



LOCH LOMOND, THE KELPIES & STIRLING CASTLE

Our tour begins very close to the famous Edinburgh Castle at the top end of the **Royal Mile**, the main street of Edinburgh's **Old Town**. In olden times, everyone used to live on this street and the ones leading off it until the building of the **New Town** began in 1770. The Royal Mile goes downhill past many interesting sights before ending at the **Palace of Holyroodhouse**, home to the kings & queens of Scotland for 500 years: opposite it is the **Scottish Parliament** which opened in 2004.

However, we drive away from the Royal Mile and soon we pass a cemetery on the right: there is a round guardhouse there dating back to an infamous period of grave robbing in the early 19thc. when men would dig up dead bodies and get well paid for them by the professor of anatomy at the university who used the bodies in large public dissection demonstrations. A little further on we pass **Murrayfield Stadium** on the right where Scotland play their international rugby matches. As we make our way out of Edinburgh the **Pentland Hills** will appear away to the left if the clouds are not too low – they mark the southern boundary of the city.

After leaving Edinburgh we join a motorway which heads north-west. Look out for two giant horse heads on the left of the motorway – they are 30 metres high and are called **Kelpies** - legendary horses that lived in the depths of lochs and would sometimes come ashore, allow people to get on their backs and then gallop back into the loch, drowning their riders! We stop here for photos of the magnificent structure before continuing onwards towards Stirling.

Our next destination is **Loch Lomond**, one of Scotland's most famous and attractive lochs. Besides having the largest surface area of any loch or lake in Great Britain, Loch Lomond has attractive hills & mountains on both sides and also 38 islands. We will stop at the south end of the loch, in a small town called **Balloch** where you will have the opportunity of going on a one-hour trip* on the loch in a well-equipped cruise boat. If you don't fancy a boat trip, you're welcome to explore Loch Lomond Shores, with convenient shops and breath-taking views over the loch.

From Loch Lomond we travel towards an area of Scotland called the **Trossachs**, a beautiful wild region of lochs, mountains, rivers and forests - indeed the word Trossachs means 'wild area' in Gaelic, Scotland's ancient native language and which is still spoken by about 60,000 people. Soon we reach another small village called **Aberfoyle** where we will stop for lunch.

From here the road now goes uphill and is called the Duke's Pass as it was paid for by the Duke of Montrose and opened in 1885. Driving over the Duke's Pass we may stop for photos if the visibility is good before getting a glimpse of **Loch Drunkie**, and nearby.



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We will now get our first view of the mountains before lovely Loch Achray comes into view - often there are Highland cattle in a field near the loch - very attractive animals with thick long coats and huge horns. As we drive around the loch we pass by a building that looks like a castle but was actually built as a hotel in 1849 when tourists started coming to the area.

We drive through a small village called Brig o'Turk, where our Queen Victoria stopped about 150 years ago for a meal and afterwards gave a gold sovereign to the landlady - her name was Muckle Kate ('Muckle' = big!) and then comes Loch Venacher, popular with fishermen and water-sports enthusiasts.

We now leave the Trossachs, drive through the small town of Callander and soon we come to the village of Doune. As we leave the village and cross over the river Teith, we get a good view of Doune Castle, built in the 14thc. and impressively situated above the river. A very popular film called 'Monty Python and the Holy Grail' was filmed here in 1975.

Soon we approach Stirling with the Wallace Monument coming into view. It is 67 metres high and was built in the 1860's to commemorate our great freedom fighter, William Wallace, who defeated the English at the Battle of Stirling Bridge in 1297 and was immortalised in the 1995 film 'Braveheart'. The battle took place on and beside an old wooden bridge over the river Forth, close to the hill (Abbey Craig) on which the monument stands.

Stirling was always known in days gone by as the 'Key to the Kingdom' because of its geographical position close to the centre of Scotland - it was said that to control Scotland in olden days, you had to control Stirling. You will have the chance to visit and explore Stirling Castle* which sits high on a large volcanic rock : the site has been fortified since ancient times although today's castle dates back mainly to the 15 - 17th centuries. The kings & queens of Scotland lived here during that period and it was not just a military base but also their home and it therefore has a palace, chapel, large banqueting hall & gardens as well as other buildings. It is well worth visiting and there are audio-guides available in several languages.

Once we leave Stirling Castle, we begin our journey home to Edinburgh, where our tour ends.

* This is an optional extra – the cost for this is not included in the price you have paid for the tour.