

# Tours available, company background & guide qualifications

## Where are visitors taken?

We specialize in tours around the "big island" - **Lewis & Harris** but cover any visits or travel within and between the Celtic Countries of **Alba** (Scotland), **Eire** (Ireland), **Ellan Vannin** (Isle of Man), **Cymru** (Wales), **Kernow** (Cornwall) and **Breizh** (Brittany). Also in the North of **England**, the areas of Northumbria & Cumbria.

## What Type Of Tours Are Available?

The 3 main types of tour are

### **1) The Scenic & Historical Area Tours**

### **2) The Celtic Highlights Tour**

### **3) The Theme Tour**

The **Scenic & Historical Tours** cover the most fascinating and beautiful places in a certain area such as the **Outer Hebrides**, **Connemara**, **Snowdonia** or **Finistere**.

Examples of **Lewis & Harris** tours include highlights like the **Calanais Standing Stones**, **Dun Carloway Broch**, **Gerrannan Thatched Village**, **Arnol Blackhouse**, **Butt Of Lewis Cliffs**, **St. Clement's 16th c Church** with its amazing **Medieval Carvings**, **Harris Tweed Weavers**, some of the best sandy beaches in the world at **Uig & West Harris** & the hidden scenic fishing villages of **Pairc**.

The **Celtic Highlights Tour** is a brief introduction to most, or all 6 countries.

This is especially popular with our North American friends who often have Celtic ancestors in more than one country. This tour gives a flavour of each country and enables comparisons eg - between the two Cornwalls! (one is spelt Cornouaille).

An example of a **Theme Tour** would be **Celtic Religion**.

The types of sites visited would range from the famous **Carnac Stone Rows in Morbihan**, to **St. Govan's Chapel** growing out the cliffs of Dyfed, **Gallerus Oratory** - the ancient, wonderful, corbelled stone cell on the Dingle Peninsula, the **Men-an-tol fertility stone** in Cornwall to the ornate **Celtic Carved Stones** in **Maughold Churchyard** in Mann and **Meigle Kirkyard** in Perthshire. The latter with its claims to Queen Guinevere's grave and its unrivalled collections of Christianised Pictish carvings.

## What Type Of People Come On Our Tours?

People from all walks of life, backgrounds and countries are welcome. If they don't understand English or French too well it will be possible to arrange a translator for some other languages.

Our clients range from archaeologists and historians keen on Earthouses/ Soutterrains / Fogou, Brochs and Pictish Carved Stones to Ley Line Diviners and latter day "Druids" who wish to tap into the energies of Stone Circles like Calanais or the Giant Burial Cairns at Locmariaquer in Brittany. Many people come just for the scenery, wildlife and atmosphere of the Celtic lands - the mountains, glens, beaches and waterfalls as well as the music buffs who enjoy the Craic in pubs with good local brews, good food and company.

## What can Albannach Guided Tours do for you?

We plan Tour Itineraries, make bookings for train journeys, ferry crossings, accommodation and can arrange activities, eg Fishing, Golf, Boat Trips or Ceilidhs, but our main activity is personally guiding individuals, small & large groups around the Celtic Countries. This can be done in a variety of ways, by car, minibus, coach, bicycle or on foot, round interesting buildings, or in the mountains and glens.

Tours range from half a day to 3 weeks.

## Why Use An Official Tourist Guide?

If your time is short and you want in-depth information about an area or attraction, need help to locate less well known places, or can't be bothered making numerous phone calls/emails to secure accommodation & transport, then that is where a Tourist Guide's expertise can ease your visit.

Travel involving multiple train or ferry journeys is no problem. We are used to dealing with the agonies of complicated timetables!

Why pay for expensive unknown accommodation when we can fix you up in comfortable, good value Bed & Breakfast Guest Houses or Hotels. Many of our clients prefer De-luxe Hotels and high quality local produce - again, we only recommend establishments which have high service standards appropriate to the cost.

