



HIGHLAND GAMES 2017

Your essential guide to Scotland's inspirational games

MINI-GUIDE

WELCOME

I'm delighted to welcome you to VisitScotland's Highland Games Guide, a handy way to see when and where these traditional Scottish events are taking place this summer. As chieftain of the Inveraray Highland Games and President of the Argyllshire Gathering in Oban, I've had the pleasure of attending many games days over the years and would highly recommend that on a trip to Scotland you put one of these events on your 'must-do' list.

Highland games have a long tradition in a land as vast and remote as this, it's a rare chance to meet new people and socialise; but above all to celebrate the skill, strength and endurance of the Highlander. Each event has its own unique character driven by their iconic locations and the people who attend and compete. The appeal is far reaching from locals enjoying the celebrations to our visitors who come to experience our traditions and enjoy our legendary hospitality.

As a Clan Chief I am no longer looking for my bravest fighters and champions but am there as the figure head of the events and take great interest in the competitions and our visitors. It gives me a wonderful opportunity to welcome as many people as I can.

The highlight of the games for me is usually the very high standard of piping and Highland dancing and in particular the younger generation who work so hard to compete.

However the biggest reward is to see the smile on the faces of those that have come to visit. For some it may be their first and for others the annual draw can't keep them away.

My fondest memories of Highland games probably come from my childhood. That wonderful opportunity to be together with your friends and tearing around as kilted miniature Highlanders. I watch on today as a proud father as my children do just the same.

This guide is an excellent resource, here to help you decide which event to attend, and offering suggestions of great things to see and do in the surrounding area.

I hope that you enjoy browsing the listings, and have a wonderful time at the games, whichever one you choose to attend.



Torquhil Campbell, the 13th Duke of Argyll, is the chief of Clan Campbell and lives with his family in his ancestral home, Inveraray Castle. Located on the banks of Loch Fyne, the castle, grounds, garden, shop and café are open to visitors, and hold a number of events throughout the year, including Inveraray Highland Games, the Best of the West Festival and spring flower festivals.

Duke of Argyll at Inveraray Highland Games

FUN FACTS

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Games and sports have been part of Scottish culture for centuries. Some believe the roots of the Highland games date as far back as the 11th century, when King Malcolm III called a foot race to the summit of Creag Choinnich, near **Braemar**, in the hopes of finding the fastest runner in the land to become his personal courier.

In the modern format we know today, Highland games have been celebrated around Scotland since the 1800s and regularly draw in crowds of thousands. Amongst the most historic is the **Braemar Gathering**, which was awarded Royal Patronage by Queen Victoria and is still regularly attended by Her Majesty The Queen and other members of the Royal Family.

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An authentic Highland games combines sport, fun and culture, all with a unique Scottish twist. Heavy contests like the hammer throw see competitors put their muscles to the test, while field events such as the hill race test speed and stamina. Pipers show off their skills in both solo and band competitions, while dancers give dazzling displays of fancy footwork in set pieces including the sword dance and the famous Highland fling.

Perhaps the games' most iconic event, the caber toss, is rumoured to have stemmed from the need to toss logs over chasms. Nowadays, however, it is judged on style rather than distance: competitors aim to flip a log weighing up to 11 st so that it falls away from them as close to the '12 o'clock position as possible'. The length it travels is entirely unimportant.

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World records are regularly broken at Highland games in Scotland and beyond. In 2014 a new Guinness World Record was set at the Masters World Championships in **Inverness**, when the most cabers were tossed at the same time. Over 160 kilted athletes took part, with 66 cabers being successfully tossed in the allotted time.



Ryan Dolan lifts Paul Craig, Scottish Backhold Wrestling at Cowal Gathering 2014



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Highland dancing at the games was originally an all-male event, and it wasn't until the late 19th century that women started to enter. **The Cowal Gathering** is renowned for the quality of its Highland dancing, drawing in the best performers from around the globe as they compete in the Scottish and World Championships.

For many, one of the most memorable sights of the Highland games is the massed bands, when hundreds of pipers from different groups come together to play and march in unison. Look out for the solo piping competitions, where competitors play in a range of styles, including the pibroch, which is considered the classical music of the **bagpipe**. Pibrochs tend to be slow, stately and complex.

