



## TRIP OVERVIEW

Join us on an unforgettable swimming expedition where we'll traverse the 10 islands that make up the southern section of the Scottish Outer Hebrides. From South Uist in the north, to Berneray in the south, we swim among some of Britain's most spectacular landscapes, all while living on board the beautiful Lady of Avenel - a 102-foot Brigantine square rigged ship.

Over the course of the trip, you will discover an abundance of beautiful lochs, long sandy beaches and scenic Scottish landscapes. You will also find plenty of fun activities out of the water on the Lady of Avenel ship, complete with your very own on board chef. You can expect to see a huge range of wildlife, both in and out of the water, making this trip a nature lover's dream.

This trip will see you exploring some of the wildest parts of Scotland on a sustainable form of transport, with the option to learn some new skills and get involved with the crewing of the ship. This is a perfect opportunity to enjoy a unique activity holiday with some impressive bragging rights to gain along the way - this truly is an epic expedition and an exciting opportunity for adventure swimming and sailing alike.

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## WHO IS THIS TRIP FOR?

This trip is made up largely of crossings and some coastal swims. Conditions will be challenging, yet extremely rewarding.

Swimmers should have a sound understanding and experience of swimming in strong sea conditions and be capable of completing the average swim distance of 2.5km. The average daily swim distance is around 4km (split over a minimum of two swims) prior to the start of the trip. Due to the nature of this trip, there is a minimum swimming speed of 30 min/km (40 min/mile).

We have given this trip a 'Challenging' grading. These trips are for experienced open water swimmers who want to push themselves.

No sailing experience is required - however, the ship's crew are happy for you to assist with onboard duties as much or as little as you like.

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## LOCATION SUMMARIES

### Outer Hebrides

Also known as the 'Western Isles' and 'Na h-Eileanan an Iar' in Gaelic, the Outer Hebrides are a 130-mile-long string of islands lying off Scotland's northwest coast. There are 119 islands in total, of which the main inhabited islands are Lewis and Harris, North Uist, Benbecula, South Uist and Barra.



## South Uist

South Uist is a landscape of fresh and saltwater lochs, bordered on its western side by miles of sandy beaches and cultivated crofts. The island is known for its birdlife, including Arctic terns, gannets, corn buntings and Manx shearwaters.

## Barra

Barra is the most southerly of the inhabited islands in the Outer Hebrides. Long famed for its idyllic beaches and moors, Barra is a special place to visit, especially if you arrive by plane, as flights land on the beach at Cockle Strand between tides.

## Mingulay

Towards the southern tip of the Outer Hebrides sits the Isle of Mingulay, abandoned by its last inhabitants 100 years ago. There you'll find the remains of an Iron Age fort, as well as an old schoolhouse and chapel house. Mingulay is also known for its important seabird populations, including puffins, black-legged kittiwakes, and razorbills, which nest in the sea cliffs and are among the highest in the British Isles.

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## TRIP SCHEDULE

<b>Start Point</b>	The Lady of Avenel, Castlebay Pier, Isle of Barra
<b>Start Time</b>	19:00 on Day 1
<b>Finish Point</b>	Castlebay Pier, Isle of Barra
<b>Finish Time</b>	10:00 on Day 7

Part of the appeal of our Lady of Avenel trips is the unpredictability of the wild areas in which we will swim. We sail when the winds are favourable, meaning a degree of flexibility is required as to when we may sail out.

Please note that the below itinerary is an example of the swims that may take place during your trip, however, actual swim locations and distances can vary according to local weather and sea conditions. Your SwimTrek guides and local boat pilot will determine the most suitable swim locations each day and will let you know swim plans as soon as possible. Sailing a tall ship by its nature brings the excitement of the elements.

### Day 1

To kick off our trip, your guides meet you at the Castlebay pier and accompany you to our ship and accommodation for the duration of the trip - the Lady of Avenel. After a tour of this classic rigger, we then hold a full trip briefing, followed by a unique acclimatisation swim as we swim around Kisimul Castle which sits in Castlebay. After our swim, we depart from Castlebay and head north arriving at



South Uist. On arrival, we hold a welcome dinner and chat further about the plan for the week ahead.

## **Day 2**

In the morning we begin our first swim of the trip by crossing from South Uist to Eriskay, which was the stage for one of Scotland's most famous tales: Whiskey Galore. The swim is an ideal introduction as the crossing is short and the location is protected. We then take time to have lunch and relax on board the ship.

