

Stunning Stonehaven

2-5 Day Itinerary



Day 1

If you're visiting us for two days, then you'll find lots to keep you occupied right here in the seaside town of Stonehaven. With great places to eat, lots of independent shops and plenty of visitor attractions there's no need to stray too far from your own home away from home.

We recommend that you head into the town centre – the area around the Mercat Cross – to get your bearings and browse some of the shops along the way. From here, walk towards the harbour and take it all in. It's a beautiful wee harbour and while it's no longer packed with fishing boats, it's still well used by pleasure vessels.



If you want to get even closer to the harbour action, why not book a session with [Stonehaven Paddleboarding?](#) Guides can take you on a water-based tour of the local coastline, but if that sounds like too much effort you could always hook up with Stonehaven Sea Safari and enjoy an adrenalin-filled tour on board their RIB.

Back on dry land, follow the walking trail from the harbour up to the stunning [Dunnottar Castle](#). It may look a little familiar – it's been used as the backdrop for Hollywood films including Hamlet starring Mel Gibson and Victor Frankenstein with James McAvoy and Daniel Radcliffe. On a side note, this cliff top fortress is said to be the inspiration behind Disney's animated movie Brave.

The castle was the home of the Earls of Marischal and it has a rich and colourful history. It's been visited by Mary Queen of Scots and James VI and in the 17th century Oliver Cromwell's army laid siege to the castle for eight months. Surrender was made – but not before the Scottish Crown Jewels were smuggled out.

On the way back down, stop off to get a closer look at Stonehaven War Memorial. The distinctive monument is perched atop a cliff and the site offers stunning views along the coastline.

Once you return to the harbour, refuel by visiting one of the local eateries. [The Tolbooth Restaurant](#), [The Marine Hotel](#) and [The Ship Inn](#) offer lovely views of the harbour – and a great selection of fresh seafood. The latter also have friendly, welcoming bars if you fancy mixing with the locals before retiring back to your luxury lodge for the evening.





Day 2

Start your day off by getting back to nature! [Fowlsheugh RSPB reserve](#), just a short drive from Stonehaven, is truly incredible. From the spring to the autumn, the cliffs come alive with over 100,000 seabirds – everything from puffins to kittiwakes and fulmars to razorbills. Enjoy a two-mile walk along the clifftops and take it all in.

Next, return to the harbour and to the fascinating [Tolbooth Museum](#) which was once used as an administrative centre for the town. It has some informative local history displays and unusual artefacts, including the Inverbervie stocks and the Crank – a punishment device for criminals who were kept prisoner in the building.



Head along the beach boardwalk and enjoy the wonderful seaside views – along with another unusual addition! Stonehaven's very own Banksy – an artist who was unknown for many years until he was revealed as local man Jim Malcolm - has created some metal sculptures along the route. All of his sculptures are created from scrap metal and are a real talking point.



All the walking will have no doubt built up an appetite, so why not round your visit off by sampling some famous Stonehaven delicacies that are situated on the beach front? Pop in past [The Bay Fish and Chips](#) for the ultimate seaside snack and then head next door to legendary ice cream parlour [Aunt Betty's](#). It may take some time to decide which flavour you want to try. Our advice...go for as many different varieties as you can!

As a side note, if you're visiting in the summer months you should also make time for a dip at the art deco lido [Stonehaven Outdoor Swimming Pool](#) and hop on board the Stoney Express – the [Stonehaven Land Train](#).

If you plan on staying a little bit longer - and who could blame you?! - then we recommend that you spend your third day in the Granite City. Aberdeen and its distinctive granite buildings are just a 15-minute drive or a short trip by rail and while it's known as the European capital of oil and gas, there's much more to the city than energy.

Day 3

Make the recently renovated [Aberdeen Art Gallery](#) your first port of call. The venue has sculptures, photographs and some fantastic pieces from Scottish artists as well as those of international acclaim. There are also visiting exhibitions from time to time, not to mention collections of decorative arts, textiles and crafts. If you have time, be sure to visit the roof where you'll experience great views of the city.



Stop for lunch on Belmont Street where you'll find a vast array of eateries from coffee shop [Cup](#), to Caribbean-inspired restaurant [Tango Turtle](#) to cheese-themed restaurant and takeaway, [Melt](#) and its kitschy interior right out of the 1970s.

