



# ITINERARY GUIDE

# ITINERARIES

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# 24 HOURS IN ABERDEEN



This 24-hour itinerary introduces your clients to the people, places and past that make Aberdeen so captivating.

It won't take long for your clients to fall in love with Aberdeen. This friendly city-on-the-sea has it all, from golden beaches and a profound maritime heritage to cutting-edge culture and cobbled streets.

Aberdeen is known as the Granite City. Much of its impressive architecture is built of the silvery-grey rock, hewn from nearby quarries. And when the sun shines, Aberdeen sparkles, which is why it's also nicknamed the Silver City.

## DAY 1

Start in the heart of the city, at **Aberdeen Art Gallery**. The joint Art Fund Museum of the Year 2020 recently had a £34.6m revamp, ensuring its nationally important collection of art from the last 700 years is displayed in style. Don't miss the panoramic city views from the gallery's roof.

From here, your clients can walk the short way to **Provost Skene's House** or **Aberdeen Maritime Museum**, taking in **Marischal College**, one of the world's biggest granite buildings, along the way.

Dating from 1545, **Provost Skene's House** is the oldest surviving house in Aberdeen. Recently refurbished, it profiles 100 local pioneers whose influence can be felt throughout this corner of Scotland – and the world.

**Aberdeen Maritime Museum** tells the story of the city's long seafaring heritage, from shipbuilding and fishing to oil and gas. See the entire deck of a steamer, a whaler's harpoon and marvel at the 9-metre-tall scale model of the mighty Murchison oil platform. The top floor overlooks Aberdeen Harbour, whose history spans almost 900 years.

Time for some fresh air! The sunken gardens of **Union Terrace Gardens** were originally opened in 1879. Following a £25.7m regeneration, there will be three pavilions for eating, drinking and culture, surrounded by statues and the spires of some of Aberdeen's finest architecture. Or, you could get a head start on the afternoon's activities and head west to explore **Johnston Gardens**. This tranquil park is Insta-candy, with rockeries, streams, mini waterfalls and towering trees. Frothy textures and colours abound.

It's a 5-minute walk from Johnston Gardens to **Gordon Highlanders Museum**, which tells the stories of the extraordinary men of "The Finest Regiment in the World," from the Napoleonic Wars to The Cold War. There's a replica WWI trench and the largest collection of Victoria Crosses outside the Imperial War Museum. Groups can sit down to a Regimental Dinner in the Officers' Mess, complete with authentic regimental silver, crystal, crockery and a piper.



With understated luxury and an award-winning restaurant in a 19th century building, the 72-room **Chester Hotel** is always an elegant choice.

For wow factor and great value, check in your clients to the 218-room **Sandman Signature Hotel & Spa**, in the enormous and iconic Robert Gordon University Building behind Aberdeen Art Gallery.

In a modern building just off Aberdeen's 'Granite Mile,' the 185-room **Park Inn by Radisson Aberdeen** is a reliable place for guests on a budget.

## DID YOU KNOW?

**Footdee is locally known as 'Fittie'. This mid-19th-century former fishing village was designed by John Smith – he was also behind Balmoral Castle – and it's one of the UK's most unique communities.**

## DAY 2

Your clients can spot dolphins at **Torry Battery** year-round. A pod of bottlenose dolphins – the largest bottlenose dolphins in the world, in fact – lives at the mouth of Aberdeen Harbour, making this one of the best places in the UK to spot the creatures from land. Torry Battery, an historic monument on a hill, juts out from Aberdeen where the River Dee meets the ocean, meaning expansive views of Aberdeen Harbour and out across the North Sea. Maximise your clients' chance of seeing the cetaceans with some guided dolphin spotting. If they're lucky, they might also see seals, otters and whales. Charity Greyhope Bay is converting a few shipping containers into an off-grid eco-facility with a glass-fronted viewing platform and a café with views of the waves here, too.

Head north to **Old Aberdeen** on the banks of the city's other river, the Don, and follow the cobbled streets to the huge twin spires of St Machar's Cathedral. This 15th-century cathedral is Aberdeen's oldest building still in active use, although this dramatic riverside spot has been a site of Christian worship for 1,500 years. Once inside, encourage clients to turn their gaze skywards to see the heraldic ceiling; there are 48 colourful coats of arms up there. Speaking of arms... Rumour has it that William Wallace's left arm is interred in the walls here.

