

Just Back- Iceland

By: Lynn Ciccarelli



Iceland. The name itself suggests cold and snow. Why would anyone go there? But I had a group of willing clients ready for the adventure.

I contacted Iceland Travel (<http://www.icelandtravel.is/>) and spoke to Johanna Gilsdorf. Not knowing much about Iceland, I explained to her that we wanted to spend five days there and asked for suggestions of what to do. She put together an action packed, fun-filled, interesting trip that none of us will ever forget.

To get to Iceland we used non-stop service from Boston to Reykjavik on Iceland Air. I was very surprised that this was only a 4 ½ hour flight.

The plan was to make Reykjavik our base and do day trips from there. Our guide, Ása Bjork Snorraddottir, met us at the airport. From that point on, she saw to our every need.

We began our adventure in Iceland with a Reykjavik City Tour. The highlights of the city tour were the National Museum and Cathedral. Then off we were to the famous Blue Lagoon for a

relaxing soak in the blue mineral springs, which many claim to have healing powers. Magnea Gudmunds-Dottir, director of public relations gave our group a private tour and arranged for us to have a “Blue Lagoon Cocktail.” The captivating warm blue waters of the lagoon invite you to step in and relax. The swim up bar is a plus!



The next day we did the well-known Golden Circle Tour. Asa drove us for an hour, stopping at Thingvellir Park, a World Heritage Site, and a must-see when visiting Iceland. An easy one hour hike was then made along the fault line there, where two tectonic plates are being pushed apart, a feature unique to Iceland. The scenery along the way was breath-taking.

Next stop was Gullfoss (Golden) Waterfall. The waterfall was unlike anything I'd ever seen. As you view it from the top, it seems to just disappear into the earth.



From the Gullfoss, we went to the famous Geyser. Walking to the site, we were greeted by Chef Bjarki Hilmarsson- head chef at Hotel Geyser. To our surprise, we were treated to a traditional Icelandic meal. Chef Helmarsson prepared our meal by wrapping eggs in cheesecloth and boiling them for twelve minutes in a nearby bubbling spring. Rye bread was then dug up from the warm ground where it had been placed to bake overnight. We were served the eggs and some herring on the buttered rye bread, accompanied with Icelandic schnapps. Thank you Johanna for a wonderful, unexpected treat!



On the third day, Johanna arranged for us to ride the famous Icelandic horses. We were picked up at our hotel and transported by van to the stables. Arriving, gear was provided, and horses selected, then off we went! The good nature and size of the horses make them a perfect choice for children or novice riders, as well as being fun for the more experienced. The whole group agreed it was the perfect ride. The scenery included interesting landscapes, trotting through streams, and climbs to the top of hills, offering great panoramic views.



Day four highlights included the spectacular waterfalls Selvandsfoss and Skogarfoss. We drove through farmland and observed the high amount of volcanic ash left over from the March 2010 eruption.

Our group had decided to stay at The Radisson 1919 (www.radissonblu.com/1919hotel-reykjavik), which is centrally located, comfortable, and moderately priced. It had a very accommodating staff, friendly bar, and nicely appointed rooms, though it could be noisy in the morning. Other nearby hotels included the 101 Hotel Reykjavik (www.101hotel.is) and the Hotel Borg (www.hotelborg.is). The 101 Hotel Reykjavík is a more contemporary hotel. You can request corner suites for a wonderful view. Hotel Borg was another nice option, with art deco charm and 7 available suites. All three hotels are within walking distance of one another, as well as shopping, good restaurants, and historic sites.

The city of Reykjavik also had a wide variety of restaurants, both traditional and modern, within walking distance of our hotel. One favorite was the Fish Company (www.fiskfelagid.is), and eclectic restaurant in the heart of the city. Chef and owner Larus Gunner Jonasson creates modern Icelandic food using only local, fresh ingredients. Another fun spot was Tapis, which offered Spanish appetizers, as well as more unusual items, such as whale meat and horse capriccio. Hotel 101 also had its own restaurant and bar. It offered a contemporary and welcoming atmosphere with a variety of light dishes. Overall, we enjoyed the very organic and resourceful Icelandic food and restaurants.

You can compare Iceland's landscape to Ireland or New Zealand, although its unique terrain often has you thinking of the moon. However, unique is best way to describe Iceland. This uniqueness of the food, the citizens, and the terrain, so unlike anything we had ever seen before, pleasantly surprised us all. In short, there is no place on Earth that provides you with the same opportunities and travel experiences as Iceland.