



West Highland Way (Self-Guided)

Please email us at info@ukexploratory.com or call us on +44 (0)1942 826 270 to chat about this holiday. You'll find all the latest information at www.alpineexploratory.com/holidays/west-highland-way.html.



Buachaille Etive Mor from the WHW

About these Holiday Notes

These Holiday Notes help you decide whether this holiday is right for you. Before your trip we send you an info pack with final details.

Details

Start Milngavie, Glasgow
Finish Fort William
Region Scottish Highlands
Country Scotland
Length 7 walking days and 8 nights (or other lengths, for example 5, 6, 8 or 9 walking days)
Total distance 152km or 95 miles
Typical day 21.5km (13 miles), 400m ascent (7-day schedule)
Highest altitude 548m at Devil's Staircase
Grade Intermediate

Introduction

The West Highland way runs for 152km from Scotland's largest city, Glasgow, to Fort William, the hub of the Western Highlands underneath Britain's highest mountain Ben Nevis (1,344m).

The scenery must be foremost among the attractions of the Way. There is colour and life the whole distance, mixed with a spirit of exploration in wild land. For many people the Way is a personal challenge, a famous trail leading out of a major city into some of the most majestic scenery in the country. For others it is simply a walk of exceptional views and experiences.

As a walking holiday, the West Highland Way excels due to the convenience of the staging posts, the quality of the trail underfoot, the interest along the way, and the easy access to the start and finish. In terms of timing, for most walkers the full route fits inside a week off work. It is also very possible to create a series of weekends along shorter stretches, in order to walk the whole Way in chunks or just to sample the landscape.

Once in Fort William, many West Highland Wayfarers stay on for an additional day to climb Ben Nevis. Along the way there are also options for side trips or for alternative routes of your own choosing.

Our approach to the Way

Your route

Your route follows the official West Highland Way. Set off from Milngavie, a small town at the Northern edge of Glasgow, at the start of your holiday. Pass rolling terrain on the way to Loch Lomond. Climb Conic Hill and descend to Balmaha on the shore. Follow the Loch for a long stretch, later walking inland to Crianlarich. Along Strath Fillan at Tyndrum the Highlands really show themselves. Trek to Bridge of Orchy and beyond it cross the edge of wild Rannoch Moor. Walking to Kingshouse and over the Devil's Staircase to Kinlochleven gives potentially the best views of the route, to a still-distant Ben Nevis over the Mamores. For a final stage ascend a high valley and drop down through trees to Glen Nevis and Fort William.

Routecards and maps

Each day's route is explained in detail on your routecards, to bring you to your night's accommodation. We give you the real map for you to follow, not printouts or photocopies.

Getting there and back

Your holiday starts in Milngavie and ends in Fort William. Travel to Milngavie and from Fort William is not included in the holiday price - we leave it to you to make the arrangements that suit you best. Milngavie and Fort William have good bus and rail connections to main line trains. Your info pack contains full information on travel options. It is possible to leave a car at either your first or last night's accommodation. If you would like to do this, please let us know.

Itinerary

Day 1: Arrival in Milngavie

Evening arrival in Milngavie. There is scope for eating out in the town centre.

Guesthouse, Milngavie

Day 2: Milngavie to Drymen

(19.5km or 12 miles)
The first day's walk takes you through rolling pastoral terrain next to the Campsie Fells. This stage is a good easy introduction to life on the trail. The village of Drymen provides a welcoming base at the end of the day.

B&B, Drymen

Day 3: Drymen to Rowardennan

(22km or 14 miles)

The Highlands make their entrance today, but mainly as a backdrop. The big feature of today's stage is Loch Lomond. After climbing Conic Hill (361m, optional) your route joins Loch Lomond at Balmaha and heads North along the shore to Rowardennan.

Small hotel, Rowardennan

Day 4: Rowardennan to Inverarnan

(22.5km or 14 miles)
Loch Lomond is the theme for almost the whole of today's stage. The Loch's wide Southern end has now been left behind as you follow its narrower stretch North towards the high mountains. The walking is on wooded paths mostly by the loch shore. There are some twisty and rocky sections but generally the way is easy.

Inn, Inverarnan

Day 5: Inverarnan to Tyndrum

(18.5km or 11.5 miles)
The Southern Highlands assert themselves now as your route winds through Glen Falloch to the village of Crianlarich, an important interchange for road and rail. Turning North West the way ahead is towards Tyndrum along valley tracks sometimes in woods and sometimes in the open.

B&B, Tyndrum

Day 6: Tyndrum to Kingshouse

(30.5km or 19 miles)
One of the most notable sights on the route, Beinn Dorain, is a feature this morning as you follow the tracks towards Bridge of Orchy. It's a triangular-looking mountain looming above the road, railway and West Highland Way. Past Bridge of Orchy and Victoria Bridge you enter different country again, skirting the huge expanse of Rannoch Moor before dropping down to Kingshouse in its amazing setting near the top of Glencoe. This is a long day but the miles fly by on the smooth solid tracks.

Small hotel, Kingshouse

Day 7: Kingshouse to Kinlochleven

(14.5km or 9 miles)
Tackle the Devil's Staircase, the Way's toughest climb, today. It's really not that hard! All the way up, weather dependent, you have views of Buachaille Etive Mor, the bold hill guarding the entrance to Glencoe. After the climb, drop down on wide tracks to the friendly village of Kinlochleven in its peaceful setting at the head of Loch Leven.

