

Orkney Guided Walking with Sightseeing

Trip style: Walking with sightseeing

Destination: 📍 Scottish Islands

Trip code: XAG07-LDW11

Trip Walking Grade: 1/2

Carbon Footprint: 🌳 262kg CO2



Holiday Overview

For anyone easily seduced by big skies, sea views, and wide-open spaces, Orkney is always a good idea. Scattered off Scotland's northeast coast, this wild windswept archipelago offers a far-from-it-all feel just a skip away from the mainland. Discover squawking seabird colonies, staggering scenery, and some of the best-preserved Neolithic ruins in Europe as you island hop between Mainland, Hoy, South Ronaldsay, and Birsay on this seven-night guided walking holiday.

WHAT YOU'LL LOVE

- Exploring the Orkadian archipelago on coastal walks
- Visiting some of the best prehistoric archaeological sites in Europe
- Taking in Orkney's sea cliffs and sandy shores
- Spotting wildlife including seals and seabirds
- Staying on the shores of Harray Loch
- A more personalised experience thanks to small group sizes (maximum 15 people)

WHAT'S INCLUDED

- Entrance to Skara Brae, Maes Howe archaeological sites, the Italian Chapel, and the Fossil & Heritage Museum
- Comfortable en-suite rooms in our partner accommodation(s)
- Cooked or continental breakfast every morning
- Daily packed lunches
- Three-course evening meals, plus tea & coffee
- Guided walks with an experienced HF Holidays Leader
- All transport to and from walks where necessary
- Return flights including hold baggage and airport transfers

WALKING GRADES AND OPTIONS

This Orkney Guided Walking with Sightseeing holiday is graded 2, which means our walks are pretty leisurely and don't involve any great ascents/descents in a day. Length of walks varies from approx. 4 miles (7km) to 6 miles (10km). Some of the paths however can be rough underfoot and the weather can be pretty blustery, making walking on wild days a little more difficult than the grade would suggest. It is your responsibility to ensure you have the relevant fitness required to join this holiday. Minibus transportation is booked for our specific itinerary transportation needs, and it will very likely not be possible for guests to stay with the minibus, or there may not be shelter or a place to rest if you prefer not to join the walk or take a break during the day. Please be sure you can manage the daily mileage and ascent as noted in the itinerary. The walking day is normally 4 to 6 hours with plenty of sightseeing included too.

It makes a lot of sense to spend time getting some additional exercise before your holiday. We suggest that you try to fit in a number of longer walks. Other exercises such as cycling, jogging and swimming are also excellent for developing increased stamina. Should you have any queries regarding the suitability of this trip for you, please feel free to reach out to our team.

ITINERARY - ISLAND HOPPING

Day 1 Arrival Day

Arrive on Orkney and settle in to the Merkister Hotel. Your leader will be in reception at 18:30 to give you a quick introduction to the holiday before dinner.

Please note the running order of your itinerary may change, the leader will confirm the exact running order while introducing the holiday.

Day 2 Birsay, Marwick Bay & Maes Howe

Our first walk on Orkney follows a clifftop coastal path from Marwick Bay to the Brough of Birsay, overlooking RSPB Marwick Head reserve. If tide times allow, we'll head over to explore the tidal island of Birsay and its remains of Pictish & Norse settlements. If the causeway is covered, wildlife watching on this coastline is superb and there's plenty to discover about the history of the island's fishing and whaling industries, too. In the afternoon we'll visit Maes Howe, one of the most treasured Neolithic sites in Europe. This mysterious tomb was built from huge sandstone blocks over 5,000 years ago and aligns perfectly with the winter solstice – testament to an advanced knowledge of astronomy by its architects.

4 miles (7km) with 510ft (160m) of ascent

Day 3 Hoy & the Old Man

One of the most beautiful and rugged of the islands, Hoy is much more akin to the Scottish Highlands than the rolling countryside and crofts of the other islands. Today's walk takes us to the famous sea stack known as the Old Man of Hoy before returning to Rackwick Bay.

6 miles (9.5km) with 700ft (210m) of ascent

Day 4 Kirkwall

Today we visit the Orcadian capital, Kirkwall. Enjoy a guided tour of the town to hear tales of Viking settlers and shipwrecks or explore independently. Visit the Kirkwall Museum and St Magnus cathedral, stop by a whisky distillery, or spend time exploring the craft and coffee shops of the town.

A historical town trail and a coastal walk are on offer today, both together totalling 6 miles (9.5km) with little ascent

Day 5 Skara Brae, Yesnaby and the Ring of Brodgar

A superb coastal trail along the spectacular sea cliffs from Yesnaby to the impressive ancient settlement of Skara Brae – a remarkable feat of ancient engineering predates the pyramids of Egypt and even Stonehenge. We'll also visit the Ring of Brodgar and the Standing Stones of Stenness, which together with Skara Brae and Maes Howe, form the Heart of Neolithic Orkney UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Total for the two walks: 6 miles (10km) with 500ft (150m) of ascent

Day 6 Broch of Gurness and Stromness

Distance: 3 miles (5 km)

Ascent: 400ft (120m)

We head for the Broch of Gurness this morning. This circular stone tower on the shores of Eynhallow Sound is an impressive Iron Age archaeological site and one of Scotland's best-preserved examples of a prehistoric settlement. In the afternoon we'll hop aboard a coach and journey to Stromness where you can check out the shops and cafes independently or join your leader for a short walk around this picturesque old herring port.

