

Walking the Orkney and Shetland Isles: A Journey of Discovery and Wonder

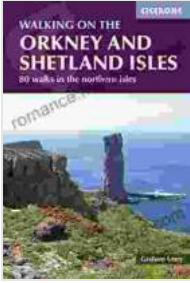
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Geography and Climate

The Orkney and Shetland Isles form two distinct archipelagos situated off the northern coast of Scotland. Orkney, the more easterly group, comprises over 70 islands, while Shetland, further north, boasts around 100 islands.

These windswept isles are characterized by their rugged landscapes, sculpted by centuries of fierce winds and crashing waves. The terrain varies from low-lying meadows to dramatic cliffs, with rolling hills and secluded bays adding to the diverse scenery.

Walking on the Orkney and Shetland Isles: 80 walks in the northern isles (Cicerone Guide) by Graham Uney



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The climate of the Orkney and Shetland Isles is influenced by their northerly location and proximity to the Atlantic Ocean. Summers are generally mild, with average temperatures ranging from 12-18°C (54-64°F). Winters, on the other hand, can be harsh, with temperatures dropping below freezing and strong winds often battering the islands.

History and Culture

The Orkney and Shetland Isles have a rich and fascinating history, dating back to Neolithic times. The islands have been inhabited for over 5,000 years, leaving behind a legacy of ancient monuments, archaeological sites, and cultural traditions.

The most iconic historical landmarks of the Orkney Isles include the Ring of Brodgar, a Neolithic stone circle dating back to 2500 BC, and Skara Brae, a remarkably well-preserved prehistoric village.

Shetland, too, boasts an array of historical treasures. Jarlshof is a complex archaeological site that reveals the remains of settlements from the Bronze Age to the Viking era. The Mousa Broch, a Bronze Age tower, stands as a testament to the defensive architecture of the time.

Both the Orkney and Shetland Isles have deep-rooted cultural traditions, influenced by their Norse heritage and the unique challenges of island life. Traditional music, storytelling, and craftwork are still practiced and celebrated on the islands.

Wildlife and Nature

The Orkney and Shetland Isles are renowned for their abundant wildlife and pristine natural surroundings. The islands provide a haven for a wide range of seabirds, including puffins, guillemots, and razorbills. Seals, otters, and whales can also be spotted along the coastlines.

The upland areas of the islands are home to various bird species, including golden eagles, peregrine falcons, and red grouse. Otters and deer roam the freshwater lochs and moorland habitats.

The marine environment around the Orkney and Shetland Isles is equally rich and diverse. The waters are teeming with fish species, including cod, haddock, and mackerel. Jellyfish, dolphins, and porpoises can also be encountered offshore.

Walking Trails and Routes

The Orkney and Shetland Isles offer a myriad of walking trails and routes, catering to all levels of experience and fitness. From gentle coastal paths to challenging hill ascents, there is something for every walker.

In Orkney, the 87-mile Orkney Way is a popular long-distance trail that circumnavigates the Mainland island. The path traverses a diverse landscape, passing by historical sites, stunning beaches, and picturesque villages.

Shetland boasts equally captivating walking routes. The 18-mile Eshaness Walk explores the remote and rugged northern peninsula of Mainland Shetland. The trail offers breathtaking coastal views, wildlife encounters, and a chance to visit the Sumburgh Head lighthouse.

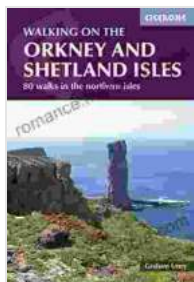
For those seeking shorter or easier walks, there are numerous options available on both archipelagos. Many trails lead to secluded beaches, hidden waterfalls, and panoramic viewpoints.

Planning Your Walking Adventure

Planning a walking adventure in the Orkney and Shetland Isles requires careful consideration. Here are some essential tips to ensure a successful and enjoyable journey:

- **Choose the right time of year:** Spring and autumn offer the most pleasant weather conditions for walking, while summer can be busy with tourists.
- **Book accommodation in advance:** Especially during peak season, it is advisable to book your accommodation well in advance to avoid disappointment.
- **Plan your itinerary:** Decide on the trails you want to walk and estimate the distances and timings involved. Allow plenty of time for rest and exploration.
- **Pack appropriately:** Pack comfortable walking boots, waterproof clothing, and enough food and water for your walks.
- **Be prepared for the weather:** The weather in the Orkney and Shetland Isles can be unpredictable, so be prepared for all conditions.

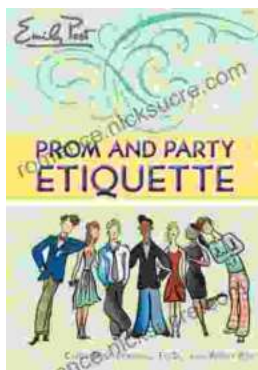
- **Respect the environment:** Stick to designated paths and leave no trace of your visit by packing out all your litter.



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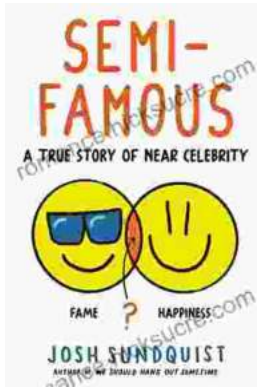
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