



www.netleyabbeytartanarmy.com

TORSHAVN “IN YOUR SPORRAN”

Version:	1
Guide published:	April 2005
Based on visits in:	September 2002



This mini guide is brought to you by NATA Online. Please use this guide at your own risk. No responsibility will be accepted for any inaccuracies. © Netley Abbey Tartan Army

About this guide

This series of downloadable NATA Mini “In Your Sporran” Guides has been designed specifically to save the hassle of printing out reams of NATA web pages in order to make sure you don’t miss something whilst wondering the back streets of your chosen destination.

This guide has been compiled almost exclusively by me (Paul Allison), and is based entirely on personal experiences and opinions. Please do not prejudge anything on my say so – not only am I quite warped, but many places were only visited once, and therefore may have been having a particularly good or bad day.

This guide is not intended to replace more traditional sources of information, such as the excellent Lonely Planet guide books or the indispensable “In Your Pocket” guides available local in many Eastern European cities (as well as the downloadable versions from www.inyourpocket.com, which have inspired this very guide). Instead, the idea is to supplement these more detailed, better researched and more balanced guides with my own ramblings.

These guides originally came about as people were forever asking for pub tips and the like for places I’ve been to – I soon grew tired of typing out the same emails every few weeks and opted instead to keep the information on the web on the NATA Online site.

All opinions expressed in this guide are those of the author, and not necessarily those of the Netley Abbey Tartan Army.

- For more information about NATA (the Netley Abbey Tartan Army), including photos and diary accounts of many trips abroad with Scotland, as well as much more travel information and guides), please visit www.netleyabbeytartanarmy.com
- For more information on me, please visit www.paulallison.co.uk



This mini guide is brought to you by NATA Online. Please use this guide at your own risk. No responsibility will be accepted for any inaccuracies. © Netley Abbey Tartan Army

Faroe Islands Introduction

The Faroe Islands are a wonderful and intriguing place, and not at all how I imagined them to be. Greener than you can imagine, which is accentuated by the many turf roofed houses around the place. Okay, the infrastructure may not be great, and it was certainly creaking with 700 or so Scottish fans in for the game, but this is a laid back country where people will go out of their way to help you. Of the 45,000 or so Faroese population, 16,000 live in the capital Torshavn – we have bigger villages over here! In fact, Torshavn isn't too dissimilar from Milngavie (small precinct, same number of pubs etc).

Although technically a county of Denmark, the Faroese are pretty independently-minded, and are perhaps more similar to outlook to their Icelandic neighbours than their Danish ones. Icelandic people tease the Faroese about their parochial lifestyle (pot and kettle!), and about their strange dialect. The funny thing is, with everything we'd heard about how great Iceland is, compared to how backward the Faroes is, we were expecting Torshavn to be a gentle warm-up for Reykjavik – it should have been the other way around. Whereas much of Iceland is stone cladding and corrugated iron, the Faroes is genuinely rustic.

Food and drink wise, one warning to heed – it's going to be expensive! Alcohol was illegal for many years, and is still heavily regulated. As a result, only a handful of "pubs" exist, and some of these are attached to hotels or restaurants. It's very difficult to get spirits before evening (but then again, all but the Café Natur are usually closed during the day), and the local Foroyar Bior is pretty acidic stuff – at least the Black Sheep lager has an amusing label. Public drunken-ness is quite common, especially at weekends, and can be quite unpredictable. One amusing by-law is that bars are not allowed to throw any drunks out, in case they injure themselves, which leads to "a guaranteed cabaret in every bar" (quote Tom Small and Maurice Hickey). Another strange feature of pre-dawn Torshavn, again witnessed by Tom and Maurice (you decide on the accuracy!), is people gathering in the main precinct to drink moonshine or vodka, or as Mo put it: "People coming out of the tress with bottles". Strangely, week beer (2% or so) is widely available all over the island like a soft drink.



This mini guide is brought to you by NATA Online.
Please use this guide at your own risk. No responsibility will be accepted for any inaccuracies. © **Netley Abbey Tartan Army**

Getting to the Faroes

Flying into Vagar airport (the only place in the islands with enough flat space to build a runway), you have the feeling of really making an entrance. Atlantic Airways planes are small, and they have to be, as you fly in low down a fjord, feeling you could reach out the window and brush the grass on the steep hillside either side – it's like something out of the Dambusters movie. Unsurprisingly, fog and inclement weather can lead to delays and cancellations, and apparently special training is needed for pilots to land here!

Atlantic run an erratic timetable between Aberdeen and Vagar a couple of times a week annually, and some flights to Stansted to London in the summer. There are also connections via Iceland (Reykjavik City airport, rather than Keflavik), and a couple of airports in Denmark (Billund and Copenhagen).

When we were there, getting to the capital city involved a bus trip around snaking cliff-side roads, a ferry trip, and then back on the bus – clocking in at around 90 minutes for the transfer. Things should have improved dramatically with the opening of a tunnel between the two islands.

