

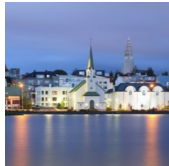
An Icelandic Odyssey: Sagas, Legends and Vikings

8 DAYS / 7 NIGHTS — GROUP TRAVEL

SUGGESTED ITINERARY — CAN BE CUSTOMIZED



This weeklong itinerary to Iceland was crafted to showcase the best of this Nordic pearl's cultural heritage. Your group will tour ancient Norse settlements, learn about Icelandic medieval Sagas, and visit amazing natural sites that have served as dazzling backdrops in many Icelandic folktales. If you are seeking a true Icelandic cultural journey; black sandy beaches, spectacular fjords, geothermal pools, rich farmlands and remote Highlands are expecting you.

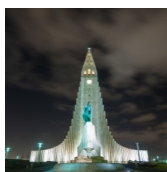


DAY 1 ~ ARRIVAL IN REYKJAVIK

Welcome to Iceland! Upon arrival to Keflavik

International Airport, an assistant will meet your group in the arrivals hall and accompany more it to the hotel in Reykjavik by private coach. After checking in, you can begin exploring the world's most northern capital city. Please note that should you arrive before the hotel's official check-in time (generally 3:00 pm), you are than welcome to store baggage with the reception staff.

This evening your group will dine on the nearby island of Viðey in a historic restaurant. Located inside one of Iceland's oldest buildings (mid-18th century), the Viðey House was the first building in Iceland to be made of stone. Surrounded by beautiful landscapes, today Viðeyjarstofa serves traditional, culinary specialties of Iceland.



DAY 2 ~ REYKJAVIK CITY SIGHTSEEING

After breakfast in the hotel, a local guide will lead your group on a sightseeing tour of Reykjavik by private coach.

Visiting these cultural attractions in Reykjavik will signal the start of your exciting quest to learn about the history of Iceland! During the tour you will see Bessastaðir; the official residence of the president of Iceland; the Icelandic Parliament, City Hall, the Lutheran Cathedral (Dómkirkjan), the Catholic Cathedral of Christ the King, and Reykjavik's colorful Old Harbor.

During the city tour of Reykjavik you will also visit the futuristic Perlan to take advantage of the amazing, panoramic views it offers of the city. Your group will then go inside of Iceland's most iconic church: Hallgrímskirkja. The church's design was meant to resemble lava flows, and its steeple has become a true landmark in Reykjavik's Old Town. Another exciting inclusion on the tour is a visit to the Settlement Exhibition, whose collection of Viking artifacts dates back to 871 AD when Reykjavik was first settled by Vikings from Norway. Your last stop today will be at the Culture House to see its impressive collection of Icelandic works of literature, including some of the medieval, calfskin manuscripts of the Icelandic Sagas.

The tour will finish up back at the hotel. Enjoy an evening at leisure in Reykjavik.

INCLUSIONS

- **Hotel accommodations:** Reykjavik 3 nights, Borgarnes area 1 night, Varmahlíð area 2 nights, Flúðir area 1 night
- **Meals:** Continental breakfast daily. Lunch and dinner as noted in itinerary
- **Air-conditioned, private coaching**
- **English-speaking assistants and guides**
- **Admission tickets as outlined in the itinerary**

HIGHLIGHTS

- **Experience landscapes unlike anywhere else on Earth!**
- **Visit the birthplace of Viking explorer Leif Eriksson**
- **Tour Thingvellir National Park, a UNESCO World Heritage Site**
- **Visit the Icelandic Saga Centre in Hvolsvöllur**
- **Explore the geothermal Haukadalur Valley, home to the Great Geysir**

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DAY 3 ~ ÞINGVELLIR – KALDIDALUR – BORGARFJÖRÐUR

After breakfast and check-out, your group will travel east by private coach to Mosfellsdalur to visit Gljúfrasteinn, the home of Icelandic writer Halldór Laxness. Laxness, who won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1955, resided here for more than fifty years, and today his home is a state museum.

Your group will then travel to a true Icelandic treasure: Thingvellir National Park. This UNESCO World Heritage Site is an absolute must-do on a vacation to Iceland for several reasons. It is home to the beautiful Þingvellir Lake, the largest natural lake in the country. It is also the site of the incredible Almannagjá fault, and visitors can actually walk along the Mid-Atlantic ridge, where the North American and Eurasian tectonic plates meet. Lastly Þingvellir National Park is home to the Althing (the Icelandic Parliament); having been founded in 930 AD, it is one of the oldest national legislative assemblies in the world. After experiencing the immense natural beauty of this historic site, journey past the edges of the Icelandic Highlands to the verdant valley of Borgarfjörður.

Your group will stop at the breathtaking Hraunfossar and Barnafoss waterfalls and then proceed to the village of Reykholt. This area is of much importance to those interested in Viking history and the Icelandic sagas. Snorri Sturluson, an Icelandic politician and medieval Saga author who was born in 1179, hailed from Reykholt, and today your group will visit interesting historical sites connected to Reykholt's era of Viking settlement in Iceland. You will also see the ancient farm of Borg á Mýrum, which was the birthplace of Egill Skallagrímsson. Arguably Iceland's most famous Viking poet, Skallagrímsson served as the protagonist in the *Egils saga*.

Your group will have the opportunity to learn more about his life at the Icelandic Settlement Center in Borgarnes, which you will visit before arriving to the hotel in Borgarnes.

After check-in and time to freshen up, your group will dine in Borgarnes.



