Traveling to Foula
Foula lies about 32 kilometres (20 miles) to the west of the Shetland mainland. The small harbour is exposed, and the airstrip can be affected by crosswinds or fog, making both sea and air travel to Foula completely dependent on suitable weather conditions. Delays are sometimes unavoidable – it is strongly recommended that you check with the ferry or airline before you travel to the terminal.

By Sea
The Foula ferry, New Advance, currently operated by BK Marine, is based in the island. The ferry crosses to Waas (Walls) at the Westside of Shetland. Please note that summer and winter timetables differ and all sailings are weather permitting. Buses going to Waas leave from the Viking bus-station in Lerwick. Please check with VisitShetland for accurate timetables.

By Air
The local council provide flights between Tingwall Airport and Foula via Direct Flight. Flights change schedule between winter and summer months and are very dependent on good weather conditions – please phone the airport booking office for up-to-date information. Some buses pass Tingwall Airport – a taxi is often the only option. There are no taxis or public transport in Foula.

Welcome to Foula
Your journey has brought you to Foula, one of Britain’s most remote inhabited islands. The crofting townships are situated in the narrow eastern coastal strip with the expanse of peat moorland rising steeply to Foula’s five dramatic peaks at the West of the island – Da Noup in the south is divided by the glacial valley of Da Daal from Hamnafiel, Da Sneug, Da Kame, and Soberlie, which stretch westwards until they drop sheer to the sea in breathtaking cliffs ranging from 150 metres (492ft) to over 370 metres (1214ft).

Foula leaves a lasting impression on everyone who visits, for there is something very special about the island – it may be the quality of light, the natural beauty and remoteness, the wide range of wildlife, the community way of life or a combination of these. It is difficult to explain this intangible quality; we hope you find it for yourself.

Geology
The action of the sea on Foula’s layered sandstone has given rise to a number of dramatic and interesting features. The breathtaking 376 metre (1233ft) sheer drop at the back of Da Kame competes with Conachair in St. Kilda as the highest sea-cliff in Britain. Gaada Stack’s three pillars tower 40 metres (131ft) over the rugged north coast of the island with its stacks, steep-sided geos, and curving storm beach aptly named Da Stanes. The sheer sides of Da Sneck ida Smalalje, a dank, dark rock fault over 30 metres (98ft) deep, cut down towards the sea at the west end of Da Daal, giving access to teeming seabird colonies under the cliffs. The way down is treacherous and should not be attempted without an experienced guide.

The entrance to Da Lum a Liorafield, on the other hand, has long been lost – superstition and tales of strange happenings surrounding Da Lum, which was mentioned by Sir Walter Scott in his novel ‘The Pirate’. Folklore also tells of the healing properties of Da Walter i da Sneug, a little spring under the north shoulder of Da Sneug.
Flowers and Plants
In the long midsummer days, Foula's wildflowers provide a glorious burst of colour: Sea-pinks carpet the areas of short maritime grass, and blue Vernal Squill and golden-eyed Tormentil make bright sweet-scented patches beyond. Montbretias and orchids blossom gold and purple in dunes and wet luscious areas, with white-tufted cottongrass, Sphagnum Sundew and Rowanberry making patterns across the moorland. Great Skua and Kestrel can be found in the North Toun, which, along with the abundant woodrush in the hills, may be a remnant of plants associated with ancient woodlands.

Birds and Animals
Foula has a great variety and numbers of sea and moorland birds. The world’s largest colony of Bremies (Great Skua) competes fiercely with Shetland Kyes (Arctic Skua) for breeding territories. Every suitable small loch in the island is occupied by a pair of nesting Red-throated Divers, and the cliffs teem with Puffins, Guillemots, Razorbills, Shags, Fulmars, Kittiwakes and Gannets. Leach’s Petrel, Storm Petrel, Manx Shearwater and Ateliers have also bred. Many shore and moorland birds, including the diurnal Ringed Plover, rest in the stony places and amongst the bog grasses. During migration periods unusual birds from as far away as America and Siberia can be seen. Foula is home to a unique sub-species of field-mouse and an island variety of goose-mouse. Both Atlantic Grey and Common Seals haul up around the shore, and can be watched at close quarters in the Voe. Schools of Killer Whales are sometimes seen close inshore and porpoises often follow the ferry. The sheep in Foula are the hardy native Shetland breed. Their great variety of coloured fleeces are much in demand by hand-spinners, ranging from the predominating brown to pink, grey, creamy white and black, and many have attractive markings.

Livelihood
Strong winds and salt spray make crofting difficult in Foula - the crofts themselves average 2-2.5 hectares (5.6 acres). The hill grazing is good, but severe weather can prevent stock reaching market. Islanders seize every opportunity to work a livelihood from sea and land and any ancillary activity which offers. Most people keep sheep, and some islanders have Shetland ponies, cows and pigs. Tourism provides seasonal income, along with some craftwork. The Foula Ranger Service can arrange guided walks and provide information for self-guided walks.

History and Folklore
Neolithic field systems, Bronze Age burial cairns, burnt mounds and a mysterious stone circle testify that Foula has been inhabited for millennia, despite its remoteness. Some time after 1804, the Norse settled here and, although they left little visible trace, their presence can still be felt in the wealth of descriptive Norse place names. On Da Bruch, a stack at the north end, an ancient stone wall was thought to be a monk’s cell, indicating the early spread of Christianity from Scotland. The island continued to be under Norse ownership until 1572, when Gorrie Faddersdatter, gave all her land in Shetland, including Foula, to Robert Cheyne, who was of Scottish descent. During the 18th Century, a time of bad famines, Foula was devastated by three successive plagues of smallpox and only six persons were said to be left to bury the dead. The island was repopulated by new families from the Shetland Mainland, and most of the Old Norse language and oral history was lost.

By the end of the 19th Century, the population had risen to 267, but this was unsustainable and many islanders emigrated. The Foula mailboat Island Lass was lost in a storm in 1962. The fire in the last inhabited blackhouse went out in 1964. By the early 70s the population had dropped to about 50, but the remaining islanders were so determined to stay, they rebuilt their own airstrip. Since then the population has remained relatively stable.

Culture and Folklore
Foula’s rich culture is evident in the Norse dialect and a strong tradition of folklore, music and special festivities. Foula folk celebrate Christmas and New Year according to the head-days of the old Julian calendar, the head-day of St. John’s Day is marked on January 4th and New Year day on January 13th. The whole way of life in the island is based on a strong tradition of caring community values.

Film
The evacuation in 1939 of another Atlantic island, St Kilda, was immortalised in Michael Powell’s famous film, The Edge of the World’, made in Foula in 1936, with many islanders taking part. A book and video about the film are available in Shetland. The splendid new community school is proof that Foula is not another St. Kilda.