



## 50 fascinating 'facts' about Oban and district

1. Oban's name derives from the Gaelic 'An t-oban' meaning **the little bay**.
2. The circular, Colosseum-style monument above the town of Oban is called **McCaig's Tower**, or McCaig's Folly. Its construction was funded to the tune of £5000 in 1897 by local banker John Stuart McCaig as a job creation scheme for local men.
3. The settlement centred around **Dunollie**, to the north of Oban bay was first home to one of Scotland's earliest peoples – the Dalriadans – in around the sixth century and they were there till the eighth century.
4. The **MacDougalls** built a stone castle at Dunollie in the 11<sup>th</sup> or 13<sup>th</sup> century and lorded it over the area from there, using the fine anchorage in Oban bay, till 1746 when they moved to a new castle in a nearby glen.
5. **Dunstaffnage Castle** 4 miles to the north east of Oban was also a MacDougall stronghold and is a brilliant castle to visit for its dramatic setting and impressive architecture.
6. **Oban's distillery** dates from 1794 and was one of the first to become legal. These days it belongs to global drinks group Diageo but continues to produce the well known Oban Malt Whisky.
7. In the early days of steam ships operating in and out of Oban, beginning in 1819, Bell's '**Comet**' (the first sea-going steam ship) was one of the vessels serving the town.
8. **Dorus Mhor** ('the big door') is a notorious sea lane between Craignish point and the island of Garbh Reisa, was where the aforementioned *Comet*, was wrecked in 1820.
9. Oban was a small village until the advent of the **railway** in 1880 which opened it up as a fish landing and shipping centre.
10. By **1886**, **tourism** was already described as 'rampant' in the newly fashionable yachting centre and travel centre Oban had become.
11. Railway access meant access could also be opened more easily to the many islands that lie to the west of Oban and today you can travel to 7 different islands from the town: Lismore; Kerrera; Colonsay; Coll; Tiree, Barra and Mull (and onwards to Iona);.
12. In the early 1900s you were able to travel by steamer from **Oban to Glasgow** via the Crinan Canal, around 30 miles south of Oban at the head of the Kintyre peninsula.
13. At that time you could also sail from **Oban to Lewis**, Inverness, Portree (Skye), Gairloch, North Uist and Glasgow via the long route around the Mull of Kintyre.
14. Since 1904 Oban has been first a shore station and subsequently a maintenance base for the Northern Lighthouse Board and specialist tender ships and helicopters continue to be based in the town to this day.
15. Oban is also a **trans-Atlantic telephone cable** terminal, where the earliest phone lines from North America made UK landfall.
16. During World War II the beach to the north of the town at Ganavan Sands was a base for HMS Caledonia **flying boat squadron**.
17. The **War & Peace Museum** on Oban's North Pier provides fascinating insights into Oban's past.
18. Nowadays Oban is **connected by air** to the islands of Coll, Tiree and Colonsay using the small airport at Connel, 5 miles north of Oban.
19. Oban had and continues to have a strong connection to **Gaelic-speaking** areas of the west of Scotland and the islands. It hosted the first ever **National Mod** – the annual festival of Gaelic music, language and culture – in 1891.

20. The **Mòd** (now the Royal National Mod!) will return to Oban in 2009; from 9 – 17 October.
21. The small green island that guards the entrance to Oban bay is called **Kerrera** and you can get to it by 5 minute ferry crossing from south of the town at Gallanach.
22. Kerrera is home to several fish farms along its western coast, the MacDougall's second stronghold, **Gylen Castle**, and the monument to ferry pioneer and entrepreneur David Hutcheson – predecessor of the famous MacBraynes.
23. **King Alexander II** of Scotland died in Horseshoe Bay, Kerrera in 1249 while battling the Norsemen.
24. The **Kilmartin** valley, a few miles south of Oban, contains archaeological monuments, standing stones and cup-and-ring rock carvings. Over 5,000 years of human history are traced across the glen with at least 150 prehistoric sites within 6 miles of Kilmartin's excellent museum and interpretation centre.
25. **Dunadd Hill Fort**, on the River Add between Lochgilphead and Kilmartin was an iron age and later hill fort. It later became the ancient capital of Dalriada, founded by immigrants from Ireland before AD500. Near the top of this ancient fort is a unique footprint, stone bowl and a rock carving of a boar – probably used during anointing or coronation ceremonies of rulers or kings.
26. The late **Rt Hon John Smith MP**, leader of the Labour party, was born in Dalmally and brought up in Ardrishaig. He was interred, at his request, on The Island of Iona. His grave can be seen in the local burial place beside Iona Abbey.
27. **Cruachan Power Station on Loch Awe** was opened in 1965 after many years of excavation beneath the granite mountain of Ben Cruachan (3,689 ft). The underground cavern houses turbines, which provide electricity for the National grid.
28. The power station – and the **inside of the mountain!** – is open to the public and is an unusual and interesting place to visit, particularly if the weather is wet outside: it's warm and dry inside Ben Cruachan.
29. **Film and TV** producers find the area excellent for locations. Film and TV productions of note have been 'My Life So Far', 'Lovejoy', 'Parahandy' 'The Crow Road' and Michael Winner's 'Bullseye'.
30. A wealth of **local produce** can be found in the Mid-Argyll area – venison, mussels, oysters, crabs, organic beef and lamb, cheese, not to mention ales from the small family run brewery on the island of Seil.
31. **"Tigh na Truish"** is the name given to the Inn beside the 'Bridge over the Atlantic' a dozen miles south of Oban. There, Highlanders changed from trousers into the kilt when returning to their islands during the time after The Battle of Culloden when highland dress was forbidden by law.
32. That Bridge – the Clachan Bridge - links the west coast of the mainland with the **Island of Seil**. It's thought to have been designed by Scots civil engineer, Thomas Telford and was built between 1792 and 1793. Its high arch, roughly 22 metres wide and 12 metres above the bed of the channel, allows the passage of vessels of up to 40 tonnes at high tide!
33. **Easdale Island** was an important centre for slate quarrying from the mid 17<sup>th</sup> C to early 20<sup>th</sup> C. Up to seven working quarries existed, some extending down to 300 ft below sea level! The neighbouring islands of Seil, Luing and Belnahua also produced the Easdale Slate which was exported to Glasgow, Ireland, London and New York. The population was more than 500 when, in 1881 a storm flooded the quarries. By the 1950s the quarry had virtually stopped working and by 1960 the population had dwindled to only 4 people!
34. The **Corryreckan whirlpool** (3<sup>rd</sup> largest in the world) is situated between the islands of Jura and Scarba, south of Oban by sea. It's on the northern side of the gulf, surrounding a pyramid-shaped basalt pinnacle that rises from depths of 70m to 29m at its rounded top. Flood tides and inflow from the Firth of Lorn to the west can drive the waters of

