

ICELAND

ROAD MAP GUIDE

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WELCOME

Welcome to my road guide for Iceland!

Throughout my four years of living here, and prior to that three years of exploring, I've come to know the country quite well.

Iceland's unique terrain and weather make for some truly out of this world imagery. The highland region, only accessible during the summer months, is one of Europe's last true wilderness zones, meaning theres plenty of space out there to be alone with nature.

Whilst Iceland's landscape is harsh and rugged, it's also extremely fragile, so making sure you minimize your impact on the nature is of upmost importance for sustaining and preserving this amazing landscape for future explorers.

Now for the guide, here are five routes I personally love.

I have tried to include various styles of travel, so there should be something for everyone in there. From easy day trips, to 10+ hour drives in the mountains, each route focuses on seeing the best sights in the given area.



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THINGS TO KNOW:

ABOUT THE NATURE:

Iceland's nature is very fragile and often dangerous. Walking on vegetation (including moss) can make damage that will take decades to recover. Stick to marked paths and do not walk over the ropes or boundaries set by officials. If you are out alone in the mountains, always let someone know what your plans are before you go, and if possible download the 112 app to check in your location to authorities in case you get lost.

ABOUT DRIVING:

Driving outside of marked tracks (off-road) is prohibited in Iceland and is a punishable offence. Tracks from car tires can again leave marks that take a long time to regenerate if at all. Stick to the tracks at all times.

It's not permitted to take regular rental cars on highland roads, so you'll need to rent a 4x4 vehicle for that. River crossings can go wrong very quickly, and rental cars are not covered if they drown. Cross with extreme caution and test the depth beforehand if you are unsure, and if it's too big to test on foot, I'd suggest turning back. If the weather gets bad and road conditions become dangerous, please be safe and consider stopping and re-assessing, but please do not stop in the middle of the road - we see people doing this all the time and it's dangerous for obvious reasons.

ABOUT DRONES:

Droning within Vatnajökull national park is prohibited unless a licence is obtained. When camping, please use designated campgrounds where possible, especially in the highlands.



RESOURCES:

- o www.road.is - for up to date road conditions
- o www.vedur.is - for the weather
- o www.safetravel.is - for safe travel information
- o www.ja.is - for more complex maps

THE WINDING WESTFJORDS.

To many, going to the West is like going back in time. Its a place of small quaint villages and rich history basically untouched in the tourism boom. It's also home to the most beautiful fjords in the country.

It's a perfect place for those seeking real isolation, history and stillness. The land here is some of the oldest in Iceland, and with its sweeping fjords you'll get a great sense of how things used to be.



- ▷ 848 km's
- ▷ 12.5 hours
- ▷ 5 Major Stops
- ▷ May - Oct best time

HIGHLIGHTS:



LÁTRABJARG

These tall cliffs (up to 400m) are found on the far west, and are home to many bird species, including puffins.



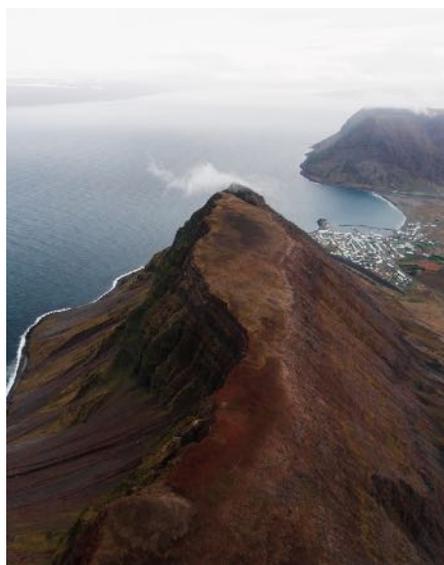
DYNJANDI

Meaning 'thunderous', this 100m cascading waterfall, is a gem of the West, and is just super breathtaking.



THE ARCTIC FOX CENTRE

In this exhibition space you'll learn everything there is to know about the amazing arctic fox, and get a chance to see them up close outside.



