

Planning Tips [Where, Length, When, Costs]

Decide Where You Want To Go - Once you decide on your destination(s), whether Scotland or Northern Ireland (you may even include England or Wales). Does these destinations include multiple cities on the mainland as well as some of the Isles?

Example: Scotland to include Edinburgh, Glasgow, Oban and Isle of Colonsay

Decide the Length of Your Trip - Once you determine your destination(s), what is the length of your each destination? NOTE: Remember to take into account that the main travel time across the "Big Pond" from any country should be included in your length of tri. Some departure countries take longer than other countries in travel time. Atlanta, USA is 9 hours total travel to Edinburgh but returning is 14 hours due to a 3 ½ layover at Heathrow Airport.

Example of a trip which has approximately 12 days in length:

Depart Atlanta, USA @ 10:20pm

Arrive in Edinburgh (thru Heathrow) on Tuesday mid-day, stay 3 days

Train ride (45 mins to 1 hr 15 mins) to Glasgow for 2 days

Train ride from Glasgow Queen Station to Oban (3 hrs, 15 mins), stay the night

Ferry (about 2 hrs, 20 mins) from Oban to Isle of Colonsay for 2 days

Ferry back from Colonsay to Oban for 2 days

Train (4 hrs 15 or 45 mins, varies) from Oban to Edinburgh for one night

Fly home from Edinburgh to USA (leaves about 10am thru Heathrow to USA)-Travel all day

Between each location, transportation (trains, buses, driving yourself, flying, even tours) will also have a bearing on the length of your stay. Each venue of transportation can have a different travel time as well as cost. Flying versus train to and from the same location can make 2 hours difference in travelling when you are trying to save time but costs will be a factor as well.

When Do You Wish to Go - The time of year you plan your trip may be determined by your budget, if children are travelling with adults and weather. When is low versus high tourist season? High tourist season usually has higher costs for flights, transportation between destination(s) and accommodation(s).

- The best time to visit Scotland is in **spring** (May – June), and **fall** (September – October). This is when the weather is most likely to be dry and pleasant. The high season is in the **summer**, from July – August, but the crowds will be quite high, and there are chances of rain as well.
- Shoulder season in Ireland is April, May, early June and early October. Shoulder season has the distinct advantage of retaining many **summer** travel perks: longer days, good weather and extended shopping hours. Low season is November through March – the **winter**-weather months in Ireland. The peak months of the tourist season are July and August. **Spring** flowers are at their best in April and May, and October offers many arts festivals.

Costs for your Trip - Now that you have your "where, length and when" for your trip, it's time to look at your costs.

Airfares: Finding the best deals on flights can be wee bit tricky but signing up for "price alerts" such as Hopper.com, Airfarewatchdog.com or Scott's Cheap Flights can help you to keep the price down. You may not use these websites to actually buy you tickets as the fares directly with the airlines do not vary that much and majority of the time are the same price. You also want to compare prices so use search engines as well like Kayak.com, Google Flights or Skyscanner.com.

So how far in advance should one buy their tickets. The average for Europe flights which include the UK and Ireland is approximately 120 days. For example, you can purchase tickets in October for the following year's April trip or how about buying in May for October trip! You can get great prices on either trip because of your price alerts. They say practice makes perfect which is not necessarily always true but by spending some time looking at flights, you'll know what the average prices are during the year. This helps you spot those good deals.

If you have the opportunity to use any unused sky miles or avios points, use them! If not, sometimes signing up for a new credit or upgrading your current credit card can get you miles quickly to use for your flight as well. There are tons of credit cards that give you miles for purchases.

Accommodations: There are so many websites on the internet to book with as well as to compare prices, so how do you decide which to use without your head spinning around? So just like your airline tickets, you can use some of the same sites for hotels or even rental cars. (Hopper.com, Airfarewatchdog.com, Kayak.com, Experida.com) to do comparisons. Some favorites are AirBnb.com and Booking.com. If you have a group of 4 or more and need 2 rooms, then sometimes looking for a full apartment is better. You also want to take into consideration some of the following items: En suite (private bathroom), lifts (elevators if you can't handle stairs), wifi, if you hire (rent) a car, parking or are you near rail stations or bus routes if you are not in walking distance to tourist sites and eating places.

Hiring (renting) a Car: Remember that unless you specifically request an automatic, you will get a manual (stick) car! Take into account that you will be driving from the opposite side of the car and road as well as roundabouts everywhere. Use the same sites for rental cars above and remember that sometimes you get discounts booking accommodations and car if using a site like Expedia, etc. Check out VisitScotland (<https://www.visitscotland.com/travel/>) as this has the top rentals. Some countries have automobile associations such as AAA (in USA) so you can get a membership discount. Other associations for retire (pensioners) age groups (AARP in USA) gives discounts as well so use your age to your advantage if needed! NOTE: When hiring a car-DO NOT pay for the collision as part of the rental as you can have this with your Travel Insurance and your credit card has coverage too. The Hiring companies cannot make you take the collision insurance.

Transportation: If you are utilizing trains, you can get a general idea of cost from their websites but keep in mind that you will use taxis, ubers or buses during your trip too. You cannot really take into account those costs but you can use extra currency or credit cards to pay for these.

Travel Insurance: Accidents happen everywhere and you should always be covered. You should never leave home without travel insurance. You can check out some of the Travel Insurance Companies on the Travel Guide page. They all give free quotes without any obligation. VERY IMPORTANT – always purchase your travel insurance within a week or two after booking your flight and accommodations, even rental car so you can include in the total price for your quote. Sometimes it helps to speak to customer service how to break down the cost if you have a family travelling as each of you will require separate coverage even if under the same quote.