

A visitor guide to one of
Scotland's five whisky regions.

Islay



Whisky

The practice of distilling *whisky* has been lovingly perfected throughout Scotland for centuries and began as a way of turning rain-soaked barley into a drinkable spirit, using the fresh water from Scotland's crystal-clear springs, streams and burns.

To this day, distilleries across the country continue the tradition of using pure spring water from the same sources that have been used for centuries.

From the source of the water and the shape of the still to the wood of the cask used to mature the spirit, there are many factors that make Scotch whisky so wonderfully different and varied from distillery to distillery.

No two are the same; each has its own proud heritage, unique setting and its own way of doing things that has evolved and been refined over time. Paying a visit to a distillery lets you discover more about the environment and the people who shape the taste of the Scotch whisky you enjoy. So, when you're sitting back and relaxing with a dram of our most famous export at the end of your distillery tour, you'll be appreciating the essence of Scotland as it swirls in your glass.

Home to the greatest concentration of distilleries in the world, Scotland is divided into five distinct *whisky regions*. These are Islay, Speyside, Highland, Lowland and Campbeltown.

Find out more information about whisky, how it's made, what foods to pair it with and more:

www.visitscotland.com/whisky

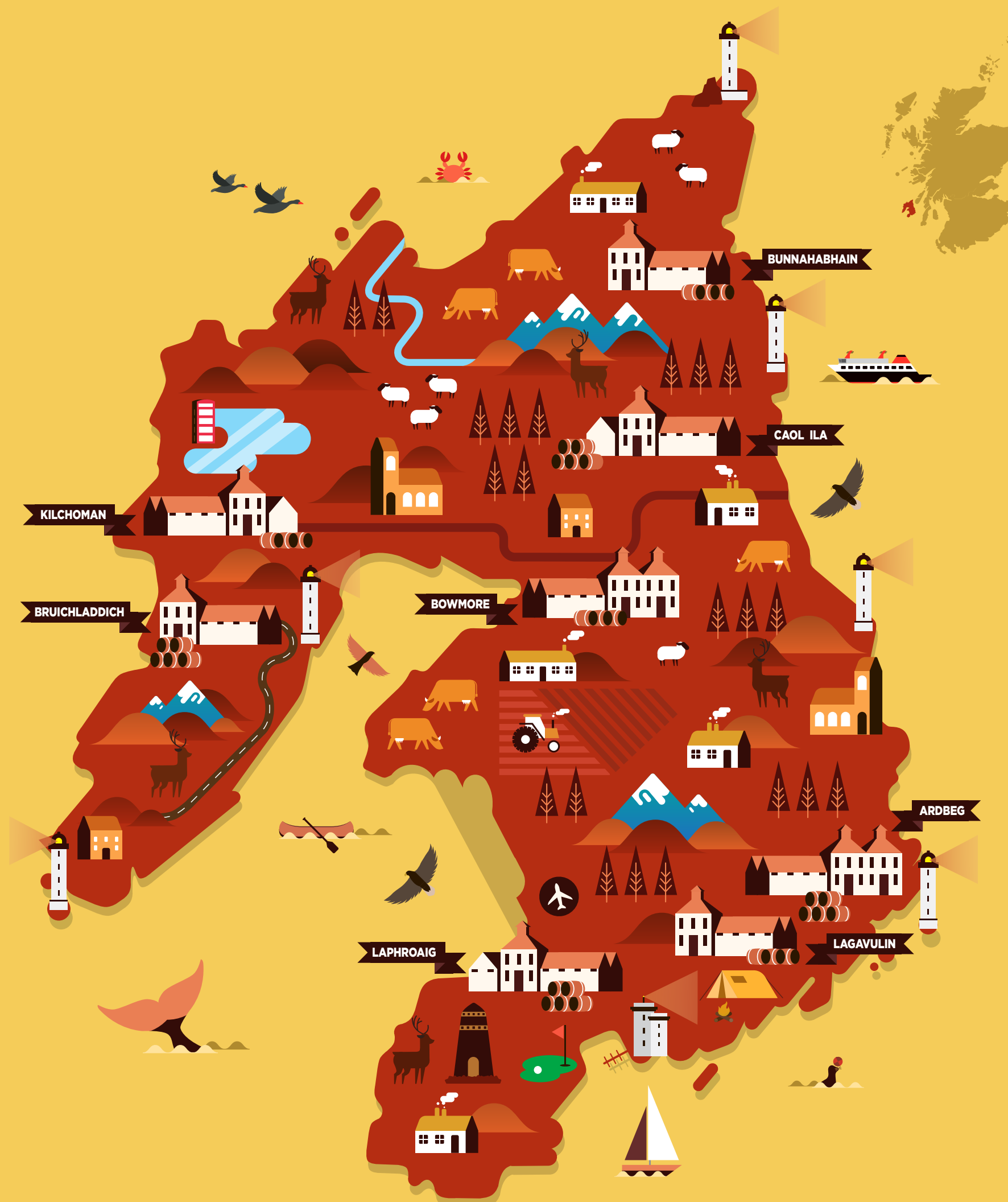
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Islay

