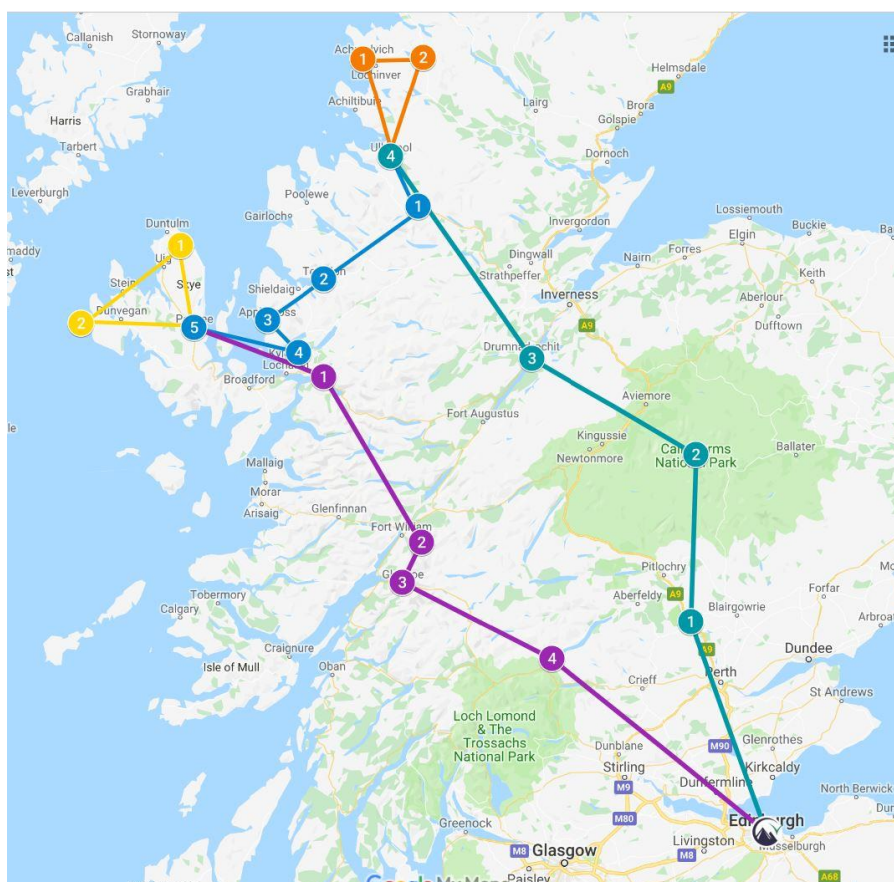


2019 Scotland Tour



Wednesday July 17th – Edinburgh, Scotland



We finish our smooth cruise across the North Sea and dock at the port of Edinburgh (Leith) at 2:30 AM.

We are required to vacate our staterooms at 8 AM. At 8:45 AM we quickly clear United Kingdom Passport Control, conveniently set up in the ship's lounge.

Now, Marie had suggested that if we were ending our Norway voyage in Edinburgh, why not spend some time in the city and then tour the Northern Scotland countryside. She found a good sounding tour with the Rabbie's company, their five day "Highland Explorer – Skye & Far North". We sign up. So, we

will spend one day in Edinburgh and then start the five-day tour, and then fly home. The map above shows our tour route, with a different color (green, orange, blue yellow, and purple for each day).

Marcia found a hotel in Edinburgh that we think will be perfect for us, for the one night after we depart the ship and then another night when we finish the tour. It is the "28 on York" and they will store our extra luggage, for a small fee, while we are on the tour.

Now, we were concerned about finding a taxi to take us to central Edinburgh (and the cost). We were delighted to find, for a reasonable fee that the Azamara is offering shuttles to the airport for those with

early departures, a shuttle for a tour of the Castle and then onto the airport for those with later departures, and shuttles to St. Andrews Square in central Edinburgh for those that are staying in town.

At 9 AM the four of us depart the ship for the last time and, for a fee of \$15 per person, board a shuttle van. It's just the four of us. A very pleasant trip to St. Andrews Square. The driver points us in the direction of our hotel. We find it is a short 100-yard walk, downhill with our luggage, to the 28 on York. We know that check in will not be until 3 PM but that they will store our luggage for us. The hotel manager gives us directions to the famous Edinburgh Castle. We can see the bus station from where we will start tomorrow's tour, only 100 yards away.

