

ABOVE BELOW

Argyll & The Isles

Map & Guide

Wild Swimming, Snorkel, Beach Hunt, Sunset & Dark Sky Trails on Scotland's Adventure Coast



Immerse your Senses

Argyll & the Isles is a scenic delight with its mountains and glens, forests and woodlands, islands and glittering sea lochs – the perfect backdrop for touring the region on foot, two wheels, four wheels or by boat. Yet there is so much more to discover and enjoy 'Above & Below' Argyll and our Inner Hebridean islands.

Our marine environment is an ecosystem of international significance with a very diverse coastline and it is home to the first Mission Blue Hope Spot in Scotland and on the UK Mainland. Our celestial – or extra-terrestrial – environment is pretty special too with some of the darkest skies in Europe and the perfect west coast conditions for stunning sunsets.

We have five themed Above & Below trails around the Sound of Jura, Firth of Lorn and Loch Linnhe to help you slow down and discover the magic.

Take to the water to snorkel or wild swim, explore the beach and rock pools at low tide or find the perfect spot to watch the sun slowly set then discover just how dark our skies really are.

These marine and celestial trails are for novices and the more experienced who don't know the area well, and with key tips on safety and respect – and we have local businesses and organisations here to help each step of the way.

So grab your wetsuit and a mask, or your camera and a flask and explore 'Above & Below' Scotland's Adventure Coast.



Sunset Trail

There's a good chance that just by looking west at the right time of day and in the right weather conditions, you'll catch a fantastic sunset in Argyll. But some locations can elevate the spectacle to the next level. Our Sunset sites offer silhouetted islands and headlands, castles and ruins, reflective waters and perhaps a nearby pub to warm up in afterwards!

Pay attention to the time of year to catch the best sunsets. In mid-summer the sun doesn't set in Argyll until well after 10pm, whereas in mid-winter it sets before 4pm. Make the most of the golden hour – the hour before the sun actually sets (and after it rises) as this is when the light conditions are perfect for photography. Arrive early and do stay after as the light can be incredible just after the sun has set.

GREAT TIPS TO CAPTURE THAT SPECIAL MOMENT

- Find somewhere to prop your phone or camera so it is as stable as possible – use a rock or something you have with you – or ideally use a mini grip tripod.
- Clean the camera lens with a lens cloth and if possibly shield the camera with your hand to minimise lens flare.
- Look out for some light clouds – ideally wispy or fluffy as they can really pick up the sunset colours. Dense clouds on the horizon could mean the sun simply disappears behind them and doesn't set.
- Think about a silhouette in the foreground – a ruin, a plant, a person – and reflections over water.
- Look out for stunning sunset images taken by local photographers and search out that location and try your hand at similar compositions.



Dark Sky Trail

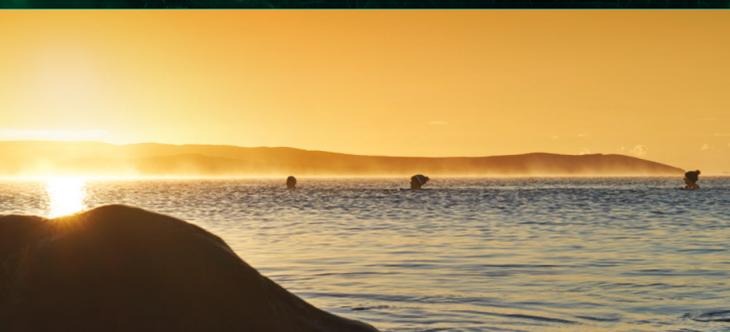
Argyll & the Isles is a great place to see the stars without light pollution. If you are used to looking up at the night skies from a busy urban area you are in for a very pleasant surprise in just how star-studded and twinkly the sky can be. If you are lucky, you might even see the Northern Lights.

We have highlighted key locations where locals love to star gaze and where you may well find some of our local photographers when the conditions are looking good. It's always worth knowing when a full moon is expected and what direction to look to spot the Milky Way or one of the constellations. If it looks like there's going to be clear sky at night do a little research online.

