

Aviemore, the Cairngorms and beyond

With its mountains, pine-clad slopes and wide river valley setting the Aviemore and Cairngorm area lies at the core of the Cairngorms National Park, the largest in Britain. The high plateau of the Cairngorms is a backdrop to every view while at a lower level, the area is also a stronghold of the ancient Caledonian pinewoods - the descendants of the natural forests that previously covered most of Scotland.

Aviemore was once a little village at a junction on the old Highland Railway. It experienced dramatic growth in the 1960s to service the ski developments on Cairngorm. Since then it has become an all-year centre and the main mountain gateway to the Cairngorms, a role confirmed by the opening of Cairngorm Mountain Railway, which takes visitors to within 122m of the summit of Cairngorm.

This is an area which has an extensive range of activities for visitors right through the year. A chain of attractive little towns and villages along the river valley, from Grantown-on-Spey upstream to Dalwhinnie, make good bases to discover the huge choice of walking at all levels, along with numerous other sports including bird-watching, cycling, mountain biking, rock climbing, watersports and golf.

For the less active there is an equally diverse range of attractions. The Cairngorm Brewery offers tours, whilst Dalwhinnie is home to the world's highest whisky distillery. Aviemore is the western terminus of the Strathspey Steam Railway which has, arguably, the best views of any preserved railway in Britain. Rothiemurchus Estate welcomes visitors with something for everyone, including a fish farm, guided walks, safari tours, clay pigeon shooting and lots more. Heading towards the mountains one will find the Glenmore Forest Visitor Centre and the neighbouring Cairngorm Reindeer Centre which enables visitors to see the UK's only reindeer herd free-ranging in their natural habitat.

To the south, are the Highland Wildlife Park, the Highland Folk Museum and the unique waltzing waters exhibition. To the north, Carrbridge is home to the Landmark Forest Theme park. Following the River Spey downstream you pass Boat of Garten, home to the famous osprey nesting site with its viewing centre and Grantown on Spey, with its award winning museum. Continuing north you join the Malt Whisky trail which includes a number of distilleries offering tours to visitors.

Aviemore also makes a good base for exploring other areas of the Highlands. Perhaps most notable is the world famous Loch Ness which is less than an hour away. Boat trips are available with some departing from Inverness where cruises to see the resident dolphins are also available. Nearby are Fort George and Cawdor Castle made famous in Shakespeare's Macbeth and often described as the most romantic castle in the Highlands. Inverness is also the gateway to the Northern Highlands, home to some of Scotland's most dramatic scenery.

The West is also easily accessible with the town of Fort William nestling below Ben Nevis – the UK's highest mountain being only just over an hour away. This area provides some of Scotland's best scenery and with its huge range of activities, the title of Outdoor Capital is well justified. For those with more time to spare, the Road to the Isles takes the visitor to Eilean Donan Castle and the Isle of Skye.

More information on the whole of the Highland area can be found at www.visithighlands.com with specific local information at www.visithighlands.com/aviemore