BOLAFJALL

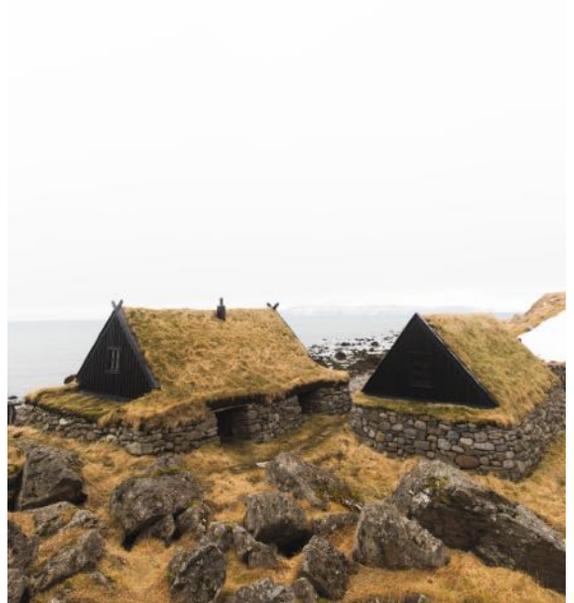
This mountain is an amazing viewpoint, some people even say you can see Greenland from up here.

HIGHLIGHTS:



HEYDALUR

A quirky little stop in a remote fjord, which has accommodations, animals, dogs running about and an amazing indoor hot pool inside a greenhouse.



ÓSVÖR FISHING OUTPOST

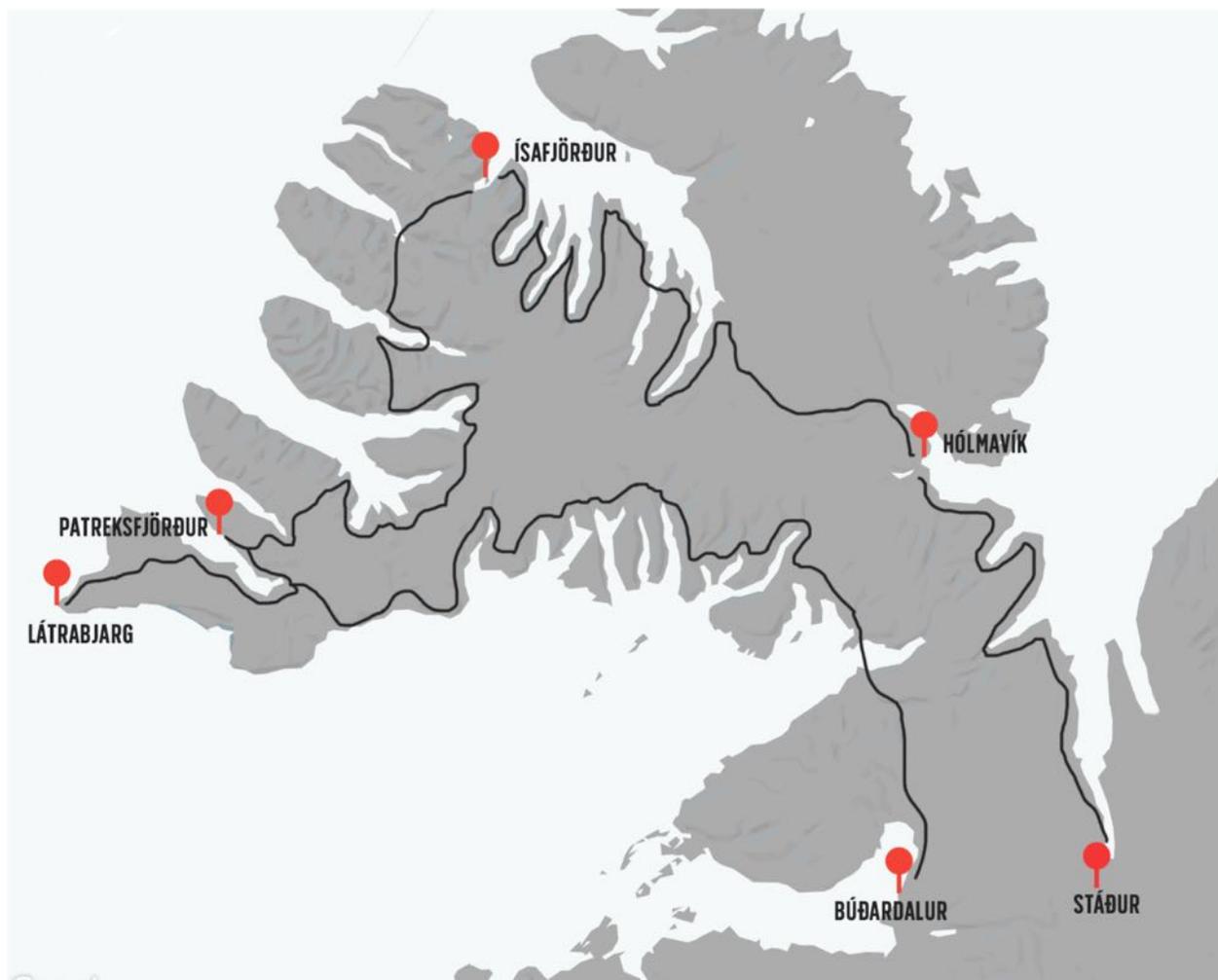
These replicas of 19th century fishing houses are amazing to see and imagine what life was like.