A **Nuart** guided tour will bring your clients bang up to date with Aberdeen's artistic side. Every April, huge murals are painted on the city centre buildings for Nuart Festival of street art. A guided tour of the street art is sure to leave your clients with the impression that they've uncovered an ancient city with a bright future.



## EAT

Explore charming Footdee (Aberdeen's quirky fishing quarter) when you take your clients to dine at **The Silver Darling**. It's in Aberdeen Harbour's former Customs House and the views are as enticing as the fine, fresh Scottish produce.

In a prime spot on Union Street, **The Esselmont Bar & Restaurant** pays homage to its past as one of Aberdeen's finest department stores with its stylish décor and seasonal menus.

Simple, local produce is on the menu at **Kirk View Café & Bistro**, making it a great spot for everything from brunch to prosecco afternoon tea to pre-theatre meals.



# ABERDEENSHIRE'S CASTLES & GARDENS

Over the centuries, Aberdeenshire has built up a collection of around 300 castles, stately homes and the fabulous gardens that so often surround them. That's more castles per acre than any other county in the UK. No wonder Aberdeenshire is known as Castle Country.

It's not just the sheer number of castles that will blow your clients' minds. It's the variety. There are spine-tingling ruins perched high on sea cliffs, opulent mansions surrounded by manicured gardens, and castles that would look completely at home in a fairy tale.

As you'd expect, these castles come with more than their fair share of gruesome, grand and downright delicious stories. From Viking raids to tales of ghosts and ploughmen, your clients will wish these walls – and walled gardens – really could talk!

This itinerary helps your clients get a taste of Castle Country – although in two days, they're only scraping the tip of the turret as far as Aberdeenshire's amazing castles are concerned.

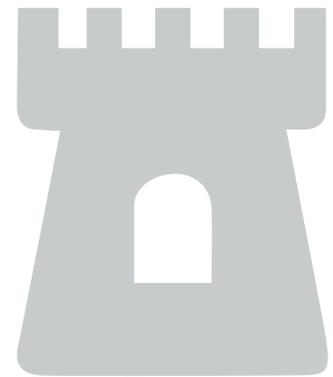
## DAY 1: CLIFFTOP RUINS, TURRETS AND TOWER HOUSES

There are plenty of ruined coastal fortresses along Aberdeenshire's coastal cliffs, but the most spectacular might just be **Dunnottar Castle**. The site, a dramatic rocky outcrop surrounded on three sides by the North Sea, is a photographer's dream. It's also the story of Scottish history laid out in one incredible place. The site is believed to have been in use since the fifth century when Saint Ninian established it as a place of Christian worship. It was here that Vikings killed King Donald II of Scotland, and legend has it that William Wallace burned English soldiers alive in the 13th-century stone chapel, parts of which are still standing.

From Dunnottar, your clients can head inland to visit two of Royal Deeside's most remarkable castles.

While Dunnottar Castle is all crumbling walls and crashing waves, **Crathes Castle** is a fairy tale of turrets, intricately painted ceilings and fine antique furniture. Don't miss the Horn of Leys, a gift to the family from Robert the Bruce, which hangs over the fireplace in the castle's Great Hall. Warn your clients to keep their eyes open (or shut!) in case the ghost of the Green Lady drifts past. Guided tours will fill them in on all the spooky details! Outside, the historic walled garden and sculpted, 300-year-old yew hedges give way to nature trails and gorgeous views back towards the 16th-century Scottish tower house.

Not far away, sprawling **Drum Castle** is one of Scotland's oldest tower houses. Its 700-year-long history encompasses tales of Bonnie Prince Charlie and the Battle of Culloden. The headily scented Garden of Historic Roses shows how the blooms were cultivated from the 17th to 20th centuries; request a guided tour with the head gardener. A peaceful stroll through the adjoining ancient oak forest, inhabited by badgers, red squirrels, roe deer and red kites, is the perfect way to end the day.