From here, head over to [Aberdeen Maritime Museum](#) to get an insight into the role of the sea in the city's heritage. It's been influencing the fortunes and industry of Aberdeen for centuries, from the days of herring fishing to oil and gas exploration and now offshore renewables.

The museum is close to the harbour, so why not hop on board one of the boat tours that leaves the port. There are a number of itineraries on these cruises – there's now even an opportunity to get a close-up look at the offshore windfarm off Aberdeen – but many opt for the wildlife cruise and the chance to go looking for the area's colony of bottle nose dolphins.

Round your day off by strolling around the tiny fishing community of Footdee (pronounced Fittie). This is a collection of picture-perfect cottages near the harbour – a village within the city. If all that fresh sea air has stirred up an appetite, why not opt for somewhere special for dinner. Michelin-recommended [Moonfish Café](#) in the city centre is one of our favourites, along with [Bistro Verde](#) in The Green.

If you are with us for five days, you're in for a real treat as we can take you from the mountains to the coast. Five days still won't be long enough for this little slice of Scottish paradise, but it's enough to cram in the highlights.

Day 4

Head west towards Royal Deeside – so called because this area was so much loved by Queen Victoria. You'll see nods to the royal heritage all over this countryside area, and it's even possible to follow the [Victorian Heritage Trail](#).

Stop off at [Royal Deeside Railway](#) - a standard gauge steam and diesel hauled heritage railway. The track is just a mile long – a return journey takes just 20 minutes – and it runs alongside the River Dee in a truly stunning location.

Next up it's one of the region's famous castles. There are dozens dotted across Aberdeenshire, but today's itinerary takes in the most famous of all – [Balmoral Castle](#), the Scottish holiday home of the Royal Family. You'll be able to take a tour of the grounds, gardens and exhibitions –





although we can't promise you'll see her majesty!

However, if you are visiting in August when the Queen and other senior royals are in residence, you might catch a glimpse of them when they attend services at nearby [Crathie Kirk](#). The current church was built in 1805 but there's been worshipping on the site since the 6th century.

Head into Ballater to eat – and some more royal links. One of our favourite spots for lunch is the Royal Station. This historic railway station, where Queen Victoria stopped off en route to Balmoral, has a wonderful café, tearoom and bistro – [The Carriage](#) - and there is also a fascinating visitor centre.

There are dozens of stunning walks all over Royal Deeside but one of the most popular is around Loch Muick, south of Braemar on the Balmoral Estate. It's a fairly lengthy one, but worth it for the views and the terrain is not difficult. It takes in the impressive Glas-allt Shiel house built by Queen Victoria, as well as some waterfalls.

Heading back towards Stonehaven, why not stop off for dinner in Banchory at the [Tor Na Coille Hotel](#) or [Banchory Lodge](#), both of which have great menus with a focus on local produce. Alternatively, why not enjoy a night in your lodge and take advantage of the well-appointed kitchen?



Day 5

Today we travel north on the bypass and to one of the region's more unusual attractions – a former prison. The award-winning [Peterhead Prison Museum](#) gives an insight into life behind bars in what was known as Scotland's toughest jail. During an audio tour you'll not only learn about key events in its 120-year-plus history – including the time the SAS were sent in to end a siege – but hear personal stories from former guards.

Have lunch at [The Coffee Apothecary](#) in Udney. As its name suggests you'll enjoy some amazing coffee, but there's a great selection of food too. The cakes are simply a must!



We then take a short trip to the charming town of Ellon – home of craft beer sensations [BrewDog](#). You can take a guided tour of the brewery – with plenty of opportunity to sample beers along the way – and stock up on some products and merchandise.

The DogTap has a hip, informal eatery serving burgers and pizza, but if you fancy something a little more sophisticated, we suggested driving over to Oldmeldrum and trying the Pineapple restaurant at [Meldrum House Hotel](#) or onto Inverurie where you'll enjoy modern dining at [Fennel](#).

Then head home to make the most of your last remaining few hours at Dalriada Luxury Lodges – sit out on the deck with a glass of wine or cosy up indoors and take in that beautiful view for the final time.