OTHER HIGHLIGHTS:

- ☆ **The Museum of Witchcraft and Sorcery** - A really cool little museum where you can learn about Iceland's history with witch burnings and black magic.
- ☆ **Rauðisandur Beach** - a surreal red sand beach, with beautiful mountain views.
- ☆ **Ísafjörður** - a town that will take you back in time, back when people wave as you pass by...
- ☆ **Pingeyri** - a cosy town on filled with creativity, an awesome little café and a view over Dýrafjörður

ROUTE MAP:



TIPS:

- ▶ The West is home to many one lane tunnels. When using them and another car is coming through, pull off in one of the side parking spots and turn off your headlights as they pass - this is customary!
- ▶ The roads in the West can be extremely treacherous during winter, and the mountain pass from Þingeyri to the southern end is often closed during high winter, separating the north and southern sides. Please refer to www.road.is as well as www.vedur.is for updates on conditions.
- ▶ Westfjords is home to the most abandoned buildings in the country - when visiting, make sure they aren't on private property or farmers land.

THE ANCIENT EAST.

Carved by lava and ancient glaciers, the Eastfjords is a sublime and endlessly interesting area to explore. You could spend weeks winding in and out of the many fjords, visiting small towns and indulging in its rich history and folklore. For this route, I've added my favourite places to visit in the East, but if you have time, driving the coast route and visiting these towns is well worth it.

The best features of the East are its forests, tall waterfalls, reindeers and bizarre slanted mountains.



- ▷ 441 km's
- ▷ 6 hours
- ▷ 5 Major Stops
- ▷ Aug - Oct best time

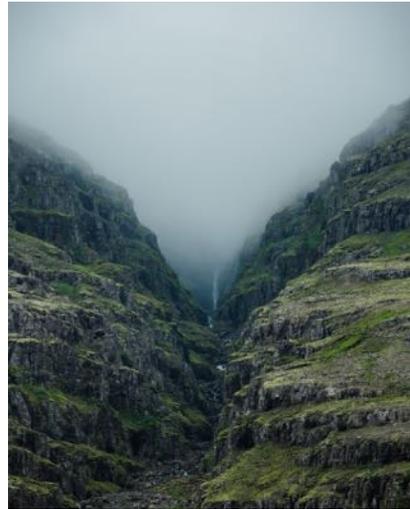
HIGHLIGHTS:



VESTRAHORN

A jagged mountain range approximately 20 minutes out of Höfn. Drive up the road and look back to see the view, the seas, and the unique sand dunes.

Note: You will have to pay a fee to the farmer upon entry to access this view.



ÖXI PASS

This mountain road provides a faster route to Egilsstaðir, but is only open in summer months. It has some of the most beautiful mountains, fog, and waterfalls, as well as being a very fun and bumpy drive!



BORGARFJÖRÐUR EYSTRÍ

The paradise of the East, home to some of the tallest mountain ranges and amazing hiking trails - Stóruvö and Dyrfjöll.