We start walking to the Castle and the Royal Mile, first seeing a monument in St. Andrews Square and a Church. There are many tourists on the streets. The weather is OK. Temperatures are in the 60s with an overcast.



We enter the Edinburgh Castle.



We get great views of the city from the castle walls.



The castle is the home of the Scottish Crown Jewels and the Royal Apartments. The interior is quite nice, but photography is limited.





The streets around the castle have beautiful old structures lining them. We find a nice restaurant for lunch...great burgers.

We walk back to our hotel to check in. Below is a view of York Street, where our hotel is, and the front of the hotel.





To the left is a view from our room.

At 6 PM the four of us meet and walk to a great pizza restaurant recommended by the hotel staff.

Back at the hotel, each couple packs the clothing and supplies that we will need for the upcoming five-day tour into one-wheel duffle bag, the ones we received from Vantage Travel for our African safari last year.

We all get a good nights' sleep. There is no air conditioning, but we open a window.

Thursday July 18th – Scottish Highlands



Today we start our five-day tour with Rabbie's. This first day looks like it will be one of our longer days on the road. We will be traveling the "green line" today, Edinburgh to Ullapool (#4), with frequent stops. A highlight today should be stopping at Loch Ness (#3 on the green line).

Each couple has incorporated needed clothes and supplies into one small duffle bag to fit in the van we will be traveling in. It will be in a 16-passenger van with a driver/tour guide. We will be buying our own meals, with appropriate stops by our guide and recommendations, and staying at accommodations we have booked ourselves, sometimes with Rabbie's recommendations.

We meet for breakfast at 7:30 AM, then check out of our hotel and leave them with our large luggage as we will be back. We walk 100 yards from our hotel to the bus terminal to meet our van and guide at 9 AM. Our guide is Billy. He quickly loads the van; we take our seats and head off for the Highlands.



Above is an interior photo of our van. We have a full group of 16 people. There are single seats on the left, double seats on the right, and a bench seat in the back. Billie drives on the right-hand side...this is Scotland. Billy likes to talk and has a nice Scottish brogue. He has a large map pinned to the ceiling and shows us where we are going each day. He updates our position as we travel. He talks to us thru the van's excellent PA system. It appears to us that our vehicle will be most comfortable.

We soon stop for coffee at the Firth of Forth, the large body of water just north of Edinburgh. We stay here for about half-an-hour. We view the large road bridge and the railroad bridge that crosses the water. This also gives us a chance to meet and chat with our fellow travelers. We learn that the four of us are the only ones from the USA. Our new friends are:

- A young single man from Quebec, Canada. He later tells us he booked this trip to meet a red-headed girl, as he heard there are a lot of them in Scotland.
- A young single lady from mainland China. She is attending college in Edinburgh.
- An energetic couple from British Columbia, Canada. They will be touring Ireland on another Rabbie's tour after this one.
- An eight-member, three generation family of Indian origin. Vijay and Cyrus are brothers. With them are their mother, wives and their three children. Vijay and his family live in Britain and Cyrus' in Singapore.

We find out later that they all met in London a couple of weeks ago to watch the World Cricket Championships. After that they watched the semi-finals at the Wimbledon tennis tournament!



Our next stop is at 10:45 AM in Dunkeld. We spend time at the Dunkeld Cathedral. It is now part of the Church of Scotland (Anglican). We learn that it was built in stages over 200 years between the year 1260 and 1501. We really enjoy walking the grounds in the area and seeing the river. A good weather day!



