

# Icelandic Expedition

## 8 Days | Reykjavik to Reykjavik



Complete a full-circle cruise of Iceland, taking in world-beating scenery and rich wildlife on this 8-day tour which starts and ends in Reykjavik. Explore sparsely inhabited islands up the east coast, enter the Arctic Circle at Grimsey and discover Iceland's second city of Akureyri. Marvel at the conical volcano of Snæfellsjökull, visit the traditional port of Djupivogur and spot whales in the bay of Husavik.

### HIGHLIGHTS AND INCLUSIONS

#### Trip Highlights

- Westman Islands - cruise past the green cluster of islands and land at Heimaey, where a volcanic eruption took place in 1973
- Husavik - gaze out over the shimmering waters of the bay in search of Humpback whales, Blue whales and Minke whales
- Grimsey - enter the Arctic Circle on this rocky island north of the Icelandic mainland, which is home to 36 different bird species
- Akureyri - wander around Iceland's cultural second city and opt for an excursion to the cascading Godafoss waterfall and Lake Myvatn

- Snæfellsnes - marvel at the lava cliffs of this striking peninsula and see the impressive conical volcano of Snæfellsjökull
- Djupivogur - visit this traditional Icelandic town to see red timber houses and wonderful art exhibitions at the Cultural Centre
- The West Fjords - sail down the west coast of the country to admire towering bird cliffs and visit the small mountainous island of Vigur
- Hafnarholmi - see puffins and other seabirds including eiders and kittiwakes which make this rugged island their summer nesting site

#### What's Included

- 7 breakfasts, 6 lunches and 7 dinners
- 7 nights aboard the Ocean Atlantic expedition cruise ship in a shared outside double cabin with private facilities
- Services of the ship captain and crew, expedition team and English-speaking guides at sights of interest
- All guided sightseeing and excursions as per itinerary
- Full board on the ship, afternoon snacks, free tea and coffee daily
- Taxes and tariffs

#### What's Not Included

- International flights and visas

- Tipping - an entirely personal gesture
- Any meals not onboard the ship & any drinks (excluding tea and coffee)
- Optional excursions
- Pre and post tour accommodation, plus any airport or port transfers

### DETAILED ITINERARY

#### Day 1: Welcome to Reykjavik



Arriving in the Icelandic capital of Reykjavik, make your way to the port to board the Ocean Atlantic expedition cruise ship. After boarding and a welcome drink, the Expedition Leader will inform you about the voyage, the ship's daily routines and the various security and safety procedures. Before sailing, there will be a mandatory safety drill.

The Captain takes the ship out of Reykjavik in the early evening, heading for the south coast of Iceland. **Overnight - Ocean Atlantic ship (D)**

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## Day 2 : Westman Islands, Surtsey & Heimaey



The Westman Islands were on the headlines of the world press in January 1973, when a volcano erupted on Heimaey. All 5,000 inhabitants evacuated, but most have now returned, and today the population is about 4,000. The Westman Islands are only 14 kilometers off the southwest coast of Iceland and consist of 15 small green islands and about 30 moorings.

In clear weather, you can see the steep and graceful cluster of islands rise from the waves. Looking at them, you'll understand why an Icelandic poet would compare them with the sapphires in a silver ring.

The birdlife on these islands is unique and you may be able to spot, among other species, puffins and gannets.

We start the day by passing close to one of the world's newest islands, Surtsey. The island rose from the sea in 1963 and was given UNESCO protection in 2008. The island is closed to the public and only researchers are allowed.

Later, we head to Heimaey, the only inhabited island in the archipelago, where we can see the recently excavated houses from the eruption of 1973.

After an exciting day at Heimaey, we set the course to the southeastern corner of Iceland on the edge of Vatnajökull National Park.

**Overnight - Ocean Atlantic ship** (B, L, D)

## Day 3 : Djupivogur town & Puffins



During the night, we sail along the southern coast of Iceland, dominated by Vatnajökull, Iceland's largest glacier. In the morning we stop at the cosy port town of Djúpvogur.

