2018 guide to the highlights of the regions of Iceland

Iceland is made up of eight geographical regions, each differing slightly in its culture and landscape but all truly Icelandic. The different regions are South Iceland, East Iceland, North Iceland, the Westfjords, West Iceland, Reykjanes, Reykjavik and the Highlands. A top five highlights in each regions is outlined below. For further information: https://www.inspiredbyiceland.com/a-o.

Iceland’s regions have a host of diverse experiences for the visitor to enjoy, from puffins in the East to the black beaches of the South, the Museum of Nonsense in the Westfjords, to whale watching in the North. Visitors can even cross tectonic plates in Reykjanes, go into a glacier in the West or hit buzzing Downton Reykjavik.
WESTFJORDS TOP FIVE

Iceland’s no. 2 ring road.
Iceland’s famous Route 1 which follows the country’s coastline has a rival; ring road no. 2 around the Westfjords. It is shorter but even more spectacular, with a rugged beauty from the snaking fjords, the marshlands and the mountain tops reaching right down into the sea.

Amazing waterfalls
Iceland is well known for its abundance of waterfalls and the Westfjords is no exception. The stunning Dynjandi waterfall is one of the best known waterfalls in Iceland and one of the top attractions of the region.

Unusual museums
The Westfjords has its fair share of unusual museums; The Museum of Icelandic Sorcery and Witchcraft in Hólmavík; the Iceland Sea Monster Museum in Bildudalur and The Nonsense Museum in Flateyri.

Peace and quiet!
The Westfjords is still the least visited region of Iceland and with just under 7000 inhabitants there is plenty of space for everyone, 1.2 km² per person to be exact. This is why one of the key elements of the Westfjords is solitude, and solitude is not another word for loneliness. Far from it, in fact: solitude means space to think, time to reflect, and the chance to stop and appreciate the smaller things in life.

Local produce and salt
The Westfjords main industry is fishing but there is plenty of other local produce to try. The Westfjords is home to two salt factories that use geothermal heat to harvest sea salt flakes from the ocean. The salt factories Saltverk and Norðursalt offer regular sea salt flakes as well as a range of...
flavored salt, liquorice salt and birch salt. The Westfjords is the only place in the world that produces 100% sustainable salt.

**REYKJANES TOP FIVE**

**Reykjanes UNESCO Global Geopark**

The Reykjanes peninsula, with its diversity of volcanic and geothermal activity, is a UNESCO Global Geopark and is the only place in the world where the Mid-Atlantic Ridge is visible above sea level. The landscape is characterised by Tuff Mountains and hyaloclastite ridges that formed in subglacial eruptions, as well as several series of craters and other large shield volcanoes from more recent times.

**The Bridge between Continents**

The lava-scarred Reykjanes peninsula lies on one of the world’s major plate boundaries, the Mid-Atlantic Ridge. The Bridge between two continents at Sandvík is a small footbridge over a major fissure which provides clear evidence of the presence of a diverging plate margin. The bridge was built as a symbol for the connection between Europe and North America.

**Gunnuhver and the geothermal energy**

On the tip of the Reykjanes peninsula is an active geothermal area called Gunnuhver. The mud pools form where steam from the boiling geothermal reservoir water mixes with surface water. Iceland’s largest is in the Gunnuhver area, 20 meters wide and is easily accessible to visit.

**The Blue Lagoon**

Although the most well-known geothermal pool in Iceland, a visit to the Blue Lagoon is an important part of any stay in the country. Guests can renew their relationship with nature, soak up the scenic beauty and enjoy breathing the clean, fresh air while relaxing in the warm geothermal seawater.

**Hiking and exploring**

On the Reykjanes peninsula one can enjoy over 230 km of hiking trails, whether it is an easy short walk into the lava fields or by the coast, or a more challenging hike in the mountains.

**NORTH ICELAND TOP FIVE**
Lake Mývatn geothermal area and the Nature Baths

In the region of Lake Mývatn, located on the Mid-Atlantic Ridge, the most interesting sights are volcanic or geothermal features, the centrepiece being the 37 sq. km lake Mývatn itself. The lake contains over 50 islands and islets, mostly pseudocraters formed when molten lava flowed into the lake. Lake Mývatn is also home of the Icelandic Yule Lads. In Dimmuborgir a lava formation at Lake Mývatn you can visit them during the advent.

