

# Stalking the Northern Lights in the Land of Fire and Ice

## Discovering Iceland's Unique Cultural and Natural History

### September 20-29, 2023



**Imagine** standing in the dark of night, staring up at the sky as the aurora borealis paints a breathtaking display of color and light above. The air is crisp and cold, but our hearts pound with excitement as we witness one of nature's most spectacular shows. The stars shine brightly around and behind the pulsing northern lights. We can't help but feel small in the face of such grandeur, but at the same time, connected to the universe in a way that is hard to describe.

As we explore the rugged countryside of Iceland, we'll come across waterfalls that seem to dance with rainbows, the mist from the falls creating a magical aura around them. Traversing miles of moss-covered ancient lava fields, we'll marvel at the subtle beauty of the stark landscape. In the autumn months, the rolling hillsides turning from a lush summer green to a rich golden hue that's simply mesmerizing.

We'll be struck by the picturesque beauty of the small villages with red-roofed white churches that dot the landscape. Shafts of sunlight peeking through the clouds will illuminate the countryside, highlighting the unique features of the terrain. And when we find ourselves walking behind a flowing waterfall, we'll sense the rush of the water as we take that perfect photo, capturing the essence of the moment.

But it's not just about capturing the perfect picture - it's about experiencing the wonders of Iceland with all our senses. We'll explore the iconic Kirkjufellfoss waterfall and the Kirkjufell mountain in the background, trying to find the best angle to capture their majesty. We'll, smell

the salty North Atlantic and feel the wind on our faces as we overlook the steep and rocky coastline and sea stacks of the Snaefellsness Peninsula. At the Black Church of Boudir we'll visit the church yard and cemetery and have some time to walk the trail down to the black, volcanic sand beach. We'll see icebergs floating in the Jökulsárlón Glacial lagoon and find diamonds of ice shards on black sand Breiðamerkursandur beach.

Iceland is a land of wonder and awe-inspiring beauty, a place that will fill our senses and leave us forever changed.



**Day 1 Wednesday September 20** Arrive Reykjavik D

Arrive Keflavik Airport and transfer to Reykjavik. We will gather for a group orientation at 7 pm and Welcome Dinner. Depending on your flight arrival time there a number of fun and interesting things to explore and do in Reykjavik.

Overnight in Reykjavik's old town at Hotel Skuggi

**Day 2 Thursday September 21** Reykjavik B

We will enjoy a guided walking tour of colorful, eclectic old town including the Solar Voyager sculpture overlooking Faxaflói Bay, iconic Hallsgrímskirkja, kitchy Lavanague Street, Rainbow Street, and the modernistic Harpa Convention Center. Oh... and I'll be sure to show you a couple of my favorite bakeries, too! This afternoon we head to the world famous geothermal springs, the Blue Lagoon, to luxuriate in the warm water. Afternoon and evening free. Note: depending on the flight arrivals on Day 1, the blue lagoon possibly can be done on the way to Reykjavik from the airport, leaving us a free afternoon in Reykjavik on Day 2.

Overnight in Reykjavik's old town at Hotel Skuggi

**DAY 3 Friday September 22**

Reykjavik/ Borganes B

We leave Reykjavík and follow the road along the scenic landscape to reach the Borgarfjörður area, which is known as the "Home of the Sagas". We visit Reykholt, home of Snorri Sturluson (1179-1241), clan leader, historian and writer, author with others of Egill's Saga. We'll see the Snorrastofa Exhibition and the museum dedicated to this important figure of Icelandic history and medieval literature. Then we're off to visit the splendid waterfalls Barnafoss and Hraunfossar where the water flows out from beneath a lava field into the river below. Next stop is Deildarhuguhver, Iceland's largest hot spring in terms of water production per second, and finally we make our way to the small village of Borgarnes, where the Settlement Exhibition recreates Iceland's earliest days and provides insight into the early settlements of the Vikings. The Egil's Saga Exhibition, on the other hand, profiles one of the most colorful of all the saga heroes, Egill, the son of Skallagrímur Kveldúlfsson.

Overnight in Borgarnes in the simple but comfortable Hotel Hamar

**DAY 4 Saturday September 23**

Snaefellsnes Peninsula B

Today we will explore the natural wonders of the Snaefellsnes peninsula. The stunning landscapes have captured the imagination of people ever since Jules Verne used Snaefellsjökull, a glacier on the extremity of the peninsula, as starting point for his science fiction novel "Journey to the Centre of the Earth." We'll first visit Budir, a former port of commerce where today you can see a beautiful wooden church (the Black Church of Boudir) surrounded by a lava field. We'll stop at Arnarstapi, a small fishing village, and take a short walk along the coast to see the fascinating sea stacks ( rock formations and basalt columns of all sizes and shapes). After a stop at the black beach of Djupalonssandur., we continue to drive around the peninsula, traveling through charming fishing villages, and making sure to stop at the picturesque Mt. Kirkjufell, before we return to Borgarnes.

