

PLAY THE GB&I TOP 100

# Arran, Argyll & Bute

You've never undertaken a golf break like this one, but after you do, we reckon you'll be searching hard for another similar one.

WORDS: Chris Bertram PHOTOGRAPHY: David Cannon, Getty

The remote location of many of Great Britain and Ireland's finest courses means that playing them often becomes as much an 'experience' as it is a golf break.

Rarely is this more true than in this month's selected area. A car, for instance, can only be one part of your transport. Sea and air, indeed, are arguably more useful. It would be convenient to describe our chosen area as 'Scotland's south west islands'. We can't though, because three of the courses aren't on an island – it just seems like they are.

Hence, the map over the page has never been more useful. It perfectly illustrates the area we are covering as well as the extent of the challenge; a golf weekend in Southport is altogether more straightforward. But a lot less fun.

Our trip takes in three main stops: the Machrihanish area near Campbeltown on mainland Scotland (albeit a slim finger of it); The Machrie on the Isle of Islay and the island of Arran.

They are all fairly close to each as the crow flies but no one method of transport fits all. There are many ways to tackle the problem and GW has had experiences of two. Both were good.

One option is to enlist the services of the Kintyre Express. This golf-friendly boat will take you from Troon harbour to and from any of the three main areas. It's efficient and fun but relatively expensive. Flying to Campbeltown and sailing to Arran and Islay is even quicker.

But for our most recent trip to this glorious part of Scotland, we drove. And if you are not on a tight schedule, it's an option we'd recommend, for two reasons.

Firstly, the route from Glasgow to Machrihanish round Loch Lomond and down the length of Kintyre is as spectacular as there is in Britain.

Secondly, there is a perfect stop-off en route; stay at Cameron House and play at The Carrick (Scottish Top 100). So, if you're travelling from, say, Manchester, you can drive three-and-a-half hours to Loch Lomond, enjoy the golf and food and carry on refreshed. Or, if you live in ►

LEFT: Machrihanish Dunes rose 21 places to 78 in our 2012 GBI Top 100 – and keeps getting better.

## COURSES

The GB&I Top 100



the south, fly to Glasgow, hire a car, and be in your swish bedroom at Cameron House within 30 minutes.

From there, a two-hour drive finds you in the Machrihanish area, home of three fine links. Golf was first played on the site of **Machrihanish (48th in our 2012 Top 100)** in 1871 but it wasn't until Old Tom Morris extended it to 18 holes that it was transformed into the wonderful links it is today. One of his decisions was to create a new 1st hole, with a drive hit over the corner of the beautiful sandy beach below the elevated tee. It is a course of great variety and although its greens suffered last winter, the charm of holes such as the aptly-named 'Punch Bowl' will surely impress all who visit.

**Machrihanish Dunes (78th)** was the third-highest climber in our 2012 GB&I Top 100, a nod to the changes made in the three years since opening. Working closely with environmentalists, 'Mach Dunes' has been honed into a links which golfers of all standards can enjoy.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: Machrihanish is an Old Tom classic; Shiskine, The Machrie and The Carrick.

It remains exhilaratingly rugged and natural, just as designer David McLay Kidd wished, but the fairways are now not so narrow and the rough not so penal. It is simply brilliant fun.

With the greens getting ever more consistent and slick, expect 'Mach Dunes' to rise even higher in our 2014 list. It is already one of Scotland's finest and a 'must visit' for links connoisseurs. Former Ryder Cup star Ronan Rafferty loves it here so much he has bought a cottage to use as a base when he visits.

**Dunaverty**, just a few miles away on the south coast of the Kintyre, is a delightful, short links laid out on springy turf with lovely views to Sanda Island, Ailsa Craig and even Northern Ireland.