DAY 4 ~ VARMAHLÍÐ

After breakfast and check-out, your group will board its private coach and drive north past fertile farmlands and along the picturesque Breiðafjörður Bay to the Viking-era home at Eiríksstaðir, located on West Iceland's scenic coast. This area is incredibly important in Nordic history as many Viking explorers set out west from this coast with the aim of discovering new and distant lands. The farm of Erik the Red, who founded the first permanent settlement in Greenland, was located in Eiríksstaðir, which was also the birthplace of his son, Leif Eriksson, the Viking explorer who landed in North America almost 500 years before Christopher Columbus. While in Eiríksstaðir your group will learn about how the Vikings lived 1000 years ago in a recreated, turf-covered Viking longhouse. You will also visit the nearby Leifssafn Museum, which houses a Vinland exhibit on Leif Eriksson's explorations, to see more fascinating artifacts from the Viking Age.

This enchanting, magical Dalabyggð region is also highly connected to Icelandic folklore. Countless tales of elves, ghosts and sorcerers inhabit the region, which has served as the setting in some of the ancient Icelandic Sagas. Today your group will visit the "elf colony" found on the rocky hill of Tungustapi. Also featured on today's sightseeing tour is the remarkable rock formation of Hvítserkur, which is located on the picturesque Vatnsnes Peninsula. While enjoying the calmness, you may happen to spot a seal or two, which frequently inhabit



the area. Before arriving to the hotel in the village of Varmahlíð, your group will stop and visit the small church of Þingeyri, which is located on the site of the first monastery established in Iceland; back in the early 12th century.

After checking in and having time to freshen up, your group will dine this evening in Varmahlíð.



DAY 5 ~ VARMAHLÍÐ – SAUÐÁRKRÓKUR – HÓLAR - SIGLUFJÖRÐUR

After breakfast in the hotel, today's sightseeing will commence with visits to the Glaumbær Regional History Museum and to the historic Víðimýrarkirkja Church; an excellent representation of Icelandic architecture. Your group will then drive east to the small community of Hólar, which has always been an important center of learning in Iceland. During the medieval era, Hólar was also important politically. While there your group will visit Hólar's archeological site as well as its pretty, wooden church.

You will then drive north along the coast to the historic trading port of Hofsós, which will give you unbeatable views of the nearby Isle of Drangey, whose steep volcanic cliffs rise dramatically (almost 500 feet) from the waters of the Skagafjörður fjord below. According to the Icelandic sagas, Drangey is where the great Icelandic outlaw, Grettir the Strong, met his end in the 11th century. The Icelandic Emigration Center, which you will visit, was created to shed light on the plight of Icelanders who emigrated to North America.

Afterwards continue traveling north to Siglufjörður, a remote fishing village that sits snugly between mountain and fjord (and not far from the Arctic Circle). Siglufjörður was once the capital of the herring industry in Iceland, and in its

heyday during the first half of the 20th century (known as the "Icelandic gold rush"), the town was prosperous and quite populated. As the herring population decreased, so did Siglufjörður's. Today your group will visit the very interesting Herring Industry Museum, which houses tools of a bygone era that have been kept in perfect working order.

The tour will finish up back at the hotel. After time to fresh up, your group will dine in Varmahlíð.



DAY 6 ~ KJÖLUR – GEYSIR – GULLFOSS – SKÁLHOLT

After breakfast and check-out, your group will board its private coach and take the Kjölur road south through Iceland's legendary Highlands. If you're looking to escape the chaos and stress of today's world, this would be a good place to do it! Most of Iceland's rugged interior is pure wilderness. You're not likely to see anyone, so just sit back and enjoy the scenery. Interestingly, this route is ancient; it's even mentioned in the Icelandic Sagas.

During the drive you will stop to see the hot springs and geothermal pools of Hveravellir. The drive will also take your group to the Haukadalur Valley, an otherworldly geothermal area that is home to boiling mud pools and erupting hot springs including the Great Geysir and the Strokkur geyser (which spouts 98 feet every 10 minutes). Iceland's beautiful Gullfoss waterfall is located nearby, which your group will also stop to see.

Before arriving to the hotel in the village of Flúðir, your group will visit the historical site of Skálholt. Much like Hólar, Skálholt was an important religious and cultural center in Iceland from the medieval era until the late 18th century. While there your group will see Skálholt's monastery, cathedral, school and smithy; as well as the



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bishop's office.

After checking in and having time to freshen up, your group will dine this evening in Flúðir.

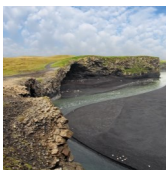


DAY 7 ~ REYKJAVÍK

After breakfast and check-out, prepare yourself for one last day of amazing nature and Icelandic folklore. Today your group will explore the coast of South Iceland, an area characterized by its black volcanic beaches, unusual rock formations, volcanos, waterfalls and legends. As this area provided the backdrop for one of the most-acclaimed works of medieval Icelandic literature, *Njáls saga*, your sightseeing will kick off with a visit to the Icelandic Saga Centre in the town of Hvolsvöllur to learn about the world of Norse mythology, arduous ocean voyages, and the Vikings' desire to discover new and distant lands.

Continuing east your group will arrive to the mighty waterfalls of Seljalandsfoss and Skógafoss, whose cliffs house nesting Fulmars in the summertime. The last natural attractions featured on today's sightseeing tour include the magnificent Reynisdrangar rock formations and the black sandy beaches that line the coastal village of Vík. Afterwards your group will travel west to Iceland's capital city.

After checking in to the hotel in Reykjavík, the remainder of the day is free. Enjoy your last evening in Iceland.



DAY 8 ~ DEPARTURE

After breakfast and check-out, your group will travel by private coach to Keflavík International Airport for its return flight to the US or Canada.

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