

THE LONGEST
ROAD OUT

THE LONGEST ROAD OUT
MOTORISTS HANDBOOK

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INTRODUCTION

The Longest Road Out is the road trip of a lifetime. Driving it gave us, without doubt, some of our favourite memories: from sampling succulent oysters on a sun-drenched Guernsey beach, to seeing our trusty Morgan hoisted onto a ferry bound for the archipelago's most remote inhabited island, to traversing some of Ireland's most precarious mountain passes in stormy weather – the list goes on. Truly, there are few things more exciting than experiential exploration.

Planning the expedition was almost as thrilling, though. We spent countless evenings scrutinising old maps in our neighbourhood pub, went on field trips to reconnoitre, and immersed ourselves in the stories of intrepid motorists who'd roamed the backroads before us. Every bit of planning brought us closer to the start of our adventure.

Now, to help you plan your own superlative road trip, we've written this handbook as an accompaniment to our travelogue, route map, and digital navigation tool. Based on a decade of rigorous research, three years of fervent planning, and lessons learned during a hundred incredible days on the road, it'll take you from the drawing board to the road in just a fraction of the time it took us.

As with the rest of our concept, this handbook is divided into three parts: inspiration, organisation, and navigation. The advice and information in each chapter will help you decide which part of the route is right for you, how much money you'll need, which bits of your itinerary you'll need to book and in what order, what sort of items you should pack, and how to navigate Britain and Ireland's scenic backroads.

Bon voyage!

STEP 1

GET INSPIRED

“Determine which part of the route you’ll drive and work out your budget.”

Start your journey in a comfortable armchair. Brew yourself a cup of steaming, milky tea or pour yourself a heart-warming dram. The route is rather extensive – it'd take you roughly half a year to drive it all in one go – so the first part of planning your own trip is determining which parts of it suit you best. That way, as opposed to seeing all of it superficially, you'll return home with better and more personal stories. Of course, you could just throw a dart at our custom-made route map and be done with it, but we recommend you opt for a slightly more attentive approach. It's best to start this phase at least six months before the start of your trip, if you've set a date already, or sooner.

First, read our travelogue, which will acquaint you with the route and our way of travel. In it, we trace our 100-day motoring expedition through Britain and Ireland. We've curated some of our fondest memories and captured them through engaging anecdotes, inspiring interviews, and captivating photographs taken en route. Let our stories fuel your aspirations.

Then, consider what type of experience you're looking for. Perhaps you're someone who prefers to tour at a leisurely pace, stopping often. Or maybe you're an avid motorist looking for wild and invigorating drives. It's important you pinpoint this before contemplating where you'd like to go, or you'll inevitably be drawn toward more prosaic places. By putting experiences first, you'll be more open to places you hadn't considered before – and that's what The Longest Road Out is about.

DRIVING EXPERIENCES

It can be overwhelming to contemplate what sort of driving experience you're after exactly – let alone determine where to find it. To make things simple for you, we've divided the route into three types of driving: there's coastal, upland, and inland. Of course, you can combine these as you like. You'll find them indicated on the route map and featured in our travelogue. Depending on where you are in Britain or Ireland, these experiences may vary a bit. Still, this should help you get your bearings.

Coastal

With several thousand miles of coastline and innumerable outlying islands, there's great coastal driving to be done all around Britain and Ireland. Along these parts of the route you'll find concealed coves, deserted beaches, picturesque ports and – of course – superb seafood such as lobster and scallops. The narrow and twisty roads make for delightful driving and they're not terribly difficult. As distances between destinations are relatively short, even inexperienced drivers should be able to manage, though perhaps with a little bit of practice.

Upland

Much of the route's interior sections are defined by rugged terrain. These uplands make for invigorating motoring and should appeal especially to more ardent motorists. The elevation is modest (the highest road being the Cairnwell Pass in the Scottish Highlands at 670m / 2199ft) and, for the most part, these sections of the route aren't too toilsome. However, there are some precarious mountain passes – including the steepest one in the archipelago at one-in-three – which may be too demanding for some. If you're in any way unsure, just find a detour. En route, you'll travel through breath-taking landscapes and at the end of an intense day's driving you can put up your feet with a glass of whisky and a roaring fire in a remote pub.

Inland

Lastly, there are the postcard-like inland parts of the route. Characterised by undulating farmland and forests, bucolic amber-stoned and half-timbered towns, and landmarks such as country houses and castles, these make for leisurely touring. There are no more than a few miles between places of interest and along the way there are many places to stop for picnics or walks, as well as comfortable roadside inns, which make this type of driving experience particularly appropriate for less intrepid drivers. Occasionally, though, the route comes through larger towns and cities, where traffic may be a little bit more hectic.

Once you've decided which experiences you're after, unfold our route map onto a table or pin it to a wall. Do further research and jot all the things you like down on the map – perhaps use pencils so you can remove anything superfluous later. You'll find that over time, as you add more points of interest, clusters will start to form. Based on these, you can see which regions – and, consequently, which parts of the route – you're most drawn to. Compare these clusters to see which ones best overlap with your preferred types of motoring.

WHERE TO FIND INSPIRATION

We've found that the more solid the groundwork, the better and more personal the road trip will be. With knowledge, you can make a solid plan – and recognise when to deviate from it. That means you need outstanding information, so where do you find that? Well, of course our travelogue makes for essential reading. Once you've read that, look

for other high-quality publications such as journals and (old) novels, which are often thorough in their research and provide niche insights. For additional inspiration, carefully scour online sources including social media accounts and blogs.

Journals, magazines & guidebooks

Head to your local bookshop and ask them to recommend some worthwhile journals and guidebooks. We draw inspiration from, among others, Ernest, Sidetracked, and Another Escape, in which you'll often find engrossing stories of unusual people and places. Even when such texts aren't about Britain or Ireland, they can help you understand your own inclinations better. For instance, when preparing for our trip we read a piece on the Faroe Islands, which made us realise we could find similar landscapes and culture in Shetland. That, then, made us consider Fair Isle – which turned out to be phenomenal.

