

Orkney & Shetland Islands



Floating off Scotland's remote northeast coast, the Orkney and Shetland Islands are captivating archipelagos forming an antithesis to modern urban grit. Life has always been different in this part of the country. Things move a bit slower and local folk appreciate a smile and a wave more than most. And, importantly, the march of progress hasn't undermined a sense of community, or a sense of place. Globalisation may have delivered the internet into many Orcadian and Shetland homes, but it hasn't interrupted a traditional way of life where separations between cultural heritage and island myth and legend are distinctly hazy.

Devolution came to these islands long before the rest of Scotland. Their geographical isolation, Norse roots and distinctive geography gives each group its own identity. This character is accentuated by echoes of the past; the islands are a living, breathing museum, with our distant ancestors leaving behind an extraordinary diary of human development. It's this sort of fusion that makes a trip to Scotland's far-flung northern outposts a highlight of any visit.

Breathtaking scenery means walking and cycling are both popular and (with sometimes ferocious headwinds) challenging island pursuits. The wildlife spectacle here is unparalleled in the British Isles, and visitors may spot porpoises, elusive otters and seal colonies – but it is the thriving bird population that is a real draw card, with millions of sea birds breathing life into forbidding coastal areas. And who can resist sitting among colonies of comical puffins as they totter about their daily business?

HIGHLIGHTS

- Shaking your head in astonishment at extraordinary **Skara Brae** (p417) and **Maes Howe** (p416), prehistoric perfection that predates the pyramids
- Blowing away the cobwebs amid the raw, desolate and beautiful landscapes of **Unst** (p434) and **Yell** (p433)
- Island hopping the magical **Northern Islands** (p419) of Orkney, where crystal azure waters lap against glittering white-sand beaches
- Checking out Shetland's absorbing brand-new **museum** (p426), which details 5000 years worth of history and landscapes
- Scuba diving in Europe's premier underwater museum of sunken warships in **Scapa Flow** (p412)



■ POPULATION: ORKNEY 19,500;
SHETLAND 22,000

■ AREA: ORKNEY 990 SQ KM;
SHETLAND 1466 SQ KM

ORKNEY ISLANDS

Orkney captures the imagination and the eye, its balding turf reflective of constantly changing shades of light as clouds scurry across windswept skies. In summer the days are lengthy and the sunniest moments are often long into the evening – a great time to be out exploring. Orcadians are a friendly bunch, seemingly immune to the unpredictable climate, and are fiercely independent of mainland Scotland, even though their magical archipelago is situated a mere 6 miles off the north coast.

Only 17 of Orkney's 70 islands are inhabited and some of the most dramatic scenery is along the coast where 300m cliffs plunge into white, sandy beaches. The archipelago contains a sliver of mankind's ancient existence that's found nowhere else. Prehistoric sites are sprinkled throughout the islands – Europe's greatest concentration – their stone walls immune to 5000 years of climatic onslaught. The Flinstonesque furniture of Skara Brae, the tomb of Maes Howe and numerous standing stones weave a mystical milieu while providing a snapshot of the way people have worshipped, lived and perished since ancient times.

Today's animated contemporary culture, its roots firmly embedded in traditional island life, is best experienced among the smaller islands and in the larger towns of Kirkwall and Stromness on Mainland, with their Norse roots, inviting drinking holes, chatty locals and vibrant festivals.

Tours

Orkney Island Holidays (☎ 01856-711 373; www.orkneyislandholidays.com; Furrowend, Shapinsay) offers holidays based on Shapinsay, with guided tours of archaeological sites, bird-watching trips, wildlife trips and excursions to other islands. One-week, all-inclusive packages cost £950.

Wildabout Orkney (☎ /fax 01856-851 011; www.wildaboutorkney.com) operates tours covering Orkney's history, ecology, folklore and wildlife. Day trips operate year-round and cost £45. The minibus tours pick you up at Stromness ferry terminal, and at Palace Rd and Kirkwall Youth Hostel in Kirkwall.

Discover Orkney (☎ /fax 01856-872 865; 44 Clay Loan, Kirkwall, Mainland) caters to individuals and

small groups, offering guided tours and walks throughout the islands in the company of a qualified guide. Specific tours are tailored to your interests and your guide comes from a long line of Orcadians.

Getting There & Away

AIR

British Airways/Loganair (☎ 0845 773 3377; www.loganair.co.uk) flies at least twice daily (except Sunday) from Kirkwall airport to Aberdeen (one hour), Edinburgh (1¼ hours), Glasgow (1¼ hours) and Inverness (45 minutes), with connections to London Heathrow, Birmingham, Manchester and Belfast. There are two daily flights (Monday to Friday, one each on Saturday and Sunday) from Kirkwall to Sumburgh airport on Shetland (35 minutes). You can book on the website; fares fluctuate depending on date and time of departure.

BOAT

Car ferries to and from Orkney can be very busy in July and August – it's best to book ahead at these times.

From Scrabster, Shetlands & Aberdeen

Northlink Ferries (☎ 0845 600 0449; www.northlinkferries.co.uk) operates ferries from Scrabster to Stromness (passenger return £26 to £30, car return £82 to £90, 1½ hours, three daily Monday to Friday, two on weekends). Northlink also sails from Aberdeen to Kirkwall (passenger return £32 to £50, car return £126 to £172, up to 7¼ hours, three or four weekly) and on to Lerwick (passenger return £27 to £40, car return £100 to £160, up to 7½ hours, one daily) on the Shetland Islands. Note that there are only two or three services weekly from Lerwick to Kirkwall, but daily services from Lerwick to Aberdeen.

Fares vary according to low-, mid- and peak-season trips (we've provided low and peak fares), and travel times vary due to winds.

From Gills Bay

Pentland Ferries (☎ 01856-831 226; www.pentlandferries.co.uk) offers a shorter and less expensive car-ferry crossing than the Northlink trip. Boats leave from Gills Bay, about 3 miles west of John o'Groats, and head to St Margaret's Hope in Orkney (passenger/car £12/28, one hour). There are three to four crossings daily in summer and usually three in winter.



From John o'Groats

During the summer period, **John o'Groats Ferries** (☎ 01955-611 353; www.jogferry.co.uk) operates a passenger-only ferry (p363) from John o'Groats to Burwick, on the southern tip of South Ronaldsay.

BUS

Scottish Citylink (☎ 0870 550 5050; www.citylink.co.uk) has daily coaches from Inverness to Scrabster (£16, three hours), connecting with the ferries to Stromness. Early-morning departures from Glasgow or Edinburgh, and overnighters from London, connect with the Scrabster bus at Inverness.

John o'Groats Ferries (☎ 01955-611 353; www.jogferry.co.uk) operates the summer-only Orkney bus service from Inverness to Kirkwall. Tickets (one way/return £30/42, five hours) include bus travel from Inverness to John o'Groats, passenger ferry to Burwick and another bus from Burwick to Kirkwall. There's one bus daily in May and two daily from June to early September.

Getting Around

Orkney Islands Council (☎ 01856-873 535) publishes the *Orkney Public Transport Timetable*, a detailed schedule of all bus, ferry and air services around and to/from Orkney. The timetable is available free from tourist offices.

The largest island, Mainland, is joined by road-bearing causeways to Burray and South Ronaldsay. The other islands can be reached by air and ferry services.

TO/FROM THE AIRPORT

British Airways/Loganair (☎ 01856-873 457; www.loganair.co.uk) operates interisland flights between Kirkwall airport and North Ronaldsay, Westray, Papa Westray, Stronsay, Sanday and Eday. For details, see each island's entry in this chapter.

BICYCLE

You can hire bikes from various locations on Mainland, including **Cycle Orkney** (☎ 01856-875 777; Tankerness Lane, Kirkwall; adult/child bikes per day from £10/6; ☹ 9am-5.30pm Mon-Sat) and **Orkney Cycle Hire** (☎ 01856-850 255; 54 Dundas St, Stromness; per day £6-10).

BOAT

Orkney Ferries (☎ 01856-872 044; www.orkneyferries.co.uk; Shore St, Kirkwall) operates car ferries from

Mainland to Hoy, Flotta and the northern Orkney islands; for details see each island's section later in the chapter.

CAR

There are several car-hire companies on Mainland, including **Orkney Car Hire** (☎ 01856-872 866; www.orkneycarhire.co.uk; Junction Rd, Kirkwall) and **Norman Brass Car Hire** (☎ 01856-850 850; Blue Star Filling Station, North End Rd, Stromness). Small-car rates begin at around £34/164 per day/week, although there are specials for as low as £25 per day.

To hire a camper van, contact **Orkney Motorhome Hire** (☎ 01856-874 391; www.orkney-motorhome-hire.co.uk). The vans sleep two adults comfortably, but two adults and three kids at a pinch. Weekly rates are £390 from November to March, £490 in July and August, and £440 all other months.

PUBLIC TRANSPORT

Orkney Coaches (☎ 01856-870 555) runs bus services on Mainland and South Ronaldsay. Most buses don't operate on Sunday. Day Rover (£6) and 3-Day Rover (£15) tickets will save you money, allowing unlimited travel on Orkney Coaches' bus routes. **Causeway Coaches** (☎ 01856-831 444) runs to St Margaret's Hope on South Ronaldsay.

KIRKWALL

☎ 01856 / pop 6200

With its roads pounded by the footsteps of tourists on their summer Orcadian pilgrimage, Kirkwall has an energy that ebbs and flows along its busy streets. It's set back from a wide bay, and its vigour, combined with the atmospheric paved streets and twisting wynds (lanes), gives Orkney's capital a distinctive character. Magnificent St Magnus Cathedral takes pride of place in the centre of town, and the nearby Earl's and Bishop's Palaces are also worth a ramble. Founded in the early 11th century, the original part of Kirkwall is one of the best examples of an ancient Norse town.

Information

There are banks with ATMs on Broad St and Albert St.

Balfour Hospital (☎ 888000; New Scapa Rd)
Lauderama (☎ 872982; 47 Albert St; ☹ 8.30am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm Sat) Service wash and dry £7.50.
Orcadian Bookshop (☎ 878888; www.orcadian.co.uk; 50 Albert St) Great selection of local books and newspapers.

Orkney Library (☎ 873166; 44 Junction Rd; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Thu, 9am-5pm Fri, Sat; ☎) Fast and free internet access (one-hour maximum).

Post office (Junction Rd)

Support Training (☎ 873582; cnr Junction Rd & West Tankerness Lane; per hr £5; ☎ 8.30am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-5pm Sat) Internet access.

Tourist office (☎ 872856; www.visitorkney.com; 6 Broad St; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-4pm Sat Oct-Apr, 9am-6pm May & Sep, 8.30am-8pm Jun-Aug) Very helpful. Has a good range of publications on Orkney.

Sights

ST MAGNUS CATHEDRAL

Founded in 1137 and constructed from local red sandstone and yellow Eday stone, fabulous **St Magnus Cathedral** (☎ 874894; Broad St; admission

free; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Sat, 1-6pm Sun Apr-Sep, 9am-1pm & 2-5pm Mon-Sat Oct-Mar) should not be missed. The powerful atmosphere of an ancient faith pervades the impressive interior. Lyrical and melodramatic epitaphs of the dead line the walls inside and emphasise the serious business of 17th- and 18th-century bereavement.

Earl Rognvald Brusason commissioned the cathedral in the name of his martyred uncle, Magnus Erlendsson, who was killed by Earl Hakon Paulsson on Egilsay in 1117. Work began in 1137, but the building is actually the result of 300 years of construction and alteration, and includes Romanesque, transitional and Gothic styles.

During summer only, 40-minute tours of the cathedral's upper levels start at 11am and

2pm on Tuesday and Thursday and cost £5.50 per person.

EARL'S PALACE & BISHOP'S PALACE

Near the cathedral, and on opposite sides of the street, these two ruined Historic Scotland (HS) **palaces** (☎ 871918; Watergate; adult/child £2.20/75p; ☎ 9.30am-6.30pm Apr-Sep) are worth poking around. The Earl's Palace was once known as the finest example of French Renaissance architecture in Scotland. It's the better of the two palaces, with many lower rooms still intact. One room features an interesting history of its builder, Earl Patrick Stewart, who was executed in Edinburgh for treason. He started construction in about 1600, but he ran out of money and it was never completed.

The Bishop's Palace was built in the mid-12th century to provide comfortable lodgings for Bishop William the Old. There's a good view of the cathedral from the tower, and a plaque showing the different phases of the cathedral's construction.

TANKERNESS HOUSE & ORKNEY MUSEUM

This fine restored **merchant's house** (☎ 873191; Broad St; admission free; ☎ 10.30am-5pm Mon-Sat & 2-5pm Sun Apr-Sep, 10.30am-5pm Mon-Sat Oct-Mar) gives an intriguing glimpse into Orkney's archaeological treasure chest, starting from the first settlers, who arrived over 5000 years ago. Exhibits include Pictish stones, 'bone' pins and Iron Age jewellery. The highlight is the photo archive downstairs, which offers snapshots of a technologically distant past. Keep an eye out for the temporary exhibitions.

HIGHLAND PARK DISTILLERY

Not only is Highland Park a very fine single malt, but the tour (£5) of the world's most northerly **whisky distillery** (☎ 874619; Holm Rd; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Fri Apr, Sep & Oct, 10am-5pm Mon-Sat & noon-5pm Sun May-Aug, 1-5pm Mon-Fri Nov-Mar) is also one of the best. You'll see the whole whisky-making process – this is one of the few distilleries that still does its own barley malting, known as floor malting. Tours are run half-hourly.

ORKNEY WINE COMPANY

About 2 miles south of Kirkwall off the A961, **Orkney Wine Company** (☎ 878700; www.orkneywine.co.uk; Operahalla, St Ola) produce handmade wines made from berries, flowers and vegetables, all naturally fermented. Get stuck into some

gooseberry or gorse-flower plonk – not everyone's cup of tea but surprisingly addictive.

Festivals & Events

The **St Magnus Festival** (☎ 871445; www.stmagnusfestival.com) takes place in June and is a colourful celebration of music and the arts.

Kirkwall is transformed into a seething swell of islanders and tourists on New Year's Day and Christmas Day, when the boisterous and chaotic (read: frankly crazy) ball game known as the **Ba'** takes place. The streets become a heaving mass of people, striking this way and that as the ba' moves through the throng.

Sleeping BUDGET

Peedie Kirkwall Hostel (☎ 875477; kirkwallpeedie-hostel@talk21.com; 1 Ayre Houses, Ayre Rd; dm from £10) This clean, compact, independent hostel has small dorms with comfy wooden bunks (two or four beds to a room), washbasin and TV in each room. It's on the waterfront next to Ayre Hotel, five minutes' walk west of the town centre.

Kirkwall Youth Hostel (SYHA; ☎ 0870 004 1133; Old Scapa Rd; dm adult/child £13.50/10; ☎ Mar-Oct) Kirkwall's well-equipped hostel is a 10-minute walk south of the bus station. Though no architectural gem, it's large (with plenty of four-bed dorms), has decent facilities and is very friendly. You'll probably get a room to yourself.

