

**THE CENTER, CHARLOTTESVILLE**  
EXCLUSIVE NATURE AND PHOTO TOUR OF ICELAND 2020

August 18<sup>th</sup> (Tuesday) to August 30<sup>th</sup> (Sunday) 2020, 13 days Program, 12 days in Iceland. All-inclusive (three meals a day, all transportation, all admissions, hotels, museums outside Reykjavik). Min. participation: 10; max. 21.



The Magical Glacial Lagoon – Breiðamerkurlón

**INTRODUCTION:**

We take you to Iceland in the late summer, when nature is slowly changing from the height of summer to beginning of the fall. The intriguing colors, the ever-shifting weather, and lowering angles of sunlight will create a lasting experience.

On this tour you will be spoiled with one culinary delight after the other. Iceland is getting famous for its excellent variety of great food. Our tour leader and guide, Björn Rúriksson, personally checks out each menu so that every night's dinner is quite different from the next: always an outstanding three-course meal with coffee and tea.

Our goal is to take excellent care of each participant during these twelve days in Iceland. You will enjoy excellent services and a roomy coach where each of you will have your own double seat and window with ample space for your gear: camera equipment, walking sticks, binoculars, jackets, etc.

For two of the nights, you are staying at the excellent four-star Hotel Selfoss, 50 km east of Reykjavik, situated on the banks of the

powerful river, Ölfusá, the biggest river in the country. Hotel Selfoss has a lovely, luxurious Riverside Spa richly equipped with steam room, sauna, hot pool, rainwater showers, relaxation room, lounge and bar. See the hotel's website at [www.selfosshotel.is/English/](http://www.selfosshotel.is/English/)

For the other nights, you are staying at excellent tourist hotels, and several nights in some of them, like the one in Snaefellsnes and in North-Iceland's main town Akureyri. Many of our hotels are in beautiful surroundings, ideal to enjoy short walks in the mornings and evenings.

This program is rich in unique natural sites all around Iceland. You will enjoy a wide variety of waterfalls and mountains created from lava flows and volcanoes, extraordinary broad vistas of brown and black deserts, and vast beaches of black sands. A popular attraction, photographically and historically, is the scenic area of Thingvellir, where the cradle of Icelandic democracy began in the year 930, only 60 years after this mid-ocean ridge land mass was first settled from Norway. Thingvellir is a geological wonder, with open faults and fissures, the most conspicuous rift valley in the world with craggy lava and green moss covering the landscape. Nearby is the Geyser basin with its spouting hot spring and pools of turquoise beauty, home to the 850 year old "Great Geysir".

We will enjoy great outdoor swimming pools, experiencing this fundamental culture of the Icelandic people. We will spend some delightful moments with the lovely Icelandic horse in its natural surroundings, taking advantage of the extraordinary, clear atmosphere and, hopefully, the low sun in the coming fall season. The first day of tour will be spent in Reykjavik, the most northerly capital in the world. Here there are many museums and great shopping. In early evening we will gather for a great dinner at one of the excellent restaurants downtown.

#### **BIO OF TOUR LEADER, BJÖRN RÚRIKSSON:**

Your tour is designed, directed, and guided by the veteran Icelandic tour director, Björn Rúriksson. He is a writer, publisher, photographer, naturalist, and an experienced pilot who knows his country and its natural history intimately from both the air and the ground. Björn has also lived and worked in the U.S., has been leading tours of his native country since the 1980's, many with his co-leader friend and geologist, Pete Cross, who set up two-week tours, designed by Bjorn, for: The New York Explorers Club, The Franklin Institute and Academy of Natural Sciences, both in Philadelphia. Other institutions Björn guided in Iceland include the University of Northern Colorado, Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History and the Denver Museum of Nature and Science. And not forgetting twice for The Center!

Björn is author of many trendsetting photobooks on Icelandic natural history, and has given lectures on Icelandic nature and geology at many museums, 60 institutes and universities worldwide; including Harvard Law School, Ohio State University, Mannheim University in Germany and The Royal Geographical Society in London. Björn has also held 35 private photographic exhibitions world-wide, many in the States including: Rockefeller Center, Nikon House and Lincoln Center in New York, Braseth Gallery in Seattle and Newark Museum of Art in New Jersey.

