

CHALICE

HEBRIDEAN WILDLIFE CRUISES

NEWSLETTER

FAREWELL TO CHALICE.....

(...and not a dry eye in the house.....)



Following a season with *Elizabeth G*, we used *Chalice* for the final time in 2009.

Although the sale of *Chalice* was agreed towards the end of 2008, the buyers would not be able to complete immediately, so we agreed that we would use her again in 2009.

We had a fantastic season - although it wasn't our busiest, it was certainly one of our most enjoyable and we met friends old and new as we sailed around the Hebrides. We only had three trips scheduled to go to St Kilda, but made successful visits on all occasions, spending some quality time ashore in gorgeous weather.

There's not a replacement for *Chalice* lined up just yet, so for 2010 we'll be using *Elizabeth G* again, albeit on a reduced itinerary. I really feel it's time to sit back for a short while and take a careful look at how we deliver our holidays - even more importantly, how we *could* deliver them. It may seem like an idyllic lifestyle, but it can be very demanding and with such a short cruising season, it's also very intense, with little or new time off to 'recharge'.



Happy New Year Folks!

*Yes, it's the end of an era. *Chalice* has sailed out of Oban for the last time and her mooring sits forlorn and empty in the bay.*

*I never thought that I'd miss a material thing so much, but talking to other skippers it would seem that such an 'attachment' is not unusual. *Chalice* has been my home for eight years and has provided so much enjoyment for so many people. Not to mention keeping us all safe when the weather became 'difficult'.*

Even so, in every ending is a new beginning - so a new adventure starts....

Chris Jackson, Skipper.

CHALICE CHARTERS



The Elizabeth G

For those of you who haven't experienced *Elizabeth G* yet, fear not - we have guests returning this year who have sailed with us on both *Elizabeth G* and *Chalice*. Of course the vessels are different, and it's very difficult to compare the two, but needless to say, *Elizabeth G* is well-equipped, comfortable and safe. Individual hand basins in every cabin have proved a hit with many, although we still get people backing off when they discover that they can't have private 'en-suite' facilities. Oh well....

For convenience, we'll be using the Chalice mooring in Oban Bay, hopefully still embarking from the Railway Pier as normal - whatever 'normal' is. It seems to be getting increasingly difficult to get safe access to this pier, but if all else fails we can easily transfer guests out to the mooring - which also has the benefit of not attracting charges from King Calmac!

2009 Wildlife

I can't think of any particularly unusual sightings for 2009, but I always have to remember that what might seem commonplace to me ("oh look, *another* white-tailed sea eagle....") could just be the highlight of someone else's holiday.

Now can you imagine my consternation when we were host to a branch of the British Naturalists Association? (Panic not - this is the bunch that keep their clothes on!). They were great - they knew just about everything about everything - birds, plants, fungi, seaweed, rocks, but we had specific requests for 'sea eagle' and 'otter'. "No problem", I said boldly, "I'll find them for you".

Me and my big mouth....

These two species managed to elude us all week, until the last morning of the trip, when we were able to marvel at two otters feeding off the starboard side, while a sea eagle surveyed us from the port side then graced us with a flypast.

Phew! It's all out there folks, all we have to do is see it!!

Trees for Life

Those of you who sailed with us in 2009 should be familiar with the Trees for Life initiative which we supported through the year.

Trees for Life is a charity whose aim is to reinstate the Caledonian Forest which once covered over 1.5 million hectares and is now reduced to only 1% of this area. For every guest who sailed with us, we planted a tree in the forest, inviting guests to make a contribution of their own. We've established a 'Chalice Charters' grove of trees in the forest and will continue to support the work of Trees for Life over the coming years. You can check out their website at www.treesforlife.org.uk.

CHALICE CHARTERS

2010 Cruises

Because we're 'chartering in' again this year we're slightly restricted on the number of cruises that we can offer, so we're going for quality rather than quantity. Some of the trips have filled really quickly, and we're looking forward to seeing some familiar faces around the dinner table again. Here's a list of what's what....

Friday 7th May - Friday 14th May:

The Outer Isles and St Kilda

7 nights £1255 (spaces)

Saturday 22nd May - Friday 28th May

The Inner Hebrides

6 nights £990 (spaces)

Saturday 12th June - Sunday 20th June

Wildlife of the Outer Hebrides with Chris Gomersall

8 nights £1550 (space for one female sharing)

Saturday 26th June - Friday 2nd July

Private Charter - GDT **

6 nights

Saturday 17th - Sunday 25th July

North Skye and the Summer Isles with Duncan MacDonald

8 nights £1350 (space for two!)

** This trip was scheduled for the German Wildlife Photographers Association (GDT), but doesn't look as if it will go ahead. As such we'll be releasing these dates for another trip. In addition it's possible that we'll be able to acquire another one or two trips depending on the general itinerary of Elizabeth G. If there's a trip that you'd like to see up there, let us know!

The Future

What of the future for Chalice Charters then....?

Honest answer? Right now I don't know. Despite what I said on the first page, Being able to sail the waters of the Hebrides and share the scenery and wildlife with others is a real privilege. Having said that, I'd hate it to become no more than just a 'job'.

As such, I think it's important that we sometimes stop and look at what we're doing and think about how we're doing it and why we're doing it. I know the things that I love about what I do and also the bits that I hate!

One thing that I'm always very aware of is that as guests, you pay us your hard-earned cash to deliver a holiday that is memorable for all of the right reasons. I think that from the feedback which we receive and the number of guests who return again and again, we have to be doing something right. Dare I say that we might even be good at what we do?

This means that we can't afford to become complacent. If we're going to continue to offer great holidays then we need to be able to improve and tweak the way in which we do it. Chalice was a fantastic boat, but because of her construction, difficult to modify to improve guest facilities. Perhaps we'll continue to 'charter in' and add our own twist to the holidays that we offer? Perhaps there will be a Chalice replacement?

In the mean time, we're really looking forward to 2010 which starts this month carrying out bird surveys around Skerryvore, which lies to the south of Tiree. This work is in advance of the installation of a proposed wind/tide turbine installation and involves sailing a grid of 250nm while some poor soul stands on the top deck and counts birds. Meanwhile, back in the wheelhouse, the tea will be flowing and the heating on 'max'.....

The Website...

As ever, the website is at www.mvchalice.com, and full details of the itineraries can be found on the 'Cruise Holidays 2010' page.