LAGARFLJÓT LAKE

Widely known for being home to a sea monster, Lagarfljót also has some of the most dense forest surrounds and peaceful picnic areas.

HIGHLIGHTS:



REINDEERS

The East is home to the population of wild reindeers in Iceland. You can spot them while driving the Ring Road, often in large groups.

Where: From Jökulsárlón to Egilssatðir.



THE COASTLINE

On the Ring Road, you will pass a stunning stretch of coastal road just past Eystahorn mountain range. At the end of this is Fauskasandur - a black beach with some tall sea stacks.



OTHER HIGHLIGHTS:

- ☆ **Hengifoss and Litlanefoss waterfalls** - One of Iceland's tallest waterfalls and another surrounded by beautiful basalt columns.
- ☆ **Seydisfjorður** - one of the prettiest towns in the country, surrounded by tall mountains.
- ☆ **Neskaupstaður** - a quaint and peaceful fishing village

ROUTE MAP:



TIPS:

- ▶ Note that fuel stations can be far and between, so make sure to fuel up when you can.
- ▶ Öxi Pass can be quite bumpy with many holes, so drive slowly!
- ▶ If you have extra time, driving the coastal road through each fjord is lovely.
- ▶ When wanting to picnic or visit the forests near Largarfjót, take the smaller roads off the main road to get to the lakes edge.

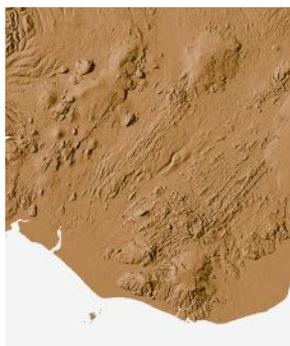
THE BARREN HIGHLANDS.

(4X4 ONLY)

The highlands of Iceland cover the interior of the country and is comprised mostly of uninhabitable volcanic desert. That being said, its also the home of some of the most stunning alien-like landscapes and landforms in the world.

From bright blue crater lakes to colourful rhyolite mountain ranges, the highlands captivating yet fragile nature draws thousands of people every summer.

Please note, travelling in the highlands requires a 4x4 vehicle, and it's important to stay on marked roads.



- ▷ 326 km's
- ▷ 7 hours
- ▷ 4 Major Stops
- ▷ June - August Only

HIGHLIGHTS:



SIGÖLDUFOSS

Situated by the entrance to Landmannalaugar, this waterfall and river makes its way down the mountains before mixing into silt water lakes. At times, it's home to some of the bluest water you will ever see.



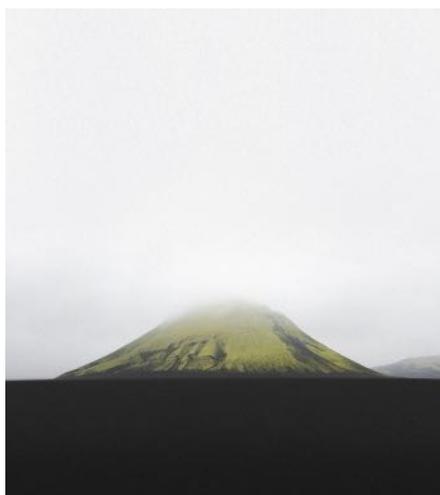
LANDMANNALAUGAR

This mountain range is world renowned for its colourful geothermal mountains and hot springs. This area is seen best on foot, so following one of the various hiking routes is recommended. It's also a stunning place to camp over the summer.



PORSMÖRK

This green mountain valley hosts endless opportunities for photographers. You will get to witness volcanos, glaciers and sublime green Middle Earth-like landscapes.



MÆLIFELL

Imagine a view of an endless black sand desert, swirling with winds, with a big green mountain sprouting in the center. Mælifell and its surrounds are indescribably beautiful – see for yourself.

HIGHLIGHTS:



BLÁHNJÚKUR

The 'blue peak' is situated in Landmannalaugar, and offers a short trail to the top for you to get a full view of the entire valley. The view is not to be missed.



