



Orkney: 5,000 years of culture

Neolithic, Iron Age, Viking, present day

23–29 July 2022 (M1 432)

7 days • £2,190 • *Flights not included*

Lecturer: Caroline Wickham-Jones

Study the 'Heart of Neolithic Orkney', a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Includes a private tour of the Ness of Brodgar dig with the director, Nick Card.

Neolithic, Iron Age, Viking and 20th-century sites with plenty of time to explore picturesque Kirkwall.

The archipelago of Orkney has been inhabited for 10,000 years. Down the millennia, the mild climate and fertile soils have nurtured a creative community here. The 67 islands are home to some of the best preserved archaeological sites in the United Kingdom, conserving an unusual amount of detail which provide a rare and intimate glimpse of life in the past.

Central to Orkney's archaeological significance is the UNESCO World Heritage Site 'Heart of Neolithic Orkney', comprising four locations that give insight into life on the islands for the first farming communities 5,000 years ago. They are among the most important Neolithic sites in Western Europe and include Skara Brae, a well-preserved village of prehistoric houses; the great stone circles of the Ring of Brodgar and Stones of Stenness; and the newly discovered ceremonial site of Ness of Brodgar. Neolithic chambered tombs can be found across the archipelago, punctuating the windswept rolling hills and dramatic sea cliffs.

The islands came under Viking rule in the ninth century and remained part of Norway until the end of the 15th century. The Vikings left their distinctive mark: the magnificent cathedral of St Magnus was built by Earl (later Saint) Rognvald, and the Neolithic tomb of Maeshowe features the largest collection of Viking runes outside Scandinavia. Orkney is unique in Scotland in having its own Icelandic saga, documenting the semi-mythical history of the islands and the earls who ruled them.

20th-century Orkney felt the impact of both World Wars, when thousands of troops were stationed on the islands, as well as many Prisoners of War. The remains from this period add to the long history of archaeology. Post-war, the collector and artist Margaret Gardiner had a long-standing connection with the islands and several of her works and those of her friends, including Barbara Hepworth, can



Kirkwall, steel engraving c. 1850.

be seen in Stromness, a town that is home to a thriving artistic community.

From vast standing circles that predate Stonehenge and the evocative poetry of the Viking earls, to the scars of modern-era conflict and the rich cultural tapestry of the 20th century, Orkney's history and stunning natural landscape offer much to stimulate the intellect and stir the soul.

Itinerary

Day 1: Kirkwall. Arrive in Kirkwall independently (see 'Practicalities' for further details). Hotel rooms are available to check in from 2.00pm. Leave the hotel at 3.00pm for a visit to the Orkney Museum and an overview of the history of the islands. Stay in Kirkwall throughout.

Day 2: Heart of Neolithic Orkney. Visit the sites that make up the UNESCO World Heritage 'Heart of Orkney': Skara Brae, the stone-built Neolithic village; the Standing Stones of Stenness; and the chambered Cairn of Maeshowe.

Day 3: Ring of Brodgar, Italian Chapel, Churchill Barriers. Walk round the Ring of Brodgar, part of the 'Heart of Neolithic Orkney'. Drive through Mainland and cross the Churchill Barriers, built to prevent any further attacks on the fleet stationed in Orkney after the sinking of HMS Royal Oak in 1939. See also

the tiny, beautiful Italian Chapel, erected in two Nissen huts by Italian Prisoners of War in 1943.

Day 4: Rousay. Board the morning ferry to the island of Rousay. From here view a series of Neolithic chambered cairns including the double-decker Taversoe Tuick. It is a short walk from the road down to the coast to view Midhowe Cairn, one of the largest tombs in Orkney and the impressive Iron Age Midhowe Broch with its immense defensive walls.

Day 5: Stromness. View the Stromness museum, then walk through the town to the Pier Arts Centre, home to Margaret Gardiner's collection of art that includes works by Barbara Hepworth, Terry Frost and Naum Gabo, as well as contemporary works by Anish Kapoor. After some free time in Stromness proceed to the Ness of Brodgar, a working archaeological site which is unearthing some surprising insights into Neolithic ceremonial life. Tour the site with Nick Card, the director of the dig.

Day 6: Birsay. Cross the tidal causeway from Mainland to Birsay – there are Pictish, Norse and medieval remains on this dramatic, uninhabited island. Visit the 16th-century Earl's Palace and the Kirbuster Museum, a small farm museum that houses the only surviving unaltered 'firehouse' in Northern Europe. Broch of Gurness is an Iron Age complex on the edge of Eynhallow Sound, affording beautiful views of Rousay. *Today's visits are subject to change based on tide times.*

Orkney: 5,000 years of culture continued

Day 7: Kirkwall. Visit the 17th-century Earl's and Bishop's Palaces in Kirkwall. The tour ends in Kirkwall after lunch, at c. 2.00pm. From here the coach takes you to Kirkwall Airport by 2.15pm and Stromness ferry terminal by 3.45pm.

Lecturer

Caroline Wickham-Jones. An archaeologist living and working in Orkney. After an active fieldwork career, she took up post as a lecturer for the University of Aberdeen and since retiring she has worked as a consultant. Her research focuses on early hunter-gatherers and the world in which they lived. She is the author of many publications, academic and popular, including three guidebooks on the archaeology and history of Orkney.

Practicalities

Price, per person. Two sharing: £2,190. **Single occupancy:** £2,550.

Included: travel by private coach, including transfers to meet recommended flights and ferries on the first and last days; hotel accommodation as described below; breakfasts; 5 lunches and 4 dinners with wine, water, coffee; all admissions; all tips; all taxes; the services of the lecturer and tour manager.

Accommodation. The Ayre Hotel, Kirkwall (ayrehotel.co.uk): 3-star hotel well located in the centre of Kirkwall. The rooms are comfortable and the service willing. It is the best available in the locality. *Single rooms are double for single use.*

Transport to Orkney is not included in the price of the tour. It is possible to fly to Kirkwall from London with Loganair via Edinburgh, Aberdeen, Glasgow or Manchester. It is also possible to take a ferry from Aberdeen to Kirkwall or Scrabness to Stromness. We will send the recommended flight and ferry options when they are available to book, by October 2021, and ask that you make your own reservation. Transfers will be provided for these recommended flights and ferries.

How strenuous? There is a lot of walking or scrambling over archaeological sites. You will be on your feet for long stretches of time, in some cases on exposed sites and walking over rough terrain and steep slopes. Therefore sure-footedness and agility are essential. Average distance by coach per day: 25 miles.

Group size: between 10 and 22 participants.