



Iceland



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**3-4
DAYS**

Reykjavík Minibreak

If you're on a lengthy layover or enjoying a long weekend away, don't miss the chance to get out into the countryside and take in some of the natural wonders located within a stone's throw of the capital. It's simple to string together top sights, including the Golden Circle, with more off-the-beaten path diversions, and still have a bit of time left to lap up Reykjavík's unique charm.

After landing in **Keflavík International Airport** make a beeline for the **Blue Lagoon** to soak away the jet lag in surreal waters and silica mud. Wander the Reykjanes Peninsula's steaming earths near **Valahnúkur** or **Krýsuvík** before barreling down the coastal highway for fresh seafood in **Eyrarbakki** or **Stokkseyri**. Choose a base near **Hella** or **Hvolsvöllur** to get out in the open air on horseback: the lush waterfall-rimmed Fljótslíð valley is a key candidate. Or try to spot the Northern Lights (in the colder months). Active bodies will enjoy the stunning Fimmvörðuháls hike from **Skógar** up through the ridge



Great Geysir (p110), Geysir

between two brooding ice caps (and the site of the Eyjafjallajökull eruption in 2010) then down into **Pórsmörk**, a forested valley dotted with wild Arctic flowers. Or you can take a super-Jeep tour or amphibious bus to Pórsmörk, and then do day hikes around the valley. Those who are tighter on time can trek along the glacial tongue of **Sólheimajökull** instead.

On your way back west, roam the **Þjórsárdalur**, a broad volcanic river valley with a handful of disparate sights, including a Settlement Era farmstead, hidden waterfalls, and the foothills of

Hekla volcano. Or, swing up to the gushing cascades at **Gullfoss**, the spurting **Geysir** from which all others got their name, and the rift valley and ancient parliament site **Þingvellir National Park** – the classic Golden Circle route. Wrap up your mini-break with a night in **Reykjavík**. Iceland's capital bustles with an all-star assortment of trendy boutiques, interesting museums and galleries, scrumptious restaurants and lively bars, plus there's easy access to whale-watching trips from the Old Harbour.



1
WEEK

Best of the West

With one week to spend, you'll be able to roam further than the popular Golden Circle, and the busy southwest. We like heading northwest from Reykjavík to lesser-travelled West Iceland, which is chock-a-block with history and boasts landscapes ranging from lava fields to broad fjords and ice caps, while giving a greater sense of the wonderful solitude that Iceland offers.

Start in **Reykjavík**, enjoying the city's museums, cafes and bars while getting acclimatised. Then complete the day-long Golden Circle with stops at glittering **Gullfoss**, surging **Gey-sir**, and historic **Pingvellir National Park**, where you'll witness the tearing apart of the continental plates. If you're feeling adventurous, go inland and bump along the rutted **Kaldidalur Corridor** for stunning vistas through the pinnacles of several ice caps, such as Langjökull with its new ice tunnel. You'll emerge at **Upper Borgarfjörður**, where you can sleep in the quiet countryside and explore enormous lava tubes. If you're not up for the back-country aspects of the Kaldidalur Corridor, head to **Borgarnes** along the coastal route instead, and learn about the sagas at its excellent Settlement Centre.

Next up, explore the wonderful Snæfellsnes Peninsula. Start by horse riding around **Breiðavík** or creeping into the bizarre gorge, Rauðfeldsgjá. Then head west to **Arnarstapi**, where you can hike the coastal trail to **Hellnar** or pick up a Snæfellsjökull glacier tour, exploring Jules Vernes' fabled centre of the earth. The area is part of Snæfellsjökull National Park and offers a multitude of hikes taking in bird cliffs, volcanic craters, lava tubes and protected native flower terrain.

On the tip of the peninsula near **Öndverðarnes** look for pods of orca whales, or catch a whale-watching or puffin-viewing tour near **Grundarfjörður**. Then alight in charming **Stykkishólmur**, where you can take in interesting museums and sup on tasty mussels. If time permits, hop aboard the **Baldur** ferry for a day trip to quaint **Flatey** island, to really disconnect from the world before returning to the capital.



