Orkney and Shetland have pristine natural landscapes, peace and tranquility, wide open spaces and lots of fresh air - you will island hop from the quaint crofting communities of Orkney to the Scandanavian style fjords and voes of Shetland. Orkney is 10 miles north of the coast of Caithness and separated from Scotland by the Pentland Firth and Shetland is 50 miles north east of Orkney.

Orkney is the name given to a group of 70 islands, the largest being ‘Mainland’, home to the majority of the Orcadian population, and the centre for your stay on the island. Life on these islands is sustained by a mixture of farming, fishing and tourism. Islanders themselves highlight the contrast between the two archipelagos of Orkney and Shetland by describing each other as: “Farmers who fish” – the Orcadians and.... “Fishermen who farm” – the Shetlanders. This illustrates ideally the contrast between the locals themselves, and the landscapes in which they live. The natural landscapes here determine all life on the islands.

On Orkney you will have the opportunity to discover a treasure trove of history at the many heritage sites on Mainland. Your walks take you to explore the standing stones of Stenness, the Ring of Brodgar, the UNESCO site of Skara Brae, and the exceptional Maes Howe.

From Orkney, your flight from Kirkwall will take you to Shetland, an island archipelago much more Nordic than Scottish. A barren but stunningly beautiful, ice-carved landscape, greets you, offering a plethora of wildlife watching opportunities. Your walks on Shetland traverse the windswept shores of the main island, from Sumburgh Head RSPB reserve in the south, to the brazenly beautiful peninsula of Eshaness and the ancient rocks of Muckle Roe.

Travel

Holiday start:
This holiday begins in Orkney. For those who have booked our “with flight” option, you will take a mid afternoon flight from Aberdeen airport to Kirkwall airport (Orkney), from where you will usually meet your leader and will be transferred to the Merkister Hotel.

If you are travelling independently
The group transfer from Kirkwall airport is included in your holiday price. Please note that these transfers will be timed to connect with the HF Holidays’ flights. We cannot make separate arrangements for guests arriving/departing at different times.

Once you have made your travel arrangements, please contact Sasha Buena on 020 8732 1279 or e mail sashabuena@hfholidays.co.uk with your travel plans and expected time of arrival.

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.

Aircraft Cabin Baggage Restrictions
Please be aware of the reduced cabin baggage dimensions, 40x35x18cm, maximum weight 6kg, on the flights to and from these islands. These flights are operated by the Flybe franchise partner Loganair.

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 on Shetland. If you have booked our “with flight” option, we will take you back to Sumburgh airport, for your return flight to Aberdeen.

Travel by sea
Ferry travel is available from Scrabster to Stromness or from Aberdeen to Kirkwall. 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](http://www.citylink.co.uk). There are also train services from Inverness to Scrabster with connections from Thurso, ran by Citylink & Rapson’s Coaches.

**Accommodation:** Stay at welcoming hotels on Orkney (4 nights) and Shetland (3 nights). In the hopefully rare event of any cause for complaints regarding accommodation then you must notify your leader at the time; he or she can then attempt to rectify the problem.

The Merkister Hotel (4 nights)
Loch Harray, Orkney, KW17 2LF
Tel: 01856 771366
Website: [www.merkister.com](http://www.merkister.com)

Situated on the shores of Harray Loch, The Merkister Hotel stands in its own grounds in the most wonderful location, commanding impressive views of this famous loch and its surroundings. All rooms have TV, direct-dial telephone, hairdryer, tea and coffee making facilities. A drying room and laundry facilities are available and there is WiFi.

Busta House Hotel (3 nights)
Busta, Brae, Shetland, ZE2 9QN
Tel: 01806 522506
Website: [www.bustahouse.com](http://www.bustahouse.com)

Nestled at the foot of rolling hills on the shore of Busta Voe, The Busta Hotel in a 16th-century homestead sits among expansive gardens. Traditional rooms have WiFi, flat-screen TVs and DVD players, tea and coffee making facilities and a hairdryer. Drying room facilities are also available.

**Island Hopping Grading**

This Guided Island Hopping Trail is graded 3 which involves walks/hikes on well-defined paths, though often in hilly or upland areas, or along rugged coastal footpaths. These may be rough and steep in sections, and will require a good level of fitness.

It is your responsibility to ensure you have the relevant fitness required to join this holiday.

**Fitness:** We want you to be confident that you can meet the demands of this walk and get the most out of your holiday. Provision cannot be made for anyone who opts out. Please be sure you can manage the daily mileage and ascent as listed below. The walking day is normally 6-7 hours. It is important for your own enjoyment, and that of your fellow guests that you can maintain the pace. We suggest that you try to fit in a number of longer walks, including some in hilly terrain.

It makes a lot of sense to spend time getting some additional exercise before your holiday. We suggest you try to fit in a number of longer walks, including some on hilly terrain. Other exercises such as cycling, jogging and swimming are also excellent for developing increased stamina.