Sheltered, but still very accessible from the ocean, the port is actually one of the oldest in Iceland, and the people from Djúpvogur take great pride in preserving some of the old houses. The town attracts creative folks and the art exhibitions are worth a visit, not least the permanent Eggin í Gleðivík, 34 oversized bird eggs, carved out of granite.

The Cultural Centre is located in the beautiful red timber house, Langabúð, and opposite this on the other side of the small harbour is the old Hotel Framtíð.

In the afternoon, we re-embark Ocean Atlantic and continue north along the dramatic coastline of the east fjords. The area has the lowest population in Iceland, and fishing is the big business. One of the fjords we'll pass is Mjóifjörður, which means the narrow fjord, flanked by high mountains with steep cliff sides and numerous waterfalls.

By mid-evening we reach the fjord Borgarfjörður Eystri. Our destination is the small island of Hafnarhólmi, now connected to the mainland by a narrow pier. This little hilltop might well be the best place to observe the fascinating puffins. The birds arrive to Hafnarhólmi from their winter stay in mid-April, and nest on rock shelves or in the tufty grass slopes of the island. As well as the puffins, eiders, fulmars and kittiwakes breed here.

**Overnight - Ocean Atlantic ship** (B, L, D)

## Day 4 : Whale spotting and the Arctic



We have seen the northeastern corner of Iceland and today we sail into the bay of Húsavík, one of the best places to observe whales in the country. Many whale species have been observed in these waters, and the most likely to be seen are the acrobatic Humpbacks, the small and agile Minke, and occasionally the gigantic Blue Whale and Sperm Whale. We sail slowly around the bay with everyone's eyes searching for these fascinating creatures. Please note that whale sightings cannot be guaranteed as these are wild creatures with the open seas as their home.

We sail further north to the island of Grimsey, and reach the northernmost point of our journey. Grímsey is located about 40 kilometers from the mainland and is the only part of Iceland with an Arctic designation. The Polar circle crosses the island at 66 ° 33 'N, and gives the island one full day of 24-hour sunlight – on June 21st!

Over 100 inhabitants reside in the little rocky island, all living close to the harbour. The fishing banks in the surrounding seas make the economy flourish, the port is expanded, and there is a small airport with daily flights to the mainland and the school for the children.

The seabirds far exceed the number of inhabitants on Grímsey, and bird cries can be heard 24 hours a day over the bright Arctic summer. Up to 36 different species breed on the island and have their nests on the rocks. One of Iceland's largest tern colonies is here, and it is said that the runway must be cleared of terns before aircraft can land.

We'll make landing by Zodiacs during the afternoon to experience the local life and

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explore the island's bird life. **Overnight - Ocean Atlantic ship** (B, L, D)

## Day 5 : Hrisey island & Akureyri

This morning we cruise through one of Iceland's longest fjords, Eyjafjörður. Sitting astride in the middle of the fjord, Hrisey is home to 200 islanders, and after Heimaey, is the second largest island off the coast of Iceland. We'll make a morning call by our Zodiacs into the small town on the south point of the island, and enjoy an easy stroll through the settlement and into the outlying grass plains. As hunting has been prohibited for many years, birdlife is unusually rich.

We continue the voyage a few miles further south to reach the beautiful city of Akureyri, where we disembark just after lunch. The climate of Akureyri is unique in these latitudes, with many more hours of sunshine and higher temperatures than the rest of Iceland.

Akureyri is a center of trade and culture and is Iceland's second largest city. With the emerging educational environment, the many cultural events and the big fishing industry, Akureyri grows steadily, with more Icelanders – and tourists – heading to the north coast's sunshine city.

Stroll around town and enjoy the lively atmosphere, with cosy cafés and great restaurants, as well as lush gardens and the splendid view from the city church, Akureyrarkirkja. You may opt for a five-hour excursion to fabulous Goðafoss waterfall & Lake Mývatn. **Overnight - Ocean Atlantic ship** (B, L, D)

## Day 6 : The West Fjords



The West Fjords offer one unforgettable experience after another. We start the

morning sailing along the coast of Hornstrandir, the northernmost part of the West Fjords. From here, it is only 300 kilometers to the eastern coast of Greenland. In 1975 the area was converted into nature reserves, and currently has some of the strictest rules to protect the peculiar and fragile nature. Along the coast, there are good opportunities to see whales and seals, and the mountainside is alive with the rich bird life. We continue into Hornvík Bay, which is considered one of the most beautiful places in Iceland, to see two of the largest bird cliffs in Europe where millions of seabirds breed.

