



World Nomads

# ICELAND

## The Insiders' Guide



Your guide to Iceland's scenic wonders, top adventures, and must-do experiences by our local experts.



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# Welcome!

From thundering waterfalls to Viking legends to the mesmerizing Northern Lights, Iceland is for lovers of nature and culture alike – and despite its chilly name, you won't find friendlier people anywhere.

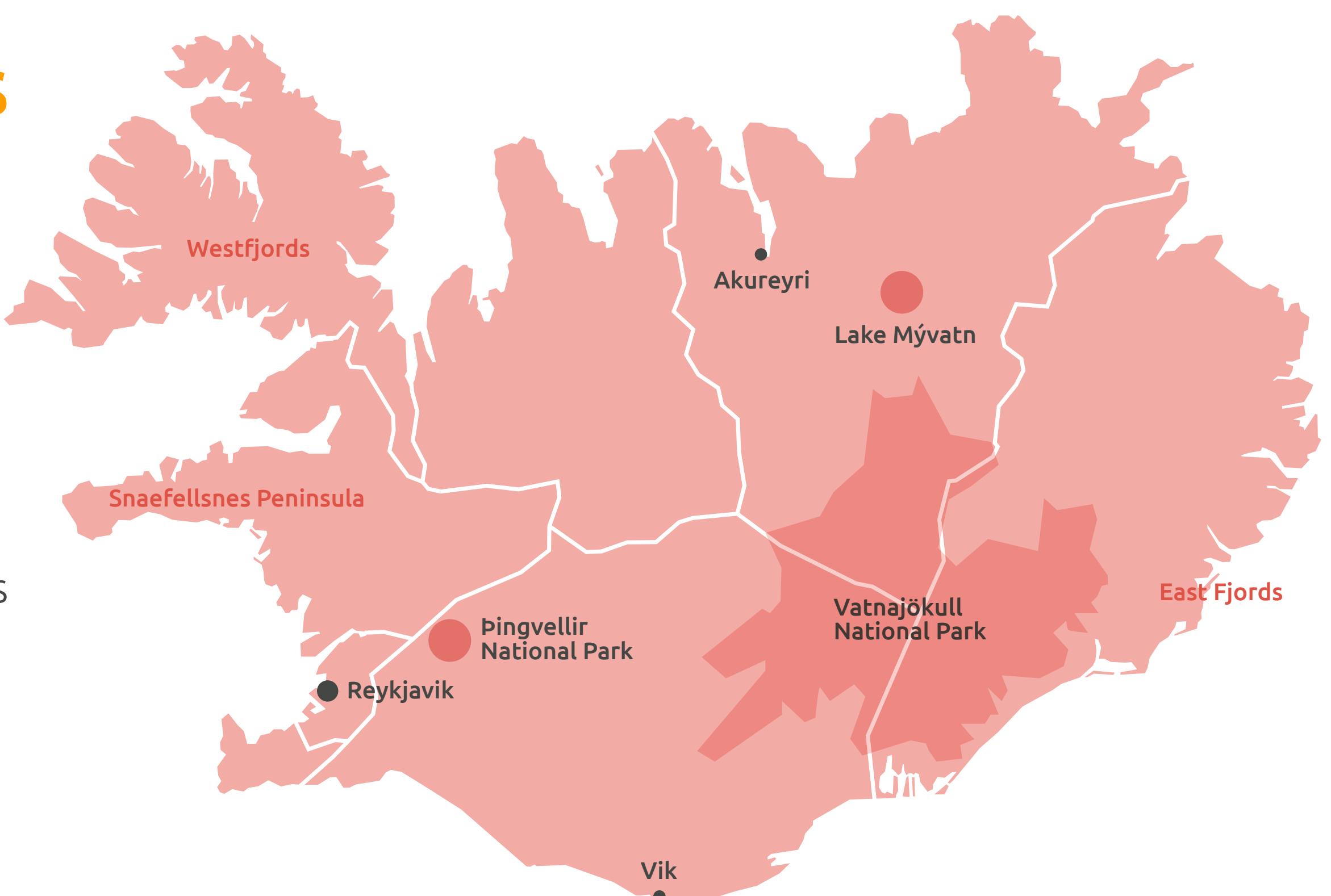
## Our Insiders' Picks of the Top 10 Experiences in Iceland

### Stand behind a waterfall

Iceland features stunning waterfalls of all sizes and descriptions, but at Seljalandsfoss, in South Iceland, you can actually walk behind the curtain of water.

### Swim between two continents

At the Silfra Fissure in Þingvellir National Park, you can snorkel or scuba dive in the crack between the North American and Eurasian continents. Fed by Langjökull glacier, the water in the fissure is famously clear, with exceptional visibility.



Blue Lagoon

### Go inside a volcano

Take a cable car into the massive magma chamber of the volcano Þríhnúkagígur – the only place in the world where this experience is possible. Don't worry – it's been dormant for 4,000 years.

### Sink neck-deep in a hidden hot spring

Natural hot springs are everywhere in this geothermal country, and if you'd prefer to soak in solitude rather than among the throngs at the Blue Lagoon, head to the secluded Lanbrotalaug spring on the Snæfellsnes Peninsula or Hörghlíðarlaug, overlooking the sea in the Westfjords.

## Explore an ice cave

The astounding cave in Langjökull glacier is the largest man-made ice cave in Europe – but for walls and formations of a truly stunning electric blue, visit the Crystal Ice Cave within Vatnajökull glacier.

## Walk on a black sand beach

Landscapes don't get much more impressive than Reynisfjara, on the Southern coast. Competing with the black sand for your amazement is an enormous cliff made of volcanic basalt columns. Off shore are the rock formations called Reynisdrangar, said to be trolls turned to stone by the breaking of dawn.

## Go paddling with puffins

Kayakers on gorgeous Breiðafjöldur Bay in West Iceland are likely to have close encounters with these adorable birds, along with seals and even whales.

## Hike on one of Europe's largest glaciers

The biggest glacier in Iceland,



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For walls and formations of a truly stunning electric blue, visit the Crystal Ice Cave within Vatnajökull glacier.

Vatnajökull is so vast that it covers not one, but several, active volcanoes. The views are epic as you cross this massive ice field and explore its ridges and cravasses.

## Gaze at the Aurora Borealis

Winter nights are long in Iceland – all the more time to view nature's greatest light show. The Northern Lights are visible here from mid-September to early April.

## Join the Djamm (Party) in Reykjavik

Reykjavik is world-renowned for its nightlife, and the party doesn't even get started until after midnight. After mingling with the townsfolk and sampling Brennivin (aka "Icelandic Black Death") at local institution Prikið, head to Paloma, the best place to dance till daybreak.

# Climate and Weather

Iceland's climate is surprisingly mild, and despite what many think, the country experiences four distinct seasons. However, the popular Icelandic joke "If you don't like the weather, just wait five minutes" is entirely accurate – weather in Iceland is very unpredictable.

## Spring

Beginning in April, spring breathes life back into the country, and longer days melt snow to reveal verdant green fields. Though most of the country is safely accessible, sunny days can quickly turn to rain or even snow. Temperatures hover between 32-50°F (0-10°C). It's a great time to explore popular spots around the south coast and Golden Circle circuit without the summer crowds.

## Summer

June signals the start of the Icelandic summer, bringing with it the most stable weather and long, sunny days. Temperatures can reach up to 68°F (20°C), but spells of misty rains can also bring it back down to a chilly 50°F (10°C).

Summer is best for exploring the furthest reaches of the country, including the uninhabited highlands which are inaccessible for the rest of the year.

## Fall

Summer vanishes at the end of August, and the landscape turns to hues of gold,



Godafoss, in the Diamond Circle

**“Summer is best for exploring the furthest reaches of the country, including the uninhabited highlands which are inaccessible for the rest of the year.”**

brown, and orange. Storms batter the countryside, leaving behind a crispness in the air, and temperatures linger between 32-50°F (0-10°C).

This is one of the best times to catch the northern lights dancing over Iceland's surreal landscapes, especially at Kirkjufell Mountain or Jökulsárlón Glacier Lagoon.

## Winter

Stretching from November until March, the dark winter months are the stormiest, bringing with them snow and ice that close smaller roads and possibly parts of the main route as well. However, temperatures are remarkably mild with the average just below 32°F (0°C), actually warmer than New York.

The freezing temperatures offer the best opportunities to experience the electric-blue ice caves beneath the behemoth glacier Vatnajökull.

# Where to Stay

Traveling in Iceland is easy and safe, and as the country becomes even more popular, there are an increasing number of options for accommodation and transport, from no-frills to ultra-luxe. No matter what you choose, you'll travel among some of the most stunning landscapes in the world – and many that look like another planet altogether.

## Hostels and guest houses

These are plentiful in Reykjavik and along the Ring Road. A simple hostel dorm bed ranges from kr. 3,100-5,160 (US \$30-\$50) per night. Guesthouses and B&Bs are more homey, and include breakfast or a guest kitchen. Rates range widely, as can the level of service, but expect to spend at least kr. 10,320-15,490 (US \$100-\$150) per night.

## Apartments

Apartment rentals are gaining in popularity in Iceland, particularly in Reykjavik, where a stylish one bedroom rents for around kr. 15,490k (US \$150) per night. In the countryside, a modest cabin or cottage costs kr. 10,320-20,650 (US \$100-\$200) per night.

## Farmstays

These are a great option for cozy accommodation in the countryside. Often located on working farms, they



Reykjavik

offer guests the chance to meet the animals, chat with farmers, and learn about life in rural Iceland. Rates start at around kr. 10,320 (US \$100) per night.

## Hotels

Icelandic hotels run the gamut in style and cost. Characterless rooms start at around kr. 10,320 (US \$100), with more plush options costing as much as kr. 41,250 (US \$400) per night. The latter are most often found in Reykjavik, but you'll find some surprisingly elegant options in the countryside.

## Camping

Camping is the most economical way to see Iceland, but it's only recommended during the short window from June to September. There are dozens of official campgrounds around Iceland. The average cost is around kr. 1,030 (US \$10) per night, and most don't require reservations.

## General Cost Guide

**Cost of a street-food meal** – kr. 515-1,550 (US \$5-\$15)

**Cost of a casual restaurant meal** – kr. 1,550-2,580 (US \$15-\$25)

**Cost of an upscale restaurant meal** – kr. 3,620-5,680 (US \$35-\$55) for entree only; kr. 6,720-9,300 (US \$65-\$90) including appetizer, entree, and dessert

**Cost of a cup of coffee** – kr. 310-620 (US \$3-\$6)

**Cost of a beer** – kr. 930-1240 (US \$9-\$12)

**Car rental** – kr. 3,100-20,670 (US \$30-\$200) per day

**Camper van rental** – kr. 10,330-31,00 (US \$100-\$300) per day

**Hostels** – kr. 3,100-5,170 (US \$30-\$50) per night

**Guesthouses** – kr. 10,330-15,500 (US \$100-\$150) per night

**Farmstays** – kr. 10,330 (US \$100) per night

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**Icelandic hotels run the gamut in style and cost.**

# Getting Around

Iceland is 39,769 mi<sup>2</sup> (103,000 km<sup>2</sup>), much of it sparsely populated, rugged, and remote. Route 1, or the Ring Road, is a 828mi (1,222km) national road that circles the island and connects the main towns. Though many of the most popular attractions can be seen by bus, a rental car or guided tour is recommended if you want to get off the beaten path.

## Bus travel

Buses are an easy, affordable way to get to and from Keflavik Airport, around the Ring Road and Golden Circle, and to larger towns throughout the country. Service is far more frequent in summer – in winter, routes are greatly reduced, if running at all. In high season, many long-distance buses stop at tourist attractions, take a short break at the final destination, and then return to Reykjavik, so you can use the bus as a DIY day trip from the city.

## Internal flights

Internal flights depart from Reykjavik's domestic airport, near downtown, and serve several areas of the country all year round. Flights last under an hour and typically cost kr. 7,230-10,330 (US \$70-\$100) each way.

## Taxis

Taxis are easy to hail and safe to use in

Reykjavik, but rarely practical outside the capital region. Fares are standardized and tipping is not expected. They're not cheap, though. The 30mi (48km) ride from the airport to Reykjavik is around kr. 12,920 (US \$125). A 10-minute ride from Reykjavik's downtown to the outskirts will be around kr. 2,070 (US \$20).

## Rental cars

Several companies offer rentals ranging from compact cars to monstrous 4x4 vehicles. Rates vary from kr. 3,100 (US \$30) per day for a small manual transmission car up to kr. 20,670 (US \$200) or more for a Land Rover suitable for the highlands.



**it's illegal to sleep in a campervan outside campgrounds or urban areas without the landholder's permission.**

## Camper vans

Save on hotels as you roam the country. These range from kr. 10,330-31,000 (US \$100-\$300) per day, depending on the size and season. Note, it's illegal to sleep in a campervan outside campgrounds or urban areas without the landholder's permission.

## Self-driving vs guided tours

It's easy to see much of Iceland independently by car, stopping at every spectacular vantage point without being beholden to a tour guide's schedule. However, in certain areas, it may be safer to leave the driving to someone more experienced. If you're planning a trip to the remote interior, or want to do a lot of exploring off the Ring Road – especially in winter – a guided trip is best if you aren't used to driving on unpaved roads, and saves the expense of renting a 4x4 vehicle.

# Cultural Highlights

When people think of Iceland, they think of fire and ice. Maybe Eyjafjallajökull too, if they can pronounce it. But that's only the tip of a very big iceberg.

## Festivals

Icelanders love festivals, especially during the summer. There's a special Icelandic word, *útihátíð*, to describe outdoor festivals, since they can only happen around July or August. Along with popular music festivals like *Þjóðhátíð*, other festivals worth a go are Gay Pride, Culture Night, the Reykjavik Art Festival, and the Food and Fun Festival.

Winter festivals are all about feasting. Try to get invited to a family gathering for *Pórláksmessa* just before Christmas Eve to sample fermented skate, or join the larger community gatherings during *Porrablót* in January to eat sour food.

## Music

Iceland has one of the highest ratio of bands per capita, and music festivals happen all year long, starting with *Aldrei fór ég suður*, a free event celebrating the diversity of Icelandic music, held annually in Ísafjörður on Easter weekend. But the season really kicks off with the Secret Solstice music festival on June 21-22, when the sun circles the horizon without ever setting.

*Þjóðhátíð* means "Nation's Celebration," and is, in theory,



celebrated all over the country, but only really happens on the island of Vestmannaeyjar, which swells from 4,000 to nearly 20,000 inhabitants the last weekend of July or the first weekend of August. There's been a new song written for the festival every year since 1874 and the location – a tiny valley with enormous, volcanic cliffs rising around the natural amphitheater – is unbeatable.

If you'd like a smaller, more local experience, check out Bakkaferði in Borgafirði eystri for Bræðslan at the end of July or Gærðin in Sauðárkrúkur in mid-August.

When *útihátíð* time has passed, the show for musicians must still go on. Reykjavik's biggest music festival of the year is the five-day Airwaves festival held in late October/mid-November. Locals and tourists alike flock here to see over 200 artists from near and far at dozens of venues.

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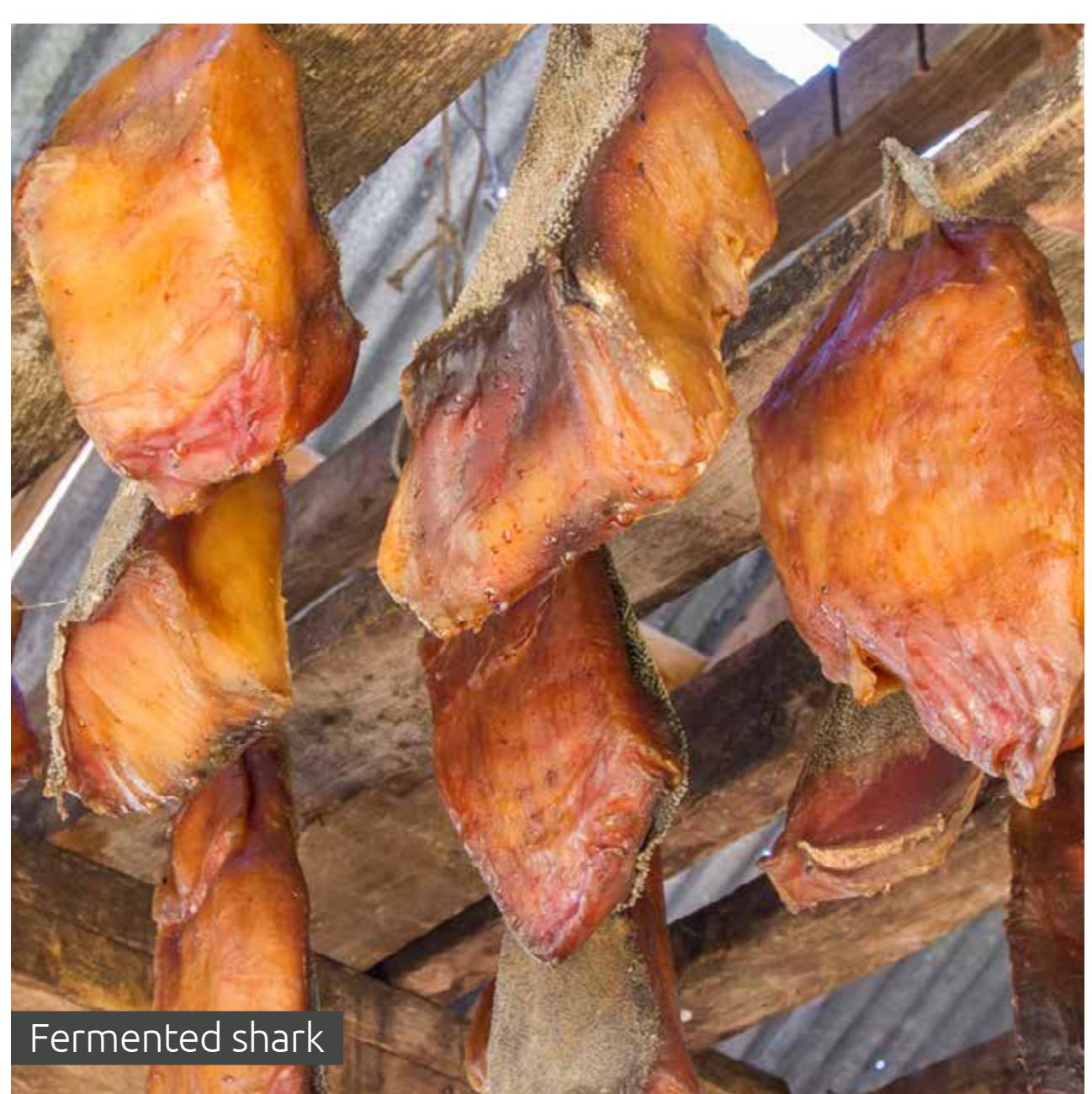
Though Icelanders have a very fun-loving culture, these traditions are not to be laughed at.

