



## ORKNEY AND SHETLAND

An island holiday is a very special experience, and the distinctive coastlines and culture of Scotland's Northern Isles – Orkney and Shetland – make for an experience to remember.

The **Orkney Islands** are an archipelago of around 70 islands (20 of which are inhabited) lying a mere 10 miles north of the Scottish mainland. You can fly to Orkney's main town of Kirkwall from the airports at Glasgow, Edinburgh, Aberdeen, and Inverness with all flights lasting an hour or less. There are four ferry routes to choose from, with up to 12 sailings a day, depending on the season.

The number of islands, countless cliffs and endless white sandy beaches means a dramatic shoreline sculpted by the seas over thousands of years. You're never far from a cliff walk in Orkney. The magnificent red sandstone cliffs on Hoy, the striking natural arch known as the Vat of Kirbister on Stronsay, or the cliff walks at Yesnaby and Marwick Head on West Mainland are just some examples

Thanks to its coast, cliffs, wetlands and moorlands, the Orkney Islands invite waterfowl, waders, raptors and seabirds, including the much loved puffin, to make their homes here. This is one of the best places in Britain to go seal-watching, as it's a breeding ground for both grey and common seals. Around 15% of the world's seal population is found here. Dolphins and various species of whale are also frequently spotted.

Divers from across the world are attracted here in search of wartime wrecks to the sealife that can be found under the water. Stay above the seas in a kayak, and explore the coastline from a different angle.

Formed by ancient hills sitting on the submerged continental shelf, Shetland boasts over 100 islands, 15 of which are inhabited. Shetland has an incredibly long coastline of over 2700km, equating to 15% of the entire UK coastline, including some of the highest sea cliffs in Britain, hundreds of pristine, sandy beaches, sea stacks and caves.

The unique scenery is due to the diverse geology (all of Shetland is a UNESCO accredited Geopark), with some rocks over 370 million years old, also giving rise to hundreds of trout lochs, salt marshes, sand dunes, exposed ancient sea floors and the best cross-section of a volcano in Britain.

Shetland's wildlife is rich and varied, with 12% of Britain's otters around its shores, significant common and grey seal populations, some of the UK's largest seabird colonies (including puffins and gannets), frequent cetacean sightings and of course the iconic Shetland pony.

Settled for over 6,000 years, there is a wealth of archaeology from Neolithic temples, Iron Age round towers and Viking long-houses to excellently preserved WWII sites. Europe's biggest Fire Festival, **Up Helly Aa**, takes place in Lerwick in January and is a homage to Shetland's Viking past.

Direct flights are available from Edinburgh, Glasgow, Aberdeen and Inverness all year round, and also from Manchester and Bergen in the summer. The Northlink Ferry sails from Aberdeen and is a 12-hour overnight mini-cruise.

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## ORKNEY



### OLD MAN OF HOY

One of Scotland's most famous landmarks in Orkney, The Old Man of Hoy is a famous 450 foot sea stack lying in a spectacular setting just off the coast of the island of Hoy. Hoy means 'High Island' in Old Norse. To see it, you can take up the challenge of a demanding three-hour walking trip from Rackwick to the coast, or take the easy route of spotting it from the daily Scrabster-Stromness ferry.



### ISLAND HOPPING

Orkney consists of 70 islands and skerries, of which 20 are permanently inhabited. There is a magic to Orkney that you will begin to feel as soon as you set foot in this unique place, and there is no better way to experience it than by visiting several different islands to experience the unique character of each.



### WESTRAY AND PAPA WESTRAY

The world's shortest scheduled flight operates between the Islands of Westray and Papa Westray. The flight takes 1 minute 14 seconds, covering a distance of 1.5 miles. Papa Westray was once a medieval pilgrimage centre, while Westray is home to over 100,000 seabirds including gannets, razorbills and guillemots, which nest on the high cliffs at Noup Head.



### CHURCHILL BARRIERS

The Churchill Barriers are four causeways built after the sinking of the HMS Royal Oak while it lay at harbour in Scapa Flow in October 1939. After WWII, a road was built on top of the barriers allowing easy driving access to the south isles. The area is popular with divers and sea-anglers, and also has some superb beaches.



### FLOTTA

The tiny island of Flotta has a rich history. It was at the heart of Orkney's military experience of WW11 and of the islands oil industry in the 1970s. It also has the distinction of offering one of the most spectacular 360 degree panoramas in the UK, taking in Scapa Flow, the Pentland Firth and views over several islands. The name 'flotta' comes from the Norse for 'flat isle'.



### SCAPA FLOW

Scapa Flow is a body of water encircled by the Orkney mainland and south isles, making it a sheltered natural harbour which has been strategically important from Viking times right up to WWI and WWII. Several wrecks from these periods are clearly visible. The Scapa Flow Visitor Centre and Museum on the island of Hoy will open in Spring 2020 following a major renovation project.



### RSPB NATURE RESERVES

The Royal Society of the Protection of Birds (RSPB) look after 13 nature reserves here, ranging from sea cliffs and farmland to wetland and moorland. The amazing range of habitats produces an unforgettable range of wildlife, with something to see all year-round. There are guided walks on many reserves between May and August, with a chance to enjoy wildlife watching with the experts on most days of the week.



