

Scottish Travel

I am getting the hang of this, I thought to myself, as I steadied my tripod on the sand and crouched to take in the impact of the roaring waves crashing down metres in front of me.

I lost myself for a minute, trying to pinpoint the exact moment when the waves would break and sea foam dance in wisps along the peaks. Suddenly, through the lens, the deep-turquoise water seemed closer than expected.

Seconds after the shutter clicked, salty ice-cold water filled my wellies. My toes went numb as I squelched back to the van in a manner that can only be described as ungainly. The result, however, is the picture that accompanies this page, snapped on a five-day photography holiday with Margaret Soraya, a four-time winner of the Master Photographers Association's travel and landscape photographer of the year prize. Suffice to say, I could not have taken a picture like this before my trip.

The holiday started with a spectacular flight with Loganair from Glasgow to Stornoway, featuring stunning coastal views and a complimentary Tunnock's

A QUEST FOR THE WAVES

A photography retreat on the breathtaking and rugged Isle of Harris turned *Gillian Furmage* from novice to skilled snapper in a few days

caramel wafer, then by road through picturesque Lewis and into the rugged beauty of Harris.

Our first stop was Oran na Mara, a cottage in western Harris with breathtaking views of the two-mile-long Scarista beach. This would serve as our group's luxury sleeping quarters and editing suite.

Designed with painstaking attention to detail, Oran na Mara is a haven that you would expect Kevin McCloud, the Grand Designs presenter, to stroll through, remarking with awe on the gorgeous cohesive interior design that reflects the sea colours of the Hebrides.

Heading to Luskentyre beach for our first snapping

session, I couldn't think of a more heart-stoppingly beautiful backdrop for our lessons. As I revealed my ineptitude with a camera, I soon learnt that in Margaret we had a teacher with endless patience. She puts everyone at ease with a warm smile.

Margaret's jewels of wisdom included how to capture the



Gillian sacrificed a dry pair of socks to take a dramatic photo of waves crashing down on the Isle of Harris, left; the wildlife, above, and dunes, above right, of the Outer Hebrides are godsend for snappers

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“The beach at Huisinish is prettier than the quaintest postcard

motion of a wave by setting up a tripod, selecting the perfect filter and slowing the shutter speed. She also taught us how to shoot a close-up with intricate detailing, and led a night-sky photography session under the glittering stars of Harris. We were treated to cosy editing sessions round the fire where we got to grips with Adobe Lightroom editing software while tucking into tea and flapjacks.

When I embarked on this trip, my thoughts revolved around the scenery of the Outer Hebrides and the skills I might learn. Food was third on my list of priorities. And so it was a pleasant surprise to learn that this was a retreat that opened the door to the foodie scene on the Hebrides. One gourmet delight was Flavour, fronted by head chef Chris Loye, who came to Oran na Mara to cater for our group.

The food was unforgettable: a richly sweet lobster bisque made me want to lick my plate clean, while an alternative take on apple crumble would rival that of any Michelin-starred kitchen.

Later in the trip we visited the unassuming North Harbour Bistro, and shortly after we sat down I noticed boats coming into the nearby shore. One course later and we

were enjoying the crab that had been fished out of the water moments earlier. There's fresh, and then there's the Hebrides.

The highlight of the trip was our venture to Huisinish. The road there slithers like a drunk sidewinder, through jagged rocks and the turquoise-jewel tones of the Atlantic. The beach is prettier than the quaintest postcard and has perfect white sand and bright blue-green sea. It's a photographer's dream.

Huisinish also has a lovely shelter that allows visitors to picnic by the beach. I was offered the choice of staying in this gorgeous place or venturing up a challenging hill to a more remote beach. Against my better judgment, I chose the latter and clambered through mud to our second destination.

I thank my lucky stars that I did, however. This was the place that tempted me to fling off my shoes and venture into the water. It was the haven where I left a piece of my heart. Some places never leave you, and the beauty of Huisinish will stay with me for ever. Thank goodness I'll always have the photos.

Gillian Furmage was a guest of Quiet Landscapes (quietlandscapes.co.uk), whose six-night Isle of Harris photography retreat costs £1,700, full-board, including island transfers. Fly to Stornoway from Edinburgh, Glasgow and Inverness from £132 return (loganair.co.uk). Ferries from Uig on Skye to Tarbert on Harris cost £13 return (calmac.co.uk).

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