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Scotland holidays

'It's regenerative tourism': a cabin stay that helps rewild Scotland's Highlands

These forest huts near Ullapool are set in a stunning landscape, close to wildlife and give something back to the surroundings and community

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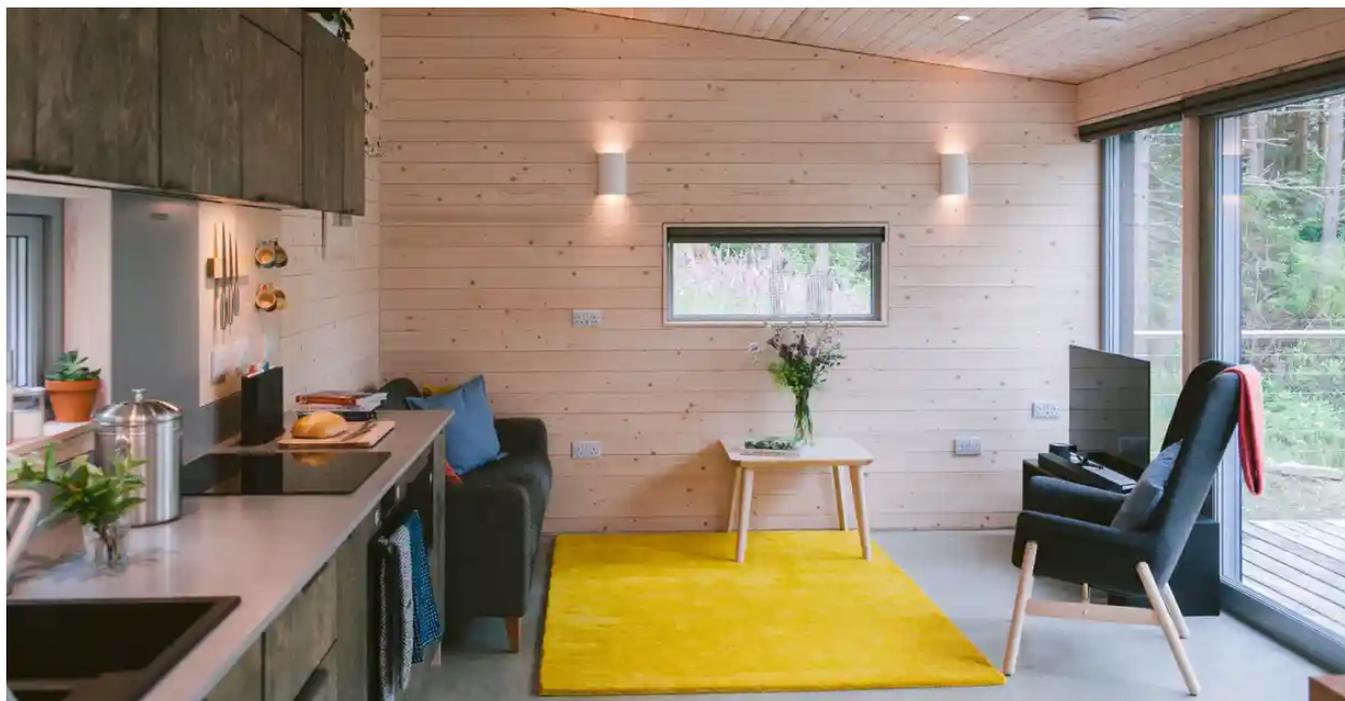
From the terrace of my cabin I can see through the trees to Loch Broom below. All is quiet, bar the faint sound of the breeze teasing branches in the forest. I close my eyes and listen to the silence, breathing in the coolness of the early evening.

A cabin in the woods is the ultimate escape - and mine, Pine Marten, one of two recently opened in Leckmelm Wood, near Ullapool in the Scottish Highlands, scores top marks for its setting. Even better, a stay here contributes to the site's nature restoration projects, so you can kick back and enjoy its simple comforts, knowing your stay is doing good too.

