

# The Cairngorms

A scenic landscape of the Cairngorms mountains at sunset or sunrise. The sky is filled with dramatic, colorful clouds in shades of orange, yellow, and purple. The mountains are silhouetted against the bright sky, and their reflection is clearly visible in the calm water of a lake in the foreground.

6th - 13th November 2021  
7 nights, £2150



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*Pinewoods, mountains and lochs.*

## THE RETREAT

**F**OOD AND PHOTOGRAPHY RETREATS are for people who enjoy a house-party style of holiday in a lovely setting where they can immerse themselves totally in photography, mix with like-minded guests, and eat very well too. We're free of the restrictions of hotels and work mealtimes around photography, rather than vice-versa. If you're weary of being herded from one "photo-opportunity" to another and want the time and space to make your own work, then our Retreats are for you.

We're delighted to welcome back well-known German photographer and teacher, [Willi Rolfes](#), who will join us as we explore the mountains, native pinewoods and lochs of the Cairngorms National Park, based in the rapidly re-wilding Glen Feshie. Our stay coincides with peak autumn colours in the valleys, always with the possibility of a sprinkling of fresh snow on the mountain tops and fog in the mornings. There will also be an opportunity to photograph red squirrels at a feeding station in the pinewoods and, weather permitting, the reindeer herd that lives on the open hill.

We make plenty of time to look at and discuss your work, share our "mobile library" of photography books and help you to find ways to expand your creative practice after the Retreat is over.



## WHAT'S ON OFFER

IF YOU'RE INTERESTED in learning one of the [particular skills](#) Niall is known for, take an eLearning class before the Retreat and have a chance to practise what you've learned in the field with him. During the Retreat, Niall will suggest and demonstrate edits on some of your photographs. Locations we will work with include:

- Loch an Eilein at dawn, Loch Morlich at dusk;
- Abernethy pine forest;
- Woodlands and the loch near Ballintean Lodge;
- Coire an t-Sneachda to look for ptarmigan;\*
- Loch Garten;
- Light painting old pine trees;
- Wild-living reindeer;
- Craigellachie birch woods;
- Red squirrel photography.

\* *unsafe if snow forecast.*



## ACCOMMODATION AND MEALS

We will be staying at [Ballintean Mountain Lodge](#) in the pinewoods of Glen feshie. This provides a well-appointed base for our travels as well as a relaxing venue for eating, talking and sleeping. There are even some photogenic Highland cattle close at hand. Each room has en-suite facilities and there is wi-fi throughout the Lodge as well as spacious social areas. There is no single room supplement for those travelling alone.

Good food is at the heart of our Retreats, from breakfast through to after-dinner chocolates, all made by Charlotte. We take the view that most things are made better by the prospect of a lovely meal at the end of the day. We eat largely vegetarian food at home but the range broadens to encompass all tastes on Retreat. She uses local ingredients, when they are available, in dishes that are delicious and imaginative without being fussy. Food allergies and intolerances are catered for sensitively when notified in advance on the booking form. Expect to eat well, for breakfast, lunch and dinner. And in between times too.

While we don't provide wine, you will have opportunity to shop for your own in local stores—and there are one or two Speyside malt whiskies available too, as you might expect!





from the kitchen of  
**Charlotte**

Charlotte's surprise from the kitchen

Salmon with creamy horseradish lentils, over-  
roasted cherry tomatoes and greens  
or

Butternut squash and nut roast served with  
a rich tomato passatta sauce and green beans (v)

Orange and ricotta tart with creme fraiche,  
accompanied by a shot of Montbazillac

Charlotte's chocolates and tea or coffee

## THE CAIRNGORMS

Scotland's second National Park, the Cairngorms, is the UK's most extensive mountain environment. The Spey valley retains some of the largest tracts of the pine forest that covered much of the Highlands after the last Ice Age. Its distance from the sea means that the area's numerous lochs and marshes are often

wreathed in early morning mist. Snow is less predictable than in the past but if there is going to be any in Scotland, it will fall here first.