Novels

If you can, source some vintage travel books or novels. Our concept was sparked by a book from the late 1940s called *The British Countryside in Pictures*, which we found at a small antiques market in a Welsh country town. We were also influenced by books such as the *In Search of ...* series, which were written in the late 20s and early 30s by H.V. Morton. If you're unable to track down any such books locally, you can get them online. You'll find that while many of the places and travel styles in those books have changed since they were written, they still make for good reading and much inspiration can be drawn from the stories in them – and some places and customs have since been forgotten and are just waiting to be re-discovered!

Social media

Through social media such as Pinterest and Instagram, it's easier than ever to find inspiration. Whenever we're on a bus or train, we spend a few minutes scrolling through our feeds to see if there's anything we don't know about yet and later save the things we like to add to our route map. We recommend you follow local people as they will often have comprehensive knowledge of an area and the places and sights there. To find them, browse accounts such as those of Visit Scotland, Visit England, and Tourism Ireland, find content that appeals to you, and work out who originally posted it. On Instagram, we regularly re-share content we like through our Stories. Do note, however, that (especially on Pinterest), descriptions and locations aren't always correct so make sure to doublecheck your finds before pencilling them onto your map.

Blogs

Lastly, there are good old blogs. Some people who undertake road trips will not just post photos online but write about them as well. However, there are a lot of blogs out there – not all of them high-quality – and it'd take a lot of time to go through even a fraction of them. So, use your preferred search engine selectively to find blogs about specific things you're developing an interest in, such as the most scenic roads in County Kerry, the prettiest beaches in Cornwall, or the quaintest places to stay in Yorkshire.

Furthermore, there's the time of year. Of course, as any motoring enthusiast will impress on you, you can have a phenomenal road trip in any kind of weather – provided your car's got a roof. But as the seasons do have a major impact on what your trip will be like, we recommend you take a moment to work out when the right time for you to travel is, or which parts of the route are best for the months in which you intend to undertake your expedition. Again, link your findings to the clusters on the map and your preferred experiences and then, once you've weighed your options, pick whichever part of the route you like best.

SEASONAL INFO

As Britain and Ireland have a mild climate, you can have a superb road trip there any time of year – to an extent, the adage 'there's no such thing as bad weather, only inadequate clothing' is all the information you need. But even so, there's still a lot of variety: in summer, it can be remarkably hot while in winter, parts could be blanketed in snow. Disclaimer: you may well get 'four seasons in one day' at whichever time of year you opt for, so you're never guaranteed either good or bad weather.

Spring

April, May, and June are great months to explore Britain and Ireland. Except for Easter and a few bank holidays, there shouldn't be any crowds and while the weather can be a little unpredictable early on in the season it'll most likely be reasonably pleasant overall. Spring is when many flowers bloom, sheep have adorable little lambs, and tourist attractions open their doors again after their winter hiatus. If you intend for your road trip to take more than a few weeks, we recommend you drive south to north for optimal weather throughout. Personally, we feel the southern parts of the British Isles are best during this time – but frankly anywhere is fine.

Summer

July, August, and September are the warmest and driest months – and consequently they are also when everyone wants to travel. Undeniably, the weather is best this time of year, but because of the crowds it's best to either try and avoid the school holidays (which vary by region) or seek out more remote and/or lesser visited areas. Summer is a time of festivals and traditional events, such as the Highland Games in Scotland and agricultural shows and country fairs all around England. At this time of year, we prefer southern and western Ireland, and the eastern border regions of Scotland and England.

Autumn

October, November, and December are, perhaps strangely, our favourite months for visiting Britain and Ireland – and northern Scotland in particular. Autumn sees the trees turn warm shades of red and gold, and in upland areas the mountains will change to an atmospheric palette of tan, amber, and browns. Eventually, these are complemented by white-capped peaks. Stunning, moody skies and a perpetually low sun make for phenomenal photographs. That said, we do recommend you opt for the earlier months of the season as attractions will still be open and (most) ferries will still sail regularly. Toward the end, it gets wetter, stormier, and colder.

Winter

January, February, and March tend to be damp and cold. Not many people would opt for a road trip during these months and, to be fair, it's not our favourite season either. However, if you bring some blankets and plenty of warm clothing you can still have a great time: it'll be quiet on the road, the moorlands will be poignantly bleak, and you'll have the beaches to yourself (although you may prefer not to swim). Very occasionally, you can see aurora borealis in the north and if you're in Scotland at the end of January there's Burns Night to attend. Be aware, though, that (some) mountain passes may be closed, and roads may be flooded or slick with mud – you'll need good driving skills.

Once you've decided on which part of Britain and/or Ireland you're going to explore, you'll just need to assess what it'll cost you. Perhaps you want to know how far your current savings can take you, or how much more you need to save for your perfect road trip. On our route map, there are arrows to help you work out the number of days required – and subsequently you can calculate how much it'll all cost. Do note that if travelling to remote islands you'll need to add a day or two more, to err on the side of caution as ferries and aircraft may be delayed. Note that there will be flexible costs (such as accommodation, provisions, vehicle hire) but also fixed costs (such as flights, ferries).

BUDGET BREAKDOWN

How much your road trip will cost depends on what sort of traveller you are. If you, like us, are more of a venturesome type you can make do for rather little. But if you prefer a bit more comfort – or even outright opulence – you'll need a more significant budget. Either way, we recommend you make a rough calculation so you know what you'll have to work with, and then keep track of costs as you build your itinerary so that you can make adjustments if and where needed. Estimates listed in this article are per person (per night/day) unless otherwise indicated.

