

Iceland: Circumnavigating the Land of Fire & Ice

Reykjavik, Iceland, Europe

Day 1 Arrive in Reykjavik and overnight

Having made your way to Reykjavik, you will be met by a representative of Aurora Expeditions and transferred to our group hotel. Upon arrival at your included hotel, please visit the Aurora Expeditions hospitality area where you can leave your luggage and enjoy refreshments if arriving prior to 4pm. Whilst here you can collect your luggage cabin tags speak with our ground operations team, who may have information to share with you about pre-embarkation or to provide you with information about where to dine, withdraw cash or purchase last minute items from a local pharmacy or supermarket. The remainder of your time is at leisure. All meals today are at your own expense. Accommodation: The Grand Hotel Reykjavik



Day 2 Embarkation

This morning, please ensure your cabin luggage is fitted with cabin tags clearly labelled with your name and cabin number. Your luggage will be collected from your hotel and transferred directly to the port for clearance and delivered to your cabin ahead of your arrival on board. Please keep any valuables or personal items with you throughout the day. Today we follow the path of one of Reykjavik's most popular seismic attractions – the Golden Circle. Stops along our route include Thingvellir National Park, accredited as the site of Iceland's first parliament. A shaky start to the new nation, it is also the point where the Eurasia and North American tectonic plates meet as an open fissure. Our next stop is Gullfoss waterfall. This

impressive water feature tumbles 34 meters into the Hvítá River, offering a popular photographic opportunity. Next we explore the geothermal fields and geysir's for which Iceland is famous. The variety of hot springs and bubbling pools are mesmerising as the sheer capacity of water and steam erupting from the ground makes you ponder just how much power is beneath your feet. Late afternoon we return to Reykjavik to board the Greg Mortimer. After boarding, there's time to settle into your cabin before our important safety briefings before we 'throw the lines' to begin our Iceland adventure. This evening, meet your expedition team and crew at the Welcome Dinner.

Day 3 Arnarstapi / Grundafjordur

Arnarstapi is the starting point of our adventures on the Snaefellsnes Peninsula, gateway to Snæfellsjökull National Park. Snaefellsnes Peninsula is an area of diverse landscapes that is characterised by lava fields and glistening fjords and home to a vast array of birdlife. The area is crowned by the magnificent, ice-capped Snæfellsjökull volcano, a 700,000-year-old dormant subglacial volcano, visible from Reykjavik on a clear day and immortalised in Jules Verne's Journey to the Centre of the Earth. You can choose from three shore excursion options that best suits your interests and level of fitness: Option 1 - Highlights of Snaefellsness (Duration: 8 hours including lunch / Level of difficulty: Easy-Moderate, dependent on fitness) Our first stop will be the dramatic black pebble beach of Djúpalónssandur, where you can marvel at the black sands and colossal rock formations, volcanic landscapes, and remains of a 1948 shipwreck. Next, you'll visit Búðir, a picturesque hamlet surrounded by the stunning landscapes of the Snaefellsnes Peninsula. Stop to admire Búðakirkja, the 19th-century church, and explore the area before enjoying lunch at Hotel Búðir. The restaurant is renowned for its fresh and local food, sourcing fresh ingredients directly from local farmers and fishermen. At the conclusion of lunch, re-join the coach to travel to Snæfellsjökull National Park, encompassing a large area of Snaefellsnes Peninsula's western tip. For the more active, explore some incredible hiking trails, or simply enjoy your drive through the park and take in the beauty that surrounds you. Concluding your day, we continue to the iconic Mount Kirkjufell, a favourite among photographers and known to many as a filming location for the TV show "Game of Thrones." Not far from this majestic mountain is a waterfall that completes the picturesque scene. Option 2 - Natural Wonders of Snaefellsnes (Duration: 8 hours including lunch / Level of difficulty: Moderate) Upon disembarkation, we will hike the coastal trail that connects the two villages of Arnarstapi and