In the afternoon, we sail further into Isafjardardjúp fjord, and take a walk on the island of Vigur to enjoy the view of the steep mountains and see the terrific acrobatics of the Arctic Terns. A local guide will take us on a walk around the island, and coffee and light refreshments will be served in the local café.

In the evening, we leave Isafjardardjúp and sail towards the southern part of the West Fjords. **Overnight - Ocean Atlantic ship** (B, L, D)

## Day 7 : Flatey island & Snaefellsjökull volcano



After breakfast we land at the island of Flatey, the only one of Breidafjörður's numerous islands which is inhabited all year round. However, most of the colorful houses are holiday homes only used in the summer months.

The island plays a rich part in the history of Iceland, and previously had great cultural significance, when in the 1100s an Augustine monastery was built at the highest point of the island. Later, the island became a focal point for trade with the northwestern part of Iceland, when the Danish king appointed Flatey as an

official trading station in 1777. Today, only two inhabited farms are left.

In the afternoon, we sail along the 100-kilometre long peninsula Snaefellsnes, with its dramatic cliff coast, hardened lava floods, sandy beaches and volcanic peaks. Enjoy the view of the snow-covered volcano, Snaefellsjökull, which was the centre of Jules Verne's novel "The Journey To The Centre Of The Earth". The volcano is almost perfectly cone shaped, and the surrounding area was designated a national park in 2001. **Overnight - Ocean Atlantic ship** (B, L, D)

## Day 8 : Reykjavik

In the morning Ocean Atlantic docks in Reykjavik. It's time to say farewell to the crew and begin the homeward journey.(B)

### HOTELS

Highlighted below are some of the hotels which we frequently use on this tour, though we reserve the right to substitute these hotels to ones of a similar standard.

**Please refer to your Tour Voucher for your confirmed arrival hotel and further arrival information.**

### Ocean Atlantic

Newly renovated in 2016, the Ocean Atlantic is the perfect vessel for exploring the Atlantic and Arctic Oceans. With an international ice class-rating of 1B, this cruise ship is one of the strongest operating in this region. At 140-metres in length, a total of 198 passengers are accommodated across multiple decks. Each cabin features an ensuite bathroom, individual temperature controls and a TV, with either portholes or windows. Indoor lounges offer large panel windows, where you can easily look out for passing whales and other sights. Passengers can enjoy shore landings, with a fleet of 20 motorized rubber 'Zodiac' boats, taking you to exciting areas that the larger vessel can't reach. Upon your return, perhaps enjoy a dip in the pool or sauna, or curl up with a book in the onboard library. There's also a spacious restaurant serving 4-star international cuisine and a bar offering an assortment of beverages.

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## KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

### Double rooms in Iceland

Please note that in Iceland double rooms are not very common - instead twin rooms are more likely. We can request double rooms if required but these are not guaranteed.

### Visas

UK, AUS, NZ, USA and CAN passport holders do not require a visa at present to enter Iceland for touristic purposes for a stay of up to 90 days.

South African passport holders can obtain a visa prior to arrival for touristic purposes, for a stay of up to 90 days. Please note that there is no Iceland Embassy in South Africa, you will need to apply at the Royal Danish Embassy in Pretoria.

A full passport with two full blank pages and at least 6 months validity beyond date of exit from Iceland upon entrance is essential. Please check your personal visa requirements with your embassy if you are from another country.

Please double-check all visa requirements with the relevant embassy at least one month before travel as the above is intended as a guide.

Please Note: Visa information is subject to change. Contact your nearest Iceland Embassy for the most up to date information. Visa procurement remains the responsibility of the passenger and not that of On The Go

### Flybus Transfer

**Applies to all tours except the Iceland Getaway tour.**

If you have the Flybus/Reykjavik Excursions airport shuttle included in your tour package then please note the transfers are on an individual basis and without a guide. The bus operates in connection with all arriving and departing flights from the Keflavik airport. So

if you are arriving late at night or your flight is delayed, don't worry, there will be a Flybus waiting for you.