## Folklore

Icelanders are still Vikings at heart. Even Christian traditions incorporate pagan beliefs – like the 13 yule lads, one for every day of Christmas, who steal candles, harass sheep, and make other types of mischief. Icelandic children fear the lads' troll mother, Grýla, who sends her devilish cat to eat naughty kids.

References to the old Norse Gods are everywhere. Icelanders like to believe every rainbow is the Bifröst bridge to Ásgarður, the center of the world and home of the twelve Norse gods. Place names from the Norse Sagas still exist all over the countryside, and the four land spirits – the Dragon, Viking, Bull, and Eagle – still protect the four quarters of Iceland.

Though Icelanders have a very fun-loving culture, these traditions are not to be laughed at. Icelanders really do believe in elves and huldufólk (hidden people), and say they only reveal themselves to a human who truly believes. A highway in Iceland was even moved because its planned location fell on some sacred elf sites.



## Traditional food

Fish of every variety is at the center of traditional Icelandic cuisine: dried fish (harðfiskur), pickled fish (síld), rotten shark (hákarl), and once in a while, some whale (hrefna). Since beer wasn't legal until 1989, Icelanders wash down their hákarl with Brennivín schnapps, aka Black Death.

The Þorrablót sour food festival, celebrated since the Viking age, is held the first Friday after January 19th each year. To find this type of food, look for the cross-eyed, pink pig logo of Bonus, a common supermarket, or try your luck at Kólaportið, the weekend flea-market held near Reykjavik's downtown harbour. Other traditional foods to try are horse (hestakjöt and folaldakjöt) and reindeer.

## Craft brews and spirits

If you like local, small-batch microbrews and craft spirits, you're in luck. Keep an eye out for Ölvisholt, Steðji, Kaldi, Gæðingur and Segull 67 craft beers, and Iceland's first-ever single malt whisky, Flóki, just released in 2017.

## Street food

Nearly all fuel stations around the country have a grill and sell a decent, affordable burger and fries. The creamy, old-style ice cream called "gamli ís" is another staple. But the king of all street foods is no doubt the Icelandic hotdog. Order one "with everything" from any gas station, corner store, or from Iceland's longest running restaurant and most iconic food stand – Baejarins Beztu in downtown Reykjavik.

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# Pronunciation Guide

Iceland is an isolated country and its language has stayed pure and close to its roots – it's the closest you can get to Old Norse. Today many Icelanders speak English, but it's always nice to be able to say place names properly, and fun to know appropriate phrases for the occasion.

## Pronunciation

Most consonants are pronounced similarly to English. Accent marks over vowels change their sound, usually from short to long.

**a** as in car, **á** as ou in shout

**e** as in bet, **é** as in ye in yet

**i** and **y** as bin, **í** and **ý** as ee in seek

**o** as the **a** in all, **ó** as ao in boat

**u** as u in under, **ú** as oo in toot

**æ** like i in ice

**ö** like u in fur

**p, þ** like th in thin

**ð, ð** like th in thunder

**ei**, ey like ai in aide

**ll** (double L) pronounced tl

**J** like y in yes

**R** is rolled

**hv** pronounced kv

**f** in the middle of a word changes to a v

Accent always on the first syllable



The famous Bæjarins beztu in Reykjavik

means "Thanks for the last time [we met]" and is used when meeting a friend or friends one has spent time with recently.

**Thank you** can be an informal *takk* (thanks). *Takk fyrir mig* (thank you for me) is more formal, and a must when standing up from the table if someone has served a meal.

**Cheers!**: *Skál* (pr: scowl)

**Yes**: *Já* (pr: yow)

**No**: *Nei* (pr:ney)

**Hello**: *Hæ* (pronounced as the English Hi) or *Hallo*.

**Goodbye**: Bless, often said twice.

**Please** is not used as frequently as in English. A request of *viltu* (will you) gives the equivalent of please.

**Excuse me**: *Afsakið* (pr: Av-sock-ith)

**Where is the toilet?** *Hvar er klósettið?*

(pr:Kvar er kloe-set-tith?)

**How much does it/that cost?** *Hvað kostar það?* (pr:Kvath kostar thath?)

**“One charming phrase that doesn't seem to have an equivalent in English is Takk fyrir siðast (pr: tahk fi-rir see-thast). It means “Thanks for the last time [we met]”.**

## Useful Icelandic phrases

One charming phrase that doesn't seem to have an equivalent in English is *Takk fyrir siðast* (pr: tahk fi-rir see-thast). It

Longer words look challenging but are often smaller words strung together, like *Eyjafjallajökull*. Eyja-fjalla-jökull, island-mountain-glacier. Break up the words to make them easier to pronounce.

# Best Side Trips

Iceland is more than the Ring Road. Equally fascinating and easily accessible are these short side trips that go beyond waterfalls and geysers.

## Secret lagoon in Fluðir

Here is where most of Iceland's produce comes from. Some of the greenhouses are open to the public and usually have shops where you can buy strawberries, cucumbers, mushrooms, potatoes, and tomatoes. Fluðir also has an old swimming hole (Gamla Laugin or Old Pool) that is increasingly being referred to as the "secret lagoon". The water's pleasantly warm and the surroundings very natural. This is also a great place to spend the night – there are many charming cottages for rent as well as excellent camping facilities with free WiFi.

## Time travel to Eyrarbakki

Icelanders drive to this South Iceland town to get a glimpse of how life was for Icelanders in the 1800s. This charming seaside village has well-preserved historical houses making you feel that you've stepped back in time. Don't forget to drop by the Þuriðubud Fólk Museum. A completely experiential exhibit, museum attendants often dress in period costume.

## Ghosts of Stokkseyri

Next to Eyrarbakki is the town of



Stokkseyri. Here, culture and art reign supreme. There is a ghost museum, an Icelandic folk tales museum, and a wildlife museum. What Icelanders often seek in Stokkseyri is the langoustine bisque served in Fjöruborðið (The Beach Table). It's said the local fishermen commune with mermaids to get the freshest catch.

## Wicked witches of the west

In Iceland's Westfjords is the town of Holmavík, which you could loosely refer to as Iceland's Salem. The town is famous for Galdrahúsið, a magic and witchcraft museum. You are handed a small booklet as you enter. Exhibits can become a tad academic, but have a go at saying the spells and take a peek at the necropants. Made from the skin of dead men, necropants are said to generate endless amounts of money.

**Fluðir also has an old swimming hole (Gamla Laugin or Old Pool) that is increasingly being referred to as the "secret lagoon."**

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**Stories say that these sorcerers were responsible for the scandalous behavior of women attending mass at Árnes church.**



## Scandals and sorcerers of Trékyllisví

Population 20, this cove has a creepy history and is actually where the witch era craze started in Iceland. You can ask for directions to the cliff called Kistan (The Coffin) where three sorcerers were burned in 1654 by the town sheriff. Stories say that these sorcerers were responsible for the scandalous behavior of women attending mass at Árnes church. A more recent claim to fame: this area (near Gjögur airport) was where most of the Justice League movie was shot.

## Petra's stone and mineral collection

Collected over an 80-year period by an Icelandic woman named Petra, this immersive exhibit is in Stöðvarfjörður, East Iceland. The constant stream of visitors to her private home forced the family to formally open a nature

exhibit. The collection is a labor of love and many who visit have a strong reaction to seeing these wonderful rocks and minerals.

## Herring adventure in Siglufjörður

Just one hour away from Akureyri is this charming fishing village that has enjoyed a resurgence because of an influx of capital from a hometown boy who made it big in the United States. Painted in bright primary colors, the town now has a five-star hotel, a bar, and new shops sitting on top of a boardwalk by the harbor. This created an impetus for other townies to move back, including a fantastic New York pastry chef who now has a coffee shop on the main street. Siglufjörður also has the largest herring museum in Europe, chronicling the herring era in north Iceland. Winters don't slow Siglufjörður down, either. It's a fantastic skiing destination and a haven for winter sports enthusiasts.

## Into the Arctic Circle in Grimsey

They say that in the old days, the priest's bedroom on the island of Grimsey was halfway inside the Arctic Circle. Accessible by air and sea from Akureyri, Grimsey is the only place in Iceland where it's possible to cross into the Arctic Circle. The islanders are said to be partially descended from trolls – easy to believe since they're a hardy lot. Grimsey also has a large population of puffins and other sea birds.

## Road Trip Playlist

Our local experts share their picks for an Iceland soundtrack.

**Emilíana Torrini – Jungle Drum**

**Of Monsters and Men – Little Talks**

**Sigur Rós – Hoppíolla**

**For a Minor Reflection – Dansi Dans**

**Seabear – I Sing / Swim**

**FM Belfast – Vertigo**

**Sóley – I'll Drown**

**Of Monsters and Men – Dirty Paws**

**Svavar Knutur – Wanderlust**

**Sigur Rós – All Alright**

# Responsible Tourism

The nature here is like nothing else, and as more admirers flock to Iceland's shores, it's vitally important to travel responsibly, helping to protect and preserve the unique environment we're all here to enjoy.

There are a number of ways to help lower your impact – including taking the [Iceland Tourism Board's Icelandic Pledge](#).

## Don't venture off-Road

It might be tempting to blast off into the unknown, but always stick to roads and tracks. If you do wander off, fragile ecosystems that take centuries to recover could be destroyed in your wake. Others might follow in your footsteps as well, causing even more damage.

## Use public bathrooms whenever possible

This might sound obvious, but it's a serious problem in Iceland. Don't answer the call of nature, in nature. Even though a lot of the country seems untamed, Iceland has indeed tamed the art of public bathrooms.

## Respect nature

Accept that the Icelandic nature is in charge here. A lot of it isn't cordoned off behind fences or rails, so stay

aware of what you're doing at all times. Stick to designated paths and remember, a photo isn't worth dying for.

## Avoid the crowds

Though Iceland is undoubtedly popular, there are still many locations that aren't yet on the tourist radar. Instead of the Golden Circle, opt instead for the sights of the Diamond Circle in the north, landscapes shaped over millennia by violent eruptions. Worthwhile stops here include the mysterious Hljóðaklettar rock formations, beautiful Lake Mývatn, and mighty Dettifoss.

Want to enjoy Iceland's hot springs? Escape the hordes at the Blue Lagoon and head to Laugarvatn Fontana Geothermal Spa, located within the Golden Circle area. The very brave can run down to the nearby lake and jump in the freezing water before rushing back to the warmth of the pools.

Avid hikers might be eyeing the popular Laugavegur Trail, but if you prefer to enjoy nature in solitude, head to the protected Hornstrandir nature reserve in the Westfjords. Hikers are rewarded with an isolated region full of spectacular mountains, deep fjords, waterfalls tumbling into the ocean, and the best chance to spot the elusive arctic fox.

Lastly, to avoid the crowds at Jökulsárlón, there is a smaller glacier lagoon just before it called Fjallsarlon which sees far less traffic, allowing you to really ponder life as you listen to the soft, deep cracking of the glaciers.

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**Don't answer the call of nature, in nature. Even though a lot of the country seems untamed, Iceland has indeed tamed the art of public bathrooms.**

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# Visa Information

## Just visiting

Iceland is a signatory of the Schengen agreement, so if you already have a visa for the Schengen region or are a resident/citizen of Schengen's visa exception countries, it is not necessary to get one. You can stay for 90 days without a visa. However, passports must be valid for three months over the date of departure from Iceland. Get the full list of countries whose citizens don't need a visa here: <http://utl.is/index.php/en/who-does-not-need-a-visa>.

If your country is not on the list, a visa is necessary. Here is a checklist of requirements: <http://utl.is/index.php/en/application-basic-requirement>. Except for Beijing and Moscow, Icelandic embassies do not accept visa applications.

## Looking to stay

Getting into the country with intentions of staying and working can be difficult, depending on your answer to these questions:

- Are you a citizen or a permanent resident of an EU or EEA country?
- Do you have a specialized skill that an Icelander or EU/EEA citizen does not have?

A "YES" means you can move to Iceland without too much trouble. If you answered "NO" to both, there is a longer road ahead.

There are several categories of



residence permits, including:

**Au pair:** Valid for one year only and not renewable or convertible to another residence permit.

**Family reunification:** Applies to the spouse, cohabiting partner, parent over the age of 67, parent of a minor in Iceland, or minor with a parent in Iceland. The closest family member must be an Icelandic or Scandinavian citizen, or a foreign citizen with a permanent residence permit in Iceland.

**Work-based:** Given to those who are coming to Iceland based on a shortage of workers, those who are athletes of exceptional talent, or are qualified professionals with contracts. This type hinges on employer sponsorship.

**Students:** Applies to those who already have an acceptance letter from an accredited Icelandic university, an exchange student, or someone who is doing an internship as part of his/her studies.

**Volunteers:** Those with proven relationships with charities and non-government organizations may apply for this permit.

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Getting into the country with intentions of staying and working can be difficult.

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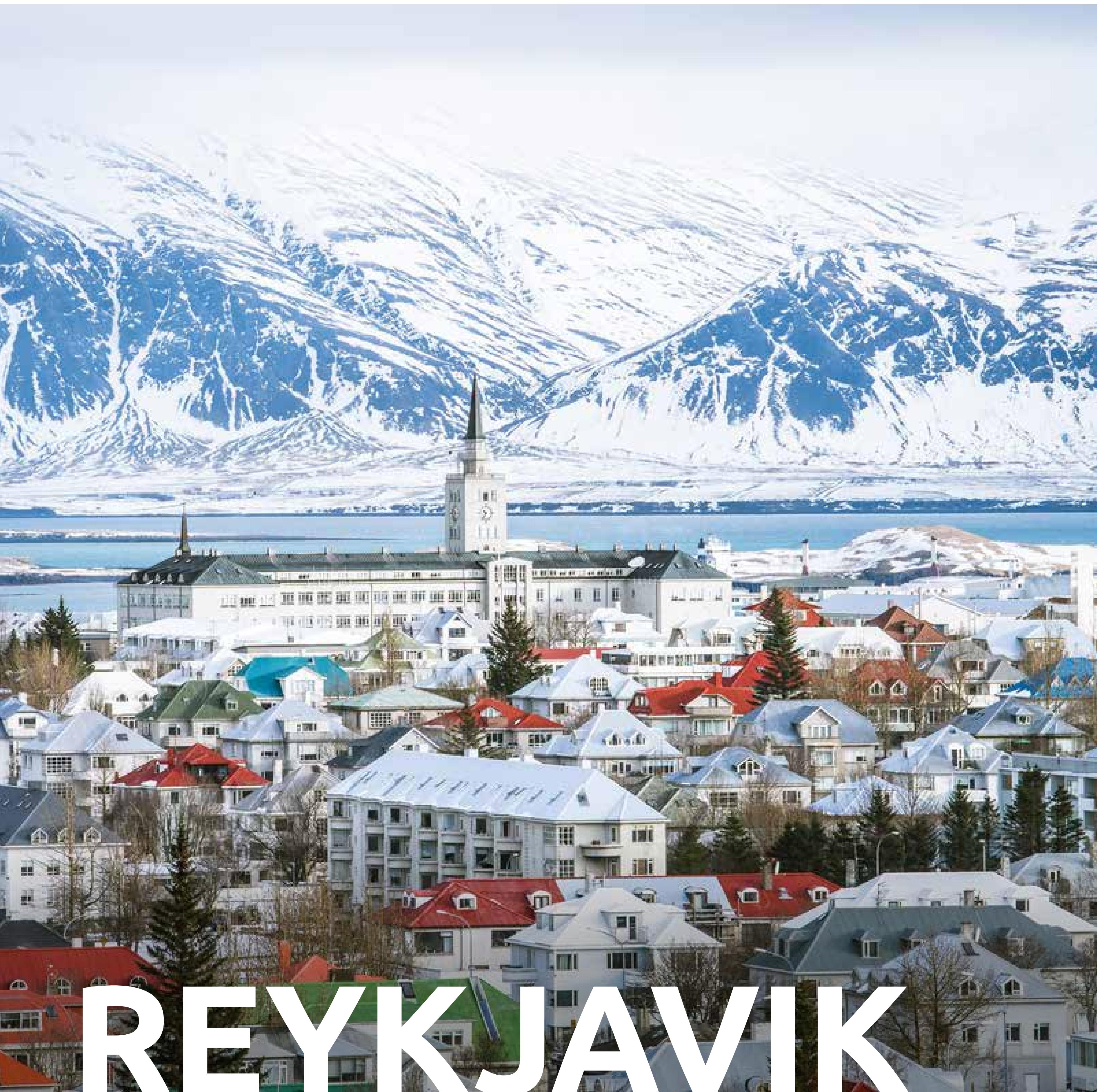
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# REYKJAVIK and Surrounds

**S**mall in size but large in personality, Reykjavik packs a plethora of interesting sights, renowned restaurants, and hopping nightspots into a few walkable districts. And you don't need to go far from town to experience Iceland's natural wonders, from geysers and hot springs to glaciers and waterfalls.

# Reykjavik Must See & Do

The world's northernmost capital, Reykjavik, is a colorful and bustling waterfront city. Compact and walkable, it nonetheless warrants two to three days of exploration to really get under its skin and uncover its culture – rich, creative, friendly, and effortlessly cool.

## 101

The 101 district is the beating heart of Reykjavik, where an exciting mesh of sights, culture, and cuisine come together to create one of the coolest capital cities in the world. Laugavegur is the main drag, turning into Bankastræti and eventually Austurstræti, where you'll find the old town and seat of government. Join one of the free walking tours to learn about the history of this remarkable city.



Downtown Reykjavik

## Where to stay

Hostels, hotels and guesthouses abound throughout the city, but there's nowhere cooler than Kex, a biscuit factory turned hostel/bar/eatery. Enjoy the beautifully-designed interior, live music, great food, and an even better location. Prices for a bed in a dorm room start at kr. 2,100 (US \$20) a night.

## Where to eat

For a delicious and hearty breakfast, Bergsson Mathús in the old town is loaded with charm. No trip to Reykjavik is complete without trying a hot dog from Bæjarins Beztu Pylsur, and dinner at the elegant Matur og Drykkur will be an experience you'll never forget – especially if you order the cod's head.

## Where to shop

To acquire an authentic Icelandic lopapeysa, the Handknitting

“ ”

**No trip to Reykjavik is complete without trying a hot dog from Bæjarins Beztu Pylsur.**

## REYKJAVIK AND SURROUNDS



Association of Iceland has a store at Skólavörðustígur 19, and Húrra on Hverfisgata is where you can pick up local Reykjavik fashion. 66 North and Cintamani are both very popular brands when it comes to buying beanies, gloves, or heavy winter jackets, and both have locations along Laugavegur.

