

*Exploring Scotland*

*There's more to Harris than tweed, finds Heidi Soholt*



*Breathtaking: Caberfeidh (below) is a large, luxurious house surrounded by stunning beaches, ideally placed to explore the picturesque delights of Harris*



# OUTER SPACE

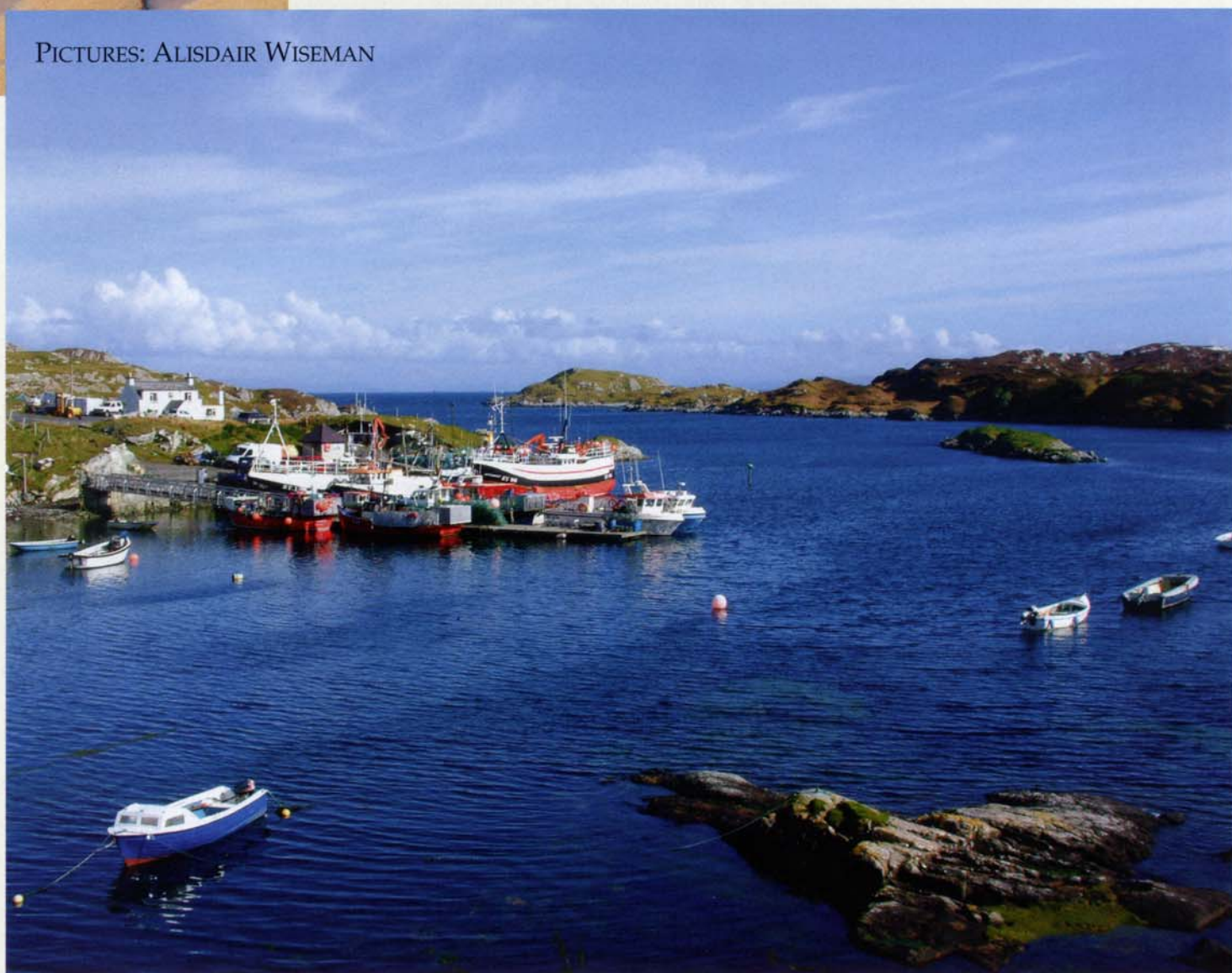
## *odyssey*

**T**O be honest, to me the Outer Hebrides had always been synonymous with wet, windy weather and midges, so a week self-catering on a far-flung Scottish island wasn't exactly my idea of holiday heaven. However, despite my mis-

givings, I was persuaded to give the Isle of Harris a try and, much to my surprise, I was completely won over by its wild beauty, breathtaking beaches and quirky charm.