Once you have cleared immigration and collected your bags please head to the exit of the airport where the bus(es) will be waiting. Please note that it may be necessary to change buses at the BSI (central bus station in Reykjavik) depending on your start hotel. The staff of the Reykjavik Excursions/Flybus are very friendly, speak great English and will help with any questions you may have.

Please note that the FLYBUS no longer stops at the Centrehotel Plaza for Land of the Northern Lights Comfort Upgrade and Northern Lights Exploration (including Small Group) but at a bus stop (number 4 Tryggvagata) a 4 minute walk from your hotel. Please see the map on the below link:

<https://www.re.is/media/map/BusStop4-Centerhotel-Plaza.jpg>

The Flybus has free Wi-Fi on board and sometimes USB charging points. It usually takes around 45 minutes to an hour from airport to hotel (and v.v.)

### Currency

The official currency in Iceland is Icelandic Krona.

Pound Sterling, US Dollars or other major currencies can be exchanged in Iceland, and you'll get a better rate of exchange if you buy and sell in destination. Just about every establishment in Iceland will accept a credit card, including taxis, gas stations, souvenir stands, and even the most remote guest house, so it is not necessary to carry large amounts of Icelandic currency. However, due to the currency's instability some credit cards are still wary of Krona transactions, so check with your bank before you go and don't rely entirely on plastic. It's advisable to request bank notes in smaller denominations, as it can sometimes be hard to get change from large notes and smaller notes are handy for smaller purchases and gratuities.

Traveller's Cheques are not recommended as they're often difficult to exchange and incur high fees.

### Time & Voltage

Iceland is on Greenwich Mean Time (GMT) and does not observe daylight saving.

The voltage here is 220 volts at 50 Hz (cycles/second) which is standard throughout most of Europe (U.K. 240 volts). "Icelandic electrical standards are European (50Hz, 220 volts) so many North American electrical devices will require converters and all will require plug adapters.

See 'Special Notes for North American Visitors' for more information.

### Health Requirements

The medical facilities in Iceland are good and available free to European Union citizens with a valid EHIC form or its replacement ID card. Infectious diseases aren't a problem in Iceland. Inoculations aren't required except if you are arriving from countries that suffer from infectious diseases like cholera.

The biggest threat to your health is likely to be accidental injury or bad weather. Always make sure you have more than adequately warm and waterproof clothing. Selection of appropriate clothing is especially important in Iceland and can even be a matter of life and death. Exercise extra caution in geothermal areas: What may appear to be solid ground can sometimes not be so solid, breaking from underneath your feet with you falling into potentially deadly boiling water.

The water quality in Iceland is excellent and tap water is always drinkable.

### Food & Drink

Icelandic food is mainly made up of lamb or fish in some form or another. A vegetarian diet isn't as common and as a result not as easy to find in the more remote parts of the country. However that said, Reykjavik is fast becoming a culinary capital with lots of different types of restaurant including European, Asian, Argentinian and lots more. There are number of distinctively Icelandic foods including

- Fish

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- Hardfiskur, dried fish pieces eaten as a snack with butter
- Skyr, a yoghurt-like dairy product available in flavoured and unflavoured varieties all over the country. Low in fat and high in protein.
- Hangikjöt, smoked lamb

## The Northern Lights

The Northern Lights are in the northern sky from September through April but are only visible when the sky is clear and free of clouds. Like many of nature's wonders, it's ephemeral – they may be visible, they may appear for a bit and then be gone (it is not a TV show that you can just turn on and off). But it's worth the patience required. Because they're a winter event, you need to be prepared to wait outside, while looking for them. It's best to dress very warmly, in layers, with good footwear, gloves, hats and whatever else will make you comfortable while you await this truly amazing event. The Northern Lights can be pretty spectacular, and for the best photos we recommend using a tripod. Much of Iceland offers a very good chance to see the Northern Lights when conditions are right, and you're in the right place.

Remember – the Northern Lights are natural phenomena, not guaranteed, but appreciated all the more for their elusive qualities. Please dress very warmly to enjoy Iceland's long winter nights, and perhaps be rewarded with a light show unlike anything you've ever seen!