Also recommended:

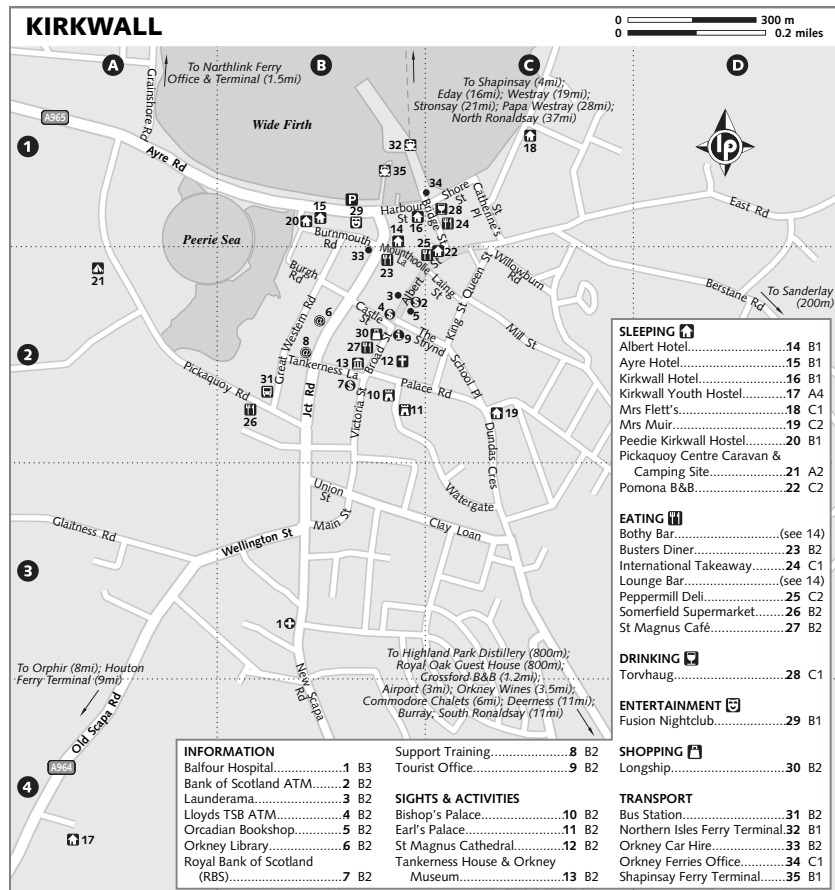
Pickaquo Centre Caravan & Camping Site (☎ 879900; Pickaquo Rd; camp site per 2 people & tent £6.60) Plenty of grass and decent facilities.

Mrs Flett's (☎ 873160; Cumliebank, Cromwell Rd; r per person from £19) Small, traditional and very friendly B&B.

MIDRANGE

Pomona B&B (☎ 872325; cjsmuir@btinternet.com; 9 Albert St; r per person £20) We rubbed our hands with glee when we found this old-fashioned B&B at the back of the café with the same name. With six en suite rooms it's not the roomiest lodging in Orkney, but it is a bargain and possibly the best located, just off the main drag in the heart of town. Singles note: no surcharge – yippee!!

Ourpick Crossford (☎ 871642; crossford@bushinternet.com; Heatherly Loan, St Ola; r per person £30) Situated in St Ola, just up the road from Highland Park Distillery, is this excellent, homely little B&B.



There's just one double en-suite room (with a lovely outlook), a small dining/sitting area and lots of privacy. There's also a small single the owner will probably let out if there's three of you (but you have to share the en suite). Very convenient to Kirkwall, but with a rural setting, you get the best of both worlds. Look for the sign just after Highland Park, heading south from Kirkwall.

Mrs Muir (☎ 874805; 2 Dundas Cres; s/d £30/44) This highly recommended mansion, the old manse for the church, has some of the best accommodation in town. Cavernous rooms have huge windows that flood the place with light. Bathrooms are shared, but these lodgings are something special.

Kirkwall Hotel (☎ 872232; www.kirkwallhotel.com; Harbour St; s/d from £60/90; 🚗) A grand old bastion of Orcadian hospitality, this hotel sits in a prime location gazing proudly over the harbour. Executive rooms face the front, have magnificent views and enough room to park your car next to your bed – they're huge! You're paying for the grandeur, but once you're snuggled into the downstairs bar, you won't care. Room size and bed quality is variable in standard rooms.

Also recommended:

Commodore Chalets (☎ 781319; www.commodorechalets.co.uk; St Marys; s/d £25/50) An excellent alternative to staying in Kirkwall. Austere B&B and self-catering options. Just before the first Churchill Barrier heading south, 6 miles from Kirkwall.

Royal Oak Guest House (☎ /fax 877177; www.royal-oakhouse.co.uk; Holm Rd; s/d £35/50) Has modern rooms that would suit business travellers or families.

Sanderlay (☎ 875587; www.sanderlay.co.uk; 2 Viewfield Drive; s/d £35/56; 🚗) Sombre Sanderlay is a classy guesthouse in a family home, with understated and first-rate rooms.

TOP END

Ayre Hotel (☎ 873001; www.ayrehotel.co.uk; Ayre Rd; s/d £75/100, seaview supplement £10) The Ayre Hotel is a very busy 200-year-old town-house hotel. The service can be surly, sure, but this four-star affair is the classiest joint in town. Modern bedrooms are formally furnished with dark polished wood, huge beds and low ceilings. Try to get a room with sea views, it's worth the extra.

Albert Hotel (☎ 876000; www.alberthotel.co.uk; Mounthoolie Lane; s/d £110/150) Central, child-friendly Albert Hotel has a pleasant, traditional feel to it. Functional, tidy rooms have

king-size beds and you'll get a discount if you stay more than three nights. Excellent meals are served downstairs, and one of the best bars in town is also here. Major refurbishments were ongoing at the time of research as a fire ripped through the place in 2005.

Eating

Peppermill Deli (☎ 878878; 21 Albert St; lunch £3; 🚗 8.30am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-5.30pm Sat, 11am-4pm Sun) The best place in town to grab a takeaway lunch; the selection of fillings for paninis, baguettes, wraps and toasties is almost limitless. It's also numero uno for coffee and you can grab smoked seafoods and cheeses here for picnics.

Busters Diner (☎ 876717; 1 Mounthoolie Lane; mains £5.50-11.50; 🚗 lunch Tue-Sat, dinner Tue-Sun) A perpetually busy, American-style diner churning out generous portions of hot dogs, pizza and burgers, and Tex-Mex such as enchiladas and tacos. Busters is popular with the younger crowd.

Albert Hotel (☎ 876000; Mounthoolie Lane; bar suppers £7, Stables Restaurant mains £12; 🚗 lunch & dinner) The Albert has the lively, friendly Bothy Bar and the more sedate Lounge Bar dishing out scrumptious bar suppers using lots of local produce, such as Orcadian beef and cheeses.

Kirkwall Hotel (☎ 872232; Harbour St; mains £10-14; 🚗 lunch & dinner) Although catering for most diners, with a mix of beef, lamb, game and veggie dishes, the seafood is the highlight at this hotel restaurant, with sauces that bring out the flavour of the sea. Locals reckon it's the best tucker in town. Dining here is a sedate experience, not for those with food fights on their minds.

Somerfield supermarket (Pickaquoyn Rd) is the best place to stock up on provisions.

Also recommended:

International Takeaway (☎ 874773; Bridge St; fish supper £4; 🚗 lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) Fires out some kicking kebabs and decent fish and chips.

St Magnus Café (☎ 873354; Broad St; light meals under £2; 🚗 9.30am-6pm & 7-10pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-4pm Sat) Old-fashioned food hall serving cheap, honest food such as toasties and bacon rolls.

Drinking & Entertainment

Bothy Bar (☎ 876000; Mounthoolie Lane) Found in the Albert Hotel, this cosy nook was the best bar in town. It was closed at the time of research due to fire damage but was expected to reopen soon. Matchmakers, in the same building, is

more sedate and, with its comfy horseshoe seating, is good for groups.

Torvhaug (nr Bridge & Shore Sts) Style cats slink into the ultracool Torvhaug with its sleek, dark leather and moody red lighting in the bar downstairs and club with DJs upstairs. Shadowy nooks are good on a stormy night – it has a real nightspot feel about it.

Fusion Nightclub (☎ 879489; Ayre Rd; admission club nights £3-7; 🚗 from 10pm Thu-Sat, last entry 11.45pm) A rocking club catering to most musical tastes – from retro and cheesy chart numbers to soul, funk and hip-hop. Local DJs also spin the latest dance tunes and the club sometimes hosts live gigs. The dress code is smart casual.

Shopping

Kirkwall has some gorgeous jewellery and crafts in shops along Albert St. Try **Longship** (☎ 888790; 7 Broad St; 🚗 9am-5.30pm Mon-Sat) for Orkney-made crafts and gifts, and especially for exquisite designer jewellery.

Getting There & Away

The **airport** (☎ 886210) is 2.5 miles east of the town centre. For information on flying into Orkney, see p405. For flights and ferries from Kirkwall to the northern islands, see the island sections.

Bus 1 runs direct from Kirkwall to Stromness (40 minutes, hourly, four Sunday); bus 2 runs to Orphir and Houton (20 minutes, four or five Monday to Saturday); and there are also buses from Kirkwall to Stromness via Birsay (one hour).

Bus 6 runs from Kirkwall to Tingwall (30 minutes, three to five daily Monday to Saturday) and the ferry to Rousay, and on to Evie (40 minutes, four daily Monday to Saturday).

From May to September, bus 10A runs between Kirkwall and the John o'Groats ferry at Burwick (40 minutes, two to five daily). From May to September, a special tourist service (bus 8A) runs twice daily Monday to Friday between Kirkwall and Stromness via Stenness standing stones, the Ring of Brodgar and Skara Brae.

EAST MAINLAND TO SOUTH RONALDSAY

☎ 01856

The sinking of the battleship HMS *Royal Oak* in 1939 – torpedoed by a German U-boat that snuck through Kirk Sound into Scapa Flow – prompted Winston Churchill to commis-

sion better defences for this important naval harbour. Causeways made of concrete blocks were laid across the channels on the eastern side of Scapa Flow, linking Mainland to the islands of Lamb Holm, Glimps Holm, Burray and South Ronaldsay. The **Churchill Barriers**, flanked by the rusting wrecks of the old blockships that once guarded the channels, now carry the main road from Kirkwall to Burwick. There are good sandy beaches by barrier Nos 3 and 4.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Orkney Coaches bus 94 from Kirkwall runs to Deerness in East Mainland (30 minutes, four daily Monday to Saturday), with one bus calling at Tankerness. From May to September, bus 10A runs from Kirkwall to Burwick (40 minutes, two to five daily).

Causeway Coaches travels from Kirkwall to South Ronaldsay's St Margaret's Hope (30 minutes, six daily Monday to Friday, three on Saturday, one on Sunday).

East Mainland

On a farm at Tankerness is the mysterious Iron Age site of **Mine Howe** (☎ 861234; adult/child £2.50/1.50; 🚗 10am-3pm Wed, Fri & Sun May, 10am-5pm daily Jun-Aug, 11am-4pm daily early Sep, 10am-2pm Wed, Fri & Sun late Sep), discovered in 1946 but reopened by farmer Douglas Paterson in September 1999. The Howe is an eerie underground chamber whose function is unknown – staff from the Channel 4 TV series *Time Team* carried out an archaeological dig here in 2000 and concluded that it may have had some ritual significance, perhaps as an oracle or shrine. Be careful as you climb down – the stairs are narrow and wet. There are other archaeological works situated in the area and, presumably, many historical mysteries yet to be uncovered.

On the far eastern shore of Mainland, a mile north of Skaill, is the **Gloop**, a spectacular natural arch and sea cave. There are large colonies of nesting sea birds at **Mull Head**, and the shores of **Deer Sound** attract wildfowl.

Lamb Holm

On the tiny island of Lamb Holm, the **Italian Chapel** (☎ 781268; admission free; 🚗 9am-10pm Apr-Sep, 9am-4.30pm Oct-Mar) is all that remains of a POW camp that housed the Italian soldiers who worked on the Churchill Barriers. They built the chapel in their spare time, using two Nissen huts, scrap metal and their considerable

DIVING SCAPA FLOW'S WRECKS

The many wrecks that litter the floor of Scapa Flow make it one of the most popular diving locations in Europe. Enclosed by Mainland, Hoy and South Ronaldsay, this is one of the world's largest natural harbours and has been used by vessels as diverse as King Hakon's Viking ships in the 13th century and members of today's NATO fleet.

It was from Scapa Flow that the British Home Fleet sailed to meet the German High Seas Fleet at the Battle of Jutland on 31 May 1916. After the war, 74 German ships were interned in Scapa. Conditions for the German sailors were poor, and there were several mutinies as the negotiations for the fate of the ships dragged on. When the terms of the armistice were agreed on 6 May 1919, with the announcement of a severely reduced German navy, Admiral von Reuter (who was in charge of the German fleet in Scapa Flow) decided to take matters into his own hands. On 21 June, a secret signal to scuttle the ships was passed from vessel to vessel, and the British watched incredulously as every German ship began to sink.

Most of the ships were salvaged but seven remain on the sea floor, attracting divers from all over the world. There are three battleships – the *König*, the *Kronprinz Wilhelm* and the *Markgraf* – which are all over 25,000 tonnes. The first two were subjected to blasting for scrap metal, but the *Markgraf* is undamaged and considered one of the best dives in the area. Four light cruisers (4400 to 5600 tonnes) – the *Karlsruhe*, *Dresden*, *Brummer* and *Köln* – are particularly interesting, as they lie on their sides and are very accessible to divers. The *Karlsruhe*, though severely damaged, is only 10m below the surface. Its twisted superstructure has now become a huge metal reef encrusted with diverse sea life.

As well as the German wrecks, numerous other ships rest on the sea bed in Scapa Flow. HMS *Royal Oak*, which was sunk by a German U-boat in October 1939, with the loss of 833 crew, is an official war grave.

Recommended contacts for diving in Scapa Flow:

Diving Cellar (☎ 01856-850 055; www.divescapaflow.co.uk; 4 Victoria St, Stromness)

Scapa Scuba (☎/fax 01856-851 218; www.scapascuba.co.uk; Lifeboat House, Dundas St, Stromness)

artistic and decorative skills. One of the artists returned in 1960 to restore the paintwork. It's quite extraordinary inside and definitely worth seeing.

Burray

Sleepy Burray village, on the southern side of this island, has a general store, a post office and a couple of places to stay.

Nearby, **Orkney Fossil & Vintage Centre** (☎ 731255; Viewforth; adult/child £3.50/2; ☎ 10am-6pm Apr-Sep) has a quirky collection of household and farming relics and 360-million-year-old fish fossils. The fossils are from the Devonian period, which predates the dinosaurs (Jurassic period) by about 200 million years. There are also galleries devoted to the world wars.

Ankersted (☎ 731217; www.ankersted.co.uk; r per person £22) is a great place to stay, with fine rooms, all with private bathroom. The upstairs lounge and balcony area overlook Watersound Bay and barrior No 4, and are exclusively for guests' use. Stay a week and you get a free night.

Sands Hotel (☎ 731298; www.thesandshotel.co.uk; Burray; s/d £65/80) is a spiffy, refurbished 19th-century

herring station, right on the pier. Very modern rooms have stylish furnishings, some with superb water views. The restaurant (mains £15, bar meals £7.50), with its genteel, nautical feel, dishes out decent nosh, and tables in the sunlit conservatory migrate outside in sunny weather. It's open for lunch and dinner.

South Ronaldsay

The main village on South Ronaldsay is **St Margaret's Hope**, named after Margaret, the Maid of Norway, who died here in 1290 on the way from her homeland to marry the future Edward II of England.

SIGHTS

Tomb of the Eagles

This 5000-year-old chambered tomb (☎ 831339; Liddle Farm; adult/child £6/3; ☎ 9.30am-5.30pm Apr-Sep, by arrangement Oct-Mar), at the southern tip of South Ronaldsay, is run as a visitor attraction by local farmers. Their entertaining and informative tour is a real draw-card and an excellent way to experience this relic. It's possible that sky burials occurred here; there's evidence

that the bodies of people had been stripped of their flesh before being put in the tomb, possibly by being placed on top of wooden platforms just outside the tomb entrance and providing the eagles with a feast. You'll also see a **burnt mound**, an impressive Bronze Age kitchen. The tomb is a 20-minute walk east of Burwick.

