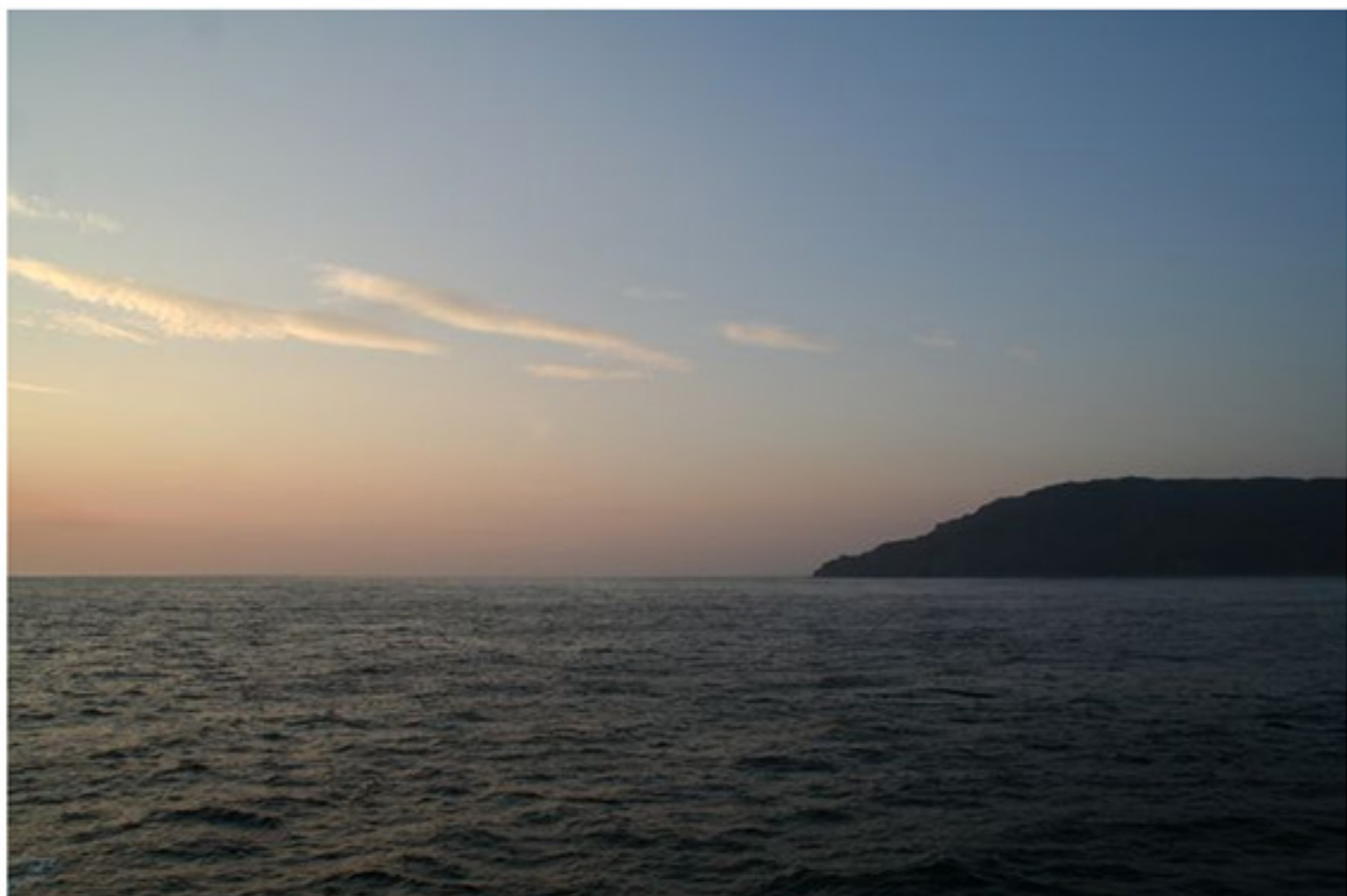


## 7 reasons why Cambeltown is back on the map



IT'S said that once upon a time Campbeltown was the richest per capita town in all of Scotland. Standing here today I can believe it going by the rich necklace of grand stone houses that hug its Gulf Stream kissed promenade.