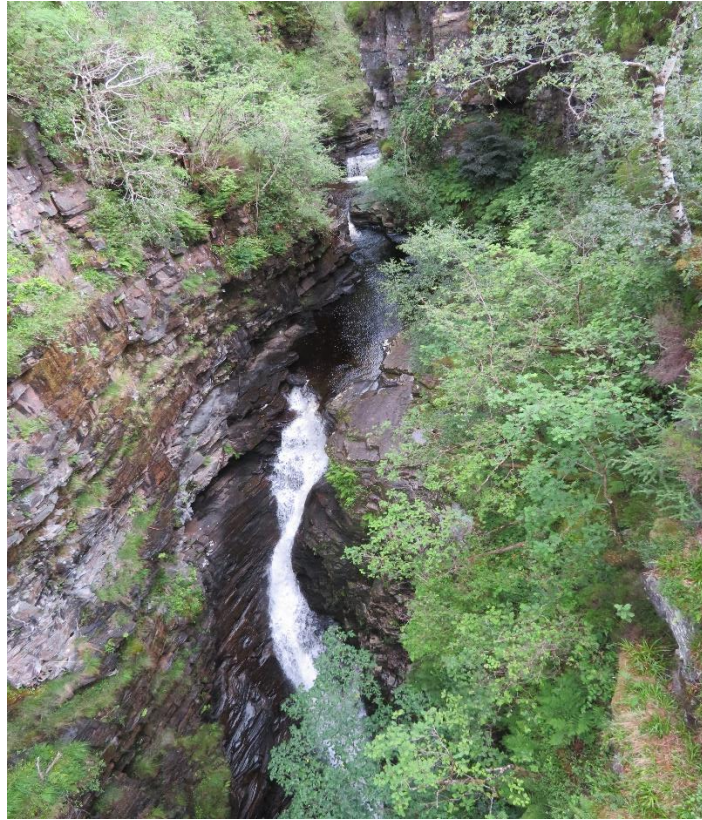
We next drive into the pretty town where we enjoy walking around. Billy has suggested a good Deli where we buy sandwiches for lunch. We walk back towards the van, parked by the river, where we eat lunch at picnic tables in a small riverside park.

We now drive thru a nice national park and proceed towards Loch Ness, arriving at 2 PM. We learn that the Loch is 27 miles long and 750 feet deep, making it the largest in the United Kingdom in volume. We do not see the monster; "Nessie".



We next set off on a hike to the Rogie Falls and Corrieshalloch Gorge where the River Droma plunges over 330 feet.





We now drive to our last destination of the day, the seaside town of Ullapool. We arrive about 6 PM. Billy states we drove 250 miles today. He drops folks off at the lodgings each had reserved. Some are at B&Bs. The Indian origin families are at a hotel. Rabbie e-mailed us that they could not get us into any larger lodgings in town and recommended that the four of us try to get lodgings at the Ferry Boat Inn. We do. Billie drops us off on the road right by the pretty harbor. We see our inn. We know that it only has eight sleeping rooms. We will be staying here for two nights.



He asks us to all walk to the Tesco Supermarket tomorrow morning where he will pick us up at 8:45 AM. He recommends that we go into the supermarket and pick up food for our lunch tomorrow. He gives us

six recommendations for places to have dinner at tonight. One is the Ferry Boat Inn, so we remember to try to make dinner reservations when we check in.



The rooms appear most comfortable and airy. We have a great view of the harbor from our bedroom window. We meet at 7 PM for dinner at the inn. Above is a picture of the bar area where people are dining. We eat in the dining room, which has perhaps six tables, on the other side of the lobby. It is apparent that the inn is mostly a “local hangout”. Our dinners are very good.



After dinner we walk around town for a while. We see many nice homes with lots of flowers.

We find a restaurant that opens early enough for our breakfast tomorrow before we need to depart. We make sure to find the Tesco Supermarket so that we can find it in the morning and stop in to see what they may have for us to pick up, tomorrow morning, for our lunches.

Weather today has been good, with just a couple of showers that did not affect us.

Friday July 19th – North of Ullapool



After a good night's sleep at the Ferry Boat Inn the four of us meet at 7:30 AM and start to walk to the meeting place at the Tesco Supermarket.

We first stop at the restaurant we had found last night and have coffee and scones for our breakfast.

After the quick breakfast we find the Tesco and pick up some food for our lunch. Everyone shows up on time and we depart in our van at 8:50 AM.

Today we will be covering the route shown in orange on the map at our left. Driver/Guide Billy says we will be driving less than 100 miles today, versus the 250 miles we traveled yesterday. He tells us we will be mostly on one lane roads.



We first stop at Ardmair Beach. Weather is nice. Next stop is the Coigach Overlook.



There are statues of two famous Scottish inventors on the trail. Our next stop, left below, is the Calda House. This was the residence of the famous and powerful Mackenzie Clan before it burned in 1730.



Next, we drive to Ardvreck, above right, built in 1600. Our friend from BC, Canada has climbed into it.



Above, Marcia, Marie and Kal at the castle. We run into another Rabbie's tour group, on the shorter three-day tour. Their guide is dressed in a traditional kilt, unlike our guide, Billy!



