



Beautiful Britain

A road trip can help you connect with your own country

by GORDON CRAIGIE



Rural bliss in Glen Docherty, Wester Ross, Scotland. Right: Dunrobin Castle in the Scottish Highlands. Below: surfing in Cornwall.

COURTESY OF NORTH COAST 500



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According to research commissioned by breakdown cover provider Green Flag (greenflag.com) in 2018, the number of UK residents planning a staycation has increased by 250 per cent over the previous five years. It also says that 13 million people chose a road trip as their preferred UK holiday last year.

If a road trip appeals to you, two main considerations require early planning: choosing a route and preparing your vehicle. Part of the fun in preparing for a road trip is deciding where and what you would like to visit, before choosing the best route and stop-off locations. However, given that there are 250,000 miles of roads in the UK, those choices may not prove easy. Assuming that most people prefer to avoid motorways as much as possible, here are two scenic suggestions at opposite ends of the UK.

North Coast 500

Scotland's answer to America's Route 66, the North Coast 500 takes in around 500 miles of Scotland's most spectacular coastline. Starting and ending in Inverness, the capital of the Highlands, the route meanders through Wester Ross, Sutherland, Caithness, Easter Ross, the

Black Isle and Inverness-shire. Notable towns along the route include Dingwall, Tain, Brora, Wick, John O'Groats, Dounreay, Durness, Lochinver, Ullapool, Scoraig, Gairloch, Applecross and, of course, Inverness itself.

The official website, northcoast500.com, recommends a minimum of five to seven days for the journey and contains useful advice about driving the route. If you have extra time on your hands, once you reach Applecross you could consider extending your journey to take in the Isle of Skye, only another three hours away. (And by the way, should you go between October and March, you might even see the northern lights.)

Atlantic Highway

At the other end of the UK is the intriguingly named Atlantic Highway. This scenic route apparently takes its name from the Atlantic Coast Express, a daily train that ran from London to Devon and Cornwall from 1926 until 1964. Nowadays the route is promoted as starting in the spa town of Bath and following the A39 through the likes of Wells, Glastonbury, Bridgwater, Tiverton, Barnstaple and Bude, before finishing at Falmouth after around 200 miles.



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From there, although it's not officially part of the Atlantic Highway, another hour or so along the A934 takes you to Land's End, another worthwhile sight to tick off your list. This road trip through Somerset, Devon and Cornwall needs at least three or four days to do it justice.

Before you leave

Whether you choose the North 500, the Atlantic Highway or select your own route,

it is vitally important to get your vehicle, and yourself, well prepared. Moreover, remember that when you're in remote parts of the country there won't necessarily be a petrol station around every corner; fill up whenever you can.

Richard Gladman, head of driver standards at motorist charity IAM RoadSmart (iamroadsmart.com), tells the *Connection*, "Driving in rural areas requires us to be prepared to share the road space with large agricultural vehicles as well as a whole range of vulnerable road users."

Gladman advocates for an attitude of patience, so be prepared to wait in a passing place for farmers to go about their daily business, or to follow a group of cyclists along a road with no opportunity to overtake them safely. "We need to accept the pace of life needs to be adjusted to the country way," Gladman says. "With tight bends, restricted vision due to hedges and foliage, and variable road surfaces due to mud, gravel and pot-holes, our countryside can be fraught with anxiety for a driver not used to it."

With a little planning and the right attitude, a road trip can be memorable for the right reasons. ■

Gordon Craigie is a freelance writer based in Dundee, Scotland.

Head out on the highway

Richard Gladman of IAM RoadSmart offers the following tips.

- Spring-clean your car: wash off all grime and road salt that may have accumulated over the winter.
- Clean windows on the inside too; dirty windows are more prone to misting up.
- Remember to replace winter tyres with summer tyres.
- Check tyres thoroughly for damage, and check the pressure before setting off.
- Ensure wiper blades are in full working order after a winter of hard use.
- Test all lights.
- Keep a pair of sunglasses in the car—low sun in spring and summer can cause problems with glare in the early morning and evening.

—GC

COSTCO CONNECTION

If you're inspired to take a road trip this summer, your local Costco warehouse has everything from a Tyre Centre to a wide selection of automotive batteries, items for maintenance and accessories for your car, as well as coolers and a wealth of food and drinks for your trip.