51 fascinating facts about Shetland

1. The flag of Shetland, commemorates the 500th anniversary of the transfer of Shetlands' islands to Scotland (from the king of Norway and Denmark). The design gives symbolic weight to the fact that Shetland had been part of Norway for 500 years and part of Scotland for 500 years. It takes the national colours of Scotland - blue and white - and uses them in the offset cross design common to all Scandinavian countries.
2. Shetland are the northernmost islands of the British Isles, comprising over 100 islands of which 16 are inhabited all year round.
3. It is said that Unst was the influence for the treasure map within the Robert Louis Stevenson's novel Treasure Island. The author certainly visited in 1869 with his father, the lighthouse engineer Thomas Stevenson.
4. Situated to the east of the Mainland of Shetland, Whalsay is a peat-covered, loch-studded island known as the 'bonny isle'.
5. Dr. Tom Anderson was known to many in Shetland as the saviour of Shetland's musical heritage long before he died. Born in 1910 on a croft ("Moorfield") at Eshaness in the north of Mainland, Anderson learned to play the fiddle from his grandfather. Although he made his living as an insurance agent, his paramount work was in the conservation of traditional Shetland fiddle style of playing - playing and passing the style on to younger generations.
6. Yell is one of the best places in Europe to see otters, which thrive on the rich food supplied in the offshore shallows.
7. BBC Radio Scotland's weekday afternoon show is hosted by Tom Morton and is broadcast from The Radiocroft - a tiny cottage on the seashore, in the remote Shetland Islands.
8. Foula islanders still use the old Julian calendar, which the rest of Britain abandoned in 1753. Christmas Day is therefore celebrated on 6th January and New Year's day on 13th January.
9. Offering shelter to the port of Lerwick, the island of Bressay lies to the east of the Mainland island of Shetland. The island is largely comprised of Old Red Sandstone, which has provided building stone for many of Lerwick's dwellings in the 1800s.
10. St Ninian's Isle, became the real Treasure Island in 1958, when schoolboy Douglas Coutts discovered a hoard of silver bowls and ornaments when helping at an archaeological dig in the ruins of the island's tiny Celtic chapel.
11. Arthur Anderson, son of a Lerwick fish curer was to become the co-founder of P&O shipping.
12. Papa Stour means *the great island of the priests,* was an early base for Christian missionaries in the Shetland Islands.
13. Scalloway was one of the bases for the WWII operation known as the Shetland Bus where Norwegians maintained a sea link with their occupied homeland to assist resistance forces there. The boats ran in the winter only for maximum cover of darkness, when the sea would have been the main foe.
14. Mavis Grind, *gateway of the narrow isthmus*, is the name given to the narrow neck of land where Shetland mainland is reduced to a strip little more than 300m. It is said you can through a stone from the North Sea into the Atlantic Ocean. It uniquely has an *Otter crossing* sign, which is a popular Kodak opportunity for visitors.
15. A former RAF monitoring base located on the north coast of Unst, the most northerly of the Shetland Islands, RAF Saxa Vord was operational between 1957 and 2006. Throughout the Cold War it provided the UK with early warning of aircraft approaching from the North.
16. Sir Robert Stout (28 September 1844 – 19 July 1930), born in Lerwick, was Premier of New Zealand on two occasions and later Chief Justice of New Zealand in the late 19th century. He was the only person to hold both these offices.
17. First settled in around 2000 BC, Jarlshof was successively occupied by Stone Age, Bronze Age dune dwellers, Iron Age broch builders, Pictish wheelhouse people and Vikings.
18. Sumburgh Head is the southernmost point of the Shetland Mainland and lies a mile (2 km) south of Sumburgh. A Robert Stevenson built lighthouse, dating from 1821, stands at the headland, which was the first lighthouse for Shetland.
19. Peerie Willie Johnson born on Yell developed from a sickly child into an influential guitar accompanist, notable for his unique style and music. Serving in WWII he was able to gain American influence from his ally colleagues. 2007 will see the third outing for a guitar music festival, which is named after Willie.
20. Broch of Mousa, is a circular drystone tower described as the best preserved Iron Age fortification of 500 of its kind in the world. Built of local slate, the broch is 13m (43 feet) tall with a diameter of 15m (49 feet) at ground level tapering to an upper diameter of 12m (39 feet).
21. The name Jarlshof, originally associated with a ruined medieval farmhouse, was coined by Sir Walter Scott in his novel *The Pirate*.

