

GETTING AROUND BY PUBLIC TRANSPORT

In general, Scotland's public transport network links city, town and village by bus and train. Ferries run regular services to the islands of the north and west. Very rural areas in places have post buses providing limited services to quite out-of-the-way locations. Finally, there is a good choice of internal air routes linking the north and west with the central belt of Scotland. Usually, there is a good measure of integration in Scotland's transport infrastructure, for example, train arrivals often fit in with ferry departures.

The key site for planning a journey by public transport in Scotland is www.travelinescotland.com as well as comprehensive timetabling for all kinds of public transport services, the site has links to around 50 local bus operators alone.

Getting around by bus

Main services, such as Scottish Citylink www.citylink.co.uk provide express coach services to over 200 towns and cities across Scotland. Stagecoach is another name which covers many parts of Scotland (and beyond), for example, Stagecoach Bluebird (covering Aberdeenshire and Moray), Stagecoach Western (Ayrshire, Galloway), Stagecoach Strathtay (Dundee and Angus) and so on – www.stagecoachbus.com

In general, bus transport is a good way of seeing Scotland's towns and villages, as bus routes tend to serve town and village centres, rather than using routes which bypass centres of population. Post Buses www.royalmail.com/postbus are run by the Royal Mail and while principally a mail service, they have a limited number of seats for passengers. This is a great way to see rural areas of Scotland, usually on an out-and-back basis, for example, up a cul-de-sac glen in the middle of the Highlands.

Special tickets – coach and bus

Scottish Citylink offer various discount cards to those with children, those under 26 or over 50 and full-time students. If planning a lot of coach travel, then a good option is an Explorer Pass, offering unlimited travel on Scottish Citylink. Students who register with My Citylink save 20% on online bookings.

The Explorer Pass means you can use any service at any time within the validity of the pass and you can also take advantage of the great discounts available from other transport and accommodation providers.

Getting around by train

First ScotRail runs train services which originate within Scotland. They connect all of Scotland's cities and have intermediate stops. In addition, they also operate routes to some of the most scenic parts of Scotland – for example, Inverness to Kyle of Lochalsh for the Isle of Skye, Inverness to Wick and Thurso (for Orkney) and Glasgow to Fort William and Mallaig. www.firstgroup.com/scotrail

Travel Passes and Special tickets – rail

The Freedom of Scotland Travelpass offers train, coach and ferry travel – all with just one ticket. Other ticket types for rail travel in Scotland include the Central Scotland Rover and the Highland Rover. In addition, visitors to Great Britain can buy a Young Persons Railcard if aged 16 to 25. www.youngpersons-railcard.co.uk

Also consider the BritRail Pass. There are a variety of passes available, for example, the BritRail Scottish Freedom Pass. www.raileurope.com

Getting around by ferry

Caledonian MacBrayne (CalMac) are the main operator on the western seaboard. They sail to twenty-two islands and four peninsulas (for example Cowal and Kintyre) and it is probably safe to say that every one of their ferry crossings offers beautiful scenery as a bonus.

CalMac offer Island Hopscotch tickets. These flexible tickets with 26 options are valid for one month from the date of the first journey. Tickets are valid for one journey on each route and can be used in either direction. www.calmac.co.uk

NorthLink Ferries sail to the islands of Orkney and Shetland. There is a 10% discount available on standard fares for senior citizens, students and disabled passengers. www.northlinkferries.co.uk

Getting around by air

While city airports such as Glasgow, Edinburgh, Aberdeen and Inverness have a variety of cross-border and international flights, they also offer internal flights to other airports in Scotland. These airports can be seen at www.hial.co.uk (Highlands and Islands Airports Ltd). Islands such as Shetland, Orkney, the Outer Hebrides and Islay are all connected to the mainland by good air links.

Compared to budget carrier prices, internal flights within Scotland can seem expensive, especially with very few discounted tickets available; however, the time saving compared to other travel methods may make it worthwhile.

Most flights are operated by British Airways or Loganair. For inter-island flights, book direct through Loganair. Other services between the mainland and several of the major islands are provided by Highland Airways and Eastern Airways.

www.visitscotland.com/sitewide/travel_around_scotland

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