### DID YOU KNOW?

**Mary Queen of Scots stayed at Dunnottar Castle twice, and the Scottish Crown Jewels found safe haven here during the 17th-century War of Three Nations.**

### DID YOU KNOW?

**Craigievar Castle is said to have inspired Walt Disney's Cinderella castle.**

## DAY 2: PLOUGHMEN, PAINTINGS AND PRODUCE

As well as admiring a 17th-century walled garden and six miles of clipped box hedge, visitors to **Pitmedden Garden & Museum of Farming Life** can take a deep dive into Aberdeenshire's agricultural heritage. They can even meet British Horse Drawn Plough Champion Jim Elliot (Downton Abbey fans might recognise him) for a talk on farming life and a horse-drawn plough demonstration – accompanied by a traditional Ploughman's lunch, naturally!

A seriously impressive collection of portraits adorns the walls of 800-year-old **Fyvie Castle**. The old fortress houses works by Raeburn, Gainsborough and Lawrence and a guided tour inside will introduce your clients to all manner of ghosts and folklore. For a truly unique experience, book a Seasonal Feast or Garden Tasting Tour to sample some of the produce grown in Fyvie's Scottish Fruit Garden.

There's something to enthrall your client at every level of **Castle Fraser, Garden & Estate**, from the parkland trails and traditional walled garden to the panoramic views of Aberdeenshire from the round tower. Added to and fortified since the 1450s, Castle Fraser is one of the largest tower houses in Scotland and it comes replete with secret staircases, a spy hole and hidden trapdoors. Warn your clients to be careful what they say in the Great Hall – they never know who might be eavesdropping from the Laird's Lug...

Don't be fooled by the clean lines of **Haddo House's** Palladian-style exterior, designed by renowned Scottish architect William Adam. Inside it's all Victorian opulence, including 85 Victorian paintings of Aberdeenshire castles – a treat for the biggest castle fans. Haddo was the family home of the Gordons for more than 400 years. More recently, it served as a maternity hospital during World War II. Step outside to explore the terrace garden, striking geometric flower beds and Haddo Country Park. It's a fairy-tale ending to your clients' tour of Aberdeenshire's castles and gardens.



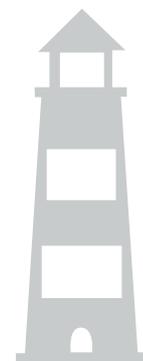
**Douneside House**, a country house with 13 bedrooms and a range of apartments and cottages, is the ideal retreat for clients who appreciate fresh air and fine food. The menus use plenty of home-grown organic produce from the hotel's kitchen garden. Groups of up to 12 can dine in the Library restaurant, surrounded by old books and next to an open fire.

**Meldrum House Country Hotel & Golf Course** prides itself on its hospitality. Your clients will be impressed by the 13th-century manor house's dining options, which include dome dining under the stars and drinks in the Cave Bar, which dates back to 1236.

**Macdonald Pittodrie House Hotel** has ancient grounds and 2,400 acres of scenic estate. The 27 bedrooms blend mod cons with countryside views. Some have original features, antiques and vistas of the perfect mountain shape of Bennachie.



# ABERDEENSHIRE'S COASTAL TRAIL



The 165-mile Aberdeenshire Coastal Trail stretches along the beautiful shoreline north and south of Aberdeen. Being well marked with brown and white Coastal Trail road signs, it's easy to follow. Your clients' biggest dilemma will be choosing where to stop.

This itinerary should help! It follows the northern route around Aberdeenshire's north-eastern tip, a stretch of the coast characterised by nature reserves, castles, towering cliffs and sandy coves. The people that live and work in the charming villages and towns are proud of their maritime heritage, and keen to share their stories with visitors.

## DID YOU KNOW?

Several of Aberdeenshire Sheepdogs' working Border Collies have competed and won at Scottish sheepdog trials.

## DAY 1: HEAD NORTH

Have your clients ever wondered how sheepdogs and their farmers are so in tune with each other? A working farm just 15 minutes out of Aberdeen has all the answers – plus a pack of cute (and very hard-working) sheepdogs to demonstrate. Michelle and Gary Bruce of **Aberdeenshire Sheepdogs** have a flock of stories about life on a Scottish sheep farm. They'll even let your clients have a go at working the dogs themselves – although it's nowhere near as easy as they make it look!