Orkney Marine Life Aquarium

This aquarium (☎ 831700; B9044, Grimness; adult/child £5.50/4; ☎ 10am-6pm; ♿) showcases the fascinating and diverse collection of marine animals found in Scapa Flow and Orcadian coastal waters. Giant shellfish such as lobsters are a feature, and there's a rock pool that allows up-close and personal inspections of local creatures – great for everyone, especially kids. Injured seals that have been nursed back to health can be viewed in open-air pools, and there's also an old creel boat to clamber about on.

SLEEPING & EATING

St Margaret's Hope Backpackers (☎ 831225; St Margaret's Hope; dm £11) The backpackers, next to the Murray Arms, is a lovely stone cottage and has one single, two twins and a six-bed dorm with comfy bunks. There's a great lounge, a kitchen and good hot showers. It's an excellent setup, particularly as the pub is right outside the front door. Book ahead for weekends. Enquiries at the Trading Post shop next door.

Murray Arms Hotel (☎ 831205; murrayarms@freeuk.com; St Margaret's Hope; hotel s/d £35/70) This bastion of hospitality is a good accommodation choice. It has been restored over the years and offers quality, if slightly frumpy, rooms. The bar is popular with locals and a great spot to have a chinwag with some Orcadians.

our pick Bankburn House (☎ 831310; St Margaret's Hope; standard/en suite r £44/60; ♿) On the A961, just outside town, this place has four smashing upstairs rooms in a large rustic house. Two rooms have en suite, all are a brilliant size, and a lot of thought has been put into guests' comfort. There's also a huge stretch of lawn out the front, which overlooks the town and bay – perfect for sunbathing on those shimmering, summery Orkney days.

The Creel (☎ 831311; Front Rd, St Margaret's Hope; starters £7, mains £18.50; ☎ dinner Tue-Sun) Arguably the best restaurant in Orkney, the Creel serves fresh local produce – simply prepared, but delicious. Try the roasted haddock with mussels, razor clams and squid stew. There are also

three first-class rooms (single/double £60/100) with panoramic views of the small harbour.

SOUTH MAINLAND

☎ 01856

With its gently rolling landscape, South Mainland may not have the archaeological treasures of the north, but it does have its share of the island's history. There are a few things to see at **Orphir**, a scattered community with no shop, about 9 miles west of Kirkwall. The town's **Orkneyinga Saga Centre** (admission free; ☎ 9am-5pm) displays relating to the Orkneyinga Saga (see the boxed text, below), and a wide-screen video show.

Just behind the centre is the **Earl's Bu** (admission free; ☎ 24hr), the foundations of a 12th-century manor house belonging to the Norse earls of Orkney. There are also the remains of **St Nicholas' Church**, a unique circular building that was originally 9m in diameter. Built before 1136 and modelled on the rotunda of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, it was popular with pilgrims after the capture of the Holy Land during the First Crusade.

If it's sunny and you're thinking about a picnic, head to **Waulkmill Bay**, between Kirkwall and Orphir. The huge sandy beach is perfect for strolling and there is bench seating with impressive views.

Roving Eye Enterprises (☎ 811309; adult/child £28/14) offers terrific boat trips, with the opportunity to view some of the rusting hulks of the German High Seas Fleet at the bottom of Scapa Flow – and you don't even get your feet wet! The boat uses a video camera

ORKNEYINGA SAGA

Written around 1200 this Saga is a rich tale of sorcery, political intrigue, and cunning and unscrupulous acts among the Viking Earls of Orkney. The Saga roughly covers the period between 900 and 1200. Part myth and part historical fact, it begins with the capture of the islands by the king of Norway and then recounts the next 300 tumultuous years until they become part of Scotland. Characters of Orcadian folklore such as Sigurd the Powerful and Magnus the Martyr regularly crop up – it's a wonderful piece of medieval literature and the Orkneyinga Saga Centre is well worth a couple of hours.

attached to a ROV (remotely operated vehicle). The trips, which must be booked in advance, depart from Houton Pier at 1.20pm from May to September, last around three hours and include a visit to the Scapa Flow Visitor Centre (p418) at Lyness.

Sleeping

Foinhaven (☎ 811249; foinhavenbandb@orphir1.free-serve.co.uk; Germiston Rd, Orphir; s/d £40/60) For a farm stay, old-fashioned hospitality and one of the best breakfasts around, try the solitude at this place, 1.5 miles from Orphir, overlooking Waulkmill Bay. Rooms are traditional and bathrooms modern – a speck of dirt would feel lonely in here. The rate comes down if you stay more than one night.

Houton Bay Lodge (☎ 811320; www.houtonbaylodge.com; Houton; s/d from £50/75; ♿) Particularly good for families or business folk, this old seaplane base has been extensively refurbished, and the cool, stylish, contemporary rooms decked out with pine furniture are top notch (No 5 is a fave). Slick leather chairs, comfy beds and en suites complete the happy picture. The lodge is right behind the ferry terminal with departures for Flotta and Hoy.

Getting There & Away

Bus 2 runs from Kirkwall to Houton (25 minutes, three to five daily Monday to Saturday) via Orphir. For details of ferries from Houton to Hoy, see p418.

STROMNESS

☎ 01856 / pop 1600

An elongated little port, Stromness lacks Kirkwall's size and punch but makes up for that with bucket loads of character. The rambling, winding streets flanking the town have changed little since the 18th century and the flagstone-paved main street curves along the waterfront, amid attractive stone cottages. Guesthouses, pubs and eateries interrupt traditional trade along the main street, where cars and pedestrians move at the same pace as each other.

Information

Bank of Scotland (Dundas St) Has an ATM.

Royal Bank of Scotland (Victoria St) Near the pier; has an ATM.

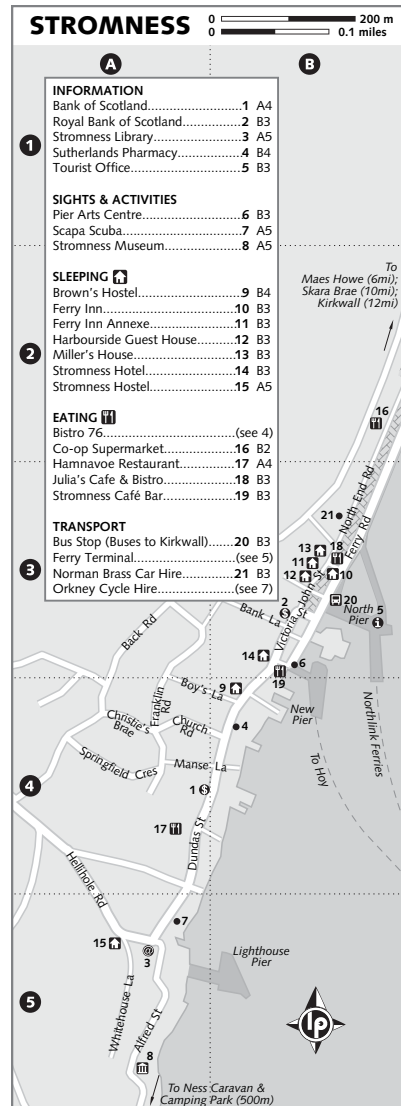
Stromness Library (☎ 850907; Alfred St; ☎ 2-7pm Mon-Thu, 2-5pm Fri, 10am-5pm Sat) Free internet access.

Sutherlands Pharmacy (☎ 876399; 31 Victoria St)

Tourist office (☎ 850716; ☎ 9am-5pm May-Sep, 9.30am-3.30pm Mon-Fri & 8.30am-2.30pm Sat Oct-Apr) Small and friendly office in the ferry terminal building.

Sights

The main recreation in Stromness is simply strolling back and forth along the narrow, atmospheric main street. The **Pier Arts Centre**



(☎ 850209; 30 Victoria St) is an exquisite gallery that has now reopened following a major extension and refurbishment.

The superb **Stromness Museum** (☎ 850025; 52 Alfred St; adult/child £3/50p; ☎ 10am-5pm May-Sep, 11am-3.30pm Mon-Sat Oct-Apr) is full of knick-knacks from maritime and natural-history exhibitions covering whaling, the Hudsons Bay Company and the sunk German fleet. You can happily nose around the place for a couple of hours. Across the street from the museum is the house where local poet and novelist George Mackay Brown (see the boxed text, right) lived.

Festivals & Events

The annual **Orkney Folk Festival** (☎ 851331; www.orkneyfolkfestival.com) is a four-day event based in Stromness in the third week of May, with a programme of folk concerts, *ceilidhs* (evenings of traditional Scottish entertainment including music, song and dance) and casual pub sessions.

Sleeping

Ness Caravan & Camping Park (☎ 873535; camp site per tent & 2 people £6.60) This breezy, fenced-in camping ground overlooks the bay at the southern end of town and is as neat as a pin.

Stromness Hostel (☎ 850589; office@stromnesshostel.co.uk; 6 Hellihole Rd; dm adult/child from £10.50/8.50; ☎ May-Sep) This sedate hostel is a 10-minute walk from the ferry terminal and is a comfortable spot, but it's not for party animals. Facilities have been spruced up in a recent overhaul and now feature en-suite dorms.

Brown's Hostel (☎ 850661; www.brownshostel.co.uk; 45 Victoria St; dm £11) Brown's is a popular 14-bed independent hostel, just five minutes' walk from the ferry. It opens year-round and there's no curfew. There are single, double and family rooms, all clean but small. The location is excellent for getting around town.

Miller's House (☎ 851969; millershous@orkney.com; 7 John St; s £35-40, d £46-50) Miller's House also runs Harbourside Guest House, a couple of doors down at 13 John St (same prices). They're both lovely historical houses that have been extensively renovated inside to fully exploit their light and space. The rooms in Harbourside are better, but all are quite luxurious. Expect a cracking breakfast in the morning. Over summer you'll need to book in advance.

our pick **Ferry Inn** (☎ 850280; www.ferryinn.com; John St; s/d £35/70) The Ferry Inn is a great pub to stay in. Rooms are cutesy, except No 9, which is

spacious and has good views. The lively bar downstairs pulls locals and tourists alike, and there are often bands in summer. The Ferry Inn also runs the annex (15 John St) across the road, which has cheaper rooms (£25 for a single, no surcharge).

Stromness Hotel (☎ 850298; www.stromnesshotel.com; Victoria St; r per person £48) The grandest place in town, 19th-century Stromness lords it over the harbour. Everything seems on a very imposing scale – the rooms are a bit old-fashioned, but stupendous views from the almost floor-to-ceiling windows more than compensate for the building's faded splendour. Room No 2 is a beauty, with brilliant harbour vistas.

Eating

Stromness Café-Bar (Victoria St; mains £2.50-7; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) This quirky little space, with attached shop, is good for a snack or something more substantial. Orkney beer is available and best enjoyed on the back terrace overlooking the water.

Julia's Café & Bistro (☎ 850904; 20 Ferry Rd; mains lunch £5-8; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat, 10am-5pm Sun) A light and airy eatery, Julia's can get frantic when the tour buses converge. Featuring local produce wherever possible, meals are not sophisticated affairs but they are tasty, filling and reasonably priced. For lunch, chow down on melts, open crab or salmon sandwiches, crisp salads and a homemade nut roast for vegetarians. Follow up with Orkney fudge cheesecake.

GEORGE MACKAY BROWN (1921-96)

One of Scotland's finest 20th-century poets, George Mackay Brown was born in Stromness and spent most of his life drawing inspiration for poems, stories and books from his native islands. Most of his writings are about protecting Orkney's culture from the relentless progress he saw unfolding in Scotland. One of his best-known works, a novel called *Greenvoe*, published in 1972, is about Orcadian life being threatened by a mystifying nuclear development called Black Star. His last novel, *Beside the Ocean of Time*, published in 1994, was shortlisted for the Booker Prize. If you're interested in learning more about the great man, pick up a copy of *George Mackay Brown: The Life by Maggie Fergusson*, published in 2006.

Bistro 76 (☎ 851803; 76 Victoria St; starters £4, mains £8.50; ☎ dinner Mon-Sat) This is an intimate cellar restaurant with a standout menu that will entice most palates through the door (from steak lovers to vegetarians). It's located under the Orca Hotel.

Stromness Hotel (bar meals £7, restaurant mains £8-15; ☎ lunch & dinner) The Stromness Hotel does excellent seafood dishes fused with tastes of the Orient (try the seafood chow mein), and there are vegetarian options. You can toast the toes in the Flattie Bar downstairs.

Hamnavoe Restaurant (☎ 850606; 35 Graham Pl; starters £7, mains £13-16; ☎ dinner Tue-Sat Apr-Sep) Taking itself pretty seriously, Stromness' gourmet restaurant uses local Orkadian produce and is especially good for seafood. Dining takes place among the crisp linen of its elegant dining room.

Self-caterers can stock up at the **Co-op supermarket** (North End Rd).

Getting There & Away

For information on ferries to Scrabster, Lerwick and Aberdeen, see p405. For bus services, see p407.

WEST & NORTH MAINLAND

☎ 01856

This part of Orkney is sprinkled with outstanding prehistoric monuments, many of them in the care of HS.

Stenness

The scattered village of Stenness, about 4 miles northeast of Stromness, consists of little more than some houses, a petrol station and a hotel. Around it, however, are some of the most captivating prehistoric monuments on Orkney, easily accessible using the regular bus service between Stromness and Kirkwall (p411). For an idea of the wealth of Orkney's prehistoric past, keep an eye out for single standing stones in pastureland around Stenness and Brodgar – weird sentrylike figures whose past relevance has been long forgotten.

Just 500m north of the Stenness crossroads, on the B9055, are the **Standing Stones of Stenness**. Only four of the original 12 mighty slabs of this prehistoric stone circle remain erect. Fenced off from the world outside, just like the sheep in the next field, the stones are impressive for their sheer size (one is over 5m high) and, of course, age – they were erected around 2500 BC.

A short walk to the east are the excavated remains of **Barnhouse Neolithic Village**, thought

to have been inhabited by the builders of Maes Howe.

Maes Howe

Egypt has the pyramids, Scotland has **Maes Howe** (HS; ☎ 761606; adult/child £5/2.50; ☎ 9.30am-5pm Apr-Sep, 9.30am-4pm Oct-Mar). Constructed about 5000 years ago, it's the finest chambered tomb in Western Europe. A long, low stone passage leads into a chamber in the centre of an earth-covered mound, which is over 6.7m high and 35m across. The size of the local sandstone slabs used, and the skill with which they were laid, is mind-boggling. During the winter solstice, Maes Howe takes on Indiana Jones-esque qualities as blood-red sunsets align themselves with the passage, striking a cairn entrance at the rear of the chamber with alarming precision. These sunsets are recorded live at www.maeshowe.co.uk in December and January.

In the 12th century, Vikings returning from the Crusades broke into the tomb, searching for treasure. They found none but left a wonderfully earthy collection of graffiti, carved in runes on the walls of the tomb, including 'Thorni bedded Helgi' – some things never change. There's also some Viking artwork here, including a crusader cross, a lion, a walrus and a knotted serpent.

Entry is through a timed ticketing system (due to the popularity of the site) and includes an excellent 45-minute guided tour, filling your mind with both awe and questions about this astonishing place. Buy your ticket across the road at Tormiston Mill. Maes Howe is about 10 minutes' walk east of the Stenness crossroads.

Ring of Brodgar

Situated about a mile north of Stenness, along the road towards Skara Brae, is this wide circle of **standing stones** (admission free; ☎ 24hr), some over 5m tall. Twenty-two of the original 60 stones still stand among the heather. These mysterious giants, their curious shapes mutilated by years of climatic onslaught, fire the imagination – what were they for? On a grey day with dark clouds thudding low across the sky, the stones look secretive and seem to be almost sneering at the jostling summer crowds. Raised skyward 4500 years ago, the stones still attract the forces of nature – on 5 June 1980 one was struck by lightning.