22. Voe is a long indented inlet from the old Norse *vagr* meaning bay.
23. Foula was the film location for the story of the evacuation of St Kilda, *The Edge of the World.*
24. Aly Bain MBE, born 15 May 1946 in Lerwick, is a Scottish fiddler who learned his instrument from the old-time master Tom Anderson. He became nationally prominent as a founding member of *Boys of the Lough* and for the *Atlantic Sessions.*
25. Shetland's remote location makes it a peaceful place ideal for wildlife watching. A keen favourite are the colonies of puffins that breed on the island and easily accessible even in deep fog!
26. In 1708 the capital moved from Scalloway to Lerwick.
27. Sullom Voe is Britain's largest oil terminal. Submarine pipelines bring in crude oil from the east Shetland oil basin. The cost of construction of the terminal was £1.3 billion.
28. The Valhalla Brewery is found in Unst, Shetland - the most northerly island in Britain. The brewery is named after the hall in the celestial regions, home of the Norse god Odin, where slain Viking warriors were borne, to be revived by a horn full of ale.
29. The road to Eshaness rewards with a dramatic coastline of sea stacks and cliffs.
30. The settlement of Graven, on the east shore of Sullom Voe, became home to a base for RAF flying boats, patrolling the North Atlantic in search of German U-Boats. To protect the flying boat base, a fighter airfield was built at RAF Scatsta, also to the east of Sullom Voe.
31. The Byre Chapel, the original chapel of the Society of Our Lady of the Isles, a convent established in Feltar brings to mind the nativity story beautifully.
32. Fishing is vital to the Shetland economy providing the greatest contribution.
33. Enjoying Shetland food as part of your visit can also be a varied experience since in addition to sea food there are fudge, seaweed lamb, beer, puffin poo [*yummy!]* and much more!
34. The abiding influence of the Vikings, who arrived in Shetland just over 1000 years ago, is celebrated on the last Tuesday of January every year, by the largest fire festival in Europe - "Up Helly Aa". After a torch-light procession of up to a thousand "guizers" through the streets of Lerwick a replica Viking longship is ceremonially burned. Lerwick is the best known of the nine similar festivals that run in Shetland.
35. The Shetland Isles has developed a strong arts and crafts community. Inspired by the region's dramatic scenery, heritage and culture, local artisans produce a unique range of woodcraft, textiles, jewellery and leatherwork. www.shelandartsandcrafts.co.uk
36. The Shetland Folk Festival is a non-profit, volunteer driven organization dedicated to presenting the best folk music from around the globe to the local community and visitors alike.
37. Unique to Shetland are the island's world-famous small ponies. The Shetland Pony Stud Book Society was established in 1890 to register and set standards for the breed.
38. Blanket peat, a globally rare and threatened habitat, cloaks most of Shetland's hills. The peat is several metres thick in places, preserving thousands of annual layers of dead plants, including - 4,000-5,000 years down from the surface - the birch and Scots pine that grew on the lower slopes before prehistoric humans and their sheep destroyed the ancient woodland.
39. The Fiddle Frenzy festival offers playing and learning of the fiddle and is open to everyone!
40. Shetland's highest summit is Ronas Hill (1,475' / 450m).
41. Shetland's remote location allows good views of the sky at night and is known for spectacular displays of the Aurora Borealis which Shetland people call the *mirri dancers*.
42. A useful resource to what's happening with Shetland nature wise see www.nature-shetland.co.uk, where active groups log sightings and photos of recent activity.
43. *The Blackening* is the latest film to be shot in Shetland. The film is a social drama about a prodigal son's return to his homeland. The north isles of Unst and Yell will provide locations for the fictional island of Breda.
44. Sumburgh Head is the seabird equivalent of a multi-storey apartment block with puffins in the penthouse!
45. Shetland knitwear's reputation led to an influx of knitwear, produced outwith the islands. The Shetland Knitwear Trades Association now has it's own ' Shetland Lady ' trademark (available only to members) which guarantees that the knitwear has been produced in Shetland, and a quality assurance program designed to maintain the highest standards.
46. Kame on Foula is the 2nd highest cliff in Britain.
47. The geology of Shetland is more diverse than in any county in Britain, stretching back some 3 billion years. Almost every geological process or phenomenon known to Man can be identified somewhere and in recognition of these riches Shetland has applied for European Geopark status and a decision is awaited soon.
48. Per unit of installed capacity Burradale Wind Farm is the most productive in the world.
49. Shetland produces more than 50% of Scotland's mussel production.
50. An annual North Sea yachting challenge, takes place between Bergen in Norway and Lerwick. These races are part of a 1000-mile double-hander challenge, which runs from Holland, Norway and Shetland.
51. When you buy a map in Shetland it shows Britain in a box to the southwest of the islands.