### [TOUR PROGRAM IN DETAIL](#)

#### **1<sup>st</sup> day. Tuesday, August 18<sup>th</sup>**

##### LEAVING CHARLOTTEVILLE FOR ICELAND

A special coach is taking the participants to Dulles International in DC. Evening flight with Icelandair is departing at 8:30PM – for a 5 ½ hours flight to Iceland.

#### **2<sup>nd</sup> day. Wednesday, August 19<sup>th</sup>**

##### WELCOME TO ICELAND



Reykjavik



Old town Reykjavik

Arrival at Keflavik International Airport, from Washington Dulles approx. 6:20AM in the morning. At the Keflavik airport we will be met by our local tour guide, Björn Ruriksson. After a short drive, we will enjoy a refreshing light breakfast at a cozy restaurant. After this, we will have a sight-seeing tour around Old Reykjavik. Arriving at our Hotel around noon to check in. The remainder of the afternoon is free for you to rest or wander about town checking out the waterfront, architecture, culture, museums, art galleries, bookstores, and the many unique retail enterprises. For dinner, we will meet at an excellent restaurant downtown in Reykjavik. Multiple course feast awaits us. Overnight at excellent hotel Vellir in the Reykjavik metropolitan area.

[www.hotelvellir.com](http://www.hotelvellir.com)

**3<sup>rd</sup> day. Thursday, August 20<sup>th</sup>**  
DRIVING TO THE WEST



Hraunfossar Waterfalls



The famous Mt. Kirkjufell

Today's drive takes us through the Hvalfjörður tunnel into the rolling fertile Borgarfjörður agricultural district known for its beautiful landscape and mountains.

We will learn of the history of the area at the Reykholt Cultural Center that emphasizes the importance of the medieval historian and novelist, Snorri Sturluson, (1178-1241). Snorri wrote famous works about Nordic mythology and is believed to have written some of the magnificent Icelandic Sagas. We stop at the most unique "Hraunfossar" waterfalls where pure spring water cascades from hundreds of springs at the base of a series of lava flows. Hraunfossar are at their most beautiful in the late summer and fall. In early afternoon we arrive at Hotel Langaholt on the Snaefellsnes peninsula, for wonderful quarters and another fabulous dinner.

**4<sup>th</sup> day. Friday, August 21<sup>th</sup>**  
AROUND SNAEFELLSNES PENINSULA



Stykkisholmur harbor



Lava rock formations at Arnarstapi

Today we will enjoy a full day around Snaefellsnes. We learn about the varied landscapes of this volcanic peninsula. The great structure of the glacier mountain of Snaefellsjökull dominates the scenery, built up by a succession of lavaflows during the last ice-age and countless flows during the past ten thousand years under open sky. We visit Ytri Vík on

the southern coast, which is often a good site for spotting seals. A very enjoyable optional one-hour walk is planned between Arnarstapi and Hellnar, where we enjoy the craggy and colourful coastline. A myriad of unusual rock structures demonstrates the interaction of ancient, glowing hot lava flows and the cold ocean water. Second overnight at Hotel Langaholt.

**5<sup>th</sup> day. Saturday, August 22<sup>nd</sup>**  
LEAVING FOR NORTH ICELAND



Inside church Thingeyrarkirkja



Green valleys of the North

Drive through idyllic countryside, ornamented by crater cones and lush green moss-covered lava fields on way to Blönduós in the North of Iceland. We visit a lovely ornamented country church at Thingeyri, the site of the first medieval Catholic Convent in Iceland, Benedictine monastery established in 1133. In this part of the country there is the lovely Icelandic horse all around. We stop to get near to these amicable animals. Today there are numerous sights, landscapes and interesting natural phenomena awaiting us! Overnight in the small picturesque Blönduós village.

**6<sup>th</sup> day. Sunday, August 23<sup>th</sup>**  
AKUREYRI AND THE NORTH



The Hofsós Emigration Center



Akureyri, largest town in North-Iceland

We will visit the fascinating country folk museums at Glaumbær in Skagafjörður and the Hofsos Museum, commemorating the era (1873-1914) when 15 thousand Icelanders emigrated to North America. We drive a mountain pass reaching Akureyri, the major town of the North. Akureyri in itself is a beautiful attraction because of the setting, one of the most picturesque towns in Iceland. Afternoon spent in the capital of the north, with its charming gardens and beautiful views of the fjord named Eyjafjörður.

