

Orkney & Shetland Guided Walking with Sightseeing

Trip style: Walking with sightseeing

Destination: 📍 Scottish Islands

Trip code: XAU07-LDW11

Grades: 1, 3

Carbon Footprint: 🌳 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

TRIP SUITABILITY

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 and equipment required to join this holiday. Provision cannot be made for anyone who opts out. Please be sure you can manage the daily mileage and ascent detailed in the daily itineraries. The walking day is normally 6 to 7 hours. It is important for your own enjoyment, and that of your fellow guests that you can maintain the pace. 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.

Your fitness

Having a solid base of fitness before your holiday will ensure you've the best chance of completing the holiday and

enjoying it to boot. Here's a few simple tips to help you get fit and ready for your challenge:

- Get out walking - whether the weather, get out there, and start building your fitness months before your holiday
- Build your distance gradually and get a number of 6-8hr hill days in
- Ideally, try and do two consecutive days training if possible
- Take the stairs every time
- Train on different terrain
- Train with your day pack and your walking boots too, to ensure they're well worn in before your holiday
- Other sports help improve your walking fitness too. The best ones are jogging, cycling, swimming, which will build your stamina, and yoga which will help strengthen your core and improve balance
- Time training will help ensure you enjoy your holiday to the max.

ITINERARY

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.

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.

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.