

# SHALEM PILGRIMAGE TO IONA - 2024

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### ABOUT TRAVEL

#### **Do I need travel documents?**

A passport valid for at least six months after your return from the pilgrimage is required for all U.S. citizens. If you are not a U.S. citizen, please contact your embassy or consulate to ensure that you obtain the proper documentation.

#### **What is required regarding vaccinations and COVID restrictions?**

Shalem does not require, but strongly encourages pilgrims to be fully vaccinated against COVID-19. We will also be following UK requirements related to travel and advise participants of any noteworthy precautions or actions that need to be taken.

#### **What airport should I use?**

The nearest major airport is Glasgow International Airport (GLA). It is also possible to travel to Iona from Edinburgh (EDI).

Most airlines have flights to Glasgow, and the airline will likely depend on your local hub. Note that some flights do not run every day. Be sure to choose flights that will allow you to arrive on Iona in time for our opening session (4:30pm Saturday, June 1, see below). Also, please note that because of the time required to travel to and from Iona, you should plan to stay at least one night somewhere in Scotland before departing for Iona and again before flying home.

#### **What about travel insurance?**

We strongly recommend Comprehensive Travel Protection Insurance. Please consult your travel agent or visit one of the various websites such as [www.travelguard.com](http://www.travelguard.com).

#### **Can I change money in the airport?**

Yes, there are ATM machines in the airport and these will give you a good rate. You might let your bank know you are traveling so that they know it is you using your card. In general, ATMs provide a better exchange rate than a "Bureau de Change."

### GETTING TO IONA

Traveling to Iona from Glasgow takes about seven hours if everything goes smoothly. The good news is that you can take public transportation the entire way there, and that the ferry, bus, and train lines run regularly.

#### **The overall route is:**

- 1) Getting from Edinburgh or Glasgow to Oban
- 2) Taking a ferry from Oban to Mull (Craignure)
- 3) Taking a public bus across Mull (from Craignure to Fionnphort)
- 4) Taking a second ferry from the other side of Mull (Fionnphort) to Iona

From wherever you arrive, your first goal is to get to Oban. This is the port from which you sail.

Travelers coming from Edinburgh or Glasgow can take the train. You can purchase tickets online via [Scotrail](#) or purchase them from a kiosk at the train station with your credit/debit card. You can purchase either a single (one way) ticket, or a return (round trip).

Traveling from Glasgow you will take **Glasgow Queen St.** station to **Oban**.

Traveling from Edinburgh you will first train to Glasgow and then switch there to a train bound for Oban.

The train station in Oban is right across the street from the ferry terminal, and you can easily walk across and purchase tickets inside. Here, you should purchase “return” (round trip) tickets for both the ferry to Craignure and the second ferry from Fionnphort to Iona). You can look at sailing schedules from **Oban to Craignure, Mull** on [the CalMac Ferries website](#), and also prebook tickets. The ferry takes about 45 minutes to cross over to Mull.

Once you arrive on Mull, the public buses will be parked in a lot on your immediate left. They travel to several locations, and you are looking for the one headed for **Fionnphort** (pronounced “finna-fort”). You can view the bus timetables on the [West Coast Motors website](#), and people on the island are also very happy to help if you ask them. The bus ride across Mull takes approximately 80 minutes. The road is winding and mostly single track, so if you have a sensitive stomach you will want to be prepared.

After arriving in Fionnphort, the ferry will be at the bottom of the parking lot. You can walk directly onto the ferry which [sails regularly during the day](#) (but does stop at night). The ride across to Iona takes only 10 minutes.

Once you are on Iona, the final leg of your journey is a short (.4 mile) walk up to the Columba Hotel. You can phone them (+44 01681 700 304) when you arrive, to have a van come and collect your luggage.

It is also possible to travel to and from Oban via Bus. This is a cheaper, but longer trip than traveling by train. You can view timetables and book tickets from Edinburgh or Oban to Glasgow with the CityLink bus service. The bus ride from Glasgow to Oban is approximately three hours. To travel from Edinburgh, you must first take the bus to Glasgow and continue on from the Buchanan St. Bus Station.

[This is the schedule](#) for busses from Glasgow to Oban.

You can purchase tickets on the [CityLink website](#).

## **ABOUT OUR SCHEDULE**

### **What time should I arrive on Iona?**

The opening session of our pilgrimage begins at **4:30 pm on Saturday, June 1, 2024, in the Sun Lounge of the St. Columba Hotel**. Please arrange your travel schedule to arrive in plenty of time for this opening session. If for any reason you are not able to make our opening session, please call the St. Columba Hotel and leave a message for the Shalem Leaders.

### **What if I arrive after the opening session has begun?**

Please try your best to arrive ahead of our opening session as it’s an important beginning to our time together. However, we know that the best laid plans can go awry and planes can be delayed! Our opening session will last from 4:30 until 6:00 pm. We will have dinner in the hotel that evening at 6:30 pm. If you arrive late, please join our session and plan to check in once you arrive. If you are unable to make any of the opening session, please join us for dinner.

