

NATURAL WONDERS OF ICELAND

A tour all around the island
June 3, 2017 - 19 Days



a world to experience



Fares Per Person:

\$10,145 double/twin

\$12,305 single



> Please add 0.1% GST.

> **Experience Points:** Earn 183 points from this tour.

Redeem **183 points** if you book by **March 2, 2017**.

Includes

- Transportation to Seattle Airport
- Non-stop Icelandair flight from Seattle to Keflavik
- Air transport tax and security fees
- 17 nights accommodation and hotel taxes
- Coach transportation in Iceland for 16 days
- Knowledgeable and bilingual Icelandic guide for 16 days
- Swim in the Blue Lagoon
- Sightseeing tour of Reykjavik
- Strokkur Geysir and Gullfoss
- Deildartunguhver Hot Springs
- Snorrastofa Museum
- Bird watching boat excursion at Stykkisholmur
- Snæfellsjökull National Park
- Bjarnarhofn Shark Museum
- Glaumbaer Folk Museum
- Horse show at Flugumyri Farm
- Sightseeing tour of Akureyri
- Ferry to/from Hrisey Island
- Tractor-drawn wagon tour of Hrisey Island
- Goðafoss — waterfall of the gods
- Skútustadir crater and Námaskarð mud pots
- Lake Myvatn nature baths
- Whale watching boat excursion from Husavik
- Jökulsárgljúfur National Park and Asbyrgi Gorge
- Hallormstadur Arboretum
- Petra's stone collection
- Vatnajökull — largest glacier in Europe
- Boat excursion at Jökulsárlón Glacial Lagoon
- Vatnajökull National Park and Visitor Centre
- Ferry to/from Heimaey on Vestmann Islands
- Shoreline cruise around Heimaey
- Eyjafjallajökull Volcano visitor centre
- Þingvellir National Park
- Iceland government 11% VAT (value added tax)
- Non-stop Icelandair flight to Vancouver
- Transportation from Vancouver to home cities
- Luggage handling in Seattle & Vancouver only
- Wells Gray tour director throughout tour
- **31 meals:** 18 breakfasts, 1 lunch, 12 dinners

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Iceland

Iceland is a remote island of nearly 104,000 square kilometres in the North Atlantic. Its highest peak, Hvannadalshnjúkur, rises to 2,110 metres and over 11 per cent of the country is covered by glaciers, including Vatnajökull, the largest in Europe. Situated on the Mid-Atlantic Ridge, Iceland is a hot spot of volcanic and geothermal activity: 30 volcanoes have erupted in the past two centuries and the most recent, Eyjafjallajökull, caused havoc with the ash fallout in Europe in spring 2010. Natural hot water supplies much of the population with cheap, pollution-free heating. Many rivers have been harnessed for inexpensive hydroelectric power. The coastline is pierced by more than 100 fjords with green fertile valleys extending inland. Iceland also has countless waterfalls and numerous hot springs.

Out of a population numbering more than 300,000, half live in the capital of Reykjavík and its neighbouring towns in the southwest. The highland interior is uninhabited and most communities are situated on the coast. Iceland was settled by Nordic people in the 9th century. Tradition says that the first permanent settler was Ingólfur Arnarson, a Norwegian Viking who made his home where Reykjavík now stands. The early settlers founded one of the world's first republican governments which lasted until 1262 when Iceland lost its independence. The present republic was founded in 1944. The country is governed by the Althing (parliament) whose 63 members are elected every four years.

The Icelanders still speak the language of the Vikings, although modern Icelandic has undergone changes of pronunciation and vocabulary. Most residents also speak fluent English. Iceland is alone in upholding another Norse tradition, the custom of using patronymics rather than surnames. An Icelander's first name is followed by his or her father's name and the suffix -son or -dóttir, e.g. Guðrún Pétursdóttir (Guðrún, daughter of Pétur). Members of a family can therefore have many different "surnames" which sometimes causes confusion to foreigners!