Skara Brae & Skail House

A visit to extraordinary **Skara Brae** (HS; ☎ 841815; Bay of Skail; adult/child £5.50/2.75, joint ticket with Skail House £6.50/3.25; ☎ 9.30am-5.30pm Apr-Sep, 9.30am-4.30pm Oct-Mar) offers the best opportunity in Scotland for a glimpse of Stone Age life. Idyllically situated by a sandy bay 8 miles north of Stromness, and predating the pyramids of Giza and Stonehenge, Skara Brae is northern Europe's best-preserved prehistoric village.

Even the stone furniture – beds, boxes and dressers – has survived the 5000 years since a community lived and breathed here. It was hidden until 1850, when waves whipped up by a severe storm eroded the sand and grass above the beach, exposing the houses underneath. There's an excellent interactive exhibit and short video, arming visitors with facts and theory, which will enhance the impact of the site. The official guidebook, available from the visitors centre, includes a good self-guided tour.

The joint ticket will also get you into **Skail House** (☎ Apr-Sep), an early-17th-century mansion and the former home of the laird of Breckness, who discovered Skara Brae. The library here has secret shelves behind the bookshelves – straight out of a spy movie! The porthole window exemplifies just how thick the outer walls are and the property is built on the site of a Pictish graveyard. Upstairs rooms afford lovely views.

Buses run to Skara Brae from Kirkwall and Stromness (May to September only). It's possible to walk along the coast from Stromness to Skara Brae via Yesnaby and the Broch of Borwick (9 miles).

Yesnaby Sea Stacks

Six miles north of Stromness are some spectacular but easy coastal walks (the Stromness tourist office has details). Less than half a mile south of the car park at Yesnaby is the Yesnaby Castle sea stack. Watch out during the nesting season in early summer when dive-bombing sea birds determinedly protect their nests.

Birsay

The small village of Birsay, with a shop and a post office, is 6 miles north of Skara Brae. The ruins of the **Earl's Palace** (admission free; ☎ 24hr), built in the 16th century by the despotic Robert Stewart, earl of Orkney, dominate the village centre. Today it's a mass of half walls and crumbling columns, the latter climbing

like dilapidated chimney stacks. Nevertheless, the size of the palace is impressive, matching the reputed ego and tyranny of its former inhabitant.

At low tide (check tide times at the shop in Earl's Palace) you can walk out to the **Broch of Birsay** (HS; ☎ 841815; adult/child £3/1.50; ☎ 9.30am-5.30pm mid-Jun-Sep), about 0.75 miles northwest of the Earl's Palace. On the island, you'll find the extensive ruins of a Norse settlement and the 12th-century St Peter's Church.

Links House (☎ 721221; www.ewaf.co.uk; The Palace; s/d £35/60), a dotting old property right in the village of Birsay, has bright, character-filled rooms (mind your head), some with en suite. There's a guest lounge and light-flooded conservatory for reflecting over the day's events.

Or try the family-run **Barony Hotel** (☎ 721327; www.baronyhotel.com; Birsay; r per person £35; ☎ May-Sep), overlooking the Loch of Boardhouse, about half a mile south of Birsay. This groaning old place has seen better days, but it's a lot better on the inside than it looks. It also has a beautiful, tranquil, loch-side location – recommended for anglers.

Evie

On an exposed headland at Aikerness, a 1.5-mile walk northeast from the straggling village of Evie, you'll find the **Broch of Gurness** (HS; ☎ 751414; adult/child £4.50/2.25; ☎ 9.30am-5.30pm Apr-Sep). Built around 100 BC, it's the best-preserved example of a fortified stone tower in Orkney. Surrounding it are the shells of houses, discernible by the hearths in the centre of each. The small visitors' centre helps unravel the mysteries of this ancient culture.

Evedale Cottages & Campsite (☎ /fax 751270; eviedale@orkney.com; Dyke Farm, Evie; camp sites £4.50-8.50, self-catering cottages per week £280-320; ☎ camping ground Apr-Sep), at the northern end of the village, has a good grassed area for camping, with picnic tables. This would suit people looking to avoid the larger municipal sites – no laundry, dogs or caravans. Next door is self-catering accommodation in excellent, renovated farm cottages.

Woodwick House (☎ 751330; www.woodwickhouse.co.uk; Evie; s £32, d £64-96) has large, stark rooms in a relaxed country house. The building is set in gorgeous gardens, where guests can catch glimpses of the sea. When you're feeling peckish, there are three-course homemade

dinners (£28) using Orcadian produce, and an à la carte menu offering delights such as Orkney sirloin steak with a grilled stilton and caramelised-onion topping. It's a top place to treat yourself and that someone special.

Hoy

☎ 01856

Orkney's second-largest island, Hoy (the name means 'High Island'), got the lion's share of this archipelago's scenic beauty. Shallow turquoise bays lace the perimeter, while peat and moorland cover Orkney's highest hills. The highest point is Ward Hill (479m), in the north of Hoy. This dramatic landscape can be accessed on foot or by wheels, and will tempt hands to cameras. Note that the ferry service from Mainland gets very busy over summer – book ahead.

Sights

The northern part of the island boasts spectacular coastal scenery, including some of Britain's highest vertical cliffs – St John's Head on the northwest coast rises 346m. Hoy is probably best known for the **Old Man of Hoy**, a 137m-high rock stack that can be seen from the Scrabster-Stromness ferry. The northern part of Hoy has been maintained as a nature reserve by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) since 1983.

Lyness, on the eastern side of Hoy, was an important naval base during both world wars, when the British Grand Fleet was based in Scapa Flow. With the dilapidated remains of buildings and an uninspiring outlook towards the oil terminal on Flotta Island, this isn't a pretty place. However, the **Scapa Flow Visitor Centre** (Lyness Interpretation Centre; ☎ 791300; admission by donation; ☎ 9am–4.30pm Mon–Fri & 10.30am–4pm Sun) is a fascinating naval museum and photographic display, located in an old pumphouse that once fed fuel to the ships.

Activities

First scaled in 1966, the **Old Man of Hoy** is a rock-climber's delight. The easiest approach to the Old Man is from Rackwick Bay, a two-to three-hour walk by road from Moaness Pier (in Hoy village on the east coast, where the ferries dock) through the beautiful **Rackwick Glen**. You'll pass the 5000-year-old **Dwarfie Stone**, the only example of a rock-cut tomb in Scotland and, according to Sir Walter Scott, the favourite residence of Troll, a dwarf from

Norse legend. On your return you can take the path via the **Glen of Kinnaird** and **Berriedale Wood**, Scotland's most northerly tuft of native forest.

The most popular walk climbs steeply westwards from Rackwick Bay, then curves northwards, descending gradually to the edge of the cliffs opposite the Old Man of Hoy. Allow seven hours for the return trip from Moaness Pier, or three hours from Rackwick, a village on the west coast – there's a hostel here from where the walk begins.

Sleeping & Eating

Rackwick Youth Hostel (☎ 873535 ext 2404 office hours only; Rackwick; dm adult/child £10/8.70; ☎ Apr–Sep) The Rackwick, 6 miles from the ferry at Moaness, is a snug (two four-bed dorms), clean place, popular with walkers. You'll need your own sleeping bag and supplies. The warden wanders in to collect your dosh in the evening.

Hoy Youth Hostel (☎ 873535 ext 2404 office hours only; Moaness; dm adult/child £12.60/9.70) This is a pretty schmick place with an enviable location, around 15 minutes' walk from Moaness Pier, at the base of the rugged Cuilags. Rooms come with twin beds and a bunk bed, or there are family rooms, all with en suite. Good special offers from April to June.

Old Hall Cottage (☎ 701213; www.oldhallcottage.co.uk; Longhope; B&B from £20, cottage per wk £315) If you're after a self-catering option, check out this old renovated hall with impeccable facilities, gorgeous gardens and lovely views. It's a good spot for a zen moment.

Quoydale (☎ 791315; www.orkneyaccommodation.co.uk; s/d from £20/36) There are several B&Bs on the island, including the welcoming Quoydale, nestled at the base of Ward Hill on a working farm one mile from the ferry terminal. It has spectacular views over Scapa Flow and offers tours and a taxi service.

Stromabank Hotel (☎ 701494; www.stromabank.co.uk; Longhope; bar meals £6–10; ☎ lunch Sat & Sun, dinner Fri–Wed) The small, atmospheric Stromabank offers tasty home-cooked meals using lots of local produce, from its small menu.

Groceries can be bought at the shops in Lyness and Longhope.

Getting There & Away

Orkney Ferries (☎ 850624) runs passenger ferries between Stromness and Moaness Pier (£3.50, 30 minutes, two to five daily May to September). There's a reduced schedule from October

to April. In the other direction, the service departs 30 minutes after its arrival on Hoy.

There's also a frequent **car ferry** (☎ 811397) to Lyness (Hoy) from Houton on Mainland (passenger/car £3.50/10, 40 minutes, up to six daily Monday to Friday, two or three Saturday and Sunday). The more limited Sunday service runs from May to September.

Getting Around

Transport on Hoy is very limited. **North Hoy Transport** (☎ 791315) runs a minibus service between Rackwick and Moaness, meeting the 10am weekday ferry from Stromness. Otherwise, call the same number for a taxi service.

You can hire mountain bikes at **Moaness pier** (☎ 791225; per day £8). Hitching is possible, but on this island there are more sheep than cars.

NORTHERN ISLANDS

The group of windswept islands north of Mainland provides a refuge for migrating birds and a nesting ground for sea birds; there are several RSPB reserves. Some of the islands are also rich in archaeological sites, but it's the beautiful scenery, with wonderful white-sand beaches and lime-green to azure seas, that is the main attraction.

The tourist offices in Kirkwall and Stromness have the useful *Islands of Orkney* brochure with maps and details of these islands. Note that the 'ay' at the end of each island name (from the Old Norse for 'island') is pronounced 'ee' (Shapinsay is pronounced *shap-in-see*).

Orkney Ferries (☎ 01856-872044) enables you to make day trips to many of the islands from Kirkwall on most days of the week (Friday only to North Ronaldsay), but it's really worth staying for at least a few nights.

Shapinsay

☎ 01856 / pop 300

Just 20 minutes by ferry from Kirkwall, Shapinsay is a low-lying, intensively cultivated island with a superb castle. There are two general stores and a post office.

Balfour Castle (☎ 711282; www.balfourcastle.com; Balfour Village; adult/child £18/9), completed in 1848 in the turreted Scottish Baronial style, is Shapinsay's most impressive draw-card. Guided tours (2.15pm Sunday from May to September) must be booked in advance; the price includes the ferry, admission to the castle and afternoon tea.

It's also possible to stay at **Balfour Castle** (☎ 711282; www.balfourcastle.com; Balfour Village; B&B incl dinner per person from £100), in the grand, old-fashioned Victorian rooms, with the added attraction that you are, of course, spending the night in a castle. A boat is available for guests for island trips, bird-watching and sea fishing.

About 4 miles from the pier, at the far northeastern corner of the island, is the Iron Age **Burroughston Broch** (admission free; ☎ 24hr), one of the best-preserved brochs (defensive towers) in Orkney.

Girmigoe (☎ 711256; jean@girmigoe.net; Girmigoe; r per person £25) is a friendly, traditional farmhouse at the northern end of the island. The breakfasts (with Mrs Wallace's homemade bread and jam) and local kippers are excellent and dinner is also available.

Orkney Ferries operates a ferry from Kirkwall (passenger/car £3.50/10, 25 minutes, six daily Monday to Friday, four or five Saturday and Sunday May to September). Services are limited in winter.

Rousay

☎ 01856 / pop 200

History buffs will adore this hilly island. Lying close to Mainland's northeast, it's known as 'the Egypt of the North' for its numerous archaeological sites. Most of the island is classed as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), but it also has the important **Trumland RSPB Reserve** and three trout-fishing lochs. Cycling around the island's one road gives you magnificent views of seacliffs, Egilsay and especially Mainland, where green velvet-clad hills heave themselves out of the icy North Sea.

Marion's shop, and a post office that looks like a hen coop, are at Sourin, 2.5 miles north of the pier.

SIGHTS

West of the pier are the prehistoric burial cairns (piles of stones to mark a path or junction) of **Taversoe Tuick**, **Blackhammer**, **Knowe of Yarso** and Midhowe Cairn.

Midhowe Cairn is an extraordinary burial cairn, containing the remains of 25 people. Dating from the 3rd millennium BC, the 'Great Ship of Death', as it's called, is the longest chambered cairn in Orkney. Bird and animal bones accompany the human remains, perhaps meant as food for the deceased. It's housed inside a modern barnlike building,

about 5.5 miles west of the pier, and a half-mile walk down from the road.

Nearby **Midhowe Broch** (admission free; ☎ 24hr) is the best example of a broch in Orkney. The tourist offices on Mainland have the useful *Westness Walk* leaflet describing the mile-long walk from Midhowe Cairn to Westness Farm. It outlines 5000 years of Orkney history and includes Viking and Pictish burial sites.

Trumland House (gardens £1.50; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Fri May-Sep) is probably the largest private house in Orkney and is currently undergoing extensive restoration. The grounds, with their thicket of native trees, are worth a stroll – you enter the walled garden through a medieval gate.

SLEEPING & EATING

Trumland Farm Hostel (☎ 821252; Trumland Farm; camp sites £5, dm £10, bedding extra £2) On an organic farm half a mile west of the ferry, this hostel offers great views and accommodation in two tidy but cramped six-bed dormitories (and one single room). Excellent self-catering facilities are also available. It's private from the rest of the farm.

Taversoe Hotel (☎ 821325; www.taversoehotel.co.uk; s/d £35/60) This hotel is about 2 miles southwest of the pier. There's one twin with en suite but no view, or two doubles with shared bathroom and each with brilliant views; all are being refurbished. There are panoramic views from the dining room – the perfect place to munch on a home-cooked pizza. Mains cost £4 to £7 and takeaway food is also available. The restaurant is closed Mondays.

Pier Restaurant (☎ 821359; snacks £3, mains £7; ☎ 11am-11pm Mon, Tue & Thu, 11am-6.30pm Wed & Sun, 11am-1am Fri & Sat) By the pier, this is an ideal spot for a bar meal, snack or dram of whisky to warm the insides while you wait for the ferry.

GETTING THERE & AROUND

A small **car ferry** (☎ 751360) connects Tingwall on Mainland with Rousay (passenger/car £3.50/10, 30 minutes, up to six daily) and the nearby islands of Egilsay and Wyre.

Rousay Transport (☎ 821234) offers a taxi tour of the island for £21 (up to four people). There's also a minibus tour, which includes guided visits to the historic sites on Tuesday and Thursday (£16 for adults, £35 for a family).

Bikes can be rented for £7 per day from Trumland Farm.

Egilsay & Wyre

These two small islands lie east of Rousay. On **Egilsay** (population 37), a cenotaph marks the spot where Earl Magnus was murdered in 1117. After his martyrdom, pilgrims flocked to the island, and **St Magnus Church**, now roofless, was built. Today it provides a rare example of a round-towered Viking church. Much of Egilsay is an RSPB reserve; listen for the corncrakes at the southern end of the island.

Wyre (population 18) is even smaller than Egilsay. It was the domain of the Viking baron Kolbein Hrugra ('Cubbie Roo'); the ruins of his castle, built around 1145, and the nearby 12th-century **St Mary's Chapel**, can be visited free. Seal sightings at the beach on Wyre's western sliver are virtually guaranteed. These two islands are reached on the Rousay-Tingwall ferry (see left).

Stonsay

☎ 01857 / pop 350

A peaceful and attractive island, Stonsay draws seals, migratory birds and tourists, the latter coming to walk or pedal over its beautiful landscapes and four curving bays. In the 19th century, Whitehall harbour became one of Scotland's major herring ports, but then the fisheries collapsed in the 1930s.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

The old **Stonsay Fish Mart** (☎ 616386; Whitehall; admission free; ☎ 11am-6pm Mon & Wed, 11am-7pm Thu-Sat & 10am-7pm Sun May-Sep) now houses a herring industry interpretation centre, designed to take visitors back to the herring boom days. There's also a hostel and café here.

