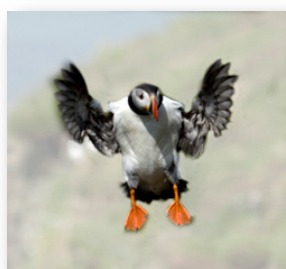


CHALICE

HEBRIDEAN WILDLIFE CRUISES

NEWSLETTER

ALL CHANGE FOR 2008....



A TOUGH DECISION, BUT IT WILL STILL BE 'BUSINESS AS USUAL'!

Well folks, if you haven't checked the website recently, then you may not know that Chalice is for sale. This wasn't an easy decision for us, but we feel that the time is right to bring some changes into what we're doing. We've just finished our fifth season, and thanks to guests like you, we have enjoyed another busy year, with most trips sailing at capacity and a healthy percentage of repeat bookings.

So why are we selling Chalice? Well, running wildlife cruises may seem like an idyllic lifestyle, but it means that Chris is away from home for over six months of the year and that there is little opportunity to plan for anything else during the cruising season. Of course it would be possible to employ a relief skipper (in fact we have done this in 2007) but then the whole thing starts to become 'just another business'. So we decided that the best way ahead would be to introduce more flexibility and choice for ourselves and really start and look at what it is that we can offer you.

It turned out that Rob Barlow - who owns the *Elizabeth G* - was also looking at life in a similar way, so we hatched a cunning plan. Rob had already agreed to run a number of dive charters on his boat in 2008, and didn't want to commit to any other work. After some discussion and lots of tea (honest!) we decided that a practical solution for both of us would be to work together with Rob running the dive charters and Chris filling in the spaces with wildlife cruises - in other words a boat-share. This roughly gives us a working schedule of two weeks on / two weeks off and means that between us we can keep the boat running for longer through the season. We'll be handling all of our own bookings as 'Chalice Charters'.

Because of the commitment to diving work in 2008, we won't be running as many wildlife or specialised cruises as we would like to, but we think that we've come up with 'something for everyone'. Please let us know if you think otherwise.

Welcome to the new-look Chalice newsletter. You'll see that there are going to be some changes for 2008 but hopefully this is all for the better and will ultimately enable us to begin to offer you more choices of holiday. Read about our new short Jura and the Corryreckan cruise and how we aim to offer you more value for money with extra crew, time on board and facilities. As ever, we welcome your feedback, so if you've got any points you'd like to make - let's hear them. Thank you.



Chris Jackson, Skipper.

CHALICE CHARTERS



The Elizabeth G

All 2008 cruises should be delivered using the Elizabeth G. This ship is a bit like 'Chalice on steroids' and indeed the main saloon and observation deck were modeled closely on Chalice.

From the guest's point of view, accommodation is similar to that on Chalice with the exception that every cabin has its own hand-basin - a welcome addition made possible by a couple of metres increase in overall length. Again there are three toilets (with one at main-deck level) and two bathrooms. Every cabin has central heating and natural light. Not having a for'ard saloon (the skipper now sleeps on deck....) means that deck space improves too, and extra seating will be installed over the winter. Just like Chalice, she is fully stabilised and we're confident that we can continue to deliver and improve the 'Chalice Experience' with Elizabeth G!

2007 Sightings

It's been another good year for wildlife sightings. Most unusual was a small school of Risso's dolphins which we saw off Arisaig on the last day of August. Otherwise the basking shark population seems to have heard that the Hebrides is quite a good place to be and in the latter part of the season, sea-eagle sightings were outnumbering golden eagles - and even buzzards! We spent some time at the Shiants watching a great skua and an arctic skua chasing puffins. The puffin's defence mechanism when dived-bombed is priceless - having the aerodynamics of a breeze block it simply stops flying and drops like a stone into the sea. This seemed to continually fox the skuas, which must be getting pretty hungry by now!

Bottlenose dolphins managed to find us again this year in Gometra Harbour, once again turning up right in the middle of dinner. Chris quickly launched the Zodiac and zoomed off to the harbour entrance to see what would ensue. When the same thing happened last year in Tobermory a very excited and noisy cook made photography almost impossible, but as you'll see a little bit of selfishness and some patience paid dividends..... The guests were able to see the spectacle from the comfort of Chalice.



CHALICE CHARTERS

What else is new for 2008?



✓ ChaliceCam: yes folks, once again, you saw it first on Chalice. It's all very well seeing what's above the water and sometimes what's in the water pays us a brief visit. But what about what's *under* the water? This year we've successfully trialled our

underwater camera rig - with good results. This can be deployed beneath the boat when at anchor and we've been amazed at the variety and diversity of marine life that's down there.