Hellnar (2 hours). Now a National Reserve, this easy level hike encompasses geology, wildlife, amazing photo opportunities, folklore and most of all adventure. This old trail takes us along the wild shoreline with a view of the ocean and extraordinary columnar basalt and lava cliff formations on one side and stunning mountains and Snæfellsjökull Glacier on the other. The cliffs are alive with a wide range of bird species such as the Arctic Tern, the kittiwakes, gulls and fulmars. Next, you'll step into the 8,000-year-old Vatnshellir Cave, replete with stunning geology, fascinating rock formations, and colourful volcanic rock. We will meet at our base near the cave, where your friendly guide will provide you with all the equipment that you need, including a helmet and headlamp (we strongly recommend that you wear comfortable and sturdy footwear, as the volcanic rock can be quite difficult to traverse). Then your friendly guide will give you a brief safety talk before we descend the spiral staircase into this subterranean wonderland. The tour meanders through the path of the lava flow around 200 meters into a large cave that lies around 35 meters beneath the surface of the earth, where we will be greeted by some rainbow-coloured volcanic rocks and incredible petrified lava formations. The cave is a fairly easy walk, although it will involve a degree of climbing (you must be able to participate in prolonged stair climbing). Following lunch, re-join the coach and travel to the iconic Mount Kirkjufell, a favourite among photographers and known to many as a filming location for the TV show "Game of Thrones." Not far from this majestic mountain is a waterfall that completes the picturesque scene.

Option 3 - Snæfellsnes Adventure (Duration: 8 hours including lunch / Level of difficulty: Moderate-Difficult) The Land of Fire and Ice is well-known for its incredible landscapes and contrasting terrains that include several natural and geological wonders rarely found anywhere else on Earth. The unique geological history of Snæfellsnes will draw you in where you can explore sites revealing Iceland's unique geological history up close. Your first stop is at the Pufubjarg bird cliff, home of nesting puffins and fulmars. From here, hike along the rugged coastline to witness the exceptionally beautiful Londrangar basalt cliffs, a geologic wonder that looks like a huge rock castle. There are many local birds here, and they are a noisy bunch. Puffins, but especially fulmars, nest in the many cavities in the two pillars. From here you hike across a pretty lava field covered in moss to Malarrið, where you can see the lighthouse and explore the beach. Following an early lunch, re-join the coach and head for Eldborg crater, located on a short volcanic rift, just 200 metres in diameter, and 50 metres deep. It is the largest crater on this rift and was created in an eruption which occurred somewhere between 5000 and 6000 years ago. Unlike many of Iceland's volcanoes, it has a very classic shape, with smooth sloping sides and a very definite crater. A marked hiking path leads through a shrub-covered

lava field to the top of the crater offering incredible views of Snæfellsnes National Park. Concluding your day, we continue to the symmetrical, hexagonal-shaped basalt columns at Gerðuberg Cliffs. Stand in awe at these impressive cliffs, a natural marvel that spans 500 metres. To enjoy the best view, take a walk by the structures. Climbing up the cliff is possible but to really soak in the views of this geological structure, it's best to enjoy a walk alongside the cliffs.

Days 4 Patreksfjordur & Dynjandi - Westfjords

Over the next three days, we explore the Westfjords region featuring outstanding landscapes with jaw-dropping views of dramatic fjords carved by ancient glaciers, sheer table mountains that plunge into the sea and pristine North Atlantic vegetation. At Patreksfjordur, a shore excursion by coach takes us to Latrabjarg cliffs. As Europe's largest bird cliff, Latrabjarg is home to millions of seabirds, such as puffin, razorbill, fulmar and guillemot. Enjoy the impressive variety of natural wonders and unspoiled nature. Latrabjarg also happens to be the westernmost point in Europe, east coast of the North American continent on the other side of the Atlantic. Immerse yourself in the tranquillity of the afternoon as we cruise northward, taking in breathtaking landscapes and keeping a watchful eye for whales. Later, we'll embark on a Zodiac landing to witness the awe-inspiring power of Dynjandi waterfall.

Days 5 Thingeyri - Westfjords

Thingeyri, a quaint village nestled on a slender strip of land, graces the shores of one of Iceland's most picturesque fjords, Dýrafjörður. Much like many other coastal settlements in Iceland, the village's culture and industry have been intricately woven with the influence of the sea over centuries. The surrounding landscape is adorned with towering mountains, lending a distinctive charm to the scenic expanse that envelops Thingeyri. This idyllic region is often hailed as the "Aps of the Westfjords," especially the highland area nestled between the majestic fjords of Dýrafjörður and Arnarfjörður. The beauty of Thingeyri lies not only in its coastal simplicity but also in the dramatic backdrop of high mountains that paints a captivating portrait of this Icelandic village. Choose one of two shore excursion options that best suits your interests and level of fitness: Option 1 - That Viking Thing Experience (Duration: 2 hours + free time / Level of difficulty: Easy) Today you will step back in time and learn about the Viking ways and

