Orkney & Shetland Guided Walking with Sightseeing



Trip style:	Destination:	Walking Grade	Carbon Footprint:
Walking with sightseeing	Scottish Islands	5	304kg CO2

HOLIDAY OVERVIEW

Scattered off the northeast coast of Scotland, Orkney and the Shetland Islands are staggeringly beautiful. In a land that's been largely tamed, they remain rare unspoiled outposts of rugged coastline and remote beauty. Fiercely independent and sprinkled with Scandinavian tradition, this pair of wild windswept archipelagos offer an island-hopping holiday that ticks-off squawking seabird colonies, stunning scenery, and some of the best-preserved Neolithic ruins in Europe.

WHAT YOU'LL LOVE

- Hopping between Orkney & Shetland
- Exploring the best of both islands on foot
- The wild and windswept natural landscapes
- Spotting wildlife on these relatively untouched islands
- Visiting some of the best prehistoric archaeological sites in Europe
- Sharing the experience with a group of like-minded walkers
- A more personalised experience thanks to small group sizes (maximum 15 people)

- Read our blog post on why Orkney and Shetland should be your next destinations.

WHAT'S INCLUDED

- Entrance to Skara Brae, Maes Howe, and Jarlshof archaeological sites
- 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
- Luggage transfers
- Flights to Kirkwall returning from Sumburgh, including internal flights, hold baggage and airport transfers

ITINERARY - ORKNEY AND SHETLAND 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.

Day 2 Brough of Birsay and Ring of Brodgar

Our first walk on Orkney follows a clifftop coastal path from Marwick Bay to the Brough of Birsay, overlooking RSPB Marwick Head reserve. 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. 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.

9 miles (14km) with 760 feet (230m) of ascent.

Day 3 Skara Brae and Stromness

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.

9½ miles (15.5 km) with 1,280 feet (380m) of ascent.

Day 4 Isle of Hoy

One of the most beautiful and rugged of the Orkney Islands, Hoy is much more akin to the Scottish Highlands than the rolling countryside and crofts found across the archipelago. Today's walk takes us to the famous sea stack known as the Old Man of Hoy and will have bird watchers twitching with excitement at the prospect of spotting arctic and great skuas.

8½ miles (13.5km) with 850 feet (260m) of ascent.

Day 5 Shetland – Sumburgh Head and Jarlshof

Today we leave Orkney and head north to Shetland. On arrival, we visit Sumburgh Head RSPB reserve. It's the most southerly point of mainland Shetland and where thousands of species of seabird come ashore to nest on the cliffs. This elevated viewpoint affords extensive views over Shetland and of Fair Isle to the south. We'll also visit the impressive archaeological site of Jarlshof. Over 4,000 years old, discoveries here include everything from Stone Age settlements and Bronze Age dwellings to Norse longhouses and medieval farms.

2 miles (3km) with 200 feet (60m) of ascent. We then rejoin our transport for the scenic transfer to Busta House.

Day 6 The Eshaness Peninsula

There's an opportunity to learn about Shetland's heritage at the Tangwick Haa museum today as we circumnavigate the beautiful Eshaness peninsula. Wildlife watching here is superb. Seabirds flock to this rocky outcrop in their thousands during breeding season and colonies of common and grey seal spend autumn in the waters of the bay.

9 miles (14km) with 1,060 feet (320m) of ascent.

Day 7 Muckle Roe

A fitting finale to the holiday, this walk along the magnificent granite coastline around Muckle Roe offers a chance to admire the windswept isolation and remote beauty of Shetland.

7½ miles (12km) with 1,360 feet (420m) of ascent.

Day 8 Departure Day

Group transfer to Sumburgh airport for your return flight.

DAILY WALK OPTIONS



Moderate walking grade 5

Some walking experience needed. Full day walks which may include some short but steep ascents and descents throughout the day, and varied terrain. Regular stops. Typically, 8-9 miles (13-15km) with around 1,300ft (400m) 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.

Busta House, Shetland - Orkney & Shetland

In the Shetlands, it's all about Busta House. While most tour operators use hotels around the capital, Lerwick, we choose to stay somewhere you can really appreciate Shetland's remote beauty. This 16th century laird's manor has bags of historic charm, as well as a roaring fireplace for chilly days, and a well-stocked whisky selection. Tastefully decorated rooms provide a comfortable place to sleep and on a clear night you can gaze up at the starry skies and search for the swirling ribbons of neon green, pink, and purple known as the northern lights. This hotel is dog-friendly so you may meet four legged friends in some of the communal areas.

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 (WITH FLIGHTS)

With flights

This holiday begins in Orkney. For those who have booked our “with flight” option, you will fly from Glasgow (2023 dates), Edinburgh (2024 dates) airport to Kirkwall airport (Orkney), from where you will be transferred to the Merkister Hotel.

The flight between Orkney and Shetland on Day 5 is included in your holiday price and our Shetland coach company will pick you up at Sumburgh Airport.

All passengers aged 16 and over are required to provide photographic ID at the check-in desk and at the departure gate.

Holiday Finish: Your holiday ends in Shetland. If you have booked our “with flight” option, we will take you back to Sumburgh airport, for your return flight to Glasgow (2023 dates), Edinburgh (2024 dates).

On occasion luggage can be delayed. It's always best to pack essentials in your hand luggage just in case.

JOINING INSTRUCTIONS (WITHOUT FLIGHTS)

Without flights

If you are 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 an outward flight to Kirkwall (Orkney), and a return flight from Sumburgh (Shetland). There are flights available from Glasgow, Edinburgh, Inverness, Aberdeen and Manchester. See Logan Air

By ferry

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.

On your departure day a taxi transfer from the Busta House Hotel to Sumburgh airport will take approximately 58 mins.

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.

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.

Maps and Guides for Orkney and Shetland

Suggested Reading and Mpas

Your leader will carry all the necessary maps and guides. For you own interest you may consider looking at the following:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Orkney

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shetland

Landranger 1: 50,000 Maps: 3, 4, 6 and 7

ATM AVAILABILITY

ATM availability for Orkney and Shetland

Please be aware that apart from the ATMs at Kirkwall and Sumburgh airports, that charge a withdrawal fee, there are no ATM machines located anywhere on our itinerary. Both hotels accept payment by card.

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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