**What to see**

The magnificent church Hallgrímskirkja lies at the top of Skólavörðustígur – explore the stark interior before taking the lift to the top for the view over the city (kr. 900 or US \$9). For a different perspective, head up to the observation deck of the Perlan, the former geothermal plant-turned-museum dedicated to the natural wonders of Iceland (kr. 490, around US \$4.50).

Perched on the edge of the water on the bay is the glittering Harpa Concert Hall, reflecting all kinds of light from inside and out. A short stroll further along the harbour is the wonderfully modern sculpture Sólfarið, ode to the sun.

**105**

Cross over the threshold of Hlemmur, and you've entered 105. This spacious neighborhood might seem quiet and residential on the outside, but there are a few spots worth checking out. First, head into Hlemmur Mathöll, a newly-developed food hall in the old Hlemmur Bus Station. Grab some coffee around the corner at Reykjavik Roasters before heading to the nearby Klambratún Park, where on a clear day you can join in on a round of Frisbee golf with the locals.

**107**

107, also referred to as Vesturbær, is the quiet seaside neighborhood west of downtown, enjoying life at a more relaxed pace. Kaffihús Vesturbæjar makes the trip to this part of town worth it alone – a coastal cottage of a café that serves up amazing coffee and food without a hint of pretentiousness.

**Festivals**

As November and the winter roll in, so too does Iceland Airwaves, transforming the whole city into one big music and arts festival for a week as artists pour in from around the world. If you don't have (or don't want to buy) a ticket, grab a guide and hunt down the off-venue gigs, where you can catch free performances from artists attending the festival.

Culture Night in August is an exciting mix of Viking battles, live music, art exhibits, and food offerings, topped off with a mighty fireworks display.

“ ”

**As November and the winter roll in, so too does Iceland Airwaves, transforming the whole city into one big music and arts festival**

**Getting Around**

Downtown Reykjavik is easily walkable, but for service to the outer suburbs hop on a Straeto bus. Tickets are kr. 440 (around US \$4), giving you unlimited transfers within 1.25 hours.

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# Nightlife

Completely at odds with its size, Reykjavik's nightlife has achieved legendary status amongst the European capitals. Skál!

## **Surviving the *djamm* (party)**

Going out on the town in Reykjavik is expensive. Take advantage of the happy hours first – once they're over, you'll be left with wistful memories of the time when beer cost merely a small fortune. But it's also important to pace yourself, because nights in Iceland start late – locals don't even think about leaving their houses until 1am or after.

## **The best happy hours**

The bar Bravó has one of the best happy hours in the city, stretching a lengthy nine hours from 11am until 8pm. Gently-lit tables and colorful cushions give this place a loveable charm, serving up beers for around kr. 725 (US \$7). Another good option is the suave bar at the Kex Hostel, frequented by locals and travelers alike – from 3pm to 7pm, beer and wine is kr. 620 (US \$6).

## **Craft beers and cocktails**

Beer fanatics should head to the cozy basement that is Micro Bar, renowned for its relaxed atmosphere and wide selection of Icelandic craft brews. If you fancy a cocktail, check out Pablo Discobar. You'd be forgiven for thinking you'd stumbled into a tropical disco, with jungle-themed walls and



a ceiling made of mirrors helping to distract from the cold weather outside.

## **Icelandic institutions**

Pay homage to Reykjavik by jamming yourself in to Kaffibarinn, one of the city's old guard bars, with its iconic London tube sign in front. Afterwards, head to Prikið, more of a crowded house party than a bar. Its two floors are perfect for frantic dancing and meeting the locals, who will no doubt encourage you to sample the "Icelandic Black Death," also known as Brennivín.

## **Dance the night away**

Though the dance floor at the Húrra seems endless, it does get busy around 2am with a young, enthusiastic crowd. Afterwards, head next door to Paloma, the best spot to dance till dawn.

## **Late night bites**

Fortify yourself for the walk home with a stop at Nonnabiti. Possibly the final rite of passage before you can safely call yourself a Reykvíkingur, the tasty subs here always help to stabilize even the most beer-befuddled individual.

“ ”

Beer fanatics should head to the cozy basement that is Micro Bar, renowned for its relaxed atmosphere and wide selection of Icelandic craft brews.

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# Day Trips

For those staying in Reykjavik who don't have the time to explore the entire country, there are a number of day trips that reveal Iceland's dramatic and elemental core. Here are a few of the best.

## The Golden Circle

The famed Golden Circle circuit's first stop is Þingvellir National Park, location of the first democratic parliament in the world, and also where you can witness two tectonic plates slowly ripping apart. Next up is the erupting Strokkur at Geysir, shooting forth a plume of water over 100ft (30m) into the air every three to four minutes. Further on is Gullfoss, Iceland's most famous waterfall that thunders down the River Hvítá, glaciers glittering on the distant horizon.

To go beyond these three, take a car and visit some of the little-known but no less exciting sights around this area. Nearby to Gullfoss is the small



Gullfoss



Strokkur

James Taylor

waterfall Faxi, and you can retrace your steps back from Geysir to find Bruarfoss, a waterfall with stunningly blue water. Also near to here is Efstidalur, a family-run farm with their very own ice cream store, or take route 35 down south to come across Kerið, a volcanic crater filled at the bottom with a milky blue water.

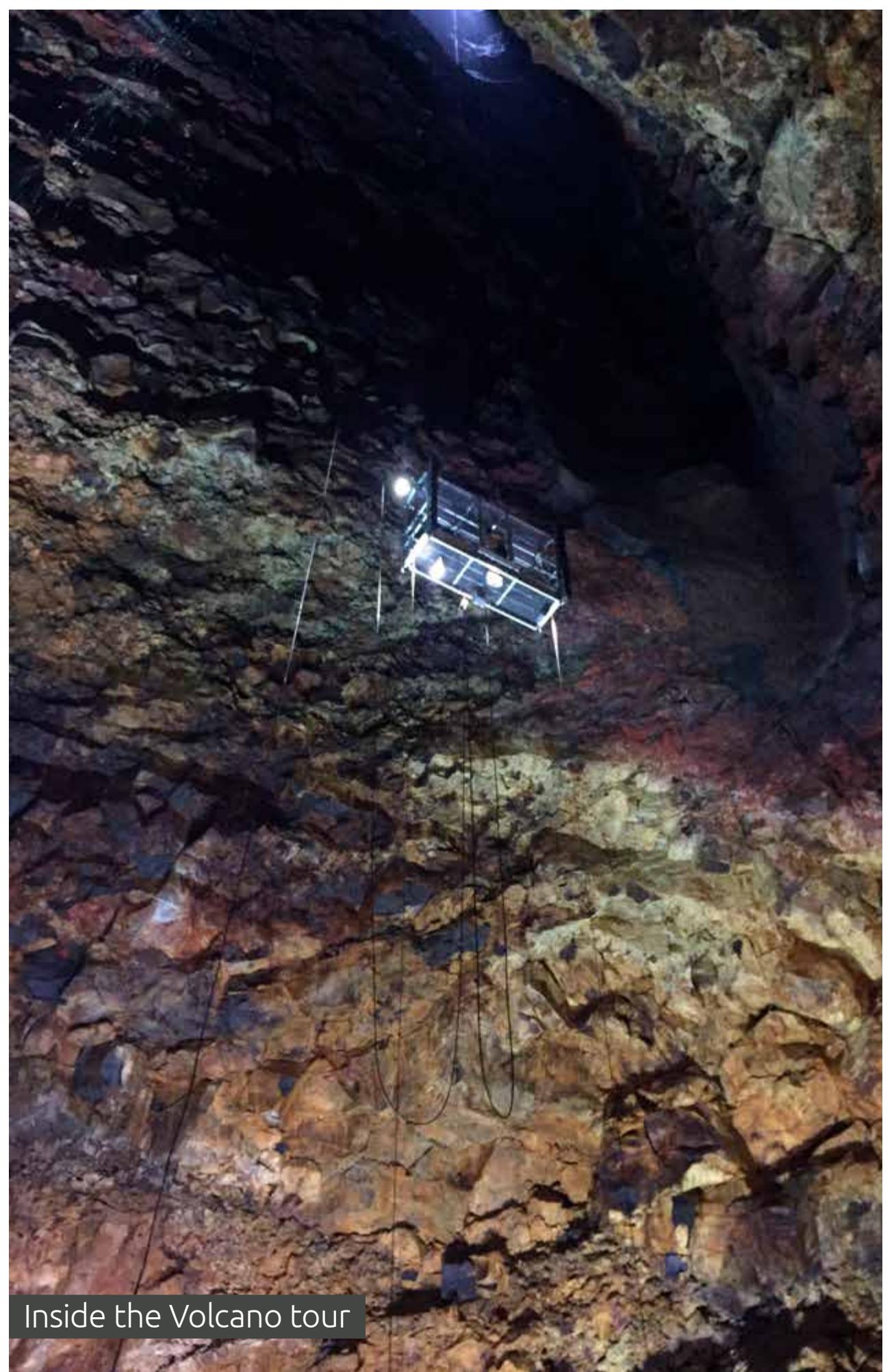
## Reykjanes Peninsula

There are many marvelous sights hidden within the southwestern tip of Iceland, which is overlooked by most travelers. Drive back towards the airport and take road 42 leading towards Kleifarvatn Lake, surrounded by contorted cliffs of lava that hide countless walking trails. Further south is Krýsuvík, a steaming geothermal area, and Grænavatn, a volcanic crater filled with a milky green water thanks to a cocktail of minerals within.

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**There are many marvelous sights hidden within the southwestern tip of Iceland, which is overlooked by most travelers.**

## REYKJAVIK AND SURROUNDS



Closer to the coast is yet another geothermal area, Gunnuhver, and lonely lighthouses are strung along the cliffs that teem with bird life.

### Day hikes

The Mount Esja trail is a Reykjavik hiking rite of passage, and from the top on a good day the resulting vista spans Reykjavik and the whole of the surrounding capital area. Take bus number 15 from Hlemmur bus station, transferring onto bus number 57 in Mosfellsbær. For a more adventurous hike, at the bottom of Hvalfjörður just north of Reykjavik lies the challenging trail leading towards Glymur, one of Iceland's tallest waterfalls.

### Reykjadalur hot springs

Another popular day trip from Reykjavik is the hike towards Reykjadalur hot spring river. Only 45

minutes' drive from Reykjavik, it's easily accessed by either a self-tour or by joining a guided tour – horse-riding tours are available starting at kr. 14,470 (US \$140). If on a self-tour, make use of the long days and either wake up early or go in the evening to avoid the throngs of people that you'll find soaking there during the day.

Don't forget to pick up a loaf of rugbrauð at the bakery beside the Bonus supermarket in the nearby town of Hveragerði. Rugbrauð is traditionally baked for 24 hours in steaming geothermal fields, of which there are plenty in the area. Also, in the same building (between the bakery and supermarket) is a large fissure on the floor that appeared during an earthquake in 2003. It's been covered over with glass and strategically lighted.

### Tours to join

Some attractions in Iceland lie out of reach without the help of a tour or guide. For an experience that you can have nowhere else in the world, join the "Inside the Volcano Tour" and delve into the dormant volcano Þríhnúkagígur to explore its magma chamber.

For your safety, any activities involving the mighty glaciers also must be undertaken on a tour. Snowmobiling, ice climbing, and glacier hikes on either Sólheimajökull or Langjökull are an amazing and unforgettable experience to have and easily accessed in a day from Reykjavik on a tour.

**“”**

For an experience that you can have nowhere else in the world, join the "Inside the Volcano Tour".

### Avoiding Natural Hazards in Iceland

Iceland's famous geysers and waterfalls are spectacular, but they can also be dangerous. In geothermal areas, be sure to stick to signed and marked paths. Off the path, the ground underfoot can be thin and next thing you know, you're waist deep in scalding hot water. Waterfalls are beautiful to behold in their natural glory, with no railings or ropes cordoning off the precipitous heights. But the rocks are sharp and the currents quick, so keep a safe distance from the edge.

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For many who think of traveling here, Iceland means the cheerful streets of Reykjavik and the geysers and waterfalls of the Golden Circle. But, those who venture further will find ample rewards: black sand beaches in the south, fascinating lava tubes in the west, the secluded Westfjords cliffs, the striking volcanic landscapes of the Diamond Circle, the snug fishing towns of the eastern fjords, and the mighty glaciers, dazzling ice caves, and iceberg-strewn lagoons of Vatnajökull National Park.

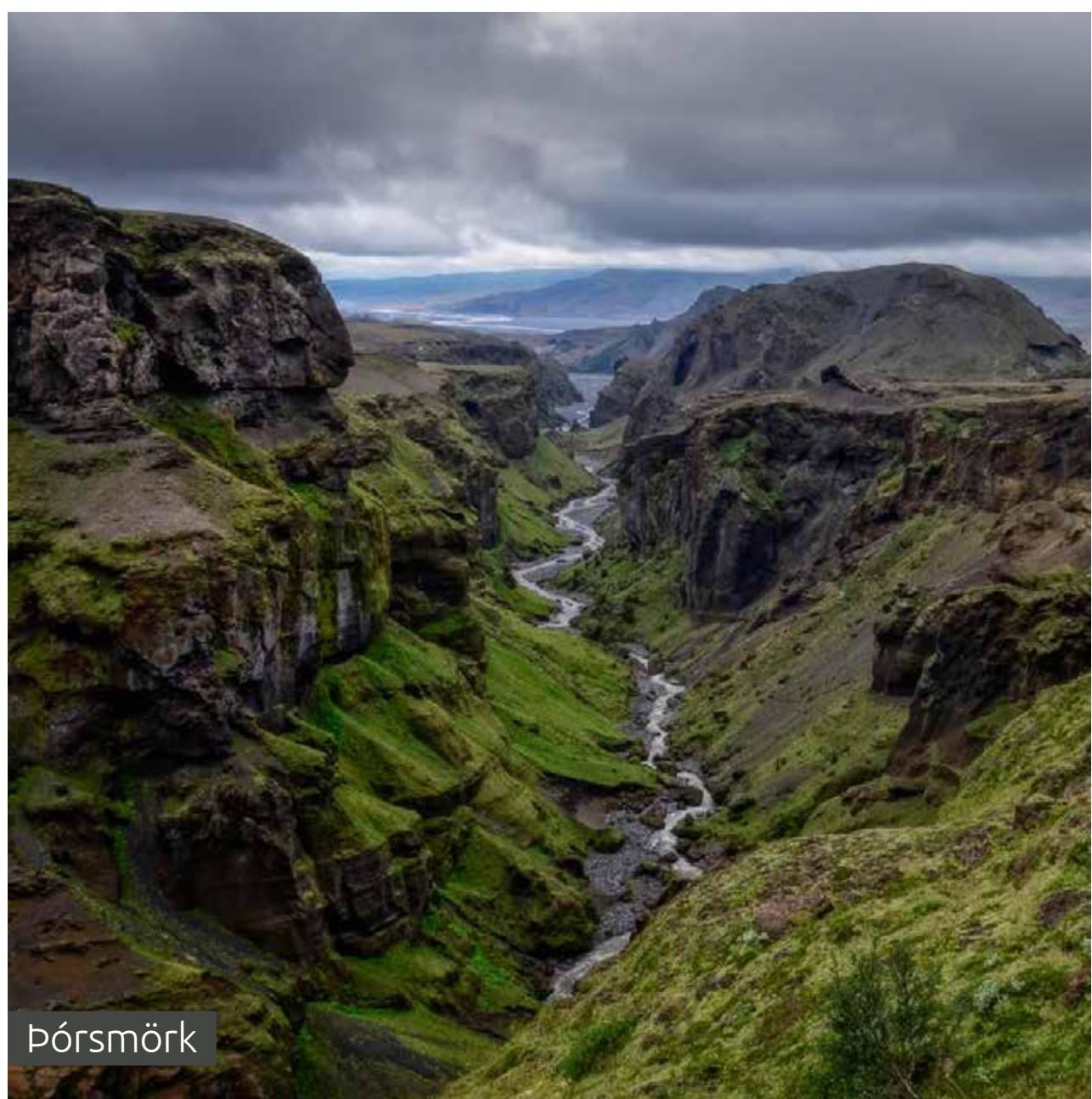
# South Iceland

South Iceland contains many of the storied landscapes that visitors here ache to see, filled with craggy peaks, thunderous waterfalls, and brooding but beautiful black sand beaches. This makes it one of the more crowded corners of the country, but stay awhile and you'll discover your own little quiet corner.

## Towns of the South

Hveragerði is well known for its hike to Reykjadalur hot spring river, but there's more to this unlikely town. Horse riding tours of the area's lava fields, lush heaths, and woodlands are available starting from kr. 8,000 (US \$76), and bike tours from kr. 16,900 (US \$160).

Brightly-lit greenhouses surround the humble country town of Flúðir, an agricultural oasis in the middle of the Golden Circle region. The town is



Pórsmörk



Reynisfjara Beach

home to the recently-renovated Secret Lagoon hot spring.

## Þjórsárdalur

East of Flúðir lies the unexplored valley of Þjórsárdalur. Seek out the waterfall Hjálparfoss, two waterfalls flowing strongly together down a small cliff. At Stöng, you can explore the dilapidated ruins of an old Viking farm, out the back of which is a short trail leading to the valley Gján where more lovely waterfalls await. Afterwards, head to Þjóðveldisbærinn, a reconstructed Viking farm (kr. 1,030 or US \$10), or opt for the 6mi (10km) hike to Háifoss.

## Pórsmörk

For those with a 4x4, a challenging F-Road (mountain road) leads to Pórsmörk, a beautiful nature reserve nestled between glaciers. Great hiking awaits here in this valley named after

“ ”

**Seljalandsfoss is a beautiful fall with a path that lets you go behind the curtain of water.**



Thor, the Viking God of Thunder, but getting here involves dangerous river crossings. For the inexperienced, it's probably best to get the bus which leaves from Reykjavik and connects at small towns along the way – Hella is the most convenient (kr. 4,600 or US \$48).

## Waterfalls

Spilling over the precipice of the highlands are a number of waterfalls, tumbling down onto the southern plains before draining out to the sea. Seljalandsfoss is up first, a beautiful fall with a path that lets you go behind the curtain of water. Just a five-minute walk to the north is Gljúrafoss, a hidden cataract tucked into the crevice of a cliff – cross a small stream into the narrow canyon to see it. Further south, Skógarfoss is a much larger waterfall, flowing down in a perfect, pearly sheet

before crashing into the river below. Also not to be missed here in the little settlement of Skógar is the Folk Museum.

