

Iceland Highlights

Reykjavik & Golden Circle



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Two Week Iceland Itinerary

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1. Introduction

Iceland is a favorite destination for nature lovers due to its rugged and mostly untouched landscape. The island is of volcanic origin and you see lava fields just about everywhere unless they are hidden under glaciers. This truly makes for a moon-like scenery. Iceland is still volcanically active and this gives rise to hot springs (thermal pools) and geysers. The hills and lava fields create perfect conditions for spectacular waterfalls and, in winter, you can explore large ice caves and bathe in hot thermal pools in a snow covered landscape while watching the Aurora Borealis (Northern Lights) light up the night sky with its myriads of stars.

This will surely make for a truly special experience and lots of memorable moments.

Not to forget, there are only 370,000 people on the island and there is plenty of solitude and untouched nature to admire.



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This “**Iceland Highlights**” guide covers a 2-week Iceland’s highlights itinerary, but you can break it up into shorter pieces if you are only here for a few days or a long layover. Did you know, that airlines will not charge you extra for a long layover in Iceland? Normally, airlines treat multi-day layovers as extra legs on your itinerary and charge you more, but in order to attract tourism, this is not the case with Iceland. So, if your trip just allows for an extra 1 or 2 days, or even a few hours, there is plenty that you can do. For a layover measured in hours, you can see the [Blue Lagoon](#), which is one of Iceland’s most visited tourist attractions. If you have a day or two, you can explore [Reykjavik](#) and you can self-drive the [Golden Circle](#) or join a guided tour. If you have 2 weeks, congratulations, then you can make good use of this guide and you can circle the island on the Ring Road.

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In this guide, we will tell you what we consider to be the major attractions, provide google maps links to help you get there, our experiences and often links to the attractions if they have a website. To help you find out what best fits you, we have added lots of photos and links to additional reviews.

This is not an in-depth Iceland guide. You can buy those from the big travel guide companies.

Our goal is to help you Make Memorable Moments on a relaxing Iceland trip and help you build the perfect itinerary for your trip.

Please also check out the other exciting destinations and travel guides on our [Backpack and Snorkel](#) website.

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2.1 Disclaimer

In this guide I am doing my best to give you the most accurate information. Over time, however, prices, times, and even attractions are subject to change. Therefore, I and backpackandsnorkel.com cannot be held responsible for the experiences of users while traveling. I strongly suggest that you write or call the attractions you plan to visit for confirmation when you make your travel plans.

Also, please stay alert, be aware of your surroundings and keep an eye on your belongings. Pickpockets and other criminals can easily ruin even the best planned vacation.

2.2 Copyright

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3. Things To Know About Iceland Before You Go

3.1 General Information about Iceland

- **Time:** Iceland is at UTC+0, also called GMT time. You can see the current time [here](#)
- **Visa:** Visas are needed for citizens of some countries. You can check with the Icelandic embassy in your country or check [here](#).
- **Language:** Icelandic. Our experience is that most Icelanders speak excellent English.

3.2 Phone calls and Internet access in Iceland

- **Calling Iceland:** the country code to call Iceland is +354
- **Cell phone signal:** Iceland typically has good cell phone signal in the cities, but no signal outside the cities
- **Wifi:** lots of stores and restaurants provide unsecured free wifi without the need to enter a password. Even in hotels, wifi is often unsecured without a password

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3.3 Money in Iceland

- **Currency:** Icelandic Króna (ISK). You can find exchange rates [here](#)
- **Credit cards** are accepted almost everywhere. Exceptions are street vendors and some rural parks that charge an entrance or parking fee.
- **Money exchange:** We did not need any cash during our Iceland trips. But it may be a good idea to have some cash available. There are 2 places at the international airport where you can do that:
 1. There are ATMs near the restrooms just outside the shopping and dining area in the main part of the secure area in the airport – just follow the restroom signs. The last time we visited neither of the 2 ATMs was operating.
 2. There is a currency exchange with a person behind the counter in the shopping and dining area in the main part of the secure area in the airport. The ATMs right next to it do not dispense local currency.
- Be advised that gas stations have limited opening hours and that you need a PIN to pay at the pump when you use a credit card. For more information see the “Driving in Iceland” tips below.

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3.8. Best Time To Visit Iceland

Iceland's Weather from JUNE - AUGUST

Summer is the warmest and most expensive time of the year - I said warm as in mid-50F or 10-13°C and most expensive as in prices going through the roof. You get 20-21h of sunlight per day and it never gets dark. This is also the best time of year to go whale watching. Puffin viewing season ends in mid-August. June is the month of the midnight sun with the longest day being on June 21. July and August are the best times for e.g. scuba diving in Þingvellir or hiking around the country.

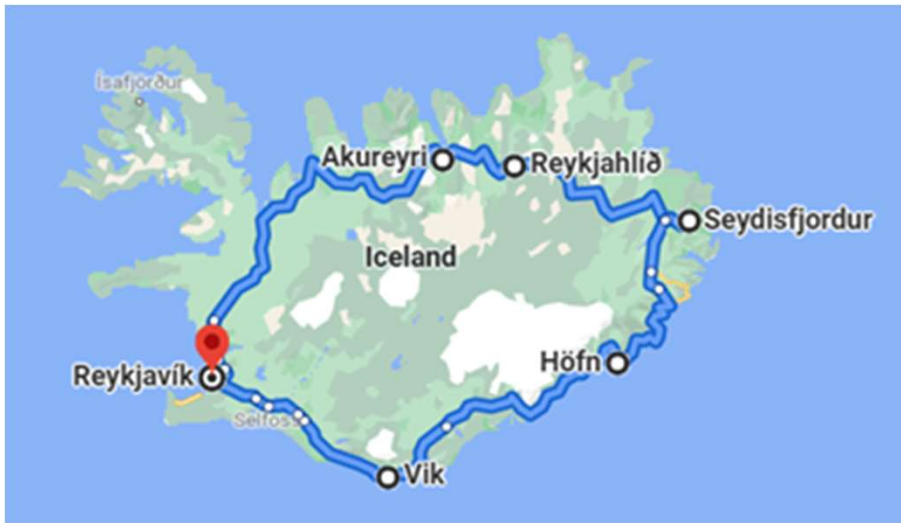
Iceland's Weather from SEPTEMBER - OCTOBER

Shoulder season with lower hotel rates and temperatures in the mid-30s to low 50s (2-11°C). The fall colors make September especially colorful and the rain is not too bad yet.

