



## THE HIGHLAND GAMES

Highland games have been a part of Scotland's culture for hundreds of years and are just as popular today as they've ever been. And it's no wonder when you experience the sense of community, heritage and celebration at each of Scotland's Highland games.

Every Highland games event has a unique character and traditions, and many are held in simply stunning locations. Make new friends with the locals and other visitors as you enjoy our Scottish hospitality and watch a gripping sporting spectacle of champions, with dancing, music, and more.

### VIRTUAL EVENTS

If you don't want to wait until next year to experience the Highland games in person, you can enjoy the amazing atmosphere that the games offer at a virtual event. These Highland games are set to stream performances, competitions and other interactive activities:

- [Dundonald Highland Games](#), 1 August
- [Cowal Highland Gathering](#), 27 - 29 August
- [Braemar Highland Games](#), 12 September

### HOW TO... HIGHLAND GAMES VIDEOS

Want to know how to caber toss, shot putt or weight for height? Whether you're a budding Highland games athlete, or just want to know more about how these amazing champions pull off these feats of strength, watch our 1-minute videos to find out more.

### WHAT ARE THE HIGHLAND GAMES?

Scotland's Highland games are usually one-day events taking place in outdoor spaces across the country. Built around traditional Highland sports such as the caber toss, tug o' war and the hammer throw, a Highland games event also includes Highland dancing and music, and lots of family fun such as food and craft stalls and games.

Many events will also involve livestock events, parades and even best-dressed pet competitions. Some Highland games continue into the night with more music gigs, ceilidhs and discos.

Our Highland games are so popular, that when Scots emigrated to other lands, they took the tradition across the world with them. Highland games have taken place in America since 1836, but also run in other countries such as Canada, Norway, New Zealand and Brazil. But there's no better way to experience them than in their original count.



### WHERE ARE THE HIGHLAND GAMES?

Though they may have started in Highland Scotland, the games these days stretch right across Scotland from the far north coast of the Highlands, out west to the island of South Uist, east to Aberdeenshire and south to Peebles.

### WHEN ARE THE HIGHLAND GAMES?

The Highland games events season begins in May with the Gourrock Highland Games, it peaks in July and August with over 30 events each month, and comes to a close towards the end of September with the Invercharron Highland Games. Most Highland games events take place at the weekend, on either a Saturday or a Sunday.



## HEAVY CONTESTS AND FIELD EVENTS

Heavy contests, including the hammer throw and weight for height, see competitors putting their muscles to the test, while field events such as the hill race and cycling competition test speed and stamina.

Competitors in the heavy events use a range of techniques to improve their chances of winning. One movement in the weight for height event goes by the somewhat surprising nickname of 'the handbag technique', because the starting position is similar to where one would hold a handbag.

Perhaps the games' most iconic event, the caber toss is rumoured to have stemmed from the need to toss logs over chasms. Nowadays, however, it is judged on style rather than distance: competitors aim to flip a log weighing up to 11 st so that it falls away from them in the '12 o'clock position'. The length it travels is entirely unimportant.



## MUSIC

For many, one of the most memorable sights of the Highland games is the massed bands, when hundreds of pipers and drummers from different groups come together to play and march in unison. Look out for the solo piping competitions, where competitors play in a range of styles, including the Pibroch, which is considered the classical music of the bagpipe. Pibrochs tend to be slow, stately and complex.

## HIGHLAND DANCING

Dancers give dazzling displays of fancy footwork in Scottish dances, such as the sword dance and the famous Highland fling. Competing for titles both solo and in groups, their colourful outfits and infectious energy will leave you in high spirits. The Cowal Highland Gathering is renowned for the quality of its Highland dancing, drawing in the best performers from around the globe as they compete in the Scottish and World Championships.



## HIGHLAND CLANS

Highland games once saw clan members go head-to-head in fierce competition - and you'll still see this enthusiasm when clans muster all their might in a tug o' war. These days, clan attendance at games is now more of a social and ceremonial affair. Some Highland games are part of a wider clan gathering - a celebratory get-together featuring parades, Scottish music and dancing, feasts, heritage events and much joviality.

