

Scottish Islands: Part 1

Lewis, Harris & Skye

Episode 202 • With Tracy & Doug Collins • 52 minutes

In this episode

Tracy is fresh back from the Outer Hebrides and the Isle of Skye, and she sits down with Doug to walk through every stage of the trip: the drive up through Glencoe to Ullapool, the CalMac ferries, the beaches of Lewis and Harris, the Callanish stones, where they stayed and ate, single-track road etiquette, and how to plan it all so you do not get caught out.

Full Transcript

■ Tracy ■ Doug ■ Announcer (intro & outro)

TRACY

From the white sands of Lewis and Harris to the dramatic landscapes of the Isle of Skye, I've just returned from an incredible journey through some of Scotland's most breathtaking islands. In this episode, I'm sharing every detail of the trip so you can plan your own Scottish island adventure with confidence.

ANNOUNCER

Welcome to the UK Travel Planning Podcast. Your host is the founder of the UK travel planning website, Tracy Collins. Each week, Tracy shares destination guides, travel tips and itinerary ideas, as well as interviews with a variety of guests who share their knowledge and experience of UK travel to help you plan your perfect UK vacation. Join us as we explore the UK from cosmopolitan cities to quaint villages, from historic castles to beautiful islands, and from the picturesque countryside to seaside towns.

TRACY

Before we get started, we'd like to thank our sponsor, Walks and Devour Tours. If you're planning a trip to London, you'll already know the challenge. There's a lot you want to do and only a limited amount of time to fit it all in. That's where the right tour makes all the difference, because you want experiences that are the best use of your time, with more access, less waiting and a deeper sense of the city. That's why we recommend Walks and Devour Tours. They offer walking tours and food tours designed to make your time count, often with early or after hours entry. You'll also be with exceptional local guides who add the stories and context so you leave with a richer understanding of what you're seeing and a trip that feels genuinely memorable. If you're visiting London as a couple with family or you simply prefer a more intimate experience, Walks and Devour Tours also offer private tour options.

TRACY

To learn more, you'll find the link in the show notes. Now let's get into this week's episode. Hi, everybody and welcome to this week's edition of the UK Travel Planner Podcast. Now this week I am going to be chatting to Doug all about my recent trip to Scotland. So I have. I actually just got back on Thursday morning. I took the Caledonian Sleeper from Fort William down to Birmingham International where it got off, which is a fairly recent new stop, I think they've added in.

DOUG

Is that right?

TRACY

Recent? Yeah. So that was really good. Actually. Quite a few people got off, so that was good. So what we thought we'd do to make this not an episode that's going to take three hours to talk all about my trip is we're dividing it up into two. So the first part will take us to Oban, but you'll kind of understand that when we go through, I'll go through what the itinerary was and then part two of this will be at the end of June, so you need to subscribe and then you won't miss an episode. And that will be the second part of the trip, which I did actually on my own when I went to the island of Mull and used public transport. So that'll be a good one to chat through about Mull and Iona.

TRACY

But that's coming at the end of next month, so no spoilers for that. So there's no questions coming about about Mull and Iona. We're going to focus this episode on the first part of my trip, which was to the islands of Lewis and Harris and Sky. So anyway, Doug, do you want to take it away and just chat to everybody about what, what. Where are you at the moment? You're in Australia. I'm in.

DOUG

That's right, I'm in just outside Brisbane in Australia.

TRACY

And I'm actually sitting at. At my parents home actually to do this on. On my birthday. So recording this on my. So I thought I would give Doug a load of questions and we can just chat through it.

DOUG

Right, okay. So before we get to the actual trip itself, how do you go about planning this fantastic adventure you've been on? You know, where, where did you start? How did you put it all together and. Yeah, just give us an overview of the, the, the route itself and the places that you've been. Just in a nutshell, if you like.

TRACY

Yeah. And I will say, if you listen to thinking that's weird that Doug didn't know about it, it's because Doug wasn't coming on the trip, so I didn't. And because I was doing a lot of planning. I didn't really tell you a lot, did I?

DOUG

No, no. And I'm not very good on boats, to be fair, so.

TRACY

No, exactly. And this did involve boats, so you weren't that keen on it. So I'll just say that I did.

DOUG

I'd rather be on a train, to be fair.

TRACY

Well, yes, I know you would. So I will just say that I did this trip with a very, very close friend of mine who lives in the UK, who said when I was telling her about what I was planning, she was like, oh, can I come along? So which worked out really lovely because we had a fantastic time and it's great to spend time with her, but also she did all the driving, so that was wonderful for me. So I could sit back and enjoy the scenery and take lots of videos and photos which I will share in the show notes on our Instagram channel and hopefully actually get a video up because I took lots of video of driving around Lewis and Harris, which I'm going to hopefully put up onto our YouTube channel, which is UK travel planning soon. So if you are planning to visit Lewis and Harris, you can get. Get a chance to have a look at. It's so beautiful. So beautiful. So the overall route was we actually started in Derby where my friend lives, and we drove up.

TRACY

So Derby's from. Isn't. Well, you want to say where Derby is, Doug, because that's where you're from.

DOUG

Well, I'm not from Derby, I'm from Burton on Trent. She's not in Derby further south. So Derby is in the East Midlands, so right in the middle of England.

TRACY

Yeah. So we, we started out from Derby and it's too far to drive up to Ullapool now. Ullapool is where we were taking the ferry over to Stornoway, which is on the island of Lewis. And it was too far to go in one day. So we, we stopped off in Gretna on the way up, which is somewhere I'd always wanted to go to because I'd kind of heard a lot about Greta. Gretna Green, if you don't know, was always very. Or is. I don't know if it still is very famous for weddings and people are eloping and running away and get married.

TRACY

So we just stopped off there, there one night, which was. Which was really nice, a good stop off place. And then the next day we had the drive then to Ullapool and when I was talking to my friend Kim about it, I was like, well, we could do it in this many hours. I don't think it was maybe five hours or we can do it in. I should know the actual number of hours, but I think it was like seven hours to do this alternative route which will take us via Glencoe on the A82. And obviously when I said to her this is. I showed us some pictures actually of, of Glencoe, she went, let's go that way.

