

Let yourself go in the peace and quiet of the changing seasons

The schools are back, the summer crowds are thinning out and there's still plenty of daylight. September is a sweet spot for getting outside, whether you fancy a day on the hills, a cycle, a cast in a river or a walk before dinner. Here are some favourite Scottish stays to make the most of the changing seasons. By **Ailsa Sheldon**



■ Loch Venachar Cabins, TROSSACHS

Get out on the water while you still can. From these four lochside cabins, you can canoe along Loch Venachar, looking for beavers, cycle to Aberfoyle through Queen Elizabeth Forest Park or head into the hills on foot. September and early October are prime wildlife-watching months: ospreys are still fishing the loch, while otters, pine martens, red squirrels and deer inhabit the surrounding woods. Brown trout

fishing continues until October 6. Back at the cabin, light the woodburner or fire pit and enjoy the rare luxury of having nowhere else to be. lochvenacharcabins.co.uk

THE FORTINGALL, PERTSHIRE
At the foot of Glen Lyon, The Fortingall has 7,000 acres to roam,



■ The Fortingall



■ The Shoregate

with guided hikes, e-mountain biking and wild swimming in the River Lyon among the options. Cast for salmon on two miles of private river or take a Land Rover into the hills to look for roe deer and golden eagles. Back at the

hotel there's afternoon tea or whisky by the fire. It's a particularly good choice for anyone who likes their Highland escape with a little action rather than simply admiring the view. fortingall.com



■ Loch Venachar Cabins

THE SHOREGATE, CRAIL

Pull on your walking boots and follow the Fife Coastal Path from this colourful village pub towards Anstruther, four miles along the coast with views to the Isle of May and Bass Rock. Reward yourself with fish and chips before returning to Crail and settling in for dinner. The Shoregate's four lovely bedrooms are above the Eighteenth-Century pub where local produce stars on the menu. St Andrews is close by for a round of golf, while the East Neuk's tidal pools make tempting swimming spots. theshoregate.com

THE BELLACHROY, ISLE OF MULL

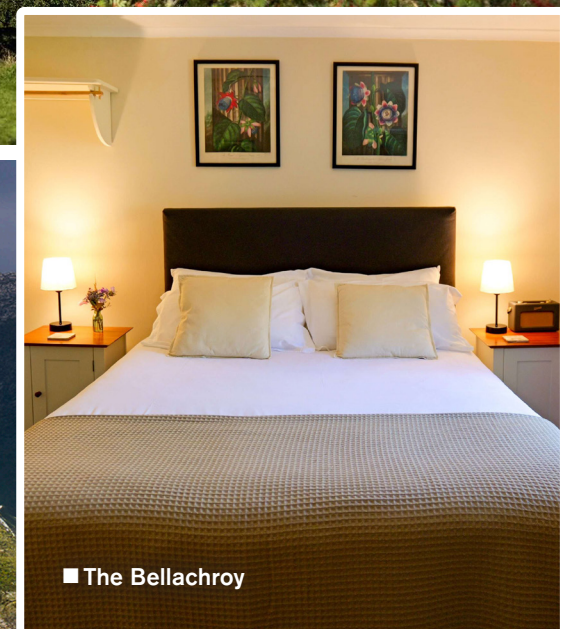
Mull is glorious in autumn. Stay at The Bellachroy, a recently renovated historic inn in the tiny village of Dervaig. It's a lively community hub with frequent live music and plenty of local produce on the menu. Walk on the beach at Calgary Bay, follow the woodland sculpture trail or take



■ The Bellachroy



■ Plockton



■ The Bellachroy



■ Plockton Inn

the path from Dervaig to Quinish Point, passing the deserted village of Ardantairbh. thebellachroy.co.uk

PLOCKTON INN, PLOCKTON
Visit Plockton after the summer

crowds have retreated for wonderful coastal and hill walking. The cheerful Plockton Inn makes a good base, with local seafood, particularly the famous Plockton prawns (langoustines), at the heart of its menu. Climb Càrn na Frith-aird for views over Loch Carron

towards Applecross and Skye, or follow the coast to Duncraig Castle. Then there's the rather pleasing prospect of a seafood dinner and perhaps a pint without having to get back in the car. highlandcoasthotels.com/plockton-inn

