



Cairngorms
National Park
& The Isle of
Mull

1st - 14th June, 2024
13 nights, 2 bases
£4200



hosted by
CHARLOTTE &
NIAL BENVIE
with
DR FERRY BÖHME

FOOD AND
PHOTOGRAPHY
RETREATS™
with The Bennies







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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 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.

This is the first two-base Retreat we have run. It's an ambitious programme designed to give you a memorably diverse range of experiences, from mountain to shore - and beyond. We're delighted to be delivering it in conjunction with German photographer, Dr Ferry Bohme who brings his own macro expertise to the Retreat.

At the start of the Retreat we will explore the mountains, native pine-woods and lochs of the Cairngorms National Park, based in the rapidly

re-wilding Glen Feshie, visiting the wild reindeer herd in Glenmore and rising early to see the mist rising over pine-fringed lochans.

From there, we move to the Isle of Mull, at the heart of Scotland's Inner Hebrides. It 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, ecotourism 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 a 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.



WHAT'S ON OFFER: CAIRNGORMS

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, on the Cairngorms leg

- Loch Vaa and Insh beech and birch woods
- Loch Garten pine woods
- Loch Morlich at dusk
- Coire-an-Sneachda to look for ptarmigan
- Mountain landscapes
- Wild-living reindeer in Glenmore
- Field studio photography of orchids.



WHAT'S ON OFFER: MULL

- 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 on the island of Lunga
- 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.



CAIRNGORMS: OUR VENUE

WE WILL BE STAYING at Ballintean Mountain Lodge in the pinewoods of Glenfeshie. This provides a well-appointed base for our travels as well as a relaxing venue for eating, talking and sleeping. There are even some photogenic Highland cattle close at hand—if we can find them. Each room has ensuite facilities and there is wi-fi throughout the Lodge as well as spacious social areas. There is no single room supplement for those travelling alone— and this applies on Mull, too.

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, you will have opportunity to shop in local stores—and there are one or two Speyside malt whiskies available too, as you might expect!





MULL: OUR VENUE

WE WILL HAVE THE EXCLUSIVE use of the lovely, centrally-located Killiechranan 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.





CAIRNGORMS
NATIONAL PARK

SCOTLAND'S SECOND NATIONAL PARK, the Cairngorms, is the UK's most extensive mountain environment. The Spey valley retains some of the largest tracts of the pine forest that covered much of the Highlands after the last Ice Age. Its distance from the sea means that the area's numerous lochs and marshes are often wreathed in early morning

mist. Snow is less predictable than in the past but if there is going to be any in Scotland, it will fall here first.

Not only is Speyside a refuge of the ancient pine forest and a host of species that have disappeared from much of the rest of the country—such as capercaillie and red squirrels— it is also the setting of exciting re-wilding

initiatives which are seeing the return of montane scrub and woodland to areas that have not had forest cover for centuries. There is simmering tension between those who'd rather see wide open vistas and those who place biodiversity ahead of visual amenity. So, for pho-

tographers interested in creating story-led collections of pictures, Speyside is a rich vein to mine. Ballintean's owner, Peter Cairns, is himself deeply involved in various re-wilding initiatives and can provide insider information on these.



THE ISLE OF MULL






TEMPERATE 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 (next page). 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 9th century Abbey, one of the most important early Christian sites in Europe. But the wild side of Iona, its colourful granite rocks and white sand beach will offer other opportunities too.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Price: GBP 4200 per person, 1st - 14th
June 2024 (13 nights)

What's included:

- 6 nights' accommodation at [Ballintean Mountain Lodge](#), Feshie Bridge and 7 nights' accommodation at [Killiechronan House](#), Isle of Mull PA72 6JU
- All meals during the Retreat, from dinner on the 1st to breakfast on the 14th June
- Transfers from Inverness bus station, railway station or airport mid-afternoon on 1st June to Ballintean and return to those arrival points on the 14th June, early evening
- Foot passenger ferry tickets to and from Mull and foot passenger ferry fare to Iona
- Transportation during the Retreat

- Tuition from Ferry and Niall.

What's not included:

- Your travel to and from Inverness
- Alcoholic drinks
- Travel insurance
- Iona Abbey admission
- Day-trip to Lunga (around €110)
- Admission to reindeer site (c. €25)

Where we will go

We have detailed already in this brochure many of the sites we will visit in the Cairngorms and when we travel to the islands. Most of our photography there 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 on Mull (exceptionally, two hours on the Cairngorms leg). Some locations are near the roadside. Most of the walking is relatively easy, under 4 km. Iona involves a little more, albeit flat, hiking. And the walk into Coire-an-Sneachda to look for ptarmigan is longer still and needs a reasonable level of fitness. For those who don't want to take part in this hike, the group will split since we have two leaders. The focus will be on landscape, macro, cultural sites and, as we come across it, wildlife:

As well as the locations listed earlier for the Cairngorms, we can add these ones for the Mull leg:

- 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 04:30 and dusk around 22:00, it's potentially a long day but if we do a dawn shoot, you'll be give the chance to rest during the day. If we have a dawn session, we take coffee or tea just before we leave and eat breakfast on return. On other occasions, Charlotte will bring it to us in the field. On the Lunga day we will take lunch and dinner with us. If we are planning a dusk shoot, we will eat first, early in the evening.

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 leaders and other guests and to this end, we'd urge you

to bring a laptop. We set up a Zoom meeting within the room which makes it much easier for the leaders to teach and the guests to share. While the emphasis is on photography and review, Niall and Ferry 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 guests 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. The walk to the reindeer is relatively short and on a well made path. The walk into Coire-an-Sneachda does, however, demand a higher level of fitness and proper walking boots.

COVID

At the time of writing, the threat from COVID has receded. Nevertheless, if there is a re-surgence, we will require guests to conform to the statutory guidelines pertaining at the time.

Travel

Our pick-up and return point for guests is Inverness airport, railway or bus station. It is recommended that you plan your return for the day after the end of the Retreat as we will arrive back in Inverness quite late that day.

Spending money

There are several cash machines on the Mull and plenty on the mainland, should you need some. Pretty much all businesses take payment by card.

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 Government 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. Be aware too that passports issued more than 10 years before the date of travel may be invalid.

Language

English is spoken, although non-native speakers might struggle with the local accent! Some Gaelic is spoken on Mull.

Climate

If we are lucky with the weather in the Cairngorms, we can expect temperatures in the low 20° C's and sun. But overcast skies and a temperature range in the low teens is just as likely. 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

Clothing

It's best to plan for the worst and bring your waterproof gear (including trousers) and warm clothes, even although it is June (especially for

boat trips). Midges will be in action in the Cairngorms and on Mull so we'd recommend a head net and cap as well as your choice of midge repellent. We are also in tick territory and highly recommend [this device](#) for easy removal.

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!
- Your own medication.

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 reason-

ably 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 with Lightroom/PS or CaptureOne or Exposure X
- You could use any lens between 16 mm and 500 mm but a macro lens, a 100-400 mm zoom and a moderate wide-angle will get most use
- A tripod - for versatility
- 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.

Partners

We can create alternative events for friends, partners or spouses centred on chocolate work and patisserie. The cost is the same for non-photographers as for photographers.

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.

[Dr Ferry Böhme](#) is a veterinarian by profession and skilled teacher and photographer by inclination. He is perhaps best-known for his work with dragon and damselfies and has also published a book of photographs of Scotland.

Niall has been a professional photographer, writer designer and guide for 28 years with a massive publica-

tion 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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