Islay is one of many small islands off Scotland's west coast but it certainly stands out from the crowd. Just 25 miles in length, its rocky bays and sheltered inlets house eight active distilleries. It is perhaps only fair then that industrious Islay has long been crowned Scotland's 'whisky island'.

Most of Islay's original distilleries – some long since lost to history – started as farm distilleries, retreating to secluded glens and caves when excise duty was first introduced on whisky in the 17th century. In actual fact, the exciseman didn't dare set foot on Islay for over 150 years because of the fearsome reputation of the islanders, who were regarded at the time as wild and barbaric. Nothing could be further from the truth nowadays, with Islay being well noted for its warm hospitality.

According to legend, monks first brought the art of whisky distilling to the island from Ireland – which on a good day you can see from Islay's south west coast. On arrival, they found it to be more than suitable for the purpose of distilling *aqua vitae* – the water of life – thanks to its abundance of peat, fresh spring water and

barley grown by local crofters.

The former is perhaps the element that most dramatically distinguishes Islay's unique single malts from the rest of Scotland's whisky producing regions. Burned in kilns to dry the malted barley used in the distillation process, the island's peat has been formed over millions of years, rich in decaying mosses, heather and lichens and very different in composition to mainland peat.

Frequently lashed by Atlantic storms, salty spray blown over the island for centuries has penetrated the deep layers of peat and seeped into the warehouses of maturing casks, ultimately affecting the taste and aroma of the dormant Scotch whisky. The resulting malts are pungent, powerful and characterful. Typically, Islay single malts are renowned for their smokiness on the nose and palate with faint notes of sea air and seaweed.

Browse the listings in this guide to find out more information about the distilleries in the Islay region, how to visit them or simply which of their drams to sample.

Be sure to check out our guides for the other four whisky regions: **Campbeltown, Highland, Lowland and Speyside.**

www.visitscotland.com/distilleries-guides

Ardbeg Distillery

Tours available

LOCATION

Port Ellen.

HOW TO GET THERE

Visit the island by air or ferry. You could even take your own car to get around or simply use the island’s fantastic taxi companies.

OVERVIEW

Founded in 1815, Ardbeg Distillery is one of Islay’s oldest whisky distilleries. Ardbeg whiskies are deep, complex and steeped in peat smoke, a distinctive property that has come to characterise many Islay whiskies, due to the abundance of peat on the island.

Although Islay is only 25 miles long, it boasts no fewer than eight distilleries (with two pending), making it easy for you to go on a whisky exploration between them. At Ardbeg Distillery you can choose from four different tours with tastings, starting from £5 for the standard Ardbeg Tour and Tasting.

If you’ve already visited a few whisky distilleries, and want something a bit different, Ardbeg offer a great Deconstructing the Dram tour from April to October, priced at £35. Use all your senses to deconstruct Ardbeg’s famous whiskies on this two hour in-depth tour, from learning about Ardbeg’s production process to taking part in a fun nosing quiz. Along the way you’ll also sample some of Ardbeg’s finest whiskies, including a cask strength tasting in the warehouse.

