

ORKNEY

See you at the weekend

FORTRESS ORKNEY

Orkney in wartime - Britain's heavily-defended northern fortress in two world war conflicts.

Orkney's strategic location and the excellence of the great natural harbour of Scapa Flow, led to these tranquil islands becoming a major military base, with thousands of servicemen and women being stationed here on ship and shore. The impact of these people and their stories is all around you.

Follow this itinerary for an introduction to Fortress Orkney.

OUTLINE

- 1 HOXA HEAD**
GARRISONED VANTAGE-POINT AND THE MAIN GATEWAY TO SCAPA FLOW IN TWO WORLD WARS
- 2 THE CHURCHILL BARRIERS**
FOUR CAUSEWAYS SEALING THE EASTERN APPROACHES TO SCAPA FLOW
- 3 ITALIAN CHAPEL**
BEAUTIFUL AND POIGNANT TESTAMENT TO FAITH AND INGENUITY IN A TIME OF WAR
- 4 STROMNESS MUSEUM**
ORKNEY'S WARTIME NAVAL HISTORY BROUGHT TO LIFE THROUGH A UNIQUE COLLECTION
- 5 NESS BATTERY**
A CRUCIAL PART OF THE DEFENCES OF THE WESTERN APPROACHES TO SCAPA FLOW
- 6 KITCHENER MEMORIAL, MARWICK HEAD**
HONOURING A NAVAL TRAGEDY



WARTIME ITINERARY



Churchill Barriers



Italian Chapel



Italian Chapel interior

YOUR ITINERARY

AUTUMN/WINTER
TIME: 1 DAY'S TOURING
DISTANCE: 52 MILES

1 HOXA HEAD

Hoxa Head overlooks the main channel into **Scapa Flow**. Imagine being stationed here many miles from home, watching the to-ing and fro-ing of ships large and small. There were so many that at anchor they have been described as a forest of ships.

Garrison duties included manning the searchlights here, or one of the gun batteries watching over the boom defences which prevented enemy submarines from entering.

In the First World War, Gunner Astle, part of the Hoxa garrison in 1917-18, whiled away his spare time by keeping a journal in which, in 1918, he describes watching the 71 ships of the **German High Seas Fleet** steam past to be interned.

When you visit, follow the path straight to the top of the hill for a panoramic view of the gun batteries and other defences from both world wars. Keep away from the crumbling ruins and the cliff edge. The garrison's barracks were right next to where you are standing and you are witnessing the same view the young soldiers saw each day.

2 THE CHURCHILL BARRIERS

The four **barriers** blocking the eastern approaches to **Scapa Flow** were built on the orders of Sir Winston Churchill, following the audacious and deadly mission of submarine U-47. On the 14th of October 1939, the submarine manoeuvred round the blockships sunk to secure the channel between the Mainland and Lamb Holm, and torpedoed the battleship **Royal Oak**, with the loss of more than 830 men and boys.

Led by contractor Balfour Beattie and with a workforce including 1300 Italian prisoners of war, the Churchill Barriers were a massive civil engineering achievement. The work was dangerous and difficult but provided permanent connections between the Mainland, Lamb Holm, Burray and South Ronaldsay.

There are small car parks at the ends of each barrier, and interpretation panels tell the story of the construction.

3 ITALIAN CHAPEL

Of the 1300 Italian prisoners of war brought from North Africa to Orkney in early 1942, 600 were housed in **Camp 60** on the small island of Lamb Holm. They were given permission to convert two Nissen huts into a chapel. Guided by Domenico Chiocchetti, they transformed the bare huts into a beautifully decorated interior. Chiocchetti returned to Orkney from his home in Moena in 1960, to assist with the renovation of the chapel. On his departure, he wrote a letter to the people of Orkney in which he said:

"The chapel is yours - for you to love and preserve. I take with me to Italy the remembrance of your kindness and wonderful hospitality. . ."

The Italian Chapel is open daily, please check opening times with the **Kirkwall iCentre**.

4 STROMNESS MUSEUM

As you drive from the Italian Chapel to **Stromness** (see the suggested route highlighted on the map), look out for wartime ruins in the fields either side of the road, all that remains of extensive defences which ringed **Scapa Flow**. The Orkney anti-aircraft barrage was famous for its effectiveness in preventing air attacks on the fleet. And for its noise!

Picture the sight in 1918, of **Britain's Grand Fleet** swaying at anchor in Scapa Flow, when the ships of **Germany's High Seas Fleet** sailed in under the terms of the armistice which brought the war to an end. Imagine, then, the scene in 1919 when the German fleet was scuttled by its crews. A handful of the proud warships remain on the seabed today, attracting experienced divers from around the world.

In Stromness, the **Stromness Museum's** galleries include the story of Orkney's wartime naval history, with artefacts on display including poignant memorabilia bringing the human stories of two world wars to life. The museum's opening hours are restricted from Monday to Saturday in the winter months so please check before visiting.



Hoxa Head



The German Fleet in Scapa Flow WW1



HMS Royal Oak



Wartime artefacts, Stromness Museum

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5 NESS BATTERY

Near Stromness, you'll find the **Ness Battery**, which guarded the Hoy Mouth entrance to **Scapa Flow** in both world wars. As well as the remains of the batteries, several of the wooden accommodation huts are intact. In one of them, painted murals of rural England on the walls no doubt helped homesick servicemen through their tours of duty at the Ness.

Although the artillery guns were removed in 1955, the site was used by the Territorial Army right up until 2001. Scheduled guided tours of Ness Battery take place during the summer months and by special arrangement at other times. See **Ness Battery website** for details.

6 KITCHENER MEMORIAL, MARWICK HEAD

On the 5th of June 1916, the armoured cruiser, **HMS Hampshire**, left Scapa Flow en route for Russia carrying Secretary of State for War, Lord Kitchener, with his staff and the ship's crew of more than 700 men. That evening, in stormy conditions off Orkney's west coast, the ship struck a mine and sank. There were only 12 survivors.

The **Kitchener Memorial** at Marwick Head commemorates this tragic loss of life, a sombre but fitting final stop on your itinerary. The remains of Fortress Orkney are evocative of a time and a place and of the scale of effort by so many people in wartime, but the lonely memorial on a windswept headland, with its spectacular views seaward, is a reminder of the true cost of conflict.

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:

In Birsay, guided tours of **HMS Tern**, a Royal Naval Air Station operational in World War Two are available by arrangement.

In Kirkwall, the **Orkney Library and Archive** has a lot of material about wartime Orkney, including the diary of Gunner Astle who was stationed at Hoxa Head during the First World War.

Visit **St Magnus Cathedral**, Kirkwall to view the Royal Oak Memorial.

Take time to also visit the **Royal Oak Memorial Garden**, at Scapa Beach.

FINDING OUT MORE

Local bookshops have a good selection of books about wartime Orkney and the story of Scapa Flow.

Our one-day itineraries are designed to give you a taste of Orkney. We hope that your short break will inspire you to come back for a longer stay and further explore Orkney

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Ness Battery



Kitchener Memorial, Marwick Head