Tour Code
XICE

ADVENTURESABROAD

ACTIVE ICELAND

Glaciers, Volcanoes, Beaches & Waterfalls

11 days

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Day 1 Arrival in Reykjavik

Welcome to Iceland!

Reykjavík is the largest city in Iceland and the world's northernmost capital. Located on the southern shore of the Faxafloi Bay with a population of around 120,000, the city is the heart of Iceland's cultural, economic, and governmental activity. It is also believed to be the location of the first permanent settlement on Iceland, which Ingólfur Arnarson is said to have established in 874 CE. Until the 18th century there was little development and Reykjavík was not established as a city until 1786 CE and grew steadily over the next century. Today Reykjavík is among the cleanest, greenest, and safest cities in the world.

This evening we convene for a welcome dinner.

Overnight in Reykjavik.

Included Meal(s): Dinner, if required.

Day 2 Reykjavik: City Touring

This morning we will enjoy a city tour of Reykjavik, the world's northernmost capital, and one of the newest, having established itself only in the late 19th century. Our walking tour will include a visit to the Old town and the Old Town harbour. The Old Town is centered around the Tjornin, a small pond on whose shores, Ingolfur Arnarson, founded the original settlement in 874. It is here where both the Town Hall and Althing, or National Assembly, is located.

At the National Museum of Iceland we will learn about the Norse and Icelandic culture. This museum houses objects of religious and folk relics, and tools dating from the period of settlement. On our tour we will enjoy a short walk along seafront, and we will also see the city Cathedral, the City Hall and the House of Parliament.

Due to the linger effects of jetlag and our full day tomorrow, the balance of the day is at leisure (dinner on your own).

Overnight in Reykjavik.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast

Day 3 From Reykjavik: Snaefellsjokull Walking Tour

This morning we depart Reykjavik on a full-day walking excursion in Snaefellsjokull National Park.* We drive north to the Snaeellsnes Peninsula, where we disembark and walk between the tiny hamlets of Arnarstapi and Hellnar (2.5k 1.5mi /1-hr.) along some of Iceland's most beautiful coastline, with several arched rocks, pillars, basalt columns, and a view of Snaeellsjokull Glacier and Mountain throughout the route. This walk is mostly on flat land, with very minimal ups and downs on a narrow path.

The Snaefellsness Peninsula offers great beauty and mystery and is often described as "Iceland in Miniature" due to beautiful mountain views, black sand beaches, rock belts down to the shore, lava fields, beautiful villages and, of course, the mysterious Snaefellsjokull glacier. Snaefellsjokull became world famous following the publication of Jules Verne's book, "A Journey to the Center of the Earth," which identified the volcano as the starting point of the journey. Its peak reaches 1446 meters (4,745 feet), and on a clear day it can be seen all the way from Reykjavik (about 200 kilometers away). It was first climbed in 1754 CE and, like many other volcanoes in Iceland, it is still active.

After our morning walk, we drive to the fishing village of Stykkisholmur, where we have a break for lunch. Stykkisholmur lies on Breiðafjörður Bay on the north coast of the Snaefellsnes Peninsula and is surrounded by wonderful views of the innumerable islands. The town is well known as the gateway to the islands, and also for the preservation of its historic houses, which give the village real character.

After lunch, we visit Stykkisholmur's Volcano Museum, the private collection of Haraldur Sigurasson, a renowned volcanologist who has

carried out research worldwide. After our visit we drive to Saxholl, an old volcano crater from the top of which one is blessed with incredible views over the Atlantic Ocean and the expansive, dried lava fields of the Snaefellsnes Peninsula. We walk to the top of Saxholl Volcano (2k / 1.2 mi. 2hrs). Saxholl is an excellent sightseeing attraction for those who do not want to hike too far. The crater is approximately 100 m (100 ft) high with a useful walking path and steps in order to make the ascent as easy as possible for guests. Saxholl is, in fact, two craters, though most guests will only summit the first due to its close proximity to the road.

After our visit we return to Reykjavik via a short stop to view Kirkjufell (or Church) Mountain (463m) located near the town of Grundarfjoraur - and the most photographed mountain in Iceland. Here we sgtop at the base of the mountain and stretch our legs briefly while absorbing the dramatic vistas and views. Return to Reyjavik for dinner and overnight.

WALK SUMMARY
Arnarstapi to Hellnar (2.5k 1.5mi /1-hr.): About 1 hour of easy coastal walking with no elevation gain/loss; distance of about 2.5km (1.5 mi); terrain is mildly undulating on crushed gravel and natural path with some unmarked path through open fields, rocks.

