Twite, and the ever-elusive Corncrake.

Our home for the cruise is the expedition vessel, the *Sylvia Earle*, equipped with inflatable Zodiacs to take us ashore in the remotest locations, giving easy access to otherwise virtually inaccessible islands. When not venturing on shore in search of adventure, we can watch from the many open decks, looking out for seabirds and marine mammals as well as simply enjoying the incredible scenery. Acting as a floating hotel, we can travel in luxury without the need to move our center of operations. Most sailing takes place at night, so every day we can wake up somewhere new!

## Tour Highlights

- Discover up to 20 species of nesting seabirds including Manx Shearwater, Northern Gannet, Razorbill, Common Murre, Atlantic Puffin, Arctic Tern, and Great Skua
- Cruise along the British Isles' most scenic coastline, exploring southern and western Ireland, then the Scottish Hebrides, the Northern Isles, and part of Scotland's east coast
- Explore some of Scotland's remotest islands such as St. Kilda with its endemic subspecies of Eurasian Wren and Fair Isle, a mecca for birders in migration time
- Witness huge concentrations of seabirds around islands like Boreray and Bass Rock (Northern Gannet), and Hirta and Staffa (Atlantic Puffin)
- Wonder at the incredible geology of the Giant's Causeway of Northern Ireland and see similar towering basalt columns on the island of Staffa in Scotland
- Enjoy walks on shore exploring the coastal countryside and visiting historic and archaeological sites, such as the Neolithic village of Skara Brae, Orkney, dating back 5,000 years
- Watch from the decks of the *Sylvia Earle* for seabirds, and marine mammals such as seals or cetaceans, including the possibility of whales
- Learn about the areas we visit from expert lecturers on board our ship

## Tour Summary

17-Day / 16-Night Ireland & Scotland Nature Cruise

From \$12,296.25, from Dublin, departing Aberdeen

Arrival airport is Dublin (DUB), departing airport is Aberdeen International (ABZ)

## Day-to-Day Itinerary

### Wed., May 17 Arrivals in Dublin

Welcome to Ireland! Upon arrival you are met by a cruise representative and transferred to our group hotel, where you can settle in and rest up from your travels. You are given luggage tags upon arrival; please mark them clearly with your name and cabin number. Meals are on your own today. There is plenty to explore in Dublin, and if you wish to arrive a few days early, we can help you arrange a hotel.

*Accommodations at the Alex Hotel or similar*

### Thurs., May 18 Embarkation

We board the *Sylvia Earle* this morning, and set sail south on our fabulous journey which takes us around the Emerald Isle and up the remote west coast of Scotland to the most northerly islands in Britain, ending on Scotland's east coast. Here in Dublin, watch out for the newly arrived Common Swift, which breed in the city. Whenever the ship is sailing there is the chance to see seabirds, so make sure to spend plenty of time out on deck.

### Fri., May 19 At Sea

This day at sea gives us a chance to get our sea legs, and to become familiar with the layout of the ship. We find the best spot out on deck to look for seabirds as we cruise along the south coast of Ireland. From the deck there is a chance to see several gull and tern species as well as auks—and always keep an eye out for cetaceans such as dolphins and maybe a whale!

### Sat., May 20 Skellig Islands, Co Kerry

The islands of Little Skellig and Skellig Michael lie off the coast of County Kerry and tens of thousands of seabirds call them home. The Atlantic Puffin on Skellig Michael were turned into Porgs by the *Star Wars* movies when they could not edit them out of the background when filming Luke Skywalker's island retreat. The stone 'beehive' dwellings of the ancient 6<sup>th</sup> Century monks who lived here are now used by thousands of European Storm-Petrel. Little Skellig has Ireland's largest colony of Northern Gannet as well as Northern Fulmar, Manx Shearwater, and Black-legged Kittiwake. In the afternoon a walk on Bere Island provides our first look at some of the common coastal land birds of the area like Hooded Crow, Eurasian Wren, European Robin, Eurasian Blackbird, European Stonechat, Meadow Pipit, and Common Chaffinch.

### Sun., May 21 Inishmore, Co Galway

The Aran Islands lie offshore of County Galway and offer a chance to see one of Europe's rarest crows, the Red-legged Chough. These birds like short-cropped grassy fields and their loud calls of 'chia' are often the first indication of their presence. It is always a thrill to see them rolling and plunging in flight with their 'fingered' wingtips. We visit the ancient fort called Dun Aonghasa, which may date back to the Bronze and Iron Ages, part of the pre-Christian and Celtic heritage of the region. Summer visitors that we might encounter while exploring local archaeological sites and a nearby village include Common Cuckoo, Northern House Martin, and Northern Wheatear.

