

How long will it take?

You can spread your walk over five to eight days, depending on the time available and what you decide about extensions and side-trips. From Buckie to Aviemore is 65 miles, and can be walked in five sections as described in Parts 3.1 to 3.5. However, don't underestimate the time you need in Speyside: there are several reasons to spend longer than five days.

First, if you have never done so before, don't miss the opportunity to tour a distillery. Even if you don't like the taste of whisky, seeing the process by which barley, yeast and water are turned into this precious amber liquid is fascinating: see page 21. Each year, over a million visitors are drawn to visit Scotland's distilleries, and your walk takes you past several of Speyside's finest: see page 23.

Second, consider one or more of the 'spurs' or extensions described in Part 4. The Tomintoul spur is 15 miles (24 km) of rougher walking, so it's a full day, especially if you pause to visit the Glenlivet Distillery: see page 56. This walk lets you sample more rugged walking and enjoy the splendid Cairngorm views, although care is needed in wintry conditions. Most people walk it in one direction only: we recommend uphill towards Tomintoul, for the best Cairngorm views. However 'downhill' may have logistic advantages, especially if you need an early start and are staying for two nights somewhere on the main Way.

Wherever you stay – in Ballindalloch, Tomintoul, or any of the B&Bs thereabouts – your host should be able to arrange transport to or from Tomintoul. Work out what help you need before you book accommodation, and whether the lift needs to be the evening before or after breakfast next morning. If you spend two nights in one place you won't have to carry any overnight stuff. Expect to pay your host some fuel money, probably in cash. If you book through an operator, transport should be included in the package.

The Dufftown circuit described in Part 4.3 is 12 miles (19 km), and you can pick it up from Aberlour, Craigellachie or Dufftown to suit your arrangements. It also offers the Glenfiddich Distillery visit: see page 59. You can regard this as a full day's walk, or just do part of it as an out-and-back walk on a spare half-day from Craigellachie or Aberlour.

If you are new to long-distance walking, it's a good idea anyway to plan a day somewhere near the halfway point when walking is optional. That way, if your feet are blistered or tired, or if the weather is terrible, you can choose whether and how far to walk that day, perhaps making some visits for a change.

Finally, you might want to spread the section from Grantown to Aviemore over two days, with an overnight at Nethy Bridge or Boat of Garten. In season (April to August) the Osprey Centre at Loch Garten offers a wonderful experience, not to be rushed, but many people will balk at adding a 2-mile detour to a 17-mile walk. Or you could finish your walk at Boat of Garten, instead riding the Strathspey Railway for the final six miles into Aviemore. This takes 15 minutes – two hours less than walking. As of 2010, there were two afternoon departures from Boat of Garten in summer months, but check in advance: see panel on page 46.

Table 1 Distances and possible overnight stops

	miles	km
Buckie	10	16
Fochabers	13	21
Craigellachie	12	19
Ballindalloch	13	21
Grantown	17	27
Aviemore		
Sub total	65	104
plus Tomintoul	15	24
Total	80	128

Table 1 shows distances and possible overnights. If your host will collect and/or deliver you to the Way, your day's walk need not coincide with your overnight stops and this may help where accommodation is scarce, such as at Ballindalloch. (You won't find this name on most maps: Ballindalloch is the district surrounding the old station, rather than a village.)

Table 2 should help you plan how to reach the start and return from the finish, depending on your method and time of travelling from home. On page 10 we suggest combining the Way with other long walks, which would affect your overall planning.

Decide about your accommodation well in advance: it can be scarce, both out of season and in high summer, and booking is essential. Be aware of the annual whisky festivals: the Spirit of Speyside Whisky Festival is in early May and there's an autumn festival in Dufftown in late September: see page 61. If your visit coincides with either of these, you may find B&B providers fully booked all week – or expecting to be, and therefore reluctant to book single nights.

Request the Speyside Way accommodation leaflet from the Ranger Service: see page 60. It is updated annually and until 2010 it covered the entire Way. From 2011 it may also be necessary to contact the Cairngorms National Park Authority: see page 60. The main list has car symbols to identify hosts who can provide lifts. But whether you use a specialist tour operator to organise your trip, or do it yourself, don't leave it too late.

Planning your travel

To plan your travel, consult an atlas together with Table 2 below, which shows fastest scheduled times for bus and train (as of 2010). Car journey times are the fastest likely within speed limits, with no allowance for traffic delays. All figures are rough guidelines only, and contact details for transport providers are given on page 61. Check travel details carefully in advance: not all services are daily and winter timetables are often restricted.

Table 2

	<i>miles</i>	<i>km</i>	<i>by bus</i>	<i>by train</i>	<i>by car</i>
Edinburgh / Inverness	160	257	3h 45m	3h 30m	3h 30m
Edinburgh / Aberdeen	125	201	3h 20m	2h 30m	3h 00m
Aberdeen / Keith	50	80	1h 30m	1h 5m	1h 20m
Inverness / Keith	55	88	2h 00m	1h 10m	1h 30m
Keith / Buckie	13	21	35m	n/a	20m
Aviemore / Inverness	30	48	45m	40m	40m
Aviemore / Edinburgh	130	209	3h 00m	2h 50m	2h 50m
London / Inverness	550	885	12h 30m	8h 10m	11h 00m

Approximate distances and journey times between places near the beginning and end of the Way

There are train and bus services between Edinburgh, Aberdeen and Inverness. To reach Buckie from Aberdeen or Inverness stations, take the train to Keith, then the connecting bus (which leaves from the station), rather than a direct bus to Buckie (which takes longer). Mainline trains from Aberdeen to Inverness stop at Keith, Elgin and Forres.