Tougher times have befallen this Argyll town of late after its role as a maritime hub receded and its shipbuilding, trading and even the hallowed whisky industry went into decline.

I'm please to report that attempts to revitalise the town are afoot. I've been back to check out work on the revamp of the old art deco picture house (which re-opens in 2017). I came away thinking Campbeltown deserves to be back on the travel map of Scotland. Here are my 7 reasons why.

### Rich Heritage



Campbeltown has heritage and history in spades. It's not just those grand old merchant houses either, with a slew of dramatic churches hinting at the once large population and the importance of the town. I'm a fan of the graceful old library building on the waterfront too. The Campbeltown Museum is the place to head for more information on this Firth of Clyde town and its history.

Their rich collection includes everything from a prehistoric stone axe head and Viking remnants, through to an old Penny Farthing bike. There is everything here from archaeology, through to paintings, which all combine to tell the story of this fascinating historic hub.

## Whisky Galore



There used to be dozens of distilleries in Campbeltown, but that number dwindled down to just a couple – the famous Springbank and Glen Scotia. I'm pleased to report that there are bright signs on the whisky front, as not only are these two thriving, but a third distillery has opened in the shape of Glengyle. Campbeltown whisky, with its water from Cross Hill Loch, is so unique it has its own whisky denomination alongside the likes of Lowland, Speyside and Islay. You can take tours at all three distilleries and, of course, pick up a wee souvenir bottle too.

## Mull of Kintyre Seatours



The sea has always been crucial to Campbeltown and its role in the world as it lay on the great aquatic highways of the Celtic world. The tradition lives on today with the fast RIB rides run by Mull of Kintyre Seatours. They sweep out of a harbour that was once alive with paddle steamers and push out by the tidal island of Davaar. The scenery then really opens up as the isles of Arran and Ailsa Craig appear, as well

as the hulk of the isle of Ireland. Their cruises are rich in wildlife with gannets and myriad other seabirds swirling all around. In the water porpoises and dolphins skip around too and – if you are very lucky - the odd whale or two. Orcas, or killer whales, have even been spotted in these waters.

## Campbeltown Picture House



I'm delighted to see that this historic cinema is being renovated. It has lain for far too long as a symbol of the decay of Campbeltown, but now it is set to be transformed into a shining star of the invigorated town. When the revamp is completed it will be back as one of Scotland's finest art deco buildings. I aim to be at the head of the queue when it is back to its best.

## Wee Shops and Crafts



As tourism grows then so does the demand for souvenirs and gifts. There is a great wee art gallery and craft shop right on the waterfront across from the very helpful tourist information office. I'm a fan of Campbeltown Pottery, which has been crafting traditional hand-made pottery since 1997. You can see their works emerge from its

potters' wheel through to the heat of the kiln. They stock a range of gifts and they can also produce bespoke works to order.

## Not Just Campbeltown



The town may be the main hub on Kintyre, but there is loads more else to do. I'm a big fan of nearby Machrihanish, with its gorgeous sweep of white sand beaches and brace of world class golf courses. Then there is the famous Mull of Kintyre. This wild rugged escape has a really end of the world feel and is a great place for spotting wildlife, from bountiful birdlife, through to dolphins and even whales. You can enjoy all this without even needing to get in a boat. There is an RSPB reserve out here too.

## Getting Active



Campbeltown is a great place to base yourself if you love the great outdoors. The town is quite compact so you can easily get away from it all. On my most recent visit I hiked up the slopes of Beinn Ghuilean, which was great fun. Proper trails for walkers and mountain bikers now hug its slopes and the views back to the town and much further beyond are gorgeous. I also recommend a cycle across to Machrinhanish and the Kintyre Way for a walk or cycle.