### **7<sup>th</sup> day. Monday, August 24<sup>th</sup>** THE LAKE MÝVATN AREA



Námaskard Mud Pot Area



Goðafoss waterfall

On our route this morning we find the beautiful Goðafoss waterfall with a charming story to it. Enjoy a walk around the scenic waterfall and its surroundings. We enter the Lake Mývatn area, the world-famous migratory bird lake of Iceland that is surrounded by a myriad of volcanic features, lava flows, pseudo-craters and cinder cones. We visit the bizarre “Black castle” lava formations of Dimmuborgir. Then on to the Námaskarð sulphuric pits – mud pots, a solfatara plain with sulphur and silica deposits of all thinkable colors!

### **8<sup>th</sup> day. Tuesday, August 25<sup>th</sup>** FOSSIL CANYON ÁSBYRGI AND DETTIFOSS WATERFALL



Dettifoss, Europe's largest waterfall



Ásbyrgi fossil Canyon



Hurled mist from Dettifoss

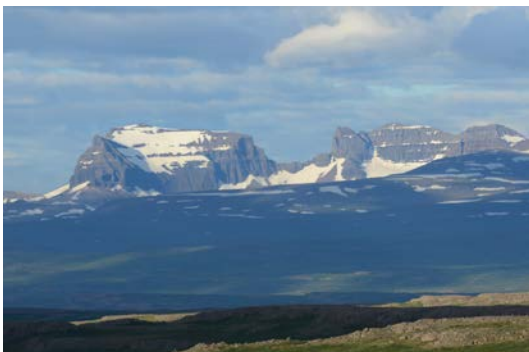


..... settling on rocks on the ground

We begin this day by enjoying the beautiful and picturesque little town Húsavík with its colorful harbor and the unique Russian-Norwegian style church. We enjoy the majestic grandeur of Iceland's geology and landforms. Visit Ásbyrgi prehistoric canyon in its beautiful setting and with its extraordinary saga. Next is Dettifoss, Europe's largest waterfall, tumbling down 150 feet into the fifteen mile long canyon below. We drive through a genuine Arctic Desert, with no or very little vegetation. The American Astronauts trained here in the sixties to study "Moonscapes"! In good weather conditions we can see over 70 miles into the back North-side of the large glacier Vatnajökull, which we encounter in the South-East. We gradually move down to the valleys of East Iceland, from the black into the lush green landscapes. Soon we reach Svartiskógur Hotel, an idyllic place in East-Iceland for our dinner and night quarters.

### 9<sup>th</sup> day. Wednesday, August 26<sup>th</sup>

### THE EASTERN FJÖRDS



Door Mountains



Berufjördur and the dyke

Today we drive through the oldest rock pile of Iceland, created some 16 million years ago. The route takes us through many fjords, by many small villages on our way to Höfn town in the South-East. Mountains, mountain ranges and the many fjords characterize this part of the country. Beaches of black sand and lagoons with birdlife. Swans and Great northern Divers dwell on the lakes. We come into the South-East

part of Iceland, where the landscape is dominated by the large Vatnajökull glacier which stretches from here some 100 miles to the west. In this area the scenery is very different to what we have experienced in the past days, deep fjords and craggy coastline. Overnight in Höfn village.

**10<sup>th</sup> day. Thursday, August 27<sup>th</sup>**

**VATNAJÖKULL NATIONAL PARK & GLACIER LAGOON**



Bizarre giant on the Glacial lake



Stranded glacial ice – the “Diamond beach”



Today’s tour takes us 100 miles along “Vatnajökull” Glacier, the largest of all the glaciers of Europe. In the morning we visit the Jökulsárlón glacial lagoon to enjoy a boat ride among the floating icebergs. We will have the chance to photograph the beautiful “Garden” of stranded icebergs of all sizes. This place is a photographer’s haven! The Lagoon is the highlight of the day – with ample time for photography. In the afternoon we visit Skaftafell in the National Park, with beautiful vistas looking south out over the vast sandur “outwash” region. Here we will have a moderate walk up to the grand amphitheater-shaped “Svartifoss” waterfall with its peculiar array of vertical basaltic columns. Stunning glacier outlets of the Vatnajökull Ice Cap meet the eye, one after another



and weather permitting, Iceland's highest peak is towering above, Öräfajökull, 2,110 m. (6,900 ft.) high, straight up from the shoreline. Overnight at Hótel Laki.