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This year the World Championship Haggis Eating Competition takes place at **Birnam Highland Games**. A fun, yet fiercely competitive event, the winner is the competitor who finishes eating a pound of haggis in the quickest amount of time. The 2014 winner was Martin Bristow, from Murthly in Perthshire, who ate the haggis in 90 seconds, and finally clinched the title after coming second in three previous attempts.

You never know quite what you'll see at a Highland games. Often one of the highlights of the local community calendar, they usually include a range of side shows, such as livestock events, parades, pet shows and even bonny baby competitions. At the Aberfeldy Show and Games in Perthshire, you can even watch the more unusual sport of terrier racing!

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Several games have boasted famous chieftains, including the singer Susan Boyle, who was Chieftain of the **West Lothian Highland Games** in 2014. Ewan McGregor (*Star Wars*, *Trainspotting*) was named Chieftain of the games in his hometown Crieff in 2001, and fellow actor Dougray Scott (*Desperate Housewives*, *Mission Impossible: II*) has held the honour at the **Markinch Games** in Fife.

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Did you know that Baron Coubertin, the founder of the modern Olympics, was so greatly impressed by a Highland display he saw at the 1889 Paris Exhibition that he introduced the hammer throw, shot put and the tug o' war to his competition? The former two are still included to this day.



Haggis hurling began as a practical joke in the 1970s but is now a popular event at many Highland games – there's even a World Haggis Hurling Association dedicated to the sport! The current world record was set at the **Milngavie Highland Games** in 2011, when Lorne Coltart hurled a haggis an impressive 217 ft.

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Highland games now take place all around the world. The most northerly are held in Finnmark, Norway and the furthest south in Dunedin in New Zealand. The US and Canada host hundreds of Highland games, and there's even a Latin American edition of the event in Brazil's Sapucaia do Sul each year.

The Scottish Highland Games Association, who represent over 60 Highland games in Scotland, state that all competitors in open heavy events must wear a kilt when they compete. Great news for kilt makers, and fans of the **tartan** look!

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Competitors in the heavy events use a range of techniques to improve their chances of winning. One movement in the weight for height event goes by the somewhat surprising nickname of 'the handbag technique', because the starting position is similar to where one would hold a handbag.

UNIQUELY SCOTTISH

Ever wondered if you have roots in a Highland clan? Why the thistle was chosen as the symbol of Scotland? Who St Andrew was? Or what the Stone of Destiny actually is? Then look no further! This handy guide will give you a whistle stop tour of all things uniquely Scottish...

Tartan (1)

With its colourful threads and traditional criss-cross pattern, tartan is Scotland's most famous textile. Originating in the Highlands, the first recorded reference to tartan in Scotland dates from 1538, when clanspeople would use local plants, mosses and berries to dye wool before spinning and weaving it into a fabric.

Image: Tartan sash pinned with brooch

The kilt (2)

The iconic Scottish kilt has evolved over the centuries. From its Highland origin, the tartan kilt became a fashion statement for Victorian aristocracy before evolving into the timeless and stylish attire that remains popular today.

Image: Tartan kilt and sporran

Clans (3)

The history of Scotland's colourful - and often bloody - clan system fascinates anyone with Scottish heritage, but did you know that not everyone in the same clan was actually related to each other? Anyone living on clan land had the right to be counted as part of the clan-chief's followers.

Image: The Glencoe Massacre Memorial to Clan MacDonald

Bagpipes (4)

With deep roots in Scotland's Gaelic culture, the rich sounds and rousing notes of Scotland's national instrument are at once unmistakable and hauntingly beautiful. From buskers on the street to pipe bands, you are likely to hear the incredible drone of the pipes before you even see the piper!

Image: Piper in full Highland regalia playing the pipes

Gaelic (5)

Melodic and beautiful, you're sure to be moved by the richness of the Gaelic tongue and its evocative music. The indigenous language of Scotland, Gaelic (pronounced gah-lick) is not as widely spoken as it once was but it is enjoying a revival and you can still hear and see its influence in many Scottish place names, mountain names and bilingual road and rail signs.