In the afternoon, we undertake an ambitious crossing of the Sound of Barra as we cross from Eriskay to Gighay. before entering a wonderful, naturally formed canal that separates Gighay and Hellisay. You'll notice the hues of the water change underneath and around you as you swim. It is a great finish point for this swim.

## **Day 3**

After a hearty breakfast, the first swim of the day is from Hellisay to Aird Mhor on Barra, passing several low-lying islands on the way. During this swim, it may be possible to see aircrafts landing on Barra's Traigh Mhor beach.

In the afternoon we carry out an exciting coastal swim from Earsairidh Lagoon to Brevig Bay on Barra's east coast. Underwater kelp forests are present below us as we swim. At the end of the day, we sail round to Castlebay - Barra's main ferry port and our stop for the night, where there is a chance to head ashore if you wish.

## **Day 4**

The Lady of Avenel journeys round to Vatersay where we disembark and walk to South Beach, which sits opposite Sandray Island. This is a relatively short swim and a good start to our southern swimming section of the itinerary.

After lunch on board the Lady of Avenel, there is time to go and explore the island. Sandray is home to several ground nesting birds due to the absence of any predators here. In the afternoon, we begin one of our more open sea crossings with an adventurous swim from Sandray to Pabbay (the most exposed swim we will undertake). We finish near Pabbay Beach, which is one of the most visually stunning stretches of sand in the British Isles.

## **Day 5**

In the morning, we cross to Mingulay, which is an undoubted highlight of the trip. There are numerous coves, tunnels and sea cliffs to explore. Also, the sandy beach and ruins of the old settlement are only a short walk away.

In the afternoon, we have the opportunity for a final swim between Mingulay and Barra Head, also known as Berneray, the southernmost island of the Outer Hebrides. The swim itself is a relatively short hop and marks the end of our incredible journey.



## Day 6

Due to the nature of where we are and the unpredictability of the conditions, this day is left open to fit in any swims missed or delays experienced due to poor conditions earlier on in the week. Should we experience no delays, then rest assured we will come up with some interesting and adventurous coastal swims to end a most extraordinary trip.

## Day 7

We start the morning with a pre-breakfast swim, where we will have the opportunity to explore the southern coastline of Barra. Following this, we have our final group breakfast on board the Lady of Avenel before saying our goodbyes.

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## TRIP INFORMATION

### Group Size

This trip has a maximum group size of 12. The group will be split into two groups, based on speed, with each group being accompanied by their own safety vessel/escort.

### Boat Support

Boat support on this trip includes one main ship and two support boats to be piloted by your SwimTrek guides and a local boat pilot. Please note that this boat support is subject to change without notice and cannot be guaranteed.

### Extra Activities

No sailing experience is required; however, the ship's crew are happy for you to assist with onboard duties as much or as little as you like. Between swims guests like while away their time wildlife watching - a small set of binoculars and a sketchbook may be helpful for this.

### Equipment Checklist

For your basic, essential packing list, please visit our [Packing List](#) page on the website. For additional, **location specific items**, please see the information below

✓	Item	✓	Item
<input type="checkbox"/>	Swimming Costume (x 3)	<input type="checkbox"/>	Thermals/Sweater/Fleece/Thick Socks
<input type="checkbox"/>	Wetsuit	<input type="checkbox"/>	Small pack towel (x 2)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Long Trousers	<input type="checkbox"/>	Woolly Hat and Gloves
<input type="checkbox"/>	Waterproof Jacket	<input type="checkbox"/>	Walking Shoes / Aqua Shoes / Sandals



**Important:** It can be cold both during and between swims, so we advise all guests to bring appropriate swimwear and clothing to be as comfortable as possible in these conditions. We recommend that all guests bring plenty of layers which can be added and removed as required. We also recommend gaiters/rubber bands for protection from ticks when trekking.

SwimTrek will supply swim hats, water and electrolyte drinks and refill your bottle. If you would like to use a wetsuit, rash vest, snorkel or fins during your swims, please ensure that you bring these with you. Please note, there are no safes in the cabins on the Lady of Avenel, so valuables and other belongings are brought on board at your own risk.

### Luggage

Due to the limited space in the cabins on board the Lady of Avenel, we strongly recommend that guests bring soft, duffle-style luggage and that it is restricted to a maximum size of 40 x 70 x 40cm.

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## TRIP GRADING

We have given this trip a 'Challenging' grading. These trips are for experienced open water swimmers who want to push themselves.