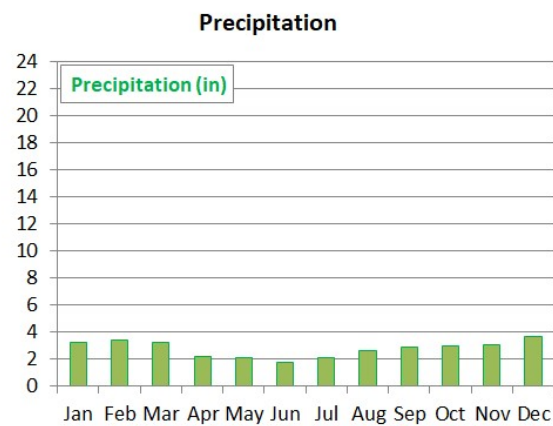
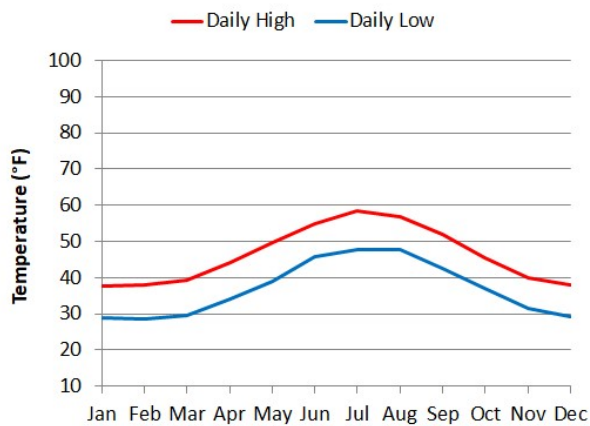
Iceland's Weather from NOVEMBER - MARCH

Temperatures will be in the mid-20s to lower 30s (-10°C to 8°C) and this is also the time of the year with the most precipitation. If the sky is clear, then now is your best chance to see the Aurora Borealis. Now is also the time for glacier hiking and ice caving, but keep in mind that many roads outside the cities are closed. December and January only have about 4-5h of sunlight. In December you will see Reykjavik light up for Christmas and Santas are scattered throughout town.

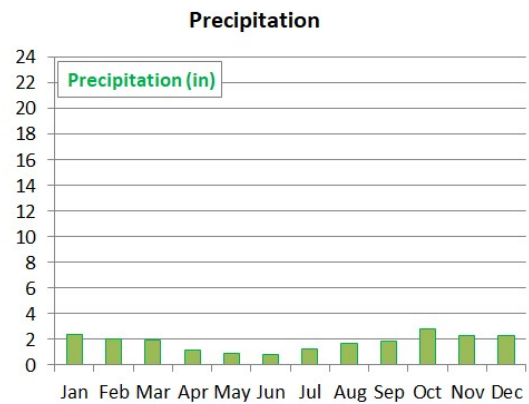
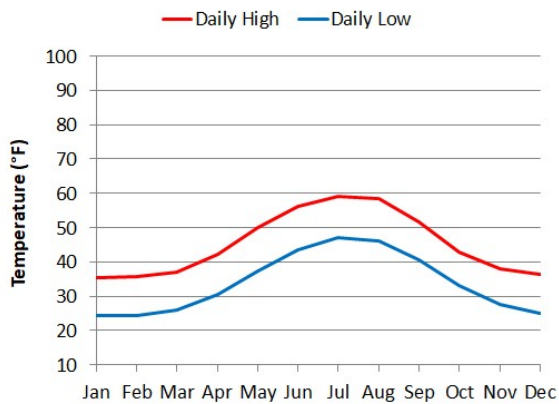
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3.11.1 The climate of Reykjavik



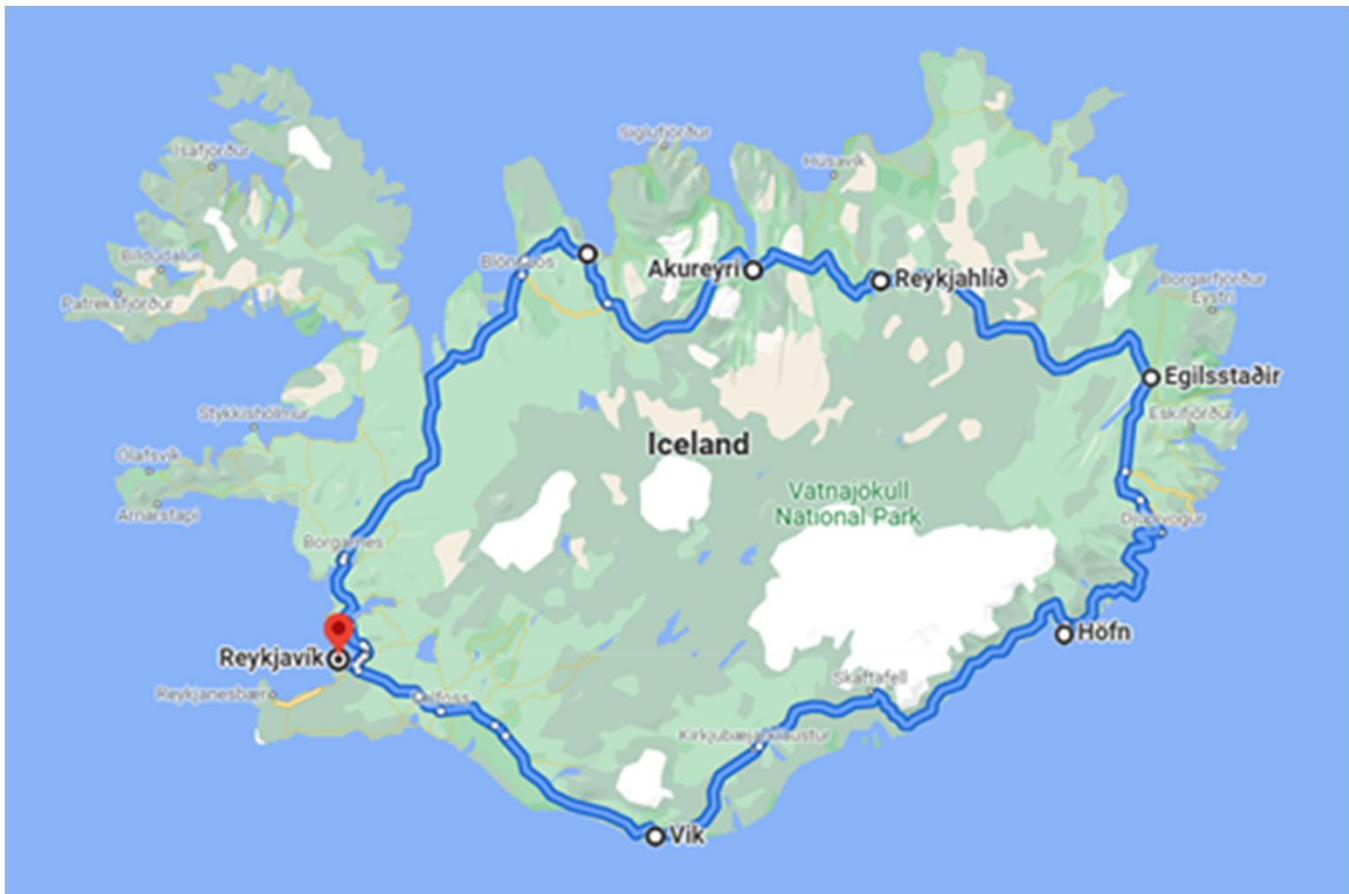
3.11.2 The climate of Akureyri



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4. Two Week Itinerary for Iceland

Iceland is a beautiful and rugged country. It can easily be toured in 2 weeks. If you only have 1 or two days then I propose to either do the self-guided walking tour of [Reykjavik](#) or explore the [Blue Lagoon](#) and the [Reykjanes Peninsula](#). If you have one week, then you may need to decide between Northern or Southern Iceland. Should you have two or more weeks, congratulations, you can explore Iceland's highlights. Use the itinerary on the next page and modify it as you see fit.