From there, head north along the coastal road, stopping off for an ice cream and a walk along sandy **Collieston Beach**. If your clients prefer more rugged scenery or love literature, they mustn't miss **Slains Castle**, standing on the very edge of the cliffs above Cruden Bay. It's a crumbling ruin now, but the empty giant windows framing the dramatic views make it easy to picture it as a celebrity haunt in the 19th century – apparently, it even gave Bram Stoker the inspiration for the setting of *Dracula*. Fans of *The Crown* will recognise it, too.

Next, whizz up the A90 to the most easterly town in Scotland and **Peterhead Prison Museum**. The notorious prison finally clanged shut in 2013 having been in use since 1888. Your clients will have an immersive experience of 'Scotland's Toughest Jail' as they sniff their way through the laundry area and listen to audio from the guards who worked here. Guided tours and an atmospheric night tour showing what prison life was like after lights out are available.



Check into **Kilmarnock Arms Hotel** for coastal walks to Slains Castle, Cruden Bay's historic harbour and sandy beach. Bram Stoker wrote the early chapters of *Dracula* here, but the hotel is decidedly cosy, not creepy!

Located towards the end of the coastal trail, **The Banff Springs Hotel** has 36 bedrooms, views across the Moray Firth and a restaurant that makes the most of the area's well-stocked natural larder.

With 44 modern bedrooms, three suites and an AA Rosette award for its restaurant, welcoming **Buchan Braes Hotel** has everything your client needs for a comfortable stay close to the coast.

## DAY 2: HEAD WEST

In Fraserburgh, on the north-eastern tip of Aberdeenshire, stands Kinnaird Head Lighthouse. Dating from 1787, it was the first lighthouse built on mainland Scotland. What makes the lighthouse even more remarkable is that it was built through the middle of 16th-century Kinnaird Head Castle. The purpose-built **Museum of Scottish Lighthouses** brings to life the stories of the engineers and keepers who tended it. After a guided tour and exploring all three attractions, make sure your clients save 30 minutes for tea and scones in the tea room with views across the treacherous seas that made the lighthouse so crucial.

Linger a little longer in Fraserburgh to wander along the golden-sand beach and learn more about town's history. Set in an old herring barrel store, **Fraserburgh Heritage Centre** has more than 20 exhibits that uncover the town's fishing heritage, Fraserburgh Railway's history, and why local merchant Thomas Blake Glover is known as the "Scottish Samurai". Friendly local volunteers are on hand to answer all your clients' questions.

On the way to Duff House, take a detour along the narrow winding road to **Pennan**, a tiny, colourful fishing village hunkered down between cliffs and the North Sea. Film buffs might recognise it from 1983's *Local Hero*, starring Burt Lancaster and Peter Capaldi, or 2016's *Whisky Galore* with James Cosmo and Eddie Izzard, but your clients don't need to know their A to Z of Hollywood to appreciate this beautiful little gem.

Magnificent **Duff House** is only a little over 11 miles from Pennan, but it feels a world away. This Georgian mansion is packed to the rafters with world-class artworks. The country house gallery's collection includes pieces by Gainsborough, El Greco and Ramsay, and its own history is just as colourful. Duff House's owner and its architect had a bitter feud that ended up in court. It has hosted royalty, been a hotel – twice – and during World War II, Duff House was used as a prisoner of war camp.

If your client started the Aberdeenshire Coastal Trail with an ice cream in Collieston (and even if they didn't!), suggest they bookend the trip with another ice cream, this time in **Portsoy**. At the time of writing, Portsoy Ice Cream's award-winning range includes more than 100 flavours! Carry a cone to Loch Soy or wander down to The Salmon Bothy in **Portsoy Harbour**. The lovingly restored salmon bothy is home to Portsoy's excellent community-run museum. It's the perfect example of the pride that local people have in Aberdeenshire coast's past, present and future.



# ADVENTURE IN ABERDEENSHIRE

Whether your clients want to bag Ben Macdui, Britain's second highest mountain, catch a glimpse of rutting stags, or picnic by the rushing waters of Linn of Dee just like Queen Victoria, there's something for every type of adventurer in Aberdeenshire. The experience can be as hardcore or gentle as your clients choose.

There's always something adventurous to do, come rain or shine. This itinerary includes a range of options to suit varying degrees of intrepidity, fitness and weather hardiness!



