



Orkney & Shetland Islands

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Best Places to Stay

- » West Manse (p422)
- » Woodwick House (p414)
- » Links House (p414)
- » Busta House Hotel (p434)
- » Lighthouse cottages (p429)
- » Almara B&B (p434)
- » St Magnus Bay Hotel (p435)

Best Places to Eat:

- » The Creel (p412)
- » Hamnavoe Restaurant (p416)
- » Monty's Bistro (p428)

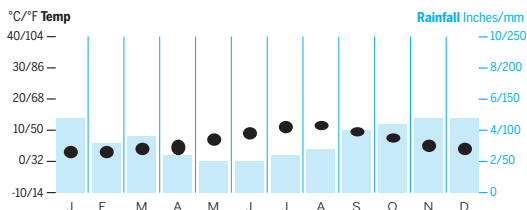
Why Go?

Up here at Britain's top end it can feel more Scandinavian than Scottish, and no wonder. For the Vikings, the jaunt across the North Sea from Norway was as easy as a stroll down to the local mead hall and they soon controlled these windswept, treeless archipelagos, laying down longhouses alongside stony remains of ancient prehistoric settlements.

Though they are not as scenically splendid as Skye, say, an ancient magic hovers in the air above the Orkney and Shetland Islands, endowing them with an allure that lodges firmly in the soul. It's in the misty seas, where seals, whales and porpoises patrol lonely coastlines; it's in the air, where squadrons of seabirds wheel above huge nesting colonies; and it's on land, where standing stones catch late summer sunsets and strains of folk music disperse in the air before the wind gusts shut the pub door. Make the journey; open that door.

When to Go

Lerwick



January The Shetlands' Up Helly Aa festival, for horned helmets and burning Viking ships on the beach.

June Orkney rocks to the St Magnus Festival: book accommodation ahead.

July Take advantage of the summer sunlight and Britain's longest daylight hours.



Orkney Islands Highlights

1 Shaking your head in astonishment at extraordinary **Skara Brae** (p413), a village of prehistoric perfection that pre-dates the pyramids

2 Plunging down the passageway into spooky **Maes Howe** (p412), an enormous Stone Age tomb lived up by some bawdy Viking graffiti

3 Exploring the scenic majesty of **Hoy** (p417) and – for serious rock climbers – scaling the Old Man there

4 Pacing the stone-flagged main street of **Stromness** (p414), as salty a fishing town as you'll ever find

5 Admiring the magnificent cathedral at **Kirkwall** (p406)

and the much humbler Italian Chapel at **Lamb Holm** (p410)

6 Island-hopping the magical **Northern Islands** (p418), where crystal azure waters lap against glittering white-sand beaches

7 Diving the sunken warships of **Scapa Flow** (p416)