For those who are interested in the **Celtic Culture** of the country they are visiting, we can reserve accommodation with native speakers, eg **Gaelic, Breton, Welsh**, etc. With a bit of notice we can arrange a **Ceilidh, Fest Noz or Noson Lawen** ( music, singing and/or dancing entertainment).

For those travelling round the **megaliths, castles, churches, beaches** or going to a music festival in Breizh we can translate from French to English for you because many Bretons only speak Breton & French, or French only.

Albannach Guided Tours main tour guide, **Les Mac an Ultaigh** (or McNulty) is one of the 300 official Scottish Tourist Guides or "Blue Badge" Guides in Scotland. They are the only Tour Guides recognised by the Scottish Tourist Board (VisitScotland) and all have comprehensive Public Liability & Professional Indemnity Insurance unlike most of the "unofficial" non STGA guides. To qualify, they have to pass practical & theoretical examinations by University lecturers and experienced Tour Guides. All aspects of Scotland are covered with subjects including **Topography**(the important locations), **Geology, Prehistory, History, Land Use, Environmental issues, Religion, Literature, Education & the Legal system**, Practical Tour Guiding is included with **Voice Projection, Microphone technique, "People skills", Itinerary planning**, etc. The practical tests involve guiding a group of 20-40 people on a coach, in noisy city streets and in a major tourist attraction eg Stirling or Edinburgh Castle.

## Our History And Maybe Yours?

**Albannach Guided Tours** was founded by **Les Mac an Ultaigh**, who qualified as a "**Blue Badge**" or "**Scottish Tourist Guide**" at Dundee University in 1990. He also has the Blue Badge Guide qualification for Cumbria(1993) & Northumbria(1997) in the North of England. Les is also a member of **G.R.TG. ( the Guild Of Registered Tourist Guides) and the D.G.A. (Driver-guides Association)**. Since 1974 he had been guiding small cycling and hillwalking groups on an amateur basis throughout the British Isles.

Through research in the excellent library in the Clan Donald Centre at Armadale on An t Eilean Sgitheanach(Isle of Skye) he discovered that his surname means "son of the Ulsterman" & that his male ancestors probably came from Co Donegal or Co Clare in Eire (Ireland).

The Irish equivalent of G. Black's "Surnames of Scotland" was the source for this information. It is called "Surnames of Ireland" by Edward McLysaght. This awareness of his Scottish/Irish roots probably sparked off his interest in Celtic Culture & History. These are such fascinating subjects that the more you learn, the more you will want to investigate! Increasingly members of the Celtic diaspora now seek their roots.

**Albannach Guided Tours** can get you close to the "real" Celts. We can point you in the right direction for "Ancestor research" and have a huge "library" of books on Celtic History & Culture as well as extensive recorded music from the Celtic countries.

Once you have done your ancestor research, over the Internet, or at the Records Office we take you to the places of your forebears. It is always a pleasure when our clients see a gravestone with their ancestor's name on it, for the first time. On one memorable occasion in the old graveyard at Killin ( Cill Fionn - White Church) I found the name we were looking for by clearing long grass and moss from a gravestone. The American in this case was delighted to be able to "step back in time" by the banks of Loch Tay.

Of course, the further back in time, the less likely it is to find the exact names you are looking for although family/"clan" names will be common in their heartland territory, eg the Buchanans near Loch Lomond or the MacNultys in Donegal's Carrick peninsula.

### **Testimonials:-**

*"one of the best guides we've ever had" ,*

*"it was great to hear the lovely Gaelic singers"*

*"your knowledge was astounding",*

*"thanks again for the wonderful tour. It was one of the highlights of our trip."*

-Caroline & Chet , Wisconsin

### **Conclusion**

Hopefully this information will convince you of the advantages of using the experts in Celtic Tours.

Even native Scots who think they know their history have been amazed at what they have seen and learned on an **Albannach Guided Tour !**