## The Westman Islands

Vestmannaeyjar is an archipelago made up of 15 volcanic islands, sitting just off of the south coast of the country. Heimaey is the only inhabited isle, renowned for its giant population of Atlantic puffins in the summer. The ferry leaves from Landeyjahöfn to sail staunchly in between the towering cliffs that flank the town's harbour. Eldheimar Museum focuses on the 1973 volcanic eruption that forced the island to evacuate (kr. 2,270 or US \$22).

## Vík

Vík is no doubt one of the prettiest towns in Iceland. Set against a formidable cliff face along the coast

## GREATER ICELAND

of black sand, the small town of 318 is a great place to stop and have a poke around. Off shore lies Reynisdrangar, three basalt stacks that legend says are trolls turned to stone by the breaking of dawn.

Just before you reach the hamlet, stop by at Dyrhólaey Peninsula, offering stunning views out over black sand beaches and towards the glaciers dominating the interior. Nearby, Reynisfjara is the most popular of black sand beaches thanks to the stack of volcanic basalt columns at one end. (The waves are very dangerous at these beaches – be sure to heed the warning signs.)

## East towards Vatnajökull

East of Vík, the horizon will soon fill with Europe's largest glacier Vatnajökull, and many might be tempted to charge on through to reach it. But road 206 off of the main route holds a surprising beauty – Fjaðrárgljúfur canyon. Carved out by an ancient glacial river, this serpentine canyon displays vibrant contrasts of greens and browns, with a river



running through the bottom.

Nearby is the last settlement of any note that you'll see for a while, the tongue-twisting Kirkjubæjarklaustur. West of town you'll see the vast Eldhraun lava field and the remains of farms destroyed in the 18th century eruption of Laki, one of the largest and most devastating in recorded history. It's said that when the lava neared the town, the church pastor delivered what became known as the "Fire Sermon," and the lava came to a halt.

## Jökulsárlón Glacier Lagoon

A stunning glacial lake filled with floating icebergs, Jökulsárlón is understandably famous – visitors can paddle a kayak among the bergs or explore the lagoon by boat. It can get crowded, though. For a more serene experience, stop instead at Fjallsárlón, the smaller lagoon just before it.



**“Carved out by an ancient glacial river, this serpentine canyon displays vibrant contrasts of greens and browns, with a river running through the bottom.”**

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# West Iceland

Western Iceland and Snæfellsness Peninsula are steeped in Viking history and sagas. Come here to learn all about these heroic tales, or explore the rugged lava fields and majestic glaciers that inspired them.

## Hvalfjöður

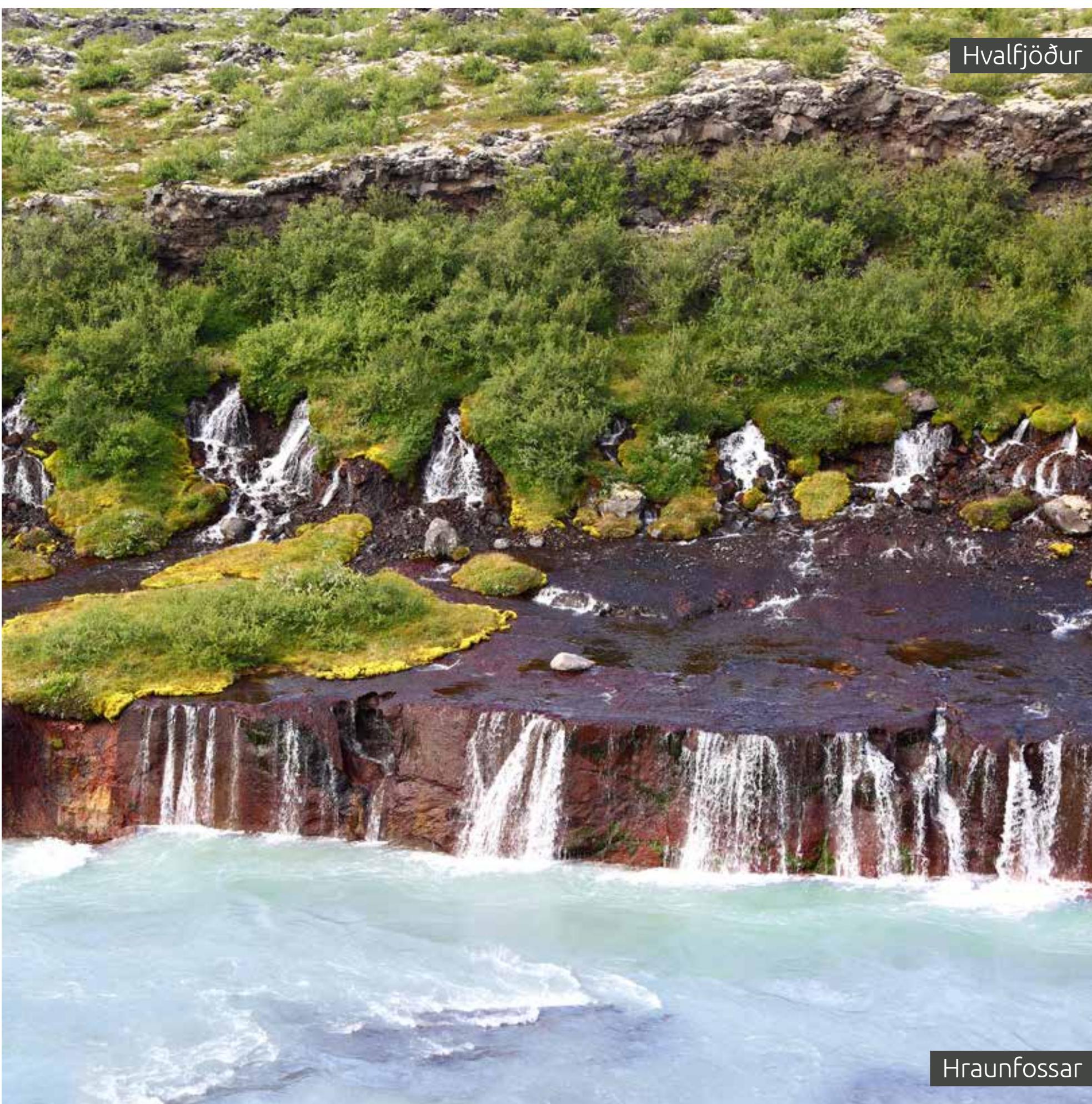
With the new tunnel under the fjord diverting local traffic, Hvalfjörður is now off the beaten track – and Glymur, Iceland's second-highest waterfall, is at the east end of the fjord. You're in Iceland to see waterfalls, right? It's worth the trek if you have four hours to do the hike. The deserted WW II British military base and the abandoned whaling station offer excellent photo opportunities.

## Borganes

The highlight of this picturesque town is the Settlement Center, a museum with fascinating exhibits about Iceland's first settlers.

## Reykholtsdalur

Home to Iceland's most famous medieval poet, Snorri Sturluson, Reykholt is a major center of Norse mythology. Dive into the history at the Snorrastofa Cultural and Medieval Center, or if that's not your thing, check out the nearby hot springs of Deildartunguhver and the waterfalls



Hraunfossar

**“The highlight of Borganes is the Settlement Center, a museum with fascinating exhibits about Iceland’s first settlers.”**

of Barnafoss and Hraunfoss (which streams straight from a lava-tube river). Or take a guided tour of Viðgelmir, the largest cave in Iceland, which lies to the east.

## Visit a family farm

Farmers in Iceland have to work in harmony with the delicate landscape, and they put the local geothermal energy to good use. Stop in to buy fresh berries and vegetables from Sólbyrgi in Kleppjárnsreykir greenhouse village, heated by thermal waters.

## Gerðuberg

As Hwy 54 turns west, look for signs to this impressive wall of cliffs with striking geometric basalt columns.

## South Snæfellsnes Peninsula

Búðir, Arnarstapi, and Hellnar offer

## GREATER ICELAND

places to stay the night. Walk the paths through lava fields and along sea cliffs while puffins fly above.

**Snæfellsjökull National Park**

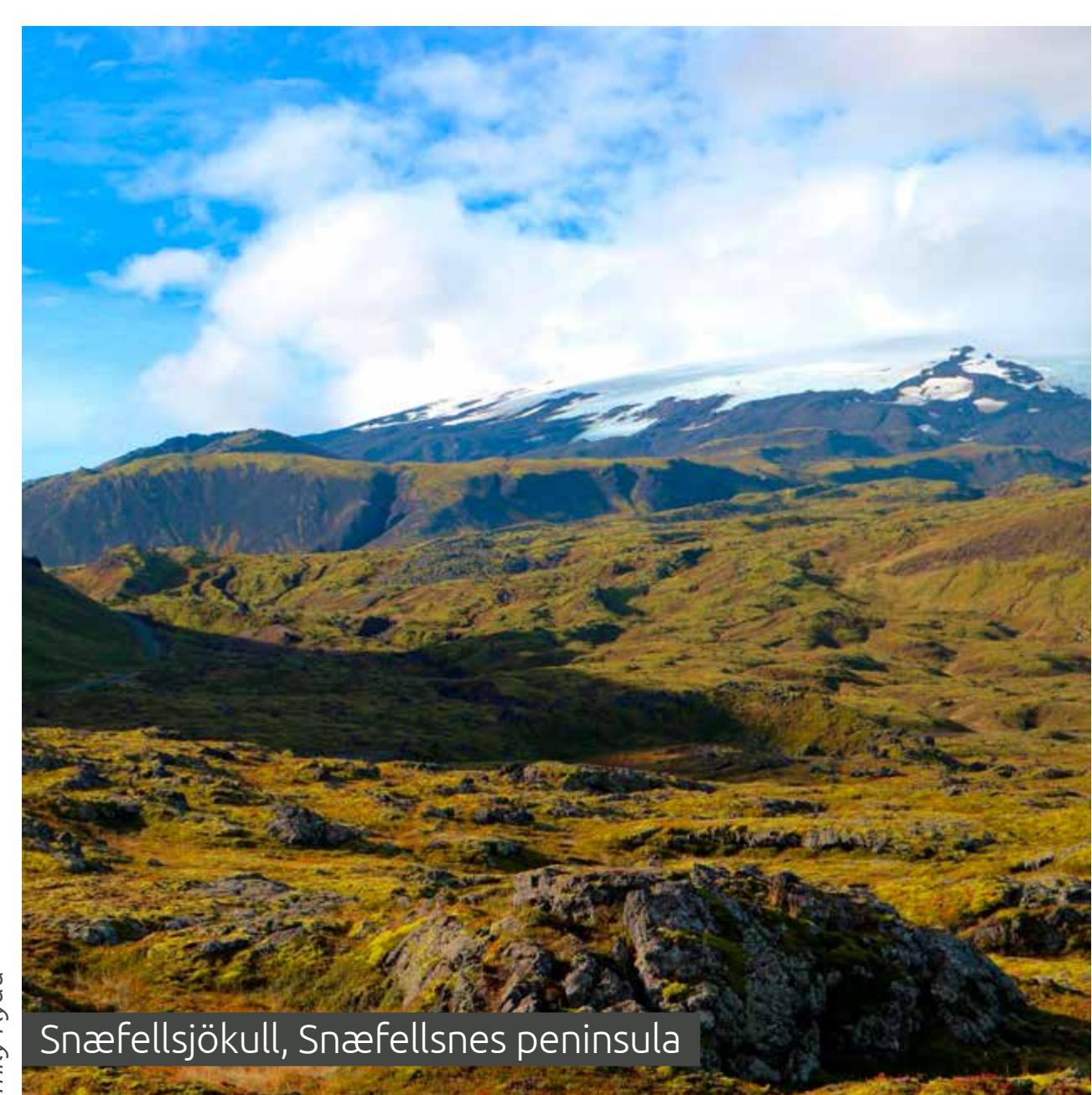
Malarrif Visitors' Center offers free, guided hiking tours from park rangers with information about the area's history, geology, and biology. The lava-tube cave tour at Vatnshellir is worth the price of admission – there's also an abundance of organized glacial adventures and hiking paths throughout the park.

**Kirkjufoss**

This waterfall, with iconic, cone-shaped Kirkjufell just beyond, is one of the most photographed landmarks in Iceland. If your heart's set on taking a snap, you'll find it between the towns of Ólafsvík and Grundarfjöður.

**Sample some shark**

Far more off the beaten path is Bjarnarhöfn, a small family business on the way to Stykkishólmur. Their Shark Museum tells of generations of shark fishing and processing – the



**“This small scenic village is known for its collection of old Danish trading houses, as well as its excellent Volcano Museum.”**

visit includes tastings of dried and fermented shark, an experience not to be missed.

**Berserkjahraun**

Opposite Hwy 54 from Bjarnarhöfn, a dirt road takes you through the “Lava Field of the Berserkers,” a moss-covered fairyland of lava formations. The name comes from an Icelandic saga about fierce warriors (berserkers) from Sweden who met their untimely end here.

**Stykkishólmur**

This small scenic village is known for its collection of old Danish trading houses, as well as its excellent Volcano Museum. Watch their film about the 2010 eruption of Eyjafjallajökull to comprehend the natural forces that created everything you've been observing since arriving in Iceland.

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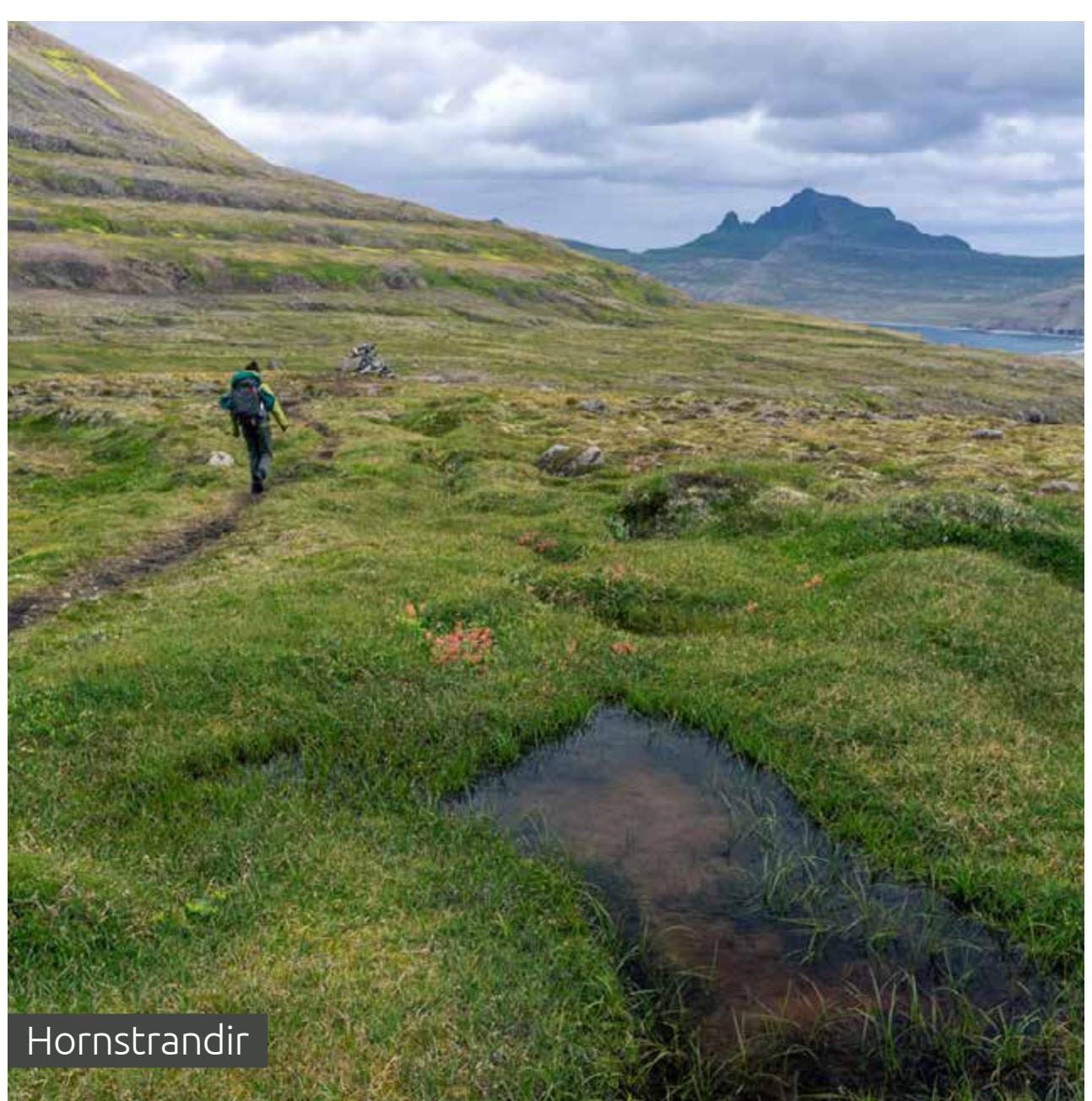
## GREATER ICELAND

# Northwest Iceland

Probably Iceland's least explored region, the northwest of the country is split into two completely different areas – the intimidating fjords and table-topped mountains of the Westfjords, and to the east, gentle hills and meadows with a scattering of lonely farmhouses.

## Flatey Island

Travelling across Breiðafjörður to the Westfjords via the Baldur ferry (leaving twice a day from Stykkishólmur, kr. 8,780 or US\$85 for a person and car) will give you the opportunity for a brief stopover on Flatey Island. Teeming with bird life and dotted with colorful houses, the island is a charming place to while away a few hours. Note that in the off-season, the ferry only operates once a day.



Hornstrandir



Látrabjarg cliffs

## The Westfjords

The dramatic scenes awaiting in the Westfjords will leave you in silent awe. Towering table-topped mountains dominate small fishing villages strung along windswept coasts, and deep valleys cut into the mountains, waterfalls spilling down on all sides to stream towards the ocean. Only six percent of all tourists visit the area, so come here to find the adventure and isolation that you've been craving.

Ísafjörður is the capital of the region, and acts as a great base for booking any outdoor activities. Skiing, horse riding, whale watching, bike tours, and kayaking are all available here.

## Látrabjarg

At the end of one of those lawless dirt roads that are so common in the Westfjords lies one of Iceland's

**“At the end of one of those lawless dirt roads that are so common in the Westfjords lies one of Iceland's biggest and most striking attractions – the Látrabjarg cliffs.”**

## GREATER ICELAND

biggest and most striking attractions – the Látrabjarg cliffs. Stretching for 9mi (14km) along the south western tip of the Westfjords, this is Iceland's easternmost point and the best spot for bird watching in Europe.

