In early 2018, my girlfriend Claire was prepared to buy me tickets to wherever I wanted as part of my 30th birthday celebrations. Iceland had been somewhere I'd always wanted to explore since I had completed a round the world trip back in 2013. However, I entered the decision with trepidation, as our previous outdoor holidays together had ended up falling short of expectations.

Nonetheless, after plenty of research, we drew up an itinerary that would suit what both of us wanted to get out of the experience. After all the plans were set, we embarked on Thursday 5th April to Reykjavik with quiet excitement.

This website is a homage to the experience that we had in Iceland. For two city-dwellers to take to the elements like we did was a credit to the wonderful locals and the unparalleled natural landscape. As a couple, we definitely grew over the week that we were there.

This site is split into three main parts, covering the main sites that we saw, with some supporting text. However, there is also a ‘Trip Gallery’ if you are only interested in the photos.

The Itinerary

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| Day one- 5th April | Arrival in Keflavik Airport  Reykjavik- city exploring |
| Day two- 6th April | ‘Ishestar’ Horse Riding- ‘Lava Tour’ |
| Day three- 7th April | ‘Arctic Adventures’ tour- day one:<br>  ‘Golden Circle’; Glacier hiking |
| Day four – 8th April | ‘Arctic Adventures’ tour- day two:<br>  Ice Caving; Pillars of Reynisdrangar; Reynisfjara Black Sand Beach |
| Day five- 9th April | ‘Arctic Adventures’ tour- day three:<br>  The Diamond Beach; Jokusarlon Glacier Lagoon |
| Day six- 10th April | Blue Lagoon |
| Day seven- 11th April | Reykjavik- day off |
| Day eight- 12th April | Departure to Manchester Airport |

Part 1

Upon arrival in Iceland, I immediately picked up on the temperature. I'd expected it to be sub-zero and had worn extra layers as a precaution. However, the dry chill seemingly did not have much bite in April, and with the sun out it very much felt very much like a pleasant Winter's day in North East England. The second thing that I noticed was just how remote, and just how small the capital city is. This would certainly go on to set the precedent for all the locations that followed. The speed limit in Iceland is only 40mph, so I had plenty of time to take in the scenery. In each direction there was melting snow, distant mountains and refreshingly, not a whole lot else.   
  
We arrived at the [**Hotel Natura**](https://www.icelandairhotels.com/en/hotels/natura) in the middle of the morning, local time. However, we had been awake since the very early hours back home, so we decided to have a bit of a nap before venturing out. The hotel staff were extremely friendly, and the room had everything we needed. We did have the option of an Airbnb, but with our busy itinerary and the special occasion that it was, we had no regrets of investing in a little extra comfort. We stayed there a couple of times during the week and rated it very highly.   
  
One of the perks of the hotel, was a free bus pass, which we later used to get into the main part of the city. Here we took a nice walk along the promenade (with more mountains to check out on the horizon), then we had ourselves a beautiful Italian meal, followed by a stroll up the hill to the famous Hallgrímskirkja Church (below):

*The beer in this shot is called ‘Viking’, which came in various strengths and sizes. It proved to be good value for money at £9 a pint, and it also tasted fantastic (even Claire enjoyed it). I say value for money, but in all seriousness, we are talking about a country where 2 locally caught fish and chips costed us £70 later on!*

**Day Two-** In the morning, we were picked up from the hotel, and taken to the Ishestar stables for a bit of horse riding. The stables were just outside of Reykjavik, but it felt like it was a million miles away. Claire did a lot of riding in her teens, whereas I’d only done it in Mexico three years earlier. We had chosen the [**‘Lava Tour’**](https://www.ishestar.is/en/tour/lava-tour/) due to its Trip Advisor reviews, and the fact that it catered for different abilities. Claire commented that the Icelandic horses were well cared for, and found the different 'gait' made for a more interesting experience. By the way, Claire has informed me that gait refers to the speed of the horse- I was none the wiser.   
  