Not only is Speyside a refuge of the ancient pine forest and a host of species that have disappeared from

much of the rest of the country—such as capercaillie and red squirrels—it is also the setting of exciting re-wilding initiatives which are seeing the return of montane scrub and woodland to areas that have not had forest cover for centuries. There is simmering tension between those who'd rather see wide open vistas

and those who place biodiversity ahead of visual amenity. So, for photographers interested in creating story-led collections of pictures, Speyside is a rich vein to mine. Ballintean's owner, Peter Cairns, is himself deeply involved in various re-wilding initiatives and can provide insider information on these.





## GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT THE RETREAT

**Price: GBP 2150 (2021)**

**What's included:**

- 7 nights' accommodation at the Ballintean Mountain Lodge;
- Transfers to and from Aviemore railway station or Inverness (airport and railway station);
- All meals during the Retreat from lunch on Saturday 6th November until breakfast on Saturday 13th November;
- Red squirrel photography fee;
- Tuition from Willi and Niall.

**What's not included:**

- Your travel to and from Inverness/Aviemore;
- Alcoholic drinks;
- Travel insurance;

- Admissions (eg, reindeer visit).

### **Travelling to and from the Retreat**

You can drive directly to Ballintean Mountain Lodge (the address is Ballintean, Glenfeshie, Kingussie, PH21 1NX) or you can arrange in advance with us to be collected (by early afternoon on Saturday 6<sup>th</sup> November) from Aviemore railway station, Inverness airport or Inverness railway station. The Retreat starts with lunch at 13:30 hrs on Saturday 6th for those who have arrived then and finishes after breakfast on Saturday 13th at which point we return you to your railway station or airport. Drivers are free to leave later if they wish but rooms need to be vacated by 10:00 hrs.

### **Where we will go**

We've detailed earlier in this brochure some of the locations we have available to choose from. With two leaders, we have the possibility to split the group if some people, for

example, want to photograph on the valley floor while others climb higher into the hills. We avoid hopping from location to location, preferring instead to work a good one thoroughly and give it the time it deserves. Good photography is often more time than location dependent.

### **The daily routine**

Whatever we are shooting, it tends to look more attractive in the early morning or late afternoon when low-angled light shows relief and colours better. With dawn at around 07:40 hrs and dusk around 16:00, it's quite a short day but the light is sympathetic for much of it. Sometimes, we'll eat breakfast in, sometimes Charlotte will bring it to us in the field, depending on how far we are from Ballintean at the time.

The plan for the next day is published at dinner, outlining the weather forecast, the locations and

ideas for the next day, drive times, walking distances, where and when we'll eat and what gear you'll probably need. Experience has taught that it's more productive—and satisfactory for you—to have a plan to follow than make it up as we go along.

We've learned over the years, too, just how much guests value being able to discuss the work they are creating, with Niall and other guests and to this end, we'd urge you to bring a laptop. When we hold processing tutorials, bandwidth-permitting, we do so over Zoom, with everyone in the one room. This makes it much easier for Niall to help you as you share your screen with him—and for you to see the techniques he applies in his post-production work. Some evenings, conditions permitting, we'll head back out after dinner to shoot the starry skies.

## **Safety**

We take your safety seriously during our Retreats. At locations with known risks—such as drop-offs, tree-roots, muddy shores, busy roads etc.—we will draw your attention to them before we leave the vehicle. Thereafter, you are responsible for your own safety. We provide guests with a hi-vis. vest to attach to their camera pack—it makes you, and it, easier to locate. We also issue each guest with a two-way radio in order that we all may keep in touch in town or in other areas where the group scatters. This also makes it easier to access help or guidance from Niall. We do not recommend leaving any equipment in our vehicle overnight. We can accommodate various levels of fitness. The walk to the reindeer, if we are able to do that, is quite easy but for anyone wanting to climb into Coire an t-Sneachda, a higher level of fitness, as well as winter clothing and strong boots, is called for.

## **COVID**

Each guest is required to have completed a course of vaccinations at least two weeks before the start of the Retreat. Depending on the progression of the pandemic at that time, we may ask you to wear a mask when we are travelling in the vehicle. We will provide hand sanitiser at entry points to our accommodation.

