



Old Man of Hoy, Orkney

Treasures from St Ninian's Isle, Shetland

St Magnus Cathedral, Orkney

Shetland fiddling traditions

Ideas to inspire

Orkney and Shetland

In 2017 Scotland will celebrate and showcase its rich history, heritage and archaeology. From the remains of our earliest settlements going back thousands of years, through the turbulent times of the Middle Ages and on to the Scottish Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution, every area of Scotland has its own tale to share with visitors.

The Orkney islands have a magical quality and are rich in history. Here, you can travel back in time 6,000 years and explore Neolithic Orkney. There are mysterious stone circles to explore such as the Standing Stones of Stenness, and the Ring of Brodgar which experts estimate may have taken more than 80,000 man-hours to construct. Not to be missed is the fascinating Skara Brae - a cluster of eight houses making up Northern Europe's best-preserved Neolithic village.

You'll also find evidence of more recent history to enjoy, such as Barony Mill, a 19th century mill which produced grain for Orkney residents, and the Italian Chapel, a beautiful place of worship built by Italian prisoners of war during WWII.

The Shetland Islands too have a distinctive charm and rich history, and are littered with intriguing ancient sites. Jarlshof Prehistoric and Norse Settlement is one of the most important and inspirational archaeological sites in Scotland, while 2,000 year old Mousa Broch is recognised as one of Europe's archaeological marvels.

The story of the internationally famous Shetland knitting, with its intricate patterns, rich colours and distinctive yarn spun from the wool of the hardy breed of sheep reared on the islands, can be uncovered at the Shetland Textile Museum.

The history of Shetland's heritage and culture from its earliest geological origins to the present day is told at the Shetland Museum and Archives in Lerwick.

Events:

Scalloway Fire Festival – January – This is the first Viking themed fire festival in the annual fire festival programme in Shetland. Watch a procession of torch bearing guisers carrying a Viking longship through the streets. www.scalloway.net

Up Helly Aa – various dates: January to March – The annual season of Up Helly Aa events are a sight to behold and emphasise the uniqueness of Shetland's history. It is a tradition that originated in the 1880s. Though the main Up Helly Aa event takes place in Lerwick there are versions held in other parts of Shetland during February and March. www.uphellyaa.org

Orkney Folk Festival – May – This four day festival attracts folk musicians from around the globe to perform in the enchanting setting of Orkney. www.orkneyfolkfestival.com

Shetland Fiddle Frenzy – August – This annual celebration of the Shetland fiddle tradition is a not-to-be-missed opportunity to enjoy the distinctive, energetic and awe-inspiring tunes and techniques of the Shetland fiddle style. www.shetlandarts.org

Orkney Storytelling Festival – October – Join local people on the Orkney mainland and islands to enjoy a story, a song and a good evening of entertainment, including fables from Orkney and Scotland. www.orkneystorytellingfestival.co.uk

Orkney and Shetland

Orkney



1
SKARA BRAE – Skara Brae prehistoric village is the best preserved group of prehistoric houses in Western Europe. The neolithic settlement, lying near the dramatic white beach of the Bay of Skail, was uncovered by a storm in 1850 and presents a remarkable picture of life around 5,000 years ago.



2
RING OF BRODGAR – The truly circular layout of the stones within the Ring of Brodgar is an unusual attribute that singles it out as one of the finest stone circles in the world. Now part of The Heart of Neolithic Orkney World Heritage Site, it's thought to date from between 2,500 and 2,000 BC, and to have originally contained 60 stones.



3
CUWEEN HILL CHAMBERED CAIRN, FINSTOWN – A fine example of a 5000 year old Neolithic chambered tomb, that when opened in the 19th century contained the remains of 24 dogs in addition to 8 people. Marvel at the remarkably high quality of the masonry in the tomb.



4
ST MAGNUS CATHEDRAL – Britain's most northerly cathedral, known as the 'Light in the North', was founded in 1137 by the Viking, Earl Rognvald, in honour of his uncle St Magnus. With its distinctive red sandstone hues, it's one of Orkney's most significant landmarks.



5
ITALIAN CHAPEL – One of Scotland's most unusual churches, the Italian Chapel was built on the Orkney island of Lamb Holm by 550 Italian prisoners of war who constructed the Churchill Barriers during WW2. Built from two Nissan huts and such everyday objects as corned beef tins and car exhausts, the chapel is a unique and special place to experience.