The video found in the link should give you a better understanding of the ride, as it was very difficult for me to take photos on horseback! Despite my camera problems, I emerged as one of the more confident riders, and had a thoroughly enjoyable time. The whole thing lasted a couple of hours. Naturally, we had a very chilled evening afterwards.

*This photo of the two of us was taken during one of the breaks. I’d felt in control of the horse for most of the day, but as he recognised the spot, he ignored all command and helped himself to some grass! As you can see, Icelandic horses are smaller than regular horses, though a bigger one had to be found to carry all 6ft2” of me!*

Day Three- Due to our limited time and ambitious itinerary, we decided that our first trip to Iceland should be guided to get the most out of the experience. As I would have been doing all the driving too, I am very glad that we picked Arctic Adventures after careful research. Our [**three day tour**](https://adventures.is/iceland/multiday-tours/multiday-adventures/golden-circle-south-coast-ice-cave/) was centred around the main sites of the south coast. The full itinerary can be found [**here**](file:///C:\Users\Tom\Documents\Code\Bootstrap\Site%202\index.html#itinerary) if you missed it. The first leg of the journey consisted of the 'Golden Circle', and naturally, we were starting off quite touristy. However, I'm a big believer in *beginning* with these sorts of places on any sort of holiday; purely because I believe it's worth seeing what all the fuss is about. Iceland's famous sights did not disappoint.   
  
The 'Golden Circle' is comprised of Thingvelier National Park, Gulfoss Waterfalls, and Geysir. All three are no more than a couple of hours outside of Reykjavik, but again, it was crazy just how isolated in the frozen wilderness we felt in the tour minibus. While we came off it to visit these places, there is one main road that spans the whole of Iceland called the [**'Ring Road'**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Route_1_(Iceland)). While it is surrounded by the most wondrous and otherworldly natural landscape I have ever seen, I would certainly not like to break down on it!

*We caught Thingvelier National Park on a very nice day, with no rain or fog. As you can see, there was still some snow still left over from the previous week. The park goes on for quite a while, though this viewpoint is a tourist hotspot, with a pleasant view of the lake. It would have been nice to explore this area more, but it was to be the first stop of many.*

*Next came Gulfoss Waterfall. Claire was really impressed with this one. If you want to see it in all its glory, check out the* [***'Trip Gallery'***](file:///C:\Users\Tom\Documents\Code\Bootstrap\Site%202\gallery.html#gulfoss)*.*

*The final stop on the Golden Circle was to see the 'Geysir'. Our word 'Geyser' comes from this Icelandic term. I admit that it was interesting to see the hot spring eject 20+ ft into the air every five minutes. However, this was perhaps the only anti-climax of the whole holiday. Once we'd seen it, we were ready for the next thing.*

Little did we know; the next thing was to be massive. It was at this point that we found out our glacier hike (supposedly at the end of our tour) had to be rescheduled to directly follow the Golden Circle. This was due to there being bad weather forecasted on the scheduled day. Ordinarily, we would have gone to our hotel and rested up, but we rolled up our sleeves and made the most of it. You can see this and more in [**Part 2**](file:///C:\Users\Tom\Documents\Code\Bootstrap\Site%202\part2.html) of the journal.

So, after a 3-hour drive, and already weary from the Golden Circle tour, we set off on a glacier hike. I had previously completed one on Franz Josef Glacier in New Zealand, so very much knew what to expect. Claire was a little bit anxious, but it proved to be more of an uphill stroll than hike. Our guide was really entertaining, so we ended up laughing most of the way up anyway; and were soon reinvigorated by the fresh air. We found the way up was atypical of most glaciers in that there was so much black, due to the volcanic ash trapped in the ice. As you can see, we stopped frequently to take in some fantastic views.