Saxholl Volcano (2k / 1.2 mi. 2hrs): About 2 hours of easy-moderate walking with an elevation gain/loss of 100ft; distance of about 2km (1.5 mi) today; terrain is entirely on a modern metal stairway/path ascending (and descending) to crater rim.

* A NOTE on Icelandic place names and spelling: the written Icelandic language relies on many special characters that are not necessarily compatible with many internationally used computer programs, most notably those responsible for the text on our website. While our preference is to render local place names as accurately as possible, for the sake of clarity, we have transliterated some special characters to their closest phonetic equivalent with our apologies to our Icelandic hosts.

Overnight in Reykjavik.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 4 Reykjavik - Vik via Golden Circle Walk

This morning we depart Reykjavik and head towards some of the best-known natural phenomena in Iceland, a region often referred to as the ‘Golden Circle’.

We first visit Thingvellir National Park, located close to Reykjavik, where we take a short stroll along flat duckboards and wooden walkways (2k 1.2mi / 1hr.) through the spectacular Almannagja Gorge, from the top of which we are rewarded with broad views of Iceland's largest lake, Lake Thingvallavatn, and after a further 15-minute walk down through the Gorge, we come across Oxararfoss Waterfall.

After our visit to Thingvellir National we re-board our vehicle and we drive to Gullfoss, the 'Golden Waterfall,' where we pause. Next, we head to the nearby geothermal area spouting the hot springs of Geysir & Strokkur. This region is famous for its numerous hot springs and boiling mud pools. We then continue along the south shore past the Eyjafjallajokull ice cap, famous for its eruption in early 2010 CE. The glacier feeds many beautiful waterfalls and we visit two of them, stopping to admire the enchanting Seljalandsfoss before continuing to the village of Vik I Myrdal, a small, charming village surrounded by high bird cliffs.

Vik is famous for its black beach, considered one of the 10 most beautiful beaches on the planet by the US journal ‘Islands Magazine’. The sand is made of basalt, and just to the west are some truly beautiful cliffs, home to many seabirds, most notably puffins, who burrow into the shallow soils during the nesting season. Offshore lie fingers of basalt rock (stacks) rising into the air, remnants of a once more extensive cliff line called Reynisfjall, now battered and eroded by the sea. Folklore tells us that the basalt stacks are former trolls who tried to drag their boats out to sea only to be caught by the rising dawn and frozen by the sunlight for all time. Contemporary legends note the story of a husband who found his wife had been taken by two trolls, and had been petrified during the night at Reynisfjara. His wife was the love of his life, and the husband made the trolls swear to never kill anyone ever again. His wife is still there, out among the trolls, rocks, and the sea. There is no landmass between here and Antarctica and the Atlantic rollers can attack with full force.

Vik lies directly beneath the Myrdalsjokull Glacier, which itself is on top of the Katla volcano. Katla has not erupted since 1918 CE, and this longer than typical repose period has led to speculation that an eruption may occur soon. An eruption of Katla could melt enough ice to trigger an enormous flash flood, potentially large enough to obliterate the town. The town's church, located high on a hill, is believed to be the only building that would survive such a flood. Thus, the people of Vík practice periodic drills and are trained to rush to the church at the first sign of an eruption.

On arrival we check-in to our hotel.

WALK SUMMARY: Thingvellir National Park, Almannagjá Gorge (2k 1.2mi / 1hr.) About 1 hour of easy valley-floor walking with insignificant elevation gain/loss (mostly flat) on an undulating route; distance of about 2km (1.2 mi) today; terrain undulates on natural path unmarked

path through open fields, rocks.

Overnight in Vik.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 5 From Vik: Full-day Walking in Landmannalaugar National Park

Today we depart on a full-day of walking in Landmannalaugar National Park, regarded as Iceland's premier hiking destination. As its name suggests, the area's geothermal activity means the park's rivers and streams are warm, and perfect for bathing. We take two walks today, one in the morning, one in the afternoon.

Landmannalaugar is located in the rhyolite mountain area – a riot of coloured geological formations, oranges, greens, purples, and reds. The mountains slope elegantly like waves on a multicoloured ocean. One of the world's uniquely beautiful places, it is much photographed. Our morning walk starts at the raven-black Laugahraun lava field to Mount Brennisteinsalda (Sulphur Wave), an 855m volcano whose name derives from the large sulfur spots that dot the mountain's side (5k / 2.5mi-2hrs.). Due to the red of the iron, the dark blues of the volcanic ash and green moss, Brennisteinsalda is considered to be the most colorful mountain in Iceland.