### Dynjandi

Considered the crown jewel of the Westfjords, Dynjandi is a series of waterfalls crashing over a set of cliffs down into the fjord. An easy track leads up to the largest and most impressive of the falls, Fjallfoss, which flows over a series of seven cliffs, growing in size as it gets closer to the bottom.

### Hornstrandir

The last untouched wilderness in Iceland, Hornstrandir is perhaps the most scenic of places in the country. Inhabited up until 1950 and now protected, it has become a haven for hikers and the arctic fox. Mountainous passes give way to sandy fjords, cliffs swarming with birds, and countless waterfalls tumbling to the sea. There are no services available here, so go prepared or take a tour. The region is accessed via ferry from Ísafjörður – prices start from kr. 10,020 (US\$97).

### Vatnsnes Peninsula

The squat peninsula of Vatnsnes makes a ruggedly-beautiful detour and is a great place to watch seals rollicking along the coast. The western side of the peninsula offers amazing views towards the coastline of Hornstrandir, while in the ocean on the eastern



Dynjandi waterfall

side lies the large, brooding rock formation Hvitserkur – a troll turned to stone by the breaking dawn as he tried to destroy a monastery at Þingeyrar (where a striking stone church now stands instead).

### Skagafjörður

Spend a bit of time in this quiet fjord to discover rural Iceland at its best. The glacial rivers running out towards Skagafjörður provide some of the best white-water rafting in the country – tours are available from kr. 24,390 (US\$236). At the end of road 748, a ferry leaves for Drangey Island, a volcanic outcrop teeming with seabirds (fares from kr. 12,190 or US\$118). On the eastern coast of the fjord at Hofsós, a magnificent swimming pool sits just above the shores, offering an amazing view over the whole fjord.

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**Considered the crown jewel of the Westfjords, Dynjandi is a series of waterfalls crashing over a set of cliffs down into the fjord.**

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# North Iceland

Just short of the Arctic Circle, Iceland's northern towns still exude an easygoing, Scandinavian country lifestyle. Farms are remote but because survival depends on help from neighbors, everyone is connected even over hundreds of miles.

## Lake Myvatn Geothermal Baths

Set alongside a volcanic lake and surrounded by magnificent scenery, these springs are definitely natural and less commercialized than the famed Blue Lagoon.

## Krafla Lava Fields

Steam vents and lava formation all around give this place a surreal, otherworldly feel.

Be sure to follow the signs – going off the path might bring you to areas that are too hot to walk on.



## Húsavík

Famous for its whale-watching expeditions, there's more to the town than that. Húsavík is also where Apollo astronauts trained. Peek into the Exploration Museum, an exhibit of man's history as explorers as well as artifacts from the astronaut training center.

## Hljóðaklettar

Known as the Singing Cliffs, these basalt rock formations were twisted into strange shapes when glacial river floods washed away portions of volcanic craters, creating eerie sounds as the wind passes through. Do not attempt to climb the dangerous formations without proper equipment – fatal accidents have occurred.

## Ásbyrgi Canyon

According to legend, this horseshoe-

**“Steam vents and lava formation all around give this place a surreal, otherworldly feel.”**

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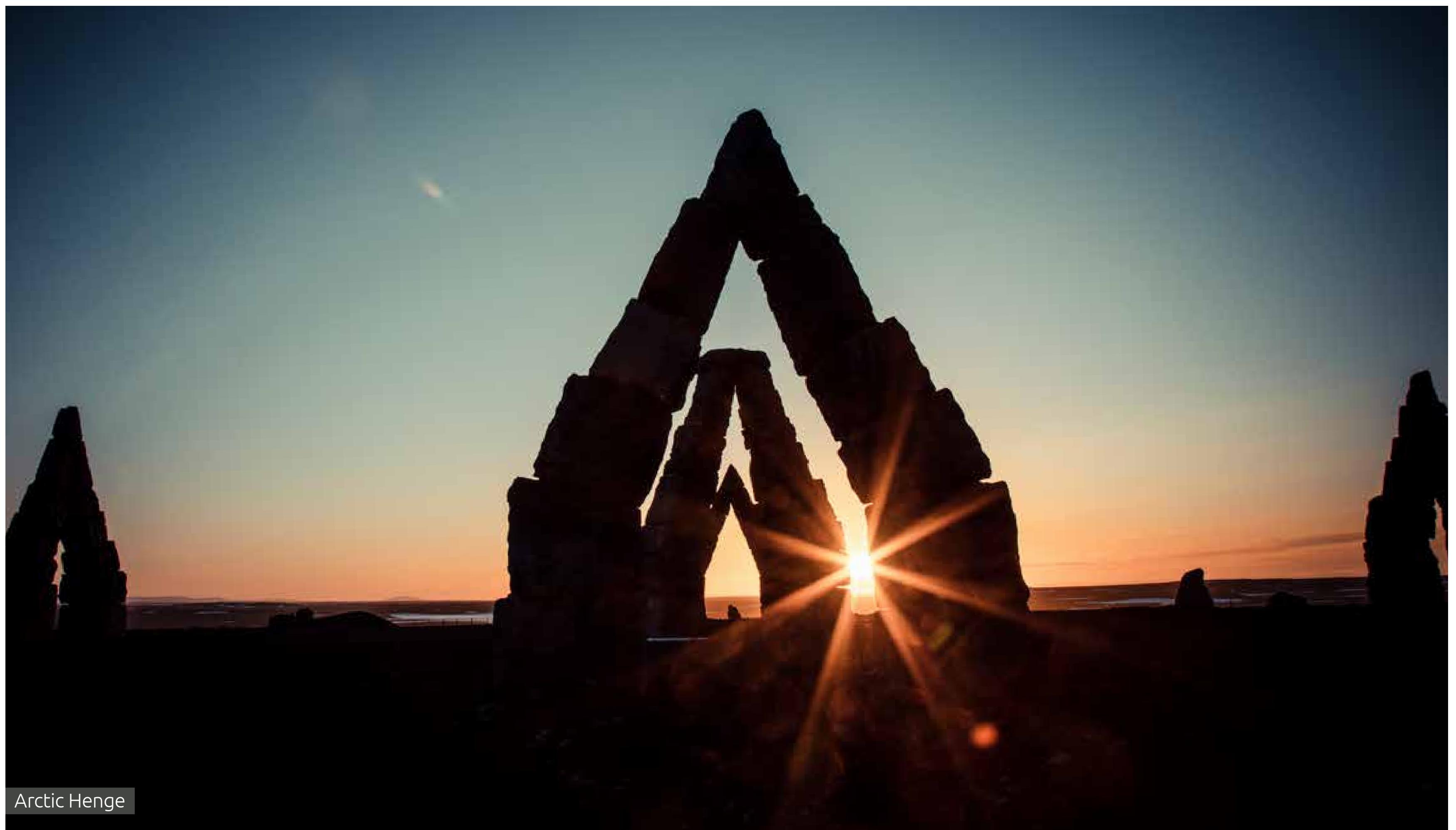
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shaped canyon was formed when the Norse god Odin's eight-legged horse, Sleipnir, put down his hoof. Ásbyrgi is a popular camping and hiking area during summers. The warmest temperatures in Iceland have been recorded here.

## Arctic Fox Prairie & Viking Burial Mound

Melrakkaslétta (Arctic Fox prairie),



which includes Raufarhöfn and Kópasker, is often forgotten. As it's hard to give exact directions, it's much better to ask your local host once there. There is nothing spectacular or extraordinary in the prairie – what is special is the absolute absence of civilization.

If you get lucky, your host might point you towards an ancient Viking burial ground, right by the lighthouse marking Iceland's northernmost point. All the locals know about it, but you would be hard-pressed to find it in official guide books. They say a warrior is buried there.

## Kópasker

There's little to see in the town of Kópasker, but the Snartastaðir Folk Museum just 1.25mi (2km) outside the town is worth a visit – it has a good collection showcasing life in the region

**“**  
If you're interested in seeing the Northern Lights, consider a night here – Raufarhöfn is the best place to see the Aurora Borealis in winter.

## GREATER ICELAND

during the 19th and 20th centuries.

### Arctic Henge

Often referred to as the village at the edge of the Arctic, Raufarhöfn is Iceland's northernmost town, with a population of less than 200. It's also home to Heimskautsgerði (Arctic-henge), a modern henge that evokes ancient religious practices and was strictly built according to instructions in ancient Icelandic Sagas – it's supposed to harness the power of the Arctic sun during solstices.

If you're interested in seeing the northern lights, consider a night here – Raufarhöfn is the best place to see the Aurora Borealis in winter. Although its population is small, Raufarhöfn has two B&Bs and one hotel. A campsite by the swimming pool is also well-sheltered and has facilities for grilling, showers, laundry, and electric outlets. Take advantage of the swimming pool, as its water is heated by geothermal power, pleasantly warm with a fantastic view of the sea.

### Langanes Peninsula

Made up of the towns of Þórshöfn and Bakkafirði, the peninsula is one of the most remote regions of Iceland. A worthy destination in the area is Skoruvíkurbjarg, with a platform slung out over the high, steep cliffs, perfect for bird watching but not for those afraid of heights.

Birdlife in north Iceland is much richer than the rest of the country. During summers, most B&Bs have hardhats ready for guests who want to



Akureyri

### Local's Guide to Akureyri

Akureyri, the second-largest city in Iceland, offers a wonderful mix of cosmopolitan vibe and small-town atmosphere.

#### Where to eat

Bautinn, in the town center, is the place to go for traditional Icelandic food. Múlaberg, overlooking the town center, serves a delicious lamb burger. Akureyri Fish and Chips has the best fish soup in town. Berlin Restaurant, a block off the main street, is hugely popular for breakfast.

#### Entertainment

For the nightlife, just take an evening stroll down Hafnarstræti. Græni Hatturinn is a popular music venue for locals. Experience the genuine crush of an Icelandic crowd.

#### Culture

For a town of only 18,000, Akureyri has a museum for everyone: aviation, motorcycles, toys, industry, history, and art. The Botanical Gardens are one of the northernmost in the world.

#### Unique Soak

Thirty minutes north of Akureyri is Bjórböðin Spa, where you can soak for 25 minutes in a wooden tub filled with beer.

hike or walk around the prairie. Birds love cannonballing on human heads during nesting season and boy, does it hurt!

# East Iceland

More remote and less traveled than the Westfjords, the eastern fjords will offer adventure, wilderness, and the best summer weather in Iceland.

## Fljótsdalshérað

This is the largest county in Iceland and the least-inhabited area of the country, with more reindeer than people. Hallormsstaðaskógur, Iceland's largest forest, is only a few minutes' drive into the Fljótsdalur valley from Egilsstaðir, the area's main commercial hub. This is a wonderful place to rent a summerhouse, hike through the bush, go for a forest ride, or look out for the glacial river monster, the "Lagarfljót Worm." Don't miss the easy hike up to Hengifoss, located just beside the road near the farmstead Skriðaklaustur, which features monastic ruins, a cafe, and a center dedicated to local author Gunnar Gunnarsson.

Base yourself at the Wilderness Center, or Óbyggðasetur, at the bottom



**“This is a wonderful place to rent a summer-house, hike through the bush, go for a forest ride, or look out for the glacial river monster.”**

of Fljótsdalur. With a guesthouse, museum, and horse rental, this is your starting point for a guided trek or ride up to Snæfell, Iceland's tallest freestanding mountain. A day or two gets you to Laugarfell mountain hostel, where you can relax your muscles in a natural hot tub, and then another day or two to hike or ride to the Snæfellsskáli lodge, with spectacular views of Vatnajökull, Europe's largest glacier.

## Borgarfjörður

At the far end of Route 94 is one of East Iceland's most charming coastal villages: Bakkagerði. Borgarfjörður eystri, or eastern Borgarfjörður, not to be confused with the one in the west, has a harbor and an airport strip. Very little traffic passes through except when the Bræðslan music festival happens at the end of July. But, for

## GREATER ICELAND



those hikers willing to make the drive, setting up camp in town and taking advantage of the dozens of well-marked trails is a must-do. Find maps for Víknaslóðir, the “trails of the inlets,” and choose a hike that suits your fitness – walk less than an hour to Álfaborg hill (aka the Elf Queen Castle), or take a full day to get up and down Dyrfjallstindur or over to Loðmundafjörður.

**Seyðisfjörður**

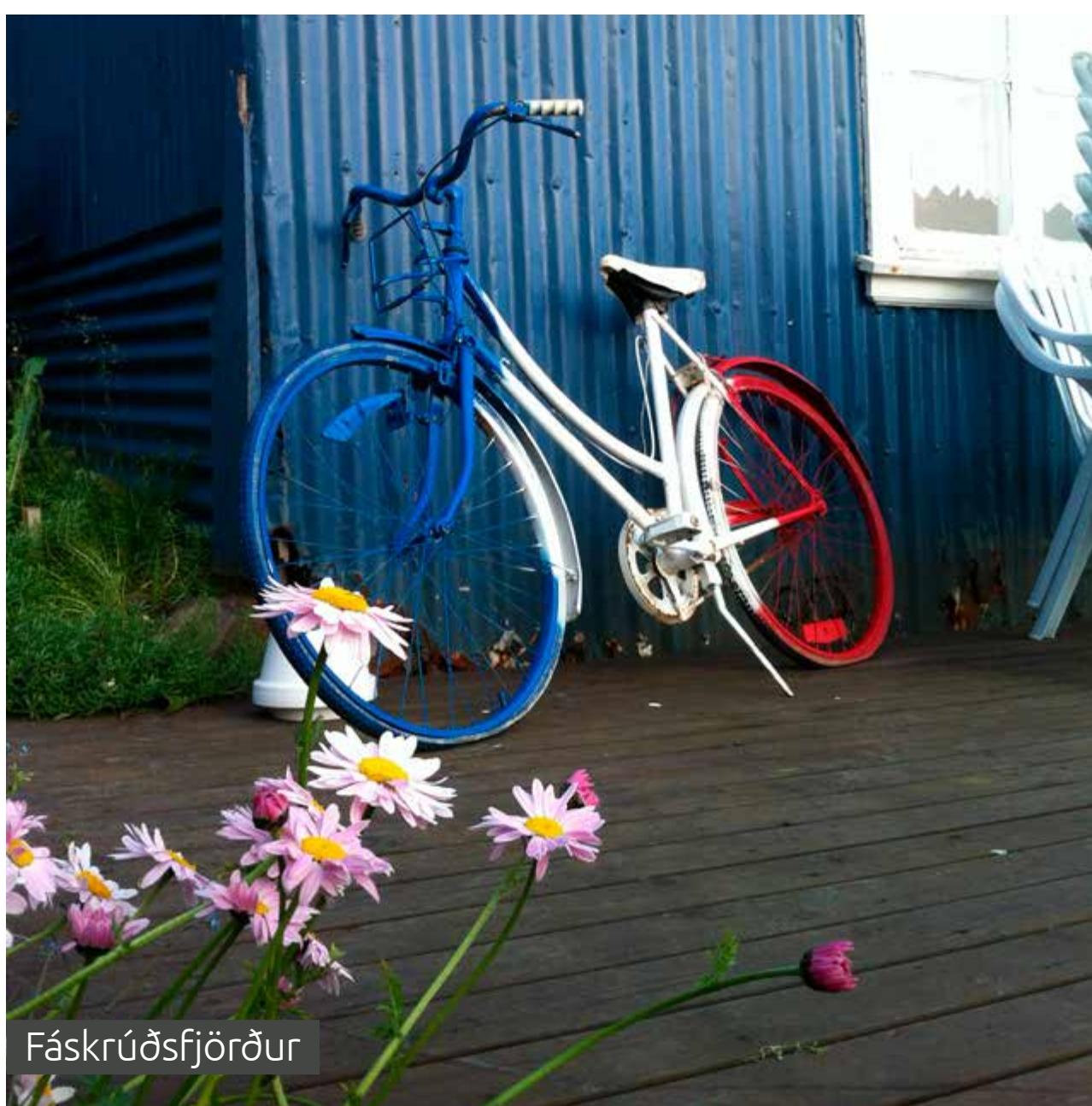
You’ll have to drive back inland to Egilsstaðir to pick up the road to Seyðisfjörður, the main eastern gateway out of Iceland by car or boat. Weekly ferries run to the Faroe Islands, Denmark, and Germany during the summer, and starting or ending your trip in this village will definitely leave you with warm, fuzzy feelings for Iceland. Hiking up from the bottom of the fjord will lead you past waterfall after waterfall, and if you’re brave enough for a four-hour climb up the north face of Bjólfur mountain, you’ll have terrific views down to the town and out to the end of the fjord. You may be tempted to go down the hill on

a skateboard, Walter-Mitty style (this is where that scene of the film was shot).

**Fáskrúðsfjörður**

Carrying on south through the Eastern fjords, head thru the tunnel to Reyðarfjörður and over the heath to Fáskrúðsfjörður, a one-time station for French cod fishermen – the village road signs are in both French and Icelandic. Stop in on the third weekend of July for the annual French Days festival, which celebrates the area’s French legacy and the ongoing friendship between France and Iceland, or check out the museum in the old French hospital.

If you’re looking for a more active adventure, just south of town are two intense mountain hikes. Start the 743 summit up Sandfell on the trail head between the farms Víkurgerði and Vík, or for something a little more challenging, the iconic Digitindur will take you an entire day to complete. There isn’t a well-marked trail – simply start the steep ascent from the abandoned farm Sævarendi. (Do this one on a day with good visibility.)

**The Icelandic Horse**

Iceland is home to over 80,000 Icelandic Horses, which is impressive for a country with only 334,000 people. Bred for both riding and companionship, the Icelandic Horse came to the island nation of Iceland with the first settlers from Norway over 1,100 years ago. Due to its isolation, the breed is one of the purest in the world. Icelandic Horses are no bigger than a large pony, but are known for their sure-footedness and their ability to cross Iceland’s rough and diverse terrain. In addition to the typical gaits, the Icelandic Horse has two special gaits called the tolt and the “flying pace.” Both gaits are fast and smooth and can reach speeds up to 30mph (48kmph).