The chilliest thing about Iceland is its name! In January, the average temperature in Reykjavik is higher than that in New York. July is the warmest month with an average daytime temperature of about 14 degrees Celsius in Reykjavik and even warmer further north in Akureyri. These mild temperatures are thanks to the Gulf Current which sweeps around Iceland. The midnight sun can be experienced during our June visit because the sun rises at 2 am and sets at midnight in Reykjavik, and never sets further north. Early June is also a wonderful time to visit Iceland because the weather is generally good, the summer crowds do not arrive until the third week of June, and the birdwatching opportunities are thrilling.

Iceland's economy was robust with income per capita among the highest in the world until October 2008 when its three privatized banks collapsed due to unwise foreign investments. In the following years, the kronur currency lost 60% of its value. Previously Iceland had a reputation as a very expensive place to vacation and Wells Gray customers experienced this on our first tour in 2007. A second tour in 2009 found amazing bargains by comparison. The 2010 *Lonely Planet* "best of" guide ranked Iceland as the #1 value destination. In the six years since, the economy has steadily improved and so has the kronur, bringing higher prices each year. The government introduced 11% VAT (like our GST) in 2015 which hiked all prices. There are not enough hotel rooms from June to August for the huge demand (Wells Gray books rooms two years in advance), and lodging prices have increased 14% in the last year. These factors make this tour expensive, but Iceland should be on everybody's bucket list, so we urge you to join us in 2017.

Itinerary

Saturday, June 3:

Transportation is provided to Seattle and we stay overnight at the **Embassy Suites** in Lynnwood.

Sunday, June 4:

Meals: B

The morning is leisure time and we check in at Seattle Airport by 2 pm. The flight on **Icelandair** is non-stop to Keflavik International Airport, located 50 km west of Reykjavik.

Monday, June 5:

Meals: B

After arrival at **Keflavik**, our Icelandic guide and driver are waiting to greet us and we drive into the town of Keflavik for breakfast. Afterwards, we enjoy a soothing swim in the **Blue Lagoon**, a natu-

ral geothermal pool in the middle of a dramatic lava field. The 40-degree Celsius mineral-rich water and white sediment is known for its healing properties. Then we drive into **Reykjavik**, the northernmost capital of Europe. The name translates as "Smokey Bay" because the first settlers of Iceland saw steam rising from a cove in a geothermal area. We stay two nights at **Fosshotel Lind** which has an excellent downtown location.

Tuesday, June 6:

Meals: B

During the morning, there is a sightseeing tour of Reykjavik. Weaving through narrow alleys framed with old timber houses, we learn about the life of the city from its beginning to the present. We visit

the landmark **Hallgrímskirkja Church**, the harbour, the University, the giant relief map of Iceland at City Hall, and **Höfði House** where the Reagan/Gorbachev summit took place in 1986. We also enjoy the panoramic view over Reykjavík from the Pearl. The afternoon is leisure time to enjoy the multitude of shops along Laugavegur.

Wednesday, June 7:

Meals: B,L,D

We drive through an agricultural area with a mixture of farms and summer cottages. **Hveragerði** has many greenhouses that grow vegetables and flowers, and are heated with natural warm water. Next is the Geysir area where we walk around boiling hot springs and hissing fumaroles, and admire **Strokkur Geysir** which erupts every 5-10 minutes. Nearby is one of Iceland's favourite waterfalls, **Gullfoss**, which plunges 30 metres into Hvítá Canyon. Our next stop is at a woolen mill where fine handicrafts can be bought. Then we drive through the 6 km tunnel under Hvalfjörður. We admire two more waterfalls, **Barnafossar** which tumbles under a natural bridge, and Hraunfossar which pours from under a lava flow. Nearby **Deildartunguhver** is one of the world's most powerful hot springs producing 198 litres per second that is piped to coastal towns for heating. Next is Snorrastofa Museum, named after Snorri Sturluson, a poet, historian, and 13th century Icelandic character. Our overnight stop is at Fosshotel Reykholt.

Thursday, June 8:

Meals: B,D

It is a short drive to **Stykkisholmur** where we take a boat excursion around the rocky islands of **Hvammfjörður**, viewing many nesting birds including puffins, kittiwakes, cormorants, fulmars and possibly the king of Icelandic birds, the white-tailed eagle. After some net fishing by the crew, enjoy a taste of some very fresh scallops. At Helgafell, we see the grave of Guðrún dating from 1008. Legend says that you can get three wishes fulfilled by climbing the hill above the grave. Our last stop is at the **Bjarnarhofn Shark Farm**. We stay two nights at Hotel Stykkisholmur.