Just across the harbour from Whitehall is the small island of **Papa Stonsay**, where Earl Rognvald Brusason was murdered in 1046. The island is owned by a monastic order, the Transalpine Redemptorists; the monks will provide **boat trips** (☎ 616389) to the island by prior arrangement.

There are good coastal walks on the island and, in the east, the **Vat o'Kirbuster** is the best example of a *gloup* (natural arch) in Orkney.

At the southern end of the island, you can visit the **seal-watch hide** on the beach. There's also a chance to see otters at nearby **Loch Lea-shun**.

SLEEPING & EATING

Stonsay Fish Mart (☎ 616386; Whitehall; dm £11) Part of the island's former herring station has been converted into a 10-bed hostel with shower

and kitchen. It's clean and well run, but pretty basic. Bedding is an extra £3 if you don't have a sleeping bag. The neighbouring café serves takeaways, snacks and meals all day.

Stonsay Bird Reserve (☎ 616363; Castle, Mill Bay; full board/B&B per person £28/20) Birders in particular will enjoy staying at the friendly, comfortable Stonsay Bird Reserve, a 40-minute walk south from the ferry pier. Rates include all the tea and coffee you can drink and ensure hours of conversation with the chatty owners.

Stonsay Hotel (☎ 616213; www.stonsayhotel.co.uk; Whitehall; s/d from £38/76; ☎ lunch & dinner; 🍷) The island's watering hole has immaculate refurbished rooms. There's also recommended pub grub (meals from £7) in the bar, with excellent seafood (including paella and lobster) in particular. There are good deals for multnight stays. Dogs welcome

GETTING THERE & AWAY

British Airways/Loganair (☎ 01856-872 494) flies from Kirkwall to Stonsay (one way/return £31/62, 20 minutes, two daily Monday to Saturday).

A **car ferry** (☎ 01856-872 044) links Kirkwall with Stonsay (passenger/car £6.50/15, 1½ hours, two to three daily) and Eday.

Eday

☎ 01857 / pop 120

Eday has a hilly centre, with cultivated fields situated around the coast. There is the impressive standing **Stone of Setter** and close by, the chambered cairns of **Braeside, Huntersquoy** and **Vinquoy**. Huntersquoy is a two-storey cairn, like Taversoe Tuick (p419) on Rousay. Keep an eye out for the Eday Heritage visitor centre, which should be open by the time you read this. The early-17th-century **Carrick House** (☎ 622260; adult/child £2.50/1; ☎ by appointment), with its floor bloodstained from a pirate skirmish, is worth a visit; tours of the house run in summer with advance notice.

It's worth getting hold of the *Eday Heritage Walk* leaflet from the Kirkwall tourist office, which details an interesting four-hour ramble from the Community Enterprises shop up to the cliffs of Red Head in the north of the island.

Eday Minibus Tour (☎ 622206) offers 2¼-hour guided tours (£9) from the ferry pier on Monday, Wednesday and Friday from May to August. Tickets don't include lunch, and Friday is the best day, as you get more time on the island.

SLEEPING & EATING

Eday Hostel (SYHA; ☎ 622206; Bay of London; dm adult/child £9.50/8.50) Four miles north of the ferry pier, this simple, renovated, 24-bed hostel is like a cross between an army barracks and a church hall. You'll need your own sleeping bag, although cotton bags are provided.

Mrs Popplewell's (☎ 622248; Blett, Carrick Bay; B&B incl dinner per person £30, croft house per person £25) Mrs Popplewell has a charming cottage opposite the Calf of Eday. There's also a couple of fully equipped, self-catering croft houses nearby sleeping three people each. Mrs Popplewell bakes fresh bread daily, and she serves snacks and meals at her craft shop.

The Red House (☎ 622282; mains £3-10 ☎ 11am-9pm Wed, Fri, Sat & Sun Jun-Sep; 🍷) Drop into this group of 19th-century croft buildings for home-cooked lunches, evening meals, local history, internet access and even battery charging!

GETTING THERE & AROUND

There are two flights from Kirkwall (one way/return £31/62, 30 minutes) to London airport – that's London, Eday – on Wednesday only. The ferry service from Kirkwall usually sails via Stonsay (passenger/car £6.50/15, 1¼ to two hours, two to three daily), but occasionally it's direct. There's also a link between Sanday and Eday (20 minutes).

Alan Stewart (☎ 622206) runs the local minibus and taxi service. He charges around £5 for a trip along the length of Eday.

Sanday

☎ 01857

Aptly named, blissfully quiet Sanday is ringed by Orkney's best beaches – with dazzling white sand of the sort you'd expect in the Caribbean. The island is almost entirely flat apart from a colossal sand dune and the cliffs at Spurness; the dunes are 12 miles long and growing, due to sand build-up.

There are several archaeological sites here, the most impressive being the **Quoyness chambered tomb** (admission free; ☎ 24hr), similar to Maes Howe (see p416) and dating from the 3rd millennium BC. It has triple walls, a main chamber and six smaller cells. At the north-eastern tip of Sanday, there's **Tafts Ness**, with around 500 prehistoric burial mounds.

SLEEPING & EATING

With permission, you can camp anywhere on the island.

Ayre's Rock Hostel (☎ 600410; diane@ayresrock.fsnet.co.uk; bed £12, with breakfast £16, with breakfast & dinner £22, camping £4) This place is well appointed, and offers self-catering or B&B accommodation in the form of two twins and an en suite family room. Also onsite is a craft shop and a chippie.

Kettletoft Hotel (☎ /fax 600217; www.kettletoft.co.uk; Kettletoft; r per person £25-30) The welcoming and family-friendly Kettletoft is a refurbished elderly statesman located near the centre of the island. The pub here serves tasty bar meals for around £8, leaning towards the seaward side of things, with lobster even scuttling onto some dishes.

Belsair (☎ 600206; info@belsairsanday.co.uk; Kettletoft; r per person £25-30) The Belsair overlooks the harbour and has tidy en suite rooms that are good value. Its bar meals and evening dinner feature Orcadian produce, and staff will even do you a packed lunch.

GETTING THERE & AROUND

There are flights from Kirkwall to Sanday (one way/return £31/62, 20 minutes, twice daily Monday to Saturday). There are ferries between Kirkwall and Sanday (passenger/car £6.50/15, 1½ hours, two daily May to September), and a link to Eday.

Bernie Flett (☎ 600284) hires out bicycles for £8 per day.

Westray

☎ 01857 / pop 700

The largest of the northern islands, Westray is a jewel in the archipelago's crown. With prehistoric sites, sandy beaches and lovely cliff scenery, this island is a favourite. The friendly locals, great places to stay and fresh seafood entice visitors to linger. The ferry docks at Rapness in the south of the island, but Pierowall, seven miles to the northwest, is the main village. It has grocery shops, a post office and a hotel. For information about island facilities, call the **Westray & Papa Westray Tourist Association** (☎ 677404; www.westraypapawestray.com).

SIGHTS

Pierowall has one of the best natural harbours in Orkney – it was once an important Viking base. The **Westray Heritage Centre** (☎ 677414; Pierowall; adult/child £2/50p; ☎ 10am-noon & 2-5pm Tue-Sat & 11.30am-5pm Sun & Mon May-Sep) has interesting displays on local history and nature and has recently added a new wing.

Believe in fairies? You may change your mind if you swing by **Orkney Faerie Museum & Gallery**

(☎ 677320; www.orkneyfaeriemuseum.com; admission free, storytelling 50p; ☎ 10am-5.30pm Mon-Sat, 2pm-4.30pm Sun mid-Apr-Sep), where a converted old crothouse showcases Orcadian folklore and legend with tales of faeries, wee folk, trows and mermaids.

A half-mile west of Pierowall lie the ruins of creepy **Noltland Castle** (HS; admission free; ☎ 9.30am-6.30pm mid-Jun-Sep), a 16th-century fortified Z-plan tower house. The RSPB reserve at **Noup Head** coastal cliffs, in the northwest of the island, attracts vast numbers of breeding sea birds from April to July. There are big puffin colonies here and at **Castle o' Burrian**, a mile north of Rapness.

SLEEPING & EATING

With permission, you can set up camp almost anywhere.

The Barn (☎ 677214; www.thebarnwestray.co.uk; Chalmersquoy, Pierowall; dm adult/child £13/9.50, camp sites from £4; ☎) This excellent, intimate, modern, 13-bed hostel is an Orcadian gem. It's heated throughout and has an inviting lounge, complete with DVD collection for when the weather turns foul. The price includes bed linen, shower and pristine kitchen facilities. Local advice comes free.

Ourpick Bis Geos Hostel (☎ 677420; www.bisgeos.co.uk; Bis Geos; dm £11; ☎ Apr-Oct; ☎) Hands down Orkney's best hostel, it's worth the trek out here just to stay at Bis Geos. The hostel is decked out in a nautical theme with old sails and whalebones and furnished with modern stuff to keep you comfy. Bunks are individually curtained with rustic hessian. The spectacular surrounds are best enjoyed from the conservatory. It's about 2 miles west of Pierowall and 30 minutes' hike from Noup Head. Ask about self-catering cottages too.

Mrs Groat (☎ 677374; Sand o' Gill; B&B/self-catering per person £22/32) Friendly Mrs Groat, at the northern end of Pierowall, has two properties that she lets out as B&B or self-catering accommodation. Each property has a double plus a two-bunk bedroom – good for families.

Pierowall Hotel (☎ 677472; www.orknet.co.uk/pierowall; Pierowall; s/d £24/44, with bathroom £28/60) The comfortable, eight-room Pierowall Hotel is famous throughout Orkney for its popular fish and chips – the fish is caught fresh by the hotel's boats and is available to eat in or takeaway. Toast your toes by the coal fire in the lounge.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

There are flights from Kirkwall to Westray (one way/return £31/62, 20 minutes, one or two

daily Monday to Saturday). A ferry links Kirkwall with Rapness (passenger/car £6.50/15, 1½ hours, two to three daily May to September). There are one to two ferries daily in winter.

There's also a passenger-only ferry from Pierowall to Papa Westray (£6.50, 25 minutes, three to six daily in summer); the crossing is free if you travel direct from the Rapness ferry. From October to April the boat sails by arrangement; phone ☎ 677216.

Papa Westray

Known locally as Papay (*pa-pee*), this exquisitely peaceful, tiny island (4 miles long by a mile wide) attracts superlatives. It is home to Europe's oldest domestic building, the **Knop of Howar** (built about 5500 years ago), and to Europe's largest colony of arctic terns (about 6000 birds) at North Hill. Even the two-minute hop from Westray airfield is featured in *Guinness World Records* as the world's shortest scheduled air service. The island was also the cradle of Christianity in Orkney – **St Boniface's Church** was founded in the 8th century, though most of the recently restored structure is from the 12th century.

From May to September, **Jim Davidson** (☎ 644259) runs boat trips to the **Holm of Papay**, a small island about a half-mile east of Papa Westray, for £5 per person. The main reason for a visit is to see the huge **chambered cairn**, with 16 beehive cells, and wall carvings. You enter through the roof – there's a torch so you can light your way as you crawl around in the gloomy interior.

Beltane Guest House & Hostel (☎ 644321; papaybeltane@hotmail.com; dm £10, s/d £27/50; ☎ lunch & dinner), owned by the local community co-op, is the best place to stay on the island. It comprises a 16-bed Scottish Youth Hostel Association (SYHA) approved hostel and a guesthouse with four simple and immaculate rooms with en suite. There is also a small shop and generous lunches and dinners (meals from £7) on offer using Orkney beef, seafood, lamb and veggies. The hotel is just over a mile north of the ferry.

B&B or full board is available at the friendly **School Place** (☎ 644268; sonofthewit@aol.com; s/d £20/38). The conservatory is good for quiet reflection and the owners are happy to impart information about their beloved island community.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

There are two or three daily flights to Papa Westray (£15, 15 minutes) from Kirkwall,

Monday to Saturday; it's an amazing deal compared with other flights in Orkney – about twice the distance for a fraction of the price (taxes not included). For ferry details, see opposite.

North Ronaldsay

☎ 01857 / pop 50

All of 3 miles long and almost completely flat, North Ronaldsay is a real outpost surrounded by rolling seas and big skies. The delicious pease and quiet and excellent bird-watching lures visitors here; the island is home to cormorant and seal colonies and is an important stopover for migratory birds. There's also a pitoeous colony of sheep, kept off the rich farmland by a 13-mile-long wall all around the island and forced to feed only on seaweed, which is said to give their meat a unique flavour.

Powered by wind and solar energy, **Observatory Guest House** (☎ 633200; alison@nrbo.prestel.co.uk; dm £11, s/£31-35, d/£50-60) is a working croft next to the ferry pier, and offers first-rate accommodation and ornithological activities. Note that under-15s are half-price, and under-fours are free. The attached **Obscave** (meals £4-8; ☎ lunch & dinner) has piping hot meals and much-needed caffeine injections.

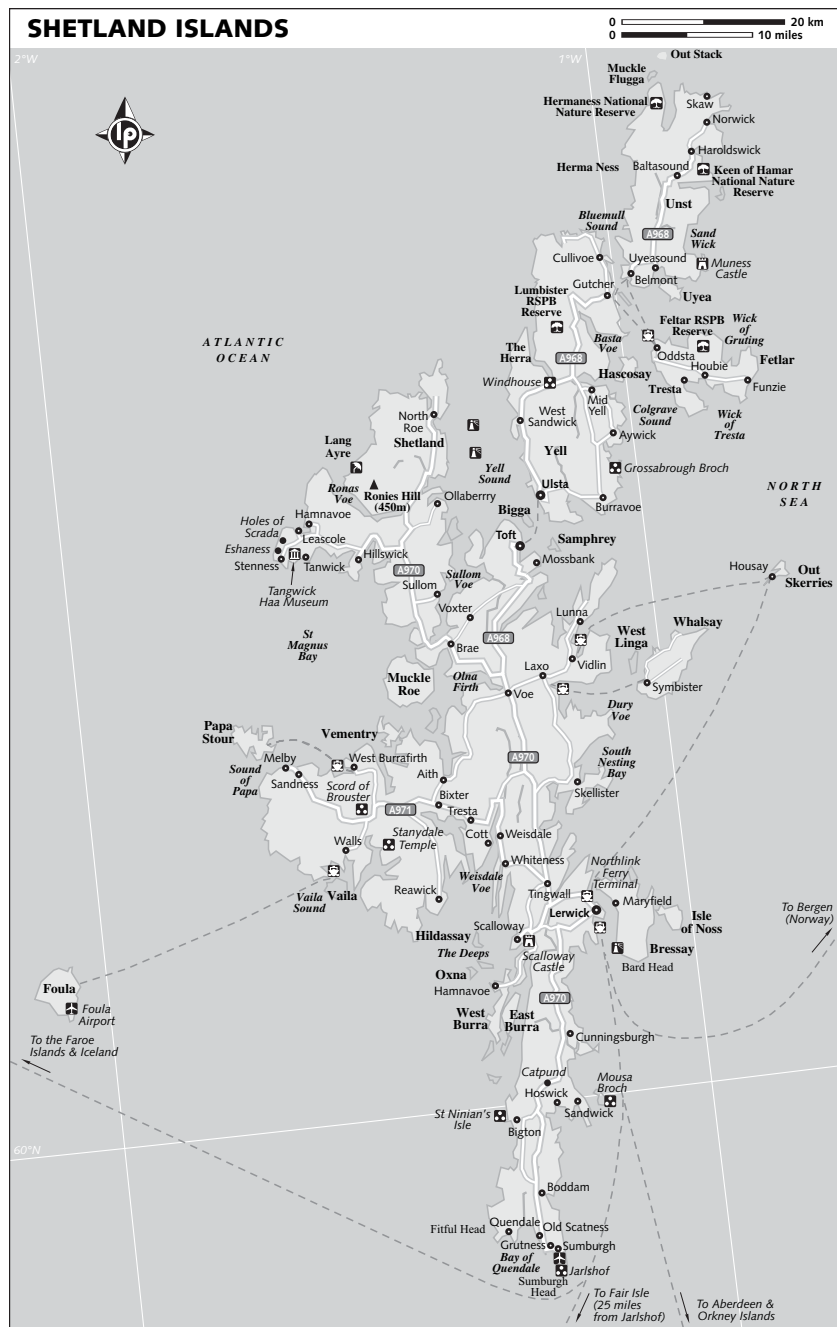
Garso Guest House (☎ /fax 633244; christine@garso.fsnet.co.uk; B&B per person £35, cottage per person per night £30) is a comfortable B&B and self-catering cottage sleeping five, with open fire and all your mod cons. It's at the northern end of the island, about 3 miles from the pier. Mrs Muir, one of the owners, also offers a taxi and minibus service.

