

Squam Lakes Natural Science Center

Presents:

Northern Isles Adventure

A Tour of Scotland's Orkney and Shetland Islands

May 19 - June 1, 2023



Led by Iain MacLeod

Itinerary

Join native Scot Iain MacLeod for a very personal, small-group tour of Scotland's Shetland and Orkney Islands. Iain is an experienced group tour leader who has organized and led tours of Scotland more than a dozen times. This will be his fourth tour of the Northern Isles.

The hotels are chosen by Iain for their comfort, ambiance, hospitality, and excellent food. Iain personally arranges every detail — flights, meals, transportation, and daily destinations. The group size (maximum 12 people), and unhurried pace fosters new friendships, a relaxed atmosphere, and flexibility in the schedule.

Friday, May 19: Depart from Logan Airport, Boston in the late afternoon for an overnight flight to the UK. Note: If you need to depart from another airport, Iain will make arrangements for you and coordinate all to arrive in Aberdeen together. Any additional cost above the cost of the "trip flight" will be added to the individual's trip balance.

Saturday, May 20: Arrive Aberdeen Airport. Iain will meet the group at the airport with a mini coach and we'll head into the city of Aberdeen to catch the overnight NorthLink ferry from Aberdeen to Lerwick in Shetland. Departure is 5:00 pm (but we can get on board at 3pm). Iain will point out seabirds (Gannets, gulls, Guillemots, etc) and perhaps dolphins from the deck before dinner. Dinner is on the ferry followed by a comfortable night's sleep rocked by the gentle ocean swell.

Sunday, May 21: Arrive in Lerwick at 7:30 am. Today will be an exploration of the south "Mainland" of Shetland including the spectacular seabird cliffs at Sumburgh Head where you can view nesting Puffins, Kittiwakes, Shags, Razorbills, and Guillemots close-up. There is also a terrific visitor center and museum celebrating the Sumburgh Light House and war history. Then it's off to visit Jarlshof. At the end of the 19th century, storms ripped open the low cliffs at Jarlshof. They revealed an extraordinary settlement site embracing 4,000 years of human history. Upon excavation, the site was found to contain a remarkable sequence of stone structures – late Neolithic houses, Bronze-Age village, Iron-Age broch and wheelhouses, Norse longhouse, medieval farmstead, and 16th-century laird's house. Then it's north to Busta House Hotel. This will be the home base for the five nights in Shetland. (<http://www.bustahouse.com/>).

Monday, May 22: Today you'll do some island hopping. First off is a short ferry crossing to the island of Yell — a mosaic of moorland and lochans, then over to Noss. The highlight will be a hike across the Hermaness Nature Reserve accompanied by hundreds of breeding Great Skuas. Puffins will be on the cliffs and great views the most northerly point in the British Isles — Muckle Flugga lighthouse — and the amazing Gannet-covered stack nearby — truly a highlight of any visit to Shetland. Then it's back to the mainland and to Busta for a well-deserved dinner.



Tuesday, May 23: Today the group will explore the eastern mainland including Scallaway where you'll learn about the Shetland Bus — the nickname of a clandestine special operations group that made a permanent link between Shetland and German-occupied Norway from 1941 until the German occupation ended in 1945. In the afternoon there will be a spectacular three-hour cruise out of Lerwick around the islands of Noss and Bressay on the Seabirds-and-Seals vessel (a unique view of wildlife above and under the water).



Wednesday, May 24: Today the group will visit the island of Fetlar. First it's over to Yell again, then it's another ferry to Fetlar with hopes of seeing the rare and elusive Red-necked Phalarope. Other highlights will include Whimbrel, Curlew, Redshank, Snipe, and several other shorebirds. In the evening (after dinner) Iain will take you on a very special night-time visit to the island of Mousa. The small passenger ferry leaves at dusk (very late) and you'll get to experience the unique spectacle of thousands of Storm Petrels that breed in the rock walls and in the ancient Broch (stone tower). You'll get to experience the near arctic "simmer dim" when it never really gets dark.



Thursday, May 25: Today, it's time to explore the north mainland. The treeless moors are home to Red-throated Divers, and many species of shorebirds. We'll visit the spectacular basalt cliffs at Eshaness, have lunch at Tangwick Ness and explore North Roe.



Friday, May 26: We'll check out of the hotel after breakfast and explore the west Mainland. We'll head out to Sandness and visit the Jamieson's Spinning Mill. We'll have lunch at one of Iain's favorite spots and explore Walls. Then we will head for Lerwick and visit the wonderful Shetland Museum where you can get a further overview of the history of these islands. We'll depart on the 5:30 pm ferry and say goodbye to Shetland. Dinner will be on the ferry and we arrive in Kirkwall, Orkney at 11:00 pm. We'll head to the Merkister Hotel (<http://www.merkister.com/>) which will be our base for our five days in Orkney.



Saturday, May 27: Orkney is an internationally-important site for ancient archeological artifacts. Today we will explore the Standing Stones of Stenness, The Ring of Brodgar, and the burial mound of Maeshowe. We'll also visit Loch Stenness and Loch Harry and Birsay Moor (for Hen Harriers and Short-eared Owls).

Sunday, May 28: Today the group will explore the West Mainland and visit several bird reserves including The Loons (which has been a wonderfully productive spot on past trips) and Marwick Head. We'll also visit the stone-age village of Skara Brae and the cliffs at Yesnaby

Monday, May 29: Today we'll explore Kirkwall including a chance to visit the magnificent St. Magnus Cathedral. If there is interest, a visit to the Highland Park Distillery could be arranged.

Tuesday, May 30 : After breakfast, it's off to explore the east Mainland and down to the southern Isles (Burray and South Ronaldsay). We'll cross the Churchill Barriers — causeways built in the 1940s to protect the anchored British fleet in Scapa Flow, and visit the amazing Italian Chapel — built by Italian prisoners of war during World War II. In the afternoon we'll visit the Tomb of the Eagles. Perched above the dramatic South Ronaldsay cliffs, the Isbister Chambered Cairn—better known today as the 'Tomb of the Eagles'—is one of Orkney's top archaeological sites. Discovered by chance by local farmer Ronnie Simison in the 1950s, the Stone Age tomb revealed an amazing collection of bones and artefacts, placed here some 5,000 years ago. Alongside the human bones were the talons and bones of an estimated 14 White-tailed Eagles—the only tomb in Orkney with such a density of eagle bones.



Wednesday, May 31 : After breakfast, we'll check out of your rooms and then we will explore areas of the mainland missed earlier and then return to the hotel for dinner. After dinner we head for Kirkwall to catch the 11:45 pm overnight ferry back to Aberdeen.



Thursday, June 1: The ferry arrives in Aberdeen at 7:00 am. We'll have breakfast on the ferry and then it's over to the airport for a departure later in the morning and back to Boston.

All-inclusive cost includes hotel accommodations and all meals, round-trip airfare from Boston to Aberdeen, van transportation in Scotland, ferry and boat trips, and admission fees to nature reserves and other destinations listed on the itinerary.



Cost per person: \$5,950 (assumes double or twin occupancy room. There is an additional \$750 single room supplement).

For more details or to book a space, call Iain at 603-968-7194 or e-mail him at iain.macleod@nhnature.org.



Note: All photos taken on previous Scotland trips led by Iain.

