

Introduction

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This is becoming a very popular staging point on a cruise around Ardnamurchan point and on up towards the Sound of Sleat. It is well sheltered although strong winds from SE to NW do penetrate but do not cause much of a sea. (If you have one of the far out moorings it can be a long haul back to the boat in a dinghy). The bay is serviced by Arisaig Marine who service the moorings and have an amenities building and cafe; on the shore convenient for the single pontoon at the head of the bay. It's a really pretty place and if you are there for a day or so there is the added romance of the steam train from Fort William to Mallaig sounding its plaintive whistle over the Loch as it passes in the morning and back in the evening.

On your first visit you will possibly be quite surprised by the number of boats here (see our photograph gallery). That is because it is a convenient spot to leave a boat, having good connection by rail to the South via Fort William as well as a goodish bus service along the coast. From here you have the choice of heading up the Sound of Sleat and the Inner Passage to the Minch, going up the West side of Skye to the Outer Hebrides, pottering around the Small Isles or wandering back down towards the South outside or inside the Isle of Mull; the computations for a summer cruise are virtually limitless.

The one thing you will find is that the staff at Arisaig marine is fairly busy for the first couple of hours of the day as they run a small ferry/trippers boat out to the Small Isles. If you want to book a mooring for the night or enquire about leaving a boat there etc it's best to wait until the ferry has left at 1100.

Apart from the ferry there are just a couple of boats working creels so us yachties have the place pretty much to ourselves and it is all very friendly. Arisaig Marine has a thriving business providing services to the yachting fraternity and you will be able to source most of your requirements from them as well as getting help with any problems.

Arisaig was originally settled by monks but developed into a thriving agricultural community before being decimated by the Highland Clearances in the early nineteenth century when a thousand souls were shipped from here to Canada where they called their new home – yes, Arisaig.

Since then it has become a mainly dormitory town astride the road/rail link between Fort William and Mallaig and nowadays many of the houses are let as holiday accommodation during the summer. It is thought that Charlie made his final departure for France after Culloden from somewhere near here

For general notes on cruising in these waters we have compiled an article which you can find on this site at:<xml>
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<http://www.visitmyharbour.co.uk/cruising-west-coast-scotland/>
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Approach

[The entrance looks complicated but is well marked;](#)

Some old hands do sail in and out but on a first visit you'd best use the engine, indeed many seasoned mariners would not consider transiting the passage under sail as the wind becomes very fluky once you get to the first turn opposite the "Porters Lodge"

The immediate problem with this entrance is that there is no large scale UKHO chart of the Loch; Antares have charted it and the CCC pilot (Ardnamurchan to Cape Wrath) has a chartlet. AC 2207 does mark the perches but very faintly and as far as we can see they are not all there.

We have produced a Google overlay which shows the navigation marks [Here](#)

Whether coming from the North or South it you should identify the entrance positively before starting your approach, a somewhat obvious statement but here you do have to be extra careful because there are quite a few off-lying

islets creating "false" entrances. To assist you the southerly headland has a large (15ft X 15ft) white patch painted on it. Just make sure you can see that "Porters Lodge" or "Cottage" and that it bears just north of east. That can be difficult on a grey day as it must be about the only building not painted white and doesn't stand out well. The orange lead in marks shown by the CCC pilot can be very difficult to find (if not impossible). Once you have picked up the approach line as you get closer you will slowly be able to see the first porthand perches so will be confident where to make the turn to port towards the next mark which is a green SHM.

Be aware that the first port perch on all the present charts (2017) was washed away during the winter and there are no plans to replace it. The second port perch has been replaced.

After that it is fairly logical but do not scrape round the marks as if you are racing, give them a couple of boat lengths offing. You should also take care that the currents in the entrance are not setting you off the ideal course to make good, and naturally it is best to make the approach in the last hour of the flood (deepest water, still a bit of rise to come if you run aground and slackish currents).

None of the marks are lit at night so an approach after dark is not an option – even twilight would be difficult.