Above is a photo of a winding, one lane road like we have been driving on all day. Above, right, is our very good Driver/Guide, Billy, showing us where we are on his map.



We stop for a stroll by a small stream that ends up running down to Clachtoll Beach, a beautiful isolated place on the very northwest of Scotland.



It is another good weather day; sunny with temperatures in the 60s. We next stop at the Stoer Head Lighthouse. Built in 1870 it is one of 200 that ring the coast of Scotland. It now has an automated beacon which can be seen at a range of 28 miles. Great views. Also, the ruins of a WWII observation post.



After lunch, which we eat as we ride in our van, we stop at Achmelvív Beach. We are surprised to see people in the water. We are as far north as the central part of Canada's Hudson Bay, but we are told the water is warmed by the gulf stream. I waded in to check this out.

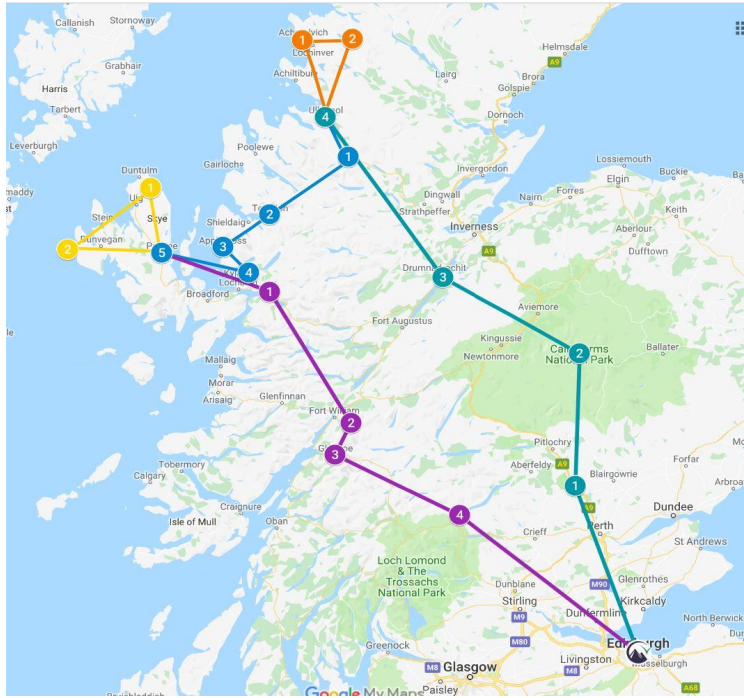


In addition to the great views, we have seen a lot of domesticated and wild animals today.



We return to Ullapool a little after 6 PM and Billy drops each of the travelers off at our hotels. The four of us will be staying at the Ferry Boat Inn for a second night. We have another good dinner in their restaurant. Tomorrow, we will travel to the Isle of Skye, said to be a real highlight of this tour.

Saturday July 20th – Portree



We wake up this morning at the Ferry Boat Inn and surprised to see a large, new Viking cruise ship anchored in the small town of Ullapool. This looks like a good time to get out of town!

Billy drives to all of the various hotels we are staying in and picks us and our luggage all up for today's travels to Portree. We are the last to be picked up at 8:40 AM. This day's route is shown in blue on the above map. We will arrive later today at the town of Portree, shown by #5 on the map, on the Isle of Skye.

Billy has been trying to set up a short boat trip for us but was unable to get seats for us. Maybe because it is Saturday, but I suspect it may have something to do with the big cruise ship. This may be OK as it does not look like a good weather day; it is misty and foggy.

We start our drive but immediately stop when Billy sees a sheep dog competition underway. We stop and enjoy watching the competition, meeting some of the dogs and chatting with their owners.





We stop at several areas for nice views. I take a picture of Cyrus and his family, who live in Singapore. The young daughter is quite intelligent and entergetic; we all are enjoying her. The son, I think, is finding this a little slow paced; he really enjoyed the earlier cricket championships in London.



We slow down several time to view the unique “shaggy” Highland Cattle.

At noontime we stop at Shildaig for coffee. At 1:30 PM we stop at another town, right on the ocean, for our lunch at the Applecross Inn. This is a popluar restaurant and the Aston-Martin car club is here.



The weather has cleared and it is at a nice temperature. We enjoy walking around and exploring the town, the cars, and the views before lunch.