Akureyri town, Europe’s best destination in 2015 according to Lonely Planet

Akureyri is the biggest town outside of Reykjavik and frequently called the Capital of the Shining North, with reference to the midnight sun in the summertime and northern lights during winter. It is a good base for exploring North Iceland. From the town, visitors can go whale watching, relax in hot geothermal pools or play on the northernmost 18 hole golf course in the world. Within less than an hours drive visitors can reach Goðafoss waterfall, Lake Mývatn, the Nature Baths and the islands of Hrísey and Grímsey.

Vatnajökull National Park

Vatnajökull National Park covers more than 13% of Iceland and it is the biggest one in Europe. The National Park showcases diverse landscape due to regular volcanic activity. The northern part of Vatnajökull National Park gives access to several unique nature attractions during summer and winter including Dettifoss, Europe’s most powerful waterfall; Ásbyrgi canyon, a horseshoe-shaped rock formation and Víti crater, an explosion crater about 300m in diameter.

Whale Watching

Visitors can easily see humpbacks, dolphins, minke and blue whales in North Iceland. Whale watching options include oak-boats, vessels, rib safaris and schooners. A unique experience available both in Húsavík town, often named the whale watching capital of Iceland, or in the calm sea of Eyjafjörður fjord, sheltered by mountains.

Winter sports, Northern Lights and skiing in Iceland’s no 1 winter destination

In North Iceland there are five flood-lit ski resorts open from December to May. Akureyri ski resort is the number one ski area for Icelander’s as it is only five minutes away from the town centre. The Troll Peninsula is the place to head to for off piste skiing, alpine ski touring, cat skiing and heli skiing. The Beer Baths and Mývatn Nature Baths are our apres ski activites. Due to high mountains, next to
non-light pollution and being right at the Arctic Circle makes North Iceland a great region to capture the Northern Lights.

**WEST ICELAND TOP FIVE**

**Largest lava tube in Iceland**

Viðgelmir cave is the largest lava tube in Iceland, about 1600 m long with the widest point being 16 meters. Thought to be one of the most spectacular caves in the world, it has beautiful ice formations and deep inside there are lava stalactites and stalagmites.

**Kirkjufell - the most photographed mountain in Iceland!**

Kirkjufell (463m) is a beautifully shaped and symmetric free standing mountain, the most photographed mountain in Iceland. Its name means ‘Church Mountain’ and comes from its shape being similar to a church tower.

**Stêðji brewery**

Stêðji Brewery is an innovative family micro-brewery producing beer with old Icelandic traditional recipes. Stêðji uses its own natural spring water which originates from Langjökull glacier and is considered to be among the purest and cleanest sources of water found in the world.

**Into The Glacier**

Into The Glacier opened in 2015 and is located high on Europe’s second largest glacier, Langjökull, where visitors can see and explore the glacier from the inside. Previously the underneath of the glacier has only been accessible to scientists but this man made ice cave and tunnels allows visitors an insight into underneath of this incredible glacier.

**Snæfellsjökull, the Center of the Earth!**

The Snæfellsjökull glacier is part of an active volcano, having been built up through numerous eruptions over the past 800,000 years. It was the inspiration for Jules Verne’s novel *Journey to the Center of the Earth* and is believed by many to be one of the seven main energy centres of the earth. It is possible to visit the glacier on snowcat or snowmobile.
SOUTH ICELAND TOP FIVE

The Land of Fire and Ice
South Iceland has a diverse and significant nature with great attraction that is easy to access and experience. The great variety and the quality of services enables our guests to enjoy the best of what Iceland has to offer all year round. All the great forces can be found in South Iceland; fire & ice, glaciers, black beaches, volcanoes, and waterfalls.

