

# GÓÐA FERÐ

Travel  
Issue

## Seeing the other side of Iceland



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**T**rips to Iceland can be very exciting — and I feel people should see and explore some of the “out of the way” places to really experience the country.

### Part One: Must-see

**Hofsós and Hólar, Skagafjörður** in the north of Iceland. Hofsós is a quaint little village. It is easy to get around and the people are very friendly. The Emigration Center ([www.hofsos.is](http://www.hofsos.is)) is an exceptional facility, especially for North Americans of Icelandic decent. Nearby Hólar is a historic site ([www.holar.is](http://www.holar.is)). It was established as a bishopric over 900 years ago and served the north of Iceland.

**Pingvellir**, the Parliament Plains, Iceland's only UNESCO

World heritage site. It is not only a historic place, but also very beautiful, especially in the fall.

**Jökulsárlón**, the glacial lagoon in the southeast. A unique and exciting spot, where you take a boat ride and sail among small icebergs. Keep an eye out for seals. The ice flows with the wind and the tide so you never know what to expect.

**Stykkishólmur**, a beautiful fishing village on the north of the Snæfellsnes peninsula. I highly recommend taking a sightseeing cruise of the bay. You will see some very unique sights; the tour ends with some shell fishing and everyone enjoys the bounty of the sea.

**Hvalfjörður**, the whale fjord. A remarkable drive, I always avoid the tunnel if possible. Try to spot where the British and American navies used to be based during the Second World War. The whaling station is along the way — but we will not touch that political hot potato.

**Kaldidal**, a rough ride not recommended for regular vehicles. It is not very scenic unless the weather cooperates. Your journey between numerous glaciers and along this trail you will have to hunt for some of the historic sites. Stop often and look around, do not rush the trip.

**Þórsmörk**, another favour-

ite of mine. A green and lush valley situated between mountains and glaciers. Spend some time here to hike and explore without hurrying.

**Gullfoss** (The Golden Waterfall). Yes, this is on the Golden Circle, which is the most well-known tour in Iceland. I still enjoy seeing it anytime, especially in winter.

**Mývatn**, Midge Lake. Don't let the name scare you. This is one of the most interesting areas in Iceland. Astronauts trained here and there have been numerous volcanic eruptions in the area. It is just an awesome place — please do not plan on spending only a couple of hours here. Take time to hike, wander and even take a dip in the Blue Lagoon of the north. Many people make the mistake of passing through, seeing only one or two of the sights.

### Part Two: Out of the way and well worth a visit

**Eldgjá and Öfærafoss**, (on Fjallabak Nyrðra, the “Behind the Mountain” trail) in the south of Iceland. A bus regularly travels this route in the summer. To travel on your own you must use a jeep and not a regular car. Öfærafoss (Impassible Waterfall) is a little hike from the road but well worth the walk. There used to be a natural bridge across the falls, but it blocked some of the view

of the waterfall so I would have to say its collapse did not make the view any less impressive.

**Vestmannaeyjar**, the Westman Islands. This group of islands to the south of Iceland was the site of a couple spectacular volcanic eruptions. The island Surtsey was formed by an undersea eruption from 1963 to 1967; and Heimaey, the largest and populated island of the group, was home to another eruption in 1973. There is still steam coming from the ground and even though the town has been rebuilt the past is not easily forgotten. A “modern Pompeii” is what one of the latest projects is called.

**Fjaðrárgljúfur**, a unique canyon that I just discovered a couple of years ago. It is just off Hwy No. 1 on the road to Laki. It is a beautiful area and well worth the stop.

**Skalafellsjökull**, the Jökullasel lodge ([www.glacierjeeps.is/joklasel.htm](http://www.glacierjeeps.is/joklasel.htm)). The road up to this site is an adventure, and not for people afraid of heights. I advise getting a ride with the super jeeps. It is a little expensive to rent a snowmobile and play follow-the-leader, but you seldom get to experience glaciers in such a way, so I say, go for it!

**Borgarfjörður Eystri**. The picturesque mountain ranges around this area are spectacular. It is quite out of the way but worth the effort. Who knows what you might see — there is an Álfaborg (Elf City) on the edge of the village.

**Skriðuklaustur**, a former monastery and home to one of Iceland's most famous writers, Gunnar Gunnarson ([www.skriduklaustur.is](http://www.skriduklaustur.is)). It is a historic site — archaeological excavations are ongoing and some very interesting artifacts are being uncovered. The main building is unique and well worth a tour. This is a great place to stop for coffee on the way to Kárahnjúkar.

**Kárahnjúkar**, the hydro-electric development area in the northeast ([www.karahnjukar.is](http://www.karahnjukar.is)). Another political hot potato, changing every day. The reservoir is being filled and will be full next summer. Because of the development this area is opening up as a place to visit. It has been mainly Icelanders visiting to catch the last glimpses of what it used to look like. Personally I think it will be a place for everyone to visit, a big lake is being formed and the roads into the area are great. You get great views of Snæfell and Herðubreið.