### Mon., May 22 Connemara, Co Galway

Connemara National Park is a great place to walk and enjoy the spectacular wild countryside of County Galway. Grassland, heaths, and bogs fill this mountainous area where a variety of birds can be found with Eurasian

Skylark filling the air with their song. We enjoy a hike into the park to look for the best it has to offer, looking out for Gray Heron, Eurasian Sparrowhawk, Common Kestrel, Pied Wagtail, and Reed Bunting.

### **Tues., May 23 Connemara, Co Mayo**

Clare Island in County Mayo has some spectacular sea cliffs with large colonies of sensational seabirds like Northern Fulmar and European Shag, plus Common Gull, Black Guillemot, and Atlantic Puffin as well as patrolling Peregrine Falcon and Red-legged Chough. The island was once home to the 16<sup>th</sup> Century figure known as Grace O'Malley or 'The Pirate Queen' and its hills, bogs, and woodlands offer a great variety of birds, as well as many unusual plants including some alpine species. While enjoying these wonderful habitats we try to find Song Thrush, Dunnock, European Goldfinch, Eurasian Linnet, and Reed Bunting, which can all be seen here.

### **Wed., May 24 Mullaghmore, Co Sligo**

The Mullaghmore Peninsula in County Sligo juts into the Atlantic with wide ocean to the north and the mighty Benbulbin Mountain to the south. Explore the coast and countryside with typical Irish birds on show. Several gull species and resident shorebirds can be seen along the coast, as well as Common Eider, while woodland areas contain Eurasian Jay, Common Chiffchaff, and Goldcrest and Common Treecreepers among other species. We enjoy a walk on Mullaghmore Head in the morning and then in the afternoon explore some wild areas around the town of Sligo.

### **Thurs., May 25 Malin Head, Co Donegal & Giant's Causeway, Co Antrim**

In the morning we visit the most northerly point in Ireland, which is famous as a sea watching site, and it is possible to see terns, jaegers, and skuas passing here in late May. Common Eider breed around the Head and if we're lucky, Grasshopper Warbler might be heard. We journey further east along the coast, into Northern Ireland, where in the afternoon we visit the famous rock formation known as the Giant's Causeway, Northern Ireland's only UNESCO World Heritage Site. Its pillars of basalt reach out into the sea and legend has it they stretch all the way to Scotland. Here we could see Eurasian Jackdaw, Rook, Hooded Crow, Northern Wheatear, Greater Whitethroat, Pied Wagtail, and Rock Pipit.

### **Fri., May 26 Argyll Coast & Islands, Scotland**

Sailing north we pass between the islands of Islay and Jura and the Argyll mainland, a Mission Blue Hope Spot including Marine Protected Areas and Special Areas for Conservation. Here we look for wildlife of all kinds, from seabirds, including gulls, terns, and auks, to White-tailed Eagle to seals, dolphins, and whales.

### **Sat., May 27 Iona & Staffa, Scotland**

These two islands in the Inner Hebrides are of great historic importance as well as being home to some wonderful wildlife. Our search for the elusive Corncrake (or Landrail) on Iona takes us past the Abbey, one of the oldest centers of Christianity in Europe and the final resting place of many Scottish kings, including Macbeth. These skulking birds have recently arrived from their East African winter quarters and can be heard 'craking' from the iris beds and with luck we might see one. The trees and bushes should be alive with bird song from summer visitors like Sedge and Willow Warblers as well as resident birds like Great Tit and European Goldfinch. The coastline is good for Oystercatcher and Ringed Plover and it is worth checking for Harbor and Atlantic Grey Seals as well as Otters. A short distance from Iona is the island of Staffa, home to Atlantic Puffin, which we may see during a Zodiac exploration of Fingal's Cave with its huge basalt columns. A walk ashore provides an opportunity to see land birds like Northern Wheatear and Twite.

### **Sun., May 28 St Kilda, Scotland**

Once known as the remotest inhabited island in Britain, the islands that make up St Kilda are now mainly for the birds! The people who lived on Hirta, the main island of St Kilda, left in 1930 when living there became untenable and we see the buildings they lived in and the 'cleits', special stone huts used for storage. Seabirds and their eggs formed a large part of their diet. In 1840, the last British Great Auk was caught alive on the St Kilda island of Stac-an-Armin and was later stoned to death as a witch. An estimated one million seabirds live here—especially Northern Gannet, Northern Fulmar, and Atlantic Puffin. About 100 pairs of the endemic St Kilda Wren (a subspecies of Eurasian Wren) are on the main island. Look out for the Soay Sheep, the most primitive domestic breed in Europe. As we explore around the islands and head north we look out for Bottlenose Dolphin and possibly even Basking Shark.