Day 7 Scapa Flow, South Ronaldsay and the Italian Chapel

Hear the story of Orkney's ornate Italian Chapel built from a pair of WWII shelters before a short invigorating coastal walk overlooking Scapa Flow and the islands of Flotta and Hoy. Visit the World War II batteries at Hoxa Head as well as the Sands o' Wright beach where we'll be on the lookout for wildflowers on the shore and dolphins and whales in the water. If the Tapestry Gallery is open, there's time to look inside and be amazed by the handwoven creations on display. We'll also visit the Fossil & Heritage centre.

4.5 miles (7km) with 310ft (90m) of ascent

Day 8 Departure Day

A group transfer takes us back to Kirkwall for the flight back to the mainland.

Daily Walk Options



Easier Walks

Good paths but walks are a bit longer. Some walks, particularly in mountain areas, may have sections over rough or steeper terrain.

Accommodation

The Merkister Hotel - Orkney

We've had a long love affair with Orkney's family-run Merkister Hotel, not least for its enviable setting on the shores of Harray Loch. It's just six miles from Skara Brae and has an award-winning restaurant overlooking the loch, serving outstanding Scottish seafood and Aberdeen Angus beef. Rooms are simple but homely and all come with TV and tea and coffee making facilities. You'll find comfortable public areas with free Wi-Fi, as well as a cosy bar, and handy drying facilities, too. This hotel is dog-friendly so you may meet four legged friends in some of the communal areas.

Food & drink

Your stay is full-board. This includes daily breakfasts, packed lunch options, and evening meals. Vegetarian choices and dietary requirements can be catered for (please give advance notice when booking).

Packed lunches

Our packed lunches will be too much food for some and not enough for others; if you feel you might need more food during the walk, please bring a supply of snacks to supplement this – it won't always be possible to buy these on the route. Your packed lunches will include: a bread sandwich or roll with a choice of filling; some fresh fruit; fruit cake/ flapjack or similar, crisps and/or biscuits. For those of you tackling a level 4 or above holiday, we would highly recommend bringing some trail mix or something similar to ensure you've some fuel in reserve should you need it.

Dietary requirements

Our partner hotels can cater for most dietary requirements, but it is important you advise us of any allergies and dietary restrictions you have at the time of booking.

Travel Details

Transfers from the airport to the Merkister Hotel are available for those who have booked flights with us. Otherwise, please make your own way from the airport to the hotel (a taxi will take approx. 30 mins).

By air

If you're travelling by air, you should book return flights to Kirkwall (Orkney). There are flights available from Glasgow, Edinburgh, Dundee, Inverness, Aberdeen, and London. See Logan Air. www.loganair.co.uk

By ferry

Return ferry travel is available from Scrabster to Stromness or from Aberdeen to Kirkwall, and back from Lerwick to Aberdeen. Ferries are operated by North Link Ferries; www.northlinkferries.co.uk The ferry terminal at Aberdeen is a 5 to 10 minute walk from Aberdeen railway station. There are bus and train routes available to Scrabster from Inverness with City Link www.citylink.co.uk. There are also train services from Inverness to Scrabster with connections from Thurso, ran by Citylink & Rapson's Coaches.

Useful Holiday Information

The UK has a famously unpredictable climate so it's best to be prepared for weather that's sunny one minute and raining the next. To make it easier, here's a list of items you should consider packing.

Essentials

- Suitable footwear such as waterproof walking boots that provide ankle support and good grip
- Waterproof and windproof jacket
- Comfortable clothing (jeans & waterproof capes are not suitable)
- Mid-layer(s) to keep you warm. Fleece(s) make a good choice
- Waterproof overtrousers
- Gloves and a warm hat
- Rucksack with waterproof liner
- Flask for hot drinks
- Water bottle (at least 1 litre capacity)
- Sunscreen
- UV sunglasses

For holidays operating October through to the end of March, please also bring the following on your walks:

- spare warm clothing
- spare high energy food
- head torch and spare batteries
- please note for the October to March season your waterproof jacket needs to offer a high level of waterproofing and wind resistance, and a hood. Look for a waterproof jacket with sealed/taped seams and a minimum HH (hydrostatic head - this is the rating given on waterproof jackets) of 10,000mm+

Recommended

- Several base layers (long-sleeve or short-sleeve)
- Cushioned walking socks to avoid blisters
- First aid kit, including plasters and insect repellent and tick remover tool
- Sit mat
- Waterproof pouch for valuables
- Rubbish bag (remember to always leave no trace)
- Wallet/purse
- Camera
- Walking poles

Tripnote validity

TRIP NOTE VALIDITY These Trip Notes are valid based on the date printed at the bottom of the page. They will occasionally be updated post booking and pre-departure. We will send you the latest trip notes prior to departure through a link in your pre departure documents or we can send you a copy in the post if preferred. In booking this trip you should be confident in your ability to participate in all activities described in these Trip Notes. If you have any doubt about your suitability you should call HF Holidays and ask to speak to one of the team about this itinerary. The information in these Trip Notes is given in good faith. Where differences exist between the Trip Notes and our current brochure, the Trip Notes supersede the brochure. All holidays can be subject to unexpected changes; so please be prepared to be flexible where necessary. At times, it may not be possible to follow the itinerary as planned due to weather conditions, political, physical or other factors. In these circumstances we will make the best possible alternative arrangements to maintain the integrity of the original itinerary.

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