**Sænantasel**, a farm out in the middle of nowhere. Some

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Information on the work of the Embassy and on Iceland can be found on the Embassy's website.

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150 years ago there was farming in this area, but all the farms were abandoned long ago. This farm has been restored to show how people lived in the early 1900s. They have fantastic *lummur* (pancakes).

**Síldarminjasafn** (Herring Museum), Siglufjörður, in the north of Iceland (<http://herring.siglo.is>). Siglufjörður is another typical fishing village. It was very isolated, especially in the winter when the mountain pass was impassible. Now they have built a tunnel to the town so travel is possible year-round. They are also planning another tunnel to connect the town with Eyjafjörður and Akureyri. This will make for a nice travel option. The Herring Museum is very well done and depicts how the town boomed in the Herring Years. They have a Herring Festival and many other events throughout the year.

**Drangey**, the island that you see in Skagafjörður. There are organized tours out to the island and it is really quite something to see. The bird life is spectacular. The ascent up the cliff is not for people who

are out of shape, like myself, or afraid of heights. The trail up is a hodgepodge, ladders, ropes and stairs. I made it to the top but have never been so afraid. I will try it again — but only in better weather.

**Koluglúfur**, another fantastic gorge, some 2 km long and 25 m deep. It is just off the No. 1 Hwy between Blönduós and Hvammstangi. It is well worth the detour.

**The West Fjörds.** A number of places to visit. They should maybe be mentioned separately. **Ösvor Fishing Station**, between Ísafjörður and Bolungarvík, is a restored fishing camp and depicts fishing practices before the onset of the larger fishing vessels. **Dynjandi** is south of Ísafjörður and is a very beautiful waterfall. It is actually a group of waterfalls, eight in total. **Látrabjarg** is a 14 km long sheer cliff that reaches over 400 m above the sea. It is the most westerly point of Iceland and a haven for birds.

**Snæfellsnes** has become more popular with visitors. Stykkishólmur is the largest town on the peninsula. **Djupa-**



PHOTO: KENT LÁRUS BJÖRNSSON

See icebergs calving from the glacier, in the lagoon at Jökulsárlón — and maybe a seal, too.

**Íónsandur** is a very interesting sight. The pebble rocks on the beach are perfectly rounded. You will see remnants of a British Trawler that ran aground there as well as the lifting stones that were used to gauge how much of a fisherman you were. **Arnarstapi** is a small fishing village; take the time to walk out by the harbour and along the coast. The birdlife and

coastline are beautiful especially when it is clear and you can see the glacier, Snæfellsjökull, up above.

I hope that this has given you an insight into the country and natural wonders of Iceland.

When you are planning your trip to Iceland, I suggest seeing the parts of the country

that most visitors do not see. Come out and enjoy Iceland and its marvels, you will not regret it.

*Kent Lárus Björnsson (www.nordictrails.ca) has lived in Iceland for a total of eight years. He is a professional guide, bus driver, amateur photographer, web master and frequent contributor to L-H.*

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### LAND

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Iceland is an island of almost 40,000 square miles, equal to that of Ohio. Iceland is home to 10,000 waterfalls, 800 hot springs and 23 hours of daylight in the summer. Iceland is Canada's closest European neighbour. With a flight time from Minneapolis only a jet lag-free 5 hours, you're ready for action as soon as you arrive.



### PEOPLE

Of a population numbering 300,000, more than half lives in the Greater Reykjavik Area. The native language is Icelandic but most Icelanders speak fluent English.

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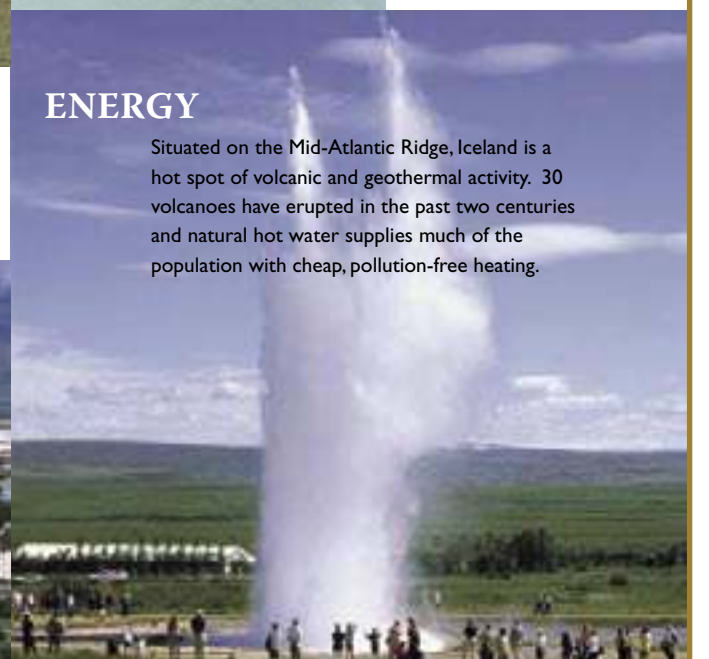
### ENERGY

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 natural hot water supplies much of the population with cheap, pollution-free heating.



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