

Welcome to Iceland

The energy is palpable on this magical island, where astonishing natural phenomena inspire the welcoming, creative locals and draw an increasing number of visitors in search of splendour.

A Symphony of Elements

An underpopulated island marooned near the top of the globe, Iceland is literally a country in the making. It's a vast volcanic laboratory where mighty forces shape the earth: geysers gush, mudpots gloop, ice-covered volcanoes rumble and glaciers grind great pathways through the mountains. Its supercharged splendour seems designed to remind visitors of their utter insignificance in the greater scheme of things. And it works a treat: some crisp clean air, an eyeful of the cinematic landscapes and everyone is transfixed.

The Power of Nature

The power of Icelandic nature turns the prosaic into the extraordinary. A dip in the pool becomes a soak in a geothermal lagoon, a casual stroll can transform into a trek across a glittering glacier, and a quiet night of camping may mean front-row seats to the aurora borealis' curtains of fire or the soft, pinkish hue of the midnight sun. Iceland has a transformative effect on people, too – its sagas turned brutes into poets; its stories of *huldufólk* (hidden people) may make believers out of sceptics. It may just have the world's highest concentration of dreamers, authors, artists and musicians, all fuelled by their surrounds.

A Personal Experience

A visit is as much about the people as it is about the landscapes. The warmth of Icelanders is disarming, as is their industriousness – they're working hard to recover from financial upheaval and to transform Iceland into a destination that, thanks to its popularity with visitors, can host triple its population each year. Pause and consider a medium-sized city in your country – then give it far-flung universities, airports and hospitals to administer, 30-odd active volcanoes to monitor and hundreds of hotels to run. How might they cope? Could they manage as well as the Icelanders – and still have time left over to create spine-tingling music and natty knitwear?

Nordic Nirvana

Don't for a moment think it's only about the great outdoors. The counterpoint to so much natural beauty is found in Iceland's cultural life, which celebrates a literary legacy that stretches from medieval sagas to contemporary thrillers by way of Nobel Prize winners. Live music is everywhere, as are visual art, handicrafts and locavore cuisine. The world's most northerly capital is home to the kind of egalitarianism, green thinking and effortlessly stylish locals that its Nordic brethren are famous for – all wrapped in Iceland's assured individuality.



Why I Love Iceland

By Carolyn Bain, Author

It's hard to answer this without either gushing embarrassingly or resorting to clichés. (OK, I'll admit it, Iceland makes me want to grow up to become a birdwatching vulcanologist who plays in a band.) Like everyone, on my first visit I was awestruck by the landscapes. On subsequent visits, the beauty of those same landscapes can still reduce me to tears – but the locals are what affirm my love for Iceland. Their resourcefulness, quirkiness, interconnectedness and warmth are unparalleled; on this research trip, every day presented human stories and interactions that rivalled Icelandic nature for beauty.

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