

Travelling to Orkney – the easy way

OVERVIEW

The one obvious fact of life in Orkney is that travel is essential, inevitable, and often complicated. This is due mainly to our privileged location, which protects us from so many of society's ills. It is my experience with many years of Orkney Travel that travelling to and from Orkney is perceived to be expensive and time consuming. However, with good advice and forward planning, most travel is actually cheaper than it was ten or more years ago, and can be very fast indeed. For example, London Heathrow to Kirkwall can be achieved in around 3 hours by air. However, be aware that late booking can be very expensive, as there may be only a few, if any seats left on the aircraft.

Internal transport is subsidised as it is classed as essential to maintain island life. This makes it not only easy but cheap to visit Orkney's many outer islands. Travel between the islands in Orkney is possible by air and by ferry as a foot passenger and also with car.

There are many different ferry routes to choose from if you plan to travel to Orkney by sea, and the ferry timetables connect with rail and bus routes from Scotland and England.

AIR TRAVEL TO ORKNEY

Orkney's external air service is operated by **Loganair** as a franchise operation on behalf of British Airways; ie the aircrew are Loganair, but the ground staff are British Airways.

The fact that we only have one airline is not a disadvantage as British Airways is one of the world's largest airlines. Being a part of this network allows great access to their through fares to and from the entire world. (The adage is that the further you fly with one airline, the cheaper the airfare.)

The aircraft that are used to fly into Kirkwall (the airport on the Orkney mainland) only carry 30 passengers, therefore early booking is essential.

Good airfares are available year-round but the very best airfares always disappear more quickly at peak times – school holidays, Christmas, Easter, Summer.

Kirkwall has direct air services from:

Aberdeen – 3 times weekdays, twice Saturday, once Sunday.
Edinburgh – twice daily Monday - Saturday, once Sunday.
Glasgow – once daily.
Inverness – 3 times weekdays, twice Saturday and Sunday.
Shetland – once daily.



Kirkwall Airport



An 8-seater Loganair Islander, for flights within Orkney.

This network allows fast and easy connections from all the airports in the United Kingdom and Europe. Same day connections can also be made from morning arrivals from USA, Canada, Australia and many other airports in the world.

TIPS FOR GETTING THE BEST AIRFARE INTO ORKNEY

Book as far ahead as possible (as much as 10½ months ahead).

Be flexible with dates and times if possible.

Try to avoid travelling on Fridays and Mondays because these tend to be the busiest days and therefore more expensive.

Stay over at least a Saturday night.

FERRY TRAVEL TO ORKNEY

Orkney is well served with a choice of ferry routes from mainland Scotland.

NorthLink Ferries operate year-round services on the following routes:

Aberdeen to Kirkwall – 6 hours
Scrabster to Stromness – 90 minutes
Kirkwall to Lerwick – 7 hours 45 minutes
Lerwick to Aberdeen – 12 hours

These routes are served by high quality, state-of-the-art ships and are subsidised by the Scottish Executive. They can take passengers and vehicles.

There are 2 independent operators from the North of Scotland to Orkney.

Pentland Ferries operates the route from Gills Bay to St Margaret's Hope in South Ronaldsay, Orkney. This sailing takes 1 hour and runs up to 3 times daily, taking both passengers and vehicles.

John O'Groats Ferries operates a summer service (May – September) from John O'Groats to Burwick, South Ronaldsay. This service is for passengers only and takes 40 minutes.

The Orkney Bus connects from Inverness to John O'Groats for this ferry and then an onwards local bus to Kirkwall.

These ferry ports all have connections with one or more of the following services: Scottish Citylink Coaches, National Express and Scotrail.



Stromness Harbour and NorthLink's 'Hamnavoe'.

INTERNAL AIR SERVICES WITHIN ORKNEY

Orkney has a North Isles air service which can offer stunning aerial views of Orkney. These flights are operated by Loganair and can only be reserved by contacting them direct at Kirkwall Airport.

The aircraft that Loganair uses for these flights have only 8 seats so early booking is essential.

Islands that can be reached using these flights are: Eday, North Ronaldsay, Papa Westray, Sanday, Stronsay and Westray.

There are generally 2 flights daily to each island, so day trips are very popular, especially in the summer.

Loganair offers the 'Island Adventure' which is a package of 3 return trips to 3 different islands within 10 days for those of you who wish to sample more than one of our outer islands.

The world's shortest scheduled flight is also in Orkney. Two minutes is all the time scheduled from fly from Westray to Papa Westray.

This article was written by Mark Ridgway, owner and Manager of Ridgway Travel – Orkney's family-run independent Travel Agency who specialise in travel to and from Orkney.



INTERNAL FERRY TRAVEL WITHIN ORKNEY

Orkney Ferries carries passengers, cars and cargo to 13 of Orkney's islands.

Reservations can be made direct at the Kirkwall office.

There are services from:

Kirkwall – to Eday, North Ronaldsay, Papa Westray, Sanday, Shapinsay, Stronsay, Westray
Houton – to Hoy, Flotta
Stromness – to Hoy, Graemsay
Tingwall – to Egilsay, Rousay, Wyre

Frequency of sailings depends on the island, but many can be visited for a day (especially in the summer) or for longer.



Orkney Ferries' 'Earl Sigurd' at Kirkwall Pier.