

Best festivals for . . . BEAUTIFUL LOCATIONS

Scotland certainly has some jaw-dropping scenery and there are plenty of festivals that make the most of it. David Kettle picks five events that don't make do with a muddy field



ST MAGNUS FESTIVAL, ORKNEY

It's a mad place for a classical music festival. Imagine the organisational feats of getting hundred-strong symphony orchestras – both instruments and players – not to mention starry soloists, string quartets and more to the remote north of Scotland, by air, road, boat or all three. But once they're there, Orkney's St Magnus Festival offers one of the most magical combinations of location and event in the world's festival calendar.

And artistic director Alasdair Nicolson is keen that audiences get to experience the islands' natural beauty through his festival events. 'I try to make sure that events get out of the two main towns – Kirkwall and Stromness – and that we take some performers to the outer islands.' This year, that means groups from the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra performing in far-flung Sanday and among the rugged landscape of Hoy. 'We also have a series of excursions where we provide transport for the audience. This year these will take the audience to the beautiful Church of St Ninian in Deerness, set near the sea with a panoramic outlook.' It's there that Glasgow's Astrid Quartet gives the first performance of a new piece by Nicolson himself, *The Keeper of Sheep*. And two special events at Orkney's remarkable Italian Chapel (pictured) – two Nissen huts transformed into an ornate place of worship by Italian POWs in World War II – mix visual art and music in songs from the time of Caravaggio.

But don't imagine it's just for hardcore classical fans: Nicolson spreads his net very wide, with theatre, poetry, film and even knitting among his offerings this year. 'It's a reflection of the range of talent and arts practice found in Orkney all year round,' he explains. 'We also have a club running throughout the festival – each evening at 10pm there's a session of folk, world or singer/songwriters, where audience members can rub shoulders with international soloists, conductors, poets, painters and orchestral musicians.' That's the unique community drawn each year to Orkney's enchanting setting.

St Magnus International Festival, Fri 20–Thu 26 June, various venues, Orkney, stmagnusfestival.com



FRINGE BY THE SEA

Escape the Scottish capital's August Fringe madness for a homely, folksy alternative just a few miles down the East Lothian coast, with North Berwick's charming harbour as the festival focal point and events all around town. In a programme that also takes in comedy, kids' events and books, there's trad music from Julie Fowlis, Phil Cunningham and Aly Bain, blues from Eric Bibb and the Manfreds (fronted by blues legend Paul Jones), plus the praising voices of the Glasgow Gospel Choir.

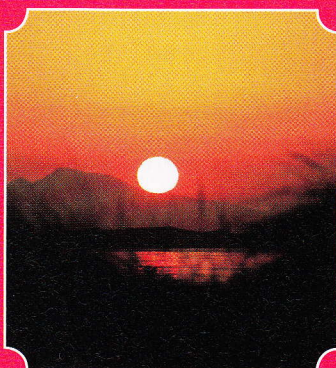
■ Various venues, North Berwick, Mon 4–Sun 10 Aug.



THE HOWLIN' FLING

Top music names from Scotland and beyond, and awe-inspiring Hebridean scenery – it's hard not to be seduced by the Howlin' Fling's magical mix of bands and location. Organised by Johnny Lynch, head of Lost Map Records (and Eigg resident), HF features the full Lost Map roster (Kid Canaveral, Tuff Love and others) plus Beth Orton, Golden Teacher, Jens Lekman and more. It sold out fast, but ticketholders will enjoy three days of music and bonfires on the island now owned by its 80 residents.

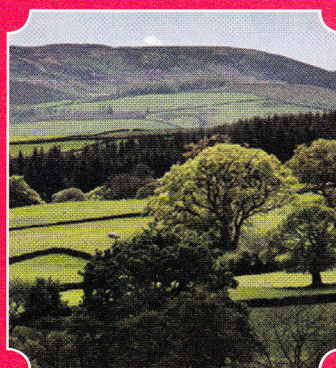
■ Isle of Eigg, Fri 18–Sun 20 Jul.



TIREE MUSIC FESTIVAL

Sweeping sandy beaches, lapping waves and wildflower-strewn meadows are the setting for another festival making the most of its Hebridean location. Tiny Tiree's three-day event was founded by local boy Daniel Gillespie (accordionist in Skerryvore), and this year features his band plus the likes of Capercaillie, Roddy Hart, Breabach and Mànran (among many others), plus a community village of workshops, food and crafts, and a special ceilidh stage.

■ Isle of Tiree, Fri 18–Sun 20 Jul.



SPRING FLING

Forget the rugged mountains and lochs of the north: the lush coves and rolling rural countryside of Dumfries and Galloway in the south have their own unique beauty, and Spring Fling opens up the workshops and studios of artists and craftspeople scattered throughout the region for anyone looking for a bit of cultural exploration. Photographers, jewellers, sculptors, digital artists and many more throw open their doors to curious travellers.

■ Various venues, Dumfries and Galloway, Sat 24–Mon 26 May.