

OCTOBER 23-31,
2003

Iceland:



FIRE, ICE, AND THE
AURORA

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Until recently, the wonders of Iceland went largely unnoticed. For many years, flights between the U.S. and Europe stopped only briefly for fuel in the capital city of Reykjavik (RAY-kyuh-vik). Today, this small North Atlantic island is blossoming into a destination noted for its wealth of natural wonders — explosive geysers, gurgling mud pools, snakelike lava flows, majestic waterfalls, towering glaciers, and steaming thermal baths. TravelQuest International and Sky & Telescope invite you to join a very special exploration of this exotic land of the Vikings, October 23-31, 2003, as we discover nature's magnificence by day and marvel at the elusive aurora borealis, or northern lights, by night.

Of the many wonders this trip offers, the two highlights are viewing and photographing the aurora without the interference from moonlight (weather permitting) and experiencing the haunting beauty of Iceland. With this in mind, most days of the tour will begin no earlier than 10:30 a.m., giving travelers who stay up late watching the aurora a chance to sleep in each morning. Since we'll be exploring Reykjavik and the southern region of this island nation, each day's activities will cover relatively small areas. This means that even though we'll see a lot of breathtaking geologic scenery, our longest day of sightseeing will be no more than eight hours.

Each clear night in the countryside, we'll stand watch for the northern lights — eerie, ever-changing glows in the sky caused when energetic particles from the Sun slam into Earth's upper atmosphere, literally electrifying it. Because these particles are channeled by our planet's magnetic field, they work their magic where the field is strongest, near the magnetic poles. Iceland, close to the north magnetic pole, is blessed with frequent and spectacular auroral displays. They take on many forms: undulating curtains, pulsing rays, and dramatic overhead coronas, or crowns. Their colors — green with red, purple, or blue — range from subtle to vibrant.

Iceland lies alongside an area of one of the most active weather patterns in the Northern Hemisphere. The Icelandic low, about 600 miles (1,000 kilometers) to the southwest, is the source of a frequent and endless supply of weather systems that move past the island, each one bringing its own retinue of clouds and precipitation. The Gulf Stream waters that bathe Iceland also warm the air and fill it with moisture. As this warm, humid air encounters the colder water from the Arctic basin west and north of the island, fog and low clouds form and produce gray weather (and nearly constant wind) even when an active low is not present. Many locales claim that if you don't like the weather, wait five minutes — but this is especially true in Iceland!

ITINERARY

DAY 1 Thursday, October 23, 2003

Fly to Iceland

Leave your home city for your journey to Iceland. Flights from the U.S. will travel nonstop from Boston or Minneapolis/St. Paul on an overnight flight to Reykjavik. Travelers may wish to arrive in Reykjavik a day or two early to recover from the long flights and take in the sights and sounds of this cosmopolitan city. Contact TravelQuest for flight details, call 800-830-1998.



DAY 2 Friday, Oct. 24*Arrive Reykjavík & Blue Lagoon*

It's an early-morning arrival at Keflavík Airport. We'll clear customs and travel by private motor coach to the famous Blue Lagoon, where we'll enjoy a welcome breakfast and swim in the warm aqua-tinted, mineral-rich water known for its curative powers. From the Blue Lagoon, we'll travel through amazing lava fields to the capital city of Reykjavík. A short rest will be followed by a guided tour of the town. Weaving our way through narrow alleys framed with old timber houses, we'll learn about the city's history, from its very beginning in A.D. 874. We'll visit the harbor and Hallgrímskirkja, whose church tower offers a panoramic view of Reykjavík, the fjord, and mountains. Later today, join us for a discussion on the aurora and photographic techniques. The evening is yours to enjoy on your own.

Overnight: Hotel Loftleidir (2 nights)

B

DAY 3 Saturday, Oct. 25*Free day in Reykjavík*

Today is free to explore Reykjavík on your own or take a sightseeing excursion. Travelers will receive a "menu" of optional excursions to choose from, including a 4x4 Jeep trip to the ancient volcanic area of Landmannalaugar, and a horseback-riding adventure with Icelandic horses.

B

DAY 4 Sunday, Oct. 26*Thingvellir ancient Viking parliament*

After a morning at leisure, we'll have lunch together before leaving the city and heading to Thingvellir National Park to stroll around Althingi, Iceland's most sacred site and the home of the old Viking parliament. Thingvellir (located near Iceland's largest lake, Thingvallavatn) is known for its fascinating natural beauty and, set on a vast plain flanked by large fissures, is geologically spectacular. In the late afternoon we'll arrive at Efri Bru (population 50) and stay at a charming farmhouse that has recently added comfortable accommodations for travelers to this beautiful area. After dinner, join us outside the hotel for our first night of aurora viewing.

Overnight: Efri Bru Country Hotel (2 nights)

B, L, D

DAY 5 Monday, Oct. 27*Gullfoss Waterfall & Geysir Hot Spring area*

Today's excursion includes many of the scenic wonders for which Iceland is justly renowned. We'll begin our day exploring the otherworldly hot spring area of Geysir, to see multicolored pools of water and mud. Here the geyser Strokkur erupts to a height of about 80 feet (25 meters) every 5 to 7 minutes. After lunch, we will drive to the mighty Gullfoss (Golden Waterfall), perhaps the most beautiful waterfall in the country. We'll walk to the edge of Gullfoss, where the Hvítá River tumbles 100 feet (32 meters) in a double cascade. When the Sun is shining, we may see a rainbow through the massive spray from the falls. On our way back to Efri Bru we'll stop at Skálholt, the site of an ancient diocese that was Iceland's main cultural center for many centuries, and picturesque Kerid, a water-filled, extinct volcanic crater. Join us this evening for our second night of aurora viewing.