TRACY

So we decided you would. Yeah, yeah. So we drove that way and she. It blew her mind actually. She said to me, she said she was so glad she did that because it was so beautiful. And obviously we stopped off in the Green Welly shop.

DOUG

Very good.

TRACY

Yes. I bought myself a lovely hat with a. With a hairy coo on it, which is. Yeah, I love my photos. A lot of people in the Facebook group and on Instagram commented on my hat. Love my hat. Anyway, we stayed in Ullapool for one night. Caught the ferry the next morning.

DOUG

So Ullapool's on the west side of Scotland, isn't it? Just tell everybody which side you're driving up.

TRACY

Yes, west coast. West coast. Because we. So those, we were going to the Outer Hebrides. So the, the Lewis and Harris are on the Outer Hebrides, Sky's Inner Hebrides. So if you look on a map, you can see off the west coast of Scotland. Everybody knows about Skye. And I am going to talk a little bit about Sky.

TRACY

Unfortunately, that sky has got, in my opinion, is over touristed. It is beautiful, it is a lovely island. It is easy to get to because you can go by a bridge. But that unfortunately is having an impact and you know, just, just trying to get parked and drive around is just a nightmare. Anyway, I'm just. I will talk a little bit about sky in a bit, but part of what I wanted to do with this trip was to highlight some of the other beautiful islands that aren't getting as visited as much and put them on. You guys listening? If you're listening to this, I thought, well, I've never heard of Lewis and Harris, then you're gonna. After this podcast you are going to want to go.

TRACY

I can, I can assure you that. Yeah.

DOUG

So how long did it take to put together the plan with you and your friend? Did it take weeks or months? Or was it sort of last minute or. It was a bit of a.

TRACY

No, I did it. Yeah. No, I did it in January. I thought as soon as Kim said she wanted to come, I mean, you know, Kim. So I just said to Kim, I'll just put it all together. But obviously I was doing a lot of other stuff at the same time because we were going to the Philippines as well. So if you want to listen to our Philippines trip, you can. That's Global Travel Planning podcast.

TRACY

So I needed to get the bare bones of it done because what people often think is they can wait to, to go to some of these. You cannot wait. You cannot just think, oh, I'll wing it with accommodation. You just can't. You've really got to look at the things that you need to do first are ferries. You need to check the ferries. So Calmac ferries.

TRACY

There's been, if there have been problems the last few years with Calmac ferries because the ferries are getting older and there's been cancellations and it's caused a lot of problems for people on the islands as well because they need to get back to the mainland for, you know, for various things. Doctor's appointments or dental appointments or whatever they need to get done, hospital visits and. And it's become a little bit more challenging. But don't. Please don't let that put you off. Yeah. Because, you know, I booked in January. Our ferries were absolutely fine.

TRACY

So obviously with a car going over and two passengers in the car. So the first ferry I booked was basically from Ullapool to Stornoway. The second one was from Tarbert on Harris to Uig on Sky, Port of Uig on sky, those. And then I did have another ferry to. From Oban to Mull, but I'll talk about that in the next podcast. So I booked the ferries first. That was the first thing I did. Second thing I did is I booked accommodation.

TRACY

Now, when I booked the accommodation on Lewis, actually, the lady got back to me and she said, have you booked your ferry? Because she said, often people will book the accommodation and then leave the ferry and then go to book a ferry and it's fully booked. So those are the two things you absolutely have to do. First, do not think, oh, I'm just going to wing it. I like to wing it. I want it. Some places you can do that. You cannot do that. If you're going to these islands, you really can't.

TRACY

You need to book. When it came to booking in Harris, I really struggled, actually, to find accommodation. Now, this is January, to travel at the end of April, beginning May, and I couldn't. I struggled. So I turned to Airbnb, which I don't use that often, but I kind of went, I'm gonna have to look on Airbnb. So I will talk about the different accommodation when we get to it, that we stayed in, because we did stay in hotels, we rented a house, we stayed in Airbnb. So different types of accommodation. But so we.

TRACY

We planned the basics. We planned the ferry, we planned the accommodation past that. We didn't really do a lot of planning because I didn't have a lot of time. And I figured, you know what, we'll see what the weather's like when we get there, we'll have a look. And, you know, because that can impact what you're doing. And we were incredibly lucky because the weather was beautiful, because you don't want to be driving around Harris to go and see beaches if it's pouring down the rain, because you're not gonna, you know, not the best anyway, so. So I did a little bit of research about things like beaches and stuff like that and things to see, but not detailed planning.

DOUG

Yeah, it'll make sense. Okay, so next question is, you partly answered this. The getting there is, you know, half the adventure. You know, that sort of trip that you've been on. So the drive up to Ullapool, I know you sort of mentioned the ferries as well, but the drive up to Ullapool itself, I have been there myself as well. So do you sort of advocate getting there early and explore or just arrive into Ullapool, catch the ferry and go? Is it something, a place to visit, is it a place to hang around or, you know, what, what's your take on the, the drive up to Ullapool?

TRACY

Oh, well, the drive up was beautiful because I said we went through Glencoe, so do that. Do the A82, because you get that drive through Glencoe. So give yourself, add that in. Honestly, do not go the quick route because we knew the ferry wasn't leaving until I think it was half past ten the next morning. So we wouldn't have made that drive anyway. So I knew we were going to stay in Ullapool overnight. Now, time of year that we're traveling, end of April, beginning of May, light night. So it was light until.

DOUG

Perfect.

TRACY

So it didn't really matter what time we arrived because it was still light. We could enjoy the sunset over the bay. It was beautiful. Ullapool is beautiful. It's very small, but it was just beautiful. We sat in the, in the restaurant, the hotel that we were at, and I'm going to give them a huge shout out in a minute because we just. The staff were amazing at this hotel and, and I always though I stay in lots and lots of different accommodation all over the world. But I'm going to give a special shout out to the, to the staff at this particular hotel.