Our walk begins at the service center then crosses the lava field on an excellent hiking path. After crossing, we are rewarded with a breathtaking view of the magnificent Vondugil (Bad Ravines). We continue along the west edge of the lava field towards Brennisteinsalda Volcano. The path is a bit steep in places, lined with small rocky lava steps up to the open area, where we find a selection of colourful small sulfur rocks and hot springs that are sometimes covered with smoke. We continue over a rocky path to Graenagil Ravine, then return to the service center and out vehicle. We then take lunch in a local café.

In the afternoon we depart on our second walk of the day to the (940m) summit of nearby Mount Blahnjukur (Blue Peak). The spectacular dark blacks and blues of the surrounding lava flows and settled ash are a memorable part of today's walk (3k / 1.8 mi – 1hr.) Mount Blahnjukur sits beside Brennisteinsalda, and on a clear day, one can look out at five different glaciers from its peak, an absolute must for avid landscape photographs.

Laugahraun lava field to Mount Brennisteinsalda (5k / 2.5mi – 2hrs). About 2 hours of easy to moderate walking with slight elevation gain/loss on an undulating route; distance of about 5km (2.5 mi) today; terrain undulates on natural unmarked paths through open rocky terrain, and undulating ground.

WALK SUMMARY
Mount Blahnjukur (3k / 1.8 mi - 1hr.) About 1 hour of easy to moderate walking with slight elevation gain/loss on an undulating route; distance of about 3km (1.8 mi) today; terrain undulates on natural unmarked paths through open rocky terrain.

Overnight in Vik.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Lunch

Day 6 From Vik: Landmannalaugar National Park, Ljotipollur Crater Lake

Today we depart on a half day of walking in Landmannalaugar National Park to Ljotipollur Crater Lake (known in English as 'Ugly Puddle'). Don't let the name put you off, as this hike comprehensively demonstrates the staggering diversity of Landmannalaugar's landscape. The name is a disservice to the 'puddle' itself; this deep, beautiful, trout-filled lake is surrounded by sloping red embankments, a stark contrast to the dark gravel that surrounds it. (10k / 6mi – 4hrs.) After our walk we return to the vehicle and drive back to Vik and our hotel; any balance of the day is at leisure.

WALK SUMMARY: Ljotipollur Crater Lake walk (10k / 6mi – 4hrs.) About 4 hours of moderate hill walking with perhaps 30m elevation gain/loss on an undulating route; distance of about 10km (6 mi) today; terrain undulates on natural paths and unmarked paths through open fields, rocks, and some scrambling.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 7 Vik - Hofn: Black Sand Beach, Skaftafell, Jokulsarlon Lagoon, Vatnajokull Glacier

Upon departure this morning we first make a short visit to the Black Sand Beach south of Vik. We then cross Eldhraun, the largest mass of lava ever to flow on the face of the earth, before reaching the small village Kirkjubaejarklaustur, a former site of a 12th-century CE Catholic convent. Even before the times of first Norse settlement in Iceland, Irish monks are thought to have lived here. Since 1186 CE, a convent of Benedictine nuns was located in Kirkjubaejarklaustur until the Reformation in 1550 CE.

Our tour continues over Skeidararsandur Sands to Skaftafell National Park. We continue on to the breath-taking Jokulsarlon Glacial Lagoon to see the birthplace of icebergs. We have some time to view this stunning area before we take a short boat tour on the glacial lagoon. Jokulsarlon started to form in the early 1920's and is getting bigger every year. We see many amazing blocks of ice that have broken off Europe's biggest glacier, Vatnajokull, and sail slowly towards the ocean, which is only a kilometer away.

After a break for lunch we take a Jeep tour on Vatnajokull Glacier. Vatnajokull, translating as "glacier of rivers", is the largest glacier in Iceland and is located in the southeast of the country. At 8100 square kilometers, it is the second largest glacier in Europe and the average thickness of the ice is an incredible 400m. Under the glacier are numerous active volcanoes. On arrival in Hofn, we check into our hotel.

Walk Summary: Half-day walking in Vatnajökull National Park: Svartifoss Waterfall (Black Falls) (3.7k / 2.2mi. 1.5 hrs.) About 2 hours of easy walking with moderate elevation gain/loss; distance of about 3.7km (2.2 mi) over mildly undulating terrain on crushed gravel and natural paths with slopes and across open ground.