## DAY 1: GET ACTIVE

Spend an adrenaline-fuelled day exploring Aberdeenshire's coast, mountains or ancient pine forests by paddleboard, mountain bike or on foot.

Aberdeenshire's coastline is strung with ruined castles, sea cliffs, waterfalls, caves and coves – perfect for discovering by paddleboard.

**Stonehaven Paddleboarding** run paddleboard lessons and trips from sheltered Stonehaven Harbour. They paddle along Aberdeenshire's beautiful rivers, too.

Clients with a reasonable level of fitness and previous paddleboarding experience (which includes successfully completing Stonehaven Paddleboarding's Beginner Lesson) can nose along the sea cliffs below the picturesque ruins of Dunnottar Castle or join a sea safari to RSPB Fowlsheugh Nature Reserve. In spring and summer, 130,000 breeding seabirds populate Fowlsheugh's cliffs, including cute puffins, razorbills and kittiwakes. Your clients might spot seals, dolphins and, if they're lucky, maybe even minke whales. It's a long way from Stonehaven, so they'll catch a thrilling ride back on a super-fast RIB.

Inland, those with paddleboarding experience under their wetsuit can gain a new perspective on Royal Deeside as they ride the rapids (or not – it's up to them!) of the River Dee.

In the afternoon, swap paddles for pedals on a guided mountain bike excursion through Royal Deeside's glens, the Cairngorms National Park or the hills surrounding the River Don.

**Ride in Peace Adventure's** guided rides are as much about the views as they are the rush of the trail, and the riding experience is tailored to your clients' abilities. They can even bag a Munro on two wheels if they want.

If tide times and rough seas put the brakes on your clients' paddleboarding plans, or if they'd rather stay on their own two feet than pedal, a spot of wildlife watching could be just the thing.

**Wild Discovery** specialises in tailor-made, sustainable wildlife watching and photography experiences. Owners Dan and Rachel Brown are professional ecologists, and every aspect of their tours is rooted in conservation and local history.

On a tour exploring the Caledonian forests of Royal Deeside, your clients could spot – and even learn to track – pine martins, red squirrels, otters, golden eagles, ospreys, mountain hares and bellowing red deer, depending on the season. Wild Discovery also offer full day tours, e-bike safaris and off-shore experiences.

## DAY 2: GO WILD

Your small group and FIT clients lead the adventure on a **Braemar Highland Experience tour**. Do they want to understand the importance of whisky in Scottish culture? Take a deep-dive into local folklore? Go off-roading in a Land Rover Discovery? Whatever quickens your client's pulse, BHE's qualified mountain, hill and moorland leaders can make it happen.

For full immersion in Aberdeenshire's wild side, check out **Mar Lodge**, a 19th-century sporting lodge on a 29,000-hectare estate of moorland, mountains, wetlands and ancient Caledonian pine forest. Clients with a sense of adventure and love of wildlife will have the time of their lives here. Film buffs might recognise the dramatic landscape from the heart-stopping opening scene of *The Dark Knight Rises*.

The ranger-led walks, available on request, are a great introduction to some of Scotland's most iconic wildlife, including golden eagles, red deer, black grouse and red squirrels. They can be tailored to your clients' interests and abilities, and a post-walk whisky tasting is on offer, too.

There's something unforgettable to see all year round, but perhaps the best time of year to visit is autumn, when the clashing of antlers and roaring of rutting red deer rings out across the glens.



Tartan touches, Victorian heritage and Highland hues are woven through the **Deeside Inn's** comfortable bedrooms and restaurant in Ballater. Think fireside Victorian afternoon teas, winged armchairs and regular live music – the ideal retreat after a day outdoors.

The **Ship Inn** has stood on the edge of Stonehaven Harbour since 1771. Seven of the 11 cosy, en-suite bedrooms have harbour views. In the evening, book a seat at The Captain's Table restaurant, which specialises in seafood.

On the banks of the River Dee, **Banchory Lodge** is the perfect spot for outdoorsy clients to spend the night. As well as excellent food and bedrooms decked out in a whimsical Scottish style, the hotel is well placed for fly fishing, walking, hunting, cycling and golf.