- Corryvreckan to waves of over 30 ft (9m) and the roar of the resulting maelstrom can be heard 10 miles (16kms) away. And some canoeists go looking for it!
35. The Cadzow family are well known in cattle breeding circles worldwide for their work in establishing the ancient White Park Cattle on the island of **Luing** south of Oban, off the Island of Seil.
  36. George Malcolm of Poltalloch, near Kilmartin, was one of the founders of the **Edinburgh Festival**.
  37. **Eilean Rìgh in Loch Craignish** was formerly the home of Sir Lionel Johnstone, tutor to the last Emperor of China. Peter O Toole depicted him in the film of that name.
  38. In 542 AD, the Celtic missionary, **Brendan the Navigator**, founded a Christian community on the southern island of the Garvellachs.
  39. **Inverliever Forest**, with numerous forest walks, was one of the first plantations acquired by the state in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The land was acquired from the Malcolms of Poltalloch in 1907 and quickly planted by the Office of Woods, which later became the Forestry Commission.
  40. Queen Victoria likened the **Pass of Brander**, which runs from Loch Awe west to the Taynuilt, to the Kyber Pass in India.
  41. The Pass of Brander was the scene of defeat of the MacDougalls by **Robert the Bruce** in early 1300s. He was aided by Douglas' and Campbells charging from above the MacDougalls from Ben Cruachan. Cruachan is said to still be the battle cry of the Campbells.
  42. **Ben Cruachan** stands at 1101m [3689 ft] and is therefore a Munro. The name Cruachan means *shoulder*.
  43. The village of **Furnace** was renamed (original name Inverleacann) after iron smelting was introduced at the end of 18<sup>th</sup> C. Bonawe Iron Foundry, near Taynuilt is open to the public today and is a splendid example of the workings of such a foundry (Historic Scotland).
  44. In the 15<sup>th</sup> Century, Muriel Calder was kidnapped by the Campbells and held captive at **Kilchurn Castle in Loch Awe**. The child heiress to the substantial Cawdor lands 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 near Nairn since 1524.
  45. **Loch Awe** has evidence of 20 **crannogs**, which date from 300BC to 1700AD. Crannog is the name given in Scotland to an artificial island or natural island, used for a settlement. They date from around 3200 BC.
  46. Oban is due to get a new **town-based marina** facility in 2010, making it easier for yachts to visit the town.
  47. **Pulpit Hill** is a terrific vantage point above Oban town centre. It used to be a place of worship, indicated by the 'Minister's Stone' but is now a great place to get your bearings among the stunning Argyll landscape. There's a useful landscape indicator that helps identify landmarks and points of interest.
  48. Oban is home to one of Scotland's most successful **shinty** ('camanachd' in Gaelic) teams. Shinty is a game similar to hockey and lacrosse that is particular to the west and central Highlands of Scotland. Ice hockey – invented in Canada – is a derivation of it, started up by Highland emigrants. You can see shinty matches in Oban on alternating Saturdays between April and September.
  49. The **Camanachd Cup Final** (shinty's premier cup competition) will take place in Oban this year, on 19 September. With shinty having been described as 'a cross between hockey and war, with the rules of neither' it's a great spectacle and occasion, even for the uninitiated.
  50. At Connel the mouth of Loch Etive is so narrow that a 'waterfall' or rapid known as the **Falls of Lora** is produced when the tide level in the Firth of Lorn (the sea side of the narrows) drops below the level of the water in Loch Etive. On the Ebb tide, the seawater in the loch pours out through the narrows which are themselves spanned by the spectacular and historic Connel Bridge.