BLÁHYLLUR & LIÓTÍPOLLUR

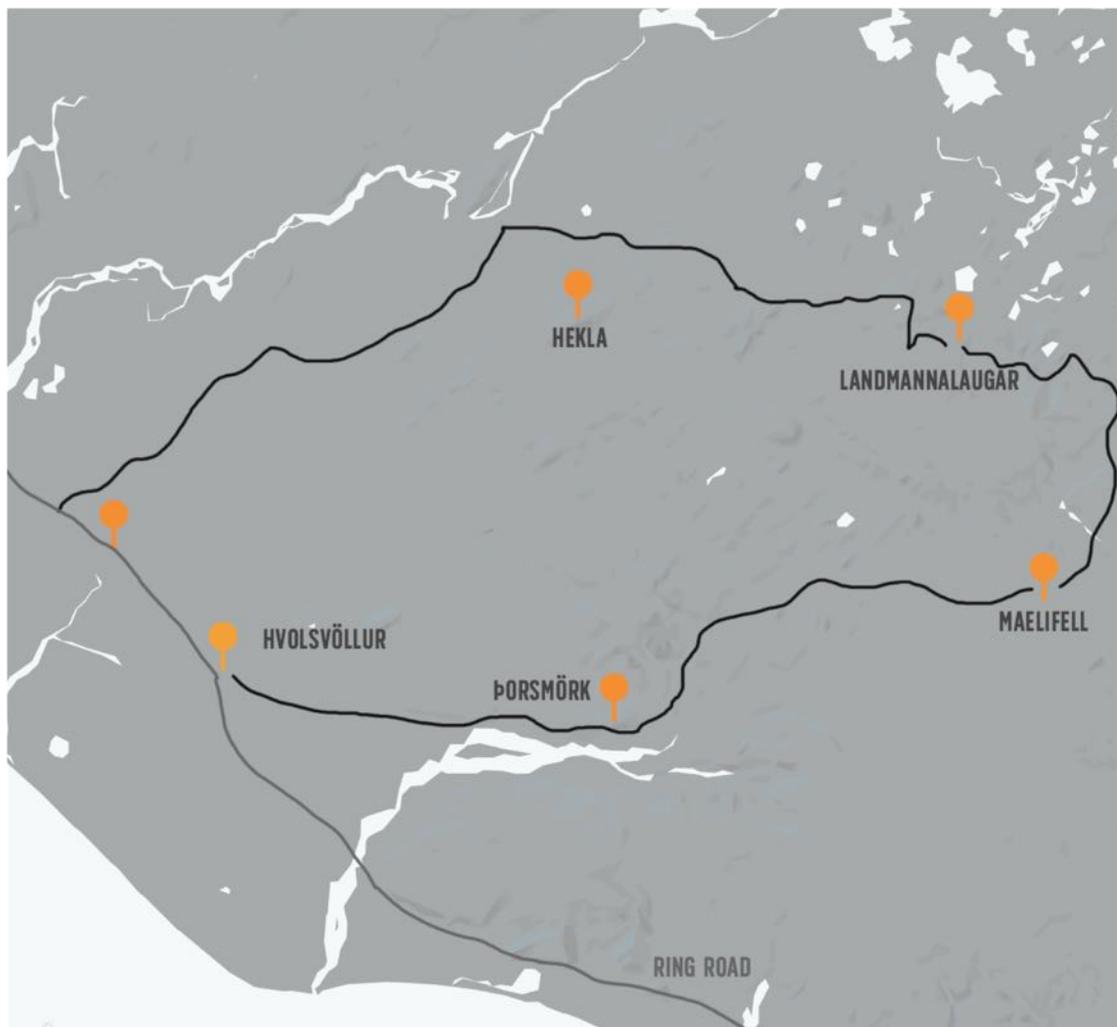
These two crater lakes have some of the most bizarre and gorgeous colours, like an oasis amongst the geothermal valleys.



OTHER HIGHLIGHTS:

- ☆ **Hekla** - on this route, you will be passing the 'gateway to Hell' - the formidable Hekla Volcano.
- ☆ **Álftavatn** - a beautiful lake area with huts and camping nearby.
- ☆ **Básar and Volcano Huts** - if you get time to cross the valley, check out these huts for great food and camp grounds.
- ☆ **Eyjafjallajökull** - on passing through Þorsmörk, don't forget to look up and see the famous volcano on top of the mountains - its hard to miss it on a clear day.