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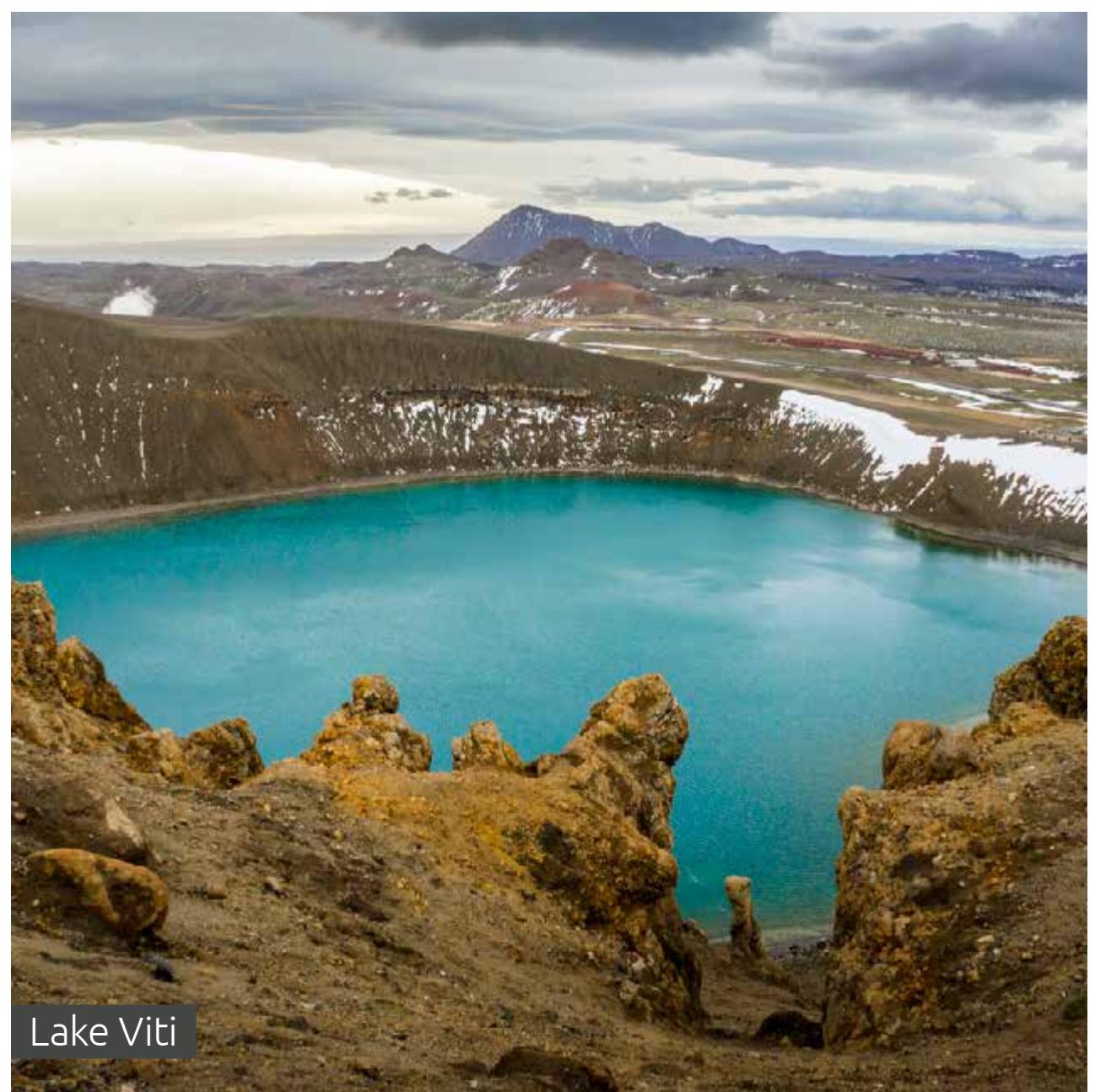
Outdoor Adventure

# The Highlands

While everyone else is busy planning their trip around the Ring Road in a Yaris, why not head straight for the highlands where driving a car is optional (and superjeeps are mandatory)?

## Hekla

Respected as one of Iceland's most dangerous active volcanoes, yet still one of its most beautiful mountains, Hekla is infamously called the "Gateway to Hell." This ticking time bomb has regularly devastated Iceland since settlement times. Covered in snow and small glaciers all year round, Hekla can be hiked in half a day. You can get there from route 26 to Gunnarsholt Trail, or from the village of Leirubakki, where public buses run to and from Reykjavik. Though Hekla's seismic activity is monitored closely, hikers should be aware that it could erupt with little warning.



Start of Fjallabak hike

Katrin SjöEnevadottir

**“Covered in snow and small glaciers all year round, Hekla can be hiked in half a day.”**

## Fjallabak and Landmannalaugar

Hekla is located in the Fjallbak, or “mountain back,” range of mountains sitting north of the Eyjafjallajökull and Myrdalsjökull glaciers. One of the best hikes in the area (a 16mi or 26km trek possible in a day or two) is actually between these glaciers, starting at Skogafoss and ending in Þórsmörk. From Þórsmörk, you can continue on for four or five days to Landmannalaugar, a steamy, geothermal wonderland of colorful hills and hot rivers.

Don't miss a visit to Gjáin, a river canyon in Þjórsárdalur full of hiking trails, waterfalls, lush greenery, and basalt columns. After snoring your nights away at well-equipped campsites and mountain huts, you won't need to walk back, since buses make the trip from Landmannalaugar to Reykjavik city center several times a day (kr. 9,300

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or US\$90 one way). You can also try to hitchhike, but be sure you pick a 4x4 you trust for river crossings, since the highland road isn't for just any car.

## Kjölur and Kerlingarfjöll

From the south, the main entrance to Kjölur's F35 dirt road is just beyond Gullfoss in the Golden Circle area. Thousands of tourists visit Gullfoss every day, but few wander further north across this ancient, highland pass between Langjökull and Hofsjökull glaciers. It's possible to hike or snowmobile on Langjökull, or even cross it east to west in a superjeep, but don't try to do the same on Hofsjökull, a glacier notorious for unstable caps and crevices.

You can walk (a week), horseback ride (five days), mountain bike (two days) or drive (two hours) the south-north Kjölur pass, and with newly-maintained roads and bridges, it can be driven in a Yaris. In settlement times, this was the shortest walking or riding route from the North to Reykjavik or Þingvellir, and many of those trails are still in use.

Slightly east of Kjölur is Kerlingarfjöll,

### Crossing Rivers in Your 4x4

Fording rivers (crossing in the shallow part) can be exciting and fun, but make sure that you are totally confident that you can ford a river before doing so. Insurance will not cover damage to the car or rescue. When in doubt either find another road or wait for more experienced drivers to show you the way.

a mountain hut, camping, and hiking area with some natural hot springs. No mountaineering experience is needed to explore the so-called "Women's Mountains."

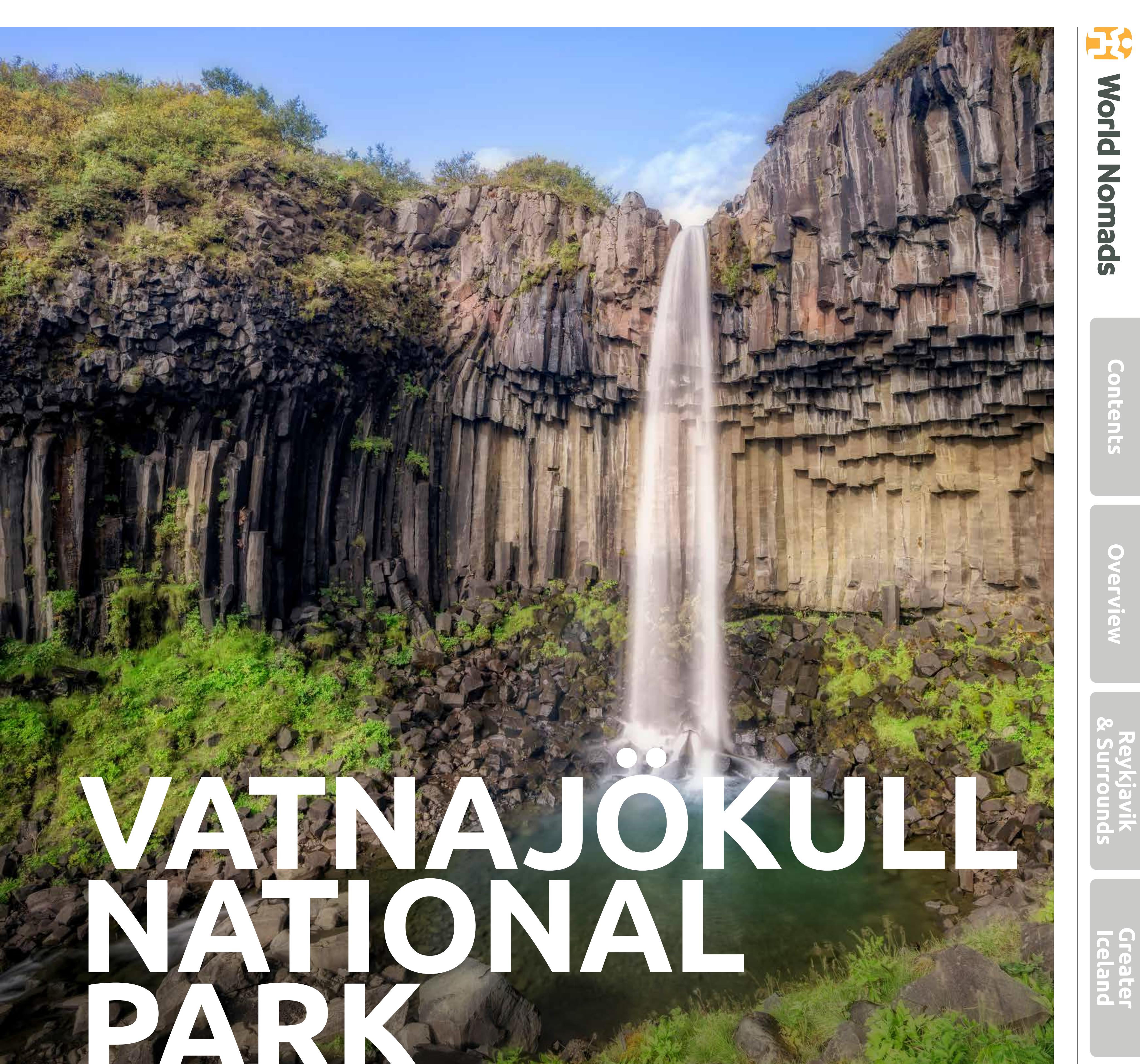
Most of the Kjölur crossings stop at Hveravellir, the rumoured home of Iceland's most infamous outlaw Fjalla Eyvindur, and site of the biggest natural hot pool in the highlands. Several fjords can be followed from here to the north coast, but if you're riding, definitely end up in Skagafjöður, the horse capital of Iceland.

## Sprengisandur

This long, extreme highland pass starts near Hekla in the Fjallabak region, and ends up near Lake Myvatn. There are still folk songs sung about how difficult this pass is to ride on a horse, and it's nearly impossible on foot without the help of a boat or car (there are several unpredictable glacial rivers that should not be waded).

Once you reach the desert area of Sprengisandur, between Hofsjökull and Vatnajökull, only a few raging, sediment-filled glacier rivers will supply you with water. Past Nyidalur hut, you can head northwest past Laugafell hut and stop at a hot spring there, go straight north past the photogenic Aldeyarfoss, or head northeast above Vatnajökull glacier.

Though this last route is the least traveled, the reward of arriving at Askja crater and seeing Lake Viti glistening at the bottom of it is indescribable. If you're there on a dry, mild day, you may be able to take a dip in the bath-warm water.



# VATNAJÖKULL NATIONAL PARK

Covering 13 percent of Iceland, Vatnajökull is the largest national park in Western Europe, and encompasses other smaller, equally amazing national parks including Skaftafell and Jökulsárgljúfur.

# Adventure in the National Park

As varied as it is vast, this extraordinary park offers glaciers, ice caves, canyons, and waterfalls enough to suit any outdoor enthusiasts.

## Skaftafell

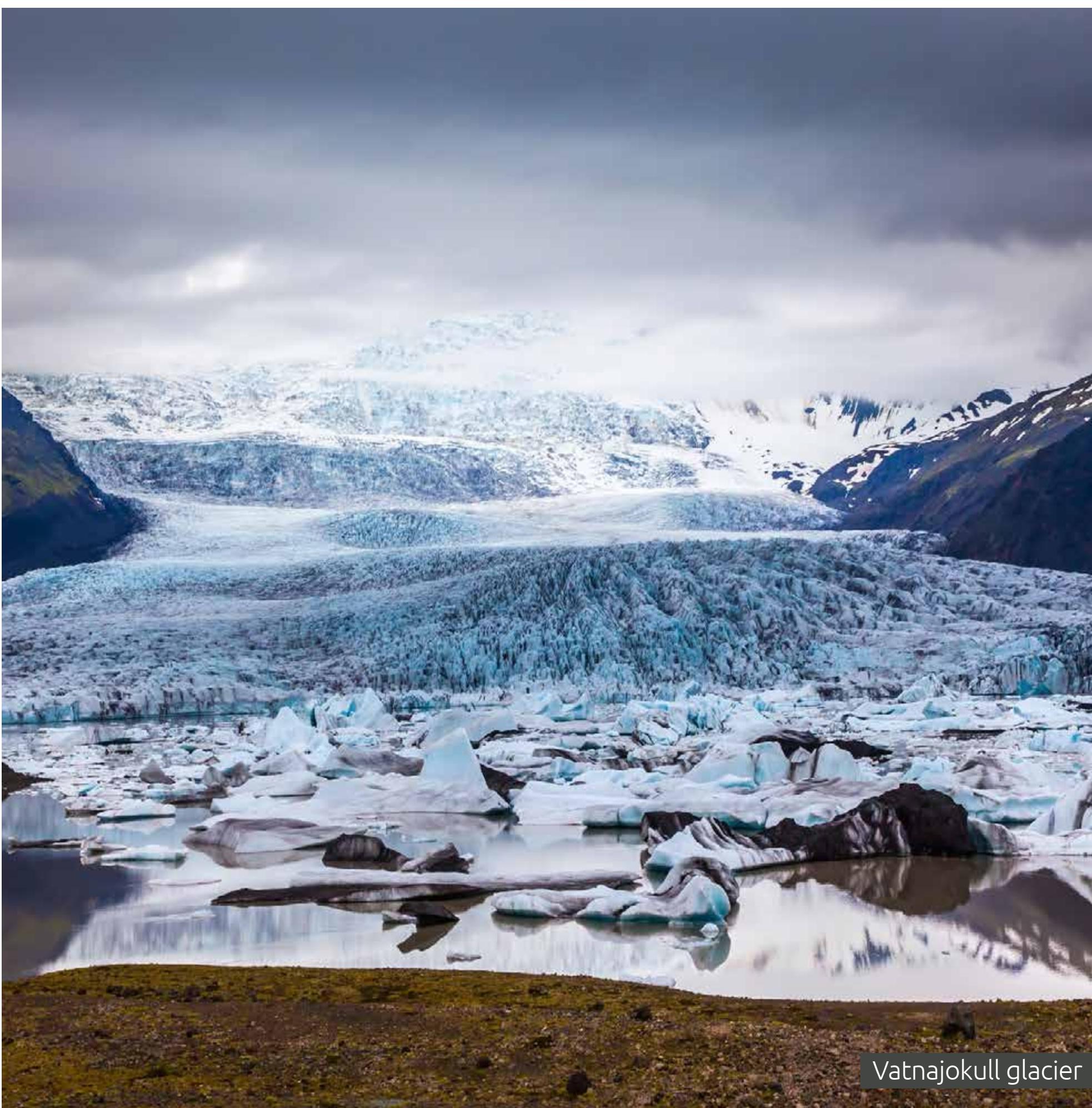
Skaftafell is one of Iceland's true hot spots, with breathtaking geological features like the bird-rich shelter of Bæjarstaðarskógar, the Öræfajökull Volcano, the glass-black basalt columns beneath Svartifoss, and more.

There are plenty of trails in Skaftafell, but one of the most popular is the relatively easy 90-minute day hike up to Svartifoss waterfall. Another popular walk leaves directly from the visitor's center and heads up to the Skaftafellsjökull glacier. Be sure to dress warmly, and remember to never attempt hiking on a glacier without an experienced guide.

## Svartifoss

Also known as Black Falls, this natural wonder is one of the most popular sites in Vatnajökull. The waterfall is surrounded by a concave wall of glassy black volcanic columns.

The falls are about a 1.25mi (2km) hike up from the car park and the trail is well sign-posted. It's a pretty steep slog up the hill, but the falls are definitely worth the effort.



Vatnajökull glacier

Instead of heading straight down, consider passing over the wooden bridge near the cascading water and hiking up an additional 1,300ft (400m) for a viewpoint that offers stunning vistas over the surrounding area.

## Dettifoss

This is one of a series of falls (including Selfoss, Hafragilsfoss, and Rettarfoss) that crash along the Jokulsá a Fjöllum river. All are awe-inspiring, but Dettifoss takes the cake. With over 130,000 gallons of water cascading over the sharp cliff every second, this is the most powerful waterfall in all of Europe.

The falls are located around 60mi (90km) from the town of Húsavík and are a popular stop on the 126mi (200 km) Diamond Circle Loop. If you prefer to make your way there by foot, you can also reach them by hiking the scenic 22mi (35 km) trail from Asbyrgi canyon.

**“Remember to never attempt hiking on a glacier without an experienced guide.”**

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Entrance to the park is free, and while it's pretty easy to get there on your own, you can also go with an organized tour. Day tours start at around kr. 29,140 (US \$282) and will take in the falls and usually some other sites like Lake Mývatn.

## Jökulsárgljúfur

Just 19mi (30km) north of Dettifoss, you'll find Jökulsárgljúfur (meaning Glacial River Canyon). Formerly its own national park until the formation of Vatnajökull National Park in 2008, this region is blessed with some of Iceland's most stunning natural wonders.

The Jokulsargljufur Canyon is the largest and most impressive river canyon in Iceland. It stretches for over 15mi (24km) with its widest point being over 1,640ft (500m).

Another one of Jökulsárgljúfur's top sites is Hljóðaklettar or "Singing Cliffs." There's a 1.75mi (3 km) walking trail from the parking area that will take around this series of strange, swirling honeycombs and basalt columns.

To get to Jökulsárgljúfur, you can take a bus from Akureyri to Ásbyrgi (changing buses in Húsavík) for around kr. 5,580 (US \$54). With your own rental car there are plenty of places to access the park, including Route 862 from Route 85 in the west, or from Dettifoss.

Getting around the park is simple and trails are very well marked. Many people choose to hike across the length of the park, camping mid-way at Vesturdalur. This takes around two days and covers 21mi (34km).

## Vatnajökull Glacier

Vatnajökull, the glacier for which the national park is named, is the largest glacial mass in Iceland, and second largest in Europe by area, measuring around 3,166mi<sup>2</sup> (8,200km<sup>2</sup>). If you actually want to walk on the glacier, you should go with a reputable tour operator or licensed guide.