OPENING TIMES

Opening times vary.

SAMPLE

- Ardbeg Ten Years Old
- Ardbeg Uigeadail
- Ardbeg Corryvreckan
- Ardbeg Supernova
- Ardbeg Blasda

WHERE TO BUY

Available at most major retailers and online.

Looking across fields to the Ardbeg Distillery

Bowmore Distillery

Tours available

LOCATION

Bowmore.

HOW TO GET THERE

To get to the Isle of Islay, daily ferries operated by Caledonian MacBrayne depart from Kennacraig on the mainland to Port Ellen/Port Askaig. Alternatively, you can fly from Glasgow or Oban.

OVERVIEW

Bowmore is the first recorded distillery on the Isle of Islay and one of the oldest in the whole of Scotland, dating back to 1779. Like other Islay malts, Bowmore is renowned for its peaty smokiness, the result of traditionally smoking the malt using peat-fired kilns. The distillers keep to the time-and-tested methods, and the process has scarcely been changed in over 200 years of production.

Lying on the south eastern shore of Loch Indaal, the distillery uses water sourced from the River

Laggan to produce a wide variety of whiskies of different ages and different finishes. Thanks to its location, some of the distinct characteristics of the Bowmore malts include smoke, salt and seaweed. Excess heat from the distillation process is used to warm the waters of Bowmore village’s nearby public swimming pool which is housed in one of the distillery’s former warehouses.

OPENING TIMES

Opening times vary – please check the website.

SAMPLE

- Bowmore 12 Year Old
- Bowmore 15 Year Old
- Bowmore 18 Year Old
- Bowmore 25 Year Old
- Bowmore Legend
- Bowmore Small Batch

WHERE TO BUY

Available online and from some retailers.

Bunnahabhain Distillery

Tours available

LOCATION

Port Askaig.

HOW TO GET THERE

To get to the Isle of Islay, daily ferries operated by Caledonian MacBrayne depart from Kennacraig on the mainland to Port Ellen/Port Askaig. Alternatively, you can fly from Glasgow or Oban.

OVERVIEW

Bunnahabhain has been part of Islay’s whisky heritage since 1881. Nestled into the north east tip of the island, it overlooks the Sound of Islay and the neighbouring Isle of Jura. The name Bunnahabhain derives from Gaelic word for ‘mouth of the river’ and the distillery draws its water from the nearby Margadale Spring. This remote distillery produces a fine range of malts which are not quite as heavily peated as other Islay malts, and with each bottling some distinctive characteristics. As well

as Bunnahabhain single malt, many casks produced in the distillery will be used in Black Bottle, a blended whisky which features a quantity of spirit from every distillery on Islay.

OPENING TIMES

Tours are by appointment only, please see website for more information. The shop is open Monday to Friday 10am – 4pm.

SAMPLE

- Bunnahabhain 12 Year Old
- Bunnahabhain 18 Year Old
- Bunnahabhain 25 Year Old
- Bunnahabhain 40 Year Old
- Bunnahabhain Ceobanach
- Bunnahabhain Eirigh Na Greine
- Bunnahabhain Toiteach

WHERE TO BUY

Both these bottlings and other Bunnahabhain whiskies are available to purchase from a number of retail outlets and from the website shop.

Looking along the coastline to Bunnahabhain Distillery on Islay





Bruichladdich Distillery

Tours available

LOCATION

Bruichladdich.

HOW TO GET THERE

To get to the Isle of Islay, daily ferries operated by Caledonian MacBrayne depart from Kennacraig on the mainland to Port Ellen/Port Askaig. Alternatively, you can fly from Glasgow or Oban.

OVERVIEW

In a sheltered spot on the shores of Loch Indaal lies Bruichladdich, home to a distillery which dates back to 1881. Bruichladdich distillery’s operation and ethos

blends an interesting mix of old and new; much of the equipment used dates back to the Victorian era but this distillery is famed for taking innovative approaches when it comes to the whisky-making process. Self-styled as ‘progressive Hebridean distillers’, Bruichladdich has released the Octomore, an experimental whisky made from super heavily peated barley and said to be the most heavily peated single malt whisky in the world. As well as whisky, the distillery started producing gin, named The Botanist, in 2011.