Here we are at lunch. At our table is the nice couple from Victoria, British Columbia, Canada. The young fellow from Quebec is also at our table, but he does not allow anyone to take his

photo! We joke that maybe he is in the Witness Protection Program!



We drive on winding, one lane roads and see more great views. The weather turned out to be OK.

At 6:30 PM we arrive in Portree, where we will be staying for the next two nights. It is a nice, large town on the sea on the Isle of Skye. We are told 10,000 people live on the Isle with 6000 living in Portree.



We are all again staying in different hotels. Billy either drops us off or directs each of us to our hotel. The four of us are the only ones staying at the Rosedale Hotel, which was booked for us by Rabbie's. It looks great; right on the sea with nice views from our room of the harbor. We covered 190 miles today.





Our room is great.

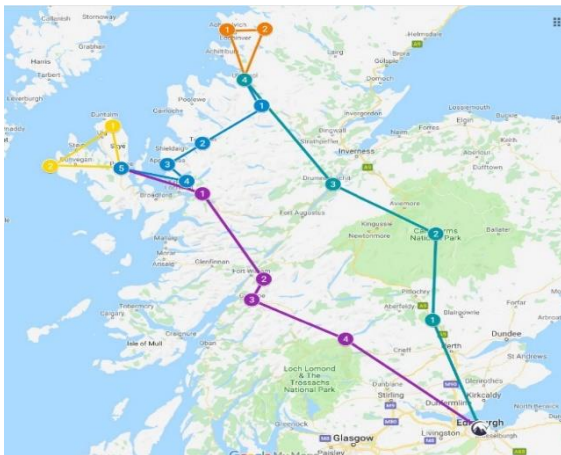
Marie and Kal are assigned a first floor room in the “annex”, and it’s quite a bit smaller than ours, but it does have a unique 4-poster bed.

Today is Marie’s birthday and we want to celebrate at dinner. We walk to several restaurants on the shore line and they are all packed with long waiting lists; it’s a busy Saturday night.

We walk back to our hotel and the super friendly staff says they are full but will try to

find a spot for us. They soon do, and we have a nice dinner.

Sunday July 21st – Isle of Skye



Today we will be exploring the Isle of Skye. Our route is shown in yellow on the map to the left.

After our included breakfast at the hotel we walk down the beach area to a distant viewpoint. We view the seashore of the town from a distance and the “Pencil” mountain.

Billy has asked all of us to meet him at 10 AM at the Town Square to start off on today’s drive.

We all show up and we start off on today’s drive.





We stop for many great views. It is overcast and windy.



We see many sheep out grazing. Billy tells us Scotland has 6 million people and 20 million sheep. We visit ruins from a castle built in the 1400s.

We also stop and visit a reconstructed old village.



At 12:45 PM we stop for an hour-and-a-half in a nice village for lunch.



There is also a small craft brewery across the square from the restaurants. Here, Billy mans the “tasting bar” serving the nice couple from British Columbia, Canada.

We get back on the van and see more great views. We continue driving on very narrow roads.



We stop for a hike. Above are Marie, Marcia and I. Also bothers Vijay’s and Cyrus’ 3-generation family.



It starts raining, quite heavily.

We stop at the Talisher Distillery which has been distilling Scotch since 1830.

Billy tells us that there are 127 or more distilleries in Scotland. He is well known at this distillery so is allowed to conduct the tasting for our group, as he did at the brewery.

Don't worry, he has not been imbibing!

We return to Portree at 6 PM and walk back to the

Rosedale Hotel for our second night's stay. We traveled 110 miles today.



We invite Marie and Kal to see our room, much larger than theirs! Marcia and I always seem to be so lucky on these room assignments.

We have a great dinner at the Sea Breezes Restaurant, a short walk along the shore line from our hotel.

Monday July 22nd – Drive back to Edinburgh



Today we will be finishing our five day Rabbie's tour of the Scottish Highlands. We will be traveling on the "purple line" route from Portree on the Island of Skye back to Edinburgh, Scotland. It will be a long drive.



Billy picks us all up at our various lodgings and we start off at 8:40 AM. We first stop at a old stone bridge near Cuillen and walk around for a bit.



At 10:30 AM we reach the southern side of the Isle of Skye to take a small ferry across the channel. We have to wait for the ferry to take over a couple of vehicles in front of the short line we are in. Billy says

he needs eight of us to go on this first ferry. About half of our group does so. It is cold and rainy. Marcia, is the eighth on the ferry, where she catches a picture of fellow travelers on this wet and windy day.