ROUTE MAP:



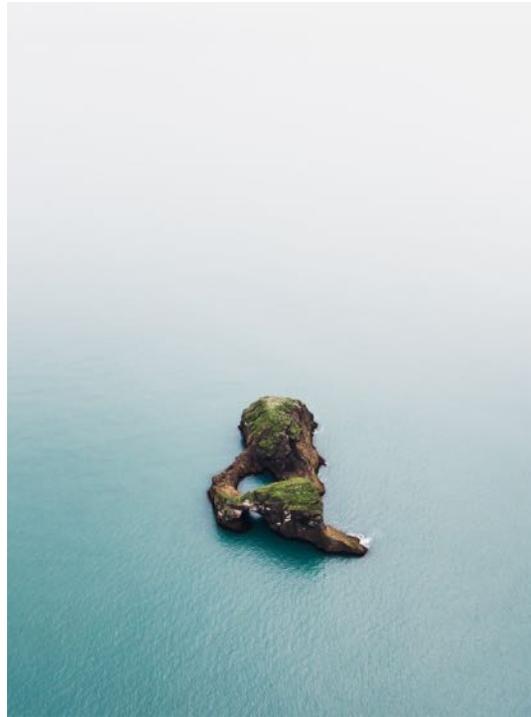
TIPS:

- ▶ The Highlands are the most fragile landscape in Iceland, so please note that every step and every tire track leaves marks in the ground and fauna that takes decades to recover. Stay on marked trails and roads when travelling here. Off-road driving breaks the hearts of all Icelanders!
- ▶ Fuel up before the journey - there won't be any fuel stations out here.
- ▶ Also stock up on food - there is only one place in Landmannalaugar where food is available during high summer.
- ▶ Never attempt to travel here in the winter months without a professional guide.
- ▶ Do not pass closed roads. For daily road information, please check www.road.is
- ▶ There will be some harsh terrain and river crossings, so ensure your vehicle is capable. If the river looks too deep, turn back or wait for someone to aid you and show you the right way of crossing. Do not cross rivers in rental cars if you are unsure - insurance doesn't cover drowned cars.

THE DIVERSE SOUTH.

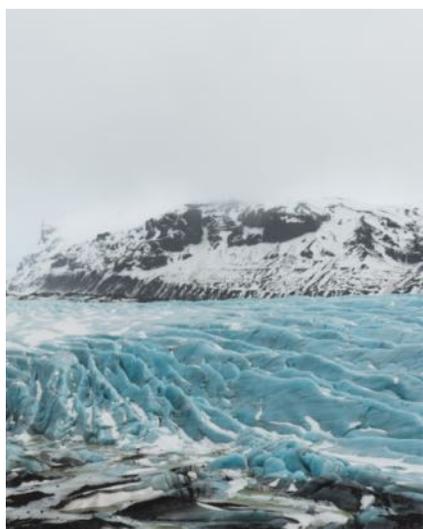
Second only to the Golden Circle, the South Coast is one of the most popular travel destinations in Iceland. This is largely due to its diversity, offering volcanos, glaciers, ash plains, mountains, black sand beaches, waterfalls and ice caves to name but a few.

While the South Coast in summer can be quite overwhelming with tourists year-round, its not to be missed. In this route I'll name a few familiar spots, but some quieter ones that are less populated too.



- ▷ 264 km's
- ▷ 4 hours
- ▷ 5 Major Stops
- ▷ All Year

HIGHLIGHTS:



SVÍNAFELLSJÖKULL

One of my favorite outlet glaciers and the filming place for many films, from the car park you can get a high vantage overview of the blue ice and hear its slow cracking.

Note: It has been recently been marked as a potential landslide zone, so research ahead if its accessible and enter the viewpoint at your own risk.



ICE CAVES & GLACIER WALKS

Between November and March, don't pass up the opportunity to go in an Ice cave or head on a glacier walk all year round. I recommend the Local Guide to visit the caves, or to hike on the Falljökull icefall in summer.



