Orkney Guided Walking with Sightseeing



Trip style:	Destination:	Walking Grade	Carbon Footprint:
Walking with sightseeing	Scottish Islands	3	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 Orcadian 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

ITINERARY - ORKNEY GUIDED WALKING WITH SIGHTSEEING

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 Pitish & 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 How, 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



Gentle walking grade 3

Slightly longer walks, mostly on well-trodden paths, with some gentle gradients plus stiles and steps possible. Typically, 5-6 miles (8-10km) with around 650ft (200m) of ascent.

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

Dining at The Merkister Hotel

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.

ESSENTIAL INFORMATION

Packing list

Weather conditions in the UK can vary throughout the day, and conditions in the mountains may be cold and windy even in summer. Use the following list as a guide when preparing for your holiday.

Essentials

- Suitable waterproof walking boots with ankle support and good grip
- Waterproof, wind-resistant jacket with a hood, taped seams and a hydrostatic head rating of at least 10,000 mm
- Waterproof overtrousers
- Spare warm clothing, such as a synthetic insulated jacket
- Comfortable walking clothing (jeans & waterproof capes are not suitable)
- Warm mid-layers, such as fleeces
- Gloves and a warm hat, even in summer
- Rucksack with a waterproof liner
- Water bottle with a capacity of at least 1 litre
- Flask for hot drinks
- Sunscreen
- UV-protective sunglasses
- Spare high-energy food
- Head torch and spare batteries for holidays between October and March
- Passport (if applicable)
- Visa (if applicable)
- Copy of your travel insurance policy

Recommended

- Several base layers, with long or short sleeves
- Cushioned walking socks to avoid blisters
- First-aid kit, including plasters, insect repellent, a midge net and a tick-removal tool
- Sit mat
- Waterproof pouch for valuables
- Rubbish bags
- Wallet or purse

- Camera
- Walking poles
- Sun hat
- Gaiters
- Mobile Phones
- Swimwear (please see accommodation information for hotel facilities)
- Membership cards for English Heritage, the National Trust or similar heritage organisations in Scotland and Wales, if you are a member. These may be useful when visiting attractions during your itinerary or on your free day.

JOINING INSTRUCTIONS (WITHOUT FLIGHTS)

Joining Instructions (Without Flights) for the Orkney Islands

Travelling independently: We look forward to welcoming you at the Merkister Hotel. A taxi transfer from the airport will take approximately 25 minutes.

By air: If you're travelling by air, you should book return flights to Kirkwall (Orkney). There are flights available from Glasgow, Edinburgh, Inverness, Aberdeen and Manchester. See Logan Air

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

USEFUL INFORMATION

Ticks

Ticks are tiny creatures that live in vegetation and can attach themselves to passing animals or walkers and may carry a risk of Lyme Disease. Please refer to NHS advice and guidelines for information prior to your holiday.

Your Island Hopping Leader

Our experienced and knowledgeable volunteer leaders undergo a thorough assessment to lead you on your holiday and are delighted to share their knowledge and enthusiasm with you.

Please ensure you complete and hand in your registration form on arrival and let the leader know about any medical problems you may have. This may be useful in the event of a problem on the walk and will be treated confidentially by the leader.

In the event of a problem

If you become separated from your group, please stay where you are. Your leader will retrace their steps to find you.

All our leaders carry a mobile phone, group shelter, spare maps and a compass. In the unlikely event your leader is incapacitated, please use any emergency kit in their rucksack and call the emergency services (call 999 in the UK, or 112 overseas).

Please then try to call the hotel where you are staying to let them know there is a problem.

If you have any cause for complaints regarding accommodation, you should notify your leader who can then attempt to rectify the problem.

Midges

Small flying insects can be prevalent from late spring to late summer. There are various products on the market which can act as a barrier treatment.

Travel Insurance

Travel Insurance

We strongly recommend that you take out travel insurance and any other personal insurance relevant to you and the holiday. It is particularly important with the possibility of flight changes and cancellations due to the challenging weather conditions that can occur on the islands and might impact your onward travel arrangements.

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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