



St Hilda Sea Adventures

Seahorse II

Eight Nights Mull and Small Isles Cruise

30th April - 8th May 2024

Day 1: Dunstaffnage – Loch Drum Buie

After meeting up with the guests and crew at Dunstaffnage Marina and settling into our home for the next eight days we headed up the Sound of Mull to our first anchorage in Loch Drum Buie, passing Lismore Lighthouse and Tobermory Bay.



After a lovely meal and chat over dinner we retired to our cabins, ready for our first full day. Dawn broke to reveal lovely calm waters and our first major sighting of two Golden Eagles high on a ridge. A lone Harbour Porpoise spent a good three hours hunting near the boat and was still there as we up-anchored and headed to Rum the largest of 'The Small Isles'. As we left the Loch a White-tailed Sea Eagle bade us farewell at the narrow entrance.

Day 2: Isle of Rum



On the way to Rum we encountered Common and Bridled Guillemot, Manx Shearwater, Shag and a brief sighting of a Minke Whale.





After anchoring up in Loch Scresort, we headed ashore in lovely warm sunshine. Great Northern and Red-Throated Divers were present in the loch, lots of Willow Warblers and Cuckoos could be heard. The highlight of the afternoon was an Osprey being mobbed by gulls and Oystercatchers over the bay







Chef became Cake-Maker during the trip, making Birthday Cakes for 2 of the guests.

Day 3: Isle of Canna

The day dawned bright with a steady breeze which eased as we made our way to Canna. On route we saw our first Puffins along with Razorbill, Shearwater Guillemot and the odd Gannet. On most days we saw a Great Northern Diver

A Great Northern Diver in striking breeding plumage



As we approached Canna a large cruise ship was anchored up but was soon on the move and we had the island all to ourselves. Some of the guests headed over the bridge to Sanday Island to check out the Puffin colony while I tried (and failed) to get pictures of a Cuckoo and Corncrake. Whilst we were ashore the crew were given a treat by a pod of Bottlenose Dolphin around the boat. The island was alive with small birds, most noticeably, Wheatear; Willow, Sedge and Reed Warblers.



The wind picked up quite a bit during the afternoon so Donald, the Captain, moved to a sheltered cove to the south of Canna for the night. I was up on deck early as usual and I

was rewarded with two Bottlenose Dolphins passing right next to the boat



Day 4: Isle of Eigg

Yet again, the weather gods were smiling on us as we sailed on to Eigg. One feature of the trip was the amazing number of Bumble Bees about....even though Skipper Donald was not a

fan !! Most of the wading birds were away at their breeding grounds but good numbers of Eider, Red Throated and Great Northern Divers more than made up for it



Some of the guests got the privilege of meeting `Charlie` the islands famous lone Taxi Driver and his wife.





Day 5: Lunga and Staffa

We were all full of anticipation and excitement as we made our way to the Tresnish Isles in calm seas but overcast, slightly misty weather. On the approach to Lunga, the largest island in the group, we were greeted with a massive raft of Puffins. As usual on Lunga, getting ashore over the boulders and kelp was a struggle but Captain Donald and Bosun Mark did a great job keeping everyone safe and dry.





Up on the plateau it was 'Puffins Galore' along with Fulmar, Razorbill, Shag and thousands of Guillemot on Harp Rock.



As usual, the Puffins weren't bothered by our presence and carried on with their business.



All of sudden all the birds dropped onto the sea. There was obviously a predator about, which was confirmed when a White-tailed Eagle came into view

