

Squam Lakes Natural Science Center

Presents:

Northern Isles Adventure

A Tour of Scotland's Orkney and Shetland Islands

May 28 - June 10, 2027



Led by Iain MacLeod

2027 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 more than 20 tours of Scotland over the last 30 years. This will be his sixth tour of the beautiful Shetland and Orkney Islands.

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

Saturday, May 29:

Arrive Aberdeen Airport. You will make your own flight arrangements which gives you the option to arrive a day early or extend your visit on either end. We will establish an official trip start/meeting time at the airport.

Iain will meet the group at the airport with a mini coach and head to Aberdeen ferry terminal to board the overnight NorthLink ferry from Aberdeen to Lerwick in Shetland.

Departure is 5:00 pm.

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 30:

Arrive in Lerwick at 7:30 am. Today will be exploring 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 we will visit [Loch of Spiggie](#) reserve for waterfowl, terns and maybe our first chance for Red-necked Phalarope. Then it's north to [Busta House Hotel](#), our base for five nights.

Monday, May 31:

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 Unst. 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, June 1:

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. The cliffs are spectacular and the Gannet show is breathtaking.



Wednesday, June 2:

Today, we will 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. In the evening (after dinner) we will go 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 the hundreds 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. We'll get back to the hotel in the early hours.



Thursday, June 3:

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. Fetlar is also famous for its abundance of Otters.



Friday, June 4:

We'll check out of the hotel after breakfast and explore the west Mainland. We'll head out to Sandness. 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](#) which will be our base for our five days in Orkney.



Saturday, June 5:

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, June 6:

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) We'll also visit the stone-age village of [Skara Brae](#) and the cliffs at [Yesnaby](#).

Monday, June 7:

Today we'll explore Kirkwall including a chance to visit the magnificent [St. Magnus Cathedral](#). In the afternoon we will visit the [Highland Park Distillery](#).

Tuesday, June 8:

Today we are 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. We'll also visit the nearby [Fossil and Heritage Museum](#).

Wednesday, June 9:

After breakfast, you'll check out of your room and load up the van 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 10:

The ferry arrives in Aberdeen at 7:00 am, then it's over to the airport for a departure later in the morning and back to the US.

Cost includes all hotel accommodations and all meals, van transportation in Scotland, ferry and boat trips and admission fees to nature reserves and other destinations listed on the itinerary. It does not include airfare.

Cost per person: \$6,950 (assumes double or twin occupancy room). There is an additional \$950 single room supplement.

For more details or to book a space, call Iain at 603-968-7194 x123 or e-mail him at iain.macleod@nhnature.org.

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

