

ORKNEY ISLAND HOLIDAYS

Check the Dates & Prices tab on our website or See our Holiday Schedule for current dates and prices for this Holiday.



The beautiful island of Islay is one of the bigger Scottish Islands, and has a varied topography of mountains, moorland, fields and forest, and a coastline of cliffs, sand and shingle beaches, and small harbours. It is the most southerly of the Inner Hebrides, and lies off the Mull of Kintyre, close to the coasts of both Mainland Scotland and Ireland. It is nearly cut in half by two long inlets, Loch Gruinart to the north and Loch Indaal to the south.



Its geographical position has governed its history, which is unique and very interesting. The island was converted to Christianity from Ireland in the early centuries AD, then invaded and settled by the Norse, before becoming the seat of the Lords of the Isles and the site of their capital.



The fiercely independent western clan chiefs did not easily accept inclusion in the Kingdom of Scotland. They were finally subdued only around the same time that Scotland and England were united under James the Sixth and First in 1603. In the nineteenth century Islay suffered from the Clearances, when Scottish Lairds evicted tenants to make way for sheep.



Traces of all this history can be found in the island, from eighth century Celtic Christian crosses to Finlaggan and Dunivaig, strongholds of the Lords of the Isles. The early graveyards have intriguing graves stones depicting warriors and ships, and the crosses show Pictish as well as Celtic influences, and even an odd Norse symbol. Prehistoric sites also exist, some Bronze Age, others possibly earlier.

Our Holiday will include a day in the island of Jura, a short ferry trip across the Islay Sound. Jura is a long narrow island with a wild landscape dominated by the Paps of Jura. Midway along the west coast a long inlet bisects the island: this is Loch Tarbert and the name shows that this is another portage place used in Norse times and maybe earlier, to avoid long rough sea passages – a favourite hobby horse of Louise's, as many will know. Jura House has extensive and surprising gardens which are open all year round, and a walk down to the sea with lots of interest on the way.

Islay bird watching & other wildlife in early spring.

Ancient habit and modern farming practices have resulted in the two major bird attractions of the island in March. These are the thousands of **geese** which winter in Islay, and **choughs** which are resident year round. 25,000 barnacle and 10,000 Greenland white-fronted geese return to Islay each winter, and special management agreements are in place to allow them their traditional grazing in the fields of Islay. In the evenings they fly to the estuaries to roost, and create an amazing spectacle against the setting sun.



Barnacle Geese

Choughs are relatively rare in Britain, confined to a few specific places. They benefit from the Islay habit of out-wintering cattle. This is possible because of mild winters and the cattle's ability to eat sea-weed – good job there's no competition from North Ronaldsay ewes here! The choughs forage around in the cattle dung for insects and so can survive the winter. With their red beaks and legs, lively flight and cheeky characters they are fun to watch.

Other birds we will see include great northern divers, long-tailed duck, scaup, Slavonian grebe, scoters, red-breasted merganser, eider and raven. Other possible species are snow bunting, numerous waders such as purple sandpiper and turnstones, glaucous and Iceland gulls, raptors such as peregrine, merlin, and resident golden eagle and many more. Hen harriers have their favourite roosts, and barn owls might be seen in the early evening. Whooper swans inhabit inland wetlands. The sheltered waters of Loch Gruinart and Loch Indaal are ideal for wintering sea birds.



Sunbathing Islay style February 2002.

The staff at Loch Gruinart RSPB Reserve keep a herd of fine beef cattle. These are used in the management of the Reserve for the benefit of choughs and other birds, and wildlife. The Visitor Centre gives us the opportunity to find out how different farms in Islay are managed for wildlife. It is a great place to view the wintering geese, ducks and waders, and perhaps a bird of prey or two.

We will visit The Oa RSPB Reserve, a rugged moorland habitat. Here we hope to see golden eagles and choughs, which may both have started nest building. There may be peregrine hunting and snow bunting flocks.