International travel and transport

If you don't live in Britain or Ireland, you'll need to arrange transport to and from the islands. You may want to bring your own car, in which case you'll need to take a ferry from mainland Europe or between Britain and Ireland. These vary in price each way from about £75 to more than £500, depending on the connection. If you're not bringing your car, the cheapest option is probably flying (anywhere between £30 and £3000), or you could consider taking the train through the channel tunnel. You'd in that case also need to book a vehicle (somewhere between £30 and £300 per day). As you can see, prices vary immensely and depend on a multitude of factors, so check online for reliable estimates.

Accommodation

Inexpensive options include hostels and wild camping (which isn't allowed everywhere, so make sure to look into the rules). These will cost you anywhere from £0–30. For a bit more comfort, consider places such as bed and breakfast establishments and inns. For these, you'll likely spend between £30–£100. Top-tier accommodation, such as luxury hotels, are well upwards of £100. Of course, you can opt for a combination, and go wild camping one day and sleep in a castle the next. We prefer to do this. During our trip we spent, on average, about £60 per night on accommodation for the two of us. For more information, see the organisation chapter.

Food

During our trip, we ate mostly in (gastro)pubs and smaller restaurants. At such places, you'll pay roughly £15–£25 for a main course, with another £5–£10 each for starters and desserts. Of course, if you opt for multi-course dinners at a luxury restaurant you may have to work with prices upwards of £50. As for drinks: the average price of a pint of beer is now about £4. Breakfast is often included with your accommodation, but if it isn't it'll cost somewhere between £8–£15. The price of lunch is usually similar, or slightly more. That said, for both we prefer to purchase some fresh local produce at markets or farm shops in the morning, or the day before, and make a picnic of it if the weather allows. That should cost about the same, or possibly a little less. For more information, see the navigation chapter.

Fuel

Provided you adhere to what we consider a reasonable daily driving distance (as indicated by the arrows on the route map), fuel should cost about £10-15 per car each day. Of course, if you drive something like a Land Rover that estimate will be higher and if you drive an electric vehicle it'll be zero (but note you may need to carefully plan charging stops in remote areas). Fuel prices are higher in remote areas and near highways. Along the route, there are a few remaining independent petrol stations, and we recommend you fill up there to support local entrepreneurs directly. Often, you'll get better service there also.

Sightseeing

The best things in life are almost free. Spending the afternoon at the beach, taking a scenic walk, and having tea with strangers are all good ways to savour Britain and Ireland – and they hardly cost a penny. But there are also plenty of places worth paying for, such as museums and attractions. Entry fees are usually between £10-£15 but for well-known places it may be as much as £25. If you intend to visit a lot of attractions, consider buying a (regional) pass, which could save you money. Have a look at our navigation chapter for more sightseeing tips.

Ferries

The route includes dozens of ferries, often scenic. Some take hundreds of cars across the sea overnight, while others carry at most three across a small river within minutes. A reasonable estimate for the bigger ferries – such as the ones to Shetland and the Channel Islands – is about £100-£400 each way, depending on whether you're sleeping on board, how long the crossing is, and the vehicle you bring. For smaller ferries, expect to pay about £5-£25 – often in cash only, so make sure to have some to hand.

Other

Then there's a few other bits and bobs to take into account – although they shouldn't really have a significant effect on your budget. The route doesn't include many toll bridges and roads, but if you do come across one the price is usually about £1-£3. Parking may cost money also: about £2 per hour / £8 per day at National Trust sites if you're not a member and more in cities, of course. Specifically, for the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man you'll need to purchase a special parking disc. Lastly, and this won't go for everyone but it'd be a shame if you'd get fined for it: if you're driving through central London between Monday-Friday 7am-10pm you'll have to pay a congestion charge, and from October most older and diesel cars will be charged for driving in London. There's more information about that online.

STEP II

PLAN YOUR TRIP

“Build your itinerary and make essential preparations for your road trip.”

Having developed a solid framework for your road trip of a lifetime, you can begin to work on your itinerary. We recommend you start this phase about five months before your planned start date, and if all goes well you should have it finished about two months before. During this phase you'll find our map particularly useful: use the front to further visualise your trip – adding hotels you want to stay at, sights you want to see, roads you want to drive – and use the back to structure the organisation process. One tip: plan to drive just after sunrise and just before sunset, during dinner time. It'll be quiet on the road and the low light will cast long shadows, which make for breath-taking photographs.

Start with the essentials and do so as soon as you can. First, book your transport to and from Britain and/or Ireland (either flights, ferries, or the train) if you don't live there and arrange a visa if required. Please note that as Britain has left the European Union, requirements have changed and we recommend you consult government websites carefully to see which documents you need. Next, you should hire a vehicle if you're not bringing your own (you may need an international driving licence). For an optimal experience we wholeheartedly recommend you drive at least part of the route in a Morgan, like we did: there are few cars more suitable for sophisticated backroad touring. Alternatively, you can hire a vehicle at any reputable rental company in advance, to pick up at your point of arrival. After this, make reservations for domestic ferry crossings if your route includes any (they may ask for your vehicle details) – our route map indicates the ones that require booking in advance.

With all that sorted, you can ease up a little. The next task in building your itinerary is finding and booking accommodation. Take your time to get this right, as it's an important aspect of your road trip experience. To facilitate exploration and chance encounters, you may like to leave some nights unbooked, and instead find something on the day. Often this works (look for signs saying 'vacancies') but be aware that in the high season or in vogueish areas it can be high impossible to find something. We strongly recommend you do book accommodation in the more remote areas or on outlying islands as soon as possible – there's usually not much and you don't want to be left with nowhere to stay! Also make sure to book unique or exclusive places early as these will get booked up almost any time of year as well. Whenever you book accommodation, try to do so through their own websites and, every so often, stay in the same place for two nights. This way, you'll benefit your hosts and the local economy, and you'll have more time to appreciate the area you're in.