TRACY

But anyway, I'll talk about that later. But we, we were where the ferry leaves, like literally two minutes. So we had to go and park the car up about 45 minutes or so before. Before. And you kind of queue your car up and then they just say, I'll leave your car and then come back. So then we just had a little bit of a walk around, just, you know, just watch other ferries coming in. And again then we had beautiful weather. So, yeah, I just do that.

TRACY

And yeah, enjoy the drive up to Ullapool because it is, it is lovely and it's actually the drive into Ullapool itself. I'd forgotten how amazing that drive is. Just how beautiful. Yeah, incredible. It was like. It's like a bit otherworldly. It's like a completely different landscape. Yeah, so I took lots of video of that because I was kind of going, oh, I forgot how the lovely this is.

TRACY

So, yeah, I mean the ferry crossing was. Was easy. You would actually been fine. I know you don't like boats but, but actually it was, it was smooth, as it has to be.

DOUG

Very smooth for me. Very smooth.

TRACY

It was very smooth. Seriously, it was just literally flat.

DOUG

Good. And how long this is crossing across, how long is that?

TRACY

2 hours 40 from Ullapool to Stornoway. Yeah. So that's a bigger ferry because those seem to be. Yeah, there's a lot of cars got on that, so. And then you pot, you go on. Well, you know, you've done the ferries before. You just drive on. They're.

TRACY

They're very, very well organized. You drive on, you park your car and then you go up and sit and you can, you know, watch. I went outside quite a bit and did some videos again. I'll share that. So you can just kind of chill out on. On the ferry itself.

DOUG

And your first views are Stornoway. What, what was your thoughts on that first time you saw it?

TRACY

Well, what was interesting as we were coming over to Lewis, that we kind of. The cloud was quite low and so we're kind of going through the mist and the ferry was making sound.

DOUG

So it was really obviously.

TRACY

Yeah. Warning any small boats that probably wouldn't have picked up. So. Yeah, so that was really cool coming in into Stornoway and then we're kind of. Yeah, we, we arrived and we did a bit of stocking up at the Tesco in Stornoway just to get some food because the first place that we're staying at in Lewis.

DOUG

Right.

TRACY

We'd rented a house for three nights.

DOUG

Yeah, okay. But you do actually need a car when you're driving on Lewis and Harris, don't you?

TRACY

I, I would say so. I mean, I didn't do public transport for Lewis and Harris, but I, I, and I didn't really spot any buses. But I did ask Kim and she said because obviously she was driving, so she probably. I was too busy. Just, ooh, in an hour at the scene. Yeah, she said we did pass a couple of small buses. So I assume that you could. I definitely could on Mull.

TRACY

But I would recommend really for Harris and Lewis that you have your own car and then you've got that freedom to travel around when you want because it was just easier. But. And I know you're probably going to ask me about the roads now.

DOUG

Well, that was coming up in a second. I was going to say, is there anything that caught you by surprise, the roads or the signs or was there anything, you know, sort of in hazards like sheep on the roads and things like that?

TRACY

Ah, well, I'm going to say that because. Because we're there in April, May, there was just lambs everywhere, literally everywhere. And they're all over the road as well. They run across the road. You have to be really careful. We did pass some people who were driving far, far too fast. And you know, if you've got a. You on one side of the road and the lambs on the other side, if the cars come in, it will dash over to get to its mom.

TRACY

And I've heard reports of, you know, sheep being killed, lambs being killed. You really have to be careful. Now, a lot of the roads on Lewis and Harris are single track. Majority actually. Well, the one road that we first went on when we got the ferry, which was direct, we were staying in Carloway, which is on opposite side of the island to Stornoway. We drove along this single track road to get to the accommodation and Kim had to really concentrate because it was kind of dropping the peat bogs. And then we realized actually there was kind of a dual road which went round the island. We kind of cut through the middle of the island, but after that we didn't do that road again.

TRACY

But, but Harris was. Was single track, was mainly single track to where we were going. And so, so Kim had to really concentrate, really concentrate on those roads.

DOUG

Passing points. Was it on the single lane?

TRACY

Yeah, a lot of passing points. And I did share in the Facebook group and, and on Instagram and I had a few comments going, what do you do, what you do if something's coming towards you? Well, there's passing points every kind of quite close together. So the main thing is to know how to use a passing point so that you know the car, if you're on the side, you'll pull in and let the car go straight around you. Yeah. So make sure you do not park as in park in and get off to have a wander around in a passing place because that's for.

DOUG

But they're clearly signposted though, are they?

TRACY

Oh, yeah, absolutely, yeah, yeah, absolutely. And very, very regular. So I don't think at any point, I think once Kim had to reverse because we kind of met a car in between passing points and they didn't want to reverse. So poor Kim had to reverse. Yeah, a couple of times actually, she had to do the reverse and so. Yeah, so make sure that you're happy that, you know, like, you can reverse your car. So that. That's important because some of those drop offs were quite steep.

DOUG

I know. Well, I've driven on sky with you, so. And I know what to expect if it's similar to. But quite a topic at the moment. What about petrol stations, gas stations? Is there, is there any of those on Lewis and Harris?

TRACY

Yeah, yeah. But you've got to, you know, in Stornoway. We filled up in Stornoway and we filled up in Tarbert, but yeah, you need to keep an eye on your petrol just to make sure that you've got enough. Again on sky, we, we filled up with. There was no problem. We didn't. There was no lack of petrol.

TRACY

We could get petrol. It was just a case of like, for example, on a Sunday, everything was shut in Lewis. So that included petrol stations. Yeah. So you need to. You don't leave it to the Sunday and think, oh, I need to fill up because you're not going to be able to. What we were incredibly surprised about and something that Kim commented on is the amount of electric cars that we saw. We would say there was.

TRACY

I would say it was over 50 electric cars.

DOUG

Really?

TRACY

Yep.

DOUG

So charging points for the cars.