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BIG SKY LODGES, MUIR OF ORD

Highland cows, red kites, red squirrels and chanterelles are among the neighbours at Big Sky Lodges, a collection of Finnish-style cabins on a family croft near Muir of Ord. Spend the day mountain biking, walking through Spittal Wood or swimming at Loch Achilty, then light the fire pit and watch the stars come out. There are six family cabins and two smaller retreats for couples. The Black Isle is also within easy reach as are beaches, distilleries, Cromarty and the Moray Firth's famous dolphins.

bigskylodges.co.uk

KNIPOCH HOUSE HOTEL, OBAN

Behind this Fifteenth-Century hunting lodge, a woodland path leads through ancient trees and autumn fungi to a viewpoint over Loch Feochan and Mull in the distance. It's a lovely little walk before dinner at 1635, Knipoch's fine dining restaurant. The hotel was extensively refurbished in 2024, retaining its old Highland-house character while giving the bedrooms a contemporary feel. Oban is just a short drive away, making this a good staging post for a trip to the islands – or just to the seafood shack on the pier.

sonascollection.com/our-hotels/knipoch

ARDBEG HOUSE, PORT ELLEN, ISLAY

Ardbeg House is a design lover's dream, with a bold maximalist style inspired by Islay's history and legends. The 12



unique rooms are packed with fun and luxurious touches, including hidden drams to search for. The Signature restaurant serves local seafood and steaks, and the bar has all of Islay's distilleries well represented – and a boat suspended from the ceiling. Stay here to tour the distilleries, explore the hills and coastline, golf at The Machrie, or soak up the atmosphere.

ardbeghouse.com

THE DUNDONALD, CULROSS

Stay overnight in Culross and you get to enjoy one of Scotland's prettiest villages after the day-trippers have



■ The Dundonald

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■ Guardswell Farm

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GUARDSWELL FARM, PERTSHIRE

Make the most of September's lingering light at Guardswell Farm, where you can stay in a cottage or off-grid cabin and spend the day exploring the farm, cooking outdoors or simply doing very little. Look out for special events dotted throughout the autumn, including produce markets, yoga classes, supper clubs and a family retreat weekend with crafts and seasonal food. It's a place where the itinerary can be as full, or empty, as you like.

guardswell.co.uk

DARROCH LEARG, BALLATER, ROYAL DEESIDE

Set on the edge of Ballater, a stay at Darroch Learg puts you in prime position for exploring Royal Deeside and the eastern Cairngorms as the first autumn colours start to creep across the hills. The 10-bedroom hotel looks across the Dee valley towards the hills of Glen Muick. From here, you can strike out on everything from an easy riverside walk to a more serious hill day, with woodland, lochs and red deer along the way. Fishing is available on the Rivers Dee, Don and Deveron, or you can play a round of golf at Ballater.

darrochlearg.co.uk

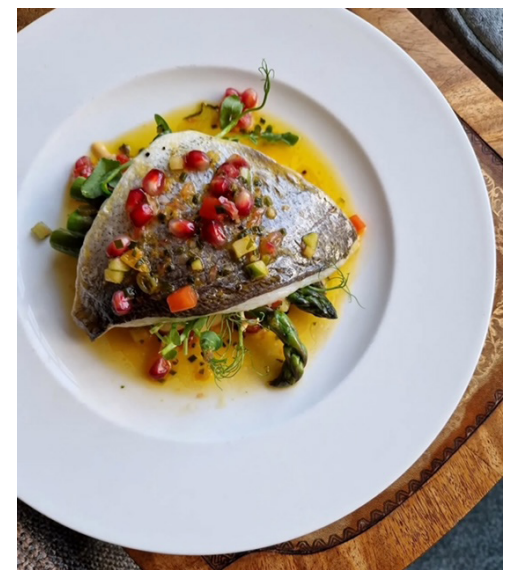
THE TORRIDON, WESTER ROSS

If you want to go properly wild before winter, The Torridon has the mountains of Wester Ross on its doorstep. The former Nineteenth-Century hunting lodge is a luxurious hideaway for hillwalking, cycling, kayaking and wildlife watching, with lochs, peaks and coastline to explore. Afterwards, settle into one of the individually designed rooms, perhaps with a dram from the whisky bar. September brings quieter trails and beautiful light and a chance to experience this spectacular corner of the Highlands with fewer tour buses on the roads.

thetorridon.com



■ Darroch Learg



■ The Torridon