

SERENITY AT SEA

A Hebridean Yoga & Wildlife Retreat

Words: Archana Karki

Imagine a voyage where the tranquil serenity of yoga meets the untamed beauty of the Scottish Hebrides, where each day unfolds like a carefully crafted masterpiece. This was precisely the journey, organised by Hebrides Cruises, that the Editor and Publisher of YOGA Magazine had the privilege to embark upon. Setting sail aboard the Emma Jane, alongside fellow adventurers, from the quaint fishing town of Oban in western Scotland on August 26th, 2023, we embarked on a captivating exploration of the inner Hebrides, returning to Oban on September 1st, 2023.



Yoga and Nature: A Harmonious Union

What renders this retreat truly exceptional is the harmonious amalgamation of yoga, wildlife encounters, and cruising through awe-inspiring landscapes. Guided by yoga practitioners, Laura Bicker and Iain Bruce-Low, the yoga sessions seamlessly unfolded both on board and ashore. The retreat commenced with a heartwarming guided meditation and an opening ceremony on the eve of August 26th. At 7 am the following day, we collectively ascended to the upper deck of Hebrides Cruises' vessel, Emma Jane, to practice yoga postures and meditation, an experience that set the tone for the entire journey.

In the days that ensued, we ventured to diverse, secluded, and breathtaking locales for our yoga sessions. Laura and Iain carefully curated these spots to foster profound connections with nature. During our forest yoga practice on a rainy day in the moss-covered Ulva forest, I personally felt that the environment transported us to an era where sages meditated, allowing moss and trees to flourish around them. The instructors immersed us in an array of practices, from forest yoga on the pristine white sands of Gunna to turquoise waters of Cairns of Coll and the majestic hills and Fingal's cave of Staffa. Under their nurturing guidance, we delved into forest yoga, shamanic

ceremonies featuring heartfelt singing, fire ceremonies, and an array of therapies including meditation, reiki, sound baths, and even acupuncture.

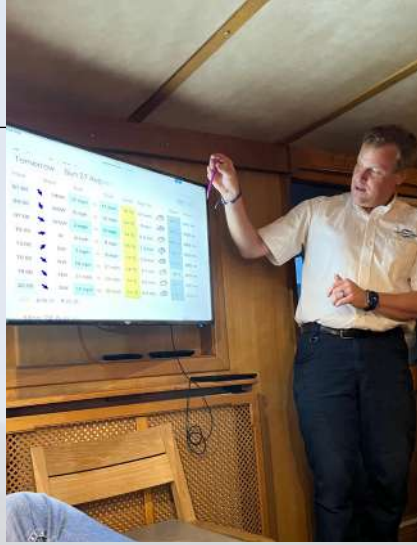
Chanting and meditation at these exclusive locations did more than unite us with one another; it united us with nature itself. It felt as though our collective voices resonated through the skies and deep into the sea. Our instructors' infectious enthusiasm and genuine warmth made this journey truly exceptional.



Exploring Hidden Gems in the Hebrides

Skipper James Fairbairns, a maestro of the seas, skilfully orchestrated our itinerary and shore excursions to harmonise with our yoga sessions, ensuring a seamless blend of relaxation and adventure.

Cruising through the captivating coastlines of the Hebrides is an unforgettable odyssey. The sheer beauty of these landscapes is enough to steal your breath away, whisking you to another world entirely. Hebrides Cruises organised visits to some of the most idyllic and tranquil beaches and bays, including Cairns of Coll, Staffa, Inche of Kenneth, Mull, Gunna, Ulva, and the colourful Tobermory. Favourable weather conditions graced our journey, gifting us sun-drenched afternoons and a spellbinding full moon night.



Wildlife Encounters: Beyond Imagination

Each evening, James – also our Wildlife Guide – joined us to discuss the possibilities for the following day's itinerary and shore excursions. His keen eye and extensive experience ensured we never missed any extraordinary wildlife sightings.

Our Hebrides Cruises' adventure was punctuated by remarkable wildlife encounters. Dolphins, seals and various sea birds graced our presence regularly, while the sight of a surfacing minke whale left us in awe. On one occasion, over a dozen dolphins were swimming alongside Emma Jane, ducking and diving into the sea. Otters and majestic sea eagles, their wings gracefully slicing through the sky, provided the grand finale to this wildlife symphony. There was palpable excitement among us as a pair of eagles perched on a tree during our approach to Staffa. On the beach of Gunna, friendly seals swam so close that it felt as though they were eager participants in our yoga sessions. Surrounded by the best of Scotland's west coast wildlife, including dolphins, minke whales, sea eagles, and otters, our adventure was bathed in love and healing.



Impeccable Hospitality

The crew of Hebrides Cruises worked in seamless harmony, ensuring our experience was not only captivating but also supremely comfortable – we felt genuinely pampered. The ensuite cabins were pristine and inviting, equipped with thoughtful amenities including a small study table and a dresser.

The lower deck lobby emerged as our communal hub, where we savoured canapés, beverages, and delightful conversations. The lobby featured a well-equipped kitchen, a bar, a dining area, and an enticing shelf adorned with captivating books. Over the course of our journey, this space became our epicentre for interaction, especially during our evening gatherings. Each night, James provided weather updates and the following day's itinerary. Prompted by the yoga instructors we shared our cherished moments of the day. Just outside the lobby, a jacuzzi awaited, offering the perfect respite for a relaxing soak.

Culinary Delights

Dining aboard Hebrides Cruises' vessel, Emma Jane, was nothing short of extraordinary, courtesy of renowned chef William Rocks from the esteemed Tigh an Truish Inn and Restaurant on Seil Island. William, a quarter-finalist in the recent Master Chef Professional series, delighted us with exquisite and healthful three-course creations. His culinary prowess was matched only by his warm and engaging personality as he described each course with evident pride. Even after dinner, we were treated to an array of local cheeses, biscuits, and beverages.

Stewardess Sophia added an extra layer of charm to our journey. Always sporting a warm smile, she demonstrated unwavering dedication, creativity, and meticulous attention to detail. Her flair for decor was evident in her exquisite table settings, adorned with rocks, feathers, shells, candles, and meticulously folded mats and napkins. To our delight, our cabins were magically tidied and adorned with a nightly chocolate on our pillows.



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Friendships Formed, Memories Crafted

Over the course of six nights, the fleeting introductions during our initial gathering over canapés and fizz transformed into profound and enduring friendships. Hebrides Cruises' voyage didn't merely connect us to nature and yoga; it united us as a community of kindred spirits seeking serenity, adventure, and balance amidst the heart of the Hebrides.

Laura and Iain ensured our journey culminated with a closing ceremony to remember, where we danced, sang, and shared stories under a luminous full moon. Disembarking, we returned to everyday life with a profound connection to both nature and self.

The "Serenity at Sea: A Hebridean Yoga and Wildlife Retreat" aboard Emma Jane is a testament to the magic that transpires when the healing power of yoga converges with the wild and untamed beauty of nature. It's an experience that not only rejuvenates the body and soul but also forges connections destined to last a lifetime. For those in search of a genuinely transformative journey, this retreat is an invitation to discover serenity amid the untamed allure of the Hebrides.

The pictures bear testament to this extraordinary odyssey but to experience it contact:

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