Two Week Iceland Itinerary

	Day	Night
Sun	Arrive at KEF airport and get your rental car ; Bridge Between Continents ; Gunnhver Geothermal Area , Reykjanes Lighthouse ; Valahnúkamöl ; Brimketill lava rock pool	Reykjavik
Mon	Self-guided walking tour of Reykjavik	Reykjavik
Tue	Self-guided Golden Circle tour	Reykjavik
Wed	Blue Lagoon ; Presidential Residence at Bessastaðir ; Fjörúkráin – Viking Village ; drive to your hotel in Skagafjörður ; optional stop at Icelandic Seal Center	Skagafjörður
Thu	Staðarbjörg Basalt Columns ; Icelandic Emigration Center (Vesturfararsetrið) ; Herring Era Museum ; Icelandic Folk Music Museum (Þjóðlagasetur)	Akureyri
Fri	Folk and Outsider Art Museum (Safnasafnið) ; Christmas House (Jólagarðurinn) ; Horse riding at Skjaldarvík Guest House ; Akureyri Art Museum ; Akureyri Church (Akureyrarkirkja) ; Explore downtown Akureyri ; Akureyri Thermal Pool (Sundlaug Akureyrar)	Akureyri
Sat	Goðafoss waterfall ; Aldeyjarfoss waterfall ; Skútustaðagígar pseudocraters ; Skútaís Farm Ice Cream ; Gamli Baerinn Restaurant	Reykjahlíð
Sun	Grjótagjá Cave ; climb up Hverfell ; Explore Dimmuborgir ; hike up Vindbelgjarfjall ; swim at Mývatn Nature Baths	Reykjahlíð
Mon	Hverir ; Leirhnjúkur Lava Field ; Viti Crater at Krafla ; Dettifoss ; Selfoss ; Hafragilsfoss	Reykjahlíð
Tue	Ásbyrgi Canyon ; Húsavík	Seyðisfjörður
Wed	Stuðlagil Canyon , Eggin í Gleðivík , Ferry to Papey Island	Höfn
Thu	Jökulsárlón , Diamond Beach , Fjallsárlón , Vatnajökull National Park at Skaftafell , Scenic Green Lava Walk ; Fjaðrárgljúfur Canyon that was shown in the Justin Bieber “I’ll Show You” video	Vík
Fri	Reynisfjara Beach with Hálsanefshellir Cave , Dyrhólaey Nature Reserve , Skógar Museum , Skógafoss waterfall	Keflavik
Sat	Fly home (alternatively, you can explore the Highlands today and leave on Sunday)	

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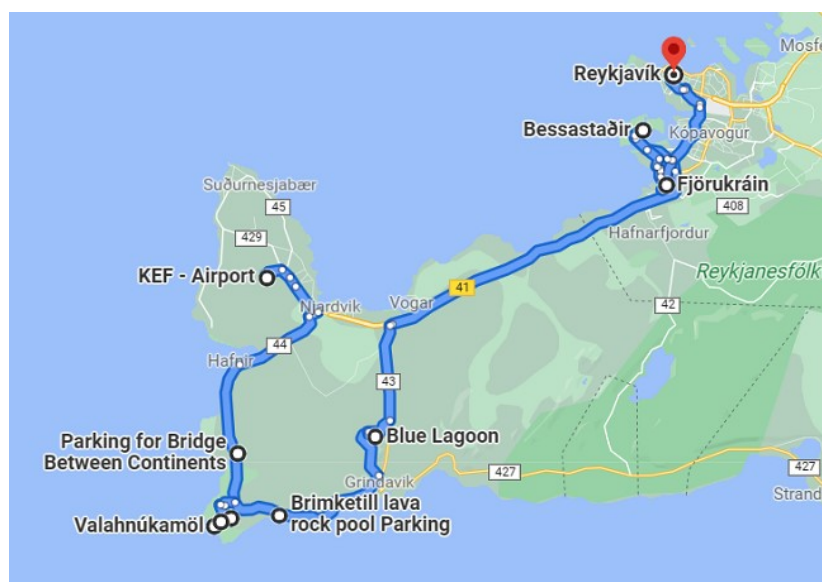
5. Self-Guided Tour of the Reykjanes Peninsula of Iceland

Get your [rental car at the airport](#) and either go to your hotel or drive to the first destination. Some hotels may have early check-in available and some even allow you to eat breakfast if you arrive before breakfast closes.

Coming from the US, we find it beneficial to do our sightseeing right after arrival in Iceland which is hours before we start to get tired. You may find it better to go to the hotel first, sleep for a few hours and then do sightseeing. Do whatever is best for you, but DO NOT put your and other people's safety at risk!

If you don't feel comfortable then you can move today's activities to [Day 4](#).

Before you drive to your first destination, make sure to buy groceries and drinks in Keflavik. Food is expensive in Iceland, but there are budget supermarkets like [Bónus](#) which have comparably low prices, but unfortunately they only open at 10am or 11am and close between 6 and 7pm. So, if you need to get groceries, there are [Extra24](#) markets, which are open 24h per day.



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5.2 Gunnuhver Geothermal Area ([map](#), [reviews](#))

Because the Mid-Atlantic rift runs through the Reykjanes Peninsula, you will see many signs of volcanic activity, including hot springs.

At Gunnuhver Geothermal Area you can find mud pools, boiling hot springs and steam vents. There are parking lots east and west of the main feature, the Gunnuhver Hot Spring. Access to the hot spring is on short wooden boardwalks. The hot spring generates large amounts of steam containing sulfur-chemicals that give it a distinct sulfur smell.

Admission and parking are free.



Origin of the name Gunnuhver

The name Gunnuhver comes from classic Icelandic folklore. About 400 years ago, the story claims, an impoverished woman called Gunna lived on a farm in the Reykjanes Peninsula. When one day, she was unable to pay her rent, her landlord took away her cooking pot as payment. She demanded the pot back or else she would starve herself to death. Unfortunately, neither one gave in and so she died of hunger.

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To the right (west), you will see several paths that lead you down to the rock covered beach. The heavy surf has abraded and thus rounded the edges of the rocks.



The drive from **Valahnúkamöl** to the next stop **Brimketill lava rock pool** is about 10min.

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5.5 Brimketill lava rock pool ([map](#), [reviews](#))

Brimketill means “whitewater cauldron” and this perfectly describes what it is at high tide: a cone shaped basin made from volcanic rock that was formed by erosion and that is often flooded by the ruthless waves that constantly hit it at high tide. During low tide, it looks like an elevated swimming pool next to the ocean.

Brimketill’s original name was Oddnýjarlaug, which means “Oddný’s Pool”. According to Icelandic folklore, Oddný was a female troll who bathed and washed her clothes here on a regular basis.

