



Media Release

NorthLink Ferries set for sell-out summer

Northern Isles ferry operator Serco NorthLink Ferries is predicting its busiest ever holiday season. The company has just completed training for its 31 seasonal Passenger Service Assistants who have joined the team ahead of the summer surge.

Bookings in 2019 have already been extremely strong, fuelled especially by interest in the Shetland TV crime series, the trend in mindfulness, and staycation demand due to Brexit uncertainty. Customer feedback also indicates that the islands' combination of wildlife, landscapes and heritage remain important in attracting visitors from throughout the UK and abroad.

Stuart Garrett, Serco's managing director for NorthLink Ferries, said: "Summer time in Orkney and Shetland is a unique experience that really does have to be seen to be believed. Our vessels are going through their annual upgrade offering something new for even returning passengers. Our staff, and everyone involved in hospitality in the islands, are ready to go for another outstanding summer."

The tourism season gets fully underway even before the Scottish school holidays, with many tourists drawn to the 'simmer dim' on 21 June, when there will be nearly 19 hours of daylight. The wide range of outdoor, music and culture festivals across Orkney and Shetland also got underway in May, marking the start of a very busy five months for the ferries.

Chris Taylor, VisitScotland regional leadership Director, said: "Both Orkney and Shetland are a huge draw for visitors, with their stunning landscapes, rich history and heritage, inspiring culture and warmth of the people. These combine to make the islands a real must-visit, must-return destination for the discerning traveller looking for an adventure in Scotland.

"Testament to their popularity is the news just this week that Shetland has been included in Lonely Planet's Top 10 'Best in Europe' list – the only UK destination on the list – which is a fantastic accolade.

"Scotland's appearances in TV in shows like 'Shetland' have the potential to reach huge global audiences and play an influential role in where visitors choose to travel. We know from research that one in five visitors are inspired to visit after seeing the country on-screen. Almost a third of visitors (29%) of visitors to Orkney were inspired to visit by a TV programme, so the opportunities for the tourism industry are immense."

Last year, NorthLink ferried around 137,000 passengers to the Northern Isles during June, July and August, from a total of 323,000.

For more information on NorthLink Ferries visit www.northlinkferries.co.uk/

Ends

3 June 2019

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Image

Summer seasonal Passenger Service Assistants with Jim Wallace - Passenger service officer (far right)

About NorthLink Ferries

Serco has operated the Northern Isles service since July 2012 providing scheduled lifeline passenger and freight services to the Northern Isles.

Named 'Best Ferry' at the Guardian and Observer Travel Awards 2016, NorthLink Ferries operate throughout the year with the MV Hamnavoe operating to Orkney on the Pentland Firth and MV Hjaltland and MV Hrossey sailing to Orkney and Shetland from Aberdeen. MV Hildasay and MV Helliar provide regular timetabled freight services to both Shetland and Orkney. NorthLink Ferries has offices in Aberdeen, Kirkwall, Lerwick, Stromness and Scrabster.

The Hjaltland and Hrossey ferries sail every evening from Aberdeen and Lerwick in Shetland and have 117 en-suite cabins along with eateries, bars and retail shops showcasing the very best of island produce. The MV Hamnavoe, which has an excellent array of services on-board, provides a swift and reliable 90-minute crossing on the Pentland Firth, and offers a unique opportunity to sail past the Old Man of Hoy as it travels between Stromness in Orkney and the Caithness town of Scrabster.

More than just a business, we view ourselves as a member of the local community, serving key sectors within the Northern Isles economies. These include the agriculture, aquaculture and tourism markets, carrying the equivalent of over 43 thousand freight trailers and over 300 thousand passengers per year. This demonstrates the integral part played by the ferry provider working daily with stakeholders in all aspects of the operation.

This community integration, as well as support of the local economy, is important to us and we are therefore proud to purchase over 84% of products for our passengers to enjoy on-board from suppliers based within 50 miles of our operating ports. This has the added benefit of reducing the distances our deliveries have to travel, thereby reducing our environmental impact.

For further information visit www.northlinkferries.co.uk

About Serco

Serco is an international service company, which combines commercial know-how with a deep public service ethos.

Around the world, we improve essential services by managing people, processes, technology and assets more effectively. We advise policy makers, design innovative solutions, integrate systems and - most of all - deliver to the public.

More information can be found at www.serco.com