### Swimming Distances

SWIM	DISTANCE	SWIM	DISTANCE
South Uist - Eriskay	1km	Eriskay - Gighay	3km
Hellisay - Barra	2½km	Earsairidh Lagoon - Brevig Bay	2km
Vatersay - Sandray	1km	Sandray - Pabbay	3½km
Pabbay - Mingulay	2½km	Mingulay - Barra Head	1km
Island Coastal	2km	Island Coastal	2km

### Swimming Conditions

Swimming in the sea is a fantastic experience, however you should be aware that certain marine life such as jellyfish may be present during the swims. In all cases we will work on reducing your contact with these creatures, however if you suffer from anaphylaxis, please consult the office prior to booking.

Sea sickness is a possibility, and guests that are prone to this often bring along some sea sickness tablets. Some more easy ways to ward off any nausea are ensuring you are well rested, avoiding screen time, getting plenty of fresh air, looking off at the horizon and moving as close to the middle of the boat as you can where the motion of the sea will be reduced.



## Walking Distances

WALK	DISTANCE	WALK	DISTANCE
Across Barra	3½km	Across Vatersay	2km
Mingulay	2km		

## Walking Conditions

Most walks take place on recognised paths and tracks, however there may be cases where we walk along trails or other unsealed surfaces, and care should be taken in these areas. If you do not wish to walk any of the trails, you are welcome to remain on board the ship.

## Temperatures

MONTH	WATER TEMPERATURE*	AIR TEMPERATURE*
August	13 - 15°C / 55 - 59°F	13 - 16°C / 54 - 61°F

\* Please note that these temperatures are indicative and should be used as a guide only.

## Weather Caveat

For safety reasons, we rely on decent weather conditions when carrying out our swims. Therefore, open water swimming holidays require a certain degree of on-trip flexibility which can result in changes to the planned itinerary. These changes often add a touch of uniqueness to your trip and will be communicated to you by your SwimTrek guides as quickly as possible.

Given the location of this trip, the weather will play a key factor in all our swims and crossings. It should be assumed that changes will be made to the planned itinerary based on local conditions.

## GETTING THERE

While we have outlined various travel options below, they are subject to change and should be used as a guide only.

As SwimTrekkers come from all over the world, and join our swimming holidays in numerous destinations, we don't currently offer flights as part of our SwimTrek packages. We do however want to do as much as we can to ensure that our guests get the best deals when travelling to one of our trips so check out our [SwimTrek flight tips](#) page on the website.

The easiest way to get to Castlebay at the start of your trip is to fly into Glasgow International Airport and then catch a connecting flight directly to Barra Airport. Alternatively, it is also possible to reach Castlebay by train and ferry from many UK destinations.

Whichever route you choose to take, we recommend confirming your flights and other travel arrangements as early as possible to avoid price rises and availability issues.



### **Option 1: Flights from Glasgow to Barra**

You can find more information about flights to Barra at <https://www.loganair.co.uk/>. Once you arrive at Barra Airport, we recommend taking a local taxi to Castlebay, which takes approximately 20 minutes. When you reach Castlebay, you will be able to see the Lady of Avenel in all her beauty, moored in the bay awaiting your arrival.

### **Option 2: Trains and Ferries**

It is possible to travel to Barra via train and ferry from various UK destinations, however, please be aware that this requires a significantly longer journey than by plane and they may have a limited timetable.

Regular train services are available to Glasgow where you will need to catch another train to Oban. This journey takes just over three hours. Information on train fares and timetables can be found at [www.scotrail.co.uk](http://www.scotrail.co.uk). Once you reach Oban, you can catch a CalMac ferry to Castlebay. This journey takes approximately five hours. Information on fares and schedules can be found at [www.calmac.co.uk/oban-castlebay-barra-ferry-summer-timetable](http://www.calmac.co.uk/oban-castlebay-barra-ferry-summer-timetable).

Please note that it's also possible to combine your travel plans from Glasgow by purchasing a 'Rail and Sail' ticket. For further information about this option, please visit: [www.scotrail.co.uk](http://www.scotrail.co.uk).

When you reach Castlebay, you will be able to see the Lady of Avenel in all her beauty, moored in the bay awaiting your arrival.

### **Accommodation While Travelling**

You may well require en route accommodation, either the night before the trip commences or for the night following the trip. If so, you can find a range of quaint and idyllic accommodation options in Oban or Castlebay and the Isle of Barra, to either break up your journey or extend your stay before or after your journey on the Lady of Avenel.

#### **Accommodation in Oban**

You can visit [www.visitscotland.com/destinations-maps/oban/accommodation/](http://www.visitscotland.com/destinations-maps/oban/accommodation/) for several B&Bs, guest houses and hotels to choose from in the harbour town of Oban, where the train pulls in from Glasgow.