There are plenty of tours around the region that will take in a glacier walk as well as other sites like the Crystal Ice Cave.

## Getting There & Around

The best way to explore Iceland, including a visit to Vatnajökull National Park, is with your own rental car or campervan.

To get to the park by public transport, most people take one of the twice daily summer bus services that connect Reykjavík and Skaftafell via the Ring Road, stopping at the park.

From mid-September through May, three weekly Þingvallaleið buses connect Reykjavík and Höfn, stopping opposite Hôtel Skaftafell which is about 3mi (5km) east of the park entrance.

Keep in mind that while the lowlands of the national park are accessible for most of the year, most roads in the highlands are only accessible by 4x4 during the summer months and early autumn.



# ADVENTURE IN ICELAND

With vast glaciers and iridescent ice caves to explore, mighty mountains to summit, and raging rivers to tame, Iceland is an adventure lover's dream.

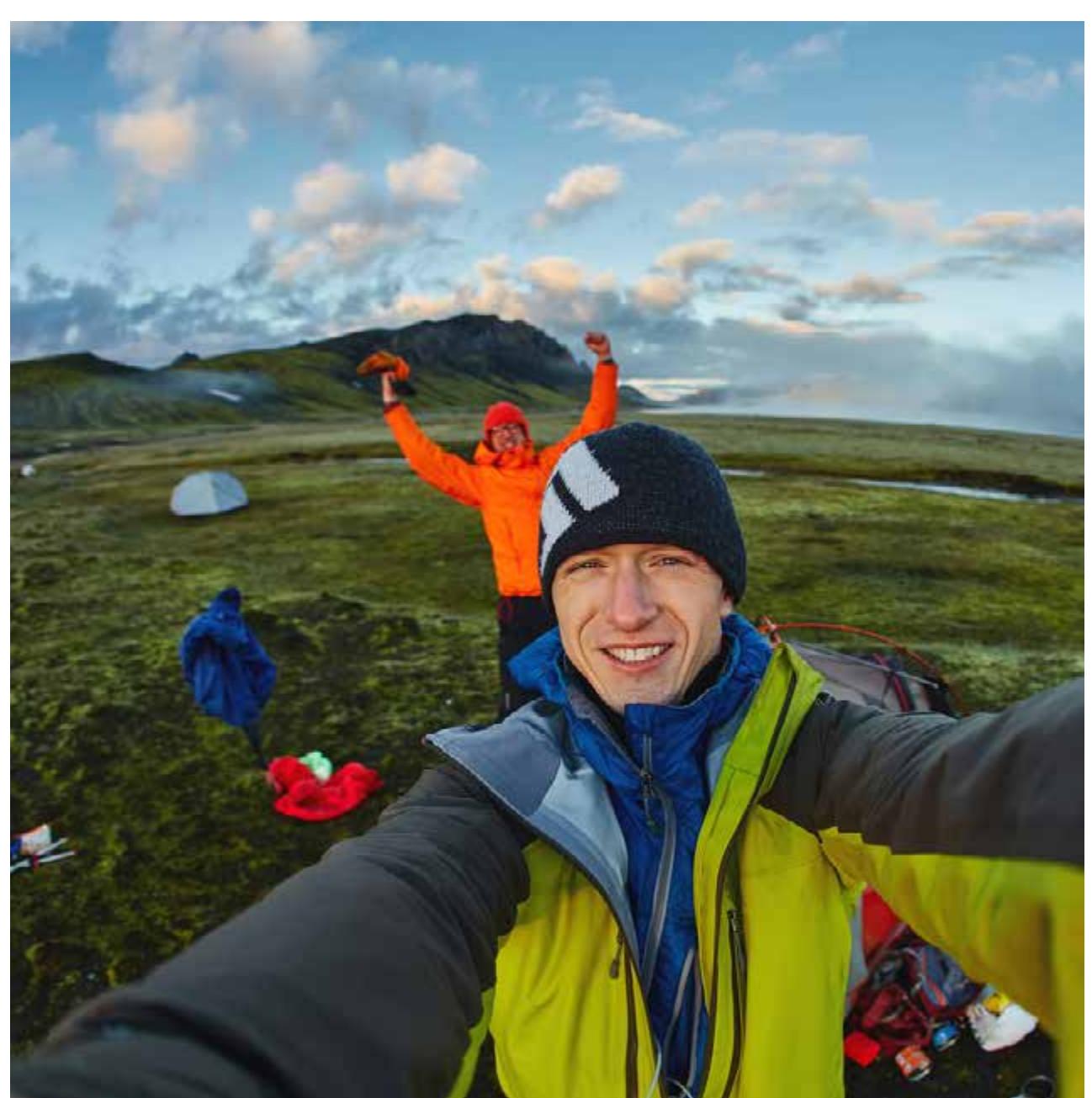
# Camping

With over 200 inexpensive, backpacker-friendly campsites, Iceland is one of the world's best destinations for camping.

But, it's still important to understand the law. Use designated campsites where they do exist, and don't camp on somebody's farm or within sight of somebody's house without asking permission.

If there is no sign and the land isn't being used to grow crops, you can camp for a single night before you need to move on. You can even park your car on the side of the road, if there's a layby. But don't drive off-road as you can damage the environment and more often than not, the land will be owned by someone.

If you can afford it, a campervan is by far the best way to explore Iceland – you can sleep soundly even if the weather turns. We strongly recommend downloading the free offline maps app, maps.me, to ensure you don't get lost on the road.



Skogafoss

## Top Tips for Happy Camping

**Don't underestimate the weather.** Icelandic weather can be wild and change abruptly. The weather forecast is pretty reliable and it's worth keeping a close eye on the Icelandic Met Office warnings: If you know which way the clouds are heading, you can travel in the opposite direction.

**Help may not be around the corner.** Some of Iceland's most stunning areas, such as the Highlands, are largely uninhabited, which means if you do get into trouble, you may be on your own. Bring a mobile hotspot so you can stay in the loop on weather and road conditions.

**Bring the right gear.** With the right camping equipment, you can stay warm and dry in most conditions. Don't rely on a single-skin tent – you'll come to regret it. A self-inflating air mattress is also worth bringing – you will lose a ton of heat to the ground without one. If you don't have your own equipment, it's possible to rent quality gear in Reykjavik.

**Camp responsibly.** If you are camping in the wild, follow these principles for disposing of waste: <https://lnt.org/learn/7-principles>.

**Always carry a headlamp.** For breakdowns, midnight toilet-runs or hiking in the dark, a headlamp is an essential piece of kit and you should always travel with one – it could just save your life.

# Hiking and Trekking

With hikes for all abilities, from easy day hikes to multi-day expeditions, Iceland has something for everybody. Here are five of the best.

## The Laugavegur multi-day trek

The 34mi (55km) hike between Landmannalaugar and Þórsmörk is doable in four to five days – most hikers stay in overnight cabins along the way. This is one of Iceland's most popular treks and for good reason – the views are simply stunning. Start the trek in Landmannalaugar where you can explore hot springs, rhyolite mountains, and vast fields of lava. You'll find yourself hiking past colorful mountains, crossing raging rivers, exploring lush green valleys, and passing fascinating rock formations on your way to Þórsmörk.

## Glymur Waterfall day hike

If you're not keen on a multi-day hike but do want to do something epic, consider hiking to the highest waterfall in Iceland. Glymur is located at the end of Hvalfjörður (the Whale Fjord) and it's a fairly easy three-to-four-hour hike to get up there.

## Laugavegur & Fimmvorduhals multi-day trek

This four-to-eight-day trek was recently named one of the world's best hiking



Laugavegur Trek

trails by National Geographic and passes through some of the most diverse and beautiful scenery in all of Iceland. Cross glacial rivers, chill out in a geothermal hot tub, and get up close and personal with some of Iceland's most pristine glaciers.

## Hvannadalsnukur Summit day hike

The highest peak in Iceland, Hvannadalsnukur involves a challenging 10-15-hour hike across difficult glacial terrain and gaping crevasses. Hvannadalsnukur towers above Vatnajökull glacier, the largest glacier in Europe, and offers stunning views.

## Mount Esja day hike

One of the easiest and certainly the most accessible hikes in Iceland, Esja is within spitting distance of Reykjavik itself and can be conquered in just a few hours. If you're very short on time while in Iceland, this is the hike to aim for.

## Top Tips for Happy Hiking

**Keep an eye on the weather.** The weather in Iceland can change rapidly and without warning. Bring multiple layers of windproof, waterproof clothing and make sure you have a hat, down jacket, and snacks in case you have to wait out a bad patch of weather.

**Bear in mind the length of the days.** In the summer, there can be up to 23 hours of daylight. In the winter, there are sometimes only 4 hours of daylight, so plan accordingly.

**Pack the right gear.** For any hiking adventure, a proper backpack with a good hip belt is essential. Decent hiking boots or shoes are also crucial and well worth investing in.

**Plan ahead.** If you are hiking in the Highlands, call the mountain huts along your route to get up-to-date intel on the current conditions. If you are going on an ambitious multi-day trek, it's worth investing in a GPS.

# Diving, Kayaking, and Rafting

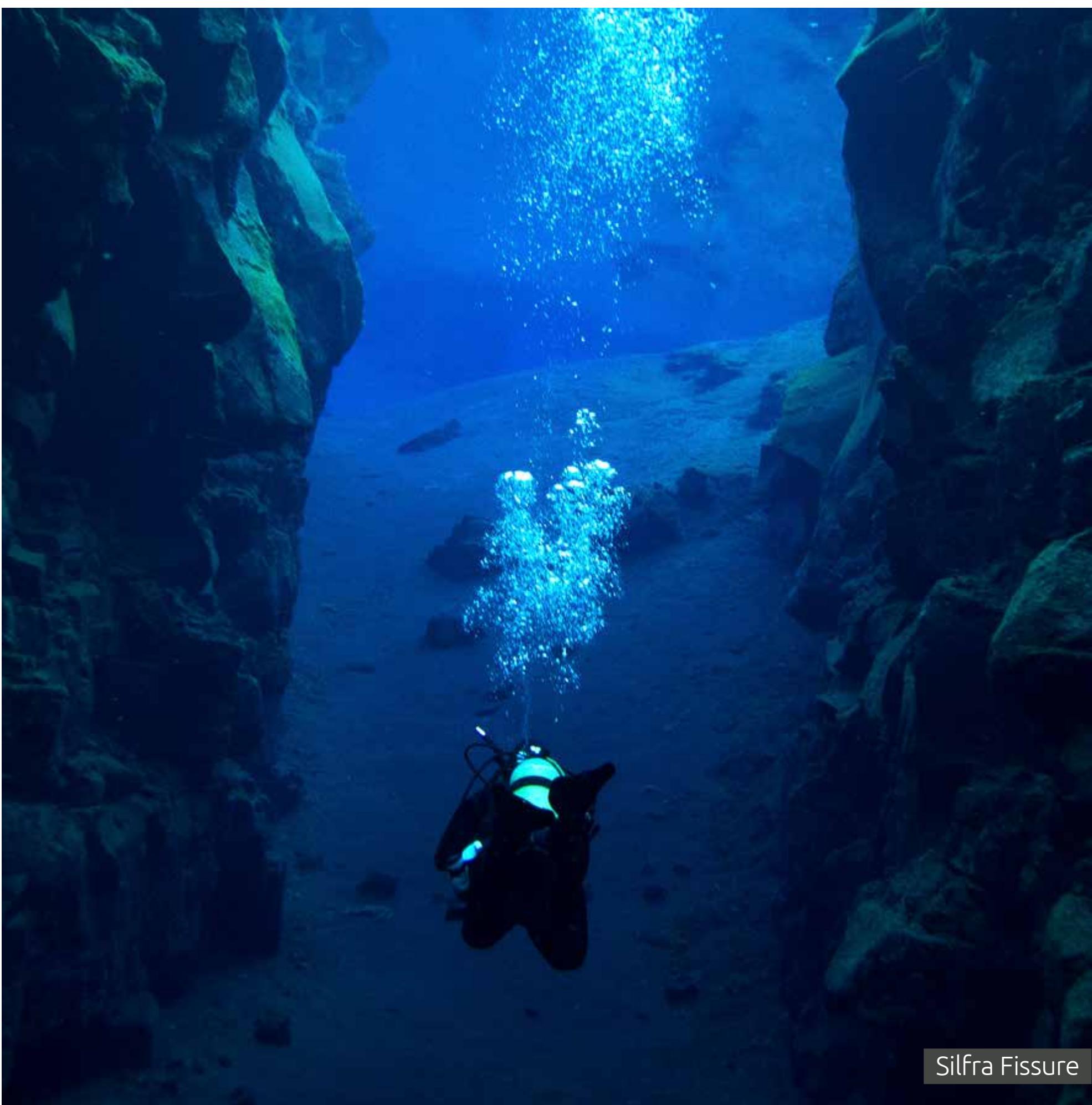
Iceland is crossed by dozens of glacial rivers and surrounded by ocean. To properly explore it, you're going to have to get your feet wet.

## Snorkeling and scuba diving

Want to swim between two tectonic plates? Visit the famous Silfra fissure in Þingvellir, a huge rift between the North American and Eurasian continents. This meltwater-fed fissure has become a mecca for divers thanks to the incredible visibility of up to 330ft (100m), allowing for sweeping 360° views of stunning underwater geology.

Not yet Padi-certified? No problem – simply don a snorkel mask and a wetsuit and you're good to go.

Iceland is very snorkel-friendly – if you have time, be sure to visit Litlaa, a geothermally-heated river



Silfra Fissure

with dancing volcanic sands and multi-colored sediments turning the riverbed into a rainbow.

For divers, Iceland is famed for unique experiences. Want to see how life could exist on a planet without a star? Check out the hydrothermal vents Strytan and little Strytan in Eyjafjordur. These are the only known underwater geothermal chimneys shallow enough to be reached by the average diver. They attract abundant marine life and it's been speculated that they provide perfect conditions for life when there is no solar power source available.

## White water rafting

If you want to kick the adrenaline up a couple of notches, Iceland's raging rivers offer some of the best white water rafting in all of Europe. The most famous spot is the relatively chill Hvita

**“”**  
This meltwater-fed fissure has become a mecca for divers thanks to the incredible visibility allowing for sweeping 360° views of stunning underwater geology.

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River in the South, which is perfect for beginners. Commonly known as the White River, this Class II river is just a couple of hours' drive from Reykjavik.

Want even more adrenaline? Jökulsá Austari, known as the Beast of the East, is a Grade IV river offering turbulent white water, steep drops, and the need to work as a team. Challenging rapids like the "Alarm Clock" and "Deep Fry" will keep you

on your toes as you glide, perhaps not so gracefully, through the amazing glacial landscape of the Austurdalur wilderness.

### Kayaking

If you want more of a personal experience with Iceland's stunning landscapes, kayaks are the best way to explore the country's serene glacial lagoons and sparkling bays. One of the best kayaking destinations is the gorgeous Breiðafjöldur Bay in West Iceland – paddlers here are likely to have encounters with puffins, seals, and even whales.

Or go kayaking between icebergs in the dazzling glacial lagoons at the edge of the massive Vatnajökull glacier. Jökulsárlón is the most famous, but kayaking tours of the more peaceful Heinabergslón lagoon are also available.



“ If you want more of a personal experience with Iceland's stunning landscapes, kayaks are the best way to explore the country's serene glacial lagoons and sparkling bays.

# Winter Activities

With a name like Iceland, it's no wonder that this 39,769 mi<sup>2</sup> (103,000 km<sup>2</sup>) Nordic island nation has a lot of winter activities on offer.

## Skiing & snowboarding

If the Norse god of weather is in a good mood, you'll enjoy some spectacular slopes in Iceland.

Hlíðarfjall near Akureyri, the largest town in Northern Iceland, is a great place for off-trail ski junkies with plenty of chutes, peaks, cornices, pipes, and cliffs. Day passes here will cost around kr. 4,750 (US \$46) for adults and kr. 1,340 (US \$13) for children. For those looking to get some style points, there's also an excellent snow park here.

Siglufjörður is another great spot for backcountry skiing, while Oddsskarð has two tow lifts and a beginners' lift. Just a 25-30-minute drive from the city of Reykjavik, Bláfjöll is the largest ski hill around, with two double-seater chair lifts, a detachable quad, and nine tows.

## Snowmobiling

Some of Iceland's best snowmobiling is also near Reykjavik and Akureyri. The Langjökull Glacier is the second-largest glacier in Iceland and after riding across it, you can also get off your snowmobile for a while and head down into the depths of an ice cave.

The hills around Akureyri are also spectacular for snowmobiling, with one-



Snowmobile on Vatnajokull Glacier

hour rides starting at around kr. 24,280 (US \$235).

## Snowshoeing

There are plenty of snowshoeing tours but some of the most scenic will again be around Akureyri and Reykjavik.

From Akureyri, you can do two-to-four-hour tours that run through the hills, past waterfalls, and along the nearby fjord. You can also do an amazing six-day snowshoe tour that includes a hike up to Lake Mývatn, which is set in an active volcanic zone. The scenery here is breathtaking and while the hike is a bit strenuous at times, only a reasonable level of fitness is required.

From Reykjavik, you can join a tour and head to Drangshlid and Skogafoss waterfall, or hike up the beautiful Mount Hengill. Prices for three-to-four-hour snowshoeing tours usually start at around kr. 12,340 (US \$120).

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You can get off your snowmobile for a while and head down into the depths of an ice cave.

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# Caves and Glaciers

They don't call it the "land of fire and ice" for nothing. No one should visit Iceland without exploring its spectacular lava caves and vast ice fields.

*For your safety, all glacier hikes and cave trips must be conducted with a reputable guide.*

## Sólheimajökull Glacier (south)

Just a two-hour drive from Reykjavik is beautiful Sólheimajökull, an outlet glacier of the Mýrdalsjökull glacier, the fourth largest in Iceland.

During your hike, you'll need to strap on some crampons, don a helmet, and grab yourself an ice pick. You'll explore ice formations and pass by deep cravasses before arriving at an ice wall for you to climb. This is where the ice picks come into play.

Seeing the black volcanic rock peeking out from the teal blue ice is a sight in itself. If you're looking for a day trip from the capital, this glacier hike should feature prominently on your itinerary.

## Vatnajökull Glacier (southeast)

Located in the National Park of the same name, Vatnajökull glacier is the largest in Iceland, covering eight percent of the country. Within, you'll find the stunning Crystal Ice Cave. The natural light filters through the thick blue ice, illuminating the cave – it's a photographer's dream.



