

ISLAY AND JURA



11TH - 18TH MARCH 2023

7 nights, £2650



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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 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.

Islay is our favourite Scottish island, and one we've visited more than 20 times since the mid-1980's. It's the mix of cultural landscape and wilderness, of bright green pastures abutted by moorland and a coastline worried ragged by the Atlantic, that make it so enchanting. That, along with huge skeins of barnacle and white fronted geese, seals, goats and choughs, keeps drawing us back. Oh, and there are the distilleries and lighthouses too.

We will return to Saddlers House in the quiet, central village of Bowmore, as our base. It's a thoroughly modernised house above the shore, with en-suite facilities and great views across Loch Indaal. It is easy to access most of the Island within 40 minutes of here. In a break with tradition, we will stay one night in The Jura Hotel to give us a day longer to explore Islay's neighbour and meet some locals.



WHAT'S ON OFFER



IF YOU'RE INTERESTED in learning one of the [particular skills](#) Niall is known for, 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. Subjects we can work with include:

- Lighthouses, one of which we will "light paint" at dusk
- Huge sandy beaches open to the Atlantic
- Rugged rocky shores with fabulously patterned rocks
- Big night skies with negligible light pollution
- The 1300 year old Kildalton Cross, at dusk
- Skeins of barnacle and white-fronted geese
- A distillery or two
- Feral goats on the coast and red deer on Jura
- Shoreline macro photography and waves
- Highland cows in great settings
- Jura's coastline.

ACCOMMODATION AND MEALS

WE USE THE LOVELY [SADDLERS HOUSE](#) in Bowmore for eating, talking and sleeping. Each room has ensuite facilities and there is wi-fi throughout. There is no single room supplement. On Jura, we will stay in the recently renovated Jura Hotel, for one night.

Good food is at the heart of our Retreats, from breakfast through to after-dinner chocolates, all made by Charlotte. She uses local ingredients, when they are available, in dishes that are delicious and imaginative without being fussy. And that goes for vegetarian options too, often enjoyed by guests who are not normally vegetarian. Food allergies and intolerances are catered for sensitively when notified in advance on the booking form.

Over the years, we have become adept at timing meals around the best times for photography—without neglecting your stomachs! With sunrise at about 06:45 during the Retreat, we will have breakfast after we return from a dawn shoot. The sun sets about 18:30 so we will eat about 20:00.

While we don't provide wine, you will have ample opportunity to shop for your own in local stores, and there are one or two whiskies available too, as you might expect.





from the kitchen of
Charlotte

MENU

Haggis and red onion marmalade
on oatcakes



Venison and chestnut casserole
with clapshot (buttery carrots and
swede), hasselback potatoes and
fresh greens

or

Leek and stuffing plait (v)



Handmade blueberry clafoutis
tartlets.



Tea or coffee and chocolates.

ISLAY AND JURA

ISLAY'S BLEND OF IMPROVED grassland, wild moor and a coastline gnawed raw by the Atlantic make it an intriguing proposition for the photographer. The cultural landscape enhances, rather than diminishes, the island's natural wealth, attracting huge numbers of wintering barnacle and white fronted geese and providing a home for many brown hares. The crough, that iconic crow of the Celtic fringes, is favoured by the presence of cattle on coastal pastures and even corncrakes have returned to slink between the irises that crowd damp field edges and disturb light summer nights. While the corncrakes won't yet have

arrived from Africa, chough are resident and we may have a chance to photograph them against a stormy sky.

It is on the coast, however, that we find real wilderness unmediated by people. The island's geological and glacial history have given rise to the whole gamut of coastal geomorphology from cliffs and arches; to stacks and geos; to sandy beaches and mudflats. We'll be hoping for strong easterly winds. Under these conditions, waves that have a reach the width of the north Atlantic build and come racing into the western bays

with spray flying out behind them—and not into your lens. Rich in texture, form and colour and constantly worried by the Atlantic, the dynamic coastline of Islay is spellbinding.