B, L, D

DAY 6 Tuesday, Oct. 28*Thjórsádalur Valley & the Highlands*

After checkout this morning, we'll travel inland through the Thjórsádalur valley, where we'll get a better idea of the rugged volcanic landscape that comprises more than half of Iceland. We'll stop at Hjalparfoss, a waterfall framed by twisted basalt columns, and at a reconstruction of a 12th-century Viking farmhouse. En route to our lunch in the Highlands Center of Hrauneyjar, we'll see Mount Hekla, a volcano that last erupted in February 2000. Later this afternoon we'll arrive at Hotel Rangá, our home base for the next three nights. After dinner, join us for a talk on volcanic Iceland and volcanoes in the solar system, followed by a third night of aurora viewing and stargazing near our hotel.

Overnight: Hotel Rangá (3 nights)

B, L, D

DAY 7 Wednesday, Oct. 29*Sagas: Iceland's rich history*

This morning we'll travel a short distance to Seljalandsfoss, a graceful, ribbonlike waterfall that drops 200 feet (65 meters) from an overhanging lava cliff. If you step carefully you can walk behind the falls, but be prepared to get wet! We'll then head to the Saga Museum at Hvolsvöllur for a fascinating look at Iceland's best-loved national epic — Njal's Saga. With a local guide we will tour the museum, enjoy a traditional lunch, and then travel to the local sites made famous by Iceland's longest and most beloved chronicle. Tonight, view the northern lights from one of our hotel's outdoor hot tubs!

B, L, D

DAY 8 Thursday, Oct. 30*Iceland's South Shore*

Our morning will begin with a visit to the thundering 180-foot (55-meter) Skógafoss waterfall and the village of Skógar, a living folk museum where old homes are preserved in their original state and a modern building is filled with a vast collection of household items depicting Iceland's past. Continuing farther east, we'll see the Mýrdalsjökull glacier, and if conditions permit we'll stop at the glacial tongue of Solheimajökull. After lunch in the beautiful village of Vík, we'll journey to the volcanic, black-lava sand beach of Reynisfjara, with its massive basalt columns and rock formations. Join us this evening for a special farewell dinner and our last chance for aurora viewing.

B, L, D

DAY 9 Friday, Oct. 31*Hveragerdi – Reykjanes Peninsula – Home*

After checkout this morning, we'll travel west to the geothermal town of Hveragerdi, over the highland plateau of Hellisheidi, and on to Reykjanes Peninsula with its ancient lava flows, rugged shoreline, hot springs, and small fishing villages. Here the landscape steams with volcanic features: hot springs, sulfuric vents, mud pools, small shield volcanoes, and fissures. We'll reach Keflavík Airport in time for our evening flight home.

B, L

Trip Cost:

\$2,770 per person, double occupancy. Add \$275 for single occupancy (very limited). Price, schedule, and activities are subject to change.

Trip Includes:

- Round-trip air from Boston or Minneapolis
- 7 nights lodging in 4-star, or best available, accommodations
- Ground transportation in Iceland
- Meals as noted in itinerary
- Sightseeing admissions as noted in itinerary
- *Sky & Telescope* study leader who will lead stargazing and aurora viewing sessions
- A complimentary copy of *SkyWatch* magazine (published by *Sky & Telescope*)
- English-speaking local guide

Not Included:

Air transportation to/from your home city and Boston or Minneapolis airports, baggage handling, gratuities to driver and local guide, and personal expenses. Contact TravelQuest for flight details.

Deposits & Terms:

A \$400 per person advance payment, along with a completed reservation form, confirms your space. Balance is due September 2, 2003. All advance payments, less a \$150 per person cancellation fee, are refundable until August 2, 2003. For cancellations made between August 3 and September 2, 2003, there is a \$400 per person cancellation fee. There are no refunds after September 2, 2003.

Optional trip cancellation/medical insurance is highly recommended. Applications will be provided with initial invoice.



SkyandTelescope.com



www.tq-international.com
Photos courtesy of Paul Deans, Sky & Telescope

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928.445.7754
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Reservation Form for Iceland: Fire, Ice, and the Aurora / October 23-31, 2003

Traveler 1 legal name _____

Preferred name _____

Traveler 2 legal name _____

Preferred name _____

Address _____

Day phone _____ Evening phone _____

Fax _____ E-mail _____

Enclosed is an advance payment of \$ _____ (\$400 per person)

___ Check payable to TravelQuest International

___ (Circle one): MasterCard VISA Discover

Card # _____ Expires _____

Authorized signature _____

Where available, I/we prefer: ___ One bed ___ Two beds

___ I am traveling alone and would like to share a double room (not guaranteed).

___ I am interested in spending extra nights in Reykjavik – \$140 per room double occ. or \$117 for single occ.

Do you subscribe to *Sky & Telescope* magazine? Yes No

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