



50+ fascinating 'facts' about Nairnshire & district

1. **Nairn** used to be called Invernairn, from its Gaelic name 'Inbhir Nathairne' or the mouth of the [river] Nairn.
2. By around 1797, when Nairn's [then] **new bridge** across the river was completed, the route across the bridge was the best road access between north and south east Scotland...via Aberdeen
3. Nairn became fashionable as a health resort after the arrival of the railway in 1855, chiefly thanks to the efforts of Dr John Grigor and a forward-thinking Lord Provost. It became known as **The Brighton of the North**.
4. **Nairn railway station** is worth a look as an attraction in its own right; its size and splendour are a tribute to its builders and a fitting memorial to its days as a very fashionable resort.
5. Until 1999, the railway signalman at Nairn station had to use a **pushbike** to get – rapidly – between two historically-significant signal boxes that controlled the inbound and outbound signaling. Electronic signaling made the bike redundant in 1999!
6. Nairn has an increasingly popular Book and Arts Festival in June each year. This year's event runs from 5 to 13 June.
7. In July 2008 some big names from Hollywood and the UK film industry pitched up in Nairn for a film festival set up by locally-based actress **Tilda Swinton**. You could get in to see the films by bringing home baking, in some cases!
8. Prior to it becoming a holiday resort in the 19th century, Nairn was primarily a **fishing village** and the Fishertoun area of the town absolutely reflects the typical architecture and layout of this history: narrow streets with jammed-close simple cottages. It's very different to the main centre of the town and worth a visit.
9. **Fishertoun** in Nairn has a museum dealing with the folklore and history of the once-sizeable fishing community. The herring fishery's collapse and the silting up of the harbour mouth led to Nairn's demise as a fishing port however.
10. Nairn's relatively benign and dry climate and its good beach made it prime **golf course** material in the 1800s, when the game was really developing. The first 18 hole links course was laid out in 1887 and the second in 1899. The championship links course is now internationally renowned and heavily frequented by enthusiasts from all over the globe.
11. **Nairn's beach** is vast and very good for watersports such as windsurfing and kite-boarding due to the prevailing wind direction being along the shoreline rather than off-shore.
12. **Fort George** near Ardersier is the most regular fortification in Britain. It was built between 1747 and 1770 in response to the Jacobite risings.
13. **Fort George** is still used as a garrison today but is also open for the public to visit as a historic site: Historic Scotland looks after the building. Its ramparts make a good outlook point for spotting dolphins and porpoises in the Moray Firth.
14. **Bottlenose dolphins** have been a familiar attraction in the Moray Firth for years. They are the most northerly population in the world.
15. **Castle Stuart**, built in 1625 by James Stuart, 3rd earl of Moray, has a secret billiard room.
16. Castle Stuart has recently been transformed into major new **golf course** and is due to open in Summer 2009.
17. The ancient burial mounds of **Clava Cairns** are between 3000 and 4000 years old.
18. The last battle to be fought on British soil was at **Culloden Moor** on 16 April 1746.
19. The **Royal Brackla distillery**, located to the east of Cawdor, was founded in 1812 by William Fraser. In 1835 it was the first distillery to be awarded the royal warrant by order of King William IV.
20. In the 15th Century, Muriel Calder, the child heiress to the substantial Cawdor lands, was kidnapped by the Campbells and held captive at Kilchurn Castle in Argyll. She was married to John Campbell at the age of 12. Their marriage in 1510 was the beginning of the family Campbells of Cawdor, who have inhabited **Cawdor Castle** since 1524.
21. **Cawdor Castle** is open to the public and is a superb example of a medieval Scottish Castle. It is more correctly spelt CALDER but pronounced Cawdor, and is home to the Thanes of Calder...or Cawdor, if you're Will Shakespeare!
22. Nairnshire is well-off for castles...**Brodie Castle** is an impressive 16th century tower house with later additions and spectacular interiors and art collections. It's in the care of the National Trust for Scotland.
23. Just to the east of Nairn, the **Culbin Forest** was once prized grazing then a desert for two centuries. Great storms in 1694 moved the sand dunes around to such an extent and depth that the fields, livestock and village were all buried. The church steeple, chimney pots and fruit trees have intermittently poked through the dunes in the intervening years.

