

EXCLUSIVE
SOLHEIMAJOKULL
GLACIER
HIKE

DISCOVER THE WONDERS OF ICELAND



OUR EXPERT
SARAH MARSHALL
Travel writer,
The Sunday Times

THE MOMENT

When you find yourself in a fantasy land, the possibilities are endless — even an exploration into the icy, groaning interior of a glacier



A blinding white ice sheet dominated the horizon as we ploughed skyward, approaching mountaintops in a freezing haze. Our transport was an 8WD modified military cruise-missile launcher, a monstrous vehicle perfectly matched to Iceland's treacherous glacial terrain.

Sculpted with fire and shaped by ice, Iceland's landscape is dominated by otherworldly sights, creating scenes unlike anywhere else. The undisturbed slopes of Langjökull glacier were pleasingly people-free, and with every metre of ascent I slipped further into a snowy Star Wars fantasy. Had Luke Skywalker emerged from a powder storm riding a woolly Tauntaun, I wouldn't have been surprised. Up there, the air tasted crisper, snow crunched loudly beneath our tyres; in the presence of no one, everything felt gloriously amplified.

Ahead of us, shadowed by the low sun's long, spidery rays, was the entrance to a tunnel and a rare opportunity to see what it's really like to be deep inside a 7,500-year accumulation of compacted snow. Four years in the making, into the Glacier is the world's largest manmade ice cave, and stepping into its blue-hued belly, I was surprised by how lively ice could be. Guttural

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groans echoed along the 1,300ft polished tunnel as I slushed past dimly lit chambers and chapels, and rivers of water trickled beneath my feet. Peering into a moulin, I wondered where the shaft might eventually lead; with 660ft of ice still between me and the earth, the possibilities were endless. Above my head, a crevasse gaped open like a painful wound. Very quickly I realised I was out of my depth, in an environment where people don't really belong. But fear only added to the thrill, as did the sense that this was transient.

“The glacier is constantly moving,” explained our guide, who claimed the entrance, if not maintained, would easily close. “In 300 years, it might shift forward by five kilometres. Although, in 100 years it's likely the glacier will have disappeared completely.” Even in a matter of days, everything could look different. It made my treasured moments even more special.

Main photograph: Skaftafell National Park. Left: taking a closer look at the glacial crevasses of Solheimajokull

YOUR EXCLUSIVE TRIP

Explore extraordinary scenery with an itinerary that lets you enjoy it all at your own pace

Iceland is unlike anywhere else, but still a relatively short hop from the UK. On this trip, you'll discover the best of the country in a hire car, following a route that takes you from rambles in the breathtaking Thorsmork Valley to underground-ice-cave exploration.

DAY 1

ARRIVAL

On landing at Keflavik Airport, collect your rental vehicle and take a drive around Reykjanes Peninsula. Visit the Blue Lagoon (extra cost) on the way south to Hotel Ranga, where you will stay for the next few nights.

DAY 2

SOLHEIMAJOKULL

Take a leisurely drive along the south coast, stopping to view the

of the most beautiful places in Iceland. Enjoy the exhilarating drive through deep glacial rivers to the base of the valley and the many hiking opportunities.

DAY 4

GULLFOSS

Explore the famous Geysir area and “golden” waterfall at Gullfoss and the perfectly formed waterfall Faxi. It is also possible to take a snowmobiling trip (extra cost) on the Langjökull glacier with a pick-up from Gullfoss. The Secret Lagoon (additional cost) offers a relaxing bathing experience in its hot geothermal waters. Check into the Ion Adventure Hotel.

DAY 5

THINGVELLIR

Take time to explore Thingvellir National Park, where the North American and Eurasian tectonic plates are pulling apart, forming a rift valley. Optional snorkelling or diving tours are available at Silfra for those wishing to experience the mysterious underwater world of the tectonic rift. Then head to Hvalfjörður and perhaps take a hike to the Glymur waterfall before heading on to Reykholt and Husafell. Check into Hotel Husafell.

DAY 6

HUSAFELL

Spend the day relaxing or hiking around the area at Husafell. Visit the famous waterfalls Hraunfossar and Barnafoss, as well as Europe's most powerful hot-spring area at Deildartunguhver.

DAY 7

VIDGELMIR CAVES

Visit this easily accessible cave system, which takes you deep underground and features magnificent lava formations. An Into the Glacier tour (extra cost) is available in the afternoon.

DAY 8

DEPART

Drive to Keflavik Airport for your flight home, or extend your stay in Reykjavik and enjoy the vibrant capital of Iceland.

WHAT WE LOVE

EXCLUSIVE READER OFFER

Enjoy an included glacier hike and cave excursion and the chance to get up close to the tectonic rift at Thingvellir

ICELAND AT GREAT VALUE

Explore the geysers, glaciers and geothermal waters of Iceland at an exclusive price

FANTASTIC HOTELS

Carefully chosen, expert-rated hotels with style, comfort and unforgettable views

DAY 3

SOUTH COAST

Another day to explore the stunning south coast, with its black-sand beaches and bird cliffs. Perhaps take the short ferry ride (additional cost) to the Westman Islands or an optional adventure by super-jeep to the secluded valley of Thorsmork. Surrounded by three glacial caps, it is one



YOUR ACCOMMODATION

HOTEL RANGA

Our Times Expert Traveller reviewer writes: “Ranga is perfectly positioned to see the northern lights and explore Iceland's Golden Circle. Floor-length glass windows in the gourmet restaurant reveal 180-degree panoramas, perfectly showing off the stunning wilderness and smouldering hot tubs.”

Times Expert Traveller rating: 9/10

ION ADVENTURE HOTEL

Close to Lake Thingvallavatn and surrounded by mountains, this hotel makes the most of its natural light, outdoor-living spaces and panoramic views. It also has its own spa, as well as a 10-metre outdoor, naturally heated pool.

HOTEL HUSAFELL

A beautifully designed property 90 minutes' drive northeast of Reykjavik. Rooms have stylish furnishings, as well as paintings by a local artist. Dining is a highlight, too, with a fantastic menu featuring seafood, local beef, lamb and wild game.

OUR RECOMMENDED PARTNER

Discover the World has been pioneering holidays to the Nordic region for 35 years. Its travel specialists know each destination inside out, having travelled there extensively.



BOOK THIS TRIP

PRICE INCLUDES:

- Seven nights' en-suite accommodation on a bed and breakfast basis
- Car rental for seven days on an unlimited-mileage basis (includes semi-comprehensive insurance

- and no charge for an additional driver)
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