MAKE THE MOST OF OUR DARK SKIES

- Get yourself as far away as possible from any light source, even if it means simply getting behind a wall.
- Allow your eyes up to 20 minutes to adjust to the dark – be patient as the longer you wait the more you will see.
- It's always best to star gaze lying down so if it's not wet bring a picnic rug or a reclining camping chair.
- You will need a torch, but rather than use your phone or a normal torch use a red beam like a rear bike light as it won't affect your night vision as much.
- You can see a lot with your naked eyes but a telescope or binoculars are handy for getting a better look at the moon and star clusters.
- Be aware that when there is a full moon, star gazing is not as clear.
- The Northern Lights – Aurora Borealis – often are picked up better on video/imagery than the naked eye – so do take some snaps but also enjoy the moment.

DID YOU KNOW The Inner Hebridean Isle of Coll was designated a 'Dark Sky Community' by the International Dark-sky Association (IDA) in 2013 and our Above & Below site at Gigha's north pier has recently been granted the status of Dark Sky Discovery Site by the UK Dark Sky Discovery Partnership.



Wild Swimming Trail

More and more people are discovering the benefits and joys of wild swimming in Scotland. Whether you are a regular selkie, or you are just dipping your toe in for the first time, these sites will leave you feeling refreshed and rejuvenated! We are highlighting some of Argyll's best swimming spots that are used and rated by local swimmers and experts alike – and sharing some important tips!

STAY SAFE & ENJOY THE EXPERIENCE

- All sites are accessed at individual risk.
- If inexperienced always use a wetsuit and make sure it fits well with plenty of movement for your arms and is right for wild swimming.
- If you haven't been wild swimming before we recommend you start with lessons from a suitably qualified instructor.
- Always respect the water – check for wind, swell height and the tides for that day and specific to the wild swimming location.
- Take a friend or join a group – it is recommended you wear a colourful silicone/neoprene swim cap or head gear and use a bright coloured tow float for heat retention and visibility.
- Be sensible and only stay in the water for very short periods when starting out even if you feel fine – and have lots of layers to put back on after.
- Only swim in skins (in a swimsuit) if you are experienced.
- Enter the water steadily to acclimatise and never jump in without firstly acclimatising and thoroughly checking for depth and obstructions.

While care has been taken when identifying wild swim locations to ensure they are as safe as possible, none of them are officially RLSS or RNLI lifeguard covered.



Snorkel Trail

Did you know that Argyll's marine environment is more diverse than almost anywhere else in Scotland? Even close to shore you can see an incredible array of species and habitats just by popping on a snorkel mask. Snorkelling is an amazing way to explore beneath the waves and see sights you may never have seen before.

PLAN AHEAD

- For your first snorkel trip think about joining an organised event or seek some BSAC accredited training on how to snorkel in open water safely.
- Do check the conditions on the day you plan to snorkel – be aware of tides, water temperatures, currents and weather forecasts before you set out.
- Take a friend: never snorkel alone and always tell people where you are going – and know to call 999 or 112 if anyone gets into trouble.
- Know your surroundings: check what the weather and tides are doing, and identify a landmark for reference as you can cover a lot of ground with fins and can also easily drift while mesmerised with what lies below.
- Only use good quality and well-fitting equipment – mask, snorkel, fins, wetsuit.
- Wear the right protection: a wetsuit is recommended and will keep you warm and protect you against jellyfish stings. When it is colder a neoprene helmet, gloves and water shoes are recommended and will let you stay in the water that bit longer.
- For less confident swimmers stay within your depth.
- Try not to disturb marine animals, plants or shells and don't take anything away with you.

Look out for the Scottish Wildlife Trust's Snorkel Trail leaflet for North Argyll. It's available online and locally. We worked on this together and it tells you a little bit more about each site and some of the wildlife you might see.



Beach Hunt Trail

Pebbly shores and sandy beaches with rockpools are the order of the day at our Beach Hunts sites. Our shores are some of the best places to get close to wildlife; whether anemones in rock pools, limpets on rocks or crabs scuttling along the sand. It's best to observe these wonderful species in their natural habitats. When exploring Argyll's beaches please consider your potential impact on the environment and respect local guidance.

TIPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL HUNT

- If you pick anything up, please return them quickly to the spot that you found them in, it is against the law to remove pebbles and sand from beaches in the UK. Coastal habitats can be fragile and are easily damaged.
- Check the local tide time tables and aim for an hour before low tide to give you a couple of hours to explore – do research in advance to understand what happens when the tide comes in so you don't accidentally get cut off.
- Keep an eye on what is happening with the tides each day – the tides move on by roughly 50 mins each day so low tide one day will be just under an hour later the next day.
- Bring a bucket and spade and either wear wellies or better still just have bare feet – you'll want to get in the water.
- Whilst it is not unlawful to remove shells and driftwood, these can provide habitats for many sea creatures, so it's best to leave them behind.

Please pick up after your dogs, and don't allow them to harass any wildlife. While it might be fun for them or even your children to chase flocks of birds, this is actually making the birds use up stores of energy they need to search for food and raise their young.



Please be mindful of local residents, livestock and wildlife when visiting any of our sites.

wildaboutargyll.co.uk/aboveandbelow

A partnership green recovery initiative funded by NatureScot, developed with local experts and community interests, and delivered by Argyll & The Isles Tourism Cooperative.



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Take Time Out to Explore Above & Below

Please only park in suitable spaces, stick to marked paths and if it feels too busy come back another time.

Explore our map and discover where you can experience these Above & Below nature based trails centred on the Argyll Coast and Islands Hope Spot and located around the Sound of Jura, Firth of Lorne and Loch Linnhe. All of the sites on our trails have been identified by working closely with our local communities and with insight from local experts. Each offers a memorable experience which changes with the seasons. Once you visit one, you'll want to visit more!

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| <p>1. Duror
Cuil Bay 🌅🌊🌳</p> <p>2. Appin
Port Appin 🌊</p> <p>3. Loch Creran
Queenie Reef 🌊
Creagan 🌊
Glasdrum Wood 🌳</p> <p>4. Benderloch
Tralee Bay 🌅🌳</p> <p>5. Dunbeg
SAMS Beach (camas rubha na liathaig) 🌊🌳🌅</p> <p>6. Ganavan/Oban
Ganavan Sands 🌅🌊🌳
Wee Ganavan (Camas Bàn) 🌊🌳</p> <p>7. Taynuilt
Kelly's Pier 🌊</p> <p>8. Oban
Pulpit Hill 🌅
McCaig's Tower 🌅</p> <p>9. Seil
Ellenabeich 🌅🌊</p> | <p>10. Easdale
Swimming Quarry 🌊</p> <p>11. Arduaine
Asknish Bay (Loch Melfort Hotel) 🌅🌊🌳
Arduaine Jetty 🌊🌳</p> <p>12. Ardfern
Village Bay, Loch Craignish 🌊</p> <p>13. Kilmartin
Mòine Mhór 🌊</p> <p>14. Crinan
Crinan Basin 🌅🌊</p> <p>15. Bellanoch
Bellanoch Viewpoint 🌅🌊</p> <p>16. Cairnbaan
Cruach Mòr Dunardry Summit 🌅
Dunardry Locks 🌊</p> <p>17. Tayvallich
Taynish Piggery 🌅
Taynish Mill 🌊</p> <p>18. Jura
Corran Sands 🌊</p> | <p>19. Tarbert
Tarbert Castle 🌅
White Shore 🌊🌳</p> <p>20. Kilberry
Port Ban 🌅🌊🌳</p> <p>21. West Loch Tarbert
Escart Bay 🌊</p> <p>22. Gigha
Garbh Beaches 🌅🌳
Port Na Chinn Mhoir (Johnny's Shore) 🌊
Port Mòr 🌊
Ardrinish Bay 🌊</p> |
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Key

- Dark Sky Trail Site
- Sunset Trail Site
- Beach Hunt Trail Site
- Wild Swimming Trail Site
- Snorkelling Trail Site
- Ferry Route
- Road
- Train
- Hope Spot Area

See the five trails and get details about each individual site at wildaboutargyll.co.uk/aboveandbelow
 Discover more about Argyll Coast and Islands Hope Spot at argyllhopespot.scot



Explore our interactive map online to filter by each trail and get all the info you need.

Support and expertise provided by Adventure Oban | Basking Shark Scotland | Dan the Merman | Gigha Heritage Trust | Heart of Argyll Wildlife Organisation | Heatherly Heights | Loch Melfort Hotel | Outside Edgel Seawilding



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