ACCOMMODATION OPTIONS

Forget about big unappealing hotels. Whether you prefer opulence or simplicity, our advice is that you stay at a variety of places that add to the driving experience you decided on earlier. Book a few nights

at a solitary lighthouse as part of a coastal drive, forsake comfort for a day and wake up to glorious mountain views in a bothy during an upland trip, or stay at an age-old roadside inn while touring the inland countryside. Opt for places that encourage socialisation: you never know what opportunities an amiable chat with hosts or fellow travellers might yield!

Bed and Breakfasts

Common across Britain and Ireland, bed and breakfasts (B&Bs) are most often private homes where some rooms are rented out to travellers. In rural areas, some farms run a B&B on the side. Sometimes, the accommodation is separate from the hosts' living space, but other times you may share the kitchen or living room. As your hosts will be locals, staying at B&Bs is a great way to learn more about an area. Occasionally, you may come across purposely converted (historic) buildings that can be more like small boutique hotels. B&Bs can usually be booked online, through their own websites or through sites such as Airbnb, but rarely you may have to phone them directly.

Inns

Roadside inns have been around for hundreds of years, both as refuges for travellers and for locals to have a pint and socialise. As the route traces many historic thoroughfares, you're sure to come across one of these every so many miles. In the more traditional inns, there'll be a roaring fire and comfortable chairs, as well as simple but wholesome food and local ales waiting for you to unwind after a long day's exploring. As in most pubs, it's normal to talk to strangers and you might be invited by some locals to join them for a drink. The rooms, upstairs or at the back of the inn, are usually unembellished but comfortable enough – although some inns have evolved into more high-end establishments.

Hotels

Exclusive to the people staying in them and run solely as a business, hotels make for comfortable but often more impersonal alternatives to B&Bs and inns. We recommend that, if you choose to stay at hotels, you opt for smaller places as these are – in our experience – more homely. Look for unusual places such as restored castles and country houses, converted windmills, or charming townhouses. One benefit of hotels, if you're not very venturesomely inclined, is that they are often able to assist in booking tours or further accommodation.

Hostels

Stereotypically preferred by twenty-somethings with little to spend, hostels are a low-budget alternative to hotels. If you're willing to sacrifice a little comfort and privacy, these places are great for finding unusual escapades: there's often a common room where travellers come together to socialise and share stories, and if you join in you may be asked to tag along for a hike or a tour someplace. That said, hostels can be hit-or-miss but some, particularly rural ones such as the Gatliff Trust's restored crofts scattered around the Outer Hebrides, are truly outstanding.

Cabins / Bothies

Speaking of rural accommodation, in the countryside you'll also find shepherds' huts and cabins. These are typically quite small and basic, but they allow you to be close to nature while maintaining a reasonable degree of comfort and privacy. In some more remote places, you'll also find bothies, which are much more austere. These are essentially ruins restored to a basic standard and they have no amenities beside a fireplace, a raised platform, and a shovel – so you'd have to bring your own sleeping bag. As they're meant predominantly for hikers, you may have to walk a fair bit to get to one and often you share the room with strangers. But seeing the sun rise above the mountains is a sight for which you may be willing to put up with all that.

Wild camping

If you're willing to opt for an even more rudimentary approach to accommodation, you could try wild camping. This isn't for everyone, but it's undoubtedly one of the most memorable ways to experience Britain and Ireland – and if you've never done it before we recommend you give it a try. It's not legal everywhere and most land is privately owned, so if you're thinking of pitching a tent somewhere make sure you adhere to the wild camping etiquette and ensure you have the landlord's consent. Of course, make sure to erase all traces of your stay when you depart.

Complete your itinerary by adding attractions and points of interest, if preferred. Make sure to make arrangements for any tours you really want to go on – especially if they're exclusive ones such as those to Skellig Michael or St Kilda – as these can book out months in advance. For others, you can just show up on the day or phone a few days beforehand to see if you can tag along. Attractions don't generally require booking unless there's a

special exhibition or similar. For the most part, we suggest you leave this bit of the itinerary blank: we've found it's much more gratifying to discover sights along the way. After all, The Longest Road Out is all about exploration and personal memories. If you do add sights to your itinerary, plan to see only one thing each day so that you can explore it properly and so there's ample time left to detour. You'll find more information on places you can stop at along the way in the next chapter.

With your itinerary settled, you should have a bit of time left before the start of your road trip. Use it to arrange appropriate insurance if you haven't already, and read up on local customs and traditions and learn a bit of the local lingo (as there are other languages than English spoken in parts of Britain and Ireland). And, of course, make sure to write up a comprehensive packing list as there's only so much space for luggage.

PRECAUTIONS

Although it's admittedly not the most thrilling part of planning a road trip, preparing for accidents is particularly important. You wouldn't want to get into trouble without knowing what to do. Of course, we hope that nothing bad will happen to you, but you can't rule out things such as punctured tires, collisions, or theft. Emergency and medical services are of high standard and reliable throughout Britain and Ireland, and usually there'll be a garage not too far away, but even so you'll want to make sure you're covered and perhaps take some courses so that you can solve minor issues yourself.

Insurance

Should something happen to you or the people you travel with, the last thing you will want to be worrying about is money. It's essential you're able to receive whatever care you need, as fast as possible. So, your top priority should be to ensure you're covered by proper insurance for the duration of your road trip. Contact an insurance provider in your home country to take out personal travel insurance, which usually covers stolen and damaged property and medical bills. Also consider insuring your car. If you're hiring one, this can be done through the rental company, but do check with your personal insurance provider first to see if you need it. Our preference in all cases is to get full cover – we gladly pay a bit more to leave these worries behind.