Image: "Welcome to Portree" sign in Isle of Skye

The Scottish thistle (6)

Alongside tartan, the thistle is perhaps one of the most identifiable Scottish symbols. Legend has it that the thistle was adopted as the symbol of Scotland after it saved a sleeping party of Scottish warriors from ambush. The story goes that an unsuspecting member of an invading Norse army trod on one barefoot and roused the sleeping Scots.

Image: Flowering thistle plant





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Scotland's crown jewels (7)

Scotland's priceless crown jewels, known as the Honours of Scotland, were first used to crown the infant Mary Queen of Scots at Stirling Castle in 1543. You'll see the jewel encrusted crown, elaborate sword and sceptre, together with the Stone of Destiny, on display at Edinburgh Castle.

Image: The Honours of Scotland

Whisky (8)

Whisky is Scotland's most famous export and has been proudly produced throughout the country for hundreds of years. You can pay a visit to many working distilleries which carefully craft their own unique single malts and whisky blends, often following secret and closely guarded recipes. If you're new to whisky, a good place to start is by learning about the complex and varied flavours of Scotland's five distinct **whisky regions** with our **FREE whisky distilleries eBooks**.

Image: Glass of whisky

Scotland's patron saint, St Andrew (9)

St Andrew has been the patron saint of Scotland since around the year AD 1000. After his crucifixion in Greece, legend has it that St Andrew's remains were moved to a church on the east coast of Fife, which subsequently became the cathedral of St Andrews. You'll see a likeness to the diagonal X-shaped cross on which St Andrew was martyred on Scotland's national flag, the Saltire.

Image: St Andrews Cathedral

The Saltire (10)

Believed to be the oldest flag in Europe, Scotland's national flag, known as the Saltire, is recognised the world over by its distinctive azure blue background (Pantone 300 for those with a bit of design knowledge!) and bright white St Andrew's cross.

Image: Saltire flag

Ceilidhs (11)

Take your partner by the hand and have the time of your life spinning across the floor to some lively ceilidh tunes. This traditional Scottish dance often marks the end of a town's Highland games and is guaranteed to be filled with fun, laughter and toe-tapping music. You're usually talked through the steps before each dance begins by an experienced ceilidh caller, so there's nothing to stop beginners from joining in. You'll be an expert by the end.

Image: Ceilidh at Hopetoun House

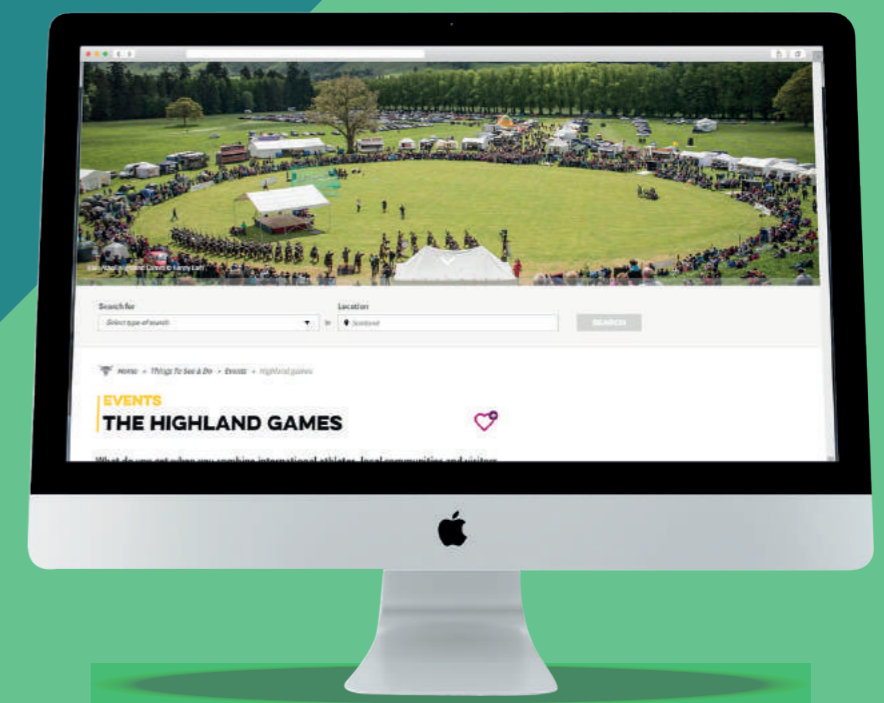
Haggis (12)