TRACY

Yep, there was charging points, but again, you'd have to plan it. But there were charging points and there certainly were enough electric cars and I mean, they could, they could be hybrid, but there was, you know, Kim was going another. Electric. Electric. Electric. Electric was kind of a lot of electric cars. They're very popular. I know that she's talking about getting electric car next time.

TRACY

They definitely seem to be. And we did comment on the fact that everybody seems to cater to be able to charge it up. But I would say where we stayed in Harris, you would have had to go to Tarbert and find somewhere. But obviously, because, you know, Kim's car's petrol, we didn't. We just noticed that you, you probably could because everybody else seemed to be happily driving around electric car. So it was. It's definitely catered for more. More now.

DOUG

That's good. And what about size of cars? Was it sort of mostly small SUV and small cars or was a bigger sort of.

TRACY

Well, Kim did comment on. Yeah, there was people in motorhomes, which I think Kim was like, I'm glad I'm not driving a motorhome. So she's got a, a medium sized SUV. I would say, really for those roads, you're better off in a kind of medium to small SUV. I wouldn't go larger than that. If you're happy to drive a motorhome and used to it, I'm sure you'll be absolutely fine. Not a problem. But I, I just felt more comfortable and safer in Kim's car because it was a SUV and I mean we always, we always rent SUV when we're traveling around the UK.

TRACY

It just feels safer.

DOUG

Just tell them one question on that. So to talk. But with the motorhomes, can you take those on the Calmac ferry?

TRACY

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. But it'll cost you more obviously because you've got to give the size of your vehicle. Yeah, yeah, you have to see size of vehicle. But yes you can. And yes, there were people driving them around, so we did see them. I would say Harris is far more harrowing in terms of driving. Yeah. I mean Kim knew the road really well from where we're staying back to Tarbert, but you know, is.

TRACY

Yeah, give yourself plenty of time when driving. Don't. Don't. You know, we had to get the ferry from Tarbert to, to Uig on Skye and we give ourselves plenty of time for that drive because you don't know, you know what you're going to pass. You've got to stop. You could have sheep in the road, we had cow in the road. You know, those sort of things that you're not used to when you're driving around kind of main roads and in cities or on the mainland are just all, all very realistic possibilities that you're going to come across.

DOUG

That's good to know. Okay, so where, let's talk about accommodation. So where did you stay across Lewis Harris and Sky. And how did you approach the subject of food? Because obviously it's, you know, I've been to something. Not Lewis house but I've been to sky. So I know you have to plan. So you know, things like self catering and eating out or was it a mixture of both?

TRACY

Right, well first of all, I will say if you've been following me on, on Instagram, you'll know that I got caught out for this on the island of Mull and you'll find out what happened because sometimes we get caught. We get caught out as well. And actually I was talking to Sally Ann from North Coast Explorers yesterday for, for a podcast which will have been out, which is actually coming out next week, which is all about summer in the UK and she said about making sure you make reservations. Eh Tracy? You know. Yes. So first of all we had, we self catering. So let's talk about Lewis first. So we, we had a house.

TRACY

So self catering so we, we did go to the Tesco and there's a co op as well in Stornoway and stocked up so just take. We're just kind of breakfasty stuff. We did eat out because you're out all day so we ate at the Uig Sands restaurant. Oh my word, you have to eat there. The view is spectacular. I mean we had a beautiful sunny blue sky day and the view from that restaurant is wonderful. It was a set menu but really good. Really love that.

TRACY

That was really good. And then for on the Sunday because we're there on the Sunday we had a Sunday roast at the Dunan Hotel. I think hopefully I pronounced that correctly. I will just mention actually because I skipped this and I didn't mention want to say is you did ask me about signs. Signs are in Scottish Gaelic as well as in English because Scottish Gaelic is commonly spoken on the islands of Lewis and Harris particularly Lewis I believe. So you'll see a lot of. And you'll probably hear somebody speaking Scottish Gaelic. We certainly did in a couple of shops.

TRACY

So if you think oh I don't understand that that's probably why and you'll see that the signs will. I think they went to Scottish Gaelic first and then English. Okay, so expect to see that. So I think Dunan Hotel Excellence and the Rose. So again we booked that. You need to make sure you book. We did look at that plan ahead and book it so that made things easier. But you really need to do research on the restaurants.

DOUG

How do you book?

TRACY

You booked online.

DOUG

Okay, yeah, yeah, online.

TRACY

In fact online I think actually I think the Dunan hotel. I think Kim phoned them. I think she phoned and, and booked that the Uig Sands restaurant. We just kind of turned up and we were fired that we managed to get in. That was a Saturday. Yeah, Saturday. And we also ate in Stornoway at a lovely fish restaurant.

TRACY

I didn't have fish because I know everybody's going don't think you like fish have fish. But they did have alternatives as well which was, which was really nice. When we went down to Harris I cooked dinner on the first night so we stayed at an Airbnb with the wonderful Alistair. Hello Alistair. And. And Ross, his dog. I'm going to talk a little bit more about Alistair because I just, I loved, I loved the stay with Alistair. I.

TRACY

It was just, it was just fantastic. It was one of the best parts of the trip for me. But yeah, so food is issue so make sure you stock up if you're staying in somewhere like a lot of Airbnb and self catering on Lewis and Harris, so you can take your own. And then the second night when we stayed down in Harris, Alistair invited us for dinner. So he cooked a lovely meal, so which was really, really nice. And we had breakfast. So we made sure. For example, in sky and on Harris, we had breakfast.

TRACY

So Alistair did breakfast, obviously, when we were in Lewis, we just made our own breakfast before we went out. So we took. Were just. There was a fridge and everything in the, in the accommodation. So I will link to all of the different places we stayed and there'll be photographs as well, so you can check all of those out. Food was really good, actually. Obviously a lot of seafood and I'm not, I'm not a big seafood fan, so. But if you are, you're going to be in for a treat.

