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Iceland: Reykjavík & National Parks

Travel Style - Guided Walking Tour

This small-group Guided Walking Adventure offers an authentic travel experience, one that takes you away from the crowds and deep into the fabric of local life. On it, you'll enjoy 24/7 expert guides, premium accommodations, delicious meals, effortless transportation, and local wine or beer with dinner. Rest assured that every trip detail has been anticipated so you're free to enjoy an adventure that exceeds your expectations.



The “Land of Fire and Ice” offers spellbinding landscapes unlike any on Earth: plummeting waterfalls ringed with green hills, iceberg-dotted lakes, smoking lava fields, and stark coastlines of black-sand beaches. In this unique country of Viking traditions, you explore deep fjords plied by minke whales and seals, walk silver-green heathland to majestic waterfalls, and relax in natural hot tubs heated by underground magma chambers. Enjoy highlights like the steaming volcano craters and bubbling mudpots of the north, the fishing villages and wild reindeer of the picturesque east, the dramatic glaciers of the south, and the fashionable city of Reykjavik to the west. You explore Europe’s largest migratory-bird sanctuary at Lake Mývatn, a peaceful oasis for red-breasted merganser, Eurasian teal, and eider that’s surrounded by steaming earth. In Pingvellir National Park, stand on the meeting site of Iceland’s thousand-year-old parliament, a dramatic rift valley where the North American and Eurasian tectonic plates pull apart—a testament to the country’s natural and cultural riches.

Tour Only Itinerary - 2019

Day 1

Join your Country Walkers *Iceland: Reykjavík & National Parks* tour

Pingvellir National Park; 3 miles, easy to moderate. Geysir and Gullfoss; 1 mile, easy. Optional evening river walk; ½ mile, easy

You begin with an early meeting in your centrally located Reykjavik hotel for a brief orientation before departing on the 50-minute drive northeast of the city through the countryside to Pingvellir National Park, one of the three national parks that you visit on this itinerary. A UNESCO World Heritage site, Pingvellir, literally “Parliament Plains,” is the site of Iceland’s ancient parliament, first established in 930 AD and convened continuously until 1798. Not only a gathering place for chieftains establishing law, it was also an open-air meeting place for games, feasts, marriages, and trade, and the site of



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some of the country's momentous decisions: from the adoption of Christianity in 1000 AD to the foundation of the Republic of Iceland in 1944. Fascinatingly, it is situated on the dramatic rift valley where the North American and Eurasian tectonic plates pull apart, clearly visible at the great Almannagjá (Everyman's Gorge), a group of gorges extending almost continuously from Lake Þingvallavatn north to Mt. Ármannsfell. The trail continues to Lögberg (Law Rock), where the "Law Speaker" proclaimed memorized laws. Moving into the park, a two-hour walk takes you to Öxarárfoss Waterfall and through a lava field covered by patchy pine plantations, dwarf birch forest, and heathland plants such as bog bilberry, wooly willow, lady smock, sweet grass, and lichen. Continuing along some of the many fissures in the rift valley, you enjoy great views of the crystal-clear, deep waters of the Vallagja, Flosagja, and Nikulasargja fissures.

From Þingvellir, a short drive takes you to a local farm for a tour of a state-of-the-art greenhouse and delicious lunch featuring fresh tomato-and-herb soup and homemade bread, followed by warm apple and rhubarb pie. The farmer and his family then take you on a tour of the stables and introduce you to the Icelandic horse.

After lunch you make your way to your first hotel, with a number of stops en route. The first stop is at Geysir, the place giving its name to the phenomenon worldwide, and Strokkur, or the "churn," the latter spouting every five minutes. From here, a 10-minute drive takes you to Gullfoss, or Gold Falls, Iceland's most-famous and most-visited waterfall, a national monument. Then you continue about 90 minutes more through much of the country's agricultural land to Hella, known for its gentle Icelandic horses.

Before gathering for a welcome cocktail and dinner in your hotel's acclaimed riverside restaurant, you may slip into one of its geothermally heated outdoor hot tubs. On the menu of high-quality local offerings, you may choose the organic lamb pastrami, followed by fresh wild salmon from the neighboring river, chocolate and *skyr* (Icelandic cream cheese) cake for dessert. After dinner, with daylight lingering well into the night, you may choose to go for a peaceful evening stroll along the banks of the Eystri-Rangá or an optional horseback ride at a nearby family-run ranch.