Now we must leave our car in Campbeltown and travel by sea to Islay to visit **The Machrie (66th)**. It has recently been bought by former BBC

chairman Gavyn Davies and Baroness Sue Nye and is undergoing development on and especially off the course. When GW visited, we found the characterful hotel and modest cottages adequate, but there is certain to be improvement on that front. The course is fabulous, the archetypal quirky links (Machrie is 'machair' in Gaelic, which means 'links'). Just let its 6,300 yards entertain you. Don't expect to rip it up though; small greens, blind shots and hanging lies on crumpled fairways keep you thinking.

Unless you stop for some whisky tasting, it's then back round the Kintyre by boat to Arran. Here there are a remarkable seven courses, headlined by the stunning **Shiskine (a Top 200 course)**. It has just 12 holes but they are good enough for it to be ranked 78 in our 2011 Scottish Top 100. Founded in 1896, expect plenty of blind shots and sloping greens. Laid out over undulating linksland, it is a mere 2,996 yards (par 42) but first-timers very rarely burn it up.

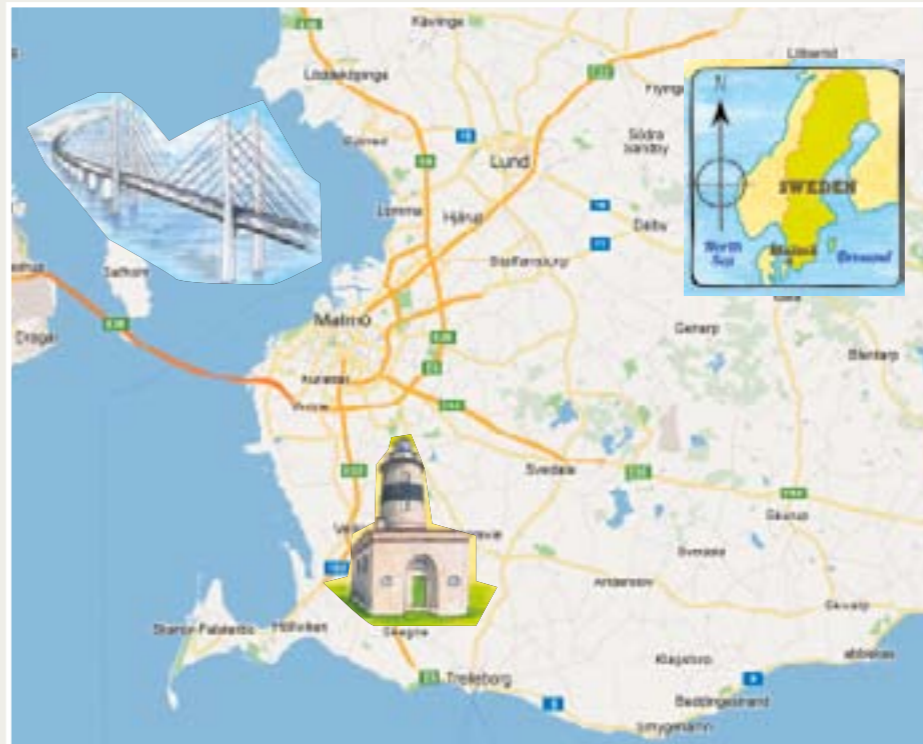
We can further content ourselves on Arran with rounds at the picturesque Lamlash and Lochranza. What's more, you can play all seven courses on Arran for a mere £125. Indeed, this might not just be the most adventurous golf break you've undertaken, despite the transport costs it may also offer the best value. **GW**

## 'Expect 'Mach Dunes' to rise even higher in our 2014 list. It is one of Scotland's finest'

## PLAY THE TOP 100

# Arran, Argyll & Bute, Scotland

## Find your way

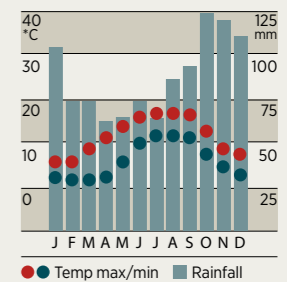


## Details

### Travel

Go to [calmac.co.uk](http://calmac.co.uk) for ferry details and to [kintyreexpress.com](http://kintyreexpress.com) for a private boat hire so useful for an itinerary. Flybe fly to Campbeltown from Birmingham, Glasgow, Guernsey, Jersey, Belfast and Newquay while BA do so from London City and Heathrow.