**11<sup>th</sup> day. Friday, August 28<sup>th</sup>**

**SOUTH SHORE ANDVENTURE, VÍK VILLAGE AND MANY WATERFALLS**



The Alaska lupine richly decorates the land



Basalt columns at "Dverghamrar"



Skógafoss



Vík, the southernmost village in Iceland

This morning we learn about the infamous Laki eruption of 1783. This is one of the largest outpourings of lava in historic times anywhere in the world: 230 square miles of glowing rock poured out for eight months and completely covered pastures and farms. The gases of this horrendous eruption killed 20% of the inhabitants of Iceland and 80% of its livestock. Furthermore, the gases and volcanic ash caused greatly diminished sunshine all over the northern hemisphere, triggering lasting famines in Japan, China, North America and in Europe. In France, it is believed to have led to the French Revolution a few years later! Today the Laki lava is covered by thick, beautiful, green moss, a stunning experience to enjoy first hand. We continue driving to the small village of "Vík" by the ocean, with its 600 inhabitants. We stop at the Black sand beach with the picturesque Reynisdrangar, standing like sentinels watching proudly over the South coast. Be careful when massive waves of the Atlantic Ocean break on the shore; they are indeed fast and powerful. Then on to the grand 180 feet-high falls of Skógafoss. And around the corner is the picturesque Seljalands waterfall, where we can walk around and behind the waterfall! Overnight at Hotel Selfoss.

**12<sup>th</sup> day. Saturday, August 29<sup>th</sup>**  
**THINGVELLIR, GULLFOSS, AND GEYSIR**



The Golden Waterfall



The Geysir "Churn"

We begin with a short drive to the Thingvellir valley basin, located on the spreading Mid-Atlantic ridge. We visit the famous open parliament site of "Thingvellir", where Iceland fostered its independence in the medieval times and where the Icelandic parliament met for over 1000 years. This area boasts some of the most magnificent volcanoes and tectonics in the world. Thingvellir is now a UNESCO world heritage site. The subsiding valley of "Thingvellir" lies astride the North-Atlantic ridge, where the Euro-Asian and North-American tectonic plates diverge from one another at the speed of ~1 inch per year; the same speed as your nails grow! Today we also visit the premier of Icelandic waterfalls, the famous Gullfoss, the spectacular 100 feet-high waterfall which, in the sunshine, so often is embraced with a rainbow in the mist, giving the golden name to the fall. A few kilometers farther, we come to the magnificent Geysir area. During a series of earthquakes 800 years ago, the hot spring "Geysir" was born, later to give such phenomena its name nearly worldwide. Geysir "Churn", is an active spring and spouts every 3-5 minutes up to a height of 60-70 feet. This is followed by a short drive to Selfoss where we spend the second of two consecutive nights at Hotel Selfoss, and where another great dinner is awaiting us!

**13<sup>th</sup> day. Sunday, August 30<sup>th</sup>**  
**THE UNIQUE BLUE LAGOON AND FLIGHT BACK HOME**



The Blue Lagoon



Krýsuvík mudpot field

On our drive from Selfoss along the South-West coastline, we first visit the colorful mudpot fields at Krýsuvík, a feast for every photographer! Enjoy the world famous “Blue Lagoon” bathing facilities. The Geothermal spa is one of the most visited attractions in Iceland. The warm waters are rich in minerals like silica and sulfur and bathing in the Blue Lagoon is reputed to help some people suffering from skin diseases such as psoriasis. The water temperature in the bathing and swimming area of the lagoon averages 99–102 °F. The lagoon is man-made and is fed by the water output of the nearby geothermal power plant, Svartsengi. The water is completely renewed every two days through natural flow! Following the Blue Lagoon visit, we will get a great lunch at the “Salthúsið” restaurant in the small town of Grindavík. Most wonderful “Fish and chips” in the country! Then a short drive to the Airport in Keflavik for your flight back home, departing around 5 PM on Icelandair to Washington Dulles in the US.



Björn Rúriksson, your Icelandic host



Icelandic horses



Admiring the Golden waterfall



A turf farm



Coastline at Snafellsnes



A black horse



Harpa the Reykjavik Concert Hall



Small and beautiful flowers

Package includes: round trip transfers air and ground. All meals, transportation in Iceland, gratuities and a 13 days Program (12 in Iceland). Activity level - Active

\*Price: \$6,400 per person double occupancy/ Single Occupancy \$7,720 – Deposit \$1,000. Travel Protection is additional.

Open to all.

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