## DID YOU KNOW?

**Mar Lodge Estate is the UK's largest National Nature Reserve and home to four of the UK's five highest mountains. It's also where the River Dee squeezes a gap in the rocks, at Linn of Dee gorge, Queen Victoria's favourite picnic spot.**



# ROYAL DEESIDE

This itinerary suggests a royal-worthy selection of things to see and do on a two-day journey along Royal Deeside. The historic route shadows the banks of the River Dee between Aberdeen, where the river spills out into the North Sea, and Braemar in the heart of the Cairngorms National Park.

Your clients will follow the rushing waters of the snow-fed river as it meanders through some of Scotland's bonniest countryside, taking in Caledonian pine forest-covered glens, mountains, pretty villages, whisky distilleries and castles that seem straight out of a fairy tale.

## DID YOU KNOW?

**Take a peek in The Fife Arms library to see a Madam Tussauds waxwork of Queen Victoria. The hotel also has an original Picasso and a photograph by Man Ray on display.**

## HOW TO EXPLORE ROYAL DEESIDE

There are lots of ways to explore Royal Deeside. Most visitors travel by road but it's also possible to paddle along sections of the river for a fish-eye view of the landscape. Others choose to hike or bike along the 41-mile-long Deeside Way from Aberdeen. It follows the old trainline that Queen Victoria used to take to Ballater, the nearest station to Balmoral Castle – the Royal residence where Queen Elizabeth is said to be at her happiest.

### DON'T MISS...

The first stop as your clients head west out of Aberdeen is **Crathes Castle**, an imposing 16th-century baronial castle with turrets, towers, fantastical gargoyles and antique furniture. The painted ceilings are well worth craning necks for, too. Queen Victoria frequently chose to stay at Crathes Castle – even though she saw a ghost here! Outside, the 595-acre estate has nature trails and a walled garden to explore. The head gardener is available for tours on request, and scheduled and group guided tours introduce visitors to the history of the family who made Crathes what it is today; King Robert the Bruce himself granted the land to the Burnett family in 1323.

From iconic castle to iconic cows! Clients can meet a herd of pedigree Highland coos at **Aberdeenshire Highland Cattle**. Grace Noble, who farms on the Crathes Estate, will tell your clients everything there is to know about the breed, woven with stories of her own life on a Scottish farm. Highland Beef tastings, photos opps with these prettiest of cows and the option for luxe food and drink upsells make this intimate tour a chance to sample proper Scottish hospitality.



**Banchory Lodge**, an independent hotel on the banks of the River Dee, is a charming place to spend the night. Your clients can drift off in modern rooms with whimsical touches, as the river ripples by outside. The restaurant champions local, seasonal produce.

In Braemar, **The Fife Arms** books up well in advance – and it's easy to see why. There's nothing understated about this place! Each of the five-star hotel's 46 bedrooms tells a story about Braemar or the hotel's own fascinating history. Think period wallpaper, original artworks, hand-painted beds or objects that once belonged to historic and cultural figures. If they don't stay, your clients are welcome to get a taste of this unexpected and unforgettable place over lunch, dinner or a drink.

For truly personal hospitality, check clients in to **Loch Kinord**, an intimate country inn-style hotel with 22 elegant rooms and suites; they also have self-catering log cabins. It's on the edge of the Cairngorms National Park, sandwiched between the River Dee, Loch Kinord and two national nature reserves.

Another place with a story that's just as delicious as the food is **The Rothesay Rooms**. Your clients will find it in Ballater's Old Royal Station – the very same station that Queen Victoria used to reach Balmoral Castle. Its most recent Royal connection is to Prince Charles, whose Prince's Foundation reinstated the station to its former glory.

## ALSO WARRANTS A VISIT...

**The Rothesay Rooms** is just one place in Ballater with royal connections. The Royal Family has awarded so many Royal Warrants to local businesses that the charming Victorian village is known as a Royal Warrant town. If Balmoral Castle is closed, which happens when the Royal Family is in residence, usually between August and October, a wander around Ballater is great alternative for fans of the Royal Family.

