

Orkney & Shetland

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Best Places to Eat

- ➔ Creel (p417)
- ➔ Foveran (p415)
- ➔ Hay's Dock (p430)

Best Places to Stay

- ➔ Scalloway Hotel (p432)
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- ➔ Albert Hotel (p414)
- ➔ West Manse (p426)
- ➔ Almara (p435)
- ➔ Busta House Hotel (p434)

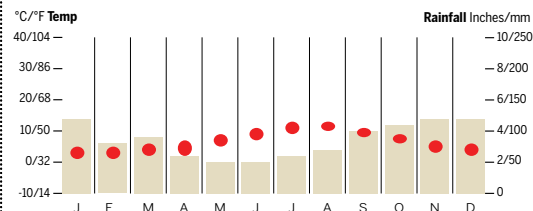
Why Go?

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.

An ancient magic hovers in the air above Orkney and Shetland, 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. These islands reward the journey.

When to Go

Lerwick



Jan Shetland's Up Helly Aa (p431): horned helmets and burning Viking ships on the beach.

Jun Orkney rocks to the St Magnus Festival (p413): book accommodation ahead.

Jul Summer sunlight and Scotland's longest daylight hours.

ORKNEY

There's a magic to Orkney that you begin to feel as soon as the Scottish mainland slips astern. Only a few short miles of ocean separate Stromness from Scrabster, but the Pentland Firth is one of Europe's most dangerous waterways, a graveyard of ships that adds an extra mystique to these islands shimmering in the sea mists.

An archipelago of mostly flat, green-topped islands stripped bare of trees and ringed with red sandstone cliffs, its heritage dates back to the Vikings whose influence is still strong today. Famed for ancient standing stones and prehistoric villages, for sublime sandy beaches and spectacular coastal scenery, it's a region whose ports tell of lives shared with the blessings and rough moods of the sea, and a destination where seekers can find melancholy wrecks of warships and the salty clamour of remote seabird colonies.



Tours

Orkney Archaeology Tours

GUIDED TOURS

(☎01856-721450; www.orkneyarchaeologytours.co.uk) Specialises in all-inclusive multi-day tours focusing on Orkney's ancient sites with an archaeologist guide. Also runs private full-day (£420 for up to four) tours.

Wildabout Orkney

GUIDED TOURS

(☎01856-877737; www.wildaboutorkney.com) Operates tours covering Orkney's history, ecology, folklore and wildlife. Day trips operate year-round and cost £59, with pick-ups in Stromness and Kirkwall.

John O'Groats Ferries

BUS TOURS

(☎01955-611353; www.jogferry.co.uk; ☼May-Sep) For the hurried; runs a one-day tour of the main sites for £58, including the ferry from John O'Groats. You can do the whole thing as a long day trip from Inverness.



Getting There & Away

AIR

Flybe (☎0871 700 2000; www.flybe.com) flies daily from Kirkwall to Aberdeen, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Inverness and Sumburgh (Shetland). Most summers it also serves Bergen (Norway).

BOAT

During summer, book car spaces ahead. Peak season fares are quoted here.

John O'Groats Ferries (☎01955-611353; www.jogferry.co.uk; single £15, incl bus to Kirkwall £17; ☼May-Sep) Passenger-only service from

John O'Groats to Burwick, on the southern tip of South Ronaldsay, with connecting bus to Kirkwall. Two to three departures daily.

Northlink Ferries (☎0845 6000 449; www.northlinkferries.co.uk) Operates ferries from Scrabster to Stromness (passenger/car £19.15/58, 1½ hours, two to three daily), from Aberdeen to Kirkwall (passenger/car £31/110, six hours, three or four weekly) and from Kirkwall to Lerwick (passenger/car £24.30/101, six to eight hours, three or four weekly) on Shetland. Fares are up to 30% lower off-season.

Pentland Ferries (☎01856-831226, 0800 688-8998; www.pentlandferries.co.uk; adult/child/car/bike £15/7/35/free) Leave from Gills Bay, 3 miles west of John O'Groats, and head to St Margaret's Hope on South Ronaldsay three to four times daily.

BUS

Citylink (www.citylink.co.uk) runs daily from Inverness to Scrabster, connecting with the Stromness ferries. John O'Groats Ferries has summer-only 'Orkney bus' service from Inverness to Kirkwall. Tickets (one-way/return £40/55, five hours) include bus-ferry-bus travel from Inverness to Kirkwall. There are two daily from June to August.



Getting Around

The *Orkney Transport Guide* details all island transport and is free from tourist offices.

The largest island, Mainland, is linked by causeways to four southern islands; others are reached by air and ferry.

AIR

Loganair (☎01856-873457; www.loganair.co.uk) operates interisland flights from Kirkwall.

BICYCLE

Various locations on Mainland hire bikes, including **Cycle Orkney** (☎01856-875777; www.cycleorkney.com; Tankerness Lane, Kirkwall; per day/3 days/week £15/30/60; ☼9am-5.30pm Mon-Sat) and **Orkney Cycle Hire** (☎01856-850255; www.orkneycyclehire.co.uk; 54 Dundas St, Stromness; per day £10-12.50). Both offer out-of-hours pick-ups.

BOAT

Orkney Ferries (☎01856-872044; www.orkneyferries.co.uk) Operates car ferries from Mainland to the islands. See individual islands for details. An Island Explorer pass costs £42 for a week's passenger travel. Bikes are carried free.

BUS

Stagecoach (☎01856-878014; www.stagecoachbus.com) Runs buses on Mainland and connecting islands. Most don't operate on Sunday. Dayrider (£8.30) and 7-Day Megarider (£18.55) tickets allow unlimited travel.