Accommodation: Hotel Rangá, Hella

A member of the Special Hotels of the World, Hotel Rangá is beautifully situated on the banks of Iceland's premier salmon river, the Eystri-Rangá. This four-star, log-cabin-style resort features cozy and comfortable rooms, facing either the river or Iceland's famous volcano, Mt. Hekla, as well as an acclaimed riverside restaurant and several geothermally-heated outdoor hot tubs.

Day 2

Seljalandsfoss and Skogafoss waterfalls; Vík cliff/beach walk

2 miles, easy. Optional late-afternoon glacier walk; 2 miles, easy

After a bountiful buffet breakfast, you drive east along the Ring Road (the one road encircling the entire island) where you take in some of the southern coast's most dramatic scenery—tall mountains



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with a succession of waterfalls cascading from the glaciers above on one side and views of the North Atlantic coastline with its black sand beaches and dramatic headlands on the other. A 20-minute drive brings you to a brief stop at Seljalandsfoss, a narrow waterfall dropping 130 feet into a shallow pool with space to walk behind it. From here another short drive brings you to Skógar, a tiny hamlet and home to one of Iceland's finest folk museums; its old turf farmhouse provides a glimpse into the fishing and farming culture of past centuries. Afterward, you stop at the town's breathtaking Skogafoss waterfall, which drops nearly 200 feet into the river Skógaá, full of salmon and char, and, according to legend, hiding a gold treasure trove visible when the sun hits it the right way.

Continuing eastward, a 35-minute drive brings you to the town of Vík, Iceland's most southerly village. This quaint town is tucked in between mountains, sea cliffs, and a long, beautiful, black sand beach. Following lunch, a spectacular coastal walk departs directly from the restaurant. Reaching the outskirts of the village, you skirt the vertical Reynisfjall cliffs—home to a remarkable bird colony including kittiwakes, fulmar, and puffins—as well as the Reynisdrangar, a series of black basalt columns sculpted by the sea. According to local folklore, these twisted shapes are trolls turned to stone by the sunrise while dragging their boats to shore. The walk concludes with a stroll along the beach, ending with an optional visit to Vík's lovely woolens shop.

Another hour's drive traverses the beautifully austere landscape of the moss-covered Eldhraun lava field, one of the largest lava fields in the world, followed by another 60 minutes meandering through a glacial floodplain called "The Sandur," the world's largest example of a black sand desert, the sand and sediment deposited by subglacial volcanoes.

By late afternoon you reach your hotel, situated 20 minutes from the famous Glacier lagoon, located on the edge of Breiðarmerkurjökull, and also adjacent to the breathtaking Vatnajökull National Park (the second national park on this tour). Before dinner at your hotel, your guides take you on an optional two-hour walk on the run-off glacier, Svínafellsjökull.

Accommodation: Fosshotel Glacier Lagoon, Hnappavellir

Ideally located between Jökulsárlón Glacier Lagoon and the breathtaking Vatnajökull National Park, this new property boasts incredible mountain views, a restaurant featuring modern Icelandic cuisine, lounge bar, and simple yet modern rooms.

Day 3

Vatnajökull National Park

12-mile full-day option, moderate to challenging, or 4-6 mile morning option, easy to moderate, and visit to Ingólfshöfði headland, 1-2 miles, easy

Following a buffet breakfast, you set out for Ingólfshöfði, a striking headland and the arrival point of Iceland's first Norse settler, Ingólfur Arnarson, more than 1,000 years ago. Today these cliffs and grassy fields atop the promontory provide nesting grounds for more than a dozen bird species, including kittiwakes, snipe, guillemots, the great skua, various gulls, graceful Arctic terns, and their



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ungainly but charming opposites, the puffin. Getting to Ingólfshöfði is truly half the fun; you ride in an open cart towed by a kindly—and now famous—local farmer over hard, sea-washed volcanic sand. Once at the promontory, you climb up a sand dune to the top, where your farmer-host regales you with stories of the ancient Norse settlers, and dramatic tales of modern sailors shipwrecked along these shores. (Please note that the Ingólfshöfði excursion is seasonal and not offered after the third week in August.)

