

NATIONAL TRUST FOR SCOTLAND MEDIA RELEASE

Scotland's most stunning winter walks

Winter has arrived and already the central belt has seen snowfall and its first icy snap. Lockdown has inspired many Scots to get out and enjoy the country's nature reserves, parks and landscapes, but as we enter that most wonderful time of the year and a nip enters the air, that doesn't mean that we should all hide indoors.

Scotland has breath-taking winter views and places which take on a whole new life and look at this time of year and the National Trust for Scotland has sites all over the country which are carefully managed by their staff and give you a chance to safely discover winter's treasures.

You can find all of their locations and updated information on any Covid-19 safety measures or restrictions on the charity's website, nts.org.uk, but here we select a magnificent seven winter wonderlands for you to explore.

Killiecrankie

The scene of one of Scotland's bloodiest battles and the infamous Soldier's Leap, where one terrified Government trooper jumped the River Garry to escape pursuing Jacobites, The Pass of Killiecrankie also offers breath-taking winter views. As the leaves fall and the giant trees stand bare, you begin to appreciate the true size and scale of this woodland gorge. You may also be lucky enough to spot pine martens, red squirrels, foxes and badgers or here the winter warble of the dipper. This plump little white breasted bird has a distinctive courtship call, which has been compared to the sound of 'babbling water'.

House of Dun + Montrose Basin

The grounds and gardens of this 18th century Georgian home are equally beautiful in winter and visitors can tread paths and see original features recently uncovered by National Trust for Scotland archaeologists. Head outside the grounds and down to Montrose Basin, you soon find yourself in one of Scotland's most important bird reserves. Every winter, this vast tidal basin is home to thousands of pink-footed geese, who are escaping the harsh winters of Iceland and eastern Greenland. They are joined by elegant whooper swans, plus thousands of wigeon, knot, redshank, shelduck and many other species.

Glencoe

The glen is one of Scotland's most stunning landscapes, whatever the season. But when winter bites you get a true sense of its majesty. Glencoe has featured in movies from Harry Potter to James Bond, which makes it fitting that one of its winter visitors is the goldeneye duck. Loch Achtriochtan is the best place to see the area's winter birdlife but NTS staff at the Glencoe Visitor Centre will also be able to provide advice on everything, from conditions to the best walking route and where to spot wildlife. You should see plenty of red deer on

the lower slopes. Just make sure you check weather reports before travelling and have the right footwear, clothing and, if you are taking a more challenging route, equipment.

The Hermitage

This Perthshire wooded glen, with its towering Douglas Firs and quirky follies, has had some notable visitors in the past. A stroll here allows you to follow in the footsteps of William Wordsworth, Queen Victoria, Felix Mendelssohn and JMW Turner. In winter the forest takes on a whole new light as spray from the River Braan coats the rocks and trees with ice. And look out for signs of otters at play. You'll see traces of snow chutes on the banks, created by their sliding bellies and the odd half-eaten fish! And even if the weather is a little testing, the Hermitage still makes for a great walk with some of the paths sheltered by the trees.

Mar Lodge

There are suitable walks for people of all ages and abilities on this sprawling estate, but it is a paradise for the seasoned winter hillwalker. Britain's largest National Nature Reserve in the heart of the Cairngorms boasts no fewer than 15 Munros, including the second highest mountain in the UK – Ben Macdui. Four of Britain's top five tallest mountains actually fall within the Mar Lodge territory although the estate also boasts woodlands, wetlands and moors. It really is the Highlands in miniature and the place to see Scotland's winter wildlife.

St Abb's

The rugged cliffs and beaches of St Abb's Head are a great place to blow away the festive cobwebs. The nature reserve is also home to Scotland's fastest growing seal colony. Zero seals were on the beaches in 2007. This year the pup count stood at 1806. The pups usually take to the sea and strike out on their own towards the end of the year, but you will still see – and hear – some of the thousands of seabirds who call the area home. Dress for the weather and prepare for a brisk and spectacular stroll.

Ben Lawers

Another paradise for winter walkers with a network of high-level summit walks. As always, when taking to the hills, check weather reports and make sure you are suitably dressed and have the right equipment. The estate has other, less testing ways to enjoy the mountain landscape and waymarked trails on the lower slopes give views of the summits and over Loch Tay. And on those lower slopes you are likely to spot deer who are often found in the sheltered corries.

ENDS

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Editor's Notes:

The National Trust for Scotland is the charity that celebrates and protects Scotland's heritage. It relies on the support of its members and donors to carry out its important work of caring for the natural and built heritage of Scotland for everyone to enjoy.

From coastlines to castles, art to architecture, wildlife to wildernesses, the National Trust for Scotland exists to protect the national and natural treasures we all love. To plan your visit today, enter your postcode at www.nts.org.uk.

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