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Top: Pub scene, Reykjavík (p83)
Bottom: Harbour, Stykkishólmur (p170)

10
DAYS

Classic Ring Road

For such a wild, wonderful land, much of Iceland is surprisingly compact, and the classic Ring Road trip loops you near the most popular sights. With extra time, you can add on myriad other adventures along the way. The Ring Road works as a cycling itinerary as well (though it'll take more than 10 days!).

Start in **Reykjavík**, enjoying the lively city's creature comforts, before heading out in a clockwise fashion. Stop in **Borgarnes** for its fascinating Settlement Centre, historical sights and tasty restaurants. Then zip up to **Stykkishólmur**, an adorable village overlooking a bay studded by islets. With extra time you'd tour the Snæfellsnes Peninsula. But either way, rejoin the Ring Road, breaking free of it once more to explore the quaint townships and coastal vistas of **Tröllaskagi** before gliding through **Akureyri**, Iceland's unofficial northern capital. Head to the geological treasure chest of the **Mývatn** region next, with a stop at **Dettifoss** to experience nature's awesome power first hand. Push eastwards, detouring to **Borgarfjörður Eystri** for summer puffins galore. Take a break in **Seyðisfjörður**, then tackle the long journey through the rest of the east as the road curls along magical fjords.

Pause in **Höfn** for langoustine, then jump on a snowmobile to discover the vast ice cap at **Vatnajökull**. Don't miss the glacial lagoon at **Jökulsárlón**, or neighbouring Fjallsárlón, where giant bergs break off of glaciers and float out to sea. You can warm up your hiking legs in **Skaftafell**, then head south across mossy lava fields and enormous river deltas to **Vík** with its fantastical basalt-columned beach and puffin cliffs. Still feeling spry? Tackle the awesome trek from **Skógar** to **Pórsmörk**, a verdant interior valley. Or continue west along the Ring Road passing enormous waterfalls at **Skógafoss** and **Seljalandsfoss**, then veer away one last time to check out the Golden Circle: **Gullfoss**, **Geysir** and the yawning continental divide and ancient governmental seat at **Pingvellir National Park**. Roll back into **Reykjavík** to spend the remainder of your holiday gossiping with the locals, whether in the city's geothermal pools or during late-night pub crawls.

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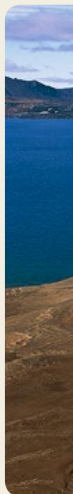
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Top: Jökulsárlón (p297)

Bottom: Puffin, Borgarfjörður Eystri (p268)





4
WEEKS

The Grand Tour

The more remote and fantastical swathes of Iceland open to you with an extended stay. In addition to seeing major sights, venture further from the Ring Road, into the gorgeous, isolated Westfjords, or four-wheel-drive the Highlands.

From **Keflavík**, rent wheels and head to the **Blue Lagoon** to unwind. Follow the coastal road to arty **Stokkseyri**, then ditch the car to hike from **Landmannalaugar** to verdant **Þórsmörk**. Next, catch the boat to **Vestmannaeyjar**, where puffins flip-flap over fresh lava. Then sojourn near **Vík**, with its black basalt beach.

At **Kirkjubæjarklaustur** venture up to **Lakagíggar** to learn about the devastating effects of Laki's eruptions. **Skaftafell** offers hiking and glacier walking. Don't miss a boat ride with icebergs at **Jökulsárlón** and a snowmobile safari on **Vatnajökull**, Europe's largest ice cap. Pause in **Höfn** for legendary langoustine, then relax in hushed **Breiðdalsvík** before negotiating hairpin fjord roads to peaceful **Eskifjörður** and inspiring **Seyðisfjörður**. Follow the rhyolite cliffs down to **Borgarfjörður Eystri** to photograph puffins, then climb through **Vopnafjörður** to the grassy plains of **Langanes**. The quiet northeastern circuit rolls through **Ásbyrgi** to charming **Húsavík**, perfect for whale watching. Scenic **Mývatn** makes a great base for exploring the pounding waterfall, **Dettifoss**, and Iceland's Highland treasures such as the mammoth caldera at **Askja** and silent ice caves at **Kverkfjöll**. Stop for a slice of civilisation in **Akureyri** before touching the Arctic Circle in **Grimsey**. Wander up through **Dalvík**, check out **Siglufjörður**, then treat yourself to a relaxing swim in **Hofsós**.