This delicious savoury pudding is one of Scotland's most popular dishes and is served on menus all over the country. Combining meat, oatmeal, salt and spices, you might be surprised to learn that haggis is a tasty dish and not, in fact, a furry wee animal you'll find at the top of a Scottish mountain. Order this **delicious Scottish delicacy** next time you see it on a menu and enjoy the savoury flavours.

Image: Haggis display in Melrose

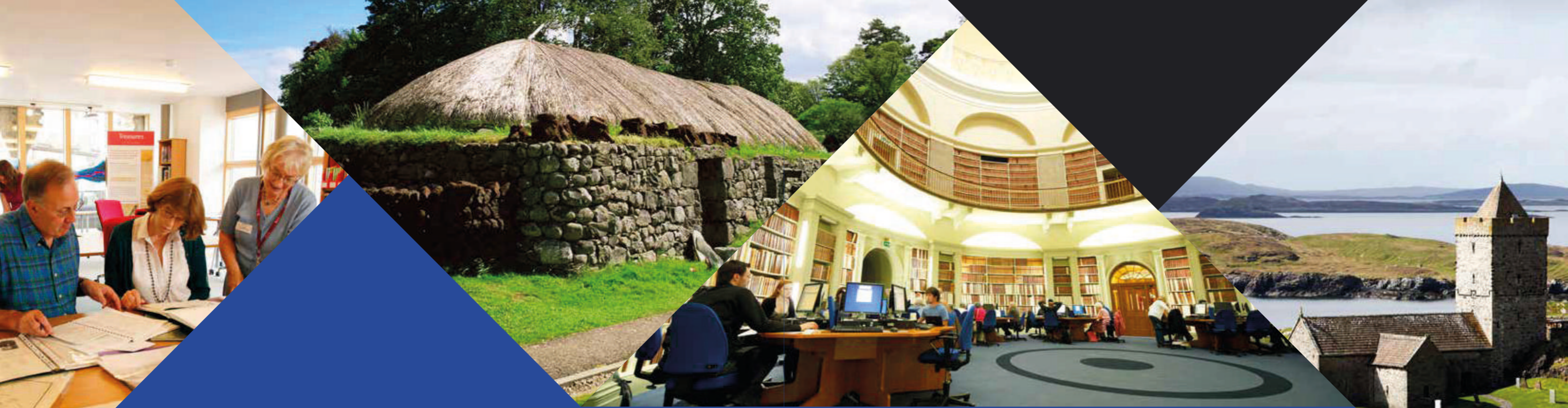
Want to find out more? Discover more about Scotland's famous icons, unearth your Scottish roots and plan your perfect day out in Scotland at **www.visitscotland.com/uniquelyscottish**

SCOTLAND'S HIGHLAND GAMES



Scotland's Highland games run from May to September every year right across the country. For details of the events planned so far for 2017, please visit

www.visitscotland.com/see-do/events/highland-games



RESEARCH YOUR FAMILY ROOTS

Everyone has a story and a rich and unique genealogical history, but most people have still to discover it.

If you're attending one of the exciting Highland games events in Scotland and have started wondering if your roots may be Scottish too, or whether you're connected with one of the Scottish clans, why not dig a little into your ancestors' history to find out?

There are plenty of easy-to-use tools for delving into your family's past and even more historical sites to visit, so we've rounded up some tips to guide you on your ancestral journey:

Edinburgh's resources

There is a wealth of genealogical and historical materials held in Scottish archives, libraries and record repositories throughout the country. If you live in Scotland or get the chance to visit, begin your search at the National Records of Scotland, home to the **Scotlands People Centre in Edinburgh**. One of the

most varied collections of public and private archives in Europe, you can search statutory registers of births, marriages and deaths, census returns, Old Parish Registers, Wills and Testaments and browse more than 100 million index entries. This exciting, world-leading initiative is the official Scottish genealogy resource.