Because it looks harmless, countless people have injured themselves when they slipped and injured themselves on sharp rocks. Other people lost their lives when they climbed the rocks and fell or when waves topped the rock pool at high tide and dragged them out to sea or pushed them against sharp volcanic rocks. Therefore: Please stay away from the pool! Enjoy it from the platform that was constructed for tourists so that they can safely enjoy this attraction.



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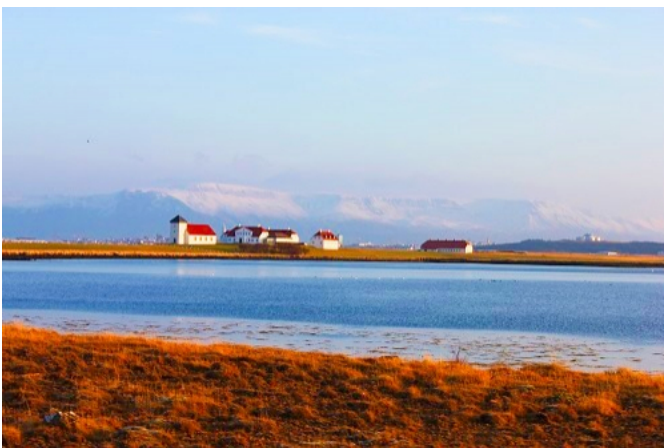
5.7 Presidential Residence at Bessastaðir ([map](#), [reviews](#))

Located in Álftanes outside of Reykjavik, Bessastaðir is the official residence of the President of Iceland.

Bessastaðir was settled since 1000AD and in the 13th century it was one of Snorri Sturluson's farms. Snorri Sturluson was an Icelandic politician, poet and historian who was elected law speaker to the Icelandic parliament (Althing) twice.

After his assassination in 1241, Bessastaðir was claimed by the King of Norway who housed his highest-ranking Icelandic officers here. In the 18th century, Bessastaðir was briefly converted into a school and then used as a farm which was purchased in 1867 by statesman and poet Grímur Thomsen. In 1940, Bessastaðir was bought by Sigurður Jónasson and donated a year later to be used as a residence for the regent and then President of Iceland.

There is really nothing to do here, except for a little sightseeing. We found it interesting that you can drive up close to the residence of the president of Iceland without ever seeing anyone, no guards, no nothing.



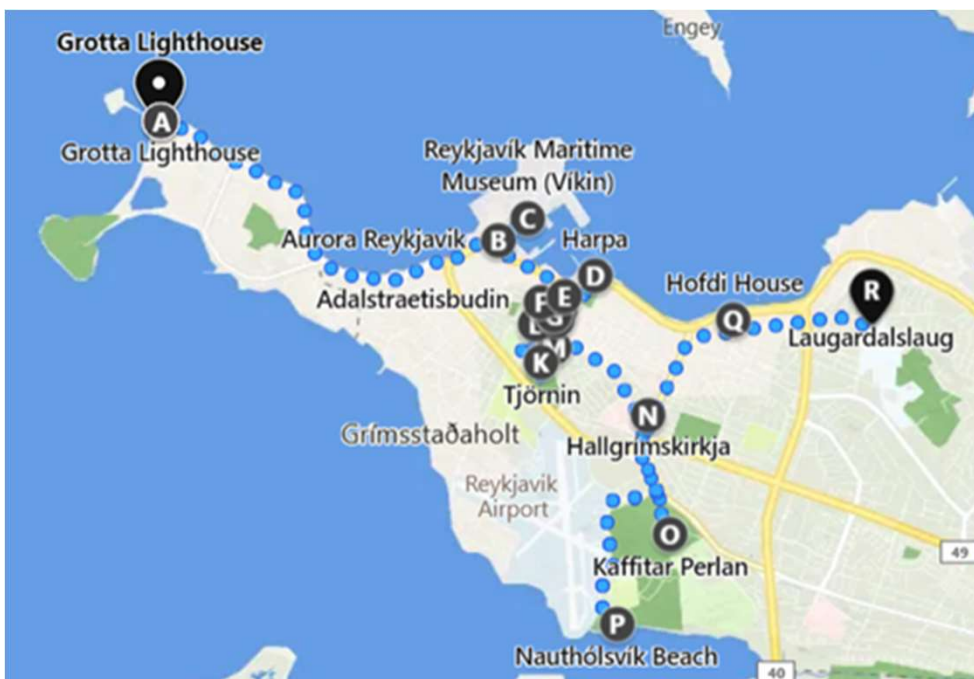
Now get back in your car and drive to Fjörukráin - The Viking Village for dinner and entertainment.

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6. Self-Guided Tour Of Reykjavik

Reykjavik is the capital of Iceland. It can easily be toured in one day. Some of the attractions are located in central Reykjavik, but you will need a car for some of the highlights. Alternatively, you can take a [bus](#) or a taxi.

Depending if you like to start your day watching birds or taking a bath in a thermal pool, you can do this itinerary as described or do it backwards. We prefer to take the bath at the end of a long adventurous day.



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(G) Austurvöllur Square with the statue of Jon Sigurdsson ([map](#), [reviews](#))

The square is lined with landmark buildings which are important to the city's history, like the Parliament building, Reykjavik's cathedral Domkirkjan, and Hotel Borg. You will find many cafes on Vallarstræti and Pósthússtræti. The square is dominated by a statue of Jon Sigurdsson, who was the leader of the Icelandic independence movement in the 19th century. Besides the statue, you will find him on the 500 Icelandic króna bank note, some stamps and his birthday (June 17) is Iceland's National Holiday.

The plaza is also known for protests against the handling of the financial crisis by the Icelandic government. The protests started on October 11, 2008 were organized by the political organization "Raddir fólksins" (=Voices of the people). They were held every Saturday until the resignation of the government of Prime Minister Geir Haarde in 2009.



Walk over to Althingi Parliament House.

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(N) Hallgrímskirkja ([map](#), [reviews](#), [website](#))

Hallgrímskirkja, the church of Hallgrímur, is a Lutheran parish church in Reykjavík. The church with its unique design stands 244ft (74.5m) tall and is the largest church in Iceland and one of the tallest structures in Iceland. It has an observation deck from which you have a fantastic view of Reykjavik, the bay and snow covered mountains in the distance. The church is named after the Icelandic poet and clergyman Hallgrímur Pétursson (1614–1674).

Hallgrímskirkja is one of the city's best-known landmarks, but Domkirkjan (City Cathedral) that you visited earlier, is the seat of the Bishop of Iceland and the central church of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Iceland.



Here are some facts of Hallgrímskirkja:

- state architect Guðjón Samúelsson's designed the church which was commissioned in 1937
- the design it said to resemble the trap rocks, mountains and glaciers of Iceland

...continued on the next page

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- the design is similar in style to the expressionist architecture of Grundtvig's Church of Copenhagen
- it took 41 years to build the church (1945-1986)
- the tower was completed long before the rest of the church was completed
- the crypt beneath the choir was consecrated in 1948
- the steeple and wings were completed in 1974
- the nave was consecrated in 1986
- the original design called for a shorter tower, but the church leaders it to be taller than Landakotskirkja, which was the cathedral of the Catholic Church on Iceland
- the interior is 18,040 sqft (1,676 square meter)
- the church underwent major restoration in 2008 and 2009
- the large pipe organ was built in 1992 by Johannes Klais of Bonn, Germany. It has 102 ranks, 72 stops and 5275 pipes and is 49ft (15m) tall and weighs 25 metric tons
- in front of the church stands a statue of explorer Leif Erikson (970–1020). It was made by Alexander Stirling Calder and was a gift from the United States in honor of the 1930 Althing Millennial Festival, commemorating the 1000th anniversary of Iceland's parliament at Þingvellir in 930
- opening hours: Winter (October – April): 9am to 5pm and Summer (May – September): 9am to 9pm

Now, take your car and drive to the next stop: Perlan.

