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[Home](#) > Taking the overnight train to Scotland

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# Taking the overnight train to Scotland

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## My account of a delightful budget break in Scotland featuring a journey on the Caledonian sleeper train and short stays in Inverness and Pitlochry

Having spent successive New Year's Eve celebrations in Edinburgh or Glasgow, I have to be honest and say that I didn't have much interest in 'doing' the rest of Scotland. However, an irrational desire to take a journey on an **overnight train** left me scouring the 'bargain berth' section of the Scotrail website and before I knew it I was on the platform at London Euston and boarding a train to **Inverness!**

The **Caledonian Sleeper** services leave London Euston every night except Saturday heading to the Highlands (<http://www.scotrail.co.uk/caledoniansleeper/index.html> <sup>[1]</sup>) and it is possible to find **bargain berth** standard class tickets for only £19! For that price it's worth it, just for the experience and the feeling that you might have unwittingly fallen into an Agatha Christie novel and be called upon to solve a mystery at any moment! The standard berths are undoubtedly small but perfectly comfortable, even for my 6'4" companion(!), and equipped with all that one would need to stay comfortable and entertained for the duration of the journey. The beds, duvets and pillows are clean and comfortable; the hangers, reading lights and magazines provide a homely feel; and the complimentary mineral water is an absolute Godsend after too many **whiskies in the lounge car!** The lounge car itself is a little disappointing. You'll be hard pressed to find floral tablecloths, fine china and eccentric guests - unfortunately *Poirot* isn't real life - but you will find a warm and comfortable carriage with lots of space to relax and enjoy a decent selection of reasonably priced meals and drinks before heading off to bed. The next morning, all passengers are woken up half an hour before arrival at their chosen destination by a cheerful host bringing breakfast in the form of a **cup of tea and a shortbread biscuit** - you can't complain for £19! Then there's just enough time to pack up your things, get washed and dressed in the surprisingly large washrooms and get off!

On arrival in **Inverness**, head to [Bazpackers Hostel](#) <sup>[2]</sup> in Culduthel Road. Don't be put off by the cheesy name or the low prices, the private rooms in this place are spotless, warm and very comfortable. The rooms at the rear of the hostel also have **great views across the river!** The communal kitchen is clean, modern and equipped with everything from free tea and coffee, to recommended recipes, a generous selection of free condiments and a bulging 'free food' shelf. In addition, the communal lounge is nicely decorated and comes complete

with a **roaring fire and a gorgeous cat** - named either Mystical or Mr Cat, we didn't quite manage to work it out! The staff are friendly and helpful, the bathrooms clean and showers powerful, and there is lots of information around the place to help you plan your stay. As hostels, b&bs or budget hotels go, we really couldn't fault it!

Inverness has more than its fair share of **pubs, cafés and restaurants** but for breakfast or lunch try **The Rendezvous Café** (14A Church St, Inverness, IV1 1EA; 01463 718 444). The decor is cheap and cheerful but the food is great - just ask the locals who reserve their lunch tables here! The sandwiches, homemade cakes and honey porridge come highly recommended! For your evening meal try **Blackfriars Highland Pub and Restaurant** (93-95 Academy Street, Inverness, IV1 1LU; 01463 233 881; <http://www.blackfriarshighlandpub.co.uk> [3]). Try the steaks or anything else on the menu of decently priced pub grub favourites.

You can't go to Inverness without making some effort to see the **Loch Ness monster** and, thankfully, buses run from Inverness to Drumnadrochit (for the various visitor centres) and then to **Urquhart Castle** (01456 450 551; [www.historic-scotland.gov.uk](http://www.historic-scotland.gov.uk) [4]). You can buy a return ticket to Urquhart on the bus (it's cheaper than buying it in the bus station office) but get off at Drumnadrochit. After a cup of tea and some souvenir shopping, take a leisurely stroll to Urquhart Castle. The route is well sign-posted and not at all strenuous. The landscape is beautiful! Entrance to Urquhart is about £7 and the fee is certainly worth it as the **ruins and surrounding landscape** really do capture the imagination and it won't be long before you're imagining yourself as some kind of Scottish nobleman! The bus back to Inverness picks up from the castle car park but be careful to check the timetables as the service is infrequent, particularly in the early afternoon.

The next stop on our trip was **Pitlochry** and there are regular direct trains running here from Inverness. All of the action in Pitlochry is centred around one road, **Atholl Road**, and this is where we found our bed for the night. **Pitlochry Backpackers** [2] provided us with a large, warm en suite room, despite us paying for a standard twin. In addition, the kitchen and communal spaces were massive and the staff were lovely. The **Mckays Hotel**, situated right next door, is a great place to find some **traditional food** (138 Atholl Road, Pitlochry, PH16 5AG; 01796 473 888). I would particularly recommend the **chicken stuffed with haggis** - delicious! It's also a great place to relax with a drink, as there is live music almost every night and a great crowd of people. For a **low budget treat**, try the **Plaice to Be** (8 West Moulin Rd, Pitlochry, PH16 5AD; 01796 473737) and sample the **locally caught fish**.

An autumn trip to Pitlochry would be incomplete without a trip to the **Enchanted Forest** (<http://www.enchantedforest.org.uk/> [5]; 0844 888 4420). Open for the **last two weeks in October**, this 'Big Tree' event is unmissable. Fun for all of the family, visitors make their way around **Faskally Wood** stopping off at various points along the way to learn a little Scottish history and encounter mystical and ghostly goings on. The forest is a beautiful backdrop and the mist and lighting make the whole experience magical. Best of all, coach transport is provided from the centre of Pitlochry and **glow in the dark accessories** are provided for free!

If you do have your own transport, a visit to the **Erdadour Distillery** (Pitlochry, Perthshire, PH16 5JP; 01796 472 095; [www.edradour.co.uk](http://www.edradour.co.uk) [6]) is a lovely way to get into the Scottish spirit! There are **free tours** of this distillery, which claims to be the **smallest and most picturesque in Scotland**, and all visitors receive a free sample! If not, wander down to the **Salmon Ladder** and visit the **Hydro-Electric Power Visitor Centre**. Both are signposted from Atholl Street and are lot more interesting than they sound!

## Destinations:

**Pitlochry** <sup>[7]</sup> ([Perth and Kinross](#) <sup>[8]</sup>, [Scotland](#) <sup>[9]</sup>, [United Kingdom](#) <sup>[10]</sup>, [Europe](#) <sup>[11]</sup>)

**Inverness** <sup>[12]</sup> ([Scottish Highlands](#) <sup>[13]</sup>, [Scotland](#) <sup>[9]</sup>, [United Kingdom](#) <sup>[10]</sup>, [Europe](#) <sup>[11]</sup>)

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**Links:**

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[3] <http://www.blackfriarshighlandpub.co.uk>

[4] <http://www.historic-scotland.gov.uk>

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[11] <http://www.simonseeks.com/travel-guides/europe>

[12] <http://www.simonseeks.com/travel-guides/europe/united-kingdom/scotland/scottish-highlands/inverness>

[13] <http://www.simonseeks.com/travel-guides/europe/united-kingdom/scotland/scottish-highlands>