**Scotland’s Islands: 790 Reasons to Get Inspired Off-shore**

With some 790 islands, only a fraction of them inhabited, there’s plenty to reel you in offshore, whether it’s the munros of Skye, the beaches on Harris, the wildlife on Mull, the seafood of Orkney, our islands reputations precede them. Take some time to surprise yourself with some of these lesser-known gems too.

Raise a glass in **Colonsay**  the world’s smallest with its own brewery, the Colonsay Micro-Brewery, and a hazelnut processing food industry dating back some 9,000 years. **St Kilda**, which has been uninhabited since 1930, has a dual UNESCO listing

On **Jura**, where George Orwell lived out his days while writing 1984, the red deer population outnumber people by 15 to 1.

On **the Isle of Cumbrae**, just 8 minutes by ferry from the Ayrshire coast, you can hire a tandem to easily get around its 10.25 miles in a day.

The shortest scheduled flight in the world goes from Westray to Papa Westray, on Orkney. The mile and a half journey takes 1 minute 14 seconds. Meanwhile **Barra** has the world’s only scheduled flight landing on the beach. Discover the fascinating history of Kisimul Castle, ancient seat of the Clan MacNeil, witness the spectacular bird colonies of the nearby island of Minguley, or try sea kayaking and you might be greeted by local dolphins !

**Lewis** - bring in history side with Calanais Stones

**Skara Brae**, on the island of Orkney, has Britain’s oldest building, dating from 3100 BC.

If you fancy taking a piece of these unique islands home with you, now’s the time to lay your hands on our crafts. This is the year of Creative Scotland, when you can get yourself kitted out in iconic Harris Tweed, woven by islanders using only local wool, or in the distinctive, bright colours of Fair Isle knitwear, and meet local artists like jeweller Sheila Flett on Craft Trails in Orkney and Shetland. Make sure you also visit the Tate Modern afiliated Pier Art Centre in Stromness and the perfect synergy of craft and environment that is the Calgary Art in Nature on Mull.

A long tradition of Gaelic singing, bagpipes and fiddles leaves us with many island maestros to get your feet tapping, from Shetland’s virtuoso fiddler Ally Bain to Orkney’s Kris Drever and Western Isles bagpiper Fred Morrison. Sample some more at the Hebridean Celtic Festival in July or the Jura Music Festival in September and pop in to legendary venues such as Mull’s An Tobar or the Mareel Art Centre coming to Shetland this autumn.

**From** dolphin expeditions on Mull, to the 100,000 strong seabird colony on Handa and the otters and orcas of Shetland, our islands are home to a staggering variety of wildlife. What’s your animal passion? Sea slugs or seals, puffins or plants, hill walking or rock pooling? Pursue it all at the Shetland Nature Festival in July or check out the Arran Show on 1 August for birds of prey, chainsaw woodcarving and sheep shearing, just one of dozens of agricultural shows happening all over the islands