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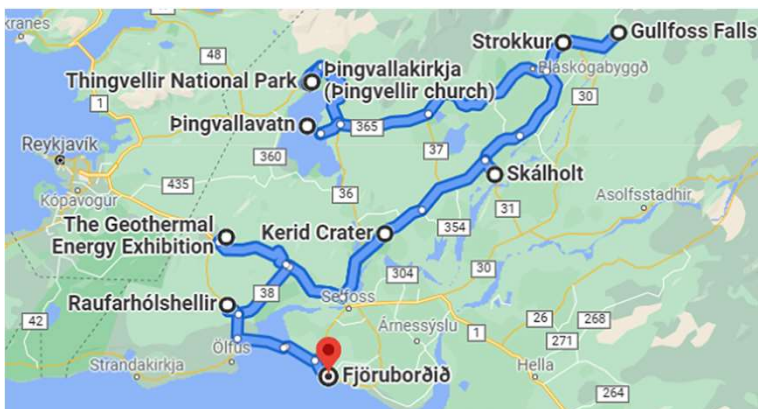
7. Self-Guided Golden Circle Tour

One of the first things people will tell you to do in Iceland is the Golden Circle Tour. It is one of the major tourist attractions in Iceland for a good reason as the Golden Circle connects 3 major sites close to Reykjavik: The Þingvellir National Park, the Geysir Geothermal Area, and the Gullfoss waterfall.

Besides those 3 major attractions, there are many other sites worth seeing. Some tours will include most or all of these additional sites and others may only bring you to the 3 major stops.

Most people decide to do the Golden Circle tour in one day and this is absolutely doable. Just rent a car and start driving. The roads are in excellent condition and there are so few roads that it is difficult to get lost. Driving the Golden Circle in a regular sedan is fine; the roads are paved and in good condition. Alternatively, you can join a guided tour.

Start your Self-Guided Golden Circle Tour in the morning so that you have enough time to see all attractions. The map below shows you the individual destinations; if you click on the map, then you will be taken to google maps with more details.



The first destination, Thingvellir National Park, lies about 40min to the north east of Reykjavik.

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The next highlight on your trip is Gullfoss which lies about 10min to the east on route 35.

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7.8 Raufarhólshellir Lava Tube ([map](#), [reviews](#), [website](#))

Raufarhólshellir is the 4th longest lava tube in Iceland. It formed about 5,600 years ago from a lava flow of the Leitaahraun eruption about 6 miles (10 km) uphill from the cave.

Because irresponsible visitors had destroyed almost all of the fragile lava straws and left lots of trash, the cave was closed in 2016 and early 2017 to repair the damage, clear out several metric tons of trash and install a walkway and lighting. The cave is now open only for guided tours.

Different 1h and 3-4h packages are available. The standard 1h tour is available Saturdays and visitors can come to the cave or book transportation from Reykjavik.



Now that you have seen the highlights of the Golden Circle, you can treat yourself to an Icelandic dinner at one of the best restaurants in Iceland.

To get there, continue on route 39 eastbound. When route 39 turns into route 38, continue straight on (south) until you hit route 34, where you will make a left turn. Follow route 34 until route 33 branches off to the right. Route 33 will bring you into the tiny town of Stokkseyri. Follow the GPS directions in town to the restaurant.

Two Week Iceland Itinerary

8. Detailed Itinerary for Iceland's Ring Road - Self-Guided Tour of Iceland's Ring Road

Iceland's Route 1 is also known as Ring Road, or in Icelandic: Þjóðvegur 1. It is 821 miles (1,322km) long and circles around the island connecting Iceland's biggest cities and many attractions outside the [Reykjavik](#) area and the [Golden Circle](#).

The road is fully paved and 2 lanes wide (=one lane in each direction) for almost its entire length. The speed limit is typically 90 km/h (55 mph) and there are several tunnels with a length of up to 4.6 miles (7.4km). The Ring Road is open year-round, but some areas may get periodically closed after heavy snow fall.



Some of these areas are very rural and gas stations can be far in-between and may close early. So, make sure that you always start your day with a full tank of gas and read our advice about [driving and gassing up in Iceland](#).

Two Week Iceland Itinerary

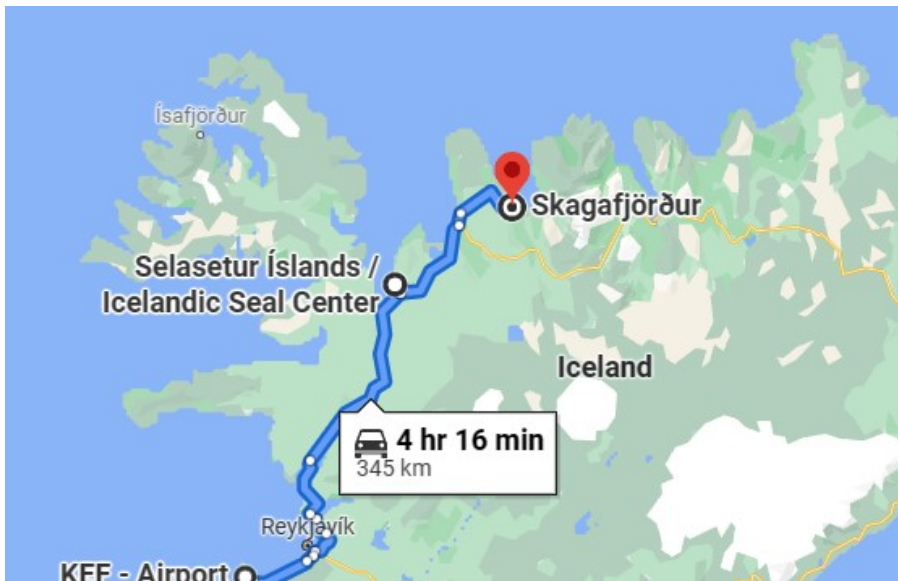
#	Daytime	Night
<u>1</u>	Arrive at KEF airport and drive to your hotel in Skagafjörður ; optional stop at Icelandic Seal Center	Skagafjörður
<u>2</u>	Staðarbjörg Basalt Columns ; Icelandic Emigration Center (Vesturfararsetrið) ; Herring Era Museum ; Icelandic Folk Music Museum (Þjóðlagasetur)	Akureyri
<u>3</u>	Folk and Outsider Art Museum (Safnasafnið) ; Christmas House (Jólagarðurinn) ; Horse riding at Skjaldarvík Guest House ; Akureyri Art Museum ; Akureyri Church (Akureyrarkirkja) ; Explore downtown Akureyri ; Akureyri Thermal Pool (Sundlaug Akureyrar)	Akureyri
<u>4</u>	Goðafoss waterfall ; Aldeyjarfoss waterfall ; Skútustaðagígar pseudocraters ; Skútaís Farm Ice Cream ; Gamli Baerinn Restaurant	Reykjahlíð
<u>5</u>	Grjótagjá Cave ; climb up Hverfell ; Explore Dimmuborgir ; hike up Vindbelgjarfjall ; swim at Mývatn Nature Baths	Reykjahlíð
<u>6</u>	Hverir ; Leirhnjúkur Lava Field ; Viti Crater at Krafla ; Dettifoss ; Selfoss ; Hafragilsfoss	Reykjahlíð
<u>7</u>	Ásbyrgi Canyon ; Húsavík	Seyðisfjörður
<u>8</u>	Stuðlagil Canyon , Eggin í Gleðivík , Ferry to Papey Island	Höfn
<u>9</u>	Jökulsárlón , Diamond Beach , Fjallsárlón , Vatnajökull National Park at Skaftafell , Scenic Green Lava Walk ; Fjaðrárgljúfur Canyon that was shown in the Justin Bieber "I'll Show You" video	Vík
<u>10</u>	Reynisfjara Beach with Hálsanefshellir Cave , Dyrhólaey Nature Reserve , Skógar Museum , Skógafoss waterfall	Keflavík
11	Fly home (alternatively, you can explore the Highlands today and leave on Sunday)	