When the Royal Family isn't staying, your clients can go right up to the front door of **Balmoral Castle**. In fact, they can even go inside to see the exquisite ballroom, the largest room in the castle, as well as explore the grounds and gardens, see exhibitions, pick up souvenirs in the gift shop and eat in the restaurant. The castle was bought by Prince Albert as a gift for Queen Victoria in 1852, although the tradition of staying there began when it was first leased in 1848.

Just up the road from Balmoral is **Royal Lochnagar Distillery**. It gained its Royal Warrant when Queen Victoria, Prince Albert and three of their children visited in 1848. It was the first distillery tour given by Lochnagar, and your clients can follow in their footsteps. The distillery runs guided group tours, and visitors can even have a "dram at the dam" – the distillery's water source. Exclusive tastings under the guidance of the manager are also available.

If your clients are visiting over the first Saturday in September, they might just catch the Braemar Gathering, the world-famous highland games event with traditional dancers and pipe band. It has been regularly attended by the reigning monarch and the Royal Family since 1848, although the Games date back to 1832, making them the world's oldest.

If the timings don't work, **Braemar Highland Games Centre** will give your clients a thorough introduction to the history of the games. Guides, refreshments and a piper on arrival are available for groups, but for the ultimate experience, arrange a Mini Highland Games Day with exclusive use of the centre, arena and equipment.





FOOD AND

# FOOD AND DRINK

This corner of north-east Scotland produces more world-class food and drink than could ever be sampled in two days, but this itinerary is a great taster!

Between Aberdeenshire's rugged Cairngorm mountains and seafood-rich coastline lie green fields, lush pastures and rivers teeming with salmon and trout. The moorland peat and fresh spring water is ideal for crafting the perfect dram and draught, too. Even better, there are plenty of locals who are passionate about turning all this fresh produce into brands everyone around here is proud of.

Bring your clients on this itinerary and they'll meet plenty of fellow foodies determined to make their mouths water!

## DID YOU KNOW?

**Ma Cameron's was built on a medieval settlement and is believed to be haunted. Staff have heard footsteps, knocks and voices after hours, and paranormal investigators have even picked up an electronic voice phenomenon.**

## DAY 1: IN THE CITY

Start the day with a heart-warming introduction to Aberdeen's community spirit. Veggie cafe and events space **Foodstory** was started by a group of locals who believe in the power of bringing people together. Most things in it are hand-made, salvaged or donated and the result is an airy cafe where everyone's welcome for breakfast, lunch and dinner. The coffee's great, too.

Clients with a sweet tooth should make a beeline for **Mackie's 19.2** ice-cream parlour – so-called because it's exactly 19.2 miles from the family-run farm that produces the 20+ types of ice cream served here. Your clients will soon see why Aberdonians rave about Mackie's! Try the 'buttery and jam' for a truly local flavour.

Stomachs lined, it's time to check out Aberdeen's spirits and beer. Food and drink experience provider **10 Dollar Shake** runs whisky tasting sessions at the award-winning **Tippling House**, an atmospheric underground venue. It's led by respected industry expert Adrian Gomes, although he calls himself Head Bartender.

Is gin more to your clients' taste? **City of Aberdeen Distillery** will show them everything they ever wanted to know about the spirit and its history in Aberdeen. Visitors can distil their own gin in a tiny copper still, take a gin-tasting masterclass and tour the contemporary distillery in a historic railway arch.

It's all about the perfect pint at **BrewDog**, which set out to smash pre-conceptions about what beer can be when it launched in 2007. The flagship pub of this now world-famous brewery is the (rather quirky) place to sample the brand's crazy creative beers, washed down with some legendary pizza.

Aberdeen's home to plenty of traditional pubs too. Punters have been propping up the cosy bar at **Ma Cameron's** since 1746, making it Aberdeen's oldest pub. Established in 1870 **The Grill** is a traditional standing pub with mahogany panels and a seriously impressive whisky selection. Head to **Old Blackfriars** for cask ales in an atmospheric pub with stained glass, church pews, ghosts (so they say!) and regular folk music sessions. Dating from 1850, **Prince of Wales** has a real pub feel with live music sessions, penny slot machines and one of the UK's longest bars.