Unlike some of the Hebrides, Islay is prospering, largely due to the boom in demand for its smoky, peaty malt whiskies. Young people are no longer obliged to leave the island to look for work, properties are well-maintained and the island has a friendly-vibe we've always put down to its close links with Glasgow. Tourism is big business too but by the time of our Retreat, when the light is most inter-

esting and the wildlife most abundant, we'll have places to ourselves.

Jura is an altogether wilder proposition. The skyline is defined by the Paps, three conical mounds of quartzite rising to over 700 metres. Below them, rolling moorland hosts over 5000 red deer, at least a few of them close to the road. The one village, Craighouse, is home of the world-famous Jura Distillery, itself rather photogenic. We are going to have the best part of two days on Jura for a change, time enough to see it in different light and meet new characters...





GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT THE RETREAT

Price: GBP 2650

What's included:

- 7 nights' accommodation: six spent at Saddler's House in Bowmore and one in the Jura Hotel
- All meals
- Transfer to and from Port Ellen or Port Askaig, Islay, or Islay Airport, where the Retreat begins and ends
- Transportation during the Retreat, including the ferry fare to Jura.

What's not included:

- Your travel to and from Islay
- Alcoholic drinks
- Travel insurance
- Distillery admissions.

Where we will go

Most of our photography will be done on Islay but we plan to make an overnight stay on Jura. There will be a combination of short drives and relatively easy walking, generally of less than three km. The focus will be on landscape, details, night-time photography and, as we come across it, wildlife;

- The west coast bay (principally Machir and Saligo but also a couple of smaller ones);
- Carraig Fhada and the Singing Sands
- Kildalton Cross and Claggain Bay
- At least one whisky distillery
- Laggan Bay and geological details
- Loch Gruinard and adjacent flatlands
- Lochindaal at dawn for geese

- Bunnanhabhain - for views to Jura
- Road up to Ardlussa, Jura and other locations on the island
- Ardnave Chapel and Celtic cross for night work.

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 07:45 and dusk around 18:30, it's not a punishing schedule.

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 it up as we go

along. The dinner menu is published at breakfast time so that you have a chance to flag up if there is something planned that you really can't manage to eat.

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. When we hold processing tutorials, bandwidth-permitting, we do so over Zoom, with everyone in the one room. This makes it much easier for Niall to help you as you share your screen with him—and for you to see the techniques he applies in his post-production work. Some evenings, conditions permitting, we can head back out after dinner to shoot the starry skies.

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 Islay...) 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 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. There is only a moderate amount of walking involved 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 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.

Travel

Our pick up and return point for guests taking the ferry is either Port Ellen or Port Askaig, Islay, depending on where the Calmac Ferry, sailing from Oban on the mainland, docks. You will be advised of ferry sailing times closer to departure. It is possible to leave your car at Kennacraig ferry terminal for the week at no charge and travel to Islay as a foot passenger. Islay is also served by flights from Glasgow Airport operated by Loganair and you might like to consider this as an alternative. We will collect you from, and return you to, Islay airport.

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.

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.

Language

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

Climate

You don't travel to Islay in March for a beach holiday and it displays the usual dynamic west coast weather of wind, sun, rain and calm all within the space of a day. It's also possible that run into completely settled weather for the week - but we'll work round the blue skies!

Clothing

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

- Walking boots are fine but even better is a pair of wellingtons, especially for shore work. You can buy some locally if bringing a pair isn't practical, although the choice is limited
- A warm hat
- Mitts and liner gloves
- Slippers for the house

- You might like to pack something a little smarter to wear in the evenings.

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 mid- range zoom will receive most use.

In addition, you will need:

- A laptop with Lightroom/PS or CaptureOne or Exposure X 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 night 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. On a number of Retreats, we cooperate with other, renowned, photographers to offer our guests an even fuller experience.

Niall has been a professional photographer, writer designer and guide for 28 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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