

It's a part of Britain further from London than Berlin or Bilbao, yet Shetland's bleak beauty still offers a warm welcome for **York Membery**

I'D LONG been intrigued by Shetland, the cluster of islands halfway between Scotland and Norway. After seeing the BBC crime drama *Shetland* – whose third series was shot in the archipelago earlier this year to return to our screens in 2016 – and with the Shetland Noir crime-writing festival taking place in the capital, Lerwick, this month, I decided to make the long trek north to see the bleak, inspirational landscapes for myself.

The television series has something of the flavour of those hit Scandi dramas we so love, such as *The Killing*, *Wallerander* and *The Bridge* – thanks in no small part to Shetland's bleak beauty, grey skies and wild weather. Moreover, the crime-writing fest highlights another link, celebrating the islands' centuries-old Scandinavian heritage – Shetland was colonised by the Vikings and for centuries was a Norwegian province.

The first challenge was getting there. It's actually further from London to Lerwick than it is to Berlin or Bilbao. The "most authentic", if not the fastest way, to reach Shetland is "to take the overnight ferry" from Aberdeen, one islander advised me beforehand (although you can also fly there from the Granite City). The 12-hour voyage certainly gave me an idea of how remote the islands are from mainland Britain. Lying at the point where the Atlantic meets the North Sea, the archipelago's windswept, hilly landscape has "a bleak beauty", in the words of Ann Cleeves, whose Shetland-based crime books inspired the TV series.

Yet there is something rather magical about driving around this treeless outpost of the British Isles (just 22,000 people inhabit an area roughly the size of Greater London), with its bountiful summer wildlife and wild, if surprisingly mild, winter weather.

Stopping off at Sandwick, south of Lerwick, I chanced upon half a dozen seals lazing on a cobblestone ramp into the sea. Half an hour later, I glimpsed kittiwakes and guillemots on the cliffs at the RSPB reserve at Sumburgh Head, on the southern tip of Mainland. Sadly, I was too late for the puffins. "They've usually gone by early August," explained Hugh Harrop, of specialist



Northern highlights: clockwise from left, Lerwick harbour; duelling seals; Douglas Henshall and Steven Robertson in the TV series; Frankie's Fish and Chips in Brae; the Up Helly Aa Viking festival; a Shetland pony



Scotland's Scandi connection

tour operator Shetland Wildlife. However, by way of recompense, I saw plenty of Shetland ponies.

It's a place apart in another respect too: Shetland only became part of Scotland in the 15th century and remains intensely proud of its Nordic roots. Indeed, I counted more Shetland flags (an off-centre white cross on a blue background) than I did Scottish saltires. This distinct cultural heritage is celebrated every January in Up Helly Aa – the Viking Fire Festival, a spectacular torchlit procession culminating in the burning of a Viking galley boat. It's visible in other ways too: for instance, an

advert for Norseman Pale Ale in the bar room window at the Queen's Hotel in Lerwick claims, rather implausibly, that it's "The choice of Vikings!"

Older than the Vikings, though, is Jarlshof's prehistoric and Norse settlement on the South Mainland peninsula. It is one of Scotland's most important archaeological sites, featuring a Stone Age hut, an Iron Age broch and a Viking village that were revealed by vicious storms in the 19th century. As I walked around the remarkable archaeological site by the water's edge, the wind in my hair, it was impossible not to be transported back to the past.

Back in Lerwick, I made a pilgrimage to The Lodeberrie, an old stone cottage by the harbour's edge that is the fictional waterfront house of Jimmy Perez, the detective hero of the *Shetland* series. The capital is also home to other locations that appear in the drama, such as the Lounge, the liveliest place in town on a Friday night, and Lerwick police station.

Gastronomically, Shetland has much

to recommend it too, not least the seafood. At the restaurant in the Scalloway Hotel (where both David Cameron and Shetland star Douglas Henshall have stayed), west of Lerwick in Scalloway, both my locally caught scallops and fillet of turbot were mouthwatering and sea-fresh. Nearby, the Scalloway Museum brings to life the remarkable story of the "Shetland Bus" – the fleet of small fishing boats that ferried resistance fighters to Nazi-occupied Norway during the war.

However, no trip to Shetland is complete without a visit to Frankie's Fish & Chips in Brae, Britain's most northerly chippie and voted No1 fish and chip shop in the UK in this year's National Fish & Chip Awards. Indeed, it's almost worth making the trek north for the fish and chips alone – they're that good.

While you probably won't see Jimmy Perez sporting a Sarah Lund-style jumper on screen, Shetland does produce renowned knits. You can pick up a chunky, wool Fair Islander for around £120 at Anderson & Co, one of a handful of shops in Lerwick selling the tradi-

tional patterned jumpers long knitted on Fair Isle, halfway between Shetland and Orkney.

Ann Cleeves may have turned Shetland into one of the UK's unlikeliest fictional crime hotspots but don't let that put you off visiting. "It's actually one of the safest places in the country," laughs the author, who's just published a coffee table book about Shetland. "Indeed, most of my friends don't even bother locking the front door when they go out!"

Details: Shetland

British Airways offers flights from Heathrow to Aberdeen (0344 493 0787; ba.com). **Flybe** (loganair.co.uk) flies from Aberdeen to Shetland. A **cabin** from Aberdeen to Lerwick starts at £100 one way (northlinkferries.co.uk). **The Scalloway Hotel** has doubles from £120 (scallowayhotel.com) **Shetland Noir** takes place from November 13 to 15 in Lerwick (shetlandnoir.com). **Shetland Tourism:** Shetland.org ■ visitScotland.com



BOOK **Nautilus but nice**

Sixty Hotels (New York, Beverly Hills) is opening its latest outpost in Miami Beach's Art Deco District next month. Nautilus was designed in the Fifties by Morris Lapidus but has been comprehensively renovated. It will pay homage to its mid-century modern heritage at the Cabana Club, complete with dining room, saltwater pool, bar terrace and garden lounge strewn with hammocks. Doubles from \$395/£263. sixtyhotels.com/nautilus



FLY **Go west**

Icelandic low-cost carrier Wow Air will start flying to the US West Coast next summer, with flights to Los Angeles and San Francisco confirmed. The routes, which will be the airline's fifth and sixth destinations in North America (it recently launched flights to Boston, Washington DC, Montreal and Toronto from Iceland), will run all year round, connecting with daily flights to Keflavik from Gatwick. Tickets will go on sale in January. wowair.co.uk



APPLY **Check, please**

US Customs and Border Protection is extending its Global Entry scheme to UK citizens, allowing "low-risk" British passport-holders to avoid the often-lengthy passport queues at US airports by using dedicated Global Entry kiosks, for a fee. Applicants will be able to register for a background check (for a fee of £42) from December 3, and once approved will be able to apply for a five-year entry permit (\$100). cbp.gov