Overnight in Borgarnes in the simple but comfortable Hotel Hamar

**DAY 5 Sunday September 24**

Hellisheiði power plant/ Thingvellir/ Selfoss B

We will make our way toward Hellisheiði to will experience firsthand how green, sustainable energy is produced at one of the largest single-site geothermal power plant on the planet, Hellisheiði ON Power plant. Located in a stunning setting surrounded by lava and moss, this plant produces electricity for the national grid and hot water for the capital region. We will see into the turbine halls of the plant, enjoy interactive and educational displays, and learn about Iceland's partnership with Carbfix, a leading solution for CO2 storage. Continuing from here, we drive to Thingvellir National Park, highly interesting from both geological and historical point of view. Here we will witness the effects of the movements of the tectonic plates which have opened cracks and fissures in the earth's crust. And it was here that the Icelandic Parliament was founded in the 10th century. We will rest comfortably tonight in our interesting and well amenitized hotel.

Overnight in Hveragerði at The Greenhouse Hotel

**DAY 6 Monday September 25**

Golden Circle B

Today we drive the famous "Golden Circle". Starting with a visit at the famous geothermal site of Geysir where the Strokkur hot spring ejects its water column high into the air every 5 – 10 minutes, with numerous other small springs and pots boiling and bubbling all around. Then we only have a short drive to reach Gullfoss, the spectacular waterfall which Icelanders refer to as the "golden" waterfall. Nearby we discover another of the many benefits of geothermal energy: greenhouse horticulture at Friðheimar greenhouse, an organic greenhouse where tomatoes grow throughout the year. We'll enjoy the tasting these (literally hot house) tomatoes at the end of our visit. Optionally, and time permitting, we may want to visit nearby Gamla Lauginn, also known as Secret Lagoon, once the place where people from the region learned to swim but mostly came to meet and talk.

Overnight in Hveragerði at The Greenhouse Hotel





**DAY 7 Tuesday September 26**

Hella/ Hvolsvollur/ Seljalandsfoss/ Vik B

Today as we head towards Iceland's South Coast region, we absorb the sweeping views of the mountains, glaciers and black volcanic deserts of the Mýrdalssandur flood plains. Farther on we drive through pasture land and past farms with craggy cliffs rising behind, many graced by small creeks and waterfalls. One of the first stops will be a favorite place of mine, Seljalandsfoss waterfall, a small but picturesque waterfall that we can even walk behind and take a memorable photo.

Weather permitting and if we're ready for the challenge, we will visit the Katla Ice Caves before proceeding to our hotel near Vik, a small fishing village located on the south coast in an idyllic setting famous for the Reynisdrangar pillars that rise from the sea just offshore. Will we be graced with a celestial show of color tonight? Fingers crossed.

Overnight near Vik at Hotel Katla

**DAY 8 Wed September 27**

Vik/ South Coast/ Vik B

This day is dedicated to exploring the southeast of Iceland. We begin by exploring the highlights of Vík village with a refreshing walk on the magnificent black sand of Reynisfjara beach with its basalt columns of all sizes and shapes. From here we have a great view of the rock pillars (sea stacks) just offshore. Legend says that the pillars originated when two trolls dragged a three-masted ship to land unsuccessfully and when daylight broke they became needles of rock. Driving on, we cross the Skeiðarársandur outwash plains with lovely views of the largest glacier in Europe, the Vatnajökull Glacier. Once we have crossed this vast black desert, we reach Skaftafell National Park, a beautiful area right at the foot of Glacier, which is known for its unique nature and abundant vegetation, like an oasis between the black desert and the glaciers. We head further east to one of the most famous attractions of South Iceland, the spectacular Jökulsárlón glacial lagoon, where icebergs calve from the Vatnajökull glacier and float on the

lagoon before being washed to the sea by the current. Here we will take time to walk around and enjoy the breath-taking scenery and visit the beach where numerous icebergs have floated ashore, adorning the beach as if it were covered in diamonds. Maybe some curious seals will also show their heads while they watch us contemplate the area.  
Overnight near Vik at Hotel Katla



**DAY 9 Thursday September 28**

Vik/ Reykjavik B, D

Today we enjoy a leisurely scenic drive back to Reykjavik along the south shore, passing picturesque farms and villages. We will enjoy a sumptuous Farewell Dinner sharing photos and stories from our trip.

Overnight in Reykjavik at Hotel Skuggi

**Day 10, Friday September 29**

Reykjavik/ Home B

Transfer today to Keflavik Airport for your flight home.

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