TRACY

Yeah, but. But otherwise the food was good, but you need to really plan ahead, do a little bit of research. I think we. Again, I tend to always slip up on food because it's. Yeah, I do enjoy my food but it kind of always goes out the window. And then I go, oops, Sky. We just ate. Well, we had planned to eat in the hotel on the first night and then they sent us any because I, I sent an email to book and they went, oh, and that was this guy in, in Portree.

TRACY

And they were like, oh, we're not actually that particular night. The restaurant was closed. We did eat there the next night, so we went out trying to find somewhere to eat, which again, is. Is not that easy because it's. Even at that time of the year, it's a. Things are not necessarily open because it's not that. Even though they say it's not high season and you can't get parked or anything. So I kind of think maybe they should be rethinking when they say it's high season.

TRACY

So that, that made it a little bit more difficult that first night. So we had kind of planned it and then kind of went, can't do it. Yeah, you can. What you can do is eat on the boats, the ferries, actually. And we did eat on the ferry because I got the message back from the sky and saying they couldn't do dinner. We actually ate on the ferry and chips on the ferry. So it wasn't plan B. Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

TRACY

Just make sure you've got stuff. And I mean, the main thing for me is make sure I can get a cup of tea and. And definitely because of a biscuit. Yeah, so. And also I just. I know we're talking about where we stayed. And so I really want to give a big shout out to the hotel we stayed at in, in Ullapool, which is a small, as I understand, a small family run hotel and that's a Royal Hotel in Ullapool. I cannot recommend this place highly enough.

TRACY

So if you are going to go and catch the ferry over to Lewis and Harris or you're going to catch a ferry from Ullapool Royal Hotel in Ullapool, a huge shout out particularly I'm going to say the food was, was fantastic. So Chef Paul, wow. We absolutely loved it. And a big shout out to the staff in the hotel, particularly Sean and Ricky who I said I was going to give a shout out for. I've got a picture of myself. I think it's with. With, with Ricky because he was there breakfast. But it just, it was just fantastic.

TRACY

They were absolutely wonderful with everybody but just totally professional with. They were just so. Prof. Just friendly talking to us, chatting about stuff. Just. I mean it really was. They were really standout. Absolute standout of all the places we stayed where you just went.

TRACY

Well, that was over and above. Over and above. So.

DOUG

Makes a big difference, doesn't it? Makes a big difference.

TRACY

It was just. Yeah, they were just so. They were just brilliant. So I can't. I'm gonna wax lyrical for the whole podcast.

DOUG

But okay.

TRACY

I just want to say they were just fabulous. So honestly, give it. Do yourself a treat and go and stay at the Royal Hotel at Ullapool. If you're going to be catching the ferry or if you're just going to stay in Ullapool, go and stay there because.

DOUG

Well, it's part of the North Coast 500 so if you're just doing that on the mainland. Yeah, yes, pop in there at Ullapool. Yeah, okay.

TRACY

Absolutely.

DOUG

So this question. So I'm sure you can talk about this next question for hours on end. So what are the experiences on Lewis and Harris that listeners genuinely cannot skip? Another. Well, are there any sort of good online but not really worth the detour. I'll try to put that diplomatically.

TRACY

No, honestly, I'd go everywhere that. Because it's. I mean it depends what you're going for, but I assume you're going through like wildlife. Wildlife scenery. Beaches. The beaches are beautiful.

DOUG

Well, they're famous. For the beaches. They are famous.

TRACY

They are. I mean Lewis and Harris beaches were just. I mean it just seemed to get better and better and better the first day. Actually I did plan a, a trip to see three of the beaches so went to Uig Sands, Cliff Beach and Reef. Reef Beach. I'll put. I'll share pictures and I probably aren't going to be able to pronounce all the different names of the beaches that I should. So apologies there, but.

TRACY

And then on Harris went to Luskentyre, which again, is just. I tell you what the beaches are. They're not. They're just out of that. They're huge. They're huge. Absolutely huge. And the.

TRACY

The water is just clear, beautiful blue. I've seen photos before and, and, and just thought, oh, this, this can't be right. I'd actually followed an artist called Hope Blamire, who does a lot of paintings of beaches on Lewis and Harris and actually was very lucky to. She's got a shop in. In Harris in Tarbert. So popped at the shop, bought a few things there. And so I'd kind of been inspired over the years by looking at all these beautiful paintings and photos that she'd shared. So that was a lot of the inspiration behind the trip.

TRACY

So it was wonderful to pop in the shop and. And have a look at. Her paintings are beautiful and they really reflect the beauty as well. So, yeah, so just the beaches are beautiful. Go for walks on the beaches. That's what, that's what we did. That's what we enjoyed. The Callanish stones, which are second most important archaeologically to Stonehenge, apparently.

TRACY

Yeah. There's part one, part two, or part three. Probably just one, two or three. I'm making it part one, part two, part three. But anyway, the. The main ones at the top of the hill are just fantastic. I did go to Callanish 3 and get some pictures. I didn't go to Callanish 2.

TRACY

They're kind of on a. You can kind of see from 1, 2 and 3. So obviously, I don't know if when whatever they were doing that they could all see what each of them are doing. Oh, I don't know. Anyway, these are so old and I should know that how old these stones are like thousands and thousands of years. Wow. And incredible. They're huge as well.

TRACY

You're like, how did these people get these stones up here and stand them up? And I should know more about their. Their meaning and stuff, and I don't. So I, I will apologize because I just get overawed by these things and just go, oh, my goodness, aren't they amazing? So I will. I will find out, do a little bit more research before the next podcast, and I can feel if you've got any questions about the Callanish stones. But yeah, just and there's an avenue for like Callanish 1. There's a. There's an avenue you walk up and then the. The kind of.

TRACY

There's the stone circle. Cool. And just obviously accessible. You just climb up there. You can drive up to one but walk up the hill to the others. Yep.

DOUG

Oh, fantastic. So I suppose there's lots of local crafts and products and things like that on. You know, on Lewis.

TRACY

Yes.

DOUG

Harris as well. Yeah.

TRACY

Well, obviously there's Harris tweed. So there's a lot of tweed stuff you can go and you'll find tweed for sale everywhere. So.