### **Mon., May 29 Papa Westray, Orkney & Fair Isle, Shetland, Scotland**

Today we have a chance to visit the RSPB reserve at North Hill, on the island of Papa Westray, with its breeding Parasitic Jaeger (Arctic Skua), Great Skua, Black-legged Kittiwake, Arctic Tern, Common Murre (Guillemot), and Atlantic Puffin. Breeding shorebirds include Northern Lapwing, European Golden Plover, Dunlin, Common Redshank, and Common Snipe. Look out for the rare Scottish Primrose, which should be in bloom. If the weather is kind, we may get to land on Fair Isle. Situated between the Shetland and Orkney Islands it is home to a small community of crofters, as well as the world-famous bird observatory, recently rebuilt following a fire. Fair Isle is a mecca for British birders as many rare vagrant birds are seen there during spring and autumn each year.

### **Tues., May 30 Noss, Lerwick & Mousa, Shetland, Scotland**

A sea cruise of Noss offers a rare opportunity to see the 15 breeding seabird species on its sandstone cliffs. Then after docking at Lerwick we visit Sumburgh Head, the southernmost point in Shetland, and always a highlight, with its Atlantic Puffin, Razorbill, and European Shag. Great Skua and Parasitic Jaeger are present, as are Twite. The island of Mousa is extra special as it has an Iron Age broch, or stone tower, important historically, but also home to European Storm-Petrel, which can sometimes be heard but are only seen at night. Other special birds include the Shetland races of Starling and Eurasian Wren.

### **Wed., May 31 Kirkwall, Orkney, Scotland**

A visit to Orkney means a trip back into the past with standing stones of Stenness, and the Ring of Brodgar, as well as Skara Brae, the best-preserved Neolithic village in Western Europe. Travelling to the various sites provides an opportunity to travel across moorland, past marshland and lochs, and also coastal shorelines where we might see some of the scarce breeding birds like Eurasian Whimbrel and maybe a Short-eared Owl, Merlin, or Hen Harrier. Common birds around the archaeological sites include Northern Wheatear and Twite.

### **Thurs., June 1 Bass Rock, East Lothian, Scotland**

Today we get a chance to see the island that gave the Northern Gannet its scientific name: *Morus bassanus*. Situated in the Forth of Forth, to the east of Scotland's capital, Edinburgh, this steep-sided island is of volcanic origin and is inhabited mainly by Northern Gannet. It holds the world's largest colony, with up to 150,000 birds and the sight and sound (and smell if you get downwind) of this incredible concentration of birds is an unforgettable experience. In the last couple of years, there has been a substantial population decline due to avian flu, which has affected many Scottish seabird colonies.

### **Fri., June 2 Aberdeen, Scotland**

Early morning, we cruise into Aberdeen, where we plan to disembark at approximately 8:00 AM. You are then transferred to the Aberdeen airport or to your centrally located hotel. Please plan flights to depart after 12:00 PM to allow for any unexpected delays at the conclusion of the voyage.

## *The Sylvia Earle*



Launching in November 2022, we invite you to join us on our purpose-built ship, the *Sylvia Earle*, in her inaugural season. Connect with like-minded travellers in a meaningful way on perspective-altering voyages to some of the most remote, unique, and spectacular places on the planet.

