

THREE OF A KIND

Orkney offers opportunity to live a good life

The islands' charms are legendary but the fact is modern living there is a real advantage, discovers **Kirsty McLuckie**

Orkney has been crowned the UK's best place to live in the 2019 Halifax Quality of Life Survey.

The archipelago off the north-east coast, famed for its spectacular landscapes and archaeological treasures, sealed the top spot based on a range of criteria.

Orkney scored high in employment rates with almost nine in ten of its 16-64 year-olds in work and weekly average earnings of £671.

The latest figures from the Office for National Statistics indicate Orkney's adults are among the most happy, satisfied and content in the UK with its populace reportedly experiencing low anxiety rates.

The Orkneys enjoy the lowest crime rates in the UK, small primary school class sizes and excellent exam results. Yet the islands are also one of the most affordable places to live, with an average house price of £173,349, standing at 5.2 times the average annual pre-tax local income, compared to the national average of 7.3.

Russell Galley, managing director at Halifax, says: "Orkney's remote location may not be for everyone, but this comes with the benefit of having high employment, low crime rates, smaller class sizes and more affordable housing."

Andrew Bonner, property manager with Lows Solicitors in Kirkwall, says that the property market is buoyant across the islands with interested buyers from the Central Belt of Scotland, elsewhere in the UK as well as local purchasers.

He says: "The Orkney market as a whole seems to operate independently of the rest of the Scottish property market, although we do feel the ripples of a slowdown elsewhere – for instance in the lead up to the Scottish independence vote in 2014."

"Properties tend to be unique – we don't have big housing estates, so each sale is individual and we market a lot of countryside properties with character and charm."

Nevertheless, the location of a property in the archipelago is an important factor in its saleability. Homes on outlying islands can be connected by a regular half-hour ferry trip to the Orkney mainland, while others have crossings which can take up to two hours, which affects desirability.

Bonner confirms that buyers are very much attracted to the quality of life on the islands. He says: "Unlike other places in the UK, you can leave doors unlocked, there is very little crime and a great sense of community."

Craigiefield House is among the most valuable currently for sale across the archipelago. Set in St Ola on the outskirts of Kirkwall, the six-bedroomed period house has an additional, private guest wing and a three-bedroomed lodge in a

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large garden. Both the guest wing and the lodge have been let previously as holiday accommodation.

Holm of Grimbister is a small island of 40 acres just off the mainland. There is a period cottage providing basic accommodation and a traditional L-shaped steading with development potential. The island is connected to mainland Orkney at low tide by a causeway.

Groatha is a registered croft extending to 30 acres complete with a one-bedroomed cottage and garden. Situated on the peaceful island of Eday, it has views over the surrounding farmland to the harbour. Eday is one of the outer isles with a population of 150 but has a regular car ferry service and weekly flights to London.



KEYS TO KNOW

Where is it: Craigiefield House, St Ola, Kirkwall, Orkney.

What is it: Victorian villa with six bedrooms, dining room, sitting

room, garden room, kitchen. Three-bedroomed guest wing and three-bedroomed lodge.

Good points: The main house, built in 1882, has plenty of period character with an ornate staircase and stained glass. The gardens are immaculate with views of Kirkwall Bay, and the town itself is within

walking distance. The house, wing and guest lodge offer great development potential.

Bad points: It is a big undertaking but it offers the chance to run a holiday accommodation business.

Price: Offers over £925,000.
Contact: Lows Solicitors on 01856 873151.



USP Victorian ecohomes

When you think of a high-performing energy-efficient property, a period home doesn't usually spring to mind.

But this month two Victorian townhouses in Manchester have become the first older homes in

Europe to achieve Passivhaus Institute standards.

The 125-year-old properties outperform 99.9 per cent of new builds and are a showcase of the potential in heritage buildings.

Renovated by Ecospheric, the townhouses offer year-round comfort and warmth without a central heating system, while maintaining superb air quality which alleviates allergies.

It is estimated that the refurbished properties will save their owners somewhere in the region of £50,000 over ten years with zero energy bills and minimal maintenance.

Solar panels on each townhouse roof heat water and power the homes' lighting and appliances. Any excess electricity can then be sold back to the grid.

Insulation, consisting of recycled newspapers, in the properties

maintains an even temperature and a thermostatically controlled roof light with rain sensor provides effective passive cooling.

Used hand-wash water directly flushes WCs and an external drainage system, sustainably made from recycled car tyres, relieves stress on the drains and also helps keep the mutual drive weed-free.

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