✓ The yellow peril: perhaps not for the faint-hearted, but the more adventurous amongst you might like to try out our new kayak! It's an inflatable expedition kayak and ideal for mooching around some of the

quiet wee places that we slip into. Here's Elaine trying to beat the sea flat.

✓ Quality as much as quantity: twice this season we've proved that it's not how far you travel, it's what you see that makes the difference, and have cut back on sea time in favour of seeing more wildlife or spending longer ashore.

We've decided that in the future, we're going to place more emphasis on stopping and looking rather than simply tearing

off to the next location. This picture, taken by one guest just goes to show what we would have missed had we been dashing off from Canna one morning.....Please let us know if you think we've got the balance right or wrong!



✓ More Crew: it's been our policy on Chalice to try and run all of our trips with four crew - Skipper, Cook, Deckhand and Guide/Observer. It's our intention that that same level of crew will sail on board Elizabeth G, rather than try and cut costs at the expense of safety and guest comfort.

Enter (and exit) Big John

Chris decided that a couple of weeks off wouldn't harm him this year and asked our friend John Maughan if he'd like to skipper a couple of charters for us. 'Big' John agreed and first of all headed off on a 'Not St Kilda' trip, then later on a St Kilda cruise.

Poor John must've run over an albatross in his landrover at some point as on both occasions he had to deal with inclement weather. However, John did a first class job for our guests on

both cruises and even though they didn't make St Kilda, everyone came back smiling. Here's a picture of John trying to look as rugged as the Cuillins behind him! CONGRATULATIONS are in order too, as John has just secured a job with CalMac Ferries as Motorman on the Tobermory/Kilchoan ferry. This means that he now has a full-time job with career prospects based near his home on Mull. Well done John!



✓ With our compliments: with the exception of full-boat charters, next season all soft drinks and water will be provided as part of your holiday. In addition, we'll be providing complimentary table wine at dinner. Additional wine, beer and lager will be available for purchase as normal.

✓ Watch this space: new projection/viewing facilities are going to be installed on board Elizabeth G to allow information and presentations/slideshows to be shown on a big screen in the saloon.

✓ Secure Car parking: has always been available but now we'll handle it for you with your booking. This is indoor secure parking offered by Stoddarts of Oban.

✓ More for no more: we're trying hard here! Two of our cruises will depart Oban at the earlier time of 10.00am. More time at sea for no more cost. Let's see how it goes.

CHALICE CHARTERS

Jura and the Corryreckan

This is a new one for us. For no real reason (apart from the fact the no-one ever asks us) we tend not to sail south of Oban, which means we're missing some beautiful scenery. Twice this season Chris has headed off to the north of Jura and the Corryreckan ("because it's there...") So now it's official - we're heading off in that direction next year. We hope to sail right around Jura (and probably through the Gulf of Corryreckan) down to Islay and Oronsay/Colonsay, possibly calling in at the Garvellachs too. As ever, the weather will have final say but there will be a 'plan B'.

Top Award for a top bloke!



We're really pleased to be able to tell you that wildlife photographer Chris Gomersall has scooped a top international award and is now European Wildlife Photographer of the Year!

Chris has almost become a fixture on Chalice but we've prised him away and are delighted that he will be leading our Wildlife Photography Cruise in June next year on Elizabeth G.

The Website...can still be accessed at www.mvchalice.com,

although the new address is www.chalicecharters.com. All of the cruise details are up there along with the trip reports from this season. You might notice that some of the text looks unusual - '?' instead of '£'. This is because we've just switched it onto a new management application and we're busy working through the glitches. Isn't technology a wonderful thing....

It's a kind of magic....

We were really pleased that guest Archie Smith from Stirling joined us for his fifth cruise aboard Chalice this season. Archie is a truly 'magic' guest and a paid-up member of the Magic Circle - bribe him with chocolate cake, and a new dimension is added to each evening.

Once again Archie amazed everyone with his impromptu performances, and although carried out at close quarters, we're still all mystified as to how he does it. Thanks Archie!



A real smasher

Those of you who sailed with us this year can't fail to have been impressed with the irrepressible good humour of Helen - supplier of Skipper's tea,



washer-up of plates and breaker of countless wine glasses (not to mention collector-of-dead-things-from-beaches...). After six months afloat with hords of guests and slave driver of a skipper, you'd think that she would be quietly retiring back down to Ess...oops, sorry, Kent. But no, this Kentish Maid (or is it a Maid of Kent?) wants to come back for MORE next year! Well done Helen! Now, about those knots.....