“We want people to come here to connect with nature, but they are also contributing to our efforts to rewild and look after the land, and demonstrate alternative ways of living,” says Sam Planterose, whose family own Leckmelm. “It’s an example of regenerative tourism - the type that has a positive impact on the surrounds and local communities.”

The story began 30 years ago when Sam’s parents Bernard and Emma, ecologists and co-founders of [Reforesting Scotland](#), bought the 13-hectare (32-acre) site from the Forestry Commission and moved their young family into the woods. What was a commercial conifer plantation is slowly being transformed to create a more diverse, wildlife-rich habitat, with areas cleared for native woodland, crofting and forest gardens, and others left to rewild naturally.





The spacious modern interior. Photograph: Margaret Soraya

Three generations of the family now live in the woods in self-built timber cabins. Bernard heads an [ecological timber building](#) business, while daughters Tiril and Merlin run [Kinder Croft](#), an outdoor children's nursery and forest school (guests' kids can join in if timings work), and Croft No 1, a pioneering woodland croft. Emma looks after the West Edge, a forest garden, plant nursery and education venue for anything from permaculture to mindfulness.

I wander the woods with Sam, passing areas that have been replanted, seeing newly blossoming wild gardens, fruit trees, polytunnels bursting with organic produce, and woodland classrooms. Monoculture plantations (many planted after the first world war in place of native forest) are notoriously species-poor, so it's inspiring to see the changes and hear that insect and birdlife is flourishing with key indicator species such as dragonflies and grey wagtails - signs of a healthier ecosystem - returning. "We're showing that what's good for the environment is good for us - even on a small scale," says Sam.





Great views of the fauna and flora are to be had from the sun deck. Photograph: Margaret Soraya

The two new Ecotone Cabins - Pine Marten, which sleeps four, and Red Squirrel, which sleeps two - add another string to the family's bow. Made using local, sustainable wood, with wool insulation and natural paint, their black exteriors blend into the landscape and floor-to-ceiling south-facing windows (good for passive heating) frame the views. Inside it's all immaculate and well equipped, with books on trees, yoga mats and baskets of homegrown produce. Outside there are firepits for evenings under the stars.

It's a joy to be able to walk straight out into woodland. The woods are in the [Wester Ross](#) Unesco biosphere; red squirrels live here after a successful reintroduction; and pine martens are often spotted. White-tailed eagles sometimes fly up and down the loch. There are mountain-bike tracks into the countryside and a path winds down to a beach by the loch, while Lael Forest Garden, great for walks and gentle cycling trails, isn't far away.