## **Spending money**

There are cash machines in Aviemore, if you need some.

## **Insurance**

It is a requirement of booking that guests provide evidence of personal travel insurance to cover cancellation and curtailment, medical and emergency expenses (including repatriation), personal accident, injury and death in addition to loss of/damage to luggage and possessions, personal possessions and flight cancellations/ delays.

## **Passport and visa requirements**

A passport valid for at least six months beyond the length of the stay is required for non-UK visitors. EU citizens should check on the latest requirements for travelling to the UK, including the possibility of an international driving permit. You should check your insurance in respect of COVID-related claims.

## **Language**

English is spoken, although non-native speakers might struggle with the local accent!

## **Climate**

While snow in November is less common than it used to be, it's always a possibility, even in the valleys. The early mornings are likely to be cold but on sunny days, the temperatures could reach double figures. Rain is possible but the climate is drier here than in the west of Scotland and the islands.

## **Clothing**

Prepare for cool weather, with the possibility of early snow in the mountains. You should have: proper walking boots; waterproof trousers; a waterproof shell; a down jacket or fleeces; and thermals. A windproof hat and fold-down mitt/ liners combination will keep head and hands warm. We'd also advise that you pack micro-spikes for your boots (we like Grivel ones) or Yaktrax if we go into the mountains.

The longest walk we anticipate would be about 5 km, although many of our forays will be much shorter. If you're travelling by car, pack rubber boots. You might not need them but they could be useful. You may want something smarter for the evenings. Since there are a lot of wooden floors in the Lodge we ask that guests wear slippers or indoor shoes when inside.

## Equipment

If you are travelling by air, you may be concerned about carry-on luggage restrictions. The way round this Niall has used for many years is to pack as much gear as you reasonably can into a photographer's waistcoat. This counts as a garment, not hand luggage, and you can still take your carry-on allowance in to the cabin. Equipment you'll need during the Retreat:

- If possible, please bring a laptop with Lightroom/PS or CaptureOne or Exposure X;
- You could use any lens between 16 mm and 500 mm (something of 300 mm or longer for the squirrels) but a macro lens, a mid-range zoom and a moderate wide-angle will get most use;
- We have a spare tripod but would urge you to bring your own;
- Please pack a head torch, for safety and navigation;

- A walking pole or staff is useful in the mountains;
- Bring all the chargers, cards, batteries and backup media you need, plus UK power adaptor if you're travelling from abroad.;
- A polarizing filter and graduated ND's—only if you have them.;
- Hand warmers—which help to prolong your battery's life.

## Partners

We can create alternative events for friends, partners or spouses centred on chocolate work and patisserie. The cost is the same for non-photographers as for photographers.

## About us

After many years leading tours and workshops for other companies at home and abroad, Niall and Charlotte Benvie established Food and Photography Retreats in 2018. Our

offer combines cultivating your photography in attractive locations with great hospitality, conversation and food.

**Willi Rolfes** is a leading German natural history photographer, tutor and author with a meticulous approach to his work and a talent for communicating his skills. He is also Director of the Katholische Akademie Stapelfeld in Cloppenburg.

**Niall** has been a professional photographer, writer designer and guide for 28 years with a massive publication record including six books and hundreds of articles. He has been involved in founding and running several of the biggest outdoor photographic initiatives of the last decade, including Meet Your Neighbours, Wild Wonders of Europe and 2020VISION and is widely recognised for the innovative nature of his work—and capacity for re-invention.

For 28 years, **Charlotte** combined a career in the Civil Service with freelance catering and hosting roles before coming to work with husband, Niall. Guests value not only her expertise in the kitchen and dining room but her attention to detail and her warmth. She has a keen eye for a picture too and can also assist with Lightroom processing. She is a trained chocolatiere.

Contact Niall and Charlotte:  
Telephone: +44 7898 788 255 or  
+33 7 52 62 06 00  
e-mail: office@foodandphotographyretreats.com.

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VAT registration 331 4337 33