*Here is where we peaked on our hike. Behind a now outdoor-enthused Claire, it’* It's fair to say that we slept well that evening. Our accomodation in the easily pronouncable 'Kirkjubaejarklaustur' was all organised by our Arctic Adventures guide very last minute, due to our change in itinerary. We stayed there on the following night too, and we were really satisfied with the quality of the hotel. But alas, we did not get a sniff of the Northern Lights whenever we ventured out. Definite first world problems!   
  
**Day 4** began with a drive to the ice caves, via some interesting lava fields left over from the last major eruption. Supposedly, one eruption badly affected the farming in a lot of Western Europe due to the amount of ash blown over, and many generations struggled to survive. The remnants of this can be viewed on the [**'Trip Gallery'**](file:///C:\Users\Tom\Documents\Code\Bootstrap\Site%202\gallery.html#lava).   
  
When we arrived at the meeting place for the ice caves, we missed the opportunity to get a comfortable seat on the next transport. We massively regretted being last on, as to get to the caves, we had to drive off road on the snow for about 45 minutes. I could not find a seatbelt, and banged my head several times! In the end, however, it was all worth it. These caves were located next to Katla Volcano, and in all my years travelling, I've never quite seen anywhere like it. It felt like we were on an expedition in the middle of the arctic. *s clear that the glacier has receded. The glacier lake at the bottom had once been all ice. This recession has happened within the last 10 years, with global warming certainly having a lot to answer for.*

*This is the banner image for a lot of this site, and for good reason. It was very special for us to feel this far from home. Katla volcano can be seen on the right side of the horizon.*

*It is worth mentioning that we faced many obstacles when taking these photos. The one was this girl in the bright pink coat. Wherever there was a photo opportunity, she would always race to be the first there with her selfie-stick, and linger there for a good 3-4 minutes. When she was near us on the bus once, I couldn't help but notice that unusually, all of her photos featured her own face for 80% of the shot, and the actual sight taking up the small remainder. Even today I question her frustrating logic! By the way, this wasn't even our helicopter!*

The caves themselves were very impressive. We navigated three in total, using crampons and ropes. Claire and I have both since commented that this was one of our favourite parts of the whole holiday.

*Helmets were necessary, as a lot of the ice was melting. I still remember the constant dripping sound in each cave, as well as occasionally being splashed! At any time, chunks of ice could have come crashing down, but luckily, we escaped unscathed. The result of the melting is that there were quite a lot of openings in the ceilings of the caves, as pictured.*

*One of our favourite things about this location was the look of the cave walls. The ice was packed so densely that it retained the colour blue. As with many locations we encountered, the ash was frozen inside a prison of ice, leaving these unusual shadows.*

I wish we could have stayed in the caves for longer, but we still had so much to see. The main highlights of which were the Skogafoss waterfall (as featured in the show [**'Vikings'**](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4nMCJA9faSw)), and Reynisfjara basalt sea stacks. At the latter, there was, curiously, a black sand beach; showing the reach and depth of the aforementioned volcanic ash. After a bumpy ride back to our main tour bus, this is where we concluded day four of our holiday.

*These are a couple of the best shots from the last part of the day. By now, we'd learned to get in before the girl with the pink coat, or at least get off the bus a few minutes after her! If you are still with us, I hope you enjoy hearing about the last leg of our journey in* [***Part 3***](file:///C:\Users\Tom\Documents\Code\Bootstrap\Site%202\part3.html)*.*

**Day 5** started with more spectacular views. Around half an hour after our departure from Kirkjubaejarklaustur, we were greeted by two glaciers, side by side. We then drove along a mountain range all the way until we got to 'Diamond Beach'.