In addition to standard daily tours, the Warehouse Experience offers something a bit special. Participants get the chance to try three single malt whiskies which are not available for general sale straight from the cask in the setting of the cathedral-like maturation room.

OPENING TIMES

Opening times vary - please see website.

SAMPLE

- Bruichladdich The Classic Laddie Scotch Barley
- Bruichladdich Port Charlotte Heavily Peated Scottish Barley
- Bruichladdich Octomore 06.1 5 Year Old Scottish Barley

WHERE TO BUY

These single malt and other Bruichladdich whiskies are available to purchase from a number of retail outlets and online.

Looking across the water to Bruichladdich Distillery on Islay

Caol Ila Distillery

Tours available

LOCATION

Port Askaig.

HOW TO GET THERE

Visit the island by ferry or by plane to Islay Airport from Glasgow International Airport. Get around using the local bus services or hire a taxi or car once here.

OVERVIEW

Located just north of Port Askaig, Caol Ila (pronounced Cull-eela) is set in a sheltered bay surrounded by gorgeous Hebridean scenery. It is the biggest distillery in Islay, producing a jaw-dropping excess of 2 million litres of spirit per year, and boasts a whisky-making heritage that stretches back to 1846. Back in the day steamboats, known as ‘puffers’, would deliver cargoes of malting barley, coal and empty casks to the distillery. They would return with these casks full of whisky to the mainland through the Sound of Islay, the straight which separates the island from neighbouring Jura.

Upon arrival, absorb the outstanding panoramic views across the Sound of Islay to the Paps of Jura, before taking a behind-the-scenes tour of the distillery. Watch the distillers hard at work tending the six copper stills on one of three tours which invite you to witness first-hand the time-tested process behind the spirit produced at Caol Ila.

Discover how Islay peat imbues the whisky distilled here with its distinctive, smoky character, sample a selection of its different ages and maturations, and discover the unexpected flavourings of its finest malts during a special tasting session accompanied with delectable chocolates – a truly unique whisky-tasting experience.

OPENING TIMES

Opening times vary - please see website.

SAMPLE

- Caol Ila 8 Year Old
- Caol Ila 12 Year Old
- Caol Ila 18 Year Old
- Caol Ila 25 Year Old
- Caol Ila Cask Strength
- Caol Ila Dstillers Edition
- Caol Ila Stitchell Reserve

WHERE TO BUY

Available at Caol Ila Distillery Shop, most major retailers and online.

OTHER NEARBY ATTRACTIONS IN ISLAY

- *Machrie Golf Links*
- *RSPB Loch Gruinart Reserve*
- *Dunyvaig Castle*
- *Cultoön Stone Circle*
- *Persabus Pottery Ceramic Café*
- *Bowmore*
- *Port Ellen*
- *Port Askaig*
- *Port Charlotte*

Port Askaig on Islay



Kilchoman Distillery

Tours available

LOCATION

Bruichladdich.

HOW TO GET THERE

Visit Islay by air or ferry. Take your own car on the ferry to get around or simply use the island's taxi companies.

OVERVIEW

Opened in 2005, Kilchoman Distillery is the youngest of all the Islay distilleries and was the first distillery to be established on the island for over 124 years. Visit this authentic farm distillery and discover how it manages every stage of the whisky making process on-site – they even grow their own barley on the farm's fertile land.

Join your expert tour guide as you journey through every stage of the production process, you can even see how Kilchoman malt their own barley on the farm's traditional malting room floor.

While other distilleries rely on specialist malting companies to supply them with malted barley for their whiskies, Kilchoman is one of the few distilleries in Scotland who malt their own barley on-site, meaning you can start your tour right at the beginning of the whisky making process.