Ovenight in Hofn.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 8 Fro Hofn: VatnajÃ¶kull National Park, Svartifoss Waterfall

Today we depart for Vatnajökull National Park to visit the beautiful Svartifoss (Black Falls). We depart the hotel and drive to the visitor center at Skaftafell, where we disembark and depart on our moderately easy walk of 45 minutes each way. The walk is well worth the effort, as the waterfall has lava basalt column on both sides, giving the falls a unique vista. The hike is easy uphill to the waterfall, returning downhill (the same, or similar way). After our walk we return to our Höfn hotel. The remainder of the day is at leisure.

Walk Summary: Svartifoss Waterfall (Black Falls) (3.7k / 2.2mi. 1.5 hrs.). About 2 hours of easy walking with moderate elevation gain/loss; distance of about 3.7km (2.2 mi) over mildly undulating terrain on crushed gravel and natural paths with slopes and across open ground.

Overnight in Hofn.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast

Day 9 To Reykjavik via Skogafoss, Iceland Erupts Museum, Hveragerdi

This morning we depart and return Reykjavik (399k / 248mi, 5-hrs). En route, we stop at three places of interest.

Our first stop is at Skogar Village where we see the Skogafoss, one of the highest waterfalls in Iceland, then visit the Skogar Museum, a folk museum giving excellent insight into Iceland's past, including reconstructed ancient Icelandic turf houses. We take lunch in a café en route. We continue our journey and about 140k from Reykjavik we stop to visit the Iceland Erupts Museum at Thorvaldseyri Visitor Center (if open). Here we are given a complete introduction and overview of the Eyjafjallajokull volcanic eruption of 2010 CE, which famously closed many of Europe's airports. Farmers living at the foot of the Eyjafjallajokull Volcano always knew the volcano was a sleeping giant, and in April 2010 the sleep was over. The family at Thorvaldseyri and many of their neighbours were temporarily evacuated and relocated, and around the world tens of thousands were left stranded due to ash clouds preventing airplanes from flying. A short film portrays the spectacular natural event, and the challenges met by the family farm at Thorvaldseyri. Finally, we stop in Hveragerdi to stretch our legs. After our visit, we return to the vehicle and continue to Reykjavik.

Overight in Reykjavik.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Lunch

Day 10 From Reykjavik: Reykjanes Peninsula & Blue Lagoon

Today we depart on a full-day excursion to Reykjanes and the Blue Lagoon. We spend the morning walking the Reykjanes Peninsula and the afternoon relaxing in the thermal waters of the Blue Lagoon.

After breakfast we depart Reykjavik and drive onto the peninsula. The landscape is dark, diverse, cragged, almost alien, uniquely molded over millennia of geothermal activity, with hidden cave networks, towering mountains, and dramatic coastlines. Today we hike from the sleepy fishing settlement of Hafnir to the low-lying cliffs of Hafnaberg where we can see a multitude of birds including nesting razorbills, fulmars, guillemots, and kittiwakes, among other species. From the cliffs are viewpoints that lend themselves to spotting whales, dolphins, and seals swimming off the Reykjanes coastline. Just make sure not to stand too close to the cliff's edge! On our walk we also encounter the "Bridge Between the Continents," otherwise known as Mialina or 'Leif The Lucky Bridge,' a 15-meter walkway between the exposed North American and Eurasian tectonic plates. On one side of the bridge, a plaque reads "Welcome to America," on the other, "Welcome to Europe."

After our hike we return to the roadhead and drive (1hr.) to the Blue Lagoon, a hot spring where we bathe outside in the mineral rick pools of superheated neon blue water believed to have restorative effects and is visited by over 400,000 people each year. Here there is a restaurant / café where we can arrange our own lunches. We spend the afternoon at the Blue Lagoon, whose hot water is sourced from over 6,000 feet below ground, where its temperature is about 464 degrees Fahrenheit, and is also used to create electricity for the nearby city of Reykjavik. The water in the Lagoon gets its colour from the rich mineral and sulfur content and it steams because, well, it's really hot. The water temperature averages about 104 degrees Fahrenheit, though you will find varying hot and cold spots as you move around the Lagoon, which has different depths and areas for relaxation, including ledges for sitting and small caves for privacy. There is also a restaurant and shop and modern changing areas with towels supplied as part of the entrance fee. After our visit, we return to the hotel for a break before our farewell dinner.

Walk Summary: Reykjanes Peninsula, Hafnir to Hafnaberg (4k /2.4mi. 2 hrs.). About 2 hours of easy coastal walking with little or no elevation gain/loss; distance of about 4km (2.4 mi) today; terrain is mildly undulating on crushed gravel and natural path with some unmarked path through open fields, rocks.

Overnight in Reykjavik.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 11 Departure

Departure from Reykjavik.

GODA FERD!

Included Meal(s): Breakfast