

Skara Brae, credit Colin Keldie

Kirkwall named top cruise destination

SCOTTISH PORT OF KIRKWALL

ORKNEY ISLANDS COUNCIL

Orkney has once again topped the table for visitor satisfaction – with Kirkwall named Top Cruise Destination for Western Europe and the United Kingdom.

The award is from Cruise Critic, the world's largest online cruise resource. Their awards are based exclusively on consumer ratings and reviews posted to the Cruise Critic website over the past year.

The port of Kirkwall is run by Orkney Islands Council, Harbour Authority for the county's 29 piers and harbours.

Chair of the Council's Development and Infrastructure Committee, Councillor Graham Sinclair, said: "We're absolutely delighted about the award which is based on first-hand feedback from cruise passengers themselves.

"This result reflects a phenomenal effort by our Marine Services team to ensure smooth port operations and a slick meet and greet service for passengers.

"But it also is testament to the local community – to the pride we have in our county, and the warm Orkney welcome that awaits our visitors at every turn."

This is not the first time Orkney has received accolades from the cruise industry.

Earlier this year, passengers from Viking Ocean Cruises voted Orkney as their top Northern European cruise destination from a total portfolio of 46 competing ports.

In 2013, Orkney took second place in the global Seatrade Insider Cruise Port of the Year.

And in 2010, Kirkwall was voted Best Cruise port in the UK by Cruise Critic – a high point reached again in 2016.

Brian Archibald, Orkney Islands Council Harbour Master and Head of Marine Services, Engineering and Transport said: "I am very proud indeed with this award which shows, once again, that it is Orkney which sets the standard.

"I am immensely grateful to my own teams at Harbours and Transport but also to the huge cast across Orkney which works so hard to make the cruise sector here so successful.

"From the meet and greet and shore excursion teams, to the coach operators, tour guides and private tour providers, and to all those sites and shops which do so much to give our visitors a wonderful experience – it takes a lot of hard work and commitment to reach this standard.

"With other ports snapping at our heels, it's great that Orkney – once again and in common with so many other things which we do here – is top.

"The challenge of course is to stay at the top and to wisely manage further growth and opportunity and, of course, we will have to move forward without the energy and drive of my recently retired Business Development Manager, Michael Morrison who did so much to achieve this.

"But, as I have said, it is a very broad team effort and I am convinced that we can continue to manage, grow and develop our world class cruise opportunities here in Orkney."

There were 138 cruise ship calls to an Orkney port in 2018, and 169 vessel calls booked for 2019 which is bringing about 160,000 visitors to the county.

Mr Archibald added: "Most of the growth is in the small to medium sized vessels and we are spreading the visits to other ports with about 22 calls to Stromness this year, including the anchorage at Cairston Roads.

"The very large ships, which are the trigger for road closures, remain steady at about 12 per year- so well under 10% of the total calls per year.

"For 2020, bookings are already at the 2019 levels – albeit growth of this rate is common across all the Scottish ports, Orkney still has the largest number of cruise ship calls of all sizes."

Destinations that feature in this year's awards received the highest ratings among cruisers who cruised to the destination in the past year and shared their experiences on Cruise Critic.

"For most travellers, the decision of where to cruise is made before they think about all the other pieces of the cruise planning process," said Colleen McDaniel, Editor-in-Chief of Cruise Critic.

"And for those looking for incredible cruise destinations, there's no better way to narrow your options than by seeing which destinations are rated most highly by cruisers who have already been there, done that."

Cruise Critic boasts the world's largest online cruise community, with more than 50 million opinions, reviews and photos, covering approximately 700 cruise ships and over 500 worldwide port