

# WILD PHOTOGRAPHY HOLIDAYS



## SCOTLAND ORKNEY, HOY & JOHN O'GROATS

### HIGHLIGHTS

- Castle Sinclair
- Duncansby Head
- John O'Groats
- Stromness Street Photography
- Birsay Sound and the Earl's Palace
- Neolithic sites
- Ring of Brodgar & Stones of Stenness
- Marwick Head & Kitchener's Memorial
- Yesnaby sea stacks and cliffs
- The Old Man of Hoy
- St John's Head Sea Cliffs

### INTRODUCTION

There's a magic to Orkney that you begin to feel as soon as the Scottish mainland slips astern. Only a few short miles of ocean separate the chain of islands from Scotland's north coast, but the Pentland Firth is one of Europe's most dangerous waterways, a graveyard of ships that adds an extra mystique to these islands shimmering in the sea mists and thrashed by the wild Atlantic waves. The approach to by ferry gives us a great sense of place as we sail past a dramatic coastline of massive sea cliffs including the Old Man of Hoy, an improbably tall and slender sand stone sea stack. The Archipelago of Orkney consists of approximately 70 islands, 19 of which are inhabited. The landscape of Orkney is green and rolling, treeless with large skies and stunning skies. Occasionally

in the winter there will be snow adding an extra touch of drama to the already bold vistas. In addition to its important and atmospheric neolithic sites, Orkney is equally famous for its dramatic coastline and spectacular towering sea stacks. The distinctive sandstone layered coastline is colourful and full of texture, throw in some wild Orcadian weather and we have all the ingredients for some fabulous wave action and dramatic seascape photography! We have included a couple of nights at the beginning to explore Scotland's North East tip visiting Duncansby Head and the dramatic Castle Sinclair located on Scotland's east coast of Wick. Classic and inspiring vistas are seemingly at every turn as are the smaller, more intimate details to be found within the landscape. We will explore how to create abstract interpretations of



the landscapes that we will be immersed in. For at least some of the time we will be encouraging participants to reach out of their comfort zone by trying some new and different techniques. We will aspire to balance our time in the field with post processing work including preparing images for the web/printing and reviewing/discussing our images in evening group sessions.

### **RACKWICK BAY**

*by George Mackay Brown*

*People left and the houses became abandoned  
At Burnmouth the door hangs from a broken hinge  
And the fire is out.  
The windows of shore empty sockets  
And the hearth coldness.  
At Bunnertoon the small drains are chocked.  
Thrushes nest in the chimney.  
Stars shine through the roof beams of Scar.  
No flame is needed  
To warm ghosts and nettles and rats  
Dead Fires.*

## **DAILY ITINERARY**

### **Day 1: John O'Groats**

WPH will arrange a transfer from Inverness to John O'-Groats and our hotel close to the castle of Mey and Duncansby head. Inverness is well connected by train and flights. You will probably need to stay in Inverness the night before Day 1 as we hope to be driving North by mid-morning. You are welcome to drive yourself to our first night hotel and it will be possible to leave your car on the mainland when we sail to Orkney.

Hotel (D)

### **Day 2: Duncansby Head & Castle Sinclair**

This morning we will rise early to catch a sunrise at Duncansby Head, the real northeastern tip of the Scottish mainland, it reveals nature at its most striking. Easy walking along the cliff tops brings the stunning view south to Thirle Door and the Stacks of Duncansby. The first is a rocky arch, the second a group of large jagged sea stacks. This is a spot you will want to savour, with a view that varies as you move along the clifftop path and bring into play different alignments of the stacks and



arch. We should be able to climb an interesting path down to the waters edge allowing us to get close to the seals hauled out on rocks. Later in the day we will drive to Castle Sinclair. Here we will find the spectacular ruins of one of Scotlands most important medieval castles in a gorgeous coastal location, a wonderful place for the sunset.