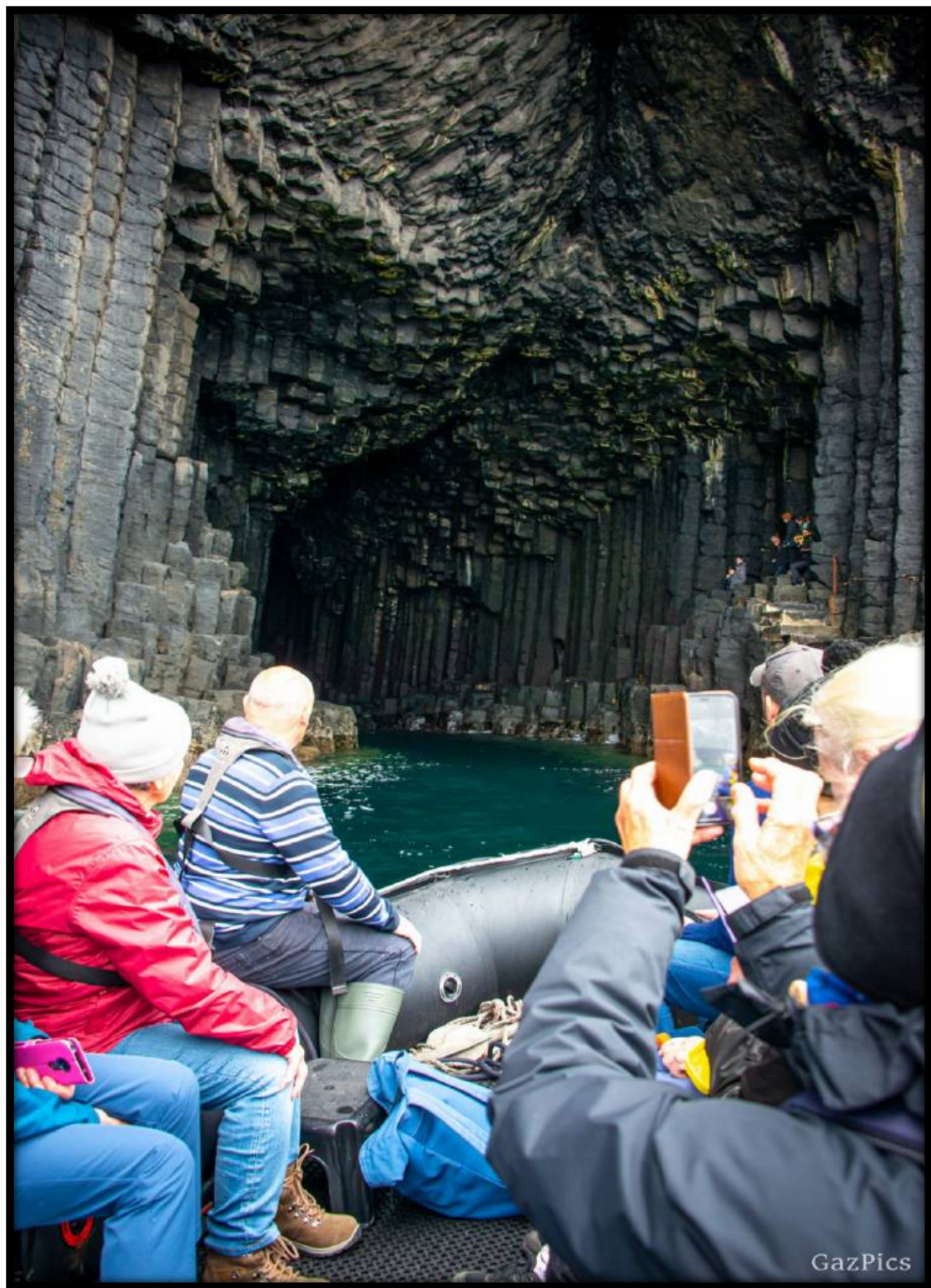




After a couple of hours with the Puffins we headed back to the boat and moved on to Staffa and Fingal's Cave.







Mark managed to get us right inside the cave a couple of times, despite a strong tidal pull. We then went ashore where I had an amazing half an hour with the Staffa Puffins





After an amazing day we headed to our anchorage near Bunessan.

Day 6: Iona

The day started with a fairly thick sea mist. A White Tailed Sea Eagle sat on a ridge for an hour before heading off to hunt. Quite a few Great Northern Divers were fishing in the bay also. On arrival on Iona we headed our separate ways.

Only a few yards away from the ferry slipway, behind the Spar shop, came the call of a Corncrake, one of Iona's iconic birds. Several people hung around to see it but, as it usually does, it stayed hidden in the undergrowth.





The fog gradually cleared to show the islands beautiful, white, sandy beaches and crystal clear waters.



We left Iona and headed up to Ulva for our anchorage. On the trip we kept seeing large yellow `slicks` on the sea. We wondered if it was some sort of pollution but turned out it was falls of pollen from Sitka Spruce trees.

Day 7: Tobermory

We left Ulva headed around Mull to its capital, Tobermory.





We saw *St Hilda* and headed ashore to explore the area's shops and walks such as the Lighthouse and Aros Park.







Day 8: Duart Castle and Loch Spelve

Woke up to a lovely morning in Tobermory Bay. We headed down the Sound of Mull to visit the lovely Duart Castle. The early breeze dropped to nothing and the sun shone brightly.







While the guests explored the Castle, I explored the grounds and sat on the rocks, Otter watching. Unfortunately no Otters appeared but a lone Peregrine Falcon soared overhead and both Meadow and Rock Pipit were plentiful.



A short hop to Loch Spelve was next for our final overnight anchorage. We had a short walk ashore, I headed to look for Hen Harrier and I was delighted to see a pair, albeit at distance. The male took exception to a Buzzard coming to close and `escorted` it away from its territory.





The final morning dawned, the loch was mirror-like. Apart from an immature White-Tailed Eagle and alone Seal, all was quite as we headed back to Dunstaffnage Marina.



To sum up, I think everyone had a great time, we were blessed with the weather and lots and lots of Puffins!!!

