

# Holidays on Ice: Glaciers and Iceland Holidays

A glacier is a heavy mass of ice that forms as layers of snow accumulate and compact over time, and then move slowly downhill as its weight responds to gravity. A visit to see one or several glacial ice giants tends to feature in most Iceland package holidays, and the most giant glacier you can visit is Vatnajökull.

## Vatnajökull – Southeast Iceland



Vatnajökull is an ice cap in the southeast of Iceland. Holidays here will take in the dramatic outskirts where the glacier meets the unfrozen land, the ice shapes, and the expanses of white. Jeep tours on the glacier are popular, and specialist holidays to Iceland might include a boat trip on a glacial lagoon called Jokulsarlon, where you can see strange ice forms in the water and the remarkable blue colours in the floating ice. Such tours will help you get a sense of the magnitude of the glacier, which is more than 900 metres thick at its deepest point and in terms of sheer bulk is it the largest glacier in Europe.

As with many glaciers in Iceland, Vatnajökull covers a number of volcanoes. Volcanic eruptions beneath the ice cap create large volumes of meltwater. This water is usually released in flash-flood rivers, called 'runs,' but sometimes the water is trapped underneath the glacier, accumulating in size and pressure. When this pressure is released, it releases an avalanche of water known as an 'outburst'. Luckily, these outbursts tend to occur only about twice a decade so one is unlikely to coincide with your Iceland holidays. However, these outbursts are indeed angry, releasing something like the volume of the Mississippi river in the case of Vatnajökull, and are capable of destroying bridges and roads.

## Thorsmork (Pórsörk) – South Iceland



The power that glaciers contain to alter the landscape is also plain to see in Thorsmork. The Thorsmork glacier valley is an area of wide flat-bottomed valleys carved out by a glacier grinding and pulling at the

rocks and mountainsides. It has created an area of natural beauty ideal for hiking holidays to Iceland, with exceptional views of scarred rock, the open spaces of marshes and woodland, and the Myrdalsjokull glacier at one end. The varied and difficult terrain makes for a challenging and exciting walk. A variety of excursions are available, more specialist holidays to Iceland might include the speed and excitement of snowmobiling on Myrdalsjokull. The Myrdalsjokull glacier sits upon a volcanic mountain (1,493 metres in height) at one end of the Thorsmork valley.

### **Skaftafell National Park**



If your holidays to Iceland take you to Thorsmork, then you will be within thirty miles of Skaftafell National Park, a large and beautiful protected area. You might see arctic foxes here, and can enjoy the views in the country's most forgiving climate. A visit to Skaftafell might form part of an escorted tour. A specialist holidays' Iceland tour including Thorsmork and Skaftafell takes six days, and there are also eleven-night Iceland holidays traveling to glaciers in the west, south and southeast of this extraordinary island.

### **By Vikki Beale**

Vikki Beale is a holiday expert for iceland2go, a specialist operator providing holidays to Iceland and Greenland. We provide luxury tailor-made itineraries and the finest package holidays Iceland can offer, with sights including glaciers, geysers, fjords, and the Northern Lights.

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