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## TOUR LIFE TRAVEL

# Year of the Homecoming: No better time to visit Scotland than 2009

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By David Brice, Golf International, Inc.

It may seem a little early to start thinking about 2009 golf trips, but if Scotland is on your list of next year's possible destinations, there really is no time like the present to start pinning down a few of the details. Scotland is the most popular vacation spot of all with golfers from around the globe and planning a golf trip here should always be started as early in the game as possible. If you are hoping to play a few of the famous links courses, a year or even 18 months ahead, is not too soon.

With the number of visiting golfers intent on playing British Open venues and other top ranked Scottish layouts, growing by leaps and bounds each year, precious visitor times are snapped up really quickly and those who don't book early are often disappointed. The available supply of visitor times simply does not meet the continual growth in the number of golfers chasing after them -- and in 2009, this situation is going to be more critical than ever before.

2009 will be the 250th anniversary of the birth of Scotland's much revered poet laureate, Robert Burns and the Scots are planning on throwing a birthday bash, the likes of which have never been seen before. For any reader who may have a blank look on their face or a, "Who the heck was Robert Burns?" kind of question, think back to every New Year's Eve party you have ever attended. Remember joining in a song that everyone sings at the stroke of midnight? It starts off, "Should auld acquaintance be forgot..." and the song is called, Auld Lang Sine. Together with a few thousand other songs, poems and literary works, this was the effort of Mr. Robert Burns, a man very close to the hearts of every Scot.

With typical ingenuity (or could it be frugality) along with Burns' 250th birthday party, the Scots are taking advantage of the



Royal Dornoch is one of the world's most sought after links and there are whisky distilleries at the doorstep.



Homecoming 2009 will be a time to celebrate everything Scottish



Tumberny's Ailsa Course hosts its fourth British Open in 2009



Never imposing from the outside, it's the treasures they produce on the inside that matters and Islay's Ardbeg Distillery produces the best.



The Machrie - Old fashioned links golf at its best



Machrihanish is fabled for its first hole and neighboring Springbank Distillery



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occasion to celebrate a few other things that Scotland has given the world - golf and whisky are close to the top of the list.

Scotland is also the home of enlightenment and innovation. Did you know that Scotsmen were responsible for the invention of the telephone, television, anesthetic, penicillin, the fax machine, economics, the decimal point, adhesive postage stamps, even the US Navy? And that's still only the beginning of a very long list. So, enlightenment and innovation are also invited to the party.

Scottish ancestry and heritage is the final celebrant at Scotland's 2009 party, officially called, Homecoming Scotland 2009. Scotland may have a modest population of 5 million or so, but there are more than 300 million claiming Scottish ancestry, scattered around the world, 9.2 million of these in the USA and a further 5 million in Canada. All are invited to Homecoming Scotland 2009, together with any who may not have Scots ancestry, but still have an affection for this very special country, including the whisky connoisseurs and golfers.

This will be a huge, yearlong event, unprecedented in tourism promotion. Everything gets off to an official start on January 25th, Robert Burns' birthday and doesn't even begin to draw to a close until the end of November and Scotland's national day, St. Andrews Day.

We are promised a year, jam-packed with special events, festivals and celebrations of Scotland and everything Scottish. From the world's biggest ever clan gathering and pageant, to arts and cultural festivals, Celtic music celebrations, genealogy and family history related events, Scottish food and drink festivals and some special golf events, open to visitors. The first official announcement will be made next month, providing a preliminary schedule, but no matter which way you look at it, if you have even the tiniest drop of Scottish blood running through your veins, 2009 will be the year to join the homecoming and make Scotland your destination.

As the home of golf, any golfer, regardless of skill level, is already on the invitation list to join the festivities. Even before the official program is made known, there are already several important events to grab every golfer's attention, not the least of which is The British Open. 2009 is the year The Open returns to Scotland and Turnberry's magnificent Ailsa Course, now the top ranked layout in the entire British Isles, will host. Located in the county of Ayrshire on Scotland's west coast, this is the same county where Robert Burns was born, 250 years ago, so here is an opportunity to learn a little more about the great poet. And there are still more ways to combine golf with other features of Scotland's homecoming year.

There are very few golfers who do not enjoy a glass or two of whisky occasionally and as the home of whisky; Scotland boasts the very best. It's no coincidence some of the most highly regarded; single malt whisky distilleries are conveniently located close to excellent links courses. Golf International has made something of a specialty out of developing fascinating golf and whisky programs for its clients that cover golf and whisky across all of Scotland, from the Highlands to Speyside, to Aberdeen and the lowlands. But there is always a special interest in a couple of the less frequented, western outreaches, where the single malts are superb and the golf, though it maybe limited, is equally as impressive.

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The tiny Whisky Island of Islay (pronounced eye-lah) is a very special whisky region -home to a population of just 3,000 people, but no less than 9 distilleries, each producing its own version of the distinctly peaty flavored, Islay whisky that delights every whisky connoisseur. Bowmore, Ardbeg, Lagavulin, Laphroaig, Bunnahabhain, and Bruichladdich are six of the best and they all welcome visitors. There may be only one course on the island, but what a beauty the 117 year-old, Machrie Golf Links is. Ranked among Scotland's top 20 courses, The Machrie is as tough a links as you will ever encounter and it's only a brief 30-minute flight from Glasgow Airport.

Just as short a flight from Glasgow is the small town of Campbeltown, located on the Mull of Kintyre and like Islay, another distinct whisky region in its own right. There were once some 30 distilleries in town, a number now reduced to just two, Glen Scotia and the famous, Springbank Distillery, but their whiskies are top drawer in every way. Nearby, the historic Machrihanish Golf Club dating from 1876, is a magnificent design from the fabled, Old Tom Morris. Ranked number 15 in Scotland, Machrihanish is one of the country's most celebrated links that belongs on the must play list of every visiting golfer, but all too few experience this beauty. If it takes more than one course to attract visitors, perhaps this year there will be a change when a new links layout will be opening next door, Machrihanish Dunes. Designed by native Scotsman, David McLay Kidd (of Bandon Dunes fame) this new boy on the block seems to have been sitting here for centuries and complements the old-timer perfectly.

Homecoming Scotland 2009 may present the perfect excuse to give yourself that long promised golf trip to Scotland. Whether you prefer to combine golf and Robert Burns, golf and history, golf and heritage, golf and whisky, or would like your golf neat and just on its own, 2009 presents a golden opportunity to do it in style -- just get started soon. For more ideas and suggestions on playing the best of Scotland's courses and tasting the best whisky, click [here](#).

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