

Hi Friends –

This is an update to prior info about going on the Eastminster trip to Scotland October 8-22, 2026.

I'm attaching all the info we shared at the prior info meeting at the church so that you will have it to refer to and will have it to pass along to a friend or family member who may be interested in joining us on the trip. We have 22 folks totally properly registered (form completed and deposit paid, Passport picture sent) at this time and I'm aware of 4 more who are in the various stages of getting on the list to go. We need a total of 40 to fill the trip so that our pricing works to cover all expenses of the trip except flights, UK entry visa, lunches, 2 dinners and souvenirs. All other expenses are covered in the trip cost: rooms at double occupancy, bus/gas and Scottish guides, entry fees at all sites, taxes and gratuities at hotels and site guides, breakfast daily and all dinners except two. Please let me know if you need help getting registered, if you are inviting someone to go with us not from Eastminster (they are very welcome!), and if you have any other questions. I'll be on the Western NC mission trip later this week returning to Columbia on April 23. After April 23 I'll be very reachable locally throughout the summer, so I'm easy to reach. Leave a message if I don't answer and I'll call you right back as we are in the yard and garden much at this time of year but I'm checking messages often.

We have a **soft deadline on May 1** to review our enrollees to determine how many short we are of the desired 40 participants. Alpha Tours will advise me if I need to expand announcing availability of the trip beyond our church to other groups or if we need to reprice the trip and stop selling more seats. My goal is to get the 40 guaranteed as I know how hard we worked to get the best pricing at every part of the trip and I'm not at all interested in repricing – and am sure that's how you feel too! So please help me to ensure that folks beyond our meeting group at Eastminster know about the trip and have the brochures, etc. to assist them in getting on the trip. **The true deadline for final payment of all trip fees continues to be May 31.** When Betty Ann receives your enrollment form, check and Passport picture, she will send you an invoice for the final payment and information about trip insurance. Follow those instructions for insurance rate calculations and email Betty Ann at Alpha Christian Tours with your selections, if any, and she will send you an adjusted statement for trip cost plus insurance for the final payment. Note there is a \$50 late payment fee after May 31.

Betty Ann has secured a number of rooms at our Edinburgh hotel for October 8 for those people who want to go a day early so that you have a rest day before our tour begins or to accommodate those people who are doing a few personal days elsewhere before joining the trip in Edinburgh. Making this extra day's reservation in the Edinburgh hotel assures you the best group pricing even a day or two early and assures that you don't have to change rooms when the group arrival officially begins. Call or write me for more info about this opportunity. Cost is \$190 per person, which includes breakfast on Oct 9 before you leave to ride over to the airport for the beginning of our tour when the planes have all arrived. That tour lasts from 1:00 to 4:00 pm with the bus before returning everyone to the Edinburgh hotel. That is a new addition to our opportunity since several people wanted to add on days to the front-end of the trip.

An update on flights: the airlines are beginning to consolidate flights into fewer schedules due to gas/oil prices rising, but it seems none of our most preferred schedules have been affected yet. Gas surcharges haven't taken effect yet either although I've seen some slight increases (not called surcharges so they don't have to reimburse you later!) on a few prime flights. So, if you haven't worked on getting your flights yet, it might be good to start working on that as this war in the Middle East seems to drag on and on. I did talk extensively with Betty Ann Buckley at Alpha Christian Tours who had advised us to wait to buy air after the May 31 payment deadline, but she too notices that this war seems to be lasting longer than anyone expected, and she also says that saving the surcharge now seems the thing to do. So, sorry for the change of attitude on that issue, but who among us ever knows how these global issues will work out.

Continuing on flights, there are numerous schedules out of Columbia through Atlanta or Charlotte that go into Edinburgh avoiding Heathrow. Delta and American both have schedules using Boeing 767 planes which seat people 2x3x2 so there are lots of seats with aisle space that is most favored by especially our longer legged men travelers. I've helped several people looking at the Charlotte flight schedules and the shuttle to the airport there, but a majority of our travelers so far are flying out of Columbia and having family or friends drop them at the airport. Avoiding airport parking at either CAE or CLT will save you at least \$300 per car for two weeks - that's a lot of lunches or souvenirs that you can now buy with saved funds! Air pricing is very similar at both of our closest airports, so you have many good choices to review and make your selection.

Mark your calendars for these summer meetings once you've finished signed onto the trip roster. Meeting Room at the church will be announced at a later date and will be sent to all who have registered for the trip about 2 weeks before these dates.

June 7 and July 26 – Douglass Key will lead us from 3:00 to 4:30 pm in talking about the history of Scotland and the growth of the Christian church there, about the life of John Knox and how his presence and fiery sermons helped fan the flames of the Scottish Reformation, and the state of the church in Scotland today. Out of all this we will learn the details of how Presbyterianism grew from the Reformation and spread to the US with numerous waves of Scots and Scots-Irish especially in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

August 16 – Carol Byrd will lead us from 3:00 to 4:30 pm in talking about Celtic Spirituality and about what we will see and experience especially while we visit at Iona. She will talk a bit about Catholic missionaries/priests Patrick in Ireland and his friend Columba in Scotland and the beginnings of the early church in these islands that are now Great Britain. We'll see how the culture of the ancient Scots and other early people (Picts, Gaels, Norse, and others) blended well with the teachings of Christianity and made this beautiful land a place where the church flourished. At this meeting we will also spend a few moments sharing the last-minute details about trip participation, have handouts on packing and wardrobe appropriate for this fall adventure, and answer your final travel questions. All participants will have time to sign up to offer a morning devotional or one evening prayer so we'll circulate sign-up lists and some suggested materials that may help you in constructing your presentations.

Thanks for your participation on this great adventure and thank you for telling others so that we can have a full bus! I can't wait to share this experience and this beautiful place with you!

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