To return from Aviemore, there are good rail and coach connections northward to Inverness, and southward to Edinburgh and beyond. London is far enough from Inverness and Aberdeen that most people will prefer the train or plane. As of 2010, BA flies from Heathrow to Aberdeen, flybe from Gatwick to Inverness and easyJet serves Inverness from Luton and Gatwick.

Inverness airport is about 10 miles north-east of the city centre, linked to it by a bus service (about every 30 minutes). From Inverness station, you'd have to take a train to Keith and bus to Buckie as above. A faster option is to take a taxi direct from the airport to Nairn station, from which Keith takes 50 minutes (service every hour or two), finally reaching Buckie by bus.

Aberdeen airport is at Dyce, six miles north-west of the city, with a railway station nearby from which you can reach Keith in just under an hour (service every hour or two). Also the frequent Aberdeen-Elgin Stagecoach Express 10 bus stops at Aberdeen airport and also at Keith and Fochabers. So the travelling time from Aberdeen airport can be shorter than from Inverness.

If you are flying in from outside the UK, you may be tempted to rent a car at the airport. However, you would have to find somewhere safe to leave the car for a week, and to allow time to return to it from the other end of the walk. You might arrange to park a car at various intermediate places on the route, especially if you are staying at a hotel or B&B; this would be entirely at your own risk. However, it would allow you to exchange some clothing and other supplies part way.

Note also that you can fly 'open-jaw' – for example, from Amsterdam outward to Aberdeen but returning from Edinburgh, using the train from Aviemore to reach Edinburgh from the end of your walk. As of 2010, easyJet and flybe flew direct from Inverness to London (Gatwick and/or Luton) and to various regional airports (Birmingham, Bristol, Manchester, Southampton) as well as Belfast (flybe): see page 61 for airline contact details.

What is the best time of year?

Fortunately for those who have little choice over their holiday dates, there is no bad time of year to walk the Way. Although you should be prepared for cold, wet and windy weather at any time of year, you may experience brilliant sunshine and clear, crisp air in winter.

Here are a few factors to think about:

- Winter is less flexible for walkers, because the days are shorter: high latitude means that the hours of daylight vary from 6-7 hours in late December to 17-18 in late June.
- Winter restricts your choice of side-trips and visits, many of which are open only from April to September.
- In winter, hikers escape flying pests such as midges and clegs (horse-flies).
- On winter timetables, public transport is less frequent.
- In summer, there will be more tourists around and more pressure on accommodation; however, in winter many B&Bs are closed for the season.

On balance, if you are free to choose, the ideal months to go are probably May/June and September/early October.

Combining the Way with other long walks

The Speyside Way links with other long walks in several places: the 24-mile Dava Way links Grantown with Forres, and the 44-mile Moray Coast Trail stretches from Forres all the way along the coast to Cullen, overlapping the Speyside Way between Garmouth and Buckie. Both are described in detail in a companion volume *Moray Coast Trail* which also covers the 95-mile Moray Way circuit: see page 62.

There is also the East Highland Way, a 76-mile route that links Fort William to Aviemore via Spean Bridge, Loch Laggan and Newtonmore. As of 2010 its route was defined only by a website: www.easthighlandway.com. For serious hill-walking, there are the Monadhliath and Cairngorm mountains. This would add significantly to your equipment needs, especially in winter: see page 25.

The Scottish Outdoor Access Code

The Code interpreted access rights established by law, and took effect in 2005. Although you have the right to be on most land in the countryside, and certainly anywhere on the Way, be aware that your access rights bring responsibilities with them: see panel.

Although you may be on holiday, for its residents the countryside provides a livelihood and workplace. Salmon fishing, roe deer stalking, and game shooting all take place near the Way at various times of year. These sporting activities contribute to the economy of the area, and do not interfere with your use of the Way. Please stick closely to the waymarked route.

Walking near livestock requires special care. Lambing takes place from February to May: never disturb pregnant ewes, nor approach young lambs. If you meet cattle on an unfenced section, give them a wide berth: they may resent your presence. Although an attack is unlikely, take special care not to come between a cow and its calf.

Know the Code before you go . . . Enjoy Scotland's outdoors - responsibly

Everyone has the right to be on most land and inland water providing they act responsibly. Your access rights and responsibilities are explained fully in the *Scottish Outdoor Access Code*. Whether you're in the outdoors or managing the outdoors, the key things are to

- take responsibility for your own actions
- respect the interests of other people
- care for the environment.

Find out more by visiting www.outdooraccess-scotland.com or phoning Scottish Natural Heritage; see page 60 for details. SNH also publishes *Dog Owners*, a useful leaflet that spells out what the SOAC means in practice.