Friday, June 9:

Meals: B,D

Today is spent on **Peninsula Snæfellsnes** with views of Snæfellsjökull where, according to Jules Verne, the entrance to the centre of the earth is found. Along the south coast, we see a rare light coloured beach at Búðir and walk the clifftop at Arnarstapi past two natural bridges and lots of birdlife. The tip of Snæfellsnes and its north coast feature magnificent seascapes with dramatic cliffs, black sand beaches, and pounding surf.

Saturday, June 10:

Meals: B,D

We head east through green valleys, across an-

cient lava and past nicely sculpted fjords before arriving in **Skagafjörður**, known as the "valley of horses". We learn the secrets and importance of the Icelandic horse during the **Flugumyri Farm horse show**. Next is Glaumbaer Folk Museum where turf buildings of the 18th and 19th centuries have been preserved. Our destination is **Akureyri**, capital of the north and a big city on the Icelandic scale with 15,000 people. The next two nights are at Hotel Kea in the shopping district.

Sunday, June 11:

Meals: B,D

We take the short ferry ride to **Hrísey**, Iceland's second largest island. The bird life is fantastic with lots of plovers, arctic terns and ptarmigans. The island is also unique because cars are rare and most people get around on bicycles. We take a tour of the island on a wagon pulled by a tractor. Back in Akureyri, there is a short driving tour, then the rest of the afternoon is leisure time.

Monday, June 12:

Meals: B,D

Our first stop is **Goðafoss** (waterfall of the gods) where, in the year 1000, a chieftain threw his pagan statues to prove his loyalty to the new Christian God. We drive around shallow **Lake Mývatn**, exploring natural wonders such as the moon-like crater Hverfjall and the colourful boiling mud pots at **Námaskarð**. Next is a wonderful relaxing dip in the **Mývatn Nature Baths** surrounded by this colourful landscape. Our overnight stop is at Fosshotel Husavík. Tonight there is a boat excursion for **whale watching**, most likely seeing the minke.

Tuesday, June 13:

Meals: B,D

Our drive follows the impressive coastline of the **Tjörnes Peninsula** from where the island Grímsey can be seen – the only place in Iceland located above the Arctic Circle. In **Jökulsárgljúfur National Park**, we take walks into Asbyrgi Gorge and to awesome **Dettifoss**, Europe's largest waterfall. We follow the long valley of Jökuldalur to the farming region of Fljótsdalshérað. The next two nights are at Hotel Herad in **Egilsstaðir**.

Wednesday, June 14:

Meals: B,D

We drive along **Lake Lagarfljót**, home to a legendary giant Lake-Worm, then take an interesting walk through the **Arboretum**, a rare Icelandic forest. Next is an exciting drive over a rugged pass to the fishing village of **Borgarfjörður-Eystri** on the east coast. It is noted for a church altar painted by Jóhannes Kjarval, an art gallery with local stones, and a colony of puffins.

Thursday, June 15:

Meals: B,D

Today's drive goes through one of Europe's longest road tunnels between Reydarfjörður and

Faskrudsfjörður. We admire Petra Sveinsdóttir's vast local stone collection, then drive through green valleys and along the wild coastline to reach **Berufjörður**. The town was a busy place in the 16th century with Danish traders and offshore is the Island of Papey where Irish monks lived a thousand years ago. We stay overnight in the fishing village of Höfn at **Hotel Höfn**. The icy tongues of Skalafellsjökull are across the seaplain.

Friday, June 16: *Meals: B,D*

An awesome sight awaits – **Vatnajökull**, the largest glacier in Europe at 8,300 square kilometres or covering about 8% of Iceland. Numerous tongues descend from its main ice cap which is an amazing contrast to the farmlands we have seen. At the **Jökulsárlón glacial lagoon**, we board an amphibious boat and sail among huge floating icebergs. As we continue along the south coast, there are more views of Vatnajökull and Iceland's highest peak, **Hvannadalshnjukur**. The next two nights are at Hotel Laki which has an isolated but splendid setting near the south coast.