Two Week Iceland Itinerary

Day 1: Drive to Skagafjörður (Skagafjörður)

If you arrive at the KFE airport in Keflavik, get your [rental car at the airport](#) and either drive directly to your hotel in Skagafjörður (4h drive) or explore the [Reykjanes Peninsula](#) first.

If you are coming from the US or Canada and have an overnight flight behind you, then it may be beneficial to drive to immediately drive to your hotel in Skagafjörður as this is a 4h drive and you want to get there safely before you get tired.



Before you take the 4h drive to Skagafjörður, make sure to buy groceries and drinks in Keflavik. Food is expensive in Iceland, but there are budget supermarkets like [Bónus](#) which have comparably low prices, but unfortunately they only open at 10am or 11am and close between 6 and 7pm. So, if you need to get groceries, there are [Extra24](#) markets, which are open 24h per day.

Two Week Iceland Itinerary

8.2.1 Staðarbjörg Basalt Columns ([map](#), [map parking lot](#))

The Staðarbjörg Basalt Columns are a hidden gem which only few tourists know about and even fewer actually visit.

They are easily accessible but smaller than Giant's Causeway in Northern Ireland and have the advantage that you can access them for free and you may have them all for yourself. For the first 20min or so we were the only ones there and then came another family.

When you get to the parking lot, walk to the set of wooden stairs that go down the hill and make sure to hold the rope towards the right. This rope is the only safety precaution at the attraction. When you get down to the basalt columns, watch your step. There is nothing that will hold you should you stumble.

The view from the top of the hill on the fjord Skagafjörður and the basalt columns is fantastic. Once you get down the hill, you will see the columns up close and you can carefully walk on them.



Two Week Iceland Itinerary



Now get back to your car and drive less than 5min to the Icelandic Emigration Center.

Two Week Iceland Itinerary

8.2.3 Herring Era Museum - Síldarminjasafn Íslands ([map](#), [reviews](#), [website](#))

The Herring Era Museum is Iceland's largest maritime museum and the only Icelandic museum which was awarded the European Museum Award.

It opened in 1994 in an abandoned salting station in Siglufjörður. Since then, 2 more buildings were added to the museum.

Róaldsbrakki is the Norwegian salting station from 1907 where you will see photos, a movie and lots of artifacts used for salting the herrings into barrels and preparing them for export. On the upper floor of the building are living quarters for some of the herring girls who came to Siglufjörður each summer for one of the well-paid herring salting jobs.

Grána is a replica of a 1930s herring factory that has lots of artefacts and explains “Iceland's herring reduction industry” meaning how herrings were transformed into meals and oil. The Grána was inaugurated in 2003 and exhibits original machinery that was used from the 1930s to the 1950s and that was brought here from old, abandoned herring factories around Iceland.

The Boathouse opened in 2004 and houses a small replica of how Siglufjörður's harbor might have look like in the heyday of the herring industry. You can go on board of a recreated herring boat, into replicas of old buildings and look at lots of other exhibits from that era.

Siglufjörður used to be the center of Iceland's herring industry which in turn was a very important factor for the country's economy as it was responsible for up to 44% of Iceland's export income in some years.

Two Week Iceland Itinerary



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8.2.6 Hotel Sveinbjarnargerdi ([map](#), [reviews](#), [website](#))

Located 10min outside of Akureyri, Hotel Sveinbjarnargerdi has beautiful views of, but no access to, the Eyjafjörður fjord.

We were upgraded when we arrived and we appreciated this very much – thank you very much.

Our hotel room on the second floor was clean rooms with a comfortable queen size bed, a small fridge, glass night stands, a glass table and wooden chair, couch, TV, basic shelf with hangers, blackout curtains, free wifi and a bathroom with a shower. Liquid soap and shampoo are in multi-use containers. Parking is free and the hotel has a small elevated outside pool.

Breakfast was included and plentiful and yummy! It consisted of sliced bread, sausages and cheese and a continental breakfast that you see in the US.



Two Week Iceland Itinerary

After the tour, participants are given food that they can feed to the horses and I can imagine that this may be a kid's favorite.



Two Week Iceland Itinerary

8.3.7 Akureyri Thermal Pool - Sundlaug Akureyrar ([map](#), [reviews](#), [website](#))

Finish your exciting day in Akureyri with a hot thermal bath in the Akureyri Thermal Pool. Please obey the special rules for thermal baths in Iceland, which I am posting further down, as they protect the health of you and every other visitor.

The Akureyri Thermal Pool is the most popular of the four thermal pools in Akureyri. It is open all year and has two 25m outdoor pools, water jets, water slides, a splash pool, an indoor pool, four hot tubs, a steam bath, a sunbathing area and a playground area for kids. All the pools are heated by geothermal water and each pool has a different temperature. The coolest pool is a comfortable 81F (27°C) and the hottest hot tub at a steaming 108F (42°C).

I have tried all water slides and my absolute favorite is the red slide which gets you up to incredible speeds and then drops you in the rotunda where you will circle like a roulette ball until you drop down towards the pool.