Tours range from the standard Distillery Tour (£6), which includes two free drams, to the Manager's Tour (£30), where you will learn about what it takes to run Islay's farm distillery from one of the managers themselves, before tasting a unique expression straight from the cask.

OPENING TIMES

Open all year though opening times vary.

SAMPLE

- Machir Bay
- 100% Islay
- Loch Gorm

WHERE TO BUY

Specialist retailers and online.

Looking over to the lighthouse at Port Charlotte on Islay



Lagavulin Distillery

Tours available

LOCATION

Port Ellen.

HOW TO GET THERE

Islay sits off the south west coast of Scotland. Daily ferries operated by Caledonian MacBrayne depart from Kennacraig on the mainland to Port Ellen and Port Askaig. Alternatively, you can fly from Glasgow or Oban.

OVERVIEW

Lagavulin is one of three distilleries that sit on the southern coast of Islay. Much like its neighbours Laphroaig and Ardbeg, the site occupies the shores of its own secluded cove, Lagavulin Bay. As is also the case for many of the distilleries on Islay, its whitewashed storehouse is proudly emblazoned with the distillery name, which can be seen from the decks of the arriving ferry from the mainland.

The tradition of whisky distilling started on the spot where the current distillery buildings stand long before it was built. As far back as 1742, there was anywhere up to 11 illicit stills making whisky in Lagavulin Bay. The current distillery, sitting in the shadow of the ruined Dunyvaig Castle – once the seat of the Lord of the Isles – wasn't built until 1816. The hallmark of Islay whiskies is peat smoke, and Lagavulin is not one to shy away from this distinct characteristic. Its signature expression, Lagavulin 16 Year Old, is appreciated the world over for its intense peat smoke notes – a superb accompaniment to a fine blue cheese.

OPENING TIMES

All year round except Christmas and New Year's Day with seasonal opening hours.

SAMPLE

- Lagavulin 12 Year Old
- Lagavulin 16 Year Old
- Lagavulin Distillers Edition

WHERE TO BUY

Available at most major retailers and online.

Laphroaig Distillery

Tours available

LOCATION

Port Ellen.

HOW TO GET THERE

Islay sits off the south west coast of Scotland. Daily ferries operated by Caledonian MacBrayne depart from Kennacraig on the mainland to Port Ellen and Port Askaig. Alternatively, you can fly from Glasgow or Oban.

OVERVIEW

Said to be the definitive taste of Islay, Laphroaig (pronounced 'La-froyg') has been distilling on Scotland's whisky island for two centuries. Perhaps the smokiest of the Islay whiskies, it uses hand-cut peat from the nearby Glenmachrie bogs to dry malted barley in on-site kilns.

Did you know that Laphroaig was the only spirit not banned during Prohibition in 1920s America? It was sold as a medicinal spirit because of its iodine taste, a characteristic derived from the moss and roots in the peat.

From March to September, visitors can help the distillery staff cut the peat by hand at Glenmachrie ready for drying as part of the Water to Whisky Experience tour, one of several different tours operated by the distillery staff.

The taste of Laphroaig also has a lot to do with its location. Nestled in a cove from which it gets its name (translated from Gaelic as 'the beautiful hollow by the broad bay'), it is in the direct path of strong salty sea winds from the Atlantic Ocean. The moisture in the air gets into the warehouse walls and casks, which gives the whisky a maritime taste profile.

OPENING TIMES

All year round except Christmas and New Year's Day with seasonal opening hours.

SAMPLE

- Laphroaig 10 Year Old
- Laphroaig 18 Year Old
- Laphroaig 25 Year Old
- Laphroaig Triple Wood
- Laphroaig Quarter Cask

WHERE TO BUY

Available at most major retailers and online.

Lagavulin Photograph © James Gray (Migrated) [GFDL]

Laphroaig Photograph © Ayack (Own Work) [GFDL]





Be sure to check out our guides for the other **four regions**.

Driving around Scotland is a great way to see more of the country but before you head out exploring by car, there are a few rules and regulations you should be aware of: www.visitscotland.com/travel/information/driving-in-scotland

Drink responsibly: find useful information about drinking: www.drinksarter.org