### **What do our days on Iona look like?**

Our days on Iona follow a rhythm that is bookended by worship in the Abbey at 9am and 9pm. Each day also includes a delicious breakfast and dinner in the hotel.

The pilgrimage content varies each day, but generally includes plenary (all-together) gatherings and time for individual or small group reflection. Afternoons are generally free. There will also be one extended period of silence and a free day for pilgrims to rest and explore as they wish. A day by day schedule of our time is on the Shalem website.

### **ABOUT OUR HOTEL**

We will be staying in the St. Columba Hotel. Check in any time after 3:00pm.

#### **St. Columba Hotel**

Isle of Iona, Argyll PA76 6SL, UK

+44 (0)1681 700304

[info@stcolumba-hotel.co.uk](mailto:info@stcolumba-hotel.co.uk)

<http://www.stcolumba-hotel.co.uk>

#### **Do I need to be prepared for stairs?**

Second floor rooms at the St. Columba Hotel are accessible only by stairs, however the staff will take your luggage to your room when you arrive. Be sure to consult the Shalem staff before you register if you have concerns.

#### **Does the hotel have WIFI access?**

Complimentary WIFI access is available, however our experience is that in some rooms at the St. Columba Hotel the signal is spotty; access in the lounge is generally fine.

#### **Is there a washing machine and dryer?**

You can ask the hotel staff for a laundry bag and they will do your laundry for a small charge.

#### **How about hair dryers?**

Hair dryers are available in the hotel. It is not recommended to bring your own because the 220v outlets in the UK cause American hair dryers to overheat.

#### **If I want to come a day or two early, or stay a few days afterwards, how do I make these arrangements?**

You can make arrangements to arrive early directly with the hotel. Unfortunately the hotel is fully booked after our stay. You may be able to stay at another nearby hotel such as [the Argyll](#).

#### **Are bathrooms in the room or shared down the hall? Are linens provided?**

All rooms at the St. Columba Hotel have a private ensuite bathroom and linens are provided.

#### **Can I use a hotel refrigerator for medicine that needs refrigeration?**

You will need to make arrangements directly with the hotel.

#### **Can special dietary needs be accommodated?**

We may not be able to accommodate every preference, but we will certainly accommodate allergies. Please make those known on the health form we will ask you to complete and also reaffirm with the staff on site. Vegetarian options are available at each meal.

## **GENERAL INFORMATION**

### **Will my phone work in Scotland?**

Most American cell phones with an international plan will work in the UK, but roaming charges can be very high. Check with your cell phone provider before leaving home to confirm that your phone will work and to ask about associated costs. Note that there is little/no cell phone reception on Iona.

### **What do I need in order to plug in my devices?**

The UK has its own standard wall outlets, and you will need a plug adapter to use your devices. Note that the UK uses 220v power and most hairdryers and beauty accessories cannot handle this (even when using converters that many travel stores sell).

### **What is the currency? Where can I find out the exchange rate? How/where can I change money? How much money do I need?**

The currency throughout the UK is the Great British Pound (GBP). Exchange rates change daily, and the easiest way to get an approximate rate comparing dollars to pounds is to search on Google "1 USD to 1 GBP." The actual exchange rate you receive may differ slightly from this. Most stores in the UK and on Iona accept credit cards, but a few on Iona are cash only (note as of this writing there is no ATM on Iona).

You will need money for travel to/from Iona and also for any personal expenses such as beverages, laundry, room service, meals not specified on our itinerary, any extra excursions on the free day, snacks, souvenirs, as well as contributions you may choose to make to local churches, organizations or charities.

### **What to bring?**

Bring any medicines that you take on a regular basis as well as a list of medical information you would like doctors to know in case of emergency. We will send you a list of other items that pilgrims have found helpful in a future mailing. For now, consider bringing anything that nurtures your soul: art supplies, a journal, spiritual readings, a musical instrument; things that are lightweight and easy to carry.

### **What kind of clothes are needed?**

Dress is casual. In general, bring clothes that you can layer. The weather changes constantly in Scotland, even in the course of a single day. Sturdy shoes for hiking/walking and rain gear are essential. Average weather conditions can be found through Trip Advisor.

### **What is the level of physical activity?**

Our physical activity is moderate. On Iona, our plenary sessions will be in or nearby the hotel. Worship at the Abbey is a short walk from the hotel. Other activities listed on the itinerary require more walking, some of it on uneven ground, sometimes uphill.

Our pilgrimage leaders are available to talk with you if you have questions/concerns about mobility issues or physical readiness.

### **What if I need a doctor?**

Medical services are readily available on the mainland, however, please note that there are no doctors or medical services available on the Isle of Iona. The nearest hospital is about an hour away on the Isle of Mull. In the case of emergency, an individual may be taken by medivac

helicopter. Please check with your personal physician and the Shalem staff if you have questions or concerns about medical support.

Also we ask that you check with your health insurance carrier to understand what coverage is available to you while you are traveling in the United Kingdom. Be sure to bring your health insurance information with you.