how the hardy Norse people lived off the land. Walk through a recreated Viking area, learning about what is fact and what is fiction in the many stories you've heard about the famous Vikings. A short hike brings you to the old ruins of the Viking meeting place called a Thing - the closest translation in English is 'parliament.' Step inside the interactive Viking Museum for a chance to dress up in authentic hand-sewn Viking clothing, take photographs, drink Icelandic Viking beer, bake your own Viking bread, and explore the museum - all part of learning more about Viking ways. Option 2 - Sandafell Mountain Hike (Duration: 3 hours / Level of difficulty: Moderate-Difficult, dependent on fitness level) For avid explorers, Iceland is littered with hidden gems, and possibly the best-kept secret of all is the Westfjords. Lying in the most north-westerly area of the island, this sprawling area of natural beauty is truly a hiker's paradise. Rocky peaks, deep crevices, and charming Icelandic towns all add to the appeal of the Westfjords, not to mention the various hiking trails snaking across the unusual countryside. Today we will hike Sandafell, offering gorgeous views over the town, surrounding mountains and the water below.

Day 6 Akureyri & Husavik

Picturesque Akureyri is Iceland's second largest city outside the capital area and is blessed with a superb snow-capped mountain backdrop. Choose from three shore excursions in Akureyri to best suit your interests and level of fitness: Option 1 - Góðafoss, Lake Myvatn & Baths (Duration: 8 hours including lunch / Level of difficulty: Easy) Our first stop will be the the Góðafoss waterfall, one of the most spectacular waterfalls in Iceland. There is a 400-metre trail, easy and mostly flat, approximately 10 minutes to get to the main viewpoint. Next, you'll visit Lake Myvatn and explore the area. At the conclusion of lunch, re-join the coach to travel to Myvatn Nature Baths. Drawing on a centuries-old tradition, the tastefully designed complex offers bathers a completely natural experience that begins with a relaxing dip amidst clouds of steam rising up from a fissure deep in the Earth's surface and ends with a luxurious swim in a pool of geothermal water drawn from depths of up to 2,500 metres / 8,200 feet. Option 2 - Góðafoss, Lake Myvatn & Dimmuborgir (Duration: 8 hours including lunch / Level of difficulty: Moderate) Our first stop will be the the Góðafoss waterfall, one of the most spectacular waterfalls in Iceland. There is a 400-metre trail, easy and mostly flat, approximately 10 minutes to get to the main viewpoint. Next, you'll visit Lake Myvatn's Skútustaðagígar pseudo craters. Wander the marked walking paths through the area. You can easily walk around the bowl-like landmasses or take a hike to reach the top for a magnificent view of the scenic surroundings. At the conclusion

of lunch, re-join the coach to travel to Dimmuborgir, an area strewn with enormous lava rocks and cliffs. The formation of these extraordinary lava cliffs and pillars are the result of molten lava flowing over a pond in the eruption of Lúdentborgir and Þrengslaborgir some 2,300 years ago. The most famous of these formations is "The Church", aptly named, as this is a cave, open at both ends and with a dome-like ceiling. Option 3 - Hverfjall Volcanic Crater Hike, Dimmuborgir & Dettifoss (Duration: 8 hours including lunch /Level of difficulty: Strenuous) Our first stop will be Dimmuborgir, an area strewn with enormous lava rocks and cliffs. The formation of these extraordinary lava cliffs and pillars are the result of molten lava flowing over a pond in the eruption of Lúdentborgir and Þrengslaborgir some 2,300 years ago. The most famous of these formations is "The Church", aptly named, as this is a cave, open at both ends and with a dome-like ceiling. From here walk up the steep slopes of Hverfjall Crater and around the crater's rim for otherworldly and awesome views of the surrounding landscape. This is a 9km loop trail and takes approximately 3 hours or 3.5 hours to include walking around the rim. At the conclusion of lunch, re-join the coach to travel to Dettifoss waterfall in northeast Iceland and is reputed to be the most powerful waterfall in Europe. The falls are 100 metres / 328 feet wide and have a drop of 44 metres / 144 feet down to the Jökulsárgljúfur canyon. In the late afternoon, we reboard our vessel in Husavik, the whale watching capital of Iceland.

