



Bosta Beach on Great Bernera

Wild for Scotland... podcasts of the Isles

Words by Katie Macleod
Photos by Kathi Kamleitner

“The story begins, as is often the case in the Scottish isles, on a boat: the small passenger ferry from the Isle of Mull to the Isle of Iona.”

With the sound of the waves lapping in the background, the voice of travel writer Kathi Kamleitner draws you in to an island adventure. The first episode of the podcast Wild for Scotland takes listeners island hopping around Iona, Staffa, and the Treshnish Isles – and is a taste of what’s to come over the next nine episodes of Season 1, which is all about the Scottish islands.

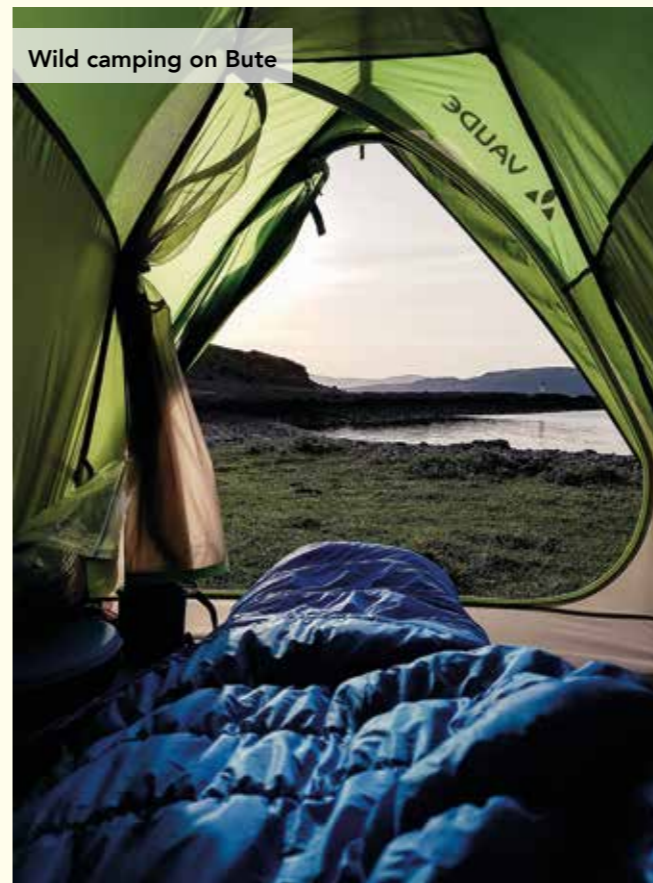
Kathi, who runs the award-winning travel blog Watch Me See from her home base in Glasgow, describes the podcast as one “that allows you travel to Scotland through stories,” and her way of helping listeners “connect with Scotland.” Each episode starts with an immersive travel story about a location or experience from Kathi’s travels, after which she shares her top tips for visiting the location which she’s just transported the listener to.

“I want the podcast to help you to feel connected with Scotland, whether you’re here or, or abroad,” Kathi explains. “Even if you’re on the mainland, you can dream of the islands, and even people on the islands can hopefully dream of other islands.”

Wild for Scotland grew out of creative frustration at the COVID-19 pandemic’s impact on travel, and the messages Kathi received from readers who desperately wanted to visit Scotland but couldn’t. “It felt a bit like: ‘What can I do to still give people something that makes them feel connected to Scotland, that people still find useful and inspiring and interesting?’”

What came first were short, immersive pieces of writing she shared on her Instagram account, which she dubbed “Sunday Stories.” Her stories gravitated towards those about the Scottish islands, and by the time another lockdown arrived in the winter of 2020-21, Kathi realised that in her social media snippets of adventure, she had the basis for a podcast.

Wild camping on Bute



Kathi on the Isle of Coll



Puffins on Lunga

“I just wanted to take people away. I wanted to take myself away! As far away as I could imagine, and for me that was the islands. I love storytelling. I love writing these stories that I can just record and give people an opportunity to – it’s going sound cheesy – but an opportunity to visit Scotland without leaving their home. The idea is ‘Close your eyes and lean back, relax, and imagine you’re there.’”

Over the course of the series, the podcast takes listeners to the likes of Coll, St Kilda, Arran, and Tiree. “I’m fascinated with islands,” says Kathi, who is originally from Austria, but relocated to Scotland in 2013 to study at the University of Glasgow. (She graduated last year with a PhD in Film and TV Studies.) “There’s something about going on a boat and travelling to a piece of land that is surrounded by water... It might be too romantic, but I’m from a landlocked country, so there is a sense of adventure in it just because of that, I think, for me.”

“I would say the love really exploded with doing the Hebridean Way, and hiking across the Outer Hebrides. You walk across seeing the difference between the islands, but also between the islands and the mainland... I think that’s when it really hit me how much I love the islands.”

In deciding which islands to focus on, Kathi looked at both the travel experiences that were transformative for her – like hiking the Hebridean Way – as well as the islands that tend to get less attention in the travel industry. “I wanted to feature islands that don’t get the same attention, or people might have not heard about,” she explains. “I wanted to tell a wee bit of the history, the local communities, and highlight all of those different aspects, to show that it’s not just about pristine beaches, it’s about the whole experience, and everybody who lives there, and the activities you can do and the things you can experience.”

This focus on sustainable travel is important to Kathi, and she uses the travel tip section of each episode to highlight local businesses, accommodations, restaurants, and activity providers. In the episode that takes place in Tiree, for example, she shares her top tips for a visit, including where to hire bikes, which companies to book a surf lesson with, and why you should stay for longer than just a day and give yourself

time to really experience the island. “It’s about making sure people see these places not just for the landscapes, but for the communities that are there... There’s that balance between the awe for nature, but at the same time, not forgetting that it’s someone’s home. I think that’s really important.”

She laughs when asked if she has a favourite island. “I think it’s too difficult to say... I do think I have favourites, but I think we’d be sitting here until tomorrow! I’ll choose one, and then I’ll think about another one, and I’ll feel guilty about not naming every single island I’ve been to.” Colonsay, Harris, South Uist, Lunga and Handa do get a mention, though, as does Islay. “I love Islay whisky, so that’s a strong contender!”

Podcasting is Kathi’s latest venture in creating travel content, which began with travel writing for an international website focused on solo female travel while she was living in Berlin in the early 2010s; launching her own site, Watch Me See, in 2016; offering personal travel itineraries and consultations for visitors to Scotland; and most recently, writing a German-language guidebook to Glasgow.

For Season 1 of Wild for Scotland, Kathi took on all the writing, recording, and audio editing by herself, although she has hired a specialist audio editor for Season 2, which launched in September. The podcast has already received national press, and Kathi notes that the reception from her readers and followers has been overwhelmingly positive. “I’m so glad I did it,” she says. “It gave me a creative output, and it gave me an opportunity to create something that is a bit different than the useful side of travel writing. It also allowed me to revisit some of these places and really think about what I learned about them on the one hand, with the histories and stories, but also to think about what do I want people to take away? What do I want people to experience and know when they visit those places?”

Wild for Scotland may have been inspired by the limitations of lockdown, but even as travel restrictions end, the audio adventures can still provide an immersive escape to the Scottish isles for listeners near and far. As Kathi says in the introduction to each episode: “Are you ready? Great – let’s travel to Scotland!”