

The route starts and finishes in the city of Inverness, itself a scenic, three-hour train ride across the Cairngorm mountain range from Edinburgh.

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Traveling clockwise, it follows Scotland's western coastline, plowing upward through the northwest Highlands, and then continues across the very top of mainland Britain.

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Travelers then drop down the east coast, closing the loop on the 120-mile journey from John O'Groats -- Britain's most northerly village -- back to Inverness.

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The highlights of the NC500 are as diverse as they are numerous.

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The route boasts some of the most dramatic scenery in Europe, with everything from snow-clad peaks, wind-ruffled lochs and ruined castles to soaring sea cliffs, sheltered coves and rolling moorland.

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With no time limit on completing NC500, those making the journey can cover the 500 miles in a long weekend, or take things more slowly and savor the experience over the course of a couple of weeks.

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