Day 7 Grímsey Island

Located approximately 40 km (25 miles) off the mainland, Grímsey is a verdant grassy island, probably best known for its proximity to the Arctic Circle, which cuts across the island. Many people travel to Grímsey just to say they have stepped across the imaginary line. With a tiny population of approximately 100 inhabitants, it's a fantastic place for Zodiac cruising, kayaking, and photographing seabirds such as guillemots, gulls and puffins. Leaving Grímsey to return closer to the mainland, we spend time scanning the waters of Skjálfandi Bay around Húsavík, a town known as the Iceland's 'whale watching capital', home to up to 24 different whale species, as well as dolphins and 30 variety of birds. The largest animal on earth, the blue whale, has also been spotted in Skjálfandi Bay, and if you are lucky, you might catch a glimpse of this magnificent creature as well as others, such as orcas, fin whales and pilot whales.

Day 8 Skálanes Research Centre &

Seyðisfjörður

Established in 2005, Skálanes is an independent nature reserve near Seyðisfjörður, that boasts beautiful bird colonies, abundant plant life, and fascinating archaeology. The stunning cliffs that reach to 640 metres are home to thousands of seabirds including nesting eiders and Arctic terns and a gradually evolving ecosystem of flora and fauna. Seals, whales and reindeers are a common sight. The landscape hosts remains of farms and turf structures which gives a context to the interaction of humans and nature since the settlement of Iceland. You may have the option to do a Zodiac cruise around the cliffs to see the bird colonies of kittiwakes, fulmars, and guillemots, or enjoy a walk ashore. In the afternoon, we spend some time exploring Seyðisfjörður, a picturesque fishing village that is renowned for its charming collection of colourful wooden buildings located around the lagoon. Take a stroll around town and discover the timber houses that are remnants from when the Norwegians settled here and established the herring fishing facilities from 1870-1900. From the valley above the town, the river Fjardara tumbles down in beautiful cascades to the lagoon. There are a number of delightful hiking trails to explore, or alternatively, you can discover a flourishing cultural scene with an arts centre, the famous blue church that stages music concerts and the only two cinemas in the east of Iceland. Back in town, browse the stores where you will discover handicrafts by local artists and artisans – perfect as a souvenir or gift.

Day 9 Djupivogur

In Iceland's east, we disembark in Djupivogur, our gateway to Vatnajökull National Park, home to Europe's largest glacier. You can choose one of three shore excursion options that best suits your interests and level of fitness: Option 1 - Waterfalls, Glacial Lagoons & Hot Tubs (Duration: 10 hours including driving to/from Djupivogur / Level of difficulty: Easy / Maximum numbers: 60) Your first stop is at Fossárfoss, a waterfall surrounded by majestic mountains with spectacular views. The layered basalt flow formations that surround the area offer a striking contrasting vista making this a favourite location among photographers. From here we depart for Vatnajökull National Park, one of the most famous natural attractions in the world. Explore the astonishing and exotic natural beauty of Jökulsárlón Glacier Lagoon by four-wheeled Amphibian boat. Here we observe giant icebergs float slowly towards the ocean from the glacier. Following lunch, re-join the coach and head for Diamond beach, a black sand beach where the icebergs are washed ashore, and Fjallsárlón