There are two or three daily flights to North Ronaldsay (£15, 20 minutes) from Kirkwall, Monday to Saturday. There's a weekly ferry from Kirkwall on Friday (passenger/car £6.50/15, 2½ hours).

SHETLAND ISLANDS

The rugged and remote Shetland Islands – a collection of mighty, wind-ravaged clumps of brown and green earth rising from the frigid waters of the North Sea – are Scotland's northerly outpost and feel miles away from anywhere. Mainland is the biggest island with over 100 windswept and virtually treeless islands making up the archipelago.

Far more desolate and cut off than Orkney, the light here is even more changeable than



on mainland Scotland. Different parts of the island are variously illuminated at any given hour – the window for that perfect photo can be short. The setting is still uniquely Scottish, though, with deep, naked glens flanked by steep hills, twinkling, sky-blue lochs and, of course, sheep with no comprehension of the ‘right of way’ on roads.

The islands’ far-flung location is belied by the activity and charisma of the capital, Lerwick, causing you to forget the 60-plus oceanic miles between you and the mainland. But once you’re outside the humming capital, the isolation sweeps you off your feet – frequent thundering gales thrash across the raw landscape and mother nature whips up the wild Atlantic into white-cap frenzies that smash into imposing coastal cliffs.

Getting There & Away

Unlike Orkney, Shetland is relatively expensive to get to from mainland Scotland.

AIR

The oil industry ensures that air connections are good. The main airport is at Sumburgh, 25 miles south of Lerwick. There are three to five flights daily between Sumburgh and Aberdeen (one hour) with **British Airways (BA)/Loganair** (☎ 0845 773 3377; www.loganair.co.uk). BA flies daily between Orkney and Shetland (35 minutes). You can also fly direct from London (Stansted), Inverness, Glasgow and Edinburgh.

BOAT

Northlink Ferries (☎ 0845 600 0449; www.northlinkferries.co.uk) runs car ferries between Lerwick and Kirkwall in Orkney (see p405).

Northlink also runs overnight car ferries from Aberdeen to Lerwick (passenger return £42 to £64, car return £170 to £230, 12 to 14 hours, daily) leaving Aberdeen at 5pm or 7pm.

For details of the ferry link between Lerwick, Torshavn (Faroe Islands) and Bergen (Norway), see the Transport chapter, p452.

Getting Around

The *Shetland Transport Timetable*, an invaluable publication listing all local air, sea and bus services, costs £1 and is available from the Lerwick tourist office (p426).

BICYCLE

If it’s fine, cycling on the islands’ excellent roads can be an exhilarating way to experience

the stark beauty of Shetland. It can, however, be very windy (wind speeds up to 194mph have been recorded!) and there are few spots to shelter. Hire bikes from **Grantfield Garage** (☎ 01595-692 709; North Rd, Lerwick; per day/week £7.50/45).

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

The wide roads seem more like motorways after Orkney’s tiny, winding lanes. Remember the golden rule when driving: give passing cars a wave. Car rental is cheaper in Lerwick than at the airport.

Bolts Car Hire (☎ 01595-693636; 26 North Rd, Lerwick) Small cars start from £22 per day for a weekly rental; £25 daily for two or three days.

John Leask & Son (☎ 01595-693162; www.leaskstravel.co.uk/car-hire; Esplanade, Lerwick)

Star Rent-a-Car (☎ 01595-692075; www.starrentacar.co.uk; 22 Commercial Rd, Lerwick) Opposite the bus station; offers pick-up and drop off at airport and ferry points throughout the Shetland Islands.

PUBLIC TRANSPORT

There are several **bus operators** (☎ 01595-694 100). Call for detailed information on services.

For interisland ferry services, see the relevant Getting There & Away sections.

LERWICK

☎ 01595 / pop 6900

The capital of the Shetlands stubbornly defies its seclusion from the rest of Scotland with a vitality that’s surprising for such an isolated town. The constant influx of tourists and oil workers provides vibrancy and energy, breathing life into the grand Victorian housing that abounds here. Lerwick is the only place of any size in this island group.

Although the Shetland Islands have been occupied for several thousand years, Lerwick was only established in the 17th century. In the late 19th century it was the largest herring town in northern Europe. Today, it’s the main port of entry into the Shetlands and a transit point to the North Sea oil rigs.

Information

Bank of Scotland (Commercial St) Has an ATM.

Gilbert Bain Hospital (☎ 743000; South Rd)

Lerwick Health Centre (☎ 693201; South Rd)

Manson’s Dry Cleaners (☎ 695335; Kantersted Rd) Charges £9 for a wash and dry.

Shetland Library (☎ 693868; Lower Hillhead; ☎ 10am-7pm Mon, Wed & Fri, 10am-5pm Tue, Thu & Sat; ☎ Free internet access.

Shetland Times Bookshop (☎ 695531; 71 Commercial St; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm Sat) Has every book you could possibly want to read about the Shetlands, with topics from the famous WWII Shetland Bus to how to spot adorable puffins around the islands.

Support Training (☎ 695026; 6a Moonthouly St; per hr £2; ☎ 9am-1pm & 2-5pm Mon-Fri; ☎) Internet access.

Tourist office (☎ 693434; www.visitshetland.com; Market Cross; ☎ 8am-6pm Mon-Fri, 8am-4pm Sat & Sun Apr-Oct, 9am-5pm Mon-Fri Nov-Mar) This friendly office has a good range of books and maps, and a comprehensive selection of brochures detailing Shetlands' activities. *Walks on Shetland* (£6.99), by Mary Welsh, is a good walking guide. There's also a bureau de change here.

Sights

Above the town, there are excellent views from the battlements of **Fort Charlotte** (Charlotte St; admission free; ☎ 9.30am-sunset), built in 1665 to protect the harbour from the Dutch navy.

Shetland Museum (☎ 695057; Hay's Dock; admission free; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon, Wed, Fri & Sat, 10am-7pm Thu, noon-5pm Sun) is an impressive recollection of 5000 years worth of culture and people, and their interaction with this ancient landscape. There's a smorgasbord of Shetland treasures, including hanging boats, and you can even pop into the underground home of a 'trowie knowe' (a Shetland mythical creature).

There's a lot of memorabilia and an authentic feel to the **Böd of Gremista** (☎ 695057; Gremista; admission free; ☎ 10am-1pm & 2-5pm Wed-Sun May-mid-Sep), a restored 18th-century fishing booth located 1 mile north of the centre; the highlight is the chatty old salt who shows visitors around.

The fortified site of **Clickimin Broch** (admission free; ☎ 24hr), just under a mile southwest of the town centre, was occupied from the 7th century BC to the 6th century AD. It's impressively large and its setting on a small loch gives it a feeling of being removed from the present day – unusual given the surrounding urban encroachment.

The **Up-Helly-Aa Exhibition** (St Sunniva St; adult/child £3/1; ☎ 2-4pm & 7-9pm Tue, 7-9pm Fri, 2-4pm Sat mid-May-mid-Sep) explains the truly bizarre, annual Viking fire festival (see the boxed text, right).

Festivals & Events

It's well worth being here for the **Folk Festival** (www.shetlandfolkfestival.com) in the last week of April, or the **Fiddle & Accordion Festival** in mid-October. See the boxed text, right, for

VIKING MAYHEM

Given the connections with their Scandinavian neighbours, it's not surprising that islanders wish to honour their Norse heritage. And what better way to do it than by burning a replica Viking longship? The **Up-Helly-Aa festival**, which takes place on the last Tuesday in January, is all about fancy dress and pageantry: costumed revellers with flaming torches lug a wooden galley through Lerwick to the designated torching site. Leading the charge is a horde of Vikings wearing sheepskins and winged helmets and armed with axes and shields. This festival dates back to Norse times, when Vikings celebrated the rebirth of the sun at yule by torching a longship in the bay.

a description of the wacky **Up-Helly-Aa** festival, which takes place on the last Tuesday in January.

Sleeping BUDGET

Clickimin Caravan & Camp Site (☎ 741000; Lochside; camp sites per small/large tent £7/11; ☎ May-Sep) By the loch on the western edge of town, Clickimin is a small and tidy park with good grassy sites. Rates include the use of the ablutions facilities in the adjacent Clickimin Leisure Centre.

our pick **Lerwick Youth Hostel** (SYHA; ☎ 692114; King Harald St; dm adult/child £15.50/12.50; ☎ Apr-Sep; ♿) This hostel, in a grand building with modern facilities, has spacious dorms and is clean and well maintained. Although the kitchen is small, there's a café on site. It's very popular with groups, so book ahead.

MIDRANGE

Fort Charlotte Guesthouse (☎ 692140; www.fortcharlotte.co.uk; 1 Charlotte St; s £20-35, d from £55) This place is like *Dr Who's* tardis – much bigger inside than it looks from the outside. In a quiet, central part of Lerwick, it has bright and cheery rooms and the best single accommodation in town. Book ahead, as it's very popular. The family room is particularly good value for three people (£55).

Carradale Guest House (☎ 692251; carradale@btinternet.com; 36 King Harald St; s £22-35, d £46-60) It's very friendly at Carradale and perpetually busy. The rooms, although a mix of old and

new, are large and well furnished and provide a concoction of comforts for visitors. Couples should ask for the huge family room, which is traditionally decked out and has a private bathroom.

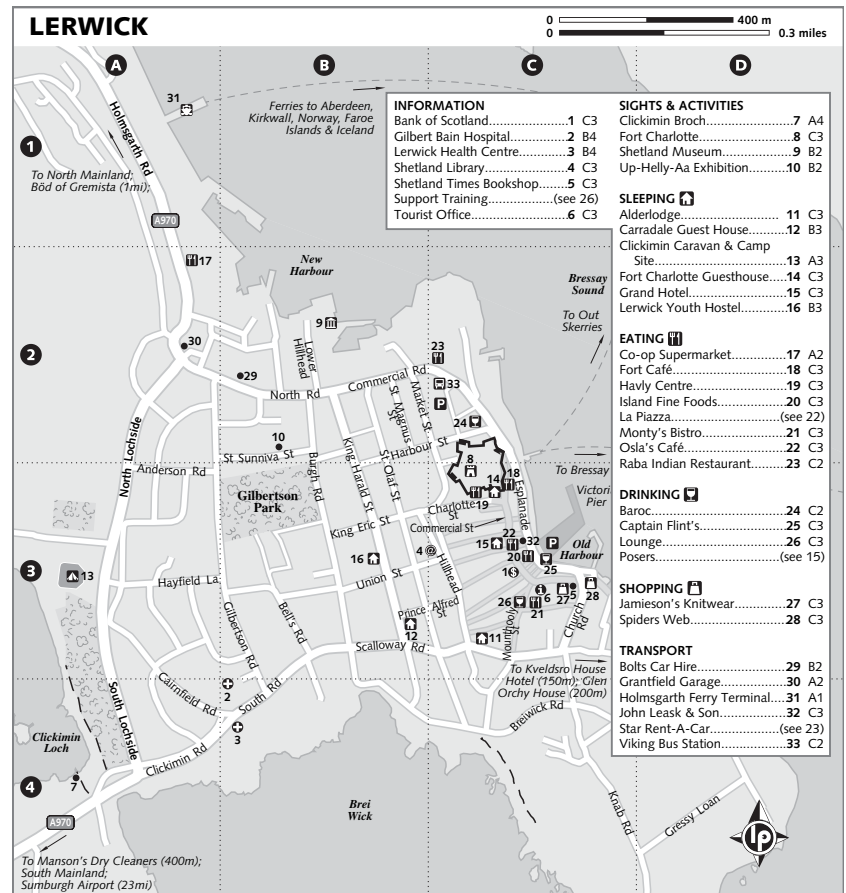
our pick **Alderlodge** (☎ 695705; 6 Clairmount Pl; s/d £37/£54) This large stone building, a former bank, is a delightful place to stay. Imbued with a sense of space and light, common in these gracious old buildings, the rooms are large and, in this particular case, well furnished. The friendly hosts, who are flexible with checking-out and breakfast times, make the place special.

Glen Orchy House (☎ 692031; www.guesthouse.lerwick.com; 20 Knab Rd, Breiwick Bay; s/d £47/74) In a great spot close to the centre but also within a

stone's throw of coastal walks, this huge place would be a great spot to treat that someone special. It's a lovely guesthouse and the large conservatory, complete with stunning coastal views, makes a good cuddle spot. Yep, it used to be a convent...put it out of your mind.

TOP END

Grand Hotel (☎ 692826; www.kgghotels.co.uk; Commercial St; s £73, d from £100) With its air of faded grandeur, this bastion of hospitality is 'grand' indeed. Rooms are mostly twins and singles, but there are four double rooms – couples should go straight for No 330, which is an enormous room (refurbished with four-poster bed) with dazzling harbour views. You'll feel like royalty.



Kveldsro House Hotel (☎ 692195; reception@kveldsrohotel.co.uk; Greenfield Pl; s/d £90/112) Shetland's most luxurious hotel overlooks the harbour. It's a dignified small hotel that will appeal to older visitors or couples looking for a treat. Room Nos 415 and 417 are doubles with striking views over the harbour, or if after a twin, try No 413, which has two walls of windows and Shetland views.

Eating

Island Fine Foods (☎ 690606; Harrison Sq; light meals £3; ☎ 9am-4pm Mon-Sat) This clean, modern place is the best spot in town for a freshly roasted coffee. It also does paninis, bagels, tasty pita breads, and wraps with a variety of fillings.

Osla's Café (☎ 696005; 88 Commercial St; pancakes £3-4, mains £6-11; ☎ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) Osla's is a sparky little joint that flips a mean pancake (£3 to £4) downstairs, but it's La Piazza upstairs where you'll discover the joys of Italian cooking. Authentic, thin-crust pizzas are just like Papa used to make... well, almost.

Monty's Bistro (☎ 696555; 5 Mounthooly St; mains lunch £5-8, dinner £11-17; ☎ lunch & dinner Tue-Sat, dinner Mon) Highly recommended, Monty's Bistro, with its seasonally changing menu, is the best place to eat in Lerwick. The bright Mediterranean décor, cheery staff and delicious local produce combine to make it an excellent dining experience. Vegetarians are catered for and the Unst brews go down a treat.

Self-caterers should head for the **Co-op supermarket** (Holmsgarth Rd).

Also recommended:

Fort Café (☎ 693125; 2 Commercial Rd; fish supper £4; ☎ lunch Mon-Sat, dinner daily) Reliable place for a fish supper, and has won praise from vegetarians.

Havvy Centre (☎ 692100; 9 Charlotte St; light meals £3-5; ☎ 10am-3pm Mon-Fri, 10am-4.45pm Sat) Mug-a-chino mums and carrot cake. Good spot for a read of the newspaper.