#### **Accommodation in Castlebay/Isle of Barra**

You can visit [www.visitouterhebrides.co.uk](http://www.visitouterhebrides.co.uk) for several B&Bs, guest houses and hotels to choose from on the Isle of Barra, where the Lady of Avenel departs from.

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## **ACCOMMODATION**

The Lady of Avenel is a 102-foot Brigantine square rigger ship with 12 berths in 6 guest cabins. Originally built in Poland in 1969 as a tug vessel, she was refitted in 1992 and the ship made her film



debut in 2016 in 'Alice Through the Looking Glass', the sequel to Tim Burton's 'Alice in Wonderland'.

All cabins on the Lady of Avenel include duvets, pillows and bed linen. Spaces are offered on a twin share basis and include bunk beds. All guests and crew use shared bathroom facilities with two bathrooms located close to the cabins on the lower deck and a toilet located on the upper deck.

Due to the limited number of cabins on board, there are restricted single occupancy and non-swimmer places available, both of which need to be booked directly with the SwimTrek office.

\*Please note sleeping at sea is an entirely different experience to dry land as lapping waves may affect sleeping patterns. Most people will adjust quite quickly but we would advise light-sleepers to bring earbuds.

\*\*Please also note that the exact details of the liveaboard and facilities may vary without notice.

### **Pre/Post Trip Accommodation and Trip Extension Options**

Occasionally we operate consecutive trips on Lady of Avenel and if you are booking both it may be possible to leave luggage or even stay aboard between trips. It is never possible for us to confirm extra pre and post nights aboard Lady of Avenel.

### **Food and Drink**

All meals are included on this trip and are prepared by our very own on-board chef. With years of experience working on various vessels, our chef offers a high standard of food which will keep you well fuelled for your swims during the trip.

### **Money, Extra Expenses and Tipping**

You should bring extra money with you to cover such items as trips to the occasional island pub and shopping on the few islands that have towns. The local currency is British pound (£).

In some countries tipping (gratuities) is not part of the culture. In others, it has become an expected norm. We believe that tipping is done entirely at your discretion. If you have been provided with excellent service, it may be something you wish to do. Your SwimTrek guides can advise on local norms for service providers like boat crew, waiters, or taxis. Nothing is expected for your SwimTrek guides, but many groups like to present something to the guides at the end of the trip.

### **Responsible Travel**

SwimTrek is conscious of the importance of protecting the world's natural wonders. We are acutely aware of our responsibility to not only take care of the natural environments which we are lucky enough to explore, but also to educate our guests about the importance of conservation efforts and responsible tourism. It's for this reason that we have worked so closely with our partners to ensure that our trips are conducted in the most responsible and sustainable way possible, working tirelessly to minimise the impact of our presence on local marine life and the natural habitat.



## Passports and Visas

Non-residents of the U.K. require a full passport to enter the country, which should be valid for six months beyond the expected length of stay. Citizens of all EU member states, the US, Canada, Australia and New Zealand are given 'leave to enter' the U.K. and do not need to apply for a visa.

Please note that visa regulations are subject to change, and we advise that you check your own visa requirements prior to travel.

## Travel Insurance

We consider comprehensive travel insurance to be essential, and we strongly recommend that you purchase insurance which includes, but is not limited to, cover for illness, accident, emergency repatriation, ambulance, air ambulance, helicopter rescue services, cancellation, lost luggage and delays. Your travel insurance should also cover you for open water swimming and any other activity listed in your trip itinerary (including races and competitions, where applicable). Please read your policy details carefully and remember to take them with you on your trip for your own reference. For further information about travel insurance, please visit: [www.swimtrek.com/travel-insurance](http://www.swimtrek.com/travel-insurance).

## Health Information and Recommended Vaccinations

For comprehensive health information for people travelling to the UK, including all recommended and required vaccinations, please visit [www.travelhealthpro.org.uk/countries](http://www.travelhealthpro.org.uk/countries). Please note that this information is subject to change, and you should re-check this site regularly prior to your trip.

## Internet Access, Electricity and Travel Plugs

There is extremely limited Wi-Fi and mobile phone reception on board the Lady of Avenel and it is entirely dependent on our exact location and signal strength. To be safe, it should be assumed that you will have no access to 3G, 4G or Wi-Fi for the duration of your trip.

The Lady of Avenel features UK-style power points in some cabins and in communal areas.

For a useful source of information on the different electrical outlets, electrical plugs, and electric sockets, please visit [www.worldstandards.eu/electricity/plug-voltage-by-country/](http://www.worldstandards.eu/electricity/plug-voltage-by-country/).