### The weather



### Typical costs

If travel costs are greater than on average, you easily make up that initial expenditure on food, drink, golf and accommodation.

## Where to play

- 1 Machrihanish Dunes:** £56 (£39 after 4pm). £79 a day (£69 if a guest of Ugdale Hotel or Royal Hotel) [machrihanishdunes.com](http://machrihanishdunes.com)
- 2 Machrihanish:** £62 all week. £93 per day, £300 a week. [machgolf.com](http://machgolf.com)
- 3 Dunaverty:** Mon-Fri £28 (£40 a day), Sat & Sun £30 (£42). [dunavertygolfclub.com](http://dunavertygolfclub.com)
- 4 The Machrie:** £72 all week. [machrie.com](http://machrie.com)
- 5 Shiskine:** Mon-Fri £20, Sat & Sun £25. [shiskinegolf.com](http://shiskinegolf.com)
- 6 Lamlash:** £15.50 all week. £24 a day Mon-Fri, £30 Sat-Sun. [lamlashgolfclub.com](http://lamlashgolfclub.com)
- 7 Lochranza:** £10 for nine holes, £15 a day. [lochranzagolf.com](http://lochranzagolf.com)
- 8 The Carrick:** £100 all week. [devere-hotels.co.uk](http://devere-hotels.co.uk)

• To play all the courses on Arran for £125, visit [golfonarran.com](http://golfonarran.com)

## Where to stay

- 1 The Ugdale Hotel** The perfect golf hotel. Refurbished magnificently by the owners of 'Mach Dunes', this iconic hotel is located 50 yards from the 1st tee of Machrihanish. It has stylish bedrooms, free WiFi, a spa, a fitness room and top-class dining options (see right).
- 2 The Royal Hotel** If you're playing the Machrihanish courses but fancy more of a bustling vibe, this is your choice. The Royal Hotel (right) opened in May this year and might be even more breathtaking than the Ugdale. Overlooking Campbeltown's busy harbour, it has 23 sumptuous bedrooms. [machrihanishdunes.com](http://machrihanishdunes.com)
- 3 The Machrie** We stayed in the modest cottages next to the small hotel which doubles as The Machrie's clubhouse. They lack creature comforts but we were perfectly happy. [machrie.com](http://machrie.com)



- 4 The Douglas Hotel** Ideally located in Brodick for a golf break in Arran, 'The Douglas' is a stone's throw from the ferry terminal. Expect a level of chic more associated with a city centre boutique hotel. [thedouglashotel.co.uk](http://thedouglashotel.co.uk)
- 5 Cameron House** Situated on the 'Bonnie Banks', this five-star De Vere hotel offers a stylish take on Scottish tradition as well as first-class service. The leisure and spa facilities are world class and keep you entertained on rainy days. [devere-hotels.co.uk](http://devere-hotels.co.uk)

## Where to eat

- 1 The Old Clubhouse** Located across the courtyard from the Ugdale Hotel, we absolutely loved this old-fashioned pub, once Machrihanish GC's first clubhouse. Traditional favourites such as steak pie, proper beer and a roaring fire make for the perfect venue for post-round discussions.
- 2 The Machrie** As part of a large party we had a terrific meal in a private dining room, then retired to the bar to sample the myriad whiskies...
- 3 The Douglas Hearty food** in the hotel's Bistro, or try amazing lamb at 'Arran on a Plate', also in Brodick.
- 4 The Cameron Grill** Even if you don't stay at Cameron House or golf at The Carrick, the Claret Jug is worth stopping off at – especially the beef-packed burger.