Raba Indian Restaurant (☎ 695585; 26 Commercial Rd; mains £6-9; ☎ lunch & dinner) Highly recommended curry house; Sunday buffet is a bargain at £8.50.

Drinking & Entertainment

The Shetland Fiddlers play at a number of locations, and it's worth attending their sessions – inquire at the tourist office.

Baroc (☎ 690995; cnr Commercial Rd & Harbour St; ☎ 11am-1am) A slick spot that becomes the island's lounge bar at nights, there's plenty of the younger set around to keep you on your toes.

Lounge (☎ 692231; 4 Mounthooly St) A friendly bar patrolled by Andy Capp characters during

the day, Lounge features a variety of live music performances several nights a week, including informal jam sessions.

Captain Flint's (☎ 692249; 2 Commercial Rd) This lively bar throbs with happy conversation and has a distinctly nautical, creaky-wooden feel. There's a cross-section of young 'uns, tourists and older locals. There's live music some nights.

Posers (☎ 692826; 24 Commercial St; admission £5) At the Grand Hotel, Posers is Lerwick's only nightclub. Show the locals your latest moves to the booming, dated dance music.

Shopping

Best buys are the woollen jerseys, cardigans and sweaters for which Shetland is world-famous.

Spiders Web (☎ 695246; 51 Commercial St) It's worth dropping in here as much for a chat as for the store's excellent array of hand-knitted garments, which are very high quality. The shop is opposite the Queen's Hotel.

Jamieson's Knitwear (☎ 693114; 93 Commercial St) You'll find real Fair Isle sweaters with the distinctive OXOXO pattern, from £50.

Getting There & Around

For details of services to Lerwick, see p425. Ferries dock at Holmsgarth terminal, a 20-minute walk from the town centre. From Sumburgh airport, Leask's runs regular buses that meet flights.

If you need a taxi, call **Sinclair's Taxis** (☎ 694617).

BRESSAY & NOSS

☎ 01595 / pop 350

Two islands lie across Bressay Sound east of Lerwick. The 34-sq-km island of Bressay (bress-ah) has some interesting walks, especially along the cliffs and up Ward Hill (226m), which has good views of the island.

Colonies of birds can be seen at the Ord and Bard Head cliffs in the south. For serious **bird-watching**, though, it's worth visiting Noss, a National Nature Reserve east of Bressay, to see the huge number of sea birds nesting on the island's 183m cliffs. Noss can only be visited from May to August, when Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) operates a small visitor centre at Gungstie.

From Lerwick, **Seabirds & Seals** (☎ 693434) runs three-hour cruises (9.30am and 2pm mid-April to mid-September) around Bressay and Noss for £35; book with the tourist office.

It also runs the Shetland Submarine, which is a remote-controlled minisub bringing live colour feeds of underwater wildlife from the caves of Bressay.

Maryfield House Hotel (☎ 820207; mains £8-11), by the ferry quay, offers bar meals with seafood specialities.

Getting There & Away

From Lerwick there are daily ferries (passenger/car return £3.20/7.60, seven minutes, frequent) to Bressay. It's then 2.5 miles across the island (some people bring rented bikes from Lerwick) to take the inflatable dinghy to Noss (adult/child £3/1.50, 10am to 5pm Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday to Sunday May to August) – but check with the **SNH** (☎ 0800 1077818) before leaving Lerwick, as the dinghy doesn't operate in bad weather.

CENTRAL & WEST MAINLAND

Scalloway

☎ 01595 / pop 820

The former capital of Shetland, Scalloway (scall-o-wah), on the west coast 6 miles from Lerwick, is now a busy fishing village set around bare, rolling hills. It's a little shabby but has an air of authenticity away from the tourist hordes.

During WWII, the Norwegian resistance movement operated the Shetland Bus from here. The trips were very successful, carrying agents, wireless operators and military supplies for the resistance movement and returning with refugees, recruits for the Free Norwegian Forces and, in December, Christmas trees for the treeless Shetlands! The **Shetland Bus Memorial** in Scalloway is a moving tribute on the waterfront, built of stones from both countries. The Norwegian stones are sourced from the home areas of 44 Norwegian men who died running the gauntlet between Norway and the Shetland Islands.

The small, volunteer-run **Scalloway Museum** (☎ 880675; Main St; donation requested; ☎ 9.30-11.30am & 2-4.30pm Mon & 10am-noon & 2-4.30pm Tue-Sat May-Sep) is best visited for its Shetland Bus displays, and a peek at Scalloway's glory days.

Down in the village close to the waterfront, the **Scalloway Hotel** (☎ 880444; Main St; s/d £55/85) has modern, spotless rooms with small en suites. Some rooms have good views over the harbour and the Scalloway may be a decent option if everything in Lerwick is full.

Being in the North Atlantic Fisheries College, it's no surprise that the **Da Haaf Restau-**

rant (☎ 880747; Port Arthur; fish dishes £9-12; ☎ lunch & dinner) specialises in seafood – excellent local seafood at that. It's easily the best place to eat in town.

Buses run from Lerwick (25 minutes, roughly hourly Monday to Saturday) to Scalloway.

Weisdale

☎ 01595

It's worth dropping into the Bonhoga Gallery in the restored **Weisdale Mill** (☎ 830400; Weisdale; admission free; ☎ 10.30am-4.30pm Tue-Sat, noon-4.30pm Sun). The first purpose-built gallery in the Shetlands, it has monthly, changing exhibitions, and everything – jewellery, crafts and paintings – is on sale. It's an excellent place to visit, very friendly, and you're likely to meet some resident artists. There's also a café that's ideal for tucking into Orcadian produce, in a sunlit conservatory overlooking the burn (stream).

On the western shore of Weisdale Voe, south of the mill, are the ruins of the house where John Clunies Ross (1786–1853) was born. In 1827 he settled in the Indian Ocean's Cocos Islands, where he proclaimed himself king.

Western Side

☎ 01595

The western side of Mainland is notable for its varied scenery: bleak moors, sheer cliffs, rolling green hills, and numerous cobalt-blue lochs and inlets. It's ideal for walking, cycling and fishing.

Out in the Atlantic Ocean, about 15 miles southwest of Walls, is the 8-sq-km island of **Foula** (Bird Island), which competes with Fair Isle for the title of Scotland's most isolated inhabited island. Foula supports 42 people, 1500 sheep and 500,000 sea birds, including the rare Leach's petrel and Scotland's largest colony of great skuas. It's all amid dramatic cliff scenery, particularly the awesome, sheer Kame (372m). There isn't a shop on the island, but centrally located **Mrs Taylor's** (☎ /fax 753226; Leraback; B&B incl dinner per person £35) offers accommodation and good food.

Foula is reached by thrice-weekly **ferries** (☎ 753226, 743976) from Walls or Scalloway (passenger return £6, car and driver return £14, four hours) and **flights** (☎ 840246) from Tingwall (return £50 to £60).

Northwest from Walls, the road crosses desolate moorland and then descends through green fields before arriving at the small crofting community of **Sandness**. Visible about a

mile offshore is the island of **Papa Stour**, home to huge colonies of auks, terns and skuas. It's mostly made up of volcanic rock that has eroded to form sea caves, underground passages, arches and columns. Access to the island is by ferry from West Burrafirth (passenger return £6, car and driver return £8, 40 minutes, daily except Tuesday and Thursday), east of Sandness; book with **W Clark** (☎ 810460).

SOUTH MAINLAND

From Lerwick, the main road south winds 25 miles down the eastern side of this long, narrow, hilly tail of land that ends at Sumburgh Head. The waters lapping against the cliffs are an inviting turquoise in many places. If it weren't for the raging Arctic gales, you may almost be tempted to have a dip.

Sandwick & Around

☎ 01950 / pop 1350

Opposite the small, scattered village of Sandwick is the **Isle of Mousa**, an RSPB reserve. The impressive double-walled **Mousa Broch** (13m) stands on the island – this well-preserved broch was built from local sandstone between 100 BC and AD 100 and features in two Viking sagas as a hide-out for eloping couples! The island is also home to many sea birds and waders; around 6000 storm petrels nest on Mousa, but they're only on the island at night. Common and grey seals can be seen on the beach and among the rocks at West Voe.

From mid-April to mid-September, **Tom Jamieson** (☎ 431367; www.mousaboattrips.co.uk) runs daily boat trips (adult/child return £10/5, 15 minutes) from Leebittou harbour in Sandwick, allowing two hours on Mousa. He also conducts night trips to the petrels.

Back on Mainland, **Hoswick Visitor Centre** (☎ 431406; Hoswick; admission free; ☎ 10am–5pm Mon–Sat & 11am–5pm Sun May–Aug) has a great collection of old wirelesses (including the daddy of them all – the Murphy-type wireless). There are displays on fishing, whaling, weaving and peat casting.

The old-style rooms with shared bathroom are pretty average at the friendly **Barday Arms Hotel** (☎ 431226; fax 431262; Hoswick; s/d £25/50), but you come here for the *craic* (conversation, gossip, fun), not the comforts – there's traditional live music at night in a great bar overlooking the water, and there are real ales on tap.

If you'd prefer a cosy B&B, try **Solbrekke** (☎ 431410; Park Rd, Sandwick; r per person £22), which overlooks Mousa Broch.

There are buses between Lerwick and Sandwick (25 minutes, three to seven daily).

Bigton & Around

Buses from Lerwick stop twice daily (Monday to Saturday) in Bigton on the west coast, but it's another couple of miles to the **tombolo** (a narrow isthmus) that connects Mainland with St Ninian's Isle. This geologically important site is the largest shell-and-sand tombolo in Britain and is an SSSI.

Across the tombolo is **St Ninian's Isle**, where you'll find the ruins of a 12th-century church, beneath which are traces of an earlier Pictish church. During excavations in 1958, Pictish treasure, probably dating from AD 800 and consisting of 27 silver objects, was found beneath a broken sandstone slab. They're now kept in the Museum of Scotland (p86) in Edinburgh.

Boddam

From this small village there's a side road that leads to the **Shetland Croft House Museum** (☎ 01595-695057; South Voe; admission free; ☎ 10am–1pm & 2–5pm mid-Apr–Sep). The years clunk by the wayside when you enter, as you step back into a primitive existence. Built in 1870, it has been restored, thatched and furnished with 19th-century furniture and utensils. The Lerwick–Sumburgh bus stops right outside.

Quendale

☎ 01950

South of Boddam, a minor road runs southwest to Quendale. Here you'll find the small but excellent, restored and fully operational 19th-century **Quendale Watermill** (☎ 460969; adult/child £2/50p; ☎ 10am–5pm mid-Apr–mid-Sep), the last of Shetland's water mills.

The village overlooks a long, sandy beach to the south in the Bay of Quendale. West of the bay there's dramatic cliff scenery and **diving** in the waters between Garth's Ness and Fitful Head and to the wreck of the oil tanker *Braer* off Garth's Ness.

From Lerwick there are two buses daily to Quendale from Monday to Saturday.

Sumburgh

☎ 01950

With its clear waters, sea cliffs, and grassy headlands jutting out into sparkling blue waters, Sumburgh is one of the most scenic places to stay on the island. The sandy beach

fringed with turquoise waters makes this place seem more like an idyllic Pacific holiday destination...when the sun shines.

SIGHTS

At the southern tip of Mainland, this village is home to the international airport and **Jarlshof** (HS; ☎ 460112; adult/child £4.50/2.25; ☎ 9.30am–5.30pm Apr–Sep), Shetland's most impressive archaeological attraction. This large settlement, with buildings from prehistory through Norse times to the 16th century, was hidden under the sand until it was exposed by a gale at the end of the 19th century. It's a thought-provoking place, mainly in ruins, but with a fascinating, intact wheelhouse that defies time. You should buy the short guide, which interprets the ruins from a number of vantage points (otherwise a fair bit of imagination is required).

Near Jarlshof you can visit **Sumburgh Head**, an RSPB reserve. The lighthouse here isn't open to the public, but you can view the many birds that inhabit the cliffs below. At various times there are puffins (over 2000 pairs), kittiwakes (1000 pairs), fulmars, guillemots (over 13,000 breed here), razorbills and cormorants. The other important bird-watching area is the **Pool of Virkie**, the bay just east of the airport.

The best thing about a visit to the remarkable excavation at **Old Scatness** (☎ 461869; Dunrossness; adult/child £4/2; ☎ 10am–5.30pm Sun–Thu May–Oct, call for winter hr; Ⓢ) is that it's very much a work in progress. A broch from around 300 BC is the centrepiece of the site, which is surrounded by wheelhouses and evidence of later Viking occupation. It's all compelling stuff and ideal for kids. Guides dressed in period costume take visitors into reconstructions of Iron Age houses and divulge all kinds of fascinating facts about life a couple of thousand years ago.

SLEEPING & EATING

Betty Mouat's Cottage (☎ 460249; Old Scatness, Dunrossness; beds £10) This is a simple 10-bed camping *böd* (basic accommodation for walkers) affair with potbelly stove, fuel for sale and coin-operated showers. It's by Old Scatness – book at Lerwick tourist office and pay the warden on site.

Sumburgh Hotel (☎ 460201; www.sumburgh-hotel.zetnet.co.uk; Sumburgh; s/d from £55/70) Next to Jarlshof is an upmarket, country-style hotel with a high standard of accommodation. For a treat go for the St Ninian room with its four-poster bed and stunning views. The bar

meals here (£8; open lunch and dinner) are delicious – pub faves such as steak-and-Guinness pie feature alongside seafood dishes and vegetarians are catered for.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

To get to Sumburgh from Lerwick, take the airport bus (45 minutes, five daily Monday to Saturday, three on Sunday) and get off at the second-last stop.

FAIR ISLE

☎ 01595 / pop 70

It's a stomach-churning ferry ride to Fair Isle but worth it for the stunning cliff scenery, isolation and hoards of winged creatures. About halfway to Orkney, Fair Isle is one of Scotland's most remote inhabited islands. It's only 3 miles by 1.5 miles in size and is probably best known for its patterned knitwear, still produced in the island's co-operative, Fair Isle Crafts.

It's also a paradise for bird-watchers, who form the bulk of the island's visitors. Fair Isle is in the flight path of migrating birds, and thousands breed here. They're monitored by the **Bird Observatory**, which collects and analyses information year-round; visitors are more than welcome to participate.

The small **George Waterston Memorial Centre** (☎ 760244; Taft; donations welcome; ☎ 2–4pm Mon, 10.30am–noon Wed & 2–4pm Fri May–Sep) has photos and exhibits on the island's natural history, crofting, fishing, archaeology and knitwear.

Fair Isle Lodge & Bird Observatory (☎ /fax 760258; www.fairislebirdobs.co.uk; full-board dm/s/d £30/44/78) offers home cooking and free guided walks; it's located about 400m from the ferry terminal.

Getting There & Away

There are **flights** (☎ 840246) to Fair Isle from Tingwall (£62 return, 25 minutes, twice daily Monday, Wednesday and Friday). There's also a return flight from Sumburgh on Saturday.

From May to September, the *Good Shepherd IV* ferry sails from Grutness (near Sumburgh) to Fair Isle (£6 return, three hours) on Tuesday, Saturday and alternate Thursdays, and from Lerwick (£6 return, 4½ hours) on alternate Thursdays. In winter, there's one return trip on Tuesday. Book with **JW Stout** (☎ 760222).

NORTH MAINLAND

The north of Mainland is very photogenic – jumbles of cracked, peaty, brown hills blend

with grassy pastureland and extend like bony fingers of land into numerous lochs and out into the wider, icy, grey waters of the North Sea. Different shades of light give it a variety of characters. Get the camera primed.

Voe

☎ 01806

Lower Voe is a pretty collection of buildings beside a tranquil bay on the southern shore of Olna Firth.