Hotel (B,L,D)

### **Day 3: Orkney & Stromnes**

After an early breakfast we board the ferry for a two and a half hour sailing from Scrabster to Stromness. Leaving the mainland behind we head for the dramatic west coast of Orkney and Stromness. We will be hoping for some interesting morning light as we pass by The Old Man of Hoy, a tall sea stack of red sandstone perched on a plinth of igneous basalt on the west coast of Hoy, this a location we will visit by foot later in our explorations of Hoy. Sailing into the bustling harbour of Stromness seems like a step back in time. There are narrow closes and buildings all huddled together above flagstone



streets with ancient piers stretching out into the sea, a superb photographic location to be visited during our stay. Our sea front hotel for the next two nights will be in overlooking Stromness harbour. Grand buildings decorate the sea-front and the spires of the town's churches challenge the familiar tower of the Cathedral for a place on the skyline. Twisting like an eel, the main street winds from the north to the south, with numerous snaking lanes and closes branching off from the main thoroughfare. After we have settled in we will view some images of our afternoon location Yesnaby Point. At Yesnaby, you'll clearly see how the sea has battered and shaped the coastline of mainland Orkney over millions of years. The result is a spectacular array of cliff scenery where

you'll find towering sea stacks and blow holes created by the force of the mighty ocean. You might also catch the "boiling seas", which are churned up by the raging waters clashing against these geological wonders. Yesnaby Castle is one of the star attractions, a two-legged sea stack set in a perfect position away from the cliffs amid the pounding waves. Wandering further there are classic repeating cliff-layers often enhanced big waves and atmospheric spray, a gorgeous vista at sunset.

Hotel Stromnes (B,L,D)

#### **Day 4: Neolithic Monuments and Birsay Beach, to Hoy**

No exploration of Orkney would be complete without acknowledging and exploring the unique Neolithic remains

that have now been unearthed and designated as a UNESCO heritage site. Our early morning location will be the Ring of Brodgar. The sheer scale of this impressive circle of ancient stones takes the breath away. The Ring of Brodgar is made up of twenty seven remaining stones, some up to fifteen feet high. It was the last of the great Neolithic monuments built in the area, close to the extensive Ness of Brodgar excavations and the Standing Stones of Stenness, this is a structure that it is estimated took 80,000 man-hours to construct, thousands of years of history within just a few hundred yards. They can be spectacular both at sunrise and sunset. Later in the day we will have the opportunity to explore the excavated dwellings at Skara Brae, Europe's most complete



Neolithic village set in a scenic coastal position and also Maes Howe – a unique chambered cairn and passage grave perfectly aligned so that its central chamber is illuminated on the winter solstice. It was looted by Vikings who left one of the largest collections of runic inscriptions in the world.

Late afternoon we will take the ferry to the remote Island of Hoy, our base for three nights.

Cottages Rackwick Bay (B,L,D)

### **Day 5: The Island of Hoy**

Hoy means the high island, so the Hoy hills are a sight to behold among the generally flat landscape of Orkney. When this is combined with some very striking coastal scenery we encounter a truly magical location in a place that is little visited, especially during the winter months. We take an early morning ferry crossing from Horton to the Island of Hoy followed by a short drive across the island to Rackwick bay where we settle into our accommodation for the next two nights. We will be staying in three crofts that have been restored and rebuilt to a high

and comfortable standard. Today we will immerse ourselves in the area around Rackwick Bay. Facing out into the Pentland Firth, Rackwick in Hoy can be a wild and raw place. Overlooked by towering sandstone cliffs and surrounded by hills, there is an 'end of the earth' feeling about this wide curving beach of sparkling sand and smooth rounded pink sandstone boulders. Otters are common along the Scapa Flow coastline of Hoy and have even been found in the Rackwick Burn. Small crofts and old ruins are dotted about the valley and looking out over the bay. The turf covered old school still stands proud on the hillside. One of the oldest buildings in Rackwick began life as a croft but became a school in 1718. Later it became a cobbler's workshop and it now serves as a folk museum. Rackwick Bay is known for a more gentle climate than the rest of the Orkneys, both sunrise and sunset can be spectacular.

Cottages Rackwick Bay (B,L,D)

### **Day 6: The Old Man of Hoy**

Weather permitting we will spend the whole of the day from after breakfast to last light exploring the sea cliffs



of Hoy's West Coast. The trail from the village school is always good, gradually ascending until it flattens out to traverse the clifftops culminating in some of Britain's highest cliffs, St John's Head. Our first full view of the "Old Man of Hoy" will undoubtedly make us gasp! This slender swaying pillar was created by the sea eroding the cliff surrounding it is fewer than 400 years old. A sketch of the Old Man of Hoy by William Daniel in 1819 shows the Old Man as a wider column with an arch at the base. In 1750, the Old Man was depicted as a headland, but by the 1820's stormy seas had carved the rock into a stack and arch – two legs gave the Old Man his name. It is possible to view and photograph the Old Man and the cliffs of St John's head from a variety of vantage points. There are also splendid vistas looking back towards the cliffs of Rackwick bay. If the weather is kind we will stay out until sunset to see the red sandstone cliffs as they take on an amazing red hue. For those participants who prefer to enjoy a less energetic day an earlier return and further gentle exploration of Rackwick is possible.

