

Orkney

Tour Manager: Martin Jamieson

Sunday 20st to Thursday 31st July 2025

Visit the Orkney archipelago, staying on the mainland and visiting several of the islands

Itinerary

Sunday 20th July 2025 Ferry from Aberdeen to Orkney

Meet in Aberdeen at the ferry terminal for the Northlink ferry to Kirkwall

- Route distance: 3.0km
- Route altitude gain: 12m
- Accommodation: Hotel
- Meals: Self-Catering

Monday 21st July 2025 Kirkwall to Rousay

On Rousay we cycle clockwise to Midhowe broch and chambered cairn with views across the Eynhallow sound to Broch of Gurness. This is one of at least nine brochs that line the sound. There are 15 chambered cairns on the island and four of these are open to the public. You may spend longer visiting these or cycle round the island.

- Route distance: 71.0km
- Route altitude gain: 771m
- Accommodation: Hotel
- Meals: (B)

Tuesday 22nd July 2025 Day trip to Shapinsay

We will visit the RSPB Mill Dam Nature Reserve and the island's Heritage Centre. If it is a nice day we will visit the beach at Sandgarth. The island is close to Kirkwall, and has a more frequent ferry service, so people can choose how long to visit. It is only 10km by 5km

- Route distance: 10.0km
- Route altitude gain: 0m
- Accommodation: Hotel
- Meals: (B)

Wednesday 23rd July 2025 Italian Chapel

We cycle south from Kirkwall and across the causeway called the Churchill Barriers. Typical of governments they were built AFTER the event. Then we arrive at the Italian Chapel which was built from Nissan Huts with fantastic ingenuity by Italian prisoners of war. Then you have the option of continuing cycling south to the tip of the island. If you decide to just return to Kirkwall do consider a visit to the magnificent St Magnus Cathedral.

- Route distance: 70.0km
- Route altitude gain: 834m
- Accommodation: Hotel
- Meals: (B)

Thursday 24th July 2025 Day trip to Westray

Ferry from Kirkwall to Westray to see Puffins at Castle O'Burrian and do a short circular walk at Noup Head. Then complete the Westray Explorer cycle route. Westray is famed for the shortest scheduled flight in the world over to Papa Westray, measured more in seconds than in minutes.

- Route distance: 32.0km
- Route altitude gain: 327m
- Accommodation: Hotel
- Meals: (B)

Friday 25th July 2025 Visit the island of Hoy and continue on to our hotel in Stromness

Hoy is the largest island in Orkney (after the Mainland) and we cycle the length of it before catching a second ferry into Stromness. We will visit the Dwarfie Stane and Rackwick bay.

- Route distance: 50.0km
- Route altitude gain: 620m
- Accommodation: Hotel
- Meals: (B, D)

Saturday 26th July 2025 Maes How and Stenness Standing stones

We also pass the site of the large archaeological dig of Ness of Brodgar. The excavations have now been completed.

- Route distance: 47.0km
- Route altitude gain: 336m
- Accommodation: Hotel
- Meals: (B, D)

Sunday 27th July 2025 Sunday Ferry Excursion or Rest Day

If the excursion runs on this Sunday it will be a full day, but failing you can have a rest day or do a longer cycle to Kirkwall and beyond of 67km and 706m of ascent

- No cycling
- Accommodation: Hotel
- Meals: (B, D)

Monday 28th July 2025 Skara Brae and Yesnaby

We will visit Skara Brae where in addition to the ruins of the original village there is a fully constructed replica house. Then we continue to the magnificent sea stack of Yesnaby, which has a window at the bottom making it look like it is standing on two legs.

- Route distance: 77.0km
- Route altitude gain: 888m
- Accommodation: Hotel
- Meals: (B, D)

Tuesday 29th July 2025 Cuween Hill Cairn

This is much less well known and less frequently visited than Maes How. You will need your bike light when you go inside.

- Route distance: 49.0km
- Route altitude gain: 497m
- Accommodation: Hotel
- Meals: (B, D)

Wednesday 30th July 2025 Broch of Gurness overlooking to Rousay and then on to Kirkwall

The Broch of Gurness is well preserved and has an iron age village beside it. Northlink ferries have a nice article on it with fabulous photos.