Accident toolkit

When you have an accident, you can wait for help, but there are many minor issues you can easily solve yourself – you'll be glad to

be able to change a tyre yourself instead of having to wait for hours. We recommend you bring some basic tools to fix your car if it breaks down (although if it's a rental, you may not be allowed to) and compile a simple first-aid kit to treat minor physical injuries. If you do this, you'll need to know how to use them of course, so take a few courses if needed before your trip. Make sure to bring at least a warning triangle and a high-visibility vest to warn other road users if you get into trouble and your car poses an obstacle: it's often difficult to look far ahead on single-track roads and without these items other drivers may spot you too late.

Emergency services

Write down and bring a list of numbers you can call in case of emergency – on paper and digitally, to ensure you'll always have access to it. In both Britain and Ireland, you can call 112 or 999 free of charge in case of life-threatening situations. Via these numbers you can reach the police, ambulance services, coastguard, mountain rescue, and more. Always remain calm and follow the operator's instructions. If you need help but it's not urgent, call a local Garda station in Ireland or in the UK dial 111 (medical services) or 101 (police). In more remote areas, it can take time for the emergency services to get to you and your phone signal may be weak there, so we recommend you also make a note of the nearest hospitals and police stations to drive to. Lastly, put a card in your wallet with the details of someone you trust whom the emergency services can call in case something happens to you.

PACKING LIST

During a road trip, how much luggage you can bring depends on what you can fit in the boot (or on the roof or back) of your vehicle. Usually, that means you can only bring a few suitcases at best. So think carefully about what you want to pack. For our 100-day trip, we brought just two weeks' worth of clothes and washed them whenever we were able. We recommend you use the back of the route map to make a comprehensive packing list, to ensure you'll have everything you need while on the road.

Rucksack

Make sure to bring a sturdy yet lightweight rucksack. We bought a sailcloth one during our trip and it proved invaluable: we used it every

time when going to the beach or for a walk, but we also put our daily essentials in it so that we wouldn't have to rummage through our cumbersome suitcase or lug one up staircases all the time. If you're a keen photographer, you may like to bring a specialist bag with compartments so you can organise your equipment.

Layers

As the weather can change suddenly, it's best to bring clothes you can layer – including at least one warm wool jumper. Wear these over a cotton shirt when it gets colder, and whenever it rains add a lightweight rain jacket over it. If you don't have a good wool jumper, consider buying one of Mati Ventrillon's, whose story is in our travelogue: they are both fashionable and made to last. Don't forget to bring plenty of cotton socks and underwear and – as strange as this may sound – sunglasses or a wide-brimmed hat for bright days.

Footwear

We recommend you bring three types of shoes. For driving, we prefer to wear light shoes with thin soles, which are also great for urban environments and sunny days. For more strenuous walks, or for when things get wet or muddy, bring some sturdier walking boots. Lastly, we recommend flip-flops, for instance for (public) bathrooms or days on the beach.

Swimwear

Speaking of the beach, unless you prefer skinny-dipping don't forget to bring swimwear – especially if you're going to the south coast of either Britain or Ireland where there are many tempting beaches. You'll need a bathing suit or shorts and some large towels, of course, but you could also pack snorkelling equipment or even a wetsuit if you're into surfing or for when the water's cold. Oh, and don't forget to bring a bottle of sunscreen!

Picnic set

For our trip, we didn't put together a picnic set and we really wish we had. Essentially, if you buy provisions locally you just need a water resistant picnic blanket and a basket (or use the rucksack) and perhaps a vacuum flask and tins to put your food and drink in. But we also recommend you bring a little stove, a kettle and some mugs to make tea – it makes a difference! Alternatively, browse some antique markets along the way to source a cutesy vintage set. For more information, see the navigation chapter.

Camera

Unless you're an avid photographer or aim to become one, a camera isn't essential – most smartphones take great pictures these days. If you do intend on bringing one, make sure you know how to get the best from it– take a course or watch some tutorials online if you don't. We use a rather basic Fuji XT-3 with a short-range zoom lens. As it's small and lightweight, it doesn't take up a whole lot of space and we can easily take it anywhere. We recommend that you bring only what you really need as spending too much time on setting up photography equipment can detract from the experience itself.

Music

Your road trip of a lifetime needs an appropriate soundtrack. To complement it, we've curated an eclectic selection of music by only British and Irish artists, available through Spotify. If your vehicle doesn't have an adequate sound system, bring an external (Bluetooth) speaker. We recommend you don't keep the music on all the time, though: the best soundtrack is still the squawking of gulls, the rain tapping on the roof of your car, and the wild howling around the mountaintops.

Important documents and tools

Last, but most assuredly not least, don't forget to bring the necessary legal documents – such as your passport, driver's licence, insurance policy, and car papers. We recommend that, along with these documents, you also make sure to always have £100 in cash on you for small expenses such as ferries and hedge-veg. It's best to keep all this in your jacket's inside pockets or the car's glove compartment so you can access them at all times. Then, as per our earlier recommendation, pack a set of basic tools and a first-aid kit, and that's you good to go.

CUSTOMS AND TRADITIONS

Britain and Ireland aren't monolithic entities. Behind the façade of overarching national cultures, there's much regional variation worth exploring. Experience traditional and contemporary music at a pub, spend a day at a local event to soak up the atmosphere, and make people laugh by pronouncing all the sounds of their minority language wrong. Of course, you can learn about these facets of British and Irish

culture while on the road, but we recommend you read up a bit about them beforehand, so that you know what to look for – and many locals will appreciate you taking an interest.

Events

One of the best ways to experience local culture is to attend events – which are mostly held during the summer months. For instance, many places across Scotland organise ‘Highland Games’ to showcase traditional sports, music, food, and crafts. In Ireland, horse racing is common still. Around much of England you’ll find agricultural shows and country fairs where farmers and locals present their livestock and produce. And then there are stranger events, such as the one where people chase a wheel of cheese down a hill. You’ll often encounter an event or two along the way, but we prefer to add a few of them to our itinerary to avoid missing out.

