



Photograph by Vishal Goklani, [veeshphotography.com](http://veeshphotography.com)



# Hen Party

## *at the Top of the World*

Text and Photography by Rebecca Reuter

At first glance, the cold, treeless, and wind- and rain-battered Orkney Islands north of Scotland may seem more like a place where adventure seekers go than a wedding destination. Upon closer look, though, humans—including my fiancé's ancestors—have called Orkney home for millennia.

Our first visit to this island archipelago was a quick two-day trip in 2013. Two years later, when my fiancé proposed, Orkney was the first place I thought of for our wedding. My decision was based on the mysterious connection I felt to a stone circle older than Stonehenge, called the Ring of Brodgar. Walking halfway around the stone circle to where the ceremony would be held, and then walking the second half as man and wife, was something out of a fairy tale I had never read. The ceremony would blend the old with the new and reclaim the Orkneys into our family.

As word got out to our close friends and family, we suddenly had 35 people flying in from the United States. The wedding became more than just a ceremony with our officiant.

For two years, I planned the wedding from Seattle, Washington—4,000 miles away and in another country. One of the rewards for traveling to these islands at 59 degrees north latitude, just south of the Shetland Islands, is to visit the 5,000-year-old UNESCO World Heritage sites, including the Ring of Brodgar, called the Heart of Neolithic Orkney.





Our ceremony would respect the Celtic and Scottish traditions, like jumping the broom, handfasting, and sealing our vows with a drink of our favorite single malt whisky from a *quaich*, a small, shallow, two-handled cup. To keep with the theme, I decided to have a hen party, the British equivalent to a bachelorette party.

When I found the Birsay Bay Tearoom online, I realized it was on the same bay as a photo I used for my wedding invitations. The photo illustrated the wild and expansive feel of the North Atlantic with wind-whipped white caps, waves breaking on tall cliffs, and a Scottish flag waving in the wind. After a few messages with Georgina, the owner, and seeing pictures of the tearoom with vistas of cows grazing across green pastures above the dark blue ocean, I was hooked. My hen party would be a tea party at the most northern tearoom in Britain.

The day of the hen party, all of my guests carpoled from Kirkwall, the largest town in Orkney and wedding central, approximately 20 miles away. I was running late. My leisurely morning became frenzied when I realized I had forgotten to deliver the centerpieces for the reception. By the time I returned, it was a half hour before the hen party was to begin. I quickly cleaned up and changed into a beautiful lavender-colored, silk halter dress my mother made for me for the occasion.

Luckily, during our first trip to Scotland, I learned how to drive on the left side of the road and use a stick shift while sitting on the right side of a car. I needed all those skills as I sped over green hills, past grazing sheep, many of the Neolithic sites, and Loch of the Boardhouse to reach Birsay Bay with a minute to spare.

I arrived to see all of my guests in awe of the views around the property. Inside, one long table was draped with a white tablecloth with colorful embroidery. It was beautifully set with a motley array of teacups and teapots and vases filled with flowers from the neighboring fields. Several towers of tea cakes and tea sandwiches sat in the middle of the table just waiting to be enjoyed.

The magic of the Birsay Bay Tearoom spilled over into the next day at my wedding reception. My dream wedding cake wasn't a cake at all. It was a scone tower. When I described my vision to Georgina, she said she had never done one before but loved the challenge. To my surprise, on my wedding day, they added an extra-large scone at the top of the tower so my husband and I could "cut the cake," a shared tradition that crossed the Atlantic to the Americas, just like my husband's Orcadian ancestors.

For more information about Birsay Bay Tearoom, go to [birsaybaytearoom.co.uk](http://birsaybaytearoom.co.uk), or ring +44 01856 721 399.



Photograph Courtesy of Birsay Bay Tearoom

OPPOSITE PAGE: (Top left) The scone tower at the wedding reception. (Bottom left) Close-up of a place setting at the hen party. (Top right) Scottish flag waving near Birsay Bay. THIS PAGE: (Above) The table set for the hen party. (Below) The Ring of Brodgar.



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