In previous incarnations, red-painted **Sail Loft** (☎ 588392, 588708; Lower Voe; beds £9), by the pier, was a fishing shed and knitwear factory, but it's now a camping *böd*, with coin-operated showers and fuel for sale. Book at the Lerwick tourist office and pay the warden on site.

How do mussels and a pint sound? Try the excellent seafood, including local salmon, in the appealing, wood-pannelled **Pierhead Restaurant & Bar** (☎ 588332; Lower Voe; starters £6, mains £10-15; ☺ lunch & dinner), opposite Sail Loft. Eat in the restaurant or go for the cheaper bar meals.

There are buses from Lerwick to Voe (35 minutes, up to six daily Monday to Saturday and two on Sunday during school terms).

Whalsay & Out Skerries

☎ 01806 / pop 1050

South of Voe, the B9071 branches east to Laxo, the ferry terminal for the island of **Whalsay**. This is one of the most prosperous of Shetland's islands, due to its large fishing industry whose fleet is based at the modern harbour of **Symbister**.

Whalsay is popular for sea angling, and for trout fishing in its lochs. There are also scenic walks in the south and east where colonies of sea birds breed and where you may catch sight of seals.

Grieve House (☎ 566341; Sodom; beds £7), the former home of famous poet Hugh MacDiarmid, is now a simple camping *böd*. There's no electricity or shower, but there is fuel for sale. Book through the Lerwick tourist office.

There are regular **ferries** (☎ 566259) between Laxo and Symbister (£3.20 return, 30 minutes, daily).

Northeast of Whalsay, another thriving fishing community occupies the 2 sq miles of **Out Skerries** (or just Skerries). It's made up of the three main islands of Housay, Bruray (these two connected by a road bridge) and Grunay, plus a number of islets. Their rugged cliffs teem with bird life.

There are **ferries** (☎ 515226) between Out Skerries and Lerwick on Tuesday and Thursday (passenger return £5.60, car and driver return £8, 2½ hours), and Friday to Monday to Vidlin (passenger return £5.60, car and driver return £8, 1½ hours), about 3 miles northeast of Laxo.

Brae & Around

☎ 01806

Accommodation is the reason to stop in the tiny township of Brae. However, you should book in advance – guesthouses are often full, as they mainly cater to oil workers (the upside for solo travellers is that there are plenty of single beds). Pack a bottle of your favourite single malt to keep you company on those stormy nights.

There's fine **walking** on the peninsula west of Brae, and to the south on the red-granite island of **Muckle Roe**, which is connected to the peninsula by a bridge. Muckle Roe also offers good **diving** off its west and north coasts.

Drumquin Guest House (☎ 522621; Brae; r per person £45-50) is a large, laid-back place with good

rooms (mix of en suite and shared bathrooms) and chilled hosts. Breakfast is served in a light-flooded conservatory.

Just outside Brae and built in 1588, luxurious, genteel **Busta House Hotel** (☎ 522506; www.bustahouse.com; s/d from £75/100, 4-course dinner extra £27.50) has a fine restaurant that's open for dinner and is a gem – it would make a great place to splash out. Refurbished rooms are tastefully decked out, and retain a classy but homely charm. They're all individually designed and named after places in Shetland. Linga and Foula, the former with four-poster bed, are both delightful rooms.

The town's only restaurant, **Brae Indian Take-away** (☎ 522500; A970; dishes £6-9; ☺ dinner Tue-Sun), is an offshoot of the Raba Indian Restaurant (p428) in Lerwick. The chefs' considerable culinary skills give diners a choice of excellent curries. You will need somewhere to chow down as there's no dining on site.

Brae Stores, near the junction in the village centre, is a supermarket and post office.

Buses from Lerwick to Eshaness and North Roe stop in Brae (35 minutes, up to seven daily Monday to Saturday).

Eshaness & Hillswick

☎ 01806

About 11 miles northwest of Brae the road ends at the red basalt cliffs of Eshaness, which form some of the most impressive, wild, coastal scenery in Shetland. Howling Atlantic gales whip the ocean into a white-cap frenzy before it crashes into the base of the cliffs. When the wind subsides there is superb **walking** and panoramic views from the lighthouse (closed to the public) on the headland.

A mile east of Eshaness, a side road leads south to the **Tangwick Haa Museum** (☎ 503389; Tangwick Haa; admission free; ☺ 11am-5pm mid-April–Sep), located in a restored 17th-century house. The wonderful collection of ancient black-and-white photos capture the sense of community here.

At **Hamnavoe**, which you reach from another side road heading north, about 3.5 miles east of Eshaness, is the basic (no showers or electricity), stone **Johnny Notions Camping Böd** (☎ 503362; beds £7); book through the Lerwick tourist office. This was the birthplace of Johnny 'Notions' Williamson, an 18th-century blacksmith who inoculated several thousand people against smallpox using a serum and method he had devised himself.

Decent camping sites, light meals (£5 to £8) and shelter from the roaring gales are available at **Braewick Café & Campsite** (☎ 503345; Braewick, Eshaness; camp site £6.50; ☺ 10am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-6pm Sat & Sun), a stunning spot overlooking St Magnus Bay.

Almara B&B (☎ /fax 503261; www.almara.shetland.co.uk; Urafirth; r per person £25), just before Hillswick, is a friendly family home with spiffy rooms decked out in wood furnishings. The elevation of the property provides the real draw and the views are just stunning. The single and one of the doubles share a bathroom that has a long, deep tub – perfect for soothing weary bones.

Down on the quay, **Booth** (☎ 503348; Hillswick; suggested donation per dish £3-8; ☺ May-Sep) serves vegetarian food in a hippy crofters' house – actually a 300-year-old former Hanseatic trading-post house and one of Shetland's oldest buildings. All proceeds go to the local wildlife sanctuary.

Buses from Lerwick run (evenings only) to Hillswick (1¼ hours) and Eshaness (1½ hours).

THE NORTH ISLES

Yell, Unst and Fetlar make up the three islands of the North Isles, all connected to each other by ferry.

Yell

☎ 01957 / pop 1100

Yell is all about colours: the browns and vivid, lush greens of the peaty moor, grey clouds thudding through the skies and the steely blue waters of the North Atlantic, which are never far away. The peat makes the ground look cracked and parched, although it's swimming most of the year. It's a desolate island with some good coastal and hill walks, especially around the **Herra peninsula**, about halfway up the west coast.

Across Whale Firth from the peninsula is **Lumbister RSPB Reserve**, where red-throated divers (called rain geese in Shetland), merlins, bonxies, Arctic skuas and other bird species breed. The area is home to a large otter population, too. The otters are best viewed near the shores of Whale Firth, where you may also spot common and grey seals.

South of Lumbister, on the hill side above the main road, stand the reputedly haunted ruins of **Windhouse**, dating from 1707. About a mile east of here is **Mid Yell**, the island's largest village and a natural harbour. The road north

BIRD-WATCHING IN SHETLAND

For bird-watchers, Shetland is paradise. This island group is internationally famous for its bird life. As well as being a stopover for migrating Arctic species, there are huge sea-bird breeding colonies.

Out of the 24 sea-bird species that nest in the British Isles, 21 are found here; June is the height of the breeding season. The **Royal Society for the Protection of Birds** (RSPB; www.rspb.org.uk) maintains several reserves on south Mainland and on the island of Fetlar. There are National Nature Reserves at **Hermaness** (where you can't fail to be entertained by the clownish antics of the almost tame puffins) and on the **Isle of Noss**. **Fair Isle** also supports large sea-bird populations.

A useful website is www.nature-shetland.co.uk. Take care when bird-watching as the cliff-edge sites can be dangerous.

to Gutcher passes **Basta Voe**, where many otters inhabit the shores. In the north, around the village of **Cullivoe**, there's more good walking along the attractive coastline.

From Ulsta ferry terminal, the road leads 5 miles east to Burray. The **Old Haa Museum** (☎ 722339; Burray; admission free; ☞ 10am-4pm Tue-Thu & Sat, 2-5pm Sun Apr-Sep) has a fascinating exhibition on local flora, fauna and military history, and there's a small gallery. It's given authenticity by the musty old stone building (Yell's oldest building, built in 1672) in which it's housed, and there's a genealogy centre for those whose ancestors came from these parts. Yell Crafts is here too, selling Fair Isle woollen garments and some vivid (and reasonably priced) paintings of Shetland scenery.

SLEEPING & EATING

Windhouse Lodge (☎ 702231; Mid Yell; beds £9) Below the haunted ruins of Windhouse, and on the A968, you'll find this well-kept, clean, snug camping *böd* with a pot-belly stove to warm your toes. You can book beds at Lerwick tourist office.

Gutcher Post Office (☎ 744201; margaret.tulloch@btopenworld.com; Gutcher; r per person £22.50) This friendly place has cosy rooms and is a stone's throw from the ferry pier. The owner has a definite piggy fetish! It's very cheerful but note that the singles are *very* small. Dinner costs £12.

Wind Dog Café (☎ 744321; Gutcher; snacks & light meals £3-4; ☞ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-5pm Sat & Sun, dinner May-Sep; ♿) While you're waiting for the ferry to Unst, you can snack at this warm, eclectic little café. It serves up paninis, burgers and hot drinks. There's also a small library inside, ideal if the rain is pelting outside.

Hilltop Restaurant & Bar (☎ 702333; Mid Yell; bar meals £6; ☞ lunch & dinner) An inviting spot to hunker down, simple bar meals (of the fish and chip variety) are served, although the puller is the wonderful views. The bar is a good spot to meet chatty locals.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Yell is connected with Mainland by **ferry** (☎ 722259) between Toft and Ulsta (passenger return £3.20, car and driver return £7.60, 20 minutes, frequent). Although you don't need to book, traffic is constant from May to September so it's wise to do so during those months.

Buses leave Lerwick for Toft ferry pier (one hour, two to five daily, Sunday during school

terms only). There are connecting buses at Ulsta for other parts of the island.

Unst

☎ 01957 / pop 1100

Unst is a lot smaller but prettier than Yell with bare, velvety-smooth hills and clusters of settlements that cling to their waterside locations, fiercely resisting the buffeting winds. It also feels less isolated and has more of a community. With an area of 45 sq miles it's Scotland's northernmost inhabited island. There's a wide variety of vegetation – over 400 different plant species. Some of the most unusual examples can be seen at the 30-hectare **Keen of Hamar National Nature Reserve** northeast of Baltasound.

In the northwest is the wonderfully wild and windy National Nature Reserve of **Hermaness**. Here you can sit on the high cliffs, commune with the thousands of sea birds and Shetland's largest colony of puffins (best seen in May and June), and gaze across the sea towards the Arctic Circle. The more energetic should take on the superb **cliff-top walk** along the west coast.

The **Hermaness Visitor Centre** (☎ 711278; Shore Station, Burrafirth; admission free; ☞ 9am-5pm mid-Apr–mid-Sep), near the reserve's entrance, has an interactive sea-bird exhibit and provides information on the island's wildlife.

Robert Louis Stevenson wrote *Treasure Island* while living on Unst and the map in the novel is reputedly based on the island. Stevenson's uncle built the lighthouse on **Muckle Flugga**, one of the group of rocks off Hermaness; another of the rocks is **Out Stack**, Scotland's most northerly point.

Unst Heritage Centre (☎ 711528; Haroldswick; adult/child £2/free, joint Unst Heritage Centre ticket £3; ☞ May-Sep) houses a modern museum with a history of the Shetland pony, and a nostalgic look at the past. There's a re-creation of a croft house complete with box bed and, for weather-obsessed Brits, a summary of the last 170 years of weather in the Shetlands.

Unst Boat Haven (☎ 711528; Haroldswick; adult/child £2/free, joint Unst Heritage Centre ticket £3; ☞ May-Sep) is housed in a large shed and is every boaty's delight, with rowing and sailing boats, photographs of more boats, and maritime artefacts.

For a swig of the most northerly beer in Britain, drop into **Valhalla Brewery** (☎ 711658; Baltasound; tours £3.50; ☞ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri).

Scotland's oddest **bus shelter**, complete with sofa, TV, books, flower box and decorative ornaments, is at Baltasound – it looks as though someone just got kicked out of home. It even has its own website (www.unstbusshelter.shetland.co.uk). If this was a few hundred miles further south it would be ripped off and grafted within hours – it speaks volumes of the community spirit that still exists throughout these islands.

SLEEPING & EATING

Ourpick Gardiesfauld Hostel (☎ 755279; www.gardiesfauld.shetland.co.uk; Uyeasound; dm adult/child £11/8, tent & 2 people £6; ☞ Apr-Sep) This 35-bed hostel is very clean, has excellent kitchen facilities and sun-drenched common areas for relaxing. There are dorms with a maximum of 10 beds, a twin and a family room with en suite. Nonresidents are welcome to use common areas. It's always open and is the place to go if you miss the ferry. The bus stops right outside.

Saxa Vord (☎ 711711; www.saxavord.com; Haroldswick; dm £15, self-catering house per week £250-450) This former RAF base has grand plans, including a natural and cultural heritage centre due to open in 2008. At the moment the well-equipped bunkhouse (seven rooms with one two-bed bunk in each) is open and so are the holiday houses, which would really suit families or groups who want to be in close proximity to each other. There's a restaurant on site that dishes out local produce and pours Unst's Valhalla beer.

Clingera Guest House (☎ 711579; clingera@btopenworld.com; Baltasound; r per person £18-25) This is one of the best places to stay on the island. It has affable hosts and huge, immaculate rooms with en suites. The twin has a separate sitting room and is terrific value. The owners also rent out a couple of self-catering croft houses.

Baltasound Hotel (☎ 711334; www.baltasound-hotel.shetland.co.uk; Baltasound; s/d £49/78) The cottage-style rooms inside this solid place are better than the rooms in the nearby chalets, which are a bit cramped. It's also a decent watering hole with a lovely country outlook, and it's popular with tourist buses. Try the local real ale White Wife, named after a ghostly figure seen by the A968, just south of Baltasound.

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Self-caterers can stock up at Skibhoul Store & Bakery (Baltasound) or at Haroldswick Shop, where you can heat up and eat your purchase (eg pie or pizza) in its little kitchen.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Unst is connected with Yell by a small car **ferry** (☎ 722395) between Gutcher and Belmont (free, 10 minutes, frequent).

Haroldswick is 55 miles from Lerwick and, if you don't have a car, you must spend the night on Unst as buses only run once daily.

Fetlar

☎ 01957 / pop 90

Fetlar is the smallest (five miles by two miles) but most fertile of the North Isles. Much of the island is designated an SSSI. There's great bird-watching here, and the 705 hectares of grassy moorland around Vord Hill (159m) in the north form the **Fetlar RSPB Reserve**. Common and grey seals can also be seen on the shores. The reserve is closed during the breeding season from May to August; contact the **warden** (☎ 733246) at Baelans.

Scenic **walking** is possible on much of the island, especially around the bay near Tresta, at Urie and Gruting in the north, and Funzie in the east.

There's no petrol on Fetlar, but there's a shop and a post office in Houbie, the main village. The excellent **Fetlar Interpretive Centre** (☎ 733206; Houbie; adult/child £2/free; ☞ 1-5pm Mon-Fri & 2-5pm Sat & Sun May-Sep), near the post office, has photos, audio recordings and videos on the island and its history.

The **Garths Campsite** (☎ 733227; Gord; camp sites £4-7.40), 2.5 miles from the ferry, overlooks the beach at Tresta and has great facilities. Nearby is the friendly **Gord B&B** (☎ 733227; nicboxall@btinternet.com; Gord; r per person £25, B&B incl dinner £37), with terrific sea views and two twin rooms and one double, all with en suite.

The shop-café in Houbie serves homemade food.

Regular ferries from Oddsta in the island's northwest connect with Gutcher on Yell and Belmont on Unst.