6
MAESHOWE CHAMBERED CAIRN – Appearing from the outside as simply a large grassy mound, Maeshow is actually the finest chambered tomb in north west Europe. Estimated to be more than 5,000 years old, it contains a stone built passage and burial chamber with cells in the walls. Look out for the graffiti runes on the walls of the main chamber, carved by Viking crusaders!



7
THE ORKNEY MUSEUM – Situated in Tankerness House, a former family home, the museum tells the story of Orkney from the Stone Age through the Picts and Vikings to the present day. The collection is of international importance, and there is a changing temporary exhibition program.



8
BISHOP'S & EARL'S PALACES – Located near the spectacular St Magnus Cathedral, these palaces are regarded as two of the finest examples of architecture in Scotland and highlight Orkney's close Norse and ecclesiastical links. A particular attraction is the magnificent monumental fireplace in the great hall of the Earl's Palace, built around 1600.



9
BROCH OF GURNESS – One of the most impressive surviving examples of an Iron Age settlement that is unique to northern Scotland. Having been archaeologically excavated it provides a vivid impression of life in the Scottish Iron Age, and gives an insight into what was probably the residence of the principal family of the community.



10
BARONY MILL – Barony Mill is a working water-powered mill specialising in stone-ground bere meal. The present mill was built in 1873. Grinding takes place here over the winter, and in the summer months the mill is open to visitors with the opportunity to see the miller demonstrate the running of the machinery.

Shetland



1
JARLSHOF PREHISTORIC AND NORSE SETTLEMENT – One of the most important archaeological sites in Scotland, Jarlshof provides a fascinating insight into the way of life in Shetland from the late Bronze Age to the Middle Ages. It includes Bronze Age houses, an Iron Age broch, Viking long houses, and a 16th century laird's house.



2
SHETLAND MUSEUM AND ARCHIVES – Set on the waterfront within a restored 19th century dock in Lerwick, the museum tells the story of Shetland's heritage and culture from its earliest geological origins to the present day. The collection ranges from delicate Shetland lace to Pictish art and you can watch vessels being constructed using generations-old hand techniques.



3
SHETLAND CROFT HOUSE MUSEUM – Step back in time at the Croft House Museum, a typical thatched 19th century building restored to how it would have looked in the 1870s. In the peaty interior you'll discover many traditions of Shetland life. The croft house also has a lovely garden with a path which leads to a restored watermill.



4
MOUSA BROCH – Standing at a height of more than 13 metres, Mousa Broch is recognised as one of the finest surviving examples of a 2,000 year old Iron Age tower or broch, and one of Europe's archaeological marvels. Take the short boat trip across from Sandwick to the island of Mousa, and climb to the top of the broch for incredible views across Mousa Sound.



5
SHETLAND TEXTILE MUSEUM – Shetland Wool and textiles, inspired by the hues of the landscapes, are known worldwide. This rich heritage can be explored at the Shetland Textile Museum. Discover how knitting was a fundamental part of the crofting life here from the 1830s, providing the islands' women with income and a new found freedom.

Day 4 - Scottish Borders



6
QUENDALE WATERMILL – This powerful watermill was built as a labour saving revolution for farmers and crofters in the late 1860s, replacing traditional hand querns for grinding cereals. Beautifully restored, the mill now houses a visitor centre with an exhibition of old farming methods and croft implements.



7
ST NINIAN'S ISLE – Visit St Ninian's Isle to discover the archaeological site located on the island. Excavated in the late 1950s then again in 2000/2001, it demonstrates the continuity of pre-Christian and Christian burial. Treasure was excavated from the site in 1958 including bowls, weapons and jewellery – replicas of the silver can be seen in the Shetland Museum.



8
OLD SCATNESS – Old Scatness, an Iron Age broch and village in the south mainland of Shetland, is one of the biggest archaeological excavations in Europe in recent years and is believed to date from between 400 and 200BC. Step back in time as you explore replica houses based on actual structures found on the site.



9
UNST – Explore the most northerly inhabited island in Shetland, rich in Viking and Norse remains. There are excavated remains of at least 60 rural longhouses. Don't miss a visit to Haroldswick to see the replica Gokstad ship and Viking longhouse reconstruction.



10
SCALLOWAY CASTLE – Situated in Scalloway, Shetland's ancient capital, this castellated mansion was built in 1600 by Patrick Stewart, Earl of Orkney. It was from here that he presided over a tyrannical regime for which the islanders dubbed him 'Black Patie'. Arrested in 1609, he was eventually executed in Edinburgh.