We arrived at our destination via a short and comfortable ferry ride from Uig on the Isle of

PICTURES: ALISDAIR WISEMAN



*An island with  
a real sense  
of tranquillity  
and stillness*

Skye. As we drove seven miles south west from the port in Tarbert – the island's small but bustling main town – to the house we had rented in Seilebost, the strange lunar-like landscape of eastern Harris made an immediate impression.

The area, which was used in the sci-fi film 2001 Space Odyssey, had a real sense of tranquillity and stillness, underlined by the fact that there was little traffic on the mostly single track road that serves as the island's main thoroughfare.

As the road twisted its way south and west, the barren landscape transformed into carpets of bright wildflowers and lush green hills, dissected by many burns and lochs.

As we rounded a hill and approached Seilebost, we were confronted by the truly stunning sight of one of the world's top-rated beaches.

Luskentyre boasts two-and-a-half miles of soft, white shell sand which gives the water a luminous, crystal clear quality that ranges from aquamarine to dark red where peat-coloured rivers cross the sands. Only the Seychelles can rival Harris for beaches, I was told during my stay. My three-year-old was beside himself with excitement, particularly

when we explained that he probably wouldn't have to share the beach with anyone else – sharing being his least favourite thing right now.

Caberfeidh, the four-bedroom modern house we had rented, was perched on the edge of the beach. The property, which was recently awarded five stars by VisitScotland, was known locally as the "big white house". The scenery surrounding it was truly breathtaking – coastal landscape with a backdrop of mountains and the island of Taransay beyond.

**T**HE garden, part of which was decked, had been designed by the property's owners, Alisdair and Lesley Wiseman, to mirror its surroundings. The interesting stones, shells and driftwood collected locally were a clue to the couple's artistic flair and attention to detail.

On entering the house we were struck by a sense of space and light. There were 2,000 square feet to spread out in – more than enough for the three of us. The walls were painted white – creating a neutral canvas for the Wiseman's art work which was dotted about the property. There





Furnished with a high level of comfort in mind: the Lilac Room (below, left), one of four bedrooms on a colour theme, and the open-plan lounge (above)

were also paintings and drawings by other artists depicting scenes from island life. In fact, the house seemed to be brimming with art; in every nook and cranny were eye-catching touches like vases filled with shells and driftwood sculptures.

The large, open-plan lounge and dining area was furnished with comfort in mind. There were soft settees to sink into in the evenings, when sheep would trot past the front window. Any initial misgivings about being by a main road were dispelled when we realised that a bit of sheep-traffic was about as busy as it seemed to get.

To add to the overwhelming sense of relaxation there was an extremely well-stocked video and DVD library, masses of books, hundreds of CDs and baskets filled with games and magazines. The attractive, spacious kitchen boasted every utensil, piece of crockery and ad hoc culinary item you could ever need – and one of the best views in Harris as a delightful bonus.

During our stay, Caberfeidh provided the perfect base from which to explore. Highlights included sunny days spent wave-watching, beachcombing and picnicking on Lusentyre and Horgabost beaches; a visit to the new Seallam! Visitor Centre where we got to grips with the

isle's rich history; and watching touring Norwegian folk dancers perform at Tarbert Community Centre – somehow an oddly fitting way to while away an afternoon in one of the UK's remotest communities.

**W**E also visited some of the many tweed outlets dotted about Harris. We were surprised to find that, instead of the large tourist traps we expected, the workshops were tiny and mostly located in the weavers' homes, where you could buy items like jackets, cushion covers and other hand-made goods.

There was tasty food to be had at many of the hotels, bars, coffee-shops and "art cafés" we tried, and for real gourmet appeal there is the famous Scarista House – which overlooks the island's scenic nine-hole links golf course. We also had delicious meals brought to our door by local caterer, Atlantic Edge.

Harris truly did seem to offer something for everyone and its unique lost-world charm left its mark on us. Its peace, friendliness and beauty will be hard to forget. I for one stand corrected – there's definitely more to this far-flung Scottish island than that which immediately springs to mind. ❖

*The perfect  
base for wave  
watching and  
beachcombing*

*To find out more*

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