Crystal Ice Cave

## Mýrdalsjökull Glacier (south Highlands)

This is one of Iceland's most interesting glaciers. You've probably heard of the Eyjafjallajökull volcano that erupted in 2011, causing flight delays across Europe? There's a much larger volcano sitting beneath the Mýrdalsjökull Glacier, and it's just a matter of time before that one erupts as well. But, at the time of writing, tours are still continuing to run and no dangers are imminent.

The glacier can be seen by air (helicopter), by snowmobile, or by foot. You can also enter the ice caves, but note that they aren't as dramatically blue-colored as the Crystal Ice Cave.

## Lofthellir Lava Cave (northeast)

After hiking over the beautiful Búrfell lava field for around 20 minutes, you'll arrive at a gaping hole in the ground. This is where you'll descend deep into the 3,500-year-old Lofthellir cave to discover the largest ice sculptures found in a lava cave anywhere in the country.

**“”**  
During your hike, you'll need to strap on some crampons, don a helmet, and grab yourself an ice pick.

## ADVENTURE IN ICELAND

This cave is for the adventurous – but maybe not for the claustrophobic. You'll need to squeeze through several small, icy openings before arriving at a spacious cavern filled with ice sculptures in all sizes and shapes.

### **Langjökull Glacier (mid-west highlands)**

This is the second largest glacier in Iceland, and as of a few years ago, it's also home to the biggest man-made ice cave in all of Europe.

The most popular ways to see Langjökull are by snowmobile tour and jeep tour, and of course, entering into the 1,640ft (500m) tunnel. The tour runs year-round and, if you're brave enough to leave the light of day behind, you'll be rewarded with icicles and brilliant colors. LED lights have been installed deep in the ice, which lets you see the natural blue hues.

Note: Under no circumstances are travelers allowed to walk on the glacier, as there are numerous dangerous cravasses. The tunnel tour costs kr. 19,120 (US \$185).

### **Drangajökull Glacier (westfjords)**

This is the most northern of all the glaciers in Iceland and the only one that hasn't receded in recent years. To see it, join one of the super jeep tours that depart from the town of Ísafjörður.

During the trip, you'll drive on the glacier before hiking up to the Hrolleifsborg Peak with spectacular views across the Westfjords.

At 2,513ft (766m), the summit of



Hrolleifsborg isn't overly difficult, but this trip is considered demanding because anything can happen out on the glacier. Bad weather can roll in making the driving conditions difficult. If this happens, you'll be required to help out in any way possible (maybe shoveling the vehicle out of the snow if needed!). And, depending on weather, the hike could be tricky as well.

### **Hallmundarhraun (west)**

This massive lava field was formed around the year 930 when a volcano sitting underneath Langjökull glacier erupted.

If you make your way to Hallmundarhraun these days, you'll be rewarded with numerous lava caves, the most famous being Víðgelmir, Surtshellir, and Stefánshellir.

At 5,249ft (1600m) long, the remarkable Víðgelmir cave is quite easy to navigate due to a new walkway, but you can choose to go on an extended tour that leaves the walkway behind. Inside, you'll find stunning ice formations, lava stalactites, stalagmites, and unique rock formations.

**Vatnajökull glacier is the largest in Iceland, covering eight percent of the country.**

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# Iceland's Hot Springs

The endless supply of hot water bubbling up from underneath Iceland's volcanic landscapes means there are scenic swimming holes everywhere. From checklist-famous to tucked-away, here are some of the best.

## The Blue Lagoon

This is Iceland's most famous hot spring: sparkling pools of turquoise water carved into the blackened debris of an ancient lava field on the Reykjanes Peninsula. Expect lots of people and astronomical entrance fees, but although it's a well-known tourist trap, it's an unforgettable experience.

## Mývatn Nature Baths

Come here for a more charming and serene bathing experience with a marginally lower price tag than the Blue Lagoon. Overlooking beautiful Lake Mývatn (65mi or 105km east of Akureyri) and surrounded by landscapes lifted straight from a fantasy novel, it's a favorite with tourists and locals alike.

## Reykjadalur

The river running through the valley Reykjadalur is one of Iceland's best natural springs. Get there via a 1.75mi (3km) hike beginning behind the town of Hveragerði. Boardwalks line the river on either side, and there are small



Reykjadalur

partitions to get changed behind.

## Hörghlíðarlaug

To really escape the crowds, head to the Westfjords and seek out this small, remote spring perched on the eastern edge of Mjóifjörður. Take road 633 along Mjóifjörður and look out for the green hut next to the rectangular pool, but remember to ask permission from the owners living on the nearby farm.

## Landbrotalaug

Another off-beat hotpot, this tiny pool on the Snæfellsnes Peninsula is so deep that you'll sink up to your neck, but only has enough room for two to three people. Head 1.75 hours north from Reykjavik to Borgarnes, then turn onto road 54. After the farm signed Skjálg, take the first left, an unassuming dirt track that ends at the holy grail of secluded springs.

## Important Hot Spring Etiquette

Before you jump in, if there are showers, it is expected that you nude up and wash yourself thoroughly (separate men's and women's facilities are provided). If you find yourself at any of the local swimming pools, you'll be expected to do the same. So, don't be shy – but do put your swimsuit back on before you leave the change room.

# How to See the Northern Lights

The Northern Lights, or Aurora Borealis, are a natural phenomenon that occurs when electrically-charged solar particles enter the earth's atmosphere. The resulting show of colors dancing across the night sky can be spectacular.

## Best time of year

The Northern Lights are only visible from mid-September to early April, on clear, dark nights with high solar activity. With so many factors affecting their visibility, there's never a guarantee that they'll make an appearance, even in the middle of winter. The lights can be active at any time of the night from sunset to sunrise, and the show might last for a few minutes, or a few hours.

The Aurora typically operates in cycles, with two to three nights of strong activity followed by four to five nights with low or no activity. For a higher chance of seeing the Northern Lights, it's best to stay in Iceland for at least six to seven nights.

## Getting forecasts

The Icelandic Meteorological Office forecasts the Northern Lights based on solar activity on a scale of 0 (little or no activity) to 9 (extremely high activity). The forecast also shows cloud cover,



Glacier Lagoon

another important factor in whether or not the Northern Lights are visible on Earth. The Aurora Borealis can still put on a dramatic show when the forecast is a 3 or 4. At a 5 or 6, you're nearly guaranteed to see some Aurora so long as the sky is clear. If the forecast shows a 7 or above, you're likely in for one of the most incredible experiences of your life.

The forecast is published a few days in advance, and includes projected cloud cover at various times throughout the night, so if your plans are flexible, plan your viewing attempt for the clearest locations and most active times for a better chance of a sighting. Several companies offer guided Northern Lights tours and cruises that depart from Reykjavik, and many countryside hotels even offer wake-up calls should the lights appear late at night.

**“The Aurora typically operates in cycles, with two to three nights of strong activity followed by four to five nights with low or no activity.”**



## Best viewpoints

When the Northern Lights are particularly strong, they can be seen dancing over the city of Reykjavik. Even on nights when activity is moderate, they are sometimes visible from the Grótta lighthouse in Seltjarnarnes, a popular viewing point just a few minutes' drive outside the city center. However, in most cases, the ideal places to see the Aurora are away from city lights, out in the Icelandic countryside.

If you're looking for a particularly striking backdrop, consider the multi-tiered Dynjandi waterfall in the Westfjords, the cone-shaped Kirkjufell mountain on the Snæfellsnes Peninsula, or the Jökulsárlón glacial lagoon on the south coast. But the weather in Iceland can be fickle – and as a result, the Northern Lights can be elusive – so the best place to see the Northern Lights is wherever you happen to be standing when they make their appearance above you.

## Tips for Photographing the Northern Lights

The best camera is a DSLR with a full frame sensor and a fast wide angle lens, like the Canon 16-35mm/f2.8.

Another gear essential is a sturdy tripod. It will allow you to shoot at longer shutter speeds, which are essential to photograph the dancing lights.

A remote shutter release or timer will drastically improve the sharpness of the photos.

And remember to be patient and keep trying – the reward is worth it.

### Get Your Camera Settings Right

1. Switch your camera to manual focus and set it to infinity.
2. Adjust your camera settings to the highest ISO possible, without the image becoming too noisy/grainy.
3. Open your aperture as much as possible by selecting the lowest possible F-number.
4. To capture details in an Aurora shot, depending on its current activity level, you should stick to shutter speeds between  $\frac{1}{4}$  of a second to 15 seconds.

Sometimes the aurora moves incredibly quickly, dancing effortlessly in the skies. Sticking to higher shutter speed will allow you to capture more detail.

### Protecting Your Gear

The most important gear is your fingers. Keep them warm with down mittens.

A wireless shutter release remote will come in handy, allowing you to shoot from a distance of up to 100m while thawing in your car.

# Where to See Wildlife

Iceland's pristine environment is home to a variety of unique animals. Since you're unlikely to see them frolicking by the roadside, make your way to the following locations or book a tour – you won't regret it.

## Puffin Viewing

From early April until September, the toothy cliffs around the island act as breeding ground for the Atlantic puffin. Vestmannaeyjar off the south coast has the biggest puffin colony in Iceland, and is accessed by a 35-minute ferry ride from Landeyjahöfn. For up-close views of the quirky birds, Látrabjarg in the Westfjords and Borgarfjörður Eystri in the east are remote spots with few crowds.

## Birdwatching

Alongside puffins, innumerable seabirds flock to Iceland during summer. Látrabjarg Cliffs in the Westfjords offer arguably the best birdwatching in all of Europe, attracting gannets, guillemots, and razorbills. Lake Mývatn in the north draws its own array of birds – but bring insect repellent, because summer also brings an unfathomable amount of buzzing midges.

## Seals

To spot mirthful seals basking and playing, head to the Vatnsnes Peninsula. A dirt road loops around the area – off



Whale watching near Husavík

the coast is the biggest seal colony in Iceland. Stop in Hvammstangi at the bottom of the peninsula to visit the Seal Museum and learn more about them.

## Arctic Fox

The beautiful and elusive arctic fox is Iceland's only native land mammal. Sightings are rare but not impossible – your best bet is the protected Hornstrandir region in the Westfjords, which has the biggest population of arctic foxes. Accessed via a ferry from Ísafjörður, the region is best explored on a tour.

## Reindeer

A strictly-controlled population of around 3,000 wild reindeer exists in the east, brought to Iceland by Norwegians during settlement times. The reindeer roam towards the interior in warmer months, but during winter, you might see them near the main route, especially near Snaefell (northeast of Vatnajökull) – but plan your trip carefully, as it's a very lonely part of Iceland.

## Whale Watching

Iceland is one of the best countries in the world for whale watching – the water off the coast is a rich feeding ground for over 20 different types of whales, including blue whales and humpbacks. You can spot these gentle giants from April until September, especially in the north – Húsavík is the most popular port. If you're short on time, tours also leave from Reykjavík.

# Essential Insurance Tips

Iceland has firmly cemented itself as a haven for tourists, nature lovers, foodies, and adventure seekers alike. And with World Nomads travelers trying new experiences and pushing their boundaries when they travel, it's essential that you match up the level of cover for the activities you're doing, with the travel insurance policy you buy to cover your trip.

## Flight cancellation

Iceland's long, dark winters can see unpredictable weather. Snow storms, ice, and high winds can occasionally force the cancellation of flights in and out of Reykjavík. Unfortunately this is the time when many travelers head to Iceland in search of the Northern Lights. Depending on what stage of your trip you're on, travel insurance for flight cancellations can vary.

Trip cancellation cover only applies if you are an Australian, New Zealand or US Resident. If you have to cancel your trip before it starts because severe weather stops your flight from leaving (in some cases the services have to have stopped for 24 hours for cover to apply), US, Australian, and New Zealand policies can cover trip cancellation expenses such as your non-refundable pre-paid accommodation and airline ticket. There's no cover in any other policies for trip cancellation due to severe weather.

So if you're not from one of those three countries, please take note.

If you're on your trip and your flight out of Iceland is cancelled because of severe weather, some policies may cover trip interruption/trip delay expenses such as meals and additional accommodation expenses until you're able to continue traveling. However, there are of course limits on what we'll cover, and the plans vary, so it's essential you read your policy to see if this applies to you, so you're not disappointed if you need to make a claim.

Should your flight be cancelled due to severe weather, you should go straight to the airline and get a letter stating the reason for cancellation and what compensation they're offering.

## Hiking and Trekking

Apart from the weather (and packing correctly), you'll need to know what type of hiking/trekking/skiing you'll be doing in Iceland, so that you can buy the correct level of coverage at the time of purchase. Many parts of Iceland are thinly populated and remote. If you don't have the right insurance, a heli-evac to get you to medical care can be very expensive.

World Nomads travel insurance policies are designed so that you can choose the right policy for the activities you're doing, giving you access to the help you need when you need it. If you do get injured in the mountains, it's essential that you get in touch with our emergency assistance teams straight away, so that they can support you from the time you fall sick or get injured until

“ ”

**Apart from the weather (and packing correctly), you'll need to know what type of activities you'll be doing on your trip, so that you can buy the correct level of coverage at the time of purchase.**

### Be Prepared

Weather conditions can change quickly in Iceland, so it's best that you're prepared. Search and rescue isn't covered in any of our policies, so make sure you know where you are at all times.

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**“ If you visit our helpdesk or read through the activities section of the purchase path, you’ll be able to see the level of cover that you will need for your particular policy.**

the time you recover. They'll be able to help you get to the nearest hospital, and if you're banged up badly enough, take you home, so that you can get the ongoing medical care that you need. However, once you're home, cover stops, so you'll need to have access to government health care or your own private medical insurance for those costs.

If you visit our [helpdesk](#) or read through the activities section of the purchase path, you'll be able to see the level of cover that you will need for your particular policy. All plans are different and may require an upgrade (for an additional premium) for certain activities. Read the policy wording carefully to choose the right plan and/or adventure sport option for your trip.

Call out box: Weather conditions can change quickly in Iceland, so it's best that you're prepared. Search and rescue isn't covered in any of our policies, so make sure you know where you are at all times.

## Scuba

Iceland's waters provide some of the most unique diving spots in the world. However, they can also be challenging and pose additional dangers. Most obvious is the water temperature -

SCUBA diving in Iceland can see you navigating waters that are near freezing. And while that may contribute to higher visibility, it also means that you need to be more aware, so that you're not putting yourself at needless risk.

We've tried to give you the freedom to learn or hone your diving skills by helping cover some of those nasty accidents when you're:

- Recreational scuba diving (qualified divers to 30 or 40 metres)
- Discover scuba dives (with professional qualified instructors)
- Shark cage diving, cavern, cave, and wreck diving (some plans only, check yours carefully)
- Snorkelling, island escapes, live-aboard trips and more

However, not all of our policies are the same, so you'll need to see what your policy covers before you buy it. If you select the right policy for the type of diving you're doing, you can be covered for medical expenses including: oxygen or hyperbaric treatment, sea level evacuation, overseas hospitalisation, and out-patient treatment.

For full terms, conditions, limitations and exclusions read the policy wording.

All of the information we provide about travel insurance is a brief summary only. It does not include all terms, conditions, limitations, exclusions and termination provisions of the travel insurance plans described. Coverage may not be available for residents of all countries, states or provinces. Please carefully read your policy wording for a full description of coverage.

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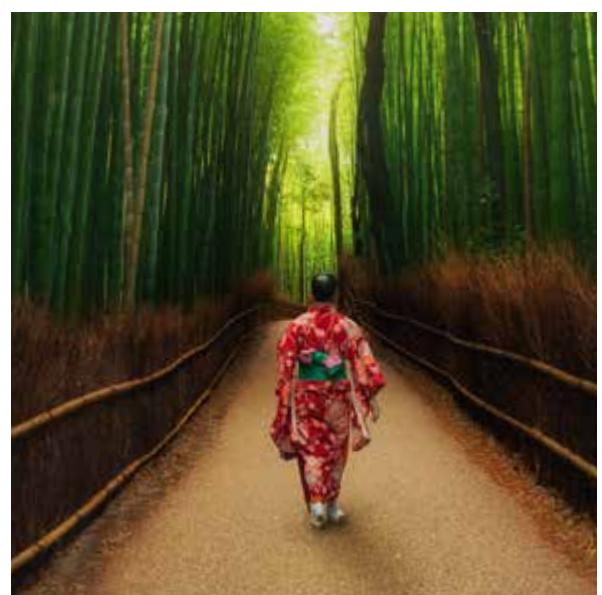
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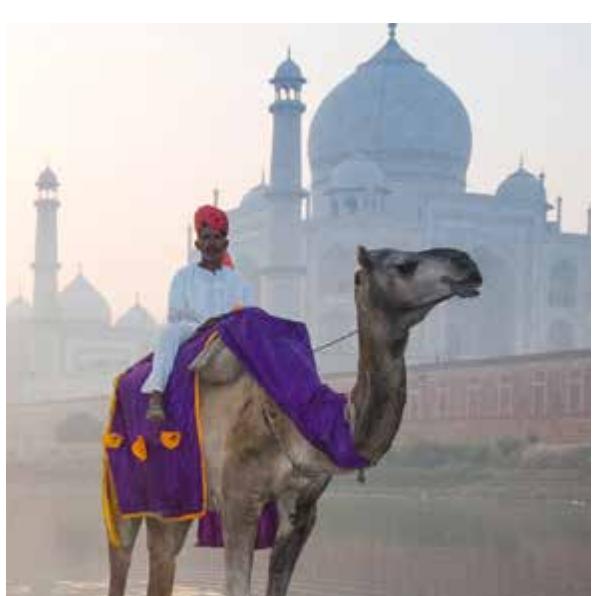
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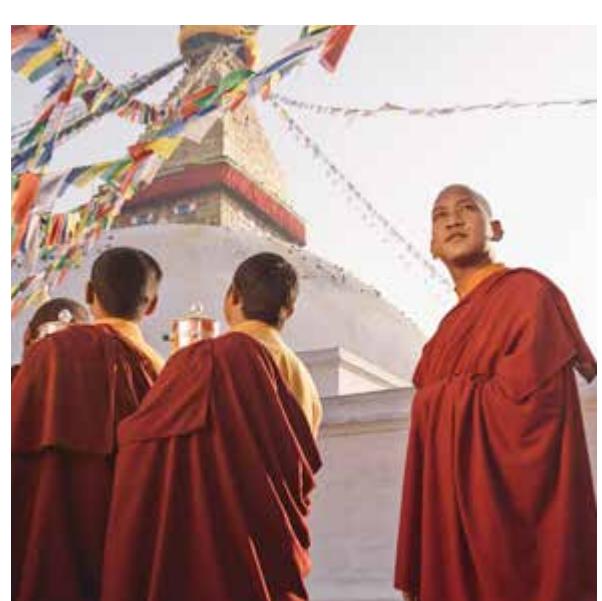
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