Afterward, a short drive brings you to the start of an optional full day's loop walk in the national park. An initial ascent up the Bæjargil gully with its multiple waterfalls, including the spectacular Svartifoss (Black Waterfall), you continue across Skaftafellsheiði heath to the viewpoint at Sjórnarripa, where you enjoy a picnic lunch. From here, you may decide to continue across Skaftafellsheiði heath for the remainder of the afternoon. As you proceed toward Kristínartindar (the Peaks of Kristín), you take in some of Iceland's most imposing and picturesque views, with Vatnajökull Glacier and its craggy peaks to the north and the vast black desert to the south.

The flora and fauna in the park are much more varied than in other parts of the country, and in midsummer you find large numbers of butterflies and considerable birdlife on the wooded slopes—the redwing, common snipe, meadow pipit, and wren are among the most common species. This is also one of the North Atlantic's most important breeding areas for the great skua. The park's sheltered position and rich volcanic soil encourages a profusion of lush vegetation, and more than 200 species of plants have been found here, including abundant summertime wildflowers.

A late-afternoon coffee at the park's visitor center is a chance to explore the exhibition room, with its intriguing display demonstrating the intertwined lives of the area's people and natural history. You also may enjoy a short film highlighting the effects of the Skeidarár glacial outburst floods (*jökulhlaup*) in 1996 before returning to relax at the hotel before reuniting for dinner.

Accommodation: Fosshotel Glacier Lagoon, Hnappavellir

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Day 4

Jökulsárlón glacial lagoon to Seyðisfjörður

Jökulsárlón; 1 mile, easy. Seyðisfjörður town walk; 1-2 miles, easy

Today's travels take you from Vatnajökull in the south to the final destination of Seyðisfjörður in the east. With an early departure, an hour's drive takes you to the dramatic Jökulsárlón glacial lagoon, the best-known and largest of a number of glacial lakes in Iceland. Here, you board an amphibious vehicle for a 40-minute boat ride and a close look at the blue-tinted natural ice sculptures, a myriad of unique shapes and sizes. Two James Bond movies, "Die Another Day" and "A View to a Kill," were filmed in this fantastic location, where a large pool between the nose of the Breiðamerkurjökull glacier



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and the sea formed after the glacier began shrinking rapidly in the 1940s, and filled with icebergs calved from the glacier. Floating among the ice you may spot seals and eider ducks, and even witness the glacier calving into the crystal turquoise waters. Crossing the road, an awe-inspiring walk takes you along the iceberg-covered black sand beach where you might spot seals as well as the great skua.

Climbing into your private coach, an 80-minute drive provides fantastic views of the Vatnajökull glacier before arriving at the busy fishing port of Höfn, the epicenter of Iceland's lobster catch. At the lobster/langoustine capital of the north, the menu for lunch at a charming local restaurant with harbor views features langoustine tails grilled with butter, parsley, and garlic, served with salad and fresh bread. You have a short stroll before the three-hour transfer to Seyðisfjörður. Breaking up the drive, you take a coffee break in the charming East Iceland fishing village of Djúpvogur, at the tip of the lower Eastfjords.

You reach your final destination of Seyðisfjörður by late afternoon. Iceland's most picturesque coastal town, Seyðisfjörður is nestled in an 11-mile-long, calm, deep fjord, lined with snowcapped mountains and tumbling waterfalls. The town's streets are lined with colorful Norwegian wood kit homes from the 19th and early 20th centuries, Iceland's best-preserved wooden buildings. With a thriving arts scene, Seyðisfjörður also serves as the port to mainland Europe, as the Smyril Line car ferry *Norræna* transits weekly to Norway, the Shetland and Faroe islands, and Denmark. The modern Icelandic poet Matthías Johannessen called the town a "pearl enclosed in a shell."

You enjoy an easy walk through the town before settling into your hotel. Your home base for the next two nights lives up to the setting: a lovely heritage hotel, its rooms beautifully furnished with handcrafted bedspreads, embroidered rugs, and antiques. The hotel's warmly lit gourmet restaurant—housed in one of Iceland's oldest general stores—invites, serving local, organic ingredients such as East Icelandic reindeer steak with caramelized onions, root vegetables, and red wine sauce. Intrigued, you may opt for a late-evening stroll through the old town or visit the vibrant Skaftfell Cultural Center and Café, where local artists and musicians meet in a grand old house with an art gallery.