lagoon, renowned for the shimmering icebergs that float in its waters. Concluding our day, we continue to the geothermal hot tubs in Hoffell, perfect for a nice, relaxing soak with an otherworldly view. Option 2 - Wonders of Vatnajökull National Park & Canyon Hike (Duration: 9 hours including driving to/from Djúpivogur / Level of difficulty: Moderate / Maximum numbers: 40) Your first stop is at Fossárfoss, a waterfall surrounded by majestic mountains with spectacular views. The layered basalt flow formations that surround the area offer a striking contrasting vista making this a favourite location among photographers. From here we depart for the dramatic Múlagljúfur Canyon, a true hidden gem ideal for hiking. Here we navigate through overgrown bushes, small river streams, and different trails along the rim of the canyon. Find yourself marvelling at the panoramic views of Fjallsárlón glacier lagoon, picturesque mountains, vibrant textures, and intriguing rock formations. Following lunch, re-join the coach and head for Vatnajökull National Park, one of the most famous natural attractions in the world. Explore the astonishing and exotic natural beauty of Jökulsárlón Glacier Lagoon by foot. Here we observe giant icebergs float slowly towards the ocean from the glacier. Re-join the coach for Diamond beach, a black sand beach where the icebergs are washed ashore. Note: Múlagljúfur Canyon Hike is 3.8km (2.35 miles) one way and approximately 3 hours duration. Terrain – 315 metre elevation with a narrow unpaved trail with two small river crossings, very easy to cross. Option 3 - Falljökull Glacier Hike (Duration: 9 hours (4 hours on the glacier) / Level of difficulty: Moderate-Difficult / Maximum numbers: 45) Your first and only stop today is at Falljökull, one of the most impressive outlet glaciers of the Vatnajökull ice cap and a once in a lifetime experience. We will take an inspiring walk along a winding path through the glacier's dramatically changing landscape. Arriving at the tongue of the glacier, we will have your crampons ready and waiting for you. With your knowledgeable guide leading the way, you will soon be exploring impressive terrain, walking through a wonderland of ice formations and brilliant blue colours. Following a hard-earned late lunch, re-join the coach and depart for the ship in Djúpivogur. Note: Falljökull Glacier Hike equipment provided - ice axe, crampons, harness and helmet. The minimum shoe size to attach crampons is EU 35 (boots can be hired at additional cost if necessary). Requires a higher level of fitness and agility as you will be on your feet for a long period of time (4 hours) and the terrain is challenging. Please note the transfer to and from the ship and Falljökull Glacier is 3 hours each way, so come prepared with a book or enjoy the magnificent scenery and a nice nap enroute.

Day 10 At sea

As we sail along the south coast, enjoy a sea day to catch up on editing your photos and enjoy an informative lecture from our knowledgeable expedition team.

Day 11 Westman Islands

Located off Iceland's south coast, the Westman Islands were formed by volcanic eruptions around 10,000 years ago. Westman Islands are surrounded by 15 other uninhabited islands and around 30 rocks and skerries offering refuge for rich array of seabirds. Westman Islands are considered to have the largest Atlantic puffin colony in the world, and when sailing around the islands it is not uncommon to see puffins but also whales and seals. You can choose from two shore excursion options that best suits your interests and level of fitness: Option 1 - Eldheimar Volcano Museum & Puffin Viewing (Duration: 3 hours / Level of difficulty:

Easy) Located off Iceland's south coast, the Westman Islands were formed by volcanic eruptions around 10,000 years ago. Heimaey is the main island in the archipelago, with a population of around 4,200. Various catastrophes have befallen the island of Heimaey and its inhabitants throughout history. Probably the most tragic incident was the volcanic eruption in 1973. Visit a unique volcano museum that tells the story of the Heimaey volcanic eruption, the emergence of Surtsey Island in 1963, and the geology of the Westman Islands. We'll continue our drive to Stórhöfði cape for some puffin watching, offering ample photo opportunities to capture shots of the charming little birds. Afterwards, enjoy some free time to explore the island if time permits. Option 2 - Eldheimar Volcano Climb & Museum (Duration: 3 hours / Level of difficulty: Difficult) Learn more about the geology and volcanology of Iceland during a two-hour hike up a volcano. Reaching the summit, you can still feel the warmth emanating from its subterranean activity. At the end of the hike, you visit a unique volcano museum that tells the story of the Heimaey volcanic eruption, the emergence of Surtsey Island in 1963, and the geology of the Westman Islands. Afterwards, enjoy some free time to explore the island if time permits. Sail past Surtsey Island, a UNESCO World Heritage site that emerged from the sea in 1963 and is one the youngest land masses on earth.

Day 12 Disembark in Reykjavik

During the early morning, we cruise into Reykjavik and disembark at

approximately 8.00 am. Farewell your Expedition Team and fellow passengers as we all continue our onward journeys. Transfer options are as follows: 1. Direct to Keflavik Airport. 2. Direct to The Grand Reykjavik (this option is only available if your hotel was booked by Aurora Expeditions). 3. Bus Stop #12 Höfðatorg (outside the Fosshotel Reykjavik) where you can make your own way to city hotels. 4. For late afternoon and evening airport departures, Bus Stop #12 Höfðatorg (outside the Fosshotel Reykjavik) where we will hold your luggage on the coach until your departure to the airport at 1pm. Note: At the conclusion of the voyage, we recommend booking flights departing after 12.00 pm on the day of disembarkation in case there are delays.