Next, head to the Westfjords to learn about ancient witchcraft in **Hólmavík**, sleep fjordside in **Djúpavík** and bathe in the **Norðurfjörður** geothermal spring. Use spunky **Ísafjörður** as a launch pad to **Hornstrandir**, Iceland's majestic hiking reserve. Enter the incredible heart of the Westfjords, to find the gushing waters of **Dynjandi**, and use **Bíldudalur** or Þingeyri as a base for exploring jaw-dropping fjords. Head down to **Patreksfjörður** for a square meal and to visit the bird cliffs at **Látrabjarg** and the mind-blowing pink-red beach at **Rauðasandur**.

Ferry over to charming **Stykkishólmur** and discover the treasures of the **Snæfellsnes Peninsula**, from golden beaches to craggy lava fields and glistening ice caps. **Borgarnes** and **Upper Borgarfjörður** blend saga sites and hidden caves. Finish the history lesson at **Þingvellir National Park**. Then end the epic journey in **Reykjavík**, the ebullient capital.



Top: Hikers, Landmannalaugar (p140)
Bottom: Óskjuvatn (p316), Askja

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OUR STORY

A beat-up old car, a few dollars in the pocket and a sense of adventure. In 1972 that's all Tony and Maureen Wheeler needed for the trip of a lifetime – across Europe and Asia overland to Australia. It took several months, and at the end – broke but inspired – they sat at their kitchen table writing and stapling together their first travel guide, *Across Asia on the Cheap*. Within a week they'd sold 1500 copies. Lonely Planet was born.

Today, Lonely Planet has offices in Franklin, London, Melbourne, Oakland, Beijing and Delhi, with more than 600 staff and writers. We share Tony's belief that 'a great guidebook should do three things: inform, educate and amuse'.

OUR WRITERS



Carolyn Bain

Coordinating Author, North Iceland, East Iceland, Southeast Iceland, The Highlands Melbourne-born Carolyn has had an ongoing love affair with the Nordic region, ignited as a teenager living in Denmark and regularly rekindled over 14 years of writing guidebooks to glorious northern destinations such as Iceland, Denmark, Sweden and Nordic-wannabe Estonia (see more at carolynbain.com.au). This is her second time working on the *Iceland* guidebook, feeding her ad-

diction to *skyr*, fjords, secret hot-pots and glacier trails, puffins, *lopapeysur* and the music of *Ásgeir*. There were some outstanding moments on this research trip – just a sample: hot-pot soaks in midnight sun, Askja on a 20-degree day (really!), a ticket to Bræðslan, and spelunking in an ice cave. Carolyn also wrote the Plan Your Trip, Understand and Survival Guide sections of this book.

Read more about Carolyn at:
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Alexis Averbeck

Itineraries, Reykjavík, Southwest Iceland & the Golden Circle, West Iceland, The Westfjords, Icelandic Culture Alexis' love of remote, icy landscapes and untouched mountain ranges started with her year spent living in Antarctica, but now it's been fully co-opted by Iceland. A self-proclaimed glacier geek, Alexis loves exploring Iceland's more remote byways: from surreal lava fields and sparkling fjords to ice-blue glacier tongues. She also thrives on Icelandic culture,

pouring over the sagas and following the super music scene. A travel writer for two decades, Alexis also covers Antarctica, France and Greece for Lonely Planet, has crossed the Pacific by sailboat and is a painter – see her work at www.alexisaverbeck.com.

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