Saturday, June 17: *Meals: B,D*

The day is devoted to the Skaftafell region of **Vatnajökull National Park**. The park offers fascinating landscapes contrasted with glaciers, moors, mountains, birch forests, glacial rivers and sandy plains. Approaching the park, the road crosses **Skeiðarársandur**, a vast expanse of glacial outwash with a kilometre-long bridge. After time in the visitor centre, there are recommended walks to the snout of Skaftafellsjökull and to Svartifoss which tumbles past basalt columns.

Sunday, June 18: *Meals: B,D*

We continue along the south coast across the black sands of Mýrdalssandur. After a walk on the beach at Vík, we admire two impressive waterfalls: 60-metre high **Skogafoss** and **Seljalandsfoss** which you can walk behind. Next is a fascinating stop at the new visitor centre for the renowned **Eyjafjallajökull Volcano**. Then we ride the ferry to Heimaey, largest of the **Vestmann Islands**. It is famous for the 1973 eruption which flooded parts of the town with lava and caused the total evacuation of the island. We take a cruise around **Heimaey**, looking at volcanic formations, birdlife and whales, and we even sail into an ocean cavern, Klettshellur. After returning to the mainland, we stay at Hotel Hvolsvollur.

Monday, June 19: *Meals: B*

Following a rural summer road, we enter **Þingvellir National Park**. The National Assembly was founded here in 930 AD to rule the country, and we take a walk through the old parliament site. Þingvellir is not only important for Icelandic history, but also for geology because the meeting of two drifting continental plates can be seen here. Then we drive through Iceland's largest agricultural district to **Reykjavík**, completing our grand circle drive around Iceland. We stay overnight at the Fosshotel Lind.

Tuesday, June 20: *Meals: B*

The morning is leisure time and we head to the airport at 1 pm. We fly on Icelandair to Vancouver and stay at the Fairmont YVR Hotel.

Wednesday, June 21: *Meals: B*

Transportation is provided to Victoria.

Tour Policies

Payments: A deposit of \$800 per person is requested at the time of booking and the balance is due March 2, 2017.

Cancellation Policy: Up to February 2, 2017, your tour payments will be refunded less an administrative charge of \$50 per person. From February 3 to March 2, the cancellation charge is \$300 per person. From March 3 to April 6, the cancellation charge is 40% of the tour fare. From April 7 to May 2, the cancellation charge is 70% of the tour fare. After May 2, there is no refund.

Fare and hotel changes: This tour was planned 2 years before departure and bookings were accepted starting in April 2016. However, Icelandair will not confirm 2017 fares until late July 2016. Therefore, the air fare included in this tour has been estimated, based on 2016 fares and could be higher or lower. Changes to taxes, kronur currency fluctuations and surcharges from tour suppliers can also occur at any time and are beyond the control of Wells Gray Tours, therefore Wells Gray Tours reserves the right to increase fares due to such changes up until the time of departure. Hotels may also change to equivalent ones.

Travel Insurance: A Comprehensive Insurance policy is available through Wells Gray Tours and coverage is provided by Travel Guard. Policies purchased at deposit include a waiver of the pre-existing condition clause for medical and cancellation claims, otherwise policies can be purchased no later than at final payment. Please contact us for details.

Home pickups and dropoffs may be offered in Greater Victoria, depending on the number of people booked and the size of the chartered vehicle. Decision is made about 2 weeks before departure and you will be contacted about your pickup point and time.

Activity Level: Moderate activity including walking trails to natural attractions, many with uneven surfaces, boardwalks and steps. Those with mobility challenges will miss some of the highlights. You must handle your own luggage in Iceland. There can be longer walks in the airports; request a cart or wheelchair in advance if this could be an issue for you. If you are not able to participate in Activity Level 2, Wells Gray Tours recommends that you bring a companion to assist you. The tour director and driver have many responsibilities, so please do not expect them, or your fellow travellers, to provide ongoing assistance.

Experience Points: This tour earns 183 points. Each time you travel on a Wells Gray tour, you earn Experience Points. One point equals \$1. Redeem your points on select tours or accumulate enough points to earn a free tour! Redemptions offered until March 2.

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