Food and drink

While traditional British and Irish cuisine isn’t known for its finesse, we still recommend you sample some local foods – many of which are rather peculiar. Of course, there are well-known victuals such as fish and chips, haggis, and whisk(e)y. But there are also many other regional dishes and foods you may not have heard of and which are actually incredibly good. So, skip the supermarket and ask locally to find out what sort of things you should try – and read the section in the navigation chapter for some suggestions.

Music

No matter where you find yourself, there’s a good chance of encountering a live band in a pub or even outside on the street. Often – particularly rurally – you’ll find folk music being played on instruments such as fiddles and (smaller) bagpipes. There’s a lot of regional variance, so you’ll find that the music differs by degrees from one place to the next. Sometimes, music is accompanied by dancing – such as with cèilidhs in Scotland and Ireland. We recommend you give more modern British and Irish music a chance too, though: the playlist we’ve curated features mostly local contemporary artists and some of the tracks have distinct traditional influences.

Language

Although almost everyone in Britain and Ireland speaks English, there are several other regional languages, dialects and accents. You’re not at all expected to be conversational in them, but locals will appreciate you making an effort. Importantly, there’s Welsh, which is spoken across

Wales and particularly in the north-west. Irish (also known as Gaelic), despite being the official language of Ireland, remains prevalent as a first language only in a number of small linguistic enclaves, which together are called the 'Gaeltacht'. Similarly, in the far north-west of Scotland, there's the 'Gàidhealtachd', where Scots Gaelic is still used regularly by mostly the people of the Outer Hebrides. Besides these languages, there are also many regional dialects and accents – some you may have a little trouble understanding. Use the back of our map to write down a few words of sentences you think will be useful.

Sensitivities

In our experience, most people – especially in rural areas – are friendly and welcoming to visitors and they won't expect you to know about local sensitivities or sentiments, let alone have an opinion on them. Still, we think it's worth having a basic understanding of them – if only to avoid awkward mishaps (like telling a Scotsman he's English). Some important issues include the situation in Northern Ireland, Scottish separatism, and continuing divisions relating to Brexit. If there's something you don't know, ask politely and people will generally be willing to explain.

STEP III

HIT THE ROAD

“Stay on track & make the most of your time on the road.”

Just before your trip begins, there should be only a few things left to do, and one of those is to make sure you have suitable navigation tools, both analogue and digital. To ensure you can easily keep to the route and don't get lost (we did, a few times), and to allow you to digitise your itinerary, we have fine-tuned our route and converted it into a lightweight GPX track. Download it through our website and transfer it to your smartphone or navigation device to drive the route.

USING A GPX FILE

Perhaps you've heard of – or even used – GPX files before. Essentially, they're nothing more than simple text files containing many different coordinates, connected by straight lines to form a route. As it's a so-called 'open standard' file, you can import those routes – including ours – into whichever app or device you prefer to navigate with. We recommend you opt for one that supports offline maps, as this will save you data and internet can be intermittent or absent altogether in more remote areas. GPX files can also be opened using other tools and software, to personalise it or digitise your itinerary before your trip.

Navigating using a GPX track

There are numerous apps – both free and paid – that support GPX files. You should also be able to open the route with newer navigation systems. Note that if you download the route onto a different device, you'll have to transfer it before you can use it. Which tool you use to navigate it is up to you. We ourselves mostly use and recommend an app called OsmAnd. It has a lot of useful features including turn-by-turn navigation, which will make it easier for you to stay on track, and it works offline by default (so don't forget to download the maps you need before your trip). To open the GPX file, just click the menu icon and select 'plan a route'. If this app seems a little too complex to you, there are more basic alternatives you can use (such as GPX Viewer), but these often require that you keep track of where you are manually, and they may charge for additional features (such as offline maps).

Personalising the route

You can also edit the GPX track to personalise the route. For this, you'll need to download software such as Basecamp (by Garmin) onto a desktop device, with which you can add and remove coordinates (called waypoints). That way, you can adjust the route itself, add detours, and draw further tracks to link different parts of the route together. If you've never used such tools before, don't hesitate to try, but don't forget to make back-ups and note that we're not responsible

for any issues resulting from the use of an adjusted or damaged GPX file. Also keep in mind that you're not allowed to distribute your adjusted GPX track, as part of our terms of use.

Digitising your itinerary

Lastly, you can use the GPX file to make a digital visualisation of your road trip and itinerary. Of course, you'll have your annotated route map but sometimes it's more convenient to have an online version with more detail as well – for instance when you need to find your accommodation. If you want to do this, we recommend you overlay the route onto a Google My Maps map. You can create one when logged into your Google Drive, much as you would a Google Sheet or Google Doc. Use the first layer to import the GPX file and add further layers to mark points of interest, and other relevant details. Please note that you'll need an active internet connection to open and use your customised Google My Maps map and that you cannot make adjustments to the route this way.

Don't start your engine just yet, though. Take some time to acquaint yourself with the etiquette for backroad driving. Britain and Ireland's scenic single-track roads make for great touring, but they can be testing for those not used to driving them. More than once during our 100-day expedition, we came across some travellers who were out of their depth, and who consequently got themselves (or us) into unfortunate situations. Granted, those situations eventually made for good stories – read about them in our travelogue – but things could just as easily have been worse! So, study the information below thoroughly and consult the Highway Code if needed. If you need a quick recap, you'll find some diagrams detailing important manoeuvres on the back of the route map.