Small hotel, Kinlochleven

Day 8: Kinlochleven to Fort William

(24.5km or 15.5 miles)
Today's last stage takes you through a high valley on the Southern side of the Mamores range. Towards the end of the day, if you're lucky with the weather, you'll be treated to unusual views of the huge slopes of Ben

Nevis. A final section of the Way drops you down into Glen Nevis where a simple walk out through the glen floor to Fort William brings your final goal. Congratulations!

Small hotel, Fort William

Day 9: Departure

Morning departure from Fort William. Climbing Ben Nevis is a traditional option today (not part of this holiday but please ask us about staying on for an extra night).

This itinerary is typical of our standard 7-day trek staying in a mix of guesthouse, inn, B&B and small hotel accommodation.

Our usual schedule of accommodation might not be available, especially if there is not much time between booking and your trip starting. We will book accommodation as closely as possible to this itinerary and present you a schedule for you to check before we proceed.

Accommodation

This holiday stays in a mix of pleasant guesthouses, hotels, bed & breakfasts or inns along the route. We place most value on a friendly welcome, comfortable standards and a good location within the village or town.

We book ensuite accommodation except where it is not available, for example in older buildings or more remote locations.

We also offer a trek that stays in some of the numerous hostels, bunk houses and wooden 'wigwams' along the WHW.

Your info pack contains full details of your accommodation including contact details and directions.

Food

Scotland's food is a great mixture, from hearty fish and chips to the finest venison.

You will have enough chances to buy lunch ingredients, or to stop for lunch, along the way. However, on some stages you will have to be self-sufficient throughout the day's walk. Your routecards show places to eat and stock up on the route.

The walking

Terrain

The terrain is a mix of the following and more:

- Paths in woodland
- Wide stony tracks
- Paths through fields
- Country lanes
- Paths over the open hillside
- Steep rocky paths or steps

The West Highland Way runs on good clear paths. For some long stretches of the route, the track underfoot is a double-track old military road. At other times you might be walking along narrow forest paths. A few short sections are rockier and twistier, for example between Inversnaid and Inverarnan. The route

does not climb any mountains apart from Conic Hill at 360m; the sharpest and highest climb comes on the crossing of the pass between Glencoe and Kinlochleven, but there is no great difficulty.

The landscape should be treated as wild terrain in which you will need to be self-reliant. We strongly recommend that you know how to navigate with a map and compass; the skills are easy to learn and your notes include details of some good books.

Signposts and waymarks

Paths, signposts and waymarks are common along the West Highland Way. It is a popular route in summer and it is signposted accordingly. Waymarks are typically the WHW thistle logo painted on wooded signposts. However, the route crosses some areas of wild country and each party should be prepared to navigate. Not all path junctions are clear and it is essential to go with a map.

Your own routes

While your routecards make up the walking for the trip, you are of course free to walk wherever you choose, taking side trips or going by a different route of your own choice. We are very happy to offer suggestions. Please note that if you follow your own route you will have left the holiday for the duration.

Local transport

No local transport is needed or included on the West Highland Way due to its nature as a continuous trek from start to finish.

Language

English is the local language.

Weather

The weather in the Highlands between May and September is generally highly suitable for walking. While snowfall is possible on higher ground all year round, it is almost unheard of in the summer months at the lower elevations taken by the Way. May is a busy month on the Way, offering the tantalising combination of warm weather and no midges. Midges, the tiny biting insects for which the Scottish summer is famed, can be an annoyance during high summer. Any time in June, July and August is likely to be warm enough for comfort but with a good chance of rain on at least some days. The Autumn months can be quieter and very pleasant, though increasingly colder.

This all means that it is sensible to come equipped and expecting all the types of weather that might be experienced in a typical summer in the UK: from heavy rain storms with a chill in the air, to hot sunshine.

Equipment

You will need the usual equipment for mountain walking in the UK. Especially important are good walking boots, waterproofs and sun protection. If taking our hostel option you will also need a sleeping bag. Your info

pack contains a suggested equipment list. Please also see the Equipment page of our website for more information.

Insurance

We recommend, but it is not compulsory, that you have insurance cover for personal liability, cancellation and your baggage and money. Your info pack contains details of suitable insurance policies.

Money

The currency is the Pound Sterling (GBP).

Local expenses

Local expenses include food and drink (except breakfast, which are included in the guesthouse itineraries) and any local travel, local attractions and extras.

Guided days

Hire a professional mountain leader to join you on this self-guided holiday, for one or more days. A leader helps plan and carry out each day's walking and adds interest to your holiday by pointing out local features. Please contact us for prices and more information.

Groups

Walk by yourself or in your own group, or see if we can match you up with other like-minded walkers on the same holiday. Any group will be a maximum of 8 people.

Hazards

Health

The UK does not require tourists to take any vaccinations. However, it is recommended to keep tetanus vaccines up to date.

Safety

This is adventure travel! This holiday takes you to some wild and remote areas, in particular some areas of upland moor and mountain where navigation can be difficult in poor weather and the trail underfoot can lead to slips. The weather can also be a hazard in itself. During any walking, whether following a routecard or making your own route, you are responsible for your own actions and safety and you should join the trip with suitable skills, experience and equipment.

Further information

Please email us with any questions at info@ukexploratory.com.

Disclaimer

This information is given in good faith and is believed to be correct at the time of issue. UK Exploratory cannot be liable for any loss or injury incurred.