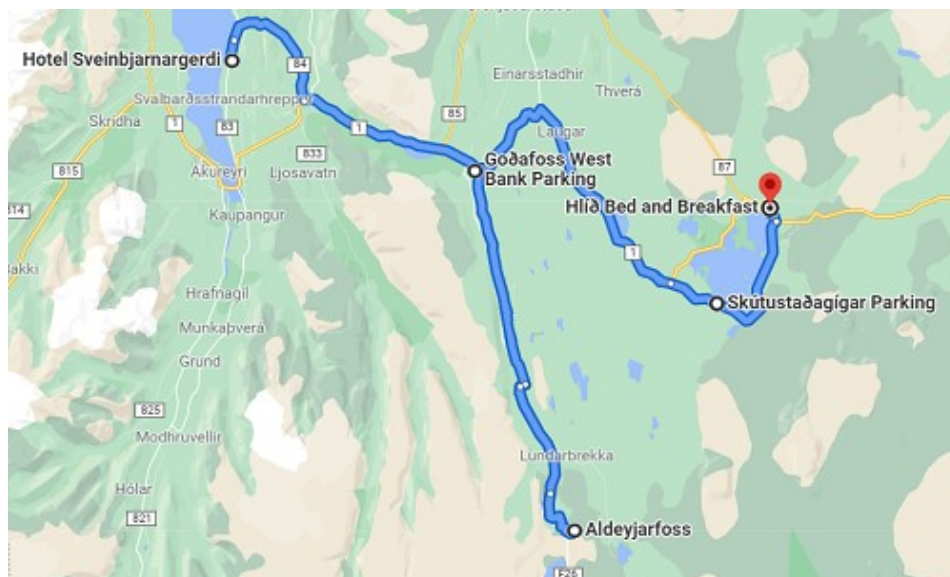
As with all water slides, you go faster if you lie down and take off your shirt in case you are wearing one.



Two Week Iceland Itinerary

Day 4: First part of the Diamond Circle

Today we will visit two of the best waterfalls in Iceland before we continue on to Lake Mývatn where we will spend another 3 days. This is the first part of Iceland's Diamond Circle. The Diamond Circle is an approx. 156 mile (250km) circle in northeast Iceland, which has 5 main destinations ([Goðafoss](#), [Lake Mývatn](#), [Dettifoss](#), [Ásbyrgi Canyon](#) and [Húsavík](#)). We will visit these 5 destinations during our trip and add several more.



Two Week Iceland Itinerary

8.4.2 Aldeyjarfoss waterfall ([map](#), [reviews](#))

Like Godafoss, Aldeyjarfoss is also created by the water of the river Skjálfandafljót. But unlike Godafoss, Aldeyjarfoss is difficult to access and in the middle of nowhere. To get to the parking lot, you will need to drive the unpaved compacted dirt road F26. Please make sure that your rental car company allows that.

We had no problems driving this road with our low clearance sedan, because the weather was dry and so was the road. You will need a 4x4 vehicle then the road is wet or when you drive in winter.

The parking lot has restrooms and you will need to hike about 10-15min hike downhill to get to Aldeyjarfoss. The reward is that you may be the only one there and you have Aldeyjarfoss all for yourself.

We absolutely loved Aldeyjarfoss. The water only drops 67ft (20m), but it is a powerful waterfall that broke through a wall of basalt columns similar to the ones you saw on Day 2 at the Staðarbjörg Basalt Columns. The power of Aldeyjarfoss, the beautiful basalt columns and the solitude in this desolate place make this a very special experience.

Aldeyjarfoss has no admission fee and it is always open.



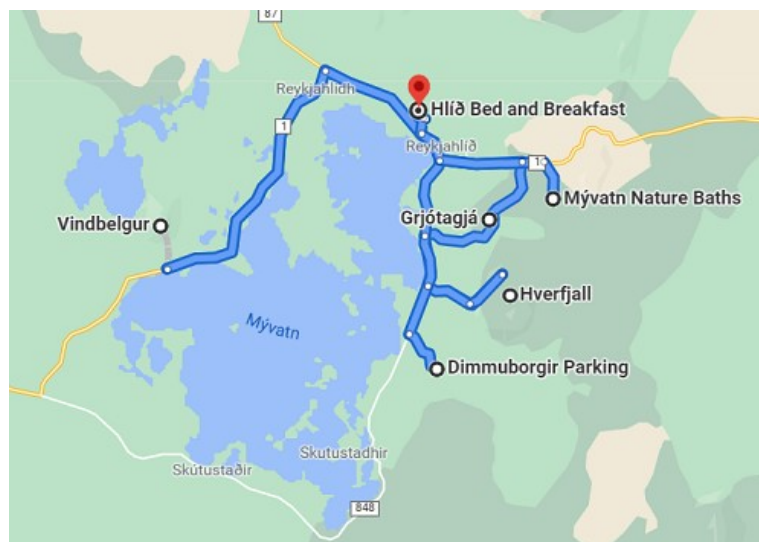
Two Week Iceland Itinerary

Day 5: Exploring Lake Mývatn and second part of the Diamond Circle

Lake Mývatn is a shallow lake that was created by a large lava eruption about 2,300 years ago. This area is still volcanically active and our tour will bring us to lots of volcanic landforms.

The lake is a habitat for numerous water birds and especially ducks.

The name Mývatn can be translated to "the lake of midges" as mý means "midge" and vatn means "lake". The name comes from the large numbers of midges which spend the summer over here.



Two Week Iceland Itinerary

8.5.2 Climb up Hverfell crater ([map](#), [reviews](#))

Hverfjall, or, Hverfell is a cone-shaped crater which was formed by an eruption about 2,500 years ago. The crater is about 0.6 miles (1km) in diameter and it is not round but a bit deformed at the southern end likely because of a landslide apparently that occurred during the eruption.

The rim of the crater is only accessible by two paths and it is not allowed to walk off these paths. The most popular and easily accessible path is at the northwestern flank. The second path is at the southern end, shortly before where the landslide occurred.

When you stand at the parking lot, walking up the steep path to the rim looks like a difficult undertaking. With moderate fitness, it takes most people only 10-15min to get up there. But you will likely be exhausted, so bring plenty of water and be advised there is little opportunity to sit down, unless you want to sit on the volcanic ash.

If you still have enough energy left, then you can walk along the rim around the crater.

Access to Hverfell is year-round and there is no admission fee.



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8.5.5 Swim at the Mývatn Nature Baths ([map](#), [reviews](#), [website](#))

Opened in 2004, Mývatn Nature Baths are man-made mineral-rich geothermal baths that draw from hot water from a depth of 8,300ft (2,500m). Like in the Blue Lagoon, the water in the 53,800sqft (5000m²) looks blue from the minerals in it, the pools are enclosed by black volcanic rock and the bottom is black volcanic rocks and sand.

The depth is about 4ft 4in (1.3m) and the temperature is around 97-104F (36-40°C).

The hot volcanic water in the Lake Myvatn area has a comparably high content of hydrogen sulfide and therefore jewelry from brass or silver should not be taken into the water as they may turn black.

Besides the thermal pool, Mývatn Nature Baths has a cafeteria and two natural steam baths in which sulphur-free steam brings the temperature to around 50°C and the humidity to close to 100%.

Need more relaxation? Then buy an alcohol bracelet at the entrance which entitles you to 3 beers or 2 glasses of wine that a staff member will bring you. This seems to be quite popular as we saw lots of adults with wine glasses.



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Visiting Dettifoss from the east:

Access is by route 864, which is a narrow compacted dirt road. There is a turn-off to the east side parking lot, which has space for maybe 30-40 cars. During peak tourist season, it is best to get here early.

You can easily navigate this road with a regular sedan in dry weather in summer.