<https://www.northlinkferries.co.uk/orkney-blog/the-broch-of-gurness/>. We have dinner in Kirkwall in the evening and then catch the overnight ferry to Aberdeen

- Route distance: 61.0km
- Route altitude gain: 701m
- Accommodation: Ferry cabin
- Meals: (B, D)

Thursday 31st July 2025 Aberdeen

This is the end of the tour, and after breakfast we can all depart for home.

- No cycling
- Accommodation: none

- Meals: (B)

Dates and Prices

Cost

- Land only price: £2350

Payment Schedule

Deposit on booking £400 followed by final payment of £1,950

Price includes:

- Hotel Accommodation
- Breakfast each day
- Dinner on six nights
- Entrance fees to Maes How, Skara Brae, Broch of Gurness and the Italian Chapel
- Ferry to and from Orkney with cabin on return journey
- Inter-island ferries

Price does not include:

- Lunches
- Cafes
- Drinks

Cancellations

| Written Notice Received | Cancellation Charge |
|--|--------------------------|
| Received by email before 13th April 2025 | Deposit of £400 |
| Received after 13th April 2025 | Full cost of tour £2,350 |

The price of £2350 is based on a minimum number of 10 people taking part in the holiday. If there are insufficient bookings by Sunday 13th April 2025, we will contact you and return all monies paid.

Holiday Information

Area

The tour starts with the evening ferry from Aberdeen to Orkney, where we stay in Kirkwall and then Stromness. The return journey to Aberdeen is overnight.

Orkney is an archipelago of islands and we stay on the "Mainland" with several visits to the islands. There are small ferries connecting the islands, but on many it is not a frequent service. Orkney is famous in archaeological circles for its Neolithic sites dating back 5,000 years to before the Egyptian Pyramids. Like much of the Scottish islands it is sparsely populated, but fortunately still has a few hotels and cafes.

Travel

Travel is by ferry to Orkney, and between the islands on Orkney. The rest of the travel is by bike or foot.

Travel to the start and from the finish is not included in this holiday. Thus, it is very important that you note that neither your Tour Organiser nor Bikexplore are responsible for you in any way until the appointed time at the designated meeting point.

Potentially a tour may be cancelled (e.g. if it does not attract the minimum numbers) so please do not commit to any travel arrangements until you have received confirmation that the tour will go ahead. In the event of cancellation Bikexplore will only be responsible for refunding you the cost of the tour itself.

Communication

Prior to the tour communication will be by email, but shortly before the tour we will set up a WhatsApp group. During the tour we will use WhatsApp to communicate details like café stops, meal arrangements, places of interest and any emergencies on route. Ideally everyone will bring a smart phone and be happy to be included in the group.

Accommodation

We will stay in two 3 star hotels, and have a cabin on the ferry for the return journey.

All rooms have en-suite facilities.

Similarly on the return ferry journey we have cabins, with ensuite.

Prices are based on two people sharing a room. When booking with a partner to share please specify twin or double beds. There are no single occupancy rooms available.

Meals, Health and Diet

Breakfast each day is included and in addition dinner is included on six evenings. We will pay for our own lunches, café stops and beverages. Most of the tour is in sparsely populated areas so there may be few options for procuring lunch and these could be closed on the day we need them. Please carry sufficient food and water to last you all day if necessary. Most places are happy to accept credit cards but please carry some cash just in case.

Please advise the tour organiser of any dietary requests in your Booking application, and do remember to pack any medications that you need. Can you also remind the tour organiser of any dietary requests and health issues at the start of the tour.

Cycles and Equipment

TYPE OF BIKE

A touring cycle, gravel bike, hybrid, tandem, recumbent or lightweight road bike would all be suitable for most of this holiday. However, a gravel bike (or touring bike) would cope better if we come to any unpaved or rough sections. There might be a short section on the day to Yesnaby.