JÖKULSÁRLÓN

A rare glacial lagoon that connects to the ocean, here you'll see floating icebergs, seals and a black beach where diamonds of ice wash ashore. Although busy, taking a short walk away from the crowds will offer you some peace with nature.



DYRHÓLAEY

'Door Hill Island' is a 120m peninsula, home to expansive views over the southern coasts and rich birdlife, including puffins. You'll find a massive rock arch and many small islands off the coast, as well as an old lighthouse that still shines at night.

HIGHLIGHTS:



KVERNUFOSS

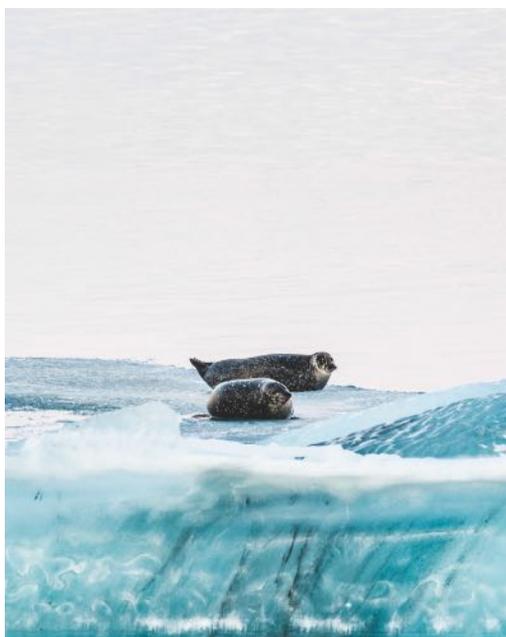
This hidden waterfall (whilst less and less secret each year) is situated right next to Skógafoss, in a valley by a small river. You can walk behind this lovely 30m waterfall, and enjoy a peaceful hike to get there.

Where – park by the Skogar Museum and walk east into the farmland, passing the ladder over the fence. Follow the trails from here into the valley.



FJALLSÁRLÓN

This stunning glacier lagoon lies not far from the other, but is far more secluded. From here, you can hike down to the waters edge, and on a calm day, the lake can look like glass.



OTHER HIGHLIGHTS:

- ☆ **Hjörleifshöfði** – a giant land island that is most certainly haunted...
- ☆ **Skógafoss** – another busy one that is worth battling the crowds, most certainly the most beautiful waterfall on earth.

CONSIDER SKIPPING: *due to overcrowding*

- X Plane wreck
- X Seljalandsfoss and Gljúfrabúi
- X Fjaðrárgljúfur
- X Sólheimajökull
- X Svartifoss

ROUTE MAP:



TIPS:

- ▶ The landmarks in the South Coast have been heavily trafficked and damaged throughout the years. Please keep to marked paths and trails to avoid damaging fragile flora.
- ▶ When visiting the icebergs at the glacier lagoon, remember not to stand or get in the water with them, as they can flip and float away!
- ▶ Bring a raincoat – getting close to waterfalls can get quite wet.
- ▶ Do not attempt to walk on the glaciers without a guide, crevasses and slippery ice can be dangerous.
- ▶ In summer, consider visiting the busy landmarks late at night, as there is no darkness, you will get a chance to likely be alone at these spots.
- ▶ The south coast has many restaurants and accommodations - but book early in summer as they can get quickly booked out.
- ▶ Droning is forbidden at most places in the South Coast, but drone permits can be acquired online in Vatnajökull National Park.

THE VOLCANIC REYKJANES.

The Reykjanes Peninsula is a UNESCO Global Geopark and part of the European and Global Geopark network. It is easily accessible and close from Reykjavik and great day trip if you have limited time, even just on a stopover for a day as its close by the airport.

Reykjanes has geothermal areas, lakes, craters, lava fields and some surreal coastline, which is usually sparse with people, allowing you some space and time with nature.

Situated between the Eurasian and North American Continental tectonic plates, Reykjanes is a hidden volcanic gem not to be missed.



- ▷ 264 km's
- ▷ 4 hours
- ▷ 5 Major Stops
- ▷ All Year

HIGHLIGHTS:



LAVA FIELDS

The lava fields in Reykjanes are from the Holocene age, spanning across the whole peninsula. Covered in vibrant moss, you can just imagine elves running around here...



