

Under Scottish Stars

Book Club Kit

"A fabulous read, filled with compelling characters, a delicious setting, and a romance that can only be described as . . . swoon-worthy."

Jen Turano, *USA Today* bestselling author



How to Prep Easy Book Club Snacks

Tips from Carla Laureano

If you're looking for some inspiration on snacks to serve at your next *Under Scottish Stars* book club gathering, read through this article by Carla for some ideas.

So you've decided to start a book club—or maybe you already belong to one, but it's your turn to host. What happens when your biggest culinary skill is calling for takeout? Never fear, these easy snacks will make you look like a hostess extraordinaire and no one will ever know about that time you burned water.

1.) **Charcuterie Board**

I recommend this every single time I talk about book club snacks because it's filling and easy to put together. Just try to pick mild, medium, and bold selections in every category. When in doubt, ask your deli manager for ideas!

- Cured meats like mortadella, a good Genoa salami, and prosciutto (3+)
- Cheeses like fresh mozzarella balls, goat cheese, Stilton, or Gorgonzola (3+)

- Sweet options such as fruit chutney and fresh whole honeycomb (1-2)
- Tart condiments like whole grain mustard (1-2)
- Savory add-ons like smoked or roasted almonds and cured green olives (1-2)
- Fresh fruit such as grapes, sliced apples, blueberries, or segmented mandarin oranges (1-2)
- Something to eat the condiments on like toast points, baguette rounds, water crackers, or seeded crackers—don't forget the gluten-free options! (3-4)

Arrange it on a pretty marble cheese board or wooden cutting board, add a couple of cheese knives and spoons, and you've got an impressive spread that looks far more difficult than it actually is.





2.) Bakery Buffet

Bigger grocery and natural foods stores provide an amazing bounty of petite sweets, and they tend to be good quality as well! Try five or six varieties of pastries like bite-size brownies, two-bite scones, mini cinnamon rolls, mini sugar cookies, tiny Danishes, rugelach, small éclairs, and cream puffs. Display on pretty plates and serve with coffee and a variety of teas and you've got an instant book club/tea party.

3.) Coffee and Chocolate Pairing

What two flavors go together better than chocolate and coffee? Make your book club meeting into an impromptu tasting by selecting a variety of different chocolates and coffees.

One idea would be to choose by region: chocolates from Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana along with Ethiopian Yirgacheffe and Kenya AA. Another would be to select coffees and chocolate from mild to bold: white, milk, dark, and extra dark chocolates along with blonde, medium, and dark roast coffee. If you need a little variety, you can also add in a selection of nuts and dried fruit.

When in doubt, think variety over time in the kitchen. After all, the point of a book club is to enjoy fellowship and discuss literature; the food just makes the time together all that much sweeter.

Under Scottish Stars

They broke out the front doors, where the sun was struggling to cut through the gray clouds. Serena inhaled the frigid air, and all her excuses to Jamie, all the reasons she'd given for staying in Nairn, fell away. "I think," Serena said slowly, "we're going to Skye."

Why *Under Scottish Stars* Is a Time Capsule Tribute to Skye

By Carla Laureano

Discuss in your group: what were some of your favorite scenes of Skye where you saw how the author's own experience of the setting made the landscape come alive for you as a reader?

In the spring of 2004, my husband and I took what would be his first trip to Scotland and my first return in over a decade. At the tail end of the trip, we spent three days on the Isle of Skye. Our travel agent had insisted that no Scottish tour would be complete without the small island just off the west coast from the Highlands, but we truly had no idea what was in store for us.

We'd been traveling in cities up to that point, but crossing over the Skye bridge from Kyle of Lochalsh onto the island itself was like traveling back in time. Deserted mountain views, a lowering gray sky shedding sheets of rain, and most telling . . . no cell service. For three days, we wandered the wild landscapes and returned home to a charming country-house hotel feeling as if we'd gotten a massive, unexpected reset on our lives. All the tension from the previous stressful year—and the maneuvering required to get more than two weeks off from work at the same time—melted away and we had time to just enjoy each other's company for the first time in ages.

When, years later, I had the idea to write a book about an overworked marketing executive (ahem, art imitating life) who finds love on a business trip, the Isle of Skye was a natural choice for the setting. Where else could you so thoroughly disconnect from the world? After all, even tropical island resorts had cell phone service, and they didn't require you to park on the verge of an overgrown shoulder on a bare quarter-mile stretch of highway to get a signal (true story). In 2012, when I wrote *Five Days in Skye*, things were beginning to change on the island, but it was still mostly the wild place that I remembered.

Fast forward eight years to the publication of the third and final book in the MacDonald Family Trilogy, *Under Scottish Stars*, and the book almost feels like a time capsule. Tour buses now crowd the roads of the tiny island, hotels require reservations a year in advance, Airbnbs are in scarce supply, and glamping cabins are popping up to accommodate the adventure tourists who flock to the island every summer. I had a moment of doubt when reediting this book for its publication this summer—should I update it to reflect the changes that happened in the mere five years since I wrote it?

In the end, I decided to leave well enough alone. There's value and beauty in marking that moment in time—the changes already reflected in Serena's difficulty in finding a last-minute cottage to rent for the summer—and preserving that sense of isolation and wildness both for myself and for readers who will never have a chance at that long-ago island experience, except in fiction. And while it's still a place of beauty I look forward to visiting again (and would have visited this summer with my family if not for a certain global pandemic), that first trip to Skye with all its romance and life-changing isolation can remain etched in my memory as it was, preserved on the pages of *Under Scottish Stars*.

Some of my favorite scenes featuring the story's setting:

Jot down some moments in the story you want to discuss with your group.

Discussion Questions

1. Throughout the book, Serena struggles with insecurity and self-doubt over her choices. Why do you think that is? How have her past experiences affected how she feels about her abilities and worth? Have your past relationships—both platonic and romantic—colored the way you think about yourself?
2. Serena feels guilty about wanting more from her life beyond motherhood. Do you relate to her need to have something of her own? In what ways is this important to her becoming a whole, thriving person?
3. Malcolm takes great pride in his work. However, he gives up his dream job for someone else not once but twice. What does that tell you about what he truly values? How do you think his childhood experiences might have shaped what's important to him?
4. In Serena's mind, art, faith, and passion are intertwined—when she lost one, she lost them all. Why do you think that is? How do you think those three things might be interrelated?
5. Muriel tells Serena that until she stops blaming God for her heartaches, she will never hear His voice over the sound of her hurt. Do you think this is true? What examples can you give from your own experiences?



Discussion Questions

6. Malcolm has a habit of defaulting to humor when he's uncomfortable or at a loss for words. He rarely speaks of his faith openly. How might his behavior and choices be a better gauge of his beliefs and values than his words? Give examples.
7. How does Serena's attitude toward God change from the beginning of the book to the end? What events contribute to that transformation?

My Book Group Questions

Jot down some questions you want to ask your group:

**"No one writes
a romantic hero
like Laureano!"**

Candace Calvert,
author of *Maybe It's You*

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Carla's website: carlalaureano.com

Visit Carla's [website](http://carlalaureano.com) to stay up-to-date on news from the author.