PRINTABLE TRIP ITINERARY

Scotland NC500 for £600 for Two

Applecross, Ullapool, Kylesku Bridge, Durness, John o’ Groats and Wick.

4 days	£300 pp	Road trip	4 days
TRIP	BUDGET	DURATION	GUIDE

What this guide includes

Actual or planned costs, a readable day-by-day itinerary, practical food and accommodation notes, and public transport station pairs where available.

Important: Historical costs are budgeting references. Verify current prices, route numbers, opening times and entry rules before travel.

Budget and transport

Expense	Cost for 2		
FlixBus Edinburgh ↔ Inverness return	£50		
Enterprise car hire	£200		
Fuel for the road trip	£175		
Inverness Airbnb	£45		
Durness room via Expedia	£75		
Thurso-area stay with a friend	£0		
Beach stop / camping on our trip	£0		
Most food	Brought from home		
Other small costs	About £55		
Total	About £600		
Option	Headline price for 2	What it covers	Likely couple total
Our real self-drive route	£600 recorded	Edinburgh–Inverness coach, rental car, fuel, two paid stays, mostly home food	£600; allow about £75 more without our free night
Rabbie’s 3-day tour	From £358	Mini-coach and driver-guide from Inverness; accommodation and food extra	About £588–£718 after estimated rooms, Edinburgh–Inverness travel and simple food
NC500 + Isle of Skye coach tour	From £798	Seven-day tour listing from £399 per adult; verify departure and inclusions	From £798 plus anything excluded
McKinlay Kidd self-drive	From about £2,070	Eight-night planned self-drive holiday, listed from £1,035 per person	From £2,070, subject to dates and inclusions
Shearings escorted coach holiday	From about £2,398	Seven nights, coach travel, breakfasts, one lunch and seven evening meals	From £2,398 plus optional spending

Bus, train, tram and ferry route card

Mode	Service	Board at	Get down at	Approx. fare	Note
Private vehicle	NC500 road trip	Edinburgh / chosen rental pickup	Applecross, Ullapool, Kylesku, Durness, John o’ Groats and Wick	Included in the road-trip vehicle and fuel budget	No single bus or train reproduces this circular itinerary; public transport would require separate regional routes and extra nights.

Checked October 2026: confirm live schedules and disruptions in the official operator planner.

Day-by-day itinerary and practical notes

Looking for an affordable North Coast 500 package for two? We compare our real £600 self-drive trip with current small-group and escorted tour prices, including what couples still need to budget for.

Prices are historical rather than live quotations. Use them as a budgeting reference and verify current fares, entry fees and booking conditions before travelling.

The NC500 was one of those trips where the road itself became the experience. We did not build the trip around luxury hotels or restaurants. We used an evening coach to Inverness, hired a car, booked remote accommodation months ahead, carried much of our food, stopped at beaches and viewpoints whenever we wanted, and spent most of the budget simply getting around the Highlands.

Our real NC500 budget

Affordable North Coast 500 packages for couples

Quick answer: the lowest headline price we found was £358 for two for Rabbie's three-day small-group tour from Inverness, but that price does not include the couple's accommodation, meals or travel to Inverness. With those extras, a practical total is closer to £588–£718 for two. That makes it comparable with our real £600 self-drive trip.

Which option gives a couple the best value?

Calculate the real package cost for two

Enter the full couple price—not the "per person" figure—and include everything the operator leaves out.

Example total: £668 for two (£334 per person).

Need rooms in Inverness? Compare Inverness accommodation on Booking.com. This is an affiliate link; the price you pay is unchanged.

Comparison method: operator prices are current "from" prices visible on their public pages on 23 October 2026. The £588–£718 Rabbie's estimate adds £160–£260 for two nights, £50–£80 for return travel from Edinburgh to Inverness, and £20 for simple food. Always price the exact dates before booking.

How to replicate this NC500 trip

The budget worked because we kept the expensive parts controlled: coach travel to Inverness, a fixed car-hire period, early accommodation bookings and food brought from home.

We used FlixBus and paid £25 return per person.

We paid about £200 total for the road-trip rental and returned the car in Inverness.

We booked Inverness and Durness roughly four months ahead, which mattered on a route with limited inventory.

Arrival evening: Edinburgh → Perth → Inverness

We took an evening FlixBus from Edinburgh to Inverness via Perth. The return fare was around £25 per person. We reached Inverness in the evening and stayed at an Airbnb that had cost us about £45, booked roughly four months in advance.

We had breakfast at the Airbnb the next morning, then collected our Enterprise rental car and began the driving section of the NC500.

Our route

Edinburgh → Inverness → Applecross → Ullapool → Kylesku Bridge → Durness → beaches → Thurso → John o’ Groats → Wick → Inverness → Edinburgh.

We returned the rental car in Inverness before travelling back towards Edinburgh.

Inverness → Applecross → Ullapool → Kylesku Bridge → Durness

The first full driving day delivered some of the most dramatic scenery of the entire trip. We drove from Inverness towards Applecross, continued through Ullapool, stopped at Kylesku Bridge, and eventually reached Durness.

Kylesku Bridge

Between Ullapool and Durness we reached the famous curved Kylesku Bridge. We spent quality time there because the combination of mountains, water and the sweeping bridge made the view extraordinary.

The turquoise-looking beaches

One of the biggest surprises was the colour of the water. Several beaches along this part of the route looked almost turquoise in the right light.

We stayed around Durness in a cosy room booked through Expedia for about £75. We had booked around four months ahead because remote accommodation along the NC500 can become limited.

Beaches, our own food and a very simple day

The next day we spent time at the beach and set up there for a while. We had carried our own food, heated what we had brought and then continued towards another beach. For us, this was one of the nicest examples of how a memorable road trip does not have to involve spending money every hour.

Our beach stop/camping cost us £0. Travellers should still check the location they plan to use: Scottish access rights include responsible lightweight camping where access rights apply, but local restrictions can exist, and access rights do not include motor vehicles.

Thurso and the John o’ Groats area

By Day 3 we reached the north-eastern side of the route. We stayed with a friend near Thurso. Our own stay cost £0, although the same accommodation is normally offered through Airbnb for around £75.

John o’ Groats → Wick → Highland cows → Inverness

We spent time around John o’ Groats, then headed towards Wick. On the way back we had a great time watching Highland cows before completing the loop to Inverness.

We returned the Enterprise car in Inverness and travelled back towards Edinburgh.

How we handled food on the NC500

We carried our own food for much of the drive and heated what we had brought during our beach stop. That made the route more flexible and reduced the pressure to find a restaurant at every remote stop.

Read our food-saving guide →

Why this trip was worth £600

The £600 did not buy us a luxury road trip. It bought us freedom: the ability to stop beside beaches, spend time at Kylesku Bridge, change pace when the scenery was too good to rush through, and enjoy the Highlands without measuring the trip by how many paid attractions we visited.

Practical guides behind this budget

More real UK budget trips

Our NC500 road-trip kit

Remote road trips make connectivity, charging and weather protection more important. These are items from our own kit.

Coverage was mostly 4G for us, but it dropped to E in a few more remote places.

Carried on all our trips for navigation, photos and long days on the road.

Part of our regular travel camera setup for scenic and outdoor trips.

Our main waterproof layer; we do not normally carry an umbrella.

Our regular cold-weather layers when conditions call for them.

Part of our kit for darker outdoor stops and emergencies.

See our complete travel kit →

Before you travel

Reconfirm every fare, stop, timetable, visa or entry requirement, baggage rule and food-import restriction with the responsible provider.