*This backdrop was supposedly used for shots found in the final season of 'Game of Thrones'. If you imagine the foreground covered in snow, and the day being a bit more unpleasant, it’s easy to see why.*

*Diamond Beach was beautiful. On the black sand, there were chunks of ice that were flowing into the area from the nearby glacier lagoon, and then being swept into the sea. This was another sight that we had never-before experienced, so Claire and I really took our time on the walk along the shore. Here she can be seen getting some nice close up shots, one of which can be found in the* [***'Trip Gallery'***](file:///C:\Users\Tom\Documents\Code\Bootstrap\Site%202\gallery.html#closeup)

The part of the trip that I had been most looking forward to, was this very glacier lagoon. Jokusarlon turned out to be an incredible last chapter to our Arctic Adventures tour, and everything that I had hoped it would be. The page [**banner**](file:///C:\Users\Tom\Documents\Code\Bootstrap\Site%202\part3.html#jumbotronlagoon) merely *hints* at the breadth and depth of this arctic-like panorama, and upon arrival I was absolutely awestruck. Jokulsarlon and Diamond Beach can apparently be unpredictable in terms of ice content, but fortunately for us, the place was covered in all manner of it.

*We were also extremely lucky to see seals playing in amongst it all!*

*We did quite a bit of walking around it; hitting a few different viewpoints. However, there were moments where I simply had to just sit down and take it all in.*

After Jokulsarlon, we had a good 5-hour trip back to Reykjavik, via a stop for hot chocolate at another waterfall. This gave us both plenty of time to look back at photos and look back at what we had seen and done. We both agreed that this place was unlike any other that we had been in the world, and could not face the prospect of going home. Still, we had another few days left before our flight out on the 12th, and we happily checked back into the Hotel Natura later on. We had intended to do some Northern Light spotting, but we were so wiped out that we settled for Dominos Pizza delivered to the room, and an early night.   
  
**Day 6** involved us going to the Blue Lagoon. This is a commercialised hot spring not far outside of Reykjavik. I didn't want to risk taking the camera containing an SD card full of our adventures, so this [**video**](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NmTyAUBY1U8) should give you a bit of an overview. Despite being very touristy, I couldn't argue with a nice warm dip after everything we had done.   
  
Back in Reykjavik, we watched Liverpool beat Manchester City in a place called [**The English Pub**](https://enskibarinn.is/). Surprisingly, it was filled with mostly Icelandic folk; a lot of whom actually supported Liverpool. Claire went against her instincts by coming with me, as usually an evening full of football and beer is her idea of hell. She probably surprised herself in how much she enjoyed herself, and we even made a couple of friends. When Salah and Firmino secured a spot in the UCL semi-finals for Liverpool, she was jumping up and down with the rest of us! The evening was topped off nicely with a few cocktails and some live music. I'd definitely go back there.   
  
**Day 7** was scheduled to be a rest day, so nothing too eventful happened. After we packed our things, we did go into the city one last time, and celebrated our final meal at an authentic Icelandic restaurant called [**Laekjarbrekka**](http://laekjarbrekka.is/). The fish here was absolutely superb, and naturally I ordered more Viking beer. Sad that we hadn't seen the Northern Lights, we spent a bit of time down at the prom. We did not get our reward there, so we hopped on the bus back to our hotel. Amazingly, at our last possible chance before heading in for the night, we did catch a tiny glimpse of them behind the clouds. The photo is not worth sharing, but for us it really rounded off a very special holiday.

*Back at the hotel, we had always passed these unusual wooden sculptures. So, obviously we had to pose next to them. I think the old lady on the right is looking a little jealous of Claire here!*

*Our final meal before the inevitable flight home. Up in the clouds, we got the chance to wave goodbye to the mountain ranges we had grown so accustomed to seeing on our long, memorable drives.*

Thank you for taking the time to read about our experiences. If you have any questions about our time in Iceland, please get in touch via our [**'Contact'**](file:///C:\Users\Tom\Documents\Code\Bootstrap\Site%202\contact.html) tab. If you'd like to see even more photos from our holiday, please visit the [**'Trip Gallery'**](file:///C:\Users\Tom\Documents\Code\Bootstrap\Site%202\gallery.html).