Various types of large mammal can be seen in both Islay and Jura. We hope to see all three species of deer, red, roe and fallow. Agricultural fields often sport mad March hares which are fun to watch. Otters are shy and elusive, but there are some excellent places to look for them, and with patience we should be lucky enough to watch them. There are also wild feral goats on the rocky crags. Both grey and common seals are to be found around the coasts.

Islay is also well-known for its whisky: there are seven distilleries in the island, and another in Jura, each with their own distinctive character. We will have an informative tour of one of them, with a chance of a free dram to encourage us to buy!



Port Charlotte Hotel



Distillery

We will stay for six nights at the Port Charlotte Hotel on the shores of Loch Indaal, giving great views of this peaceful inlet and its birds. Otters inhabit the shores and have regularly been seen near the Hotel and in other parts of Islay. The Hotel, built in 1830, has been refurbished to four-star standards, and is known for its good food, excellent service and beautiful rooms.



Getting to Islay.

We will meet you at either the airport or ferry terminal in Islay and transfer you to the Port Charlotte Hotel, and will transfer you back to these points at the end of the Holiday after breakfast.

The ferry for Islay goes from Kennacraig on the Mull of Kintyre on the west coast of Scotland and takes about two hours to cross the Sound of Jura to reach Islay.

By Car and Ferry: Drive to Kennacraig via Glasgow, Lochgilphead, and Tarbert on the A82/A83, allowing two and a half hours minimum from Glasgow. Kennacraig is five miles beyond Tarbert.

Car ferry reservations Tel: 08000 66 5000. The most convenient ferry would be the 1300 from Kennacraig, arriving in Islay at 1505.

By Bus: A daily bus operates from Glasgow Buchanan Street to Kennacraig. Telephone for timetable information, 0141 3327133. Information to hand indicates that you could leave Glasgow around 0830, arriving at Kennacraig in time for the 1300 ferry and arriving in Islay at 1505.

Ferry information: 08000 66 5000 or 01880 730253.

By Air: Flights come from Glasgow Monday to Saturday, taking 40 minutes. Operated by FlyBe and/or LoganAir Tel: 0871 700 2000 or 01496 302022. Information at present indicates a convenient flight at 1705 from Glasgow, arriving in Islay at 1750.

Further information can be obtained from Islay's Tourist Information Centre, Tel: 08707 200 617.

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WHAT'S INCLUDED IN THE COST.

Hotel transfers in Islay.

Full board and ensuite accommodation for 6 nights in the Port Charlotte Hotel.

Five days guiding and excursions by minibus to different parts of Islay and Jura.

Entrance fees to sites of interest where applicable.

WHAT IS NOT INCLUDED IN THE COST.

Travel to Islay. Personal Travel Insurance.

All drinks from the bar, telephone calls, things of a purely personal nature. Laundry of personal clothes.

Tips for hotel staff.

BOOKING.

Please phone to reserve your place, then fill in the Booking Form and send this with your deposit made out to

Orkney Island Holidays Ltd.

Your booking will be confirmed in writing.



Islay & Jura Holiday Summary.

This is a special Holiday to explore the birds, mammals, history and archaeology of both Islay and Jura in the Western Isles of Scotland. You will stay at the sumptuous Port Charlotte Hotel with excellent facilities and fine cuisine. In March winter birdwatching highlights include the world famous flocks of thousands of barnacle and Greenland white-fronted geese, along with birds of prey like hen harriers and golden eagles, plus sea ducks such as scaup, scoters and long-tailed ducks, Slavonian grebes and diver species, and the enigmatic & rare chough, an Islay speciality. We will search the coastlines for otters and hope to see three species of deer plus brown hares and seals. History and archaeology abound, with Pictish and Celtic crosses and symbol stones, and strongholds of the Lords of the Isles to be explored. With 8 distilleries, we will visit a special one and sample the tastes and aromas! The scenery is wonderful and the sea air invigorating. We will explore each day by minibus with short walks and visits to all the best sites on these islands. This Holiday is great fun and full of interest. Why not give it a try?

