



Above: Birsay Bay, Orkney Islands. **Below:** Neolithic Ring of Brodgar.

Art in Orkney • Beth Habian, ITN

As they have for nearly everyone, the last 18 or so months have had an unpredictable impact on me.

At first, the pandemic seemed to force a much-needed slowing down of the hectic “work, eat, sleep, repeat” pace of life. It allowed time to take a deep breath (albeit, while quarantined, alone in my house), with time to reflect, before I embarked on a few enthusiastic DIY projects. (It can’t really be THAT hard to refloor my entire living space on my own, can it?)

But as weeks turned to months turned to more than a year, things got a bit tougher. My father lost his battle with his failing heart, and in between dealing with the mountains of paperwork that follow death and the emotional rawness of such a loss, I lost myself a little bit.

One day, looking for distraction by tumbling down an internet-search rabbit hole, I happened upon the website of a company I had never heard of before: Wild at Art Scotland (Argyll, Scotland; phone +44 788 496 6165, wildatartscotland.com). I have no idea how I even found it — it seems as if it found me — but when I saw a creative retreat in Orkney called “Rediscovering a

Sense of Possibility,” I sent in my non-refundable £500 deposit without a second thought.

I would be spending a week on the remote Scottish island of Mainland Orkney, a place that had never entered my thoughts when planning my next trip abroad, and I would be doing so in late November. But, then, I’ve always had a bit more luck when following the trail of breadcrumbs life sometimes throws down for me than when trying to make well-researched plans. And this time, impulse delivered big time!

A sense of renewal

I spent a night in Glasgow at the no-frills-but-wonderfully-located-for-a-morning-flight **Holiday Inn Glasgow Airport** hotel (£74, or \$100, for an executive room) before hopping on a short Loganair flight to Kirkwall, where I was met by a few of my fellow “creatives” and the driver who would deliver us to our beautifully appointed cottage accommodations in Stromness.

While I won’t recount the day-to-day details of my retreat — days spent bathed in the amazing light of this place, exploring the landscapes with retreat facilitator Margaret Soraya, an incredible photographer,

and company cofounder Ute Amann-Seidel (and her gentle rescue dog, Islay), with time carved out to “play” in the art space provided for us in this picturesque fishing town — I will say that spending a week with like-minded travelers looking for a way to incorporate more creativity into our everyday lives had, like the pandemic, an unpredictable effect. This time, however, it was nothing but positive.

It is easy to forget the importance of stopping to appreciate the beauty of the natural world. Of being present in the moment, to enjoy new friends, good food and peaceful reflection.

I’m always amazed at how group travel, spending a week with people you’ve never met and perhaps will never see again, can result in such an immediate bond between strangers and can so quickly refuel energy depleted by the stresses of life’s regular routines.

“Retreat” was a perfect word for this experience, and I can wholeheartedly recommend this company for anyone looking to engage the personal inspiration that many of us often forget to indulge.

While this particular 7-night retreat (£1,920, or \$2,591, per person, double, with no single supplement) is not on offer for 2022, Wild at Art Scotland has a number of small-group “creative experiences” currently listed online, including a spring drawing-and-painting holiday in the Outer Hebrides, a summer “Outlander Art Experience” exploring the sights and crafts of the popular TV series, and a textile tour on the Isle of Skye in the fall.

All tours are suitable for participants of any skill level, and each is accompanied by a company representative and guest tutors whose specialties match the tour’s theme.

Go. Be inspired! ♦