Cottages Rackwick Bay (B,L,D)

### Day 7: Hoy to Stromness and Birsay Sound

This morning following a sunrise shoot and breakfast we will take the morning sailing back to Houton. From here we will drive to Stromness and enjoy a classic fish & chips lunch close to the harbour followed by an exploration of the town. The curved, narrow, flagged sandstone streets are rich with photographic potential and steeped in history. The Vikings named the area Hamnavoe, which meant 'haven bay', a safe anchorage. It was sheltered from everything but a south-easterly gale. Though it was a popular base for fishermen, Stromness didn't really come into being as a settlement until after the 16th century, when explorers and merchants started sailing around the North of Scotland to across the Atlantic. Between 1688 and 1815 there were sustained periods when Britain was involved in wars, ending with the Napoleonic wars (1803–1815), and the English Channel was dangerous to pass through. Many ships passing to and from the Atlantic chose a northerly route, and called at Stromness for shelter, provision and ship repairs. An afternoon outing to a well know distillery in the Island's Kirkwall will be optional! For our sunset adventure we will head out to Birsay where it may be possible to walk over the causeway to Birsay Village, although this is tide and weather dependent. During the winter months Birsay experiences storms bringing huge waves that break over the causeway to the village and the rocks on the shoreline. The Point of Buckquoy is the perfect vantage point to observe the waves crashing onto Birsay beach, the bay and the cliffs of Marwick head, this is truly dramatic during stormy weather.

Hotel Stromness (B,L,D)



### Day 8: To Scrabster and Inverness

After breakfast we take the short drive to Stromnes Harbour where we will board our ferry for the return journey to Scrabster on the mainland. For those participants needing to travel to Inverness we will include a transfer. (B)

#### WHAT'S INCLUDED

- All accommodation
- All meals, breakfast, lunch & dinner
- Transport & transfers to & from Inverness
- Photographic tutors/tuition
- All ferry crossings

#### WHAT'S NOT INCLUDED

- Flights
- Alcoholic beverages
- Snacks and beverages other than with meals
- Travel insurance
- Distillery entrance fees

#### JOINING ARRANGEMENTS AND TRANSFERS

The trip officially starts on the first day (23 Oct.) with a mid-day transfer from Inverness Railway Station to our first night hotel. We will pick up participants from in front of the railway station. The station is next door to the [Royal Highland Hotel](#) which is reasonably priced and is right in the centre of Inverness. Please note: the hotel only has 8 parking spaces available on a first come first serve basis. There is alternative parking in the 24-hour multi-storey car park (approximately 200 m from the hotel).



There is also railway parking. It is 9 miles from Inverness Airport to the Royal Highland Hotel. Here is further information re [the railway car parking, bus from the airport to the railway station etc.](#) Alternatively there will be taxis. We will do a pick up at Inverness airport if this coincides with us collecting our hire vehicle at around 10:30 am on 23 Oct. Any guests who choose to drive directly to [the first night hotel](#) in John O’Groats will meet the group there at around 16:00. Following a brief intro talk and briefing we will head out for some early evening photography before returning for dinner and an evening image presentation.

The return journey on the last day (30 Oct.) will see the ferry from Stromness landing in Scrabster on the mainland at 13:30. We will probably arrive at Inverness Railway Station around 17:00. Return flights/trains should be planned around this timing. We will be happy to transfer any guests on to Inverness airport.

## ACCOMMODATION

Hotels in John O’Groats (2 nights) and Kirkwall (3 nights) Cottages Rackwick Bay (2 nights) The price is based on single rooms. Double or twin rooms are available for friends and couples who wish to share. There is no extra single supplement.

## FOOD

In Kirkwall and John O’Groats we will eat dinner in the hotel restaurant. In the Rackwick Bay Cottages meals will be prepared by our guides. Lunch will generally be packed and breakfasts will always be at our hotel/cottages. Please let us know when you book if you have any special dietary requirements.

## ALCOHOL

The hotel has a bar and serves alcohol. There will be no alcohol for sale on Hoy, we will call at a supermarket for you to buy some alcohol for the two nights on the island.



## TRAVEL INSURANCE

It is recommended that you take out appropriate insurance to cover personal accident, medical costs, holiday cancellation, repatriation and loss of baggage. We will need a copy of your travel insurance at the time of booking.