DOUG

Yeah, I never thought of that.

TRACY

Yeah.

DOUG

How is tweed?

TRACY

Yeah, yeah, yeah. And there's also the bottom black houses. So now they. They are from. You can go. We went in to see the black houses, actually, where we were staying Carloway. There's a couple you can go and have a look at. And these were lived into.

TRACY

In until fairly recently. It's where you've got the. The fire inside the house. Like inside the main room of the house, I think. No, like a fireplace thing. But then I guess they, they, they would. There's a lot of peat, so I'm assuming they just. Peat.

TRACY

It's where and where people lived. And they've got stone roofs. I might get this right. Stone roofs. I've got lots of photos. Had a look around. I went into the museum briefly to have a look around. So they're really famous, the black Houses and then.

TRACY

Yeah, so. So arts and crafts. Yeah, lots of crafts and lots of artists live on Lewis and Harris. So you can go and pop in and you can stop off and you'll see different shops. Did have one beside where we were staying and I popped in there and the lady was lovely and I got some photos and videos in her shop and did buy a few things.

DOUG

No wonder. You want me to bring the next suitcase.

TRACY

I've got her business card. I'll take a screenshot of that. Put that in there.

DOUG

Okay.

TRACY

I can't remember what it was called. Oh, I can't remember the name of the shop, but I'll. I'll link to that in the show. Note to put a photo because a link to her business card. Yeah. Yep.

DOUG

Well, so much to see on Lewis and Harris. How long do you think somebody going for the first time could actually spend on. On Lewis and Harris? Because it is one island, isn't it?

TRACY

It is one island. Yeah. It's a bit confusing because it sounds like it's two because one is called Lewis and one's called Harris, but it's one island. But they're very different. Lewis is. Is kind of more like peat. Peat. Flatter peat.

TRACY

So like peat bogs and marshes. I don't know. Yeah. And then the beaches. But you go to Harris is dramatically different. It's all like, just. Just like mountains and big, big stones everywhere and just far more dramatic. I.

TRACY

I think. I think both myself and Kim both preferred Harris. Not saying that anything. We would. We loved Lewis. Lewis is amazing and I would not skip Lewis anyway, but. But Harris was just kind of like, wow. But I mean, I'm a mountain person.

TRACY

I like mountains. Just. Just incredibly beautiful and very diff. Just so different because actually the three islands that we were at, so if you think of Lewis and then we went to Harris and then went to sky, all completely different.

DOUG

Yeah.

TRACY

Completely different type of scenery. So, like, it's really funny because we went to sky and Kim hadn't been to sky before and she said this feels like more like the mainland. It's more gentle. It's like a. So softer kind of fluffy version.

DOUG

Yeah.

TRACY

Like, Lewis and Harris are just far more gritty and just. Yeah, just. I mean, fantastic. Just fantastic. And I. I go back to both. In a heartbeat. In a heartbeat.

TRACY

But I would say we did five days. So three days on Lewis, two on Harris. That worked absolutely fine. I felt that was. That was probably enough.

DOUG

That's enough.

TRACY

Yeah. Yeah. And then we just had two on sky, mainly for a couple of reasons. Reasons. One, I've been to sky many times before and B, it's. Again, it's just. Even though this was the end of. Yeah, it was the last day of April, I think, around it.

TRACY

It was. It was incredibly busy. We couldn't get. We're trying to get parked at the Quiraing. Oh, my goodness. There's just. Yeah, I'm a bit sad. I'm a bit sad that.

DOUG

Okay, we'll cover sky in a second. So just tell me a bit about the crossing from across to Sky. From.

TRACY

From Harris. Tarbert. Yeah, from Harris. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

DOUG

How does that crossing work?

TRACY

Exactly the same as the one previously. You just go and park up. Okay. And then the tick, you're on the ferry. It's a small. It was a smaller ferry that took about an hour 40. Again, it was a very smooth crossing. So you've been fine.

TRACY

Got off at Uig on Sky and then it was just a drive.

DOUG

You keep saying. You keep saying Uig. Just tell everybody how you spell that, would you, please?

TRACY

Yeah. U I G not egg.

DOUG

So I called it.

TRACY

No, no, I did look it up and I did ask the locals and it's.

DOUG

Yeah, okay.

TRACY

I think it means bay. I think it actually means bay. Are some of these obviously the words that. Yeah, yeah, it means different things, which is why you'll find an Uig on Lewis and Harris and a Uig on Sky. There's Uigs everywhere, but. Yeah, so that, that was the easy crossing. It was no problem. The main problem we had is that we were driving from.

TRACY

From. From Uig to Portree and they closed. There's not many roads and they closed the road to resurface it.

DOUG

Oh, wow.

TRACY

So we sat for nearly an hour before and then said, oh, we're only going to open the road at 8pm so by the time it got to 8pm, I can tell you how many irate because all of the people off the ferry, if they just waited for the people off the ferry to go into Portree with middle life, but they decided to close it and I. We were a bit like, well, I know the ferry's coming in with all these people anyway. So that was a bit of a. So there was a lot of irate people kind of going, right. So we had to wait 55 minutes to them and then they open.

DOUG

Imagine. Imagine how many people get on sky coming from Lewis and Harris and all of a sudden across onto Sky. There's a lot more traffic anyway.

TRACY

Oh, yes, yes.

DOUG

Because a certain amount of people that go to sky is, you know.

TRACY

Yeah, it's. Yeah, yeah, it's easy to get the sky. The roads are the, the main roads are better on sky in terms of like, you know, they're pretty good. But once you get. Again, once you get off in a single roads.

DOUG

Yes.

TRACY

You know, they're not so good, actually. I think they were better on Harris a lot. The Harris and Lewis, the single roads were better.

DOUG

I do remember a lot of potholes on sky.

TRACY

Potholes, yeah. And the problem with sky is, just as I said before, you just can't get parked.

DOUG

Just volume of people.