Accommodation: Hótel Aldan, Seyðisfjörður

This lovely in-town Heritage Hotel is comprised of three historical buildings: a former bank, post office, and one of Iceland's oldest stores, all now completely restored more than a century later to their former splendor. Inviting rooms exude old-fashioned charm and are beautifully furnished with handcrafted bedspreads, embroidered rugs, wood floors, and antiques. (Please note: while rooms do not feature telephones, there are phone services available at the reception desk.)

Day 5

Skálanes Nature Reserve

4-7 miles, moderate. Fjarðará River; 3 miles, moderate with some challenging downhill sections



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A scrumptious breakfast buffet starts the day with still-warm home-baked bread, fresh fruit, and cereals. Afterward, a 20-minute drive brings you to the trailhead for a four- to five-hour walk to Skálanes—a nature reserve located at the mouth of Seyðisfjörður Fjord. With snowcapped mountains and cascading waterfalls on one side and the deep blue fjord on the other side, the morning route takes you across peaceful meadows, along sandy beaches, and into lush wildflower fields. The area is known for its beauty and considerable birdlife, including the Arctic tern, black-tailed godwit, golden plover, and eider duck. Other wildlife includes seals and whales in the fjord and reindeer populating the high-mountain heathland. Around lunch time, you arrive at Skálanes farm, where a delicious lunch is served. Continuing on after lunch, the trail proceeds to the edge of the fjord, up along the bird cliffs with large colonies of sea birds including kittiwakes and puffins. From here you ascend lupine-covered hills before descending alongside a stream bank back toward the fjord trail. The bus is waiting to drive those who wish to have a ride back to town; others may prefer to return on foot.

This afternoon a short drive takes you above the town of Seyðisfjörður for an optional walk along Waterfall Lane. You follow a path along the south bank of the Fjarðará River dotted with more than 20 waterfalls, past Iceland's oldest operational power plant (1913), and down the dramatic valley back to your hotel.

You are free to continue your explorations this evening with dinner on your own in one of Seyðisfjörður's restaurants or cafés, or at your hotel. Afterward, with the late setting sun, you may venture out to visit to the local pub, Kaffi Lára, known for its beer, El Grillo, named for a British tanker sunk in Seyðisfjörður by German bombers in 1944.

Accommodation: Hótel Aldan, Seyðisfjörður

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Day 6

Transfer to Lake Mývatn

Dettifoss; 1 mile, easy. Lake Mývatn: Leirhnjúkur and Námaskarð; 1-3-mile options, easy

Today you leave the Eastfjords to head north with a final destination of Lake Mývatn, via a four-hour drive across the fascinating interior of the island, with its stark and barren northeast highland desert plateaus. The halfway point is a coffee break at Sænautasel Farm, a reconstructed turf farm on a 37-mile-long remote heathland called Jökuldalsheiði, where you may see reindeer grazing! Halldór Kiljan Laxness, Iceland's Nobel Prize-winning author, used the farm as the setting for his novel, *Sjálfstætt folk* ("Independent People").

You first stop is Jökulsárgljúfur, which translates as "Glacial River Canyon," Iceland's most well-



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known canyon, replete with extraordinary rock formations, waterfalls, and plant life. Arriving at the park's southern boundary, an easy, one-mile loop leads to Dettifoss, Europe's most powerful waterfall (often compared to Niagara Falls).

After fueling up with lunch, you proceed to the day's final destination—the Mývatn/Krafla region—the part of Iceland where you see that it is indeed a land in formation. Geologically active, the landscape is teeming with volcanic craters, recent lava fields, and bubbling mud flats, and is part of the greater Krafla volcanic system, a three-mile-wide and 50-mile-long strip of faults and fissures running north to south, with the Krafla caldera at its center. In the midst of the evolving geology is stunning Lake Mývatn, a unique ecosystem and Europe's largest migratory bird sanctuary, with its many species of waterfowl feeding on the insects and algae of the lake's warm, shallow waters. The region is also the center of the country's geothermal energy industry.