She also gets a photo of our van, left behind. I am comfortably seated in the van!



The ferry comes back and I jump off the van to get a photo of Billy driving on board. I get back on the van for the short 10 minute trip over. We drive off and pick up the shivering folks that went on the first ferry...they did have a little shack on shore for some to huddle in. Marcia is soaked and not happy.

At 12:45 PM we stop for coffee and watch a surging stream across the street; it has been pouring.





We drive on for a view of the highest mountain in Scotland, Mt. Nevis at 4115 feet. However, it is a rainy, foggy and cloudy day; there is no view at all of the Mountain.

To the left is a picture of Mt. Nevis that I have taken from the internet.

At 2 PM we stop at a great country pub for lunch. There is said to be nice views at the ends of their two hiking trails, but it is pouring, cold and foggy so no one goes on a hike. Lunch is excellent.

Back on the road, it stops raining at 4 PM. At 4:35 we stop and view the Falls of Dochart and an hour later Loch Lubnaig. The sun has now come out.



As we drive towards Edinburgh, at 6 PM we see Doune Castle, originally built in the 1300s and rebuilt in the 1400s. Later, we see Stirling Castle where Mary Queen of Scots was crowned in 1520.



At 7 PM we are back in Edinburgh and Billy drops us off at the Bus Station. He says we have driven 920 miles during the past five days. We say our goodbyes to all and the four of us walk less than 100 yards back to our hotel, 28 on York.

We find that our heavy suitcases, that have been in their storage, have been delivered to our rooms. We ask the friendly manager how to catch a taxi to the airport for our morning flights. She says “You don’t want to do that. The last stop on the Tram is right in front of the hotel. Take the tram in the morning to the first stop on the line, the airport”. Later, I walk over to the Tram stop and check the schedule. Friendly locals, waiting for the next tram, show me how we can buy tickets from a machine in the morning and give me tips on what the ride will be like.

The Hotel Manager gives us suggestions for a dinner spot. We end up having an excellent meal at a German themed restaurant.

Tuesday July 23rd – Travel Home

Today we go home. We check out of our hotel at 7:30 AM and walk, with our luggage, 50 yards to the Tram Stop. This hotel, which Marcia found, was perfectly located for us and made the Scotland part of trip most convenient. The ships’ shuttle dropped us off 100 yards from the hotel, we were less than 100 yards from the Bus Station where the Rabbie’s tour started and ended, and 50 yards from the Tram stop.



We each easily buy our tickets from a machine for 6 pounds (\$7.50).

We wheel our luggage right onto the tram. We are comfortably seated for the 9 mile trip, with 16 quick stops, to the Edinburgh Airport. The trip takes 35 minutes.

At the airport tram station we walk 100 yards to the airport entrance and quickly check in.

Marie and Kal have a special credit card that gives them access to a private airport lounge. They get

us admitted to the lounge as their guests and we relax to wait for our flights.

Marcia and my flight, on an old American Airlines 757, takes off on time at 10:45 AM. We have paid a little extra to secure Economy Max seats in an exit row. We have 4 feet of leg room for our 9 hour flight! We pick up 6 hours in time flying across the Atlantic Ocean and land on time in Philadelphia. Our flight to Pittsburgh lands on time a little before 6 PM. Our dear daughter picks us up and drives us home.

Marie and Kal's United Airlines flight to Chicago is delayed at for at least an hour. They take off from Edinburgh at 12:30 PM, then drive home to Dayton.

This has been a long vacation, 25 days, but a great one.

The short stay in Oslo at the start was enjoyable.

The 16 day all inclusive cruise on the Azamara Journey, found and suggested by Marie and Kal, was wonderful. I know I enjoyed nearly every minute of every day. We are glad we went this year, as the schedule for their Norway cruise for next July has been published and they are not going to be allowed to cruise up the fiord to Flam or the fiord to Geiranger, as Norway has banned all but Solar or Liquified Natural Gas powered cruise ships (yet to be developed or built) to sail into those fiords. For me, these were the highlights of the trip!

Our day in Edinburgh was enjoyable

The 5 day Rabbie's land tour of the Scottish Highlands, found by Marie, was also wonderful. I enjoyed our Driver/Guide, the route, the food, accomodations, fellow travelers and, of course, the land and people.

As always, Marie and Kal were great to travel with.