Aberdeen has plenty of luxury dining options to write home about, too. Naturally, local produce takes centre stage. At **The Silver Darling**, in the old Customs House at the mouth of Aberdeen Harbour, the fresh fish could almost have jumped out of the sea, through the floor-to-ceiling windows and onto your clients' plates. The views may be vastly different

at **Moonfish Cafe**, but the food is just as local, seasonal and delicious! Your clients can feast on beautiful, modern British dishes as they gaze across the cobbles at the 12th-century Kirk of St Nicholas.

**The Ashvale** on Great Western Road is the place to go for award-winning traditional fish and chips. Operations Director Stuart Devine has even been awarded an MBE for services to the seafood industry, and to charity work. The large restaurant is perfect for big groups.

For the ultimate Scottish dining experience, try **Dine like a Noble**. Guests don kilts and ladies tartan sashes and are heralded by a piper before they sit down to dine in Maryculter House, a historic country house hotel on the banks of the River Dee. The five-course feast takes place in the Great Hall, which dates to 1225, making it perfect for a complete immersion in local history and legends.



The 13th-century **Maryculter House** occupies a beautiful spot on the banks of the River Dee. The 40-bedroom hotel is filled with period details and many, many stories, from the Knights Templar to the Titanic. In the restaurant, the best seasonal, local produce graces the menu.

Sprawling through the enormous and iconic Robert Gordon University Building, the quirky **Sandman Signature Hotel & Spa** has 218 rooms and a whisky bar with around 300 single malts and a carefully curated selection of artisan gins.

Set in a 19th century building, the 72-bedroom **Chester Hotel's** award-winning restaurant, the 72-room is a great choice for foodies who like a touch of luxury.



## DAY 2: OUT AND ABOUT IN ABERDEENSHIRE

Much of the delicious dishes and drinks tasted yesterday started in the fields and rivers and shores around Aberdeen, so head into the countryside to sample them at source. There's a lot to take in, so your clients can either follow in the footsteps of royalty along the River Dee towards Balmoral, or travel north to visit contemporary breweries.

Start with something unexpected on Royal Deeside. **Lost Loch Spirits**, not far from Aberdeen, distils quirky small batches of spirits including the first Scottish absinthe (named after a wicked Scottish fairy), an old family recipe made from local brambleberries, honey and whisky, and a Scottish gin.

As well as its award-winning field-to-fork food, two royal connections make **The Rothesay Rooms**, in Ballater, worthy of a stop. The elegant restaurant was started as a pop-up by HRH The Prince of Wales, to grow tourism and unemployment in the area after Storm Frank flooded the village in 2015. Recently, it moved to Ballater's Old Royal Station, which was originally built in 1866 to allow Queen Victoria to alight from the train on her visits to Balmoral Castle.

We've got Queen Victoria to thank for putting the next stop on the map too. Along with Prince Albert and their three oldest children, she took the first distillery tour of **Royal Lochnagar** in 1848. Nowadays, visitors can have a guided tour of the distillery or take a scenic walk to the water source where they can enjoy a few drams. The most royal-worthy excursion has got to be the Meet the Manager Experience, which includes an in-depth tour and tastings by the manager, who will regale your clients with stories about the 177-year-old distillery.

Alternatively, head north out of Aberdeen to **Glen Garioch Distillery** (pronounced Glen Geery). At 225 years old, it's one of Scotland's oldest operating distilleries. It's also its furthest east! For the ultimate whisky experience, book the Legends of the Garioch, which includes tastings of local delicacies and Glen Garioch's oldest, rarest whiskies and lunch in Meldrum House's 800-year-old cave bar.

From there, your clients can leap forward in time to one of Scotland's biggest and most recent food-and-drink success stories: **BrewDog**. The brewing phenomenon started life in Fraserburgh, but it was when it moved to a state-of-the-art brewery in Ellon in 2012 that things really took off for them. As well as BrewDog HQ, there are guided brewery tours with tastings, and a tap room with 60 taps of fresh craft beer and menu packed with juicy burgers and sourdough pizzas.

Peterhead's **Brew Toon** is at the other end of scale of production to BrewDog, but just as fascinating. The microbrewery draws inspirations from the town's seafaring traditions and its own building's heritage. The unique and heartfelt tour of the 10-barrel brewery doesn't take long, but the time spent tasting craft beers and comparing notes with Brew Toon's friendly staff in the tap room afterwards will stay with your clients for years to come.



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