The trail to Dettifoss is about $\frac{1}{4}$ mile (400m) downhill. There are several areas to take nice photos of Dettifoss and two main designated viewpoints where most people aggregate.

The second viewpoint gets you fairly close to the waterfall and here you can hear the powerful thundering of the falling water and feel the ground vibrating from it. And best of it all: you can take real nice photos and don't need to worry about water spray.



Two Week Iceland Itinerary

Visiting Selfoss from the east:

Shortly before you get to the Dettifoss viewpoints, the 0.6 mile (1km) rocky trail to Selfoss branches off to the left. The trail is well marked, but be advised that you will climb over volcanic rocks quite a few times and it is definitely of moderate difficulty. This trail follows the river and the last 650ft (200m) are basically one continuous fantastic viewpoint which allows you to take in the sheer size of Selfoss.

You can get fairly close to Selfoss and even walk all the way to the area behind the falls into the water. Just be careful.

If you are anything like us, you may want to find one or two or three places to sit down and take in the majesty of Selfoss.



Two Week Iceland Itinerary

Accessing Stuðlagil Canyon from the East ([map](#))

This is by far the best way to experience Stuðlagil Canyon. Fortunately, access has recently been made a lot easier. The farmer who owns this land has collected enough funds to build a new parking lot that is much closer to the canyon and cuts your hike in half.

From Ring Road 1, you turn onto route 923, which soon turns into a compacted dirt road with steep drop offs to the east in several areas. After 9 miles (14km) you will turn left towards the Klaustursel farm. There is no need to park at the parking lot unless you want to hike for several hours. Instead, you pass the parking lot, pass the bridge and then follow the dirt road to the new parking lot. At the time of writing, google maps does not have it listed, so please use the coordinates above as an approximate location.

From the parking lot the easy hike to Stuðlagil Canyon is approx. 1.3 miles (2km). After a few minutes you will pass a nice waterfall called Stuðlafoss to your left.

Because the canyon is so spectacular, you will likely see lots of other people on this trail.

Even though the trail to the canyon is easy, we still recommend to wear good shoes as you will be walking over gravel and you need sturdy shoes in case you plan to walk into the canyon to catch some of the most spectacular views Stuðlagil Canyon has to offer.

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8.9.6 Fjaðrárgljúfur Canyon that was shown in the Justin Bieber “I'll Show You” video ([map](#), [reviews](#), [video](#))

Fjaðrárgljúfur means Fjaðrárgljúfur in Icelandic. It is a spectacular canyon that has come to fame after it was shown in Justin Bieber's “I'll Show You” video. Unfortunately, the masses of visitors have damaged the frail environment of the canyon. To combat this, Iceland's authorities are periodically closing parts of Fjaðrárgljúfur Canyon for revegetation.

The parking lot can be accessed via a 2 mile (3.2km) dirt road from Iceland's Ring Road in summer; in winter 4x4 vehicles are strongly advised.

Fjaðrárgljúfur Canyon is up to 328ft (100m) deep and 1.25 miles (2km) long. It was formed over the last 2 million years by progressive erosion from flowing glacier waters.

From the parking lot, you will need to walk 0.6 miles (1km) uphill to the first viewpoint which is pretty spectacular already. But wait, it will get better. Keep on walking 0.4 miles (0.6km) to the second viewing platform. From here you will have even better views on the canyon and on the Mögáfos waterfall.

Do not leave the marked path as the grass can be slippery, the ground unstable and there is nothing that will stop you when you slip and fall.

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8.10.2 Dyrhólaey Nature Reserve ([map1](#), [map2](#), [reviews](#))

The Dyrhólaey Nature Reserve has one main developed access point and an undeveloped access point that can be accessed through a dirt road that branches off route 218 to the right.

A trail from the parking lot of the undeveloped access point ([map2](#)) goes by the Dyrhólaey Lighthouse and then provides close-up views of the Dyrhólaey Arch.

From the parking lot of the developed access point ([map1](#)), you get distant views of the Dyrhólaey Arch, Reynisfjara Beach, Hálsanefshellir Cave and Reynisdrangar. In addition to that, you see more basalt rocks in the water, more black sand beaches and, in summer, come close to a colony of puffins which was a highlight for us.

There is even a 0.9 mile (1.4km) hiking path that connects the two parking lots.

Admission and parking are free.



Two Week Iceland Itinerary

9. How to see the Aurora Borealis

The Aurora Borealis can be a magical once-in-a-lifetime experience and a true highlight on your trip to Iceland.

You may be lucky and see it when you get to Iceland, but most people will not be that fortunate. With a little bit of planning you can greatly increase your chances of seeing the Northern Lights make your Iceland trip magical experience.

Our Aurora Borealis guide gives you the details you need for a successful Aurora Borealis hunt.

9.1 What is the best month to see the Aurora Borealis?

Some people will tell you that you can only see the Northern Lights in winter. That is not true. In theory, you can see the Aurora Borealis every month of the year in Iceland except for June, when it does not get dark enough.

In practical terms, the best months are those close to the fall and spring equinoxes: September, October, February, March and April. However, the months of September and October have a high chance of cloudy skies and rain and you need clear skies to see the Northern Lights, so you will have a higher likelihood to see the Aurora Borealis in February, March and April.



10. Closing Remarks

ABOUT RUDY FROM BACKPACK & SNORKEL

I was born in Germany and emigrated to the US in 2003. My wife and I are a truly multinational couple: I, with my German background, and she with her Chinese heritage. Both of us live in the USA.

Sadly, working in the US means we have much fewer vacation days compared to other countries like e.g. Germany and thus we cannot travel very frequently.

Through a lot of trial and error, we have found our ideal travel and vacation style. **Making Memorable Moments** by focusing on important destinations, planning time for meeting the locals and, of course, for relaxation are our priorities.

We have also learned to appreciate local foods and try to eat as many local dishes as possible. Just for fun, we try to eat at one Chinese restaurant in each country we visit. It is absolutely amazing how different Chinese food is all over the planet.



MAKING MEMORABLE MOMENTS

You may take 10,000 photos during your vacation, rush from one attraction to the next, but what you will remember in your heart is how you were **Making Memorable Moments**.

For me, that was e.g. Spider Rock in Canyon de Chelly (ever heard of this US National Park?). When I first saw it, I was blown away by this majestic natural obelisk and the beautiful canyon that it sits in. I have been there two more times and still feel the same.

Or think of Isla Mujeres, a small island outside Cancun, Mexico. On the surface, Playa Norte is supposedly Mexico's most beautiful beach and it is always crowded and the boats that anchor there play loud music. Below the surface, Isla Mujeres is very relaxed, quite walkable and it has friendly locals, good authentic Mexican food and good international cuisine and is often very affordable.

Isla Mujeres is our personal paradise!



PACK YOUR BACKPACK & SNORKEL AND LET'S GO

Our travel style has evolved over the years. We are packing light these days when we travel and typically only need a small backpack per person - see my [Traveling Light Guide](#).

With this guide, I want to provide value to you and help you plan your own relaxing vacations with the goal of **Making Memorable Moments!**

Please contact me if you have any questions or comments.