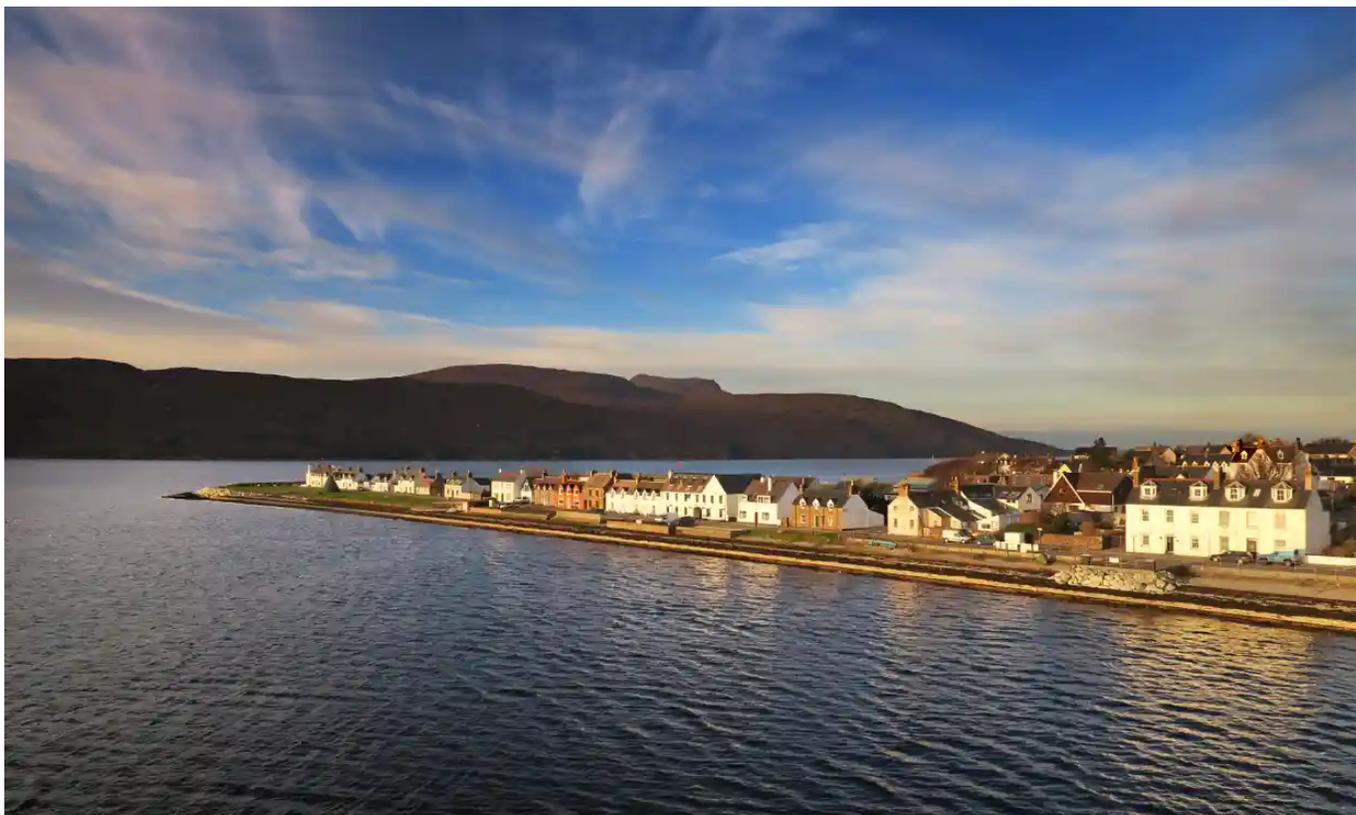




The surrounding woods are home to red squirrels and pine martens. Photograph: Margaret Soraya

Ullapool is an hour on foot through forests. Up on the hills above town, the views sweep over mountains and lochs and the Summer Isles scattered off the coast. I wander down to browse galleries and shops and stop at the [Seafood Shack](#) for its famous haddock, lemon mayo and pesto wrap.

The next morning, I take to the water with [Kayak Summer Isles](#). A windy start means we stick to more sheltered Loch Broom rather than heading out to sea, but we learn about the beautiful landscape and wildlife, and stop on a beach for hot chocolate.



Ullapool is the nearest village. Photograph: Murdo MacLeod/The Guardian

Bernard offers birdwatching or ecology walks in the woodlands and wider area too - tailored to guests' interests. We head out past Corrieshalloch Gorge, with its impressive canyon and waterfalls, to walk in a nearby glen. His depth of knowledge and passion for nature is impressive as he talks about deforestation, issues of overgrazing, and how the landscape could look. He's written widely about crofting forestry, community revival and how land could be better managed to work for people and nature. And that's what this family is doing at Leckmelm, showing what

people and nature. And that's what the family is doing at Leckmelm, showing what can be achieved on a small scale.

These cabins can be just a wonderful holiday base - somewhere to relax and explore a stunning part of the world. But for those with an interest, a stay at Leckmelm offers much more - an insight into, and a chance to contribute to, a different way of life.

The trip was provided by Visit Scotland and [Ecotone Cabins](#). Cabins sleeping two/four start from £495/£695 for four weekday nights or a three-night weekend

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