MAINTENANCE

You should ensure your cycle is well maintained, paying particular attention to wheels, tyres and brakes. A low bottom gear (eg. small chainring the same size or smaller than the largest cog on your rear wheel) is recommended. Mudguards are optional but demonstrate respect to those who are following you in wet weather. Lights are recommended in the very unlikely event of arriving back late and useful if walking outdoors at night. A bell is advised and bring a bike lock for security. Water bottles are required to ensure you are hydrated at all times. You must carry sufficient spares and tools to deal with punctures and minor repairs, including two inner tubes, spare gear and brake cable, split link and spare brake pads. There are almost no bike shops on route and they are never when you need them. You are advised to use 28mm tyres, or larger, to suit the variable terrain.

This tour is based in just two centres so the only luggage is on the day we go from Kirkwall to Stromness and the last day on Orkney when we return to Kirkwall. On arrival we have a flat 3km from the ferry to our hotel. The luggage weight for transfers is limited to 10kg per person, which is usually sufficient for any holiday, washing spare clothes each night.

Please bring a bike lock suitable to your attitude towards the risk of theft.

Ride, Rest Days and Fitness

This is a cycling holiday for 12 days with several days when we visit islands by ferry and have little cycling. We stay in Kirkwall for 5 nights, then Stromness for 5 nights, and we have an overnight ferry.

Most of the cycling is on minor roads, but we also use cycle paths and there are some sections on main roads. People tend to cycle in small groups, and meet up with the rest of the group at view points and cafes. The tour should be manageable for someone who cycles regularly and has reasonable fitness. There are some longer days and some days with a lot of ascent, as well as shorter and easier days. Please train for the tour and ride some hilly 80km day trips in preparation.

People may want to stop for photographs, look at the view or explore some local attraction and this is encouraged. You are on holiday. If you wish to go further from the group and do your own thing then please do advise the tour organiser.

WEATHER, CLOTHING AND CULTURE

The weather in the UK can be very variable so please carry waterproof clothing and sun screen. You might end up using them on the same day.

The average maximum temperature in Orkney on 21st July is 16 degrees C, while the average rainfall for the whole month is 48mm. In comparison figures for London are 23 degrees and 36mm. For most people this will be colder than at home, so do bring additional layers.

Diane and I like open water swimming, and there will be some opportunities to swim or just paddle if you would like to join us. Please only do what you are safe and comfortable with. A swimming costume, goggles and microlight towel would not add much weight to carry.

Please carry waterproof clothing and sun screen.

Helmets are optional, but are recommended.

Maps and Guides

The tour organiser will email a link to Plotaroute with all of the planned rides for the tour. These can be downloaded to your Garmin, or other cycle computer, or phone. If you do not use such technology please do bring the relevant pages from a road atlas and highlight the planned routes. Maybe bring the road atlas pages as well as a Garmin.

There are lots of maps available but I still use a Philip's Red Books "Orkney Shetland" which is printed with Orkney on one side and Shetland on the other.

There are lots of guide books available and the one I have is called "The Islands of Orkney" by Liv Kjorsvik Schei ISBN 978-1-84107-359-0

Travel Insurance and Vaccinations

Holiday costs in the UK have risen so we strongly recommend purchasing travel insurance in case you have to cancel for any reason.

There are no additional medical requirements for UK residents holidaying in Scotland, but please do bring any medications that you need to use. Please also make the tour organiser aware of any health issues.

Passport, Visa and Monies

Scotland voted to stay in the EU and stay in Britain, so there is no requirement for Passports or Visas. The currency is pounds Sterling.

Joking aside, since covid most cafes now take credit cards (but please do bring some cash as well). You will need access to sufficient funds for evening meals (six are included in the tour price) and all lunches and café stops.

Ferries

The tour includes ferries to get to Orkney as well as ferries between islands. Unlike on planes, if a ferry is cancelled because of bad weather the ferry company does not compensate travellers. Bikexplore would help make alternative arrangements, but the cost of these is not included in your holiday. As a guide there were no failures by Northlink ferries in the whole of July 2024 or 2023 on either this route or the Scrabster route.

Tour Organiser - Contact Details

Martin Jamieson - mdjamieson@hotmail.co.uk