### TOURS ON ORKNEY

One of the best ways to get to know Orkney is by touring the island with the locals. There's a range of exciting options to choose from. Get close to the islands' history and nature on a walking tour, enjoy the unique experience of a trike tour, explore the islands' food and drink or set sail on a boat trip to see wildlife and the stunning coastlines.



### BEAUTIFUL BEACHES

As you might expect from a group of islands, Orkney has numerous distinctive and beautiful beaches to discover. North Link Ferries which runs daily ferries to Orkney from Scrabster on the mainland have pulled together their top ten Orcadian beaches - whether you're looking for a beach that's beautiful, peaceful, atmospheric, or fun-filled, you'll find it here.



### CYCLING AND WALKING ROUTES

Cycling is an excellent way to discover the Orkney Islands, as it allows you to take your time, exploring the beauty of the islands' land and seascapes, as well as their dramatic coastlines as you go. Whether you want to plump for an easy route, or something more challenging, there's a route to suit you with stunning backdrops guaranteed. There is also the **St Magnus Way** - a new 55km pilgrimage path, much of which is coastal.

## SHETLAND



### TOURS ON SHETLAND

Take a tour to explore Shetland's waters and coastlines. Explore the amazing cliffs, seabird colonies and other wildlife around Noss on a boat trip from the town of Lerwick, or be adventurous by taking a tour by kayak or jet-ski. The area's abundant wildlife means that no matter where on Shetland you are, there are operators who can take you on the perfect wildlife journey of discovery.



### UNST

Unst, Britain's most northerly island, has an amazing history and spectacular landscape, such as the hills of **Hermaness** and Saxavord. Hermaness National Nature Reserve is home to thousands of breeding birds, and Keen of Hamar is an exposed ancient seabed, with unique flora found only in this area. Unst also has the highest density of Viking rural sites anywhere, including a full-sized replica Viking ship and longhouse.



### ST NINIAN'S ISLE

St. Ninian's Isle is linked to the mainland of Shetland by one of Europe's finest sand tombolos, a stunning 500m long sandy beach with sea either side, created and maintained by wave action. The 12th Century chapel on the island became famous in the 1950's for the discovery by a teenage schoolboy of the St. Ninian's treasure, 28 silver Pictish items plus the jawbone of a porpoise, buried under a slab near the altar, perhaps during a Viking raid.



### SUMBURGH HEAD LIGHTHOUSE

Sumburgh Head Lighthouse, Visitor Centre and Nature Reserve is a world class visitor attraction, providing an engaging and interactive experience for visitors of all ages. Explore the history and natural heritage of Sumburgh Head, from early geological beginnings and Iron Age settlers to the lives of lighthouse keepers and the local wildlife.



### SCALLOWAY MUSEUM AND UNST BOAT HAVEN

Shetland has a host of fascinating museums spread across all the islands. Visit the **Scalloway Museum** to hear about the wartime operation that ran special agents across the sea from Norway, or visit **Unst Boat Haven** to explore Shetland's boat-building traditions the origins of which date back to the 9th century. Exhibits include a collection of over 20 wooden boats.



### NATURE RESERVES

Shetland is renowned for the richness and diversity of its wildlife and natural habitat. In the north of Unst is Hermaness with 170m high cliffs and over 100,000 breeding seabirds while the island of Noss has an incredible "seabird city" on its 180m cliffs, including the UK's 7th biggest gannetry. Sumburgh Head is famous as a place to spot the charming puffin, while Fair Isle is a stopover for many species of migrant birds.



### SHETLAND MUSEUM AND ARCHIVES

Set on the waterfront within a restored 19th century dock in Lerwick, this fascinating museum tells the story of Shetland's heritage and culture. It charts the development of the archipelago from its earliest geological origins to the present day. Visit the renovated Boat Shed to watch vessels being constructed by hand, using techniques handed down through generations.



### MOUSA ISLE

Mousa Isle is home of the best preserved brochs (Iron Age round tower) in Scotland and is one of the nation's most atmospheric places. Built over 2,000 years ago, it stands over 13 metres high, and in climbing the ancient internal staircase, you will be rewarded with a stunning view. Seabirds and seals can be spotted in coastal areas.



### FAIR ISLE

Most famous for the intricately patterned knitwear that has been hand produced on the island for centuries using yarn spun in Shetland, Fair Isle lies midway between Orkney and Shetland. The island is also home to a variety of flora and fauna, particularly seabirds and wildflowers. It can be reached by plane or by ferry from Grutness at the south end of the Shetland mainland.



### EAST/WEST BURRA AND TONDRA

These three islands run parallel to the south mainland and are linked by bridges to each other and to the mainland of Shetland. On Tondra the Croft Trail is on a working croft dedicated to Shetland's native breeds. Burra boasts some of Shetland's finest beaches and a wonderful Shetland pony experience, plus Icelandic horse beach-trekking at **Houlls Horses and Hounds**.