

ISLE OF SKYE, SCOTLAND

THE QUIRAING

A geological wonderland in the north of Skye

Just above Staffin Bay in the northeast of the Scottish Isle of Skye rises the Quiraing, part of the Trotternish Ridge geologic phenomenon, formed when the weight of volcanic lava flow on the region's sandstone and limestone caused massive landslips. The result was this statuary of basalt pinnacles—towering rock pillars and overgrown obelisks on a most majestic green carpet unraveling down steep slopes to the sea. Closer to shore, ice scouring of Jurassic rock rounded lower gully formations, leaving rolling hills and bumps while other high rises of the Quiraing, like the 120-foot (37 m) so-called Needle, are still “young” and a bit, er, unstable. Even today shifting slips still morph the landscape, as evidenced by frequent road repairs.

From the Bealach Ollasgairte car park, a circuitous 4.3-mile (7 km) footpath weaves through the Quiraing's geological folds to its summit, crisscrossing nicknamed sites like the Table, a football field-size plateau hidden amid this stone stadium. The so-called Prison got its name from the rock walls that form a surrounding “fortress,” perhaps used as such against Viking invaders in earlier centuries. Beyond the Quiraing, other curious formations jut from the Trotternish Ridge, including the Old Man of Storr, Kilt Rock, and the plummeting Mealt Waterfall. And don't miss the rippled terrain of Fairy Glen—a miniature Quiraing—outside the nearby village of Uig.

UNFORGETTABLE EXPERIENCES

Many anchor south in Portree, but you'll find the Flodigarry Hotel (hotelintheskye.co.uk) much closer to the Quiraing, with newly renovated circa-1895 lodge rooms named for such revered Scots as William Wallace and a pub serving whiskeys fireside from Talisker Distillery. To the north are spectacular viewpoints at Rubha Hunish—Skye's northernmost point. Finish up in Uig with a pint by the pier at Isle of Skye Brewing Co. skyeale.com



The colorful houses of Portree harbor (above) pale in comparison with the nuanced palette of the Quiraing (opposite), a still moving landslip on the Isle of Skye.

TRAVELER'S NOTEBOOK

*WHEN TO GO

The Isle's Highland Games in August are enough reason to head here in the summer, but you'll also find the Fèis an Eilein, or Skye Festival, July–Aug. in south Skye.

*PLANNING

The Quiraing is not on a direct bus route. Come by car from the Scottish mainland via the Skye Bridge in Kyle; the Mallaig–Armadale Ferry; or the ferry from the Outer Hebrides (Tarbert or Lochmaddy) into the port at Uig. Park at Bealach Ollasgairte.

*WEBSITES

seall.co.uk, theskyeguide.com