BACKROAD DRIVING

To begin with, you'll need to get used to driving on the left if that's something you've not done before. In normal traffic, it's quite straightforward but do pay attention when turning onto empty country roads! Then there are some further essential motoring skills to work on. Among other things, you must be able to use passing places properly, tackle mountain roads, and move livestock off the road – yes, really. But don't worry, with a bit of practice you'll be adept soon enough. And remember: if at any point a pass is too steep or a ford too deep, just take it slow or find a detour.

Passing places

Most backroads are single-track and too narrow for two cars to pass each other. That's why there are wider sections called passing places. These are usually indicated by signs and, as their name suggests, they're where you pass oncoming traffic. Here's how it works: when you see someone driving towards you, look for a passing place – and note that the closest one may be behind you. If it's on the left, pull into it. If it's on the right, stop opposite it. Wait for the other car to pass you and then continue. With some experience, you may not even need to stop and instead you can pass one another at low speed. If the other car stops further up the road and flashes its headlights at you, it means they've already found a good passing place and you should proceed.

Passing places are also for overtaking. Throughout your trip, always drive at a speed you're comfortable with. Often, you'll drive slower than locals who know the roads well. They may have places to be – such as ferries or even a hospital appointment – so keep an eye on your rear-view mirror and if you see someone approaching behind you pull into a passing place (on your left; make sure to use your indicator) when you can, to let them past. The other driver may flash their emergency lights twice: this means 'thank you'.

Please don't use passing places to park, as this will impede traffic – people may have to reverse for up to half a mile to find another one. Just look for parking spots instead; there are usually plenty. If you really must stop, park your car on a wider stretch of road instead, partly in the verge if you can but not in front of a gate, and ensure other vehicles can pass it with ease.

Mountain roads

Much of the route passes through mountainous areas and you may come across parts where there are significant changes in elevation. These roads, also single-track, may be twisty and it can be hard to look far ahead in such circumstances. That's why there are some additional rules. Most importantly, uphill traffic has the right of way. It's advisable to stop at the bottom of a pass for a bit if you can, to see if there's any traffic coming down. If so, it can be worthwhile to let it pass first so the road is clear when you begin your ascent, as there are usually not many passing places on mountain passes. Keep in low gear and, when going downhill again allow engine braking to avoid overheating the brakes. Don't push the car too far, but don't be too afraid of high RPM either. This said, some of the passes on the route are extremely steep or tight and if you're not an experienced and confident driver it may be better to take a detour instead – you've nothing to prove.

Gates

You may occasionally come across a gated public road in a rural area. Unless there's a sign telling you otherwise, these barriers aren't there to keep you out. Rather, they're meant to keep livestock inside a large fenced area. Where these fences intersect with roads, there'll usually be cattle grids but sometimes there'll be a gate instead. If you come to one, simply stop and open the gate, drive through, and then close the gate behind you. It's important you do this with care so that the animals don't escape – lest you ruin a local farmer's day.

Livestock

Once you've driven through such a gate, or crossed a cattle grid, you may encounter a flock of sheep or a herd of cattle on the road. Often, the animals will move when they see or hear you approaching, but sometimes they're stubborn. In such cases, there isn't much to do but drive slowly forward and wait for them to get out of the way. Note that animals will run away from danger – which may mean away from you, up the road. If that's the case, drive further to the side of the road (but make sure there's no oncoming traffic) to persuade them into the verge. If they won't move at all, stick your head out of the car, tap the side of the car rhythmically, and tell the animals to move. With sheep, this usually works – somehow, they don't understand there's people in cars and once they notice they'll scatter. With cows, it may not suffice: avoid using your headlights and sound your horn instead of tapping. Don't ever hit an animal (with your car or otherwise) and preferably don't get out of your vehicle, especially if the cows have calves.

Fords

During your road trip, it's likely you'll encounter some fords. These are places where the road runs through a small river, or another shallow body of water, and you'll have to drive through. If there are other cars similar to yours and they make it to the other side, you can assume that you'll be fine too. However, if your car is particularly low, or if the current is strong, or if you have doubts for any other reason, recce first. If there's a footbridge, have a look from that as well as from both sides of the ford. Look for any large holes or protruding rocks, which you'll need to avoid. If it looks safe, drive slowly but steadily through the ford. Stay in your lowest gear and try to keep the tailpipe out of the water. Do not stop and do not reverse – especially if the tailpipe is under water. If you're uncomfortable with driving through any particular ford, just back up and find a detour.

Potholes

Some backroads are in a bad state of repair. We noted down any we came across during our 100-day trip and removed them from the route, but you may still encounter potholes at times. Drive slowly on such roads, as they can be hard to spot and hitting a pothole at speed will result in major damage to your vehicle. If you have someone with you, ask them to get out if the pothole is large, to help you drive across it. If it's been raining and a pothole is flooded, don't drive through it without gauging how deep it is first.

Then, all there's left to do is hit the road and make unforgettable memories. Along the way, there are innumerable sights to see, compelling things to try, and delectable foods to sample. When stocking up on provisions, avoid the supermarkets and support local communities. Stop and ask around locally to find out what's on and when and learn about off-the-beaten-track attractions. Immerse yourself and savour it all, but always remember you're a guest and behave responsibly: take your trash home with you, don't disturb animals or people, don't trespass, don't light fires in places where it's not allowed, and leave places the way you found them – or preferably cleaner.

FOOD & DRINK

People don't generally visit Britain and Ireland for the food. They're convinced that the local cuisine offers nothing but potatoes and mutton. And to an extent, that's true – traditional pub food is often rather simple. But that's not all there is. In truth, you can now find fabulously flavourful victuals all around: from locally caught lobster and scallop, to raw milk and piquant cheeses straight from the farm, and even good sparkling wine. So make food and drink an integral part of your road trip – not least because every proper road trip needs at least one good picnic.