TRACY

Yeah. It's just the sheer volume because you can drive over. It's easy now. People can just drive over on the bridge. So it's less hassle to kind of organize to get there.

DOUG

It's difficult to see the things on sky because there's people all day long, you know, waiting to see.

TRACY

Yeah.

DOUG

So there's really no quiet moment, is there? It's just got to be lucky and wait.

TRACY

Yeah. Because we've done it early in the morning. We got up so early that the, the mist hadn't had. Remember when we went to the Quiraing last time and we had to sit in the car for like an hour and even then try to get parked. It's not easy. You have to pay for parking as well and there's just. You just can't get. There's just so many people.

TRACY

Just so many people. So that's a bit of a shock to the system after Lewis. Yeah, not so many people. Yeah but let's.

DOUG

Let's talk about budget and timing. So you've already said what time of year that you visited because you're not long gone back so it's hard to say about spending because obviously everybody has different budgets but just gives an idea about cost of things and fuel put food and fuel if. If you can.

TRACY

Not easy Fuel at the minute has gone. It's gone up in cost so again that. That's difficult to kind of. I'd say the main thing people worried about is not getting fuel but you could get.

DOUG

Yeah.

TRACY

In terms of the ferries obviously these ch. These are booked in January and this is for two passengers and a car but it's going to depend on the size of your car. So they're very over from. Just to Stornoway, it was 90, about 95 pound and then the ferry to Uig was. Was about 58. 59 I think or 50.

DOUG

Right.

TRACY

Come on. Right in 50. And then accommodation obviously I was sharing that so we. That that varied. It's not cheap I have to say to you because you know there's a lot of demand for if you people going over if they're going to Harris. Oh and there's only a certain amount of places you can stay.

DOUG

Sure.

TRACY

So it's not cheap but it. But it's good. So as I say the first place we had a. A two bedroomed house which was. Which actually was three bedroom house which was really nice with everything included so you know kitchen and could wash stuff and all the rest of it which was lovely. And then we stayed in Harris. We stayed at Alistair's Airbnb so that Alistair is fantastic and he. I.

TRACY

I just had an amazing time. I've shared some beautiful photos. I went. You did a walk with. Yeah, I went for a walk with Alistair and Ross. Yeah he's collie dog one evening because he does that twice a day takes the dog for a walk around so that was. I don't know how long it took maybe an hour or so and it was up and down and around. He's like a mountain goat.

TRACY

He was unbelievable. And I was like as me with my stick struggling. It's a bit marshy at places but oh my God, the view. And then I planted a tree as well. So there's Tracy's tree in Alistair's place and Alistair was, you know, what a, what a fantastic guy. What a place to live. So his mum was born on Harris so he's got that connection and he used to travel there all the time as a child. He told me so many amazing stories and he decided that's where he wanted to retire to, so built his house which he has an Airbnb.

TRACY

Yeah, I just, just fantastic. Absolutely. Just loved Alistair. So I'm hoping I can share this podcast and he can, he can listen to. To know how much he was appreciated because he, he truly was.

DOUG

Yeah.

TRACY

He lived in Australia as well part of his life. So we're talking about. He lived in Perth so we talked about that. Yeah. So it was great. Yeah. And just going out with, with Ross the dog and I, it was, it was lovely. It was so relaxing.

TRACY

Now I will say I, I kind of learned this from. I think there's a lot of bird watchers out there so I'm sure there's lots of bird life as well on Lewis and Harris which I probably didn't appreciate as much as I did until I went to Mull and people went, oh look, there's a white tailed eagle and there's a golden eagle. I was like, oh wow. So I assume that's also fantastic bird like life on.

DOUG

I bet there is. Yeah.

TRACY

Lewis and Harris as well. Yeah. But yeah, the weather was really good. We're very, very lucky. In fact, when we were shopping in the Tesco the. The cashier was saying, you're so lucky. The weather is perfect because they've had a lot of rain and we literally had sunshine and as warm as it's going to get for those on. So it still, it was still pretty, you know, it wasn't 30 degrees put it that way, but it was warm.

TRACY

I had my jacket on. I had. It still had a hat and scarf on but it was beautiful. Sunglasses on. Enjoying that as I say, it wasn't. There wasn't a lot of wind so there's no. There used to be trees apparently on, on Lewis but maybe Lewis ours but there's not anymore because apparently now I don't know if it's true the Vikings burnt them all down so I. And now they've got the peat bogs so don't quote me on that but.

TRACY

So there's not. But they say there's quite windy those islands, but we didn't have a lot of wind. So. Yeah, it was good.

DOUG

It was really good. Sounds like a fantastic trip you've had. So if anybody's listening to this and they're actually looking to do something similar, you know, what does the planning checklist actually look like and is there anything you do slightly different next time?

TRACY

No, I think it worked out really well. I think the, the amount of nights was good. The three and the two. Because, because, because obviously after that I was going to sky and then I was going to Mull and I had five nights in Mull so that worked really well. Probably just spend. I, I don't know. I, I just, I think if you're driving yourself maybe just take a few, you know, just take a few groceries and stuff like that with you. But you can buy them.

TRACY

You can buy those in store. No way. Just, just if, if it's important to you about, you know, knowing where you're gonna have dinner, then you just, you do need to plan that ahead of time. If you're not in a place where you can self cater.

DOUG

And what about the time of year that you went is, do you say that is a very good time here to go or do you go slightly different time?

TRACY

No, I think it was actually perfect.

DOUG

Yeah.

TRACY

I, I mean we didn't have any midges but. Midges, midges, wherever you want to pronounce them. But I think they can, they can be a little bit of, of an issue but there's lots of. It depends on the weather again but I think in the summer they can be a little bit more annoying.

DOUG

Yeah.

TRACY

But again like a bit of breeze and stuff and that kind of. They don't like breeze and they don't like, they don't like sunny days apparently. So we didn't have any issues with that. It was quite on Lewis and Harris but again there's only a limited amount of people that can go there and I was actually talking to again some of the locals and they're quite happy with the volume they've got because they, they are concerned that they don't have the infrastructure in place. A bit like sky doesn't infrastructure in place to deal with a huge influx, influx of tourists, that's for sure. And I don't think they do, I don't think they'll be able to cope with it. So it's probably, it's probably as what it needs to be at the moment. I don't think they're particularly, I mean, I don't know, I think there, it has been quiet this year.