Pay a visit to the **Scottish Genealogy Society Family History Centre on** Victoria Street for more information and advice, or become a member of one of Scotland's family history societies. Both are valuable sources of information, but best of all – it's where you can meet like-minded travellers, get some extra guidance and encouragement and share and exchange your experiences and tips with fellow researchers.

The National Library of Scotland should certainly be on your list of 'sites-to-explore' too, as it's the world's leading centre for the study of Scotland and the Scots, while at the **Scottish Archive Network**, also accessible online, you will find plenty of digital images of exhibitions, publications and more to help you dig into your past. And that's not all!

Regional archives

Scotland boasts an excellent range of archive centres at local registrars' offices and libraries as well as museums and heritage centres outside of the capital city. Search for your roots at the fantastic **Highland Archive Centre in Inverness**, a state-of-the-art facility including a family history room, archive conservation unit and repository

facilities. The Heritage Hub in the Scottish Borders' town of Hawick is a treasure trove of archive materials, offering one of the most advanced facilities of its kind in the UK.

If you think your family may have come from the islands, **Co Leis Thu?**, an online resource based at **Seallam! Visitor Centre**, on the Isle of Harris in the Outer Hebrides or **Orkney Family History Society** in Kirkwall are both great starting points to get your family tree researched.

First hand experience

It's undoubtedly a rewarding process having your family roots researched and discovered, but make sure you visit and explore the sites your ancestors lived and worked for a full, first-hand experience.

- Tour your family castle and **historical sites** connected with your ancestors
- Visit the **cemetery** or **churchyard** where your ancestors are buried
- Find out if your clan was involved in the last battle fought on British soil at **Culloden Battlefield** near Inverness
- Explore the **Highland Folk Museum** in Newtonmore, an amazing, mile-long recreation site of an old Highland township
- For an idea of whether your surname is connected with one of Scotland's famous clans and to find out more of where your family may have come from, use

search facilities on sites such as **ScotsClans**.

- Or to uncover the turbulent Jacobite times in Scottish history, visit **West Highland Museum** in Fort William for useful tips
- Love tartan? To track down your family tartan, browse the **Scottish Register of Tartans'** online collection.

For more information on researching your Scottish roots and how to plan a trip to the land of your ancestors, visit www.visitscotland.com/ancestry where you will find further information. You can also download our free **guide to researching your Scottish ancestry**.

“HOW TO” WITH JAMIE BARR

Think you’ve got what it takes to be a Highland games heavy athlete? Reckon you could toss a caber at a Highland games, but not sure how it’s done?

We got Scottish strongman Jamie Barr to show you how it’s done at Balgonie Castle in Fife. Click on any of the three images to see our “How To” videos for Shot Put, Caber Toss and Weight for Height.

SHOT PUT



- 1 WRAP THE WRIST & CHALK THE STONE
- 2 WEDGE STONE INTO SIDE OF HEAD THEN KEEPING YOUR ELBOW HIGH DRIVE FORWARD FROM THE HIPS
- 3 THROW THE STONE AS HARD AS YOU CAN

WEIGHT FOR HEIGHT



- 1 PLANT FEET FIRMLY ON THE GROUND & PICK UP WEIGHT WITH ONE HAND
- 2 SWING THE WEIGHT BACK THROUGH YOUR LEGS
- 3 DRIVE WITH THE LEGS & THROW THE WEIGHT UP & OVER THE BAR

CABER TOSS



- 1 LIFT THE CABER, GRIP IT WITH CLASPED HANDS AT THE BOTTOM AND PIVOT
- 2 START RUNNING AS FAST AS YOU CAN & CHOOSE A POINT OF RELEASE
- 3 USE YOUR MOMENTUM AND DRIVE WITH YOUR LEGS & HIPS, PUSH UP WITH YOUR HANDS AS YOU RELEASE THE CABER



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The events information in this eBook is, to the best of VisitScotland's knowledge, correct at the time of publication. Events can be subject to change, so we recommend you check details on the event website before travelling.