24. Culbin Sands are now in the care of the Forestry Commission and there are miles of **tranquil, waymarked walks** and cycle paths to be discovered among the Corsican pine that grows there now.
25. The Nelson Tower, which overlooks **Forres** from Cluny Hill, is 70 Feet [21 metres] high. Its viewing platform, open in summer, affords open views of the Moray Firth to the North and Grampian Mountains to the south.
26. **Fochabers** Folk Museum houses the largest collection of horsedrawn vehicles in north east Scotland.
27. On top of **Lady Hill**, which rises to the southwest of Elgin and was once the site of Elgin Castle, is a 24m high (80 feet) monument erected in 1839 in honour of the 5th Duke of Gordon, the first Commander of the Gordon Highlanders regiment.
28. **Elgin's** castle was the reputed scene of King Duncan's murder by Macbeth.
29. **Ramsay Macdonald**, Labour's first UK Prime Minister [1923] was born in Lossiemouth.
30. Sandstone from **Hopeman** was used in the building of the Museum of Scotland in Edinburgh which opened in 2000.
31. **Burghhead** still celebrates the ancient mid-winter Yule-fire festival known as 'Burning the Clavie' on 11th January (Old Yule Night) each year. The Clavie crew led by the Clavie King take it in turn to carry through the streets the blazing tarbarrel or Clavie, which is made from a whisky barrel and set alight with a burning peat.
32. RAF **Lossiemouth** is the largest and busiest fast-jet base in the Royal Air Force and is home to three operational squadrons of Tornado GR-4s.
33. The '**muckle spate of 1829**' in the North East of Scotland has been recorded as the severest flooding in UK history.
34. The **Findhorn Foundation** begun in 1962 by Peter and Eileen Caddy and Dorothy Maclean, is now an internationally recognised centre of spirituality.
35. The Findhorn Foundation is, in part, open to the public for the sale of crafts, specialist books, produce and a wholefood café.
36. Grant Lodge, situated in **Elgin's** Cooper Park, was the location of the last clan uprising in Scotland when in 1820 some 700 Highlanders of Clan Grant marched on Grant Lodge to protect Lady Ann Grant during an election dispute.
37. **Burghhead's** Pictish Fort was one of the most magnificent centres of Pictish power. Dating from the 4th or 5th centuries AD the remains were so exceptional they were mistaken for evidence of Roman occupation.
38. **Forres** is one of the most ancient places in Moray, having been noted by the mapmaker Ptolemy almost two thousand years ago.
39. **Elgin** Cathedral is known as the "Lantern of the North".
40. **Forres** is closely associated with the name Macbeth, whose tale was told by William Shakespeare, giving rise to much speculation about the exact spot where the legendary eleventh century king-to-be met the three witches.
41. In 1390 the notorious Alexander Stewart, "**Wolf of Badenoch**" and son of King Robert II, quarrelled with Bishop Alexander Bur, who excommunicated him for his unfaithfulness to his wife. In revenge the Wolf burned the Cathedral and the towns of Elgin and Forres.
42. The Biblical Garden at **Elgin** Cathedral includes all 110 ten plants mentioned in the Bible.
43. **Findhorn** derives its name from the river at whose mouth it stands, where Findhorn is thought to derive from the Scots Gaelic '*white water*'.
44. Talking of white water, the Findhorn is one of Scotland's best rivers for white water rafting, with rapids graded up to 4 and 5 (on a scale of 5!) when the river is high. The activity is suitable for most people, however, and is actually very safe, despite the excitement!
45. **Findhorn** [the village] used to be the port for the town of Forres and it was originally well to the west of its current location. The highly mobile, windblown sands at Culbin buried one incarnation of the village in 1694, and the river itself took out another rebuilt version of the village in 1701. Third time lucky, we hope!
46. Described as the 'tallest and most complex piece of early medieval sculpture in Scotland', Sueno's stone standing over 6.4m (21 feet) high at the east end of **Forres** in Moray, is arguably the most remarkable sculptured monument in Britain, dating to the end of the first millennium AD.
47. The **Beatrice oil field**, the first oil production in the Moray Firth area, is the only platform visible from the mainland.
48. Several well-known branded products bear the name NAIRN....Nairn's Oatcakes and Nairn linoleum and Marmoleum flooring for example. Neither are directly connected with the town, however, other than by name. The oatcakes are from Edinburgh and the lino is made in Kirkcaldy in Fife.
49. Another famous Nairn name is Lady Nairne, [Carolina – 1766-1845] who was a very well known songwriter and poetess. Nothing was published under her own name in her lifetime but popular – and seditious! – lyrics in support of the Jacobite cause turned out, after her death, to have been her compositions. 'Charlie is my darlin' is probably the best known of these.
50. Nairnshire stopped being a county in its own, administrative right in 1975 when local government in Scotland was re-organised. It was subsumed into Highland Region.