Berthing

There are no alongside berths here

The pontoon at the head of the loch is for loading/unloading and taking on water and, of course, for the ferry. Thus your options are to pay for a mooring (2013 prices were £13 for a small boat and £15 for a larger one) or find somewhere to anchor.

We have produced a chartlet of the mooring numbers to assist you with finding your allocated mooring but there is plenty of room outside those moorings to drop an anchor (be advised that if you make use of the facilities at Arisaig Marine pontoon they will make a charge of £4.00 if you are not using one of their moorings).

Update 2022 The buoys are now each marked with large letters showing their identity which makes the next few paragraphs historical (and hysterical if you were here earlier in the century!)

When you contact Arisaig Marine for a mooring they will tell you where the mooring is and the description goes something like "The moorings are laid out in North-South trots, your mooring is in the third trot, fourth buoy in between the so-and-so and the so- and-so. Simple!! No it's not - as you can see from our picture gallery as you pass the last marks inbound you are presented with a blanket of moored boats, all lying to the wind (which is unlikely to be N/S) and with no obvious trot alignment. Coupled with that is the fact that it is the small, yellow pick-up buoys which are numbered, not the buoys themselves, and those moorings with boats on them all have the pick up buoy up on their foredecks with number concealed. You will also note from the mooring schematic that there is not a regular number of buoys in each trot - so the northern buoy in each trot doesn't start the same as the one, logically, in the trot next to it.

If you are lucky it will all appear very obvious and you'll locate your buoy with ease, if you are not then you'll at least be reassured as to your sanity when you see other boats swanning up and down trying to identify their moorings as well. We were particularly unlucky in that our buoy's pick up buoy was supported by an unnumbered fender – and I still don't know if it was the right one!

Most skippers use the pontoon for landing in their dinghies but this is not the official place to do so. In a stay of four days I saw one dinghy holed by sharp metal on the pontoon and another got caught under the gantry on a rising tide and was sunk along with its engine. The best place to land your dinghy is on the slip round the corner from the pontoon but you'll have to drag it ashore (which is why people tie up at the pontoon)

If you don't want to make the trip all the way in to the Arisaig anchorage there is a spot just off the Cottage/Porters

Lodge opposite the third PHM on the way in; best only used in Easterly to South Easterly winds and you need to tiptoe in on the echo sounder.

Another alternative to the main bay is the little bay in behind Morroch Point but that is fairly crowded with moorings run by a local moorings association and you should be careful when coming ashore there as there is a fence dividing the cottages from the shore line. The locals prefer that you keep to the shore side of that fence. Again you'd need to approach cautiously on the echo sounder and definitely use a tripping line.

Facilities

There is water and a hose at the pontoon and you can tie up there to replenish when the ferry is not alongside. Diesel can be bunkered alongside the pier at HW otherwise you will have to collect it in cans. Petrol is a major problem as the nearest petrol is halfway to Mallaig and you can't carry cans on public transport. You can get Calor Gas and Propane at the village shop and 907 Gaz refills at the boatyard. Provisions are available at the Spar shop in the village. Toilets, showers and a laundrette are available in the Marine amenities block.

There are good road and rail connections with the south here but you would need a taxi to transfer your gear to or from the railway station if joining a boat here.

There is a reasonable internet connection in the bay using a dongle and if you have BT open zone you can get a connection in the cafe;

What To Do

There is a cafe at the marine amenities block along with a souvenir shop which carries some very basic chandlery and fishing tackle. You will find two hotels and a restaurant on the seafront and further details of what to do at

[North of Ardnamurchan text.docx \(scottishanchorages.co.uk\)](#)

We are not in total agreement with that site on the undesirability of the spot having spent several days here awaiting a spare valve repair kit for our dinghy and thoroughly enjoyed it.

Since that note we have stopped here three or four times as well as both Mallaig and Armadale; we would agree Mallaig is possibly the best of the three for crew change and a major re-victualing, but of the three we would opt for Arisaig as the best for a stop over.

History