For Northern Lights forecast and further information visit: <http://www.gi.alaska.edu/AuroraForecast/>

PLEASE NOTE: Our Iceland Circle tour is not a Northern Lights tour. Most hotels used on this tour are located in towns and villages and therefore not ideal for Northern Lights viewing due to light pollution. From some of the hotels it might be easy to walk just a short distance to get to a darker location nearby when searching for the Northern Lights. Please ask the front desk of the hotel and your tour guide for suggestions.

## Icelandic Weather

Iceland isn't as cold as its name implies but it's not exactly a tropical paradise, either. Iceland's weather can fluctuate wildly and a

warm sunny day can quickly become chilly and wet. You'll need sturdy gear for outdoor activities, and yet, Reykjavik is known for its forward-thinking fashionistas, so packing for a trip to Iceland can be quite daunting. The following pages give you a bit of advice.

It doesn't snow as much in Iceland as you may think, especially in Reykjavik where there is hardly any snow, even in winter. In some parts of Iceland – the north, east, and Westfjords, there is some snow and nice skiing areas where you can take advantage of it.

Thanks to the Gulf Stream, Iceland enjoys a moderate maritime climate: cool in summer and fairly mild in winter. It is an island in the North Atlantic, nestled against the Arctic Circle, so the weather is very changeable and visitors should be prepared for the unexpected. Normal summer day temperatures range between 5-8 °C (41 – 47 F) for lows and 12 -18 °C (54 – 64 °F). The interior highlands are often colder than that – close to 0°C (32°F) even in summer. Normal winter temperatures range between 0-5 °C (32 – 41 °F). When it comes to Iceland's weather – the one thing you can count on is unpredictability. You never know what is going to happen next! A beautiful sunny day can suddenly turn windy and rainy – then it can all change again in a moment. You may experience every weather imaginable over the course of a few days, especially in late autumn and early spring. Important to remember when packing: Iceland is a very windy place! The best plan is to be prepared for anything and everything AND always dress in layers. The Icelanders have a saying: "there's no such thing as bad weather, just bad clothing."

## Daylight in Iceland

Iceland enjoys/suffers long daylight hours in summer and long darkness hours in winter.

In the height of summer (July) the city of Reykjavik can be awash with daylight for as much as 21 hours a day whereas come January it can be as little just 4 hours of daylight. In the north of the country this can increase to 22 1/2 hours a day in July with sunset being midnight and sunrise 1:20am

and come January sunrise is at 11:30am and sunset at 3pm.

## Preparing to pack

Pack for activities first:

Start by studying your itinerary to see what you'll be doing on your trip to Iceland. Most outdoor activities (horseback riding, caving, hiking, glacier walking, etc.) will require basically the same gear (with the outfitter providing any specialized gear that's required – helmets, crampons, etc). You'll need to wear heeled boots, such as hiking boots, moisture-wicking socks, long pants, and long sleeve shirts. You'll also want a lightweight, waterproof but breathable shell for rainy or misty days, and a few wool (not cotton) or fleece sweaters for cooler days and evenings. You should consider bringing a hat, scarf and gloves all year round. There are also many opportunities to purchase Icelandic woollen goods!

Add in some "city clothes":

In Reykjavik and Akureyri, the only unified theme in fashion is "unique." It's all about personal style, from the frilly dresses and stiletto heels you'd expect to find in New York and London to the hippe-chic styles you might imagine as the norm in any modern city. What you won't find is anything boring and basic – no plain jeans, white t-shirts and sneakers here. Dressing for Reykjavik isn't about changing your personal style, but it is about taking it to the next level. Though, if you plan on going on the weekend Runtur (pub crawl), you'll want to add a few dressier items to your wardrobe. Women generally "dress" in a skirt or dress, or jeans with trendy tops. Men wear tailored dark jeans and button-up shirts, or dark pants and sportcoats. For footwear, men usually wear sport loafers or Converse, while women wear anything from high-heeled boots to open-toed stilettos to fashionable flats.

