Norwegian Vikings would have taken just two days to sail to Orkney where they raided, traded, settled and prospered. They told stories of their ancestors in drinking halls and by hearth-light at home. These stories are the Orkneyinga Saga, the history of the Earls of Orkney.

YOUR VIKING ITINERARY

1. START YOUR DAY AT THE ORKNEYINGA SAGA CENTRE
2. NEARBY YOU’LL FIND EARL’S BU
3. CLOSELY FOLLOWED BY THE RUINOUS ROUND CHURCH
4. SEE INSIDE MAESHOWE’S CHAMBERED CAIN
5. CONTINUE ON TO BIRSAY, THE ORIGINAL CENTRE OF VIKING POWER
6. IMAGINE EARL THORFINN THE MIGHTY IN HIS SEAT OF POWER AT THE BROUGH OF BIRSAY
7. ADMIRE ST MAGNUS CHURCH
8. END THE DAY IN KIRKWALL
9. TAKE IN THE MAGNIFICENT ST MAGNUS CATHEDRAL
10. VISIT THE NEARBY ORKNEY MUSEUM

AND IF YOU’VE GOT MORE THAN A DAY...

11. WALK THE ST MAGNUS WAY
12. TAKE A TRIP TO EGILSAY AND SEE THE IMPRESSIVE ST MAGNUS KIRK

The best place to start your Viking day is at the Orkneyinga Saga Centre in Orphir. The centre’s video and exhibition prepares you to see some of the saga locations in person. The first of these is the Earl’s Bu and nearby Round Church, immediately beside the Saga Centre. The Bu features in the saga as the site of the murder of Sweyn Breastrope by the notorious Sweyn Asliefsson. The ruinous Round Church is thought to have been modelled on the rotunda of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem.

From the Saga Centre, make your way to Maeshowe. As recounted in the saga, a party of Vikings broke into this Neolithic chambered cairn and left runic carvings on the walls - Viking graffiti, the largest such group of runic inscriptions in the world. Visits to Maeshowe are by Historic Environment Scotland guided tour only, and you are strongly advised to book online in advance at www.historicenvironment.scot

Now continue your journey north-westwards to Birsay, the original centre of Viking power in Orkney. The most powerful of Orkney’s Earls - Earl Thorfinn the Mighty - had his seat here, either on the tidal island called the Brough of Birsay or in what is now Birsay village. The Brough can be visited at low tide. St Magnus Church in the village stands on the site of the earliest Cathedral in Orkney.

The final stop in your Orkneyinga day is Kirkwall - Kirkjuvagr, church bay, as the Vikings knew it. The magnificent St Magnus Cathedral, founded by Earl Rognvald in 1137, dominates the town. The nearby Orkney Museum is a perfect end to your day.

OTHER PLACES TO VISIT IF YOU HAVE MORE TIME

Leaflets and guide books will guide you to many more sites throughout these Viking islands, but here are two suggestions. If you are a keen walker, the St Magnus Way is a 55-mile pilgrimage trail through the West Mainland, commemorating the 900th anniversary of the martyrdom of St Magnus. The route is divided into five sections. More information can be found at www.stmagnusway.com including start and end points. On the island of Egilsay, the impressive 12th century St Magnus Kirk stands on the spot where the martyrdom is believed to have taken place.
DID YOU KNOW?

Orkney wasn’t always part of Scotland. In 1474, Orkney became part of Scotland, after King Christian I of Norway (plus Denmark and Sweden) pledged Orkney and Shetland against payment of his daughter’s dowry when she married King James III of Scotland. He failed to pay so both groups of islands were annexed to Scotland.