

Being able to recognise clouds is not only fun, but is useful for helping you predict the weather during your visit. We have divided cloud types into **four families** - see how many you can spot floating high above the lochs, glens and forests.

## Cumulus

Latin: *heap or pile*  
Altitude: low  
Weather: fine, sunny  
Checklist: looks like a big puffy cotton ball; mostly white with a grey bottom; when hand held at arm's length, puffs are approx size of your fist.  
Fun fact: glider pilots use cumulus clouds to find uplifts of warm air.



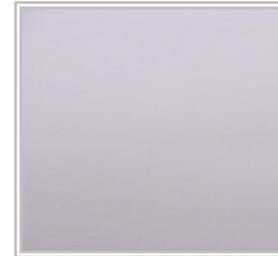
## Alto cumulus

Latin: *high heap/pile*  
Weather: can mean rain  
Checklist: looks like a flock of sheep or lots of cotton balls; small cumulus clouds clustered together; when hand held at arm's length, puffs approx thumb size.  
Fun fact: smooth, lens-shaped alto cumulus clouds have been mistaken for UFOs.



## Cirrocumulus

Weather: usually fair but cold days.  
Checklist: white with no shading; rippled look or lots of very small puffs; when hand held at arm's length, puffs are approx fingernail sized.  
Fun fact: sometimes referred to as 'mackerel sky' as it resembles the markings on the fish.



## Stratus

Latin: *layer* Altitude: low  
Weather: overcast, sometimes drizzling.  
Checklist: greyish; featureless and uniform in appearance; covers sky like a blanket.  
Fun fact: mist and fog are both stratus. Fog is when visibility is less than 1km; mist is visibility of 1-2 km.

## Stratocumulus

Latin: *layer of heaps/piles* Altitude: low  
Weather: becoming overcast, or weather is clearing.  
Checklist: grey, puffy, textured base; covers most of sky; looks like cotton candy or pillow stuffing; when hand held at arm's length, puffs are approx fist sized.  
Fun fact: during a flight stratus clouds will not cause much turbulence, but are difficult to see through.



## Altostratus

Latin: *high layer*  
Weather: can turn into rain-producing nimbostratus  
Checklist: grey or blue-grey and mid-level; covers most of sky; appears smooth; usually precedes rain.  
Fun fact: altostratus cloud causes a corona around the sun (a white or bright coloured disc).

## Cirrostratus

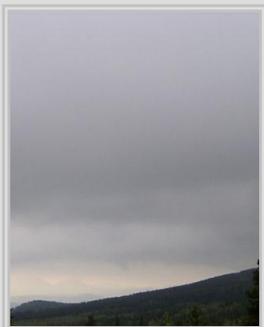
Weather: expect rain in the next 24hrs.  
Checklist: transparent and/or milky high clouds; looks like a veil; sun may have a halo.  
Fun fact: you cast a shadow when under a cirrostratus cloud; under altostratus, the cloud is too thick.



Always check the weather forecast before and during your trip.

### Cumulus congestus

Latin: *piled up*  
Weather: showers.  
Checklist: looks like a giant cumulus cloud; appears taller than it is wide; still has sharp outline at top.  
Fun fact: appears with rainbows.



### Cumulonimbus

Latin: *pile/heap of rain*  
Weather: sudden heavy rain/showers; hail, thunder or lightning.  
Checklist: dark base; towering in sky; raining.  
Fun fact: these clouds can produce tornadoes.



### Nimbostratus

Latin: *rain layer*  
Altitude: low to mid  
Weather: prolonged continuous rain or snow.  
Checklist: dark grey; covers most of sky; no sun visible; difficult to see base of clouds; steady rain, not showers.  
Fun fact: these clouds never produce rainbows, hail, thunder or lightning.



### How are clouds formed?

The sun's heat evaporates moisture at ground level. As it rises in the sky, this water vapour cools and condenses into water droplets or ice crystals if very high. When they become too heavy, they fall to the ground as snow, rain or hail.



### Cirrus

Latin: *curl of hair*  
Altitude: high  
Weather: generally fair weather; usually are first sign of a warm front approaching and a corresponding change in the weather.  
Checklist: bright white; wispy, looks like horses' tails; wisps are separate rather than like a veil.  
Fun fact: these are the fastest moving clouds.  
Precipitation from cirrus clouds evaporates long before reaching the Earth.

### Contrails

Altitude: high  
Weather: show humidity levels high up.  
Checklist: bright white; in a straight line; visible on a fine day; usually an aeroplane has just passed.  
Fun fact: these are man-made cirrus clouds. They are formed when water vapour freezes around particulates from the plane's engines, creating a long white trail of ice crystals. There are three types of contrail:



**Short lived:**  
does not stay in the sky very long



**Persistent non-spreading:**  
stays in the sky a long time



**Persistent spreading:**  
stays in the sky a long time and widens

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