Geothermal energy and bathing
Geothermal energy is one of Iceland’s most important power sources and the South is the home to some of the largest geothermal areas in Iceland. Green energy has been and still is utilised for heating greenhouses, washing laundry, bathing and for cooking and baking. The geothermal energy also creates plenty of hot natural pools in many shapes and sizes, where visitors can bathe year round.

The Icelandic horse
The Icelandic horse is a favorite of many and well known around the world. Small herds were first brought to Iceland from Norway and no other horses have been allowed on the island since then, resulting in a pure breed, known for its fifth gait and character. The South region is the largest agricultural area in Iceland and the Icelandic horse has been an integral part of the workforce, utilised for transport and as a pack and draft animal.

Black beaches
South Iceland boasts around 500 km (311 miles) of coastline, from the town Þorlákshöfn in the West to Höfn in the East. Between the two towns are many black sand beaches which change colour slightly in different seasons of the year and in different lights, offering great photo opportunities.

Outdoor Activity Destination of the Year 2018 – Luxury Travel Guide Awards
South Iceland was awarded the LTG Outdoor Activity Destination of the year 2018 in Europe. The Luxury Travel Guide Awards represent the pinnacle of travel and tourism achievement, championing the best in their respective fields; therefore to come out on top is truly an achievement we are proud of.
REYKJAVÍK TOP FIVE

Thermal Pools
Reykjavik boasts seven swimming pools all filled to the brim with Iceland’s famous geothermal water. Each features a traditional lap-pool, with a number of wonderful ‘heitur pottur’ or ‘hot tubs’ where visitors can join the locals to relax and engage in a little small-talk.

Old Harbour area
With the impressive addition of Harpa - the city's award winning new concert hall - the colourful Old Harbour, which was built between the years 1913 and 1917, is fast becoming one of the city’s most popular areas.

Hallgrímskirkja
Hallgrímskirkja church is Reykjavik’s main landmark and its tower can be seen from almost everywhere in the city. Hallgrímskirkja, the Church of Hallgrimur, is a national monument, dedicated to the most renowned sacred poet of Iceland, Hallgrimur Petursson. The church features, most notably, a gargantuan pipe organ. Standing tall at an impressive 15m and weighing a remarkable 25 tons, the organ is driven by four manuals and a pedal, 102 ranks, 72 stops and 5275 pipes.

Mt. Úlfarsfell
One of Reykjavík’s best kept secrets is Mt. Úlfarsfell, which is a small mountain, around 296 meters high, located south of Mosfellsbær, one of Reykjavik’s municipalities. The mountain is an easy climb for all and from the top there is a great view over the majestic Mt. Esja, Bláfjöll skiing area, the Reykavik area and Faxaflói bay.

Downtown Reykjavik
Downtown Reykjavik is the most popular area of the city for visitors. It has an astounding variety of restaurants offering both traditional and international cuisine cooked using the finest ingredients. For the best shopping experience visitors should hit the downtown area of the city which is where most of the shops and boutiques are concentrated, mainly on the city’s famous shopping streets of Laugavegur and Skólavörðustígur.

EAST ICELAND TOP FIVE
Hólmanes
Hólmanes is a nature reserve between Reyðarfjörður and Eskifjörður and has a great hiking trail. It is known for its unique rock formations and as a good spot for bird watching. Hikers have also been known to spot a herd of reindeer.

Laugarfell
Laugarfelli is a geothermically run mountain hut in the Icelandic highlands with natural geothermal pools. Surrounded by glaciers, mountains, waterfalls and reindeer and with modern facilities and comforts, it is an ideal wilderness stay!

Hengifoss
Hengifoss is the second highest waterfall in Iceland, falling 128 m into a magnificent gorge. There is a colorful rock face surrounding the waterfall showing different layers from volcanic eruptions when Iceland was formed.

Seydisfjördur
Seydisfjördur village sits within a fjord covered in waterfalls. The village is unique in Iceland due to its Norwegian heritage, with colourful, Norwegian-style wooden houses, dating from the early years of the 20th century.

Hafnarhólmi
The "Hafnarhólmi" in Borgarfjörður is a great spot for birdwatching, particularly for puffins. The puffin season is from April to mid-August.

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