All walking days listed below involve minibus or local transport between the walking route and your accommodation and this is included in your holiday price.

Please allow approximately £25 for entrance fees on this holiday.

**Planned Itinerary**

**Day 1: Arrival Day**

Arrive on Orkney and meet at the Merkister Hotel.

**Day 2: Brough of Birsay and Marwick Bay**

Your first walk on the island of Orkney begins by following a superb cliff-top path from the island of Birsay, to the RSPB reserve of Marwick Bay and The Loons. In the late afternoon we explore the Ring of Brodgar, the standing stones of Stenness and the Neolithic chambered cairn of Maes Howe (Entrance fee not included Scottish/Welsh/English National Heritage members free). 9 miles (14km) with 760 feet (230m) of ascent.
Day 3: Skara Brae and Stromness
We begin with a visit to the impressive, ancient settlement of Skara Brae, now a UNESCO site of special heritage. (Entrance fee not included Scottish/Welsh/English National Heritage members free). Leaving this site mid-morning we then walk the coast south above the spectacular sea cliffs of Yesnaby to meet our transport on the outskirts of Stromness. 9.5 miles (15.5km) with 1280 feet (380m) of ascent.

Day 4: Isle of Hoy
Visiting the island of Hoy, we enjoy a magnificent walk which takes us out to the famous sea stack of the “Old Man of Hoy”, before returning via the mysterious “Dwarfie Stone”. Watch out for the “Bonxie” – the local name for the Great Skua. Spot them before they spot you, with one of their dives. 8.5 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, the most southerly point of mainland Shetland. This elevated viewpoint affords extensive views over Shetland and of Fair Isle to the south. Our May & July departures will also witness an amazing sea bird spectacle as thousands of birds come ashore to nest on the cliffs. From here we descend to the inspirational archaeological site of Jarlshof (Entrance fee not included Scottish/Welsh/English National Heritage members free) which covers a period of continuous habitation from 2500BC through to the 1600s. 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
This is our opportunity to learn a little about Shetland’s heritage at the Tangwick Haa museum, as we circumnavigate the beautiful Eshaness peninsula. Today grants us a plethora of wildlife watching opportunities, as we wander past colonies of seabirds numbering in their thousands during the breeding season. We may also be lucky enough to spot seals today, both Common and Grey seals are often seen bobbing up and down in the bay. 9 miles (14km) with 1,060 feet (320m) of ascent.

Day 7: Muckle Roe
A rugged and remote walk to discover the red granite coastline of the Muckle Roe. This walk is a fitting finale from where we can look back and appreciate the beauty of yesterday’s walk as well as today’s, and admire the windswept isolation and beauty of Shetland. 7.5 miles (12km) with 1,360 feet (420m) of ascent.

Day 8: Departure Day
Transfer to Sumburgh airport for your return flight to Aberdeen

The itinerary may be subject to change at the discretion of the leader with regard to the weather and other external factors

Island Hopping Leader
Our experienced and knowledgeable volunteer leaders undergo a thorough assessment to lead you on your Island Hopping Trail and will also be 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.

**What to wear**

To enjoy walking/hiking comfortably and safely, footwear, clothing and equipment needs to be suitable for the conditions. Safety is our priority and Britain is famous for its changeable weather, so our advice is to come prepared for all eventualities. Footwear with a good grip on the sole (e.g. Vibram sole) is the key to avoiding accidents. Walking/hiking boots providing ankle support and good grip are recommended (ideally worn in), and specialist walking socks to avoid blisters. Several layers of clothing, which can be added or removed, are better than a single layer (include spares). Fabrics (lightweight and fast drying) designed for the outdoors are recommended. Waterproof jacket and waterproof over trousers are essential and a warm hat and gloves are useful additions. Gaiters are an optional but useful extra. Denim jeans and capes are not suitable on any walks.

**What to bring**

Rucksack with a waterproof liner, thermos flask for hot drink, water bottle (at least 1 litre) and spare high-energy food such as a chocolate bar. First aid kit – your leader’s first aid kit doesn’t contain any medication or blister kits (such as Compeed). Walking poles are useful, particularly for descents. Insect repellent, sun hat, sunglasses and protection cream and camera are all optional extras you may choose to bring.

**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.

**On the walk**

We try to create a relaxed atmosphere on the walk but please listen to safety instructions from your leader. Keep members of the group in view especially when weather or visibility is poor. If you leave the group, then your leader will no longer have responsibility for you. Our leaders consider the safety of the group as a whole and are likely to be more cautious over potential risks such as bad weather.

**In the event of a problem**

If you become separated from the party 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. Call the emergency services (call 999 in the UK, or 112 overseas). Please then try to call the hotel where you are staying.

**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.

**ATMs**

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.

**While every effort has been made to ensure accuracy, the information in this guide may change after it has been printed. For the most up-to-date information please see our website or use the contacts below.**

**Enquiries**

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