

ORKNEY

PLAN YOUR ESCAPE

LANDSCAPES & SEASCAPES

Welcome to Orkney's landscapes and seascapes, stunning views transformed by every change in weather and season.

There are other contrasts too. The spectacular cliffs of the West Mainland face the Atlantic Ocean, while the gentler landscape of the East Mainland faces the North Sea. Throughout, the blues and greys of sea and sky are complemented by the heather browns and lush greens of Orkney's heaths and fertile farmlands. A dramatic palette for artists, photographers and lovers of the outdoors.

This one-day touring itinerary includes just 43 miles of driving between locations, leaving the rest of the day for peaceful exploration on foot. Don't forget your binoculars, camera and - just in case - waterproofs!

OUTLINE

- 1 YESNABY**
HIGH SANDSTONE CLIFFS WITH ENDLESS VIEWS WESTWARDS ACROSS THE OPEN SEA, A DELIGHT FOR THE SENSES
- 2 BIRSAY**
HISTORIC PLACE OF POWER AND PILGRIMAGE, NESTLED BESIDE A TIDAL ISLAND, THE BROUGH OF BIRSAY
- 3 DINGIESHOWE BEACH**
A DELIGHTFUL SOUTH-FACING SAND-AND-PEBBLE BEACH ON AN ISTHMUS, PERFECT FOR BEACHCOMBING
- 4 MULL HEAD, DEERNESS**
LOCAL NATURE RESERVE OF HEATHLAND, GRASSLAND AND CLIFFTOPS, POPULAR FOR ITS GEOLOGY, WILDLIFE AND PREHISTORY



LANDSCAPES & SEASCAPES ITINERARY



Yesnaby



Brough of Birsay



Dingieshowe Beach

YOUR ITINERARY

SPRING

TIME: 1 DAY'S TOURING
(OR SPLIT OVER 2 DAYS)

DISTANCE: 43 MILES

1 YESNABY

The dramatic Old Red Sandstone sea-cliffs of **Yesnaby** on the west coast of the Orkney Mainland stand tall, proudly defying the seas and winds of the Atlantic. The rocks are about 400 million years old, and erosion sculpts them into attractive shapes such as the iconic **Yesnaby Castle**, a distinctive and photogenic two-legged sea stack sometimes described as a smaller version of its more famous cousin, the **Old Man of Hoy**.

Whether in the teeth of an Atlantic gale or the stillness of a calm day, you'll find Yesnaby invigorating. There are clifftop walks to both north and south, but be careful near the cliff edge and on any slippery footpaths. Keep your eyes peeled for birds on the wing or roosting on the cliffs, and for seals in the sea far below you. Orkney's Grey seal population breeds in October-November and Common seals breed in the summer, but these inquisitive sea-mammals can be spotted year-round if you are observant and fortunate.

2 BIRSAY

Located on the north-west of the Mainland, the historic village of **Palace** had such a favourable location that it was once the centre of the Viking Earldom. Easy access to the sea and with an exceptionally fertile hinterland, no wonder that earls and bishops chose this place. Look for seals and seabirds, and hunt the beach next to the **Brough of Birsay** for rare cowrie shells, known locally as Groatie Buckies, said to bring luck to their finders.

At low tide you can cross to the Brough and wander amongst the remains of Viking houses, barns, a church and monastery and even a sauna. Follow the path up to the lighthouse for a bracing walk rewarded with an expansive view. Puffins come ashore here in summer to breed. Do **check the tide times** before visiting the Brough.

THE SCOTTISH OUTDOOR ACCESS CODE

Everyone has access rights and responsibilities in Scotland's outdoors, helping the needs of different users to be balanced while our landscapes and seascapes are enjoyed and protected.

The **Scottish Outdoor Access Code** has lots of advice and guidance to help you.

THE ORKNEY NATIVE WILDLIFE PROJECT

Led by Scottish Natural Heritage and RSPB Scotland, the main aim of the project is to ensure that Orkney's unique native wildlife is safeguarded by managing the invasive non-native predators that threaten the current balance. A major part of this is a stoat eradication programme and we ask that if you see one you let us know on 886163 or email north@snh.gov.uk.



Yesnaby Castle



Brough of Birsay



Inquisitive seals



Atlantic Puffin - Tammie Norrie

YOUR ITINERARY

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3 DINGIESHOWE

Depending on the wind direction, the pleasant sandy beach at **Dingieshowe** can be very sheltered, a perfect place for leisurely beachcombing and rock-pool exploration. Just along from the small car park there is a mound containing the remains of an Iron Age coastal broch or fort. It is said that the mound was an important assembly place in the Viking period.

In common with beaches all round the world, Dingieshowe experiences discarded plastic washed ashore by current and tide. Please help us keep our beaches clean by collecting any plastic waste and putting it in the bins in the car park.

4 MULL HEAD, DEERNESS

The **Mull Head local nature reserve** in Deerness comprises over 200 acres of coastal grassland, heath and sea cliff, with a cosy visitor centre to help you get your bearings and show you the wildlife, geology and prehistory to look out for. There are leaflets available here or from the **Kirkwall Visitor Information Centre** if you want to study them in advance of your visit.

A short walk from the car park will bring you to the roof of a partially collapsed sea cave known as **the Gloop**, a spectacular sight when the sea crashes through the cave entrance. There is a fenced viewing platform but be careful here and as you follow the signposted pathway along the cliff.

OTHER PLACES TO VISIT IF YOU HAVE MORE TIME

There is lots to see and do in every corner of Orkney whatever the season; the quieter months are a great time to sightsee at a slower pace. If you have time to explore further, see the suggested sites below:

Wideford Hill near Kirkwall provides a panoramic view of Orkney's landscape and scatter of islands, with an impressive **chambered tomb** on the steep hillside overlooking the Bay o' Firth.

The **RSPB** manages 13 nature reserves in Orkney. From the shelter of the Eddie Balfour hen harrier hide at **RSPB Cottascarth and Rendall Moss**, you are able to watch some of our moorland bird species including perhaps the iconic hen harriers.

At the **Orkneyinga Saga Centre** in Orphir, beside the sheltered waters of Scapa Flow, there is a delightful circular walk enabling you to enjoy views of the Flow where nature, history and modern industry sit easily together.

The **Orkney Museum** in Kirkwall and the **Stromness Museum** both have excellent displays about Orkney's natural history, the perfect way to prepare for a day's exploration out of doors.



Dingieshowe Beach



The Gloop, Deerness



Mull Head, Deerness

FINDING OUT MORE

Local bookshops have a good selection of books and maps to help you explore our landscapes and seascapes and the native wildlife which thrives here.

Our one-day itineraries are designed to give you a taste of what Orkney has to offer. With so much to see and do we hope you are inspired to spend more time exploring Orkney

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