## PASSPORT AND VISA REQUIREMENTS

If you’re coming from abroad you will need a valid passport or national identity card to enter the UK. You might also need a visa, see the [UK Government website](#)

## TRAVEL RESTRICTIONS DUE TO COVID 19

Due to possible Covid 19 restrictions we advise you to check the [official Covid pages](#) and if travelling from abroad to consult [Entering the UK](#) on the UK Government website.

## LANGUAGE

English and Gaelic



## CLIMATE

Scotland's climate is tempered by the Gulf Stream. Summers are mild, often damp and the winters are averagely cold. The weather is very changeable at all times of the year, there may be rain, sunshine, drizzle and very rarely snow all in the same day. Expect temperatures to be 0–7°C in February and around 6–11°C in October. It can be very windy during both months. Most importantly for us, the lack of pollution means that the clarity of the light is often exceptional with phenomenal 'big skies' and really atmospheric cloud patterns.

## CLOTHING SUGGESTIONS

As we will often be standing around in one location it's important to have some warm clothes. The best solution to temperature control is to have a number of layers available from lightweight thermal underwear through mid-layer insulation to a windproof jacket. A warm down jacket is great for standing around. For the lower body choose a pair of warm trousers. There are numerous makes and types of warm trousers to choose from, just ensure that the cut is generous to allow freedom of movement. We will sometimes be walking in snow and on ice so good quality warm walking boots are recommended. A pair of wellington boots can be useful on the beach but these are not essential if space/weight is an issue. If you have any questions feel free to contact us at anytime before the trip.

- Backpack to contain camera gear and few spare items
- Pair warm trousers, fleece lined are great
- Thermal tops e.g. 'smartwool' (base layer)
- Thermal leggings e.g 'smartwool' (base layer)
- Light fleece/wool jumper
- Duvet jacket, down or synthetic
- Waterproof jacket
- Waterproof trousers
- Quality warm walking socks
- Leather/waterproof walking boots
- Warm hat
- Fleece neck-warmer
- Light warm gloves
- Warm windproof over-mittens
- Casual clothes for hotel wear
- Sun cream, sunglasses
- Head torch

- Small, basic first aid to include plasters and any medications of a personal nature

## PHOTOGRAPHIC EQUIPMENT/INFORMATION

- Camera bag or backpack such as the Flipside or Trekker series designed by LowePro.
- Any extra equipment that doesn't fit in your camera bag/hand luggage will need to go in a hard case that can be put in the aircraft hold.





- A camera with interchangeable lenses such as a digital SLR or a compact system camera/mirrorless camera.
- A set of lenses to cover the whole range from wide-angle to telephoto, for example...  
For full-frame cameras: 16–35mm wide-angle, 24–105mm mid-range and a 70–200mm or longer tele zoom. For crop format cameras: 10–20mm wide-angle, 17–70mm mid-range and a 70–200mm or longer tele zoom.
- Spare camera (highly recommended)
- Sturdy tripod – not only useful for low light photography but also for accurate framing and composition of landscape and close-up images.
- Remote release to avoid shake on long exposures.
- Neutral density filter in the range of 4–6 stops
- Graduated filters and polariser, if you use these.
- Lens cloth
- Sensor cleaning device (optional)
- Lightweight ‘trekking’ absorbent towel for drying cameras and equipment

- Rain cover for camera and camera bag.
- Sufficient memory cards for the whole holiday as it may not be possible to buy more during the trip.
- Film users should bring enough film, as it may not be possible to buy in many places.
- A laptop or tablet with the image editing applications of your choice, essential for checking and presenting images during the trip and for one-on-one sessions with the tutor. Most places we stay in have Wi-Fi.
- Backup storage device (optional)
- Spare batteries and chargers
- All electrical sockets are UK three-pin. If you’re coming from outside the UK you might need a travel plug adapter on sale at airports.

#### **PARTNERS**

Although this is primarily a photography holiday, non-photographer partners will be very welcome as there are many options and interesting possibilities in addition to taking photographs. The price will be the same.

#### **MORE QUESTIONS?**

While we hope that this information has answered most of your questions about the holiday, we know it will not give you all the information you need. If you have any more questions, please get in touch. Talking to us on the phone (we will always call you back) can often be a quick way of sorting out individual questions. It also helps us to get to know each other before the holiday.

## BOOKING THIS HOLIDAY

Fill in the [online booking form](#), or give us a call on +44 (0)1270 440222.

## LINKS

View [images and information for this tour](#) on the website.

Read about [our approach to teaching photography](#)