TRACY

I think there's a little bit concern about it's quiet and whether that's due to the ferries or whether that's just due to tourism general is a little bit down this year. But just yeah, just be aware things like on a Sunday in Lewis things will be shut I assume be exactly the same in Harris. We went in Harris on the Sunday but Lewis everything was shut, all the shops, there's nothing open on it. Yeah, that took us a little bit by surprise but we had booked a Sunday roast so that was fine. But there's not a lot to do so make sure that you like you can go to the beach that day and stuff like that but if you want to go shopping or you want to fill up with petrol, you that's. Don't do that. Yeah. Expect I would honestly recommend and I know we saw it do Tripiamo driving course.

TRACY

If you are unsure about how to drive on these sort of roads and seriously it's not for the faint hearted, I'll tell you, you need to know what you're doing and especially if you're used to driving on the other side of the road or even if you used to drive in Australia or New Zealand or wherever. Honestly it's, I think it's very different driving on these sort of islands. It's. You need to be really aware of the rules the road. You need to be aware of kind of just etiquette when it comes to passing places. You need to be very aware of things like the, the fact that you could get, get you know, a lot of livestock on the road. You can get deer in the middle of the road. You could get, you know, a lot at the minute, a lot of say lots of lambs all over the places.

TRACY

So you just need to kind of be aware and plan for that. As I say, if you're going to do this, do not think that you can wing it. Make sure you book those ferries and you book your accommodation after that. You can do it. You can then start looking at the, the you know, things like, you know, what day the Black House is open, what, what restaurants you want to eat at that sort of thing. But make sure you absolutely don't think I'm just going to head over to Lewis and Harris and then find accommodation when you get there. Because you won't you absolutely.

DOUG

And probably recommend listening to a very decent podcast I'd imagine as well about. Something visited.

TRACY

Yeah, I think that's it. It's like as somebody who's just recently been and done it, that's a good idea and experienced it. And so the next episode is, is because I guess that's. I think we've kind of wrapped up Harris and Lewis. If, if there's any questions, just, you know, get into the Facebook group or, or send me an email if this is a trip that you're thinking about doing. So the next, the next episode I'm going to be talking about. So we left sky, drove down to Oban. I had originally planned to get the bus from Fort William down to Oban, but then Kim decided she, she was going to come down Oban as well.

TRACY

So did that drive leave. I stayed in Oban one night and then I spent the next five nights over in Mull. Now I did all of that and actually came back over from Mull to Oban and up to Fort William to catch the Caledonian Sleeper. That was all done solo and public transport. So I can talk a lot in the next episode, all about Mull, all about Iona, the places I stayed, how I got around, how I found it in that episode. So that was a solo. That was just me, me going and doing that.

DOUG

I would love for.

TRACY

You made a few little mistakes, but yeah, it was really good actually. Talk about the public transport, which is particularly what I want to do because we've, we're often asked about that. So again, met lots of lovely people. Yeah, it was just, it was really, really good. I thoroughly enjoyed it. I absolutely love Scotland. You know, been going since I was knee high to grass. Grasshopper.

TRACY

Is that the term? Yeah. So feel along a very strong attachment and I know everybody says their, their relations are Scottish but my, my maiden name was. So my, my grandparents were from Scotland. Yeah, from actually near Callander. So yes. So it's always really fun when I'm in Scotland because my surname is. My maiden name is a Scottish name and I see it everywhere, just different spellings which is always really fun. Yeah.

TRACY

So yeah, I think that was. That gives everybody an idea of what we did. I will put in the show notes. Well, thanks for chatting to me about this, Doug.

DOUG

Not a problem.

TRACY

I'm sure I made you jealous and you'll be wanting to do the trip.

DOUG

Yeah. Jealous about being there, not jealous about the, the sea travel. You were looking. You were lucky.

TRACY

Yeah, it was very, very, very smooth.

DOUG

You were easy.

TRACY

I will put in the show notes, I will put links. Links. Hopefully I'll get a YouTube video up just time wise at the minute and then I'll put a link to some photos. I will put links to the accommodation and some of the restaurants that we ate at as well. And so if you're planning to do this, it's probably too late for this year, but I mean maybe September, October you could do. But I certainly probably wouldn't this I think you one thing you're gonna ask, I probably wouldn't want to do Harris or Lewis in the middle of winter, put it that way. Those roads when the icy. No, no.

TRACY

Big, big no from me.

DOUG

Yeah.

TRACY

Yeah. So probably for next year now if you're planning this trip. So yeah, photos, links, everything will be in the show notes. That's uktravelplanning.com forward slash episode202 and as I say, part two will be out at the end of June. So tune in for that if the island of Mull and island of Iona, which I absolutely love, is on your potential future itinerary when you visit Scotland. Anyway, Doug, thanks so much for chatting with me. You're going to interview me in a second all about Mull and Iona, aren't you?

DOUG

I am. That's to come.

TRACY

Yeah. And you'll be arrived in by the time this episode is out, which is on the 26th of May, you'll have just arrived in the UK, won't you?

DOUG

I'll have just arrived on the bank holiday Monday.

TRACY

Yeah. 25th. So yeah. So there's lots of stuff coming in June about all the trips that we're gonna everything that we've got planned. But for this week it's just leaves, I guess, myself, Doug to say, as

DOUG

always, happy UK Travel Planning.

ANNOUNCER

Thank you for tuning in to this week's episode of the UK Travel Planning Podcast. As always, show notes can be found at uktravelplanning.com. If you've enjoyed the show, why not leave us feedback via text or a review on your favorite podcast app? We love to hear from you. And you never know, you may receive a shout out in a future episode, but as always, that just leaves me to say until next week. Happy UK Travel Planning.