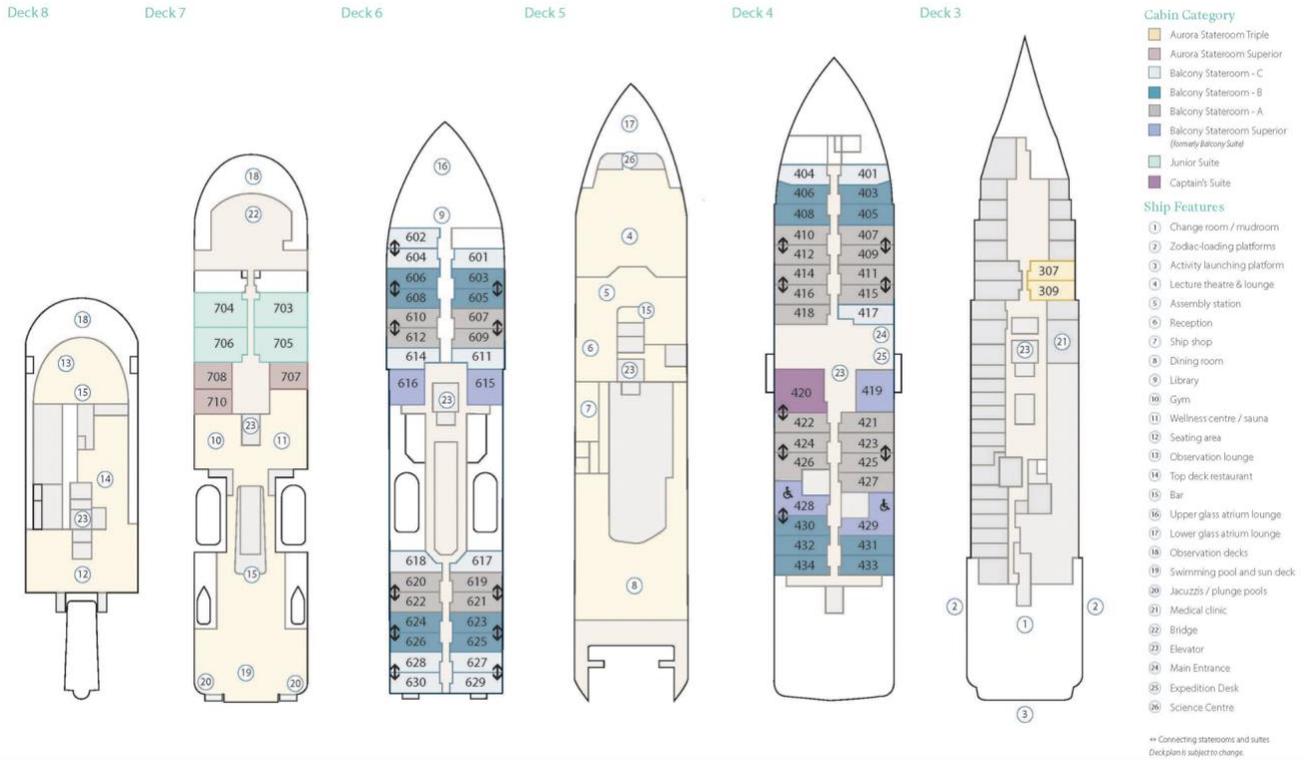
The *Sylvia Earle* is a floating ambassador for the conservation of the planet. Paying tribute to Dr. Sylvia Earle and six pioneering conservationists with public decks honouring their contributions and shining a light on their important conservation causes.

Certified 100% Carbon Neutral, with a fully equipped Citizen Science Centre, expert lectures and participative citizen science programs, to enrich your knowledge and connection to the places we travel to.

The *Sylvia Earle* is a comfortable base camp for adventure. With an average of 130-140 expeditioners, our aim is to get you off ship experiencing the natural environment as much as possible and our smaller groups also mean we can tread lightly, making a positive impact to the environment.

Each of the vessel's public decks bear the names of six pioneering female conservationists—Dr. Carden Wallace AM, Joanna Ruxton, Sharon Kwok, Bernadette Demientieff, Dr. Asha de Vos and Hanli Prinsloo—along with a deck dedicated to Dr. Earle herself. The scientists are inspiring leaders in their fields.

Onboard, enjoy state of the art lecture facilities, a science center and lounge, library, mudroom, hot tub and sundeck, sauna, spa, and gym, as well as a lovely dining room and a choice of lounges and bars. Cabins are fresh, clean and modern, and provide a quiet retreat at day's end. Enjoy en-suite facilities, a closet, desk, in-room safe, 42" television, and room controlled thermostat.



## Cruise Details

### Plan Ahead!

Protect yourself with Allianz Travel Insurance. Please note, starting in January 2017, Naturalist Journeys pays 100% of your flight carbon offset.

### Cost of the Journey

Cost of the journey is \$12,296.25 per person for Balcony Stateroom C (see deck plan) cabin types from Dublin, Ireland, departing Aberdeen, Scotland. If you would like a different cabin category, please ask and we can work with our operator to see which cabin categories are available at the time of your booking. Cost includes: all accommodations; all meals aboard the cruise; airport transfers and ground transportation; professional guide services; park, preserve, and other activity fees; gratuities, wine with dinner, all excursions, all port taxes/fees, and miscellaneous program expenses.

Tour price does not include: round trip airfare to Dublin and from Aberdeen, or items of a personal nature such as laundry, portage, and telephone charges.

### Travel Information

Please plan to arrive at leisure into Dublin International (DUB) at your leisure no later than May 17. You will be picked up by a cruise representative from the airport and transferred to our hotel in Dublin. Please plan for meals on your own on May 17. Please plan your departure flights after NOON on June 2 from Aberdeen International (ABZ); you will be transferred from the dock to the airport by our cruise staff.

### Photo Credits

Atlantic Puffin, Gerard Gorman; Iona Abbey, courtesy UnSplash; Eurasian Jay, stock; Northern Gannets, stock, Great Tit, stock; Giant's Causeway, courtesy UnSplash; Sylvia Earle photos, courtesy Aurora Expeditions.

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