The other way to get to the islands is by boat on the Smyril Line car ferry Noronna. This boat plies a weekly summer route around the North Atlantic, with ports of call at Torshavn, Lerwick, Hanstholm, Bergen and Seydidsfour on the south-east Icelandic coast. The winter timetable is subject to change – check out the details at the Smyril Line website. You can't miss Torshavn ferry port – it's just across from Tinganes, and down from Café Natur.



This mini guide is brought to you by NATA Online.
Please use this guide at your own risk. No responsibility will be accepted for any inaccuracies. © **Netley Abbey Tartan Army**

Things to do

You're not exactly spoiled for choice as regards museums, but then, you're probably not reading this guide for cultural advice anyway! The things you should probably make an effort to check out are:

- **Tinganes** – this gorgeous wee peninsula splits the harbour, and is covered with winding lanes and grass-roofed wooden houses. These are real houses, with real people living in them, so best not to poke around too much, but it is a lovely place to stroll.
- **Fort** – Just behind the Smyril Line ferry terminal is the remnants of an old Danish army garrison fort. It's open and free, so just wander up for a nice view over the harbour.
- **Roof terrace of Hotel Hafnia** – brass neck your way up to the roof terrace for the best high-level view of downtown Torshavn and the harbour.
- **Puffin cruise** – These are a bit misleading, as despite the pictures of cute wee puffins all over the leaflets and posters promoting the cruise, it seems that there's hardly any left, as the locals have eaten most of them! Two well-regarded companies operate out of Vestmanna harbour, and you can catch regular buses from Torshavn.
- **Ferry to Toftir** – if you've loads of time on your hands, or are just an obsessive ground-hopper, you could always make your way across to the most scenic ground I have been to – at the top of a steep cliff in Toftir. It's either a bus or ferry ride, then a steep hike, and there's not much when you get to the top, save a windswept pitch and breath-taking views over the fjord.



Places to drink

Err, this isn't so much the best of list, rather it's *the* list. Hamstrung by high-prohibition level laws until only a few years ago, the Faroese culture has yet to embrace social drinking. And just to make matters worse, expect to pay around £6 a pint.

- **Café Natur** - For years, Café Natur was the only place to get a beer in Torshavn (apart from the brewery, or the "key clubs"). It has grown slightly in size over the years, adding a "mezzanine" level, but is still a tiny place considering it has been the focal point of Torshavn night-life for years. Sometimes home to live music, and usually always to a lively atmosphere. The T-shirts are an essential souvenir. Can get very crowded, and the local jakey quotient is usually quite high.
- **The Dubliner** - Owned by the legendary and irrepressible Lars, this is one of the cheaper places to drink, and it's succeeded in taking much of Natur's trade. Expect drunken sing-alongs and dancing on the table to a succession of locals belting out Irish pub standards at the excellent karaoke session on Sunday afternoons/evenings. Be warned: the toilets can take a bit of battering. This place can be tricky to find - best ask a local or take one of the few cabs in town. As the t-shirts rightly claim: so good you'll think you dreamed it!
- **Cleopatra's** - Above a decent standard restaurant, but best accessed from the main precinct street, this decent bar (probably my favourite in the town) is well worth a visit. Not much else to say, really!
- **Manhattan** - Another bar attached to a restaurant, although this one claims to do cocktails. Err, that's it.
- **Hafnia Bar** - Breaking with the bar/restaurant theme, this one is actually part of a hotel. Comfortable, and a wee bit reminiscent of an airport lounge, the best hotel in town was actually very welcoming and friendly to the Tartan Army, extending the opening hours specially. The Best Western up the big hill also has a bar, but we didn't have any need to go out that far.



- **Club/Disco** - There is a leisure complex of sorts, which boasts a couple of discos on the top floor – one is for a younger crowd, the other for the more mature swinger. As I was dry at the time of my visit, and as the pubs were adequate enough, we didn't venture in (but many who did had a good time). It's in the same building as Pizza 67 (below) – come out the Hafnia hotel and head left, it's around 50 yards on the other side of the road.
- **Key Clubs** - These are a strange feature left over from prohibition-era Faroes – these are basically rooms with a bar in that serve alcohol (smuggled in when it was banned), and are where the real Faroese drink. They are unmarked – we spotted one a couple of streets west off the main drag just by glancing a row of optics through an upstairs window, then brass-necked it by walking around the back, smiling at the doorman and ordering a drink. Slightly cheaper than the actual pubs and bars, this is where you will meet the real locals, and a few mad fishermen. The Tartan Army's great social commentators (Tom & Mo) memorably summed this very place up as "like something out of Star Wars, with eyes coming out the side of people's heads". Tricky to find, but worth a visit.
- **Pizza 67** - Not a bar as such, but an excellent pizzeria. This Icelandic chain has a branch in the same leisure complex as the discos, and is absurdly popular. A good choice for some decent, and relatively cheap, food.

Was this guide useful? Please let me know:
paul@netleyabbeytartanarmy.com