Not far from the lake, in the active Krafla volcanic zone, you stop for a relaxing two-hour walk at Leirhnjúkur, an eerie expanse of still-smoldering lava resulting from the Krafla fires of 1974-1984. You explore the multicolored sulfurous slopes of Námaskarð Pass at 1,300 feet above sea level and Hverir, a large geothermal field, full of bubbling mud pots, hissing steam vents, and fumaroles.

This evening, after settling in to your room on the shores of Lake Mývatn, you gather for dinner in the hotel's dining room. If you still have energy after dinner, you may take an evening walk along the southwest shore of the lake to observe some of the varied birdlife—merganser, widgeon, teal, and the rare Barrow's goldeneye, to name a few. The Northern version of Reykjavík's Blue Lagoon, the Mývatn Nature Baths, are nearby, and your guides can arrange a visit at your own expense. Lastly, a neighboring farm provides Icelandic horse rides, also at your expense, but with the guide's assistance.

Accommodation: Icelandair Hótel Mývatn, Mývatn

This brand new hotel, rebuilt on the foundation of a family-run property, is ideally located on the shores of Lake Mývatn. Innovative Icelandic design is reflected throughout the property. Guest rooms feature individual décor and are equipped with modern amenities. This lakeside hotel also features a cozy bar/lounge and restaurant.

Day 7

Lake Mývatn

Hverfjall and Dimmuborgir; 8 miles, moderate. Skútustaðagígar; 2 miles, easy, or Hofdi; 1-2 miles, easy

After a delicious breakfast buffet, you set off for a full day's exploration of the Lake Mývatn region. The morning's trail transitions from richly vegetated lava fields to an area blighted by wind erosion. En route you pass by the Storagja and Grjotaga fault fissures, both used for bathing in earlier times. From Grjotaga, you proceed through sandy plains and lava formations up the northern side of Hverfjall, a classic tephra ring. This near symmetrical crater appeared 2,500 years ago in a cataclysmic eruption. Rising 1,520 feet from the ground and stretching 3,400 feet across, it is a massive and awe-inspiring



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landmark in Mývatn. The trail circles along the western edge of the crater, from where you enjoy stunning views of the crater itself and the surrounding landscape, before continuing down the southern side of the crater into Dimmuborgir. The giant jagged lava field at Dimmuborgir (literally the “Dark Castles”) is one of the most interesting lava flows in Iceland. The strange lava pillars were created about 2,000 years ago when lava flowed across older lava fields and was dammed into a fiery lake. The surface of the lake cooled but when the dam broke the remaining lava flowed onwards and left behind the cooled oddly-shaped pillars.

Following lunch in Dimmuborgir, you continue your exploration of the natural wonders of the Lake Mývatn area. A short transfer brings you to Skútustaðagígar craters, an unusual geological formation found only in Iceland and on the planet Mars! Alternatively, you may elect a tranquil walk through the forested lakeside Hofdi area; viewpoints over the lake may offer sightings of Barrow’s goldeneye, wigeon, Slavonian grebe, scaup, and many other water birds.

This afternoon you return to your hotel in Mývatn with time to relax and pack before a celebratory farewell dinner. Starting with the Mývatn specialty of hot spring bread, baked in the local underground bakery using geothermal heat and traditional methods, topped with butter and smoked arctic char, the main course may be wild thyme-cruste roasted leg of lamb or pan-fried Lake Mývatn trout.

Accommodation: Icelandair Hótel Mývatn, Mývatn

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Day 8

Your Iceland: Reykjavík & National Parks tour concludes

The final day of your tour begins with a 40-minute drive to the town of Húsavík for the flight back to Reykjavík. After your 55-minute flight, you arrive into Reykjavík’s domestic airport. You enjoy a final (one-hour) walk in Öskjuhlíð park. Conveniently located in the heart of the city, this tranquil area offers paths that weave through a dense forest of pine and birch trees, leading to the scenic shores of Nauthólsvík Bay and around the coastline towards Seltjarnanes. Following lunch in Reykjavík, you are driven to the departure point, the bus terminal by 2:00 p.m., where you can easily transfer to the city center or to Keflavík International Airport for onward travels.