## CHIEFTAINS

The ceremonial role of chieftain is bestowed upon a member of the local community or clan chief, who then leads processions, opens the games and oversees the whole event with aplomb.

Did you know that several games have boasted famous celebrity chieftains, including singer Susan Boyle and actors Ewan McGregor and Dougray Scott?



## THE HISTORY OF THE HIGHLAND GAMES

Some believe the roots of the Highland games date as far back as the 11th century, when King Malcolm III called a foot race to the summit of Craig Choinnich, near Braemar, in the hopes of finding the fastest runner in the land to become his personal courier. Many games still include a hill race, although the winner is no longer destined for a life of servitude!



The games evolved into a test not only of strength and stamina, but also of creative dance and music skills, to keep kings, queens and clan chiefs entertained.

Highland games as we know them today have been celebrated around Scotland since the 1800s and regularly draw in crowds of thousands.

Amongst the most historic is the Braemar Gathering, which was awarded Royal Patronage by Queen Victoria and is still regularly attended by the reigning monarch and other members of the Royal Family.

Highland dancing at the games was originally an all-male event, and it wasn't until the late 19th century that women started to enter. The Cowal Gathering is renowned for the quality of its Highland dancing, drawing in the best performers from around the globe as they compete in the Scottish and World Championships.

The Highland games were so impressive, that the founder of the modern Olympics, Baron Coubertin, introduced the hammer throw, shot putt and the tug o' war after watching the Highland display at the 1889 Paris Exhibition. The hammer throw and shot putt are still included to this day.

Haggis hurling began as a practical joke in the 1970s but is now a popular event at many Highland games - there's even a World Haggis Hurling Association dedicated to the sport! The current world record was set at the Milngavie Highland Games in 2011, when Lorne Coltart hurled a haggis an impressive 217 ft.

Join the words to the definitions.

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|--|----------|
| 1. taking a powerful hold upon one's interest or feelings.           | aplomb   |
| 2. beginning and showing signs of promise in a particular sphere.    | bestow   |
| 3. a party with music, dancing, and often storytelling.              | budding  |
| 4. the capacity to sustain a prolonged stressful effort or activity. | ceilidhs |
| 5. abyss, a narrow steep-walled canyon.                              | chasm    |
| 6. toss so as to cause to turn over in the air.                      | flip     |
| 7. marked by lofty or imposing dignity.                              | gripping |
| 8. gather, bring together.   | muster   |
| 9. convey as a gift.   | stamina  |
| 10. self-assurance.  | stately  |

Match the two parts of each sentence.

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| 1. The virtual Highland games stream _____                   | so that it falls in the '12 o'clock position' from them. |
| 2. The Highland games videos _____                           | begins in May and finishes at the end of September.      |
| 3. The Highland games include sports events as well as _____ | the classical music of the bagpipe.                      |
| 4. The Highland games take place in Scotland and _____       | performances, competitions and other activities.         |
| 5. The Highland games season _____                           | speed and stamina.                                       |
| 6. Heavy contests test _____                                 | for titles both solo and in groups.                      |
| 7. For field events, you need _____                          | from a foot race he organized.                           |
| 8. The handback technique is used _____                      | opens the games and oversees the whole event.            |
| 9. In the caber toss competitors flip a log _____            | last just one minute.                                    |
| 10. The Pibroch is considered _____                          | competitors' strength.                                   |
| 11. Dancers in colourful outfits compete _____               | was set at the Milngavie Highland Games in 2011.         |
| 12. Clan members compete in _____                            | are Olympic events.                                      |
| 13. The chieftain leads processions, _____                   | other countries as well.                                 |
| 14. King Malcolm III chose his personal messenger _____      | in the weight for height event.                          |
| 15. The Braemar Gathering is attended by _____               | the tug o' war event.                                    |
| 16. The Cowal Gathering best performers _____                | music and dancing, food and craft stalls and games.      |
| 17. The hammer throw and shot putt _____                     | the monarch and other Royal Family members.              |
| 18. The haggis hurling world record _____                    | compete in the Scottish and World Championships.         |