KRÝSUVÍK

A geothermal area opposite Kleifarvatn lake, here you can walk through geothermal steam and admire the many colours of the soil as well as the bubbling fumaroles.



ELDBORG CRATER

The highest of five craters lying along a volcanic fissure in the slopes of Geitafell. A rugged and rocky crater that gives you a taste of the power of volcanic forces. Remember to keep on the tracks.



BLUE LAGOON

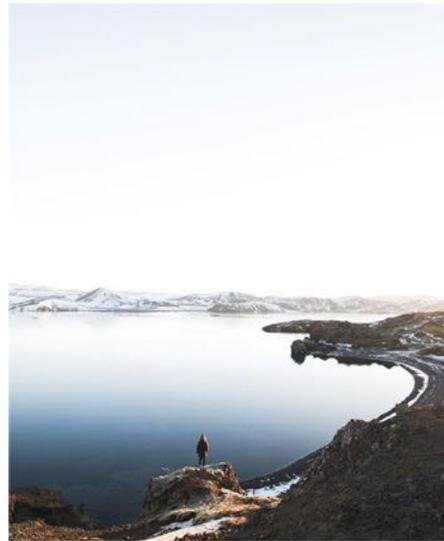
Something everyone should experience at least once, is the Blue Lagoon for some relaxing and unwinding. You can also visit the bright blue water outside the establishment without paying for entry for photos.

HIGHLIGHTS:



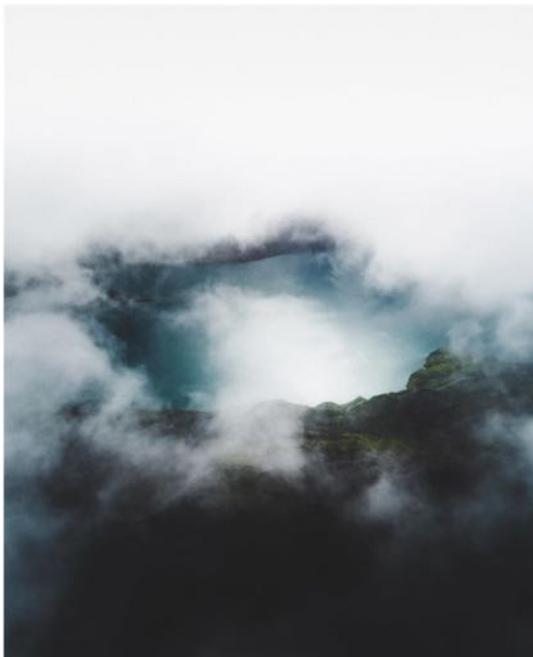
GUNNUHVER & REYKJANESVITI

At the end of the coast to the far west lies a surreal scene of tall geothermal steam, a lighthouse, and a black and jagged coastline that holds a sublime kind of beauty.



KLEIFARVATN

An ideal place to shoot on a limited time schedule, Kleifarvatn lake gets its water from deep underground and is surrounded by black sand banks, jagged cliffs and caves.



OTHER HIGHLIGHTS:

- ☆ **Krisuvikurberg Cliffs** - a great viewing spot of the cliffs of Reykajnes.
- ☆ **Grænavatn** - a vibrant green crater lake on the edge of Kleifarvatn.
- ☆ **Sandvik** - a lava field area with some amazing dark black craters and sand.

ROUTE MAP:



TIPS:

- ▶ Roads on route to Kleifarvatn are gravel, so watch out for holes and rough terrain if travelling in a smaller car.
- ▶ There are some dirt tracks around Kleifarvatn, which are lovely but should only be attempted in a 4x4 when no snow is around.
- ▶ If you plan on swimming in the Blue Lagoon, note that you will have to book tickets in advance as it often gets booked up, booking an obscure hour will give you more chance of a relaxed swim. It's also great to visit on a bad weather day!
- ▶ Grindavík is a great stop point along this route to fill up and get food.
- ▶ When visiting geothermal areas, make sure to stick to paths as it is possible your foot will go in and get burned in over 100 degree heat!



TAKK FYRIR, GOÐA FERÐ!