

# ICELAND: WHERE NATURE IS THE ADVENTURE



It is hard to believe that a tiny island in the North Atlantic Ocean can have as many different natural wonders as Iceland has. Covering barely 103,000 km<sup>2</sup> of landmass with an abundance of geological wonders, the country's most popular tourist destinations have still been left more or less untouched, pure natural wonders to say the least.

With a population of approximately 300,000 people (making it roughly 3 individuals per each km<sup>2</sup>) and a major part of the population living in the southwest corner of the island, there is a lot of uninhabited land to explore. There is only about 30 minutes drive from the capital to reach uninhabited areas, all packed with different and unique natural wonders.

**In a country most famous for its glaciers and volcanic activity it is not a surprise that this small island attracts great number of world travelers.** On top of its attractive nature the fact that the global economic crisis hit the Icelandic economy really hard, leading to a major collapse in the local banking sector and its own currency "Icelandic krona" has only made the country more attractive as a tourist destination. What used to be a relatively expensive destination has now become affordable for average income travelers who crave for outdoor adventures.

**One of the unique activities waiting for the visitor is lava caving.** Caving adventure in the large lava fields just outside of the capital area offers visitors a chance to explore the hidden world beneath ours and see the magical rock formations left behind in last volcanic eruption. What better way to start an adventure on a volcanic island than to explore hidden lava tubes and learn how the island was actually formed? Adding even more excitement to the adventure snorkelling in Iceland's frigid waters is an activity no one should miss.

**The Silfra lava fissure (in Thingvellir, one of Iceland's National Parks and the site of the world's oldest parliament) offers a unique view in crystal clear water, world-famous for its heavenly shades of blue.** Although it is where you find the coldest groundwater in the world (2°-3° C) top of the line snorkeling equipment makes this adventure possible for the average traveler, given that he or she travels with a professional tour operator. For those wanting to see a glacier, Solheimajokull is roughly 2-3 hours drive from the capital where there are both guided glacier hiking and ice climbing trips. This ever-changing hub of ancient frozen water offers breathtaking views for those who decide to hike the glacier itself (please note that glacier hiking should only be done under the supervision of a professional guide). If you have more time to spend then go for **Vatnajokull, by far the largest glacier in all of Iceland and in fact the largest glacier mass in Europe.** It is only 4-5 hours drive from the capital.

Skaftafell and Jokulsarlon are the most popular spots there offering everything from relaxing boat rides among the enormous icebergs on the extraordinary glacier lagoon to the more challenging glacier hikes on the glacier tongue. The availability of activities in Iceland seems to be endless, with seasonal weather changes being the major factor limiting what can be done each month. For extreme activities like river rafting in glacial rivers the summer is high season, while the water is simply too cold over the winter months for such activities. Although the winter brings with it a drastic drop in temperature it still has its benefits for the visitor. In winter the days become shorter

and the sun barely rises in the winter months. This offers unique opportunities to see the vivid and bright northern lights (Aurora Borealis) on clear and cloudless winter evenings, a sight to remember. Be it summer, winter, spring or fall, Iceland is definitely worth a visit with each season offering unique experiences and memories that will last a lifetime.

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