Be prepared for anything:

A day that starts out rainy and cold can become warm and sunny by mid-afternoon (or vice versa) and when it's pleasant in the city it may be frigid twenty minutes away, so always plan on wearing layers and being ready for a range of conditions. A light,

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breathable, waterproof shell jacket that can be layered with a wool sweater or cardigan, and a scarf and hat will prove invaluable. And don't forget the bathing suit. Icelanders love swimming and there is a municipal pool in nearly every town. Admission prices are generally just a few bucks, with towels and bathing suits available for rent. Visiting one of these hot spring pools is one of the best ways to experience Icelandic culture, so be sure to come prepared for a soak.

## What to pack

- Clothes for cold/cooler outdoor weather: warm trousers, a woolen pullover or fleece sweater, a warm wind and water proof jacket and rain pants, woolen socks and an insulated bottom layer, like thermal underwear. Remember, it is a winter trip and it is ICELAND, known for unpredictable weather.
- A hat, scarf and gloves that are made from material that will dry overnight are great protection in Iceland's winter weather and strong winds.
- Sturdy comfortable (hiking) boots are necessary for walking and when there is snow and icy terrain. Make sure your feet will be warm and dry – otherwise it is not fun. All sightseeing tours in the countryside involve some short walks here and there. In order to maximize your experience to explore these many nature sites good walking boots or shoes that may get dirty and wet are important.
- Buildings are often very warm, so bring light indoor clothes – t-shirts, lighter shirts and blouses.
- Bathing suits are essential, as a lot of the natural hot water is used to fill swimming pools, which are all over the country. Towels can be rented at most swimming pools.
- Binoculars, especially if you're a bird watcher!
- Sunglasses and a bit of sunscreen are helpful - the air is very clear in Iceland so when the sun shines, it is very bright.
- A camera with lots of film or memory cards. Many travellers say that they shoot twice as many pictures in Iceland than in other destinations. For Northern Lights photography we recommend bringing a

second battery for your camera and also a tripod.

- A small alarm clock or cell phone with an alarm clock feature, since not all hotels offer wake-up calls.
- A torch for evening walks and Northern Lights photography in order to operate your photo camera in the dark.
- If you like a drink every now and then, consider stopping at the duty-free store on arrival at Keflavik Airport because alcoholic beverages are very expensive in Iceland. The same applies to tobacco. Travellers are allowed to bring 1 litre of strong liquor as well as 1 litre of wine or similar drinks into the country, and 1 carton of cigarettes. For more details see <http://iceland.visahq.com/customs/>

## Special Notes for North American Visitors

Electricity in Iceland is 220 volts (as opposed to 110 volts in North America) most modern appliances – computers, cameras, hairdryers - will adapt to either voltage - check the power unit, which should indicate 110- 220 volts. If not, you'll need to bring a transformer. In most cases you'll just need to get an adapter to allow you to plug into Iceland's power outlets. You'll need a two pin adaptor, typically labelled as "northern European". They are available in many electronic stores, or if you forget to bring them, you can often buy them at the international airports before you go.

Cell phones are ubiquitous in Iceland, but they work on a GSM system, which often doesn't work with North American cell phone systems. You should check with your service provider before you travel to see if they have an international cell phone service upgrade available. If not, it's possible to rent a phone from your airline or from an international cell phone rental company before you leave. Once in Iceland sometimes it's possible to rent phones from a telephone company, but that may require a visit to their office during business hours. Because there are so many cell phones, public pay phones are hard to come by. Most hotels have phones that you can use for long distance calls with a credit card for payment.

## Nature Fees

Since the beginning of 2014 it has become apparent that landowners of several scenic tourist sites in Iceland intend to start charging fees for visits in the future. The ownership of these sites is not clear. The Icelandic state partly owns these sites and questions the legitimacy of this action by some of the landowners. The Icelandic state has requested landowners not to implement a fee collection but rather to wait for the proposals of the government in regards to the implementation of a "nature pass". The "nature pass" is meant to finance the structure and maintenance of most tourist sites in Iceland. Therefore it is possible that some of the nature attractions around Iceland might charge an entrance fee during your trip. These entrance fees are not included in the tour price and need to be paid by all tour members additionally on spot, if you wish to enter any of these nature sites. Locations, amount of entrance fee, form of payment and other details are not known at the moment and are subject to change.

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