Picnics

Let's talk about these first. In Britain, and to a lesser extent in Ireland, picnics became an intrinsic part of touring almost as soon as motoring developed into an affordable pastime, around a century ago. A picnic needs a decent blanket and a basket for the food and drink, of course, but otherwise you can keep it as simple or make it as opulent as you like. We prefer things such as unostentatious finger food with a bottle of locally pressed juice, but you might like to splurge

and bring a bottle of fizz and smoked salmon sandwiches instead. Along the route you'll find plenty of places to picnic but make sure to always leave these the way you found them, or cleaner if possible, and take care not to disturb others.

Farmers' markets

Good places for buying provisions for such picnics include farmers' markets, which are commonly held a few times a month in attractive historic towns along the route. At these markets, local producers and artisans sell things such as crumbly country cheeses, crusty breads warm from the oven, savoury game pies, and home-baked cakes. To make sure you can visit one or two, we recommend you plan ahead a little and then detour to visit whichever are closest: just have a look at the websites of nearby towns to find out when they're held. It's best to go early in the morning as they can get quite busy, and you can then take the afternoon to go sightseeing.

Hedge-veg and farm shops

Are you unable to find local produce at a local market? No worries: as you drive, you'll likely encounter little stalls along the way, where you can buy provisions as well. Sometimes, there's someone there but other times it's self-service, in which case there'll be a box for you to put the money in. Be honest and pay for what you've taken, or the system won't exist for much longer! In addition to these stalls, some farms have their own shop, usually indicated by signs along the road, where you can buy the food they've grown directly.

Seafood shacks

If you're near the coast, you'll have the opportunity to add locally caught (shell)fish to your picnic. In port towns and at coves and beaches you'll find seafood shacks. Probably our favourite places to get a snack, these usually prepare food from whatever was brought in that morning – think seared scallops, clam chowder, lobster rolls, or fried fish bites. Sometimes, there are small seating areas but more often they're take-out only. Sit at the end of the pier, find a spot somewhere on the beach, or bring your seafood along for later.

Pubs

Alternatively, you can also sit down for a drink and more substantial food someplace along the way, such as at pubs and inns. In most places and particularly in rural areas, these have always been – and remain – an integral part of social life and there's often live music. Ask around to find out which are good, or just stop at one along the

route. Some of these often age-old places have become refined gastropubs, serving gourmet food and a wide variety of drinks in a more restaurant-like atmosphere, while others remain plain and have only simple pub grub such as bangers and mash or fish and chips, and some local ales. One of our best memories is of a small, unassuming Welsh pub where it was just us, a roaring fire, and a few Welsh-speaking locals.

Ordering is usually done at the bar; just wait your turn as it can take a while when it's busy. When you hear a bell, it means the place is about to close and you can order one final round of drinks. Don't be afraid to start or ask to join a conversation with strangers: this is normal and you never know what opportunities it might bring. When with a group, it's customary to order and pay for everyone at the same time (a 'round'). After you've done so, someone else should take the next round and so on. A quick word on alcohol and driving: the legal alcohol limit varies within Britain and Ireland, so be aware of the rules where you are – or better still, don't drive after you've had a drink.

Tea rooms

No beverage is more popular across Britain and Ireland than tea. Dotted along the route and especially in towns and villages you'll come across tea rooms. These traditional and usually rather quaint establishments serve quality (loose-leaf) teas as well as home-baked treats. Many also have gardens where you can have your cuppa and cake in the sunshine. Tea is usually drunk with milk and sugar (there's a persistent debate about whether to put the milk or tea in first). There are regional variants such as cream tea which is common in the West Country (Dorset, Cornwall, Devon, and Somerset): tea is served in the afternoon along with scones and jam and clotted cream. Good times to have tea are typically in the late morning (elevenses) and around four (afternoon tea).

SIGHTSEEING TIPS

Depending on how spontaneous you want to be, you may already have added some tours and sights to your itinerary. Still, you'll find many more stunning sights as you drive and we encourage you to detour to explore them. Signs (usually brown) along the road indicate places of interest and local events are also usually signposted. Some attractions may charge an entry fee, but other landmarks – especially natural ones – will be free. Even if you haven't bought a visitor pass to save money on paid attractions, you may still like to support

organisations such as the National Trust or An Taisce to help preserve important sites around Britain and Ireland.

Walks & landmarks

The route was designed to be extraordinarily scenic: it traverses mountain ranges, meanders through the countryside, and traces the seashore. As such, you'll regularly come across stunning natural landmarks such as roaring waterfalls, imposing rock formations, and poignant forgotten ruins. Many of these make for great picnic spots and there may be walking trails nearby to stretch your legs after a long drive. Often these are clearly marked, starting at car parks. Make sure to put on suitable shoes and bring a light rain jacket if the weather's changeable – and use your common sense to stay safe.

Museums & attractions

Equally, you'll come across many museums and attractions. There's a lot of variety, from grand castles and stately homes with splendid gardens, to small remote distilleries producing local spirits, to curious local museums, cathedrals and other ecclesiastical monuments. Usually, you'll have to pay an entry fee to visit these, and most of these are covered by the major tourist passes. Please note that some of these places may be closed for the part of the year outside the tourist season (so from October through to April).

Events

As you may already have read in the chapter on organisation, there are many events held locally throughout the year – and particularly in the summer months. You may have already included some in your itinerary, but often the smaller ones are the most characterful so ask around locally to see if there's anything happening nearby and detour accordingly.

Tours

By now you will have built up a lot of knowledge about your road trip and destinations, but some places are better explored with a guide, whose knowledge and skills will help you explore parts of Britain and Ireland you wouldn't have been able to on your own – and who can help you understand these better. For instance, up in Shetland it's possible to go whale watching, on the Norfolk coast you can explore the otherwise inaccessible salt marshes, and in Wales local guides can take you scrambling along the coast or in river gorges. Again, you may have already booked some of these tours but it's worth asking around locally to see what sort of other opportunities there are.



