2019 guide to the highlights of the regions of Iceland

Iceland is generally split into seven 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 and Reykjavík or the capital area. Top five highlights and top five trends in each regions are 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 downtown Reykjavík.
WESTFJORDS

**TOP FIVE**

**Winter**

In the Westfjords, winter is king. It is the longest and most varied season, and a genuine treat for the traveller. The winter season lasts almost half the year and, in that time, there will be extended spells of still, clear weather; some truly thrilling storms; and some grey days with curtains of impenetrably thick snowfall.

Plenty of activities are available during the winter, the Westfjordians love all sorts of skiing, backcountry skiing, cross-country skiing and alpine skiing. If skiing is not your thing you can go sea kayaking, snow mobiling, jeep touring or of course northern lights chasing. The hot pools are still hot during the cold winter nights and the chances of spotting the green dancing lights while soaking in a pool are not too bad. Some locals open their homes to visitors during the new year’s festivities, you can even be dropped off at an abandoned valley where you get to be left alone, snowed in for a few days. And the storms themselves, if you are lucky enough to experience one, a proper one where you wrap up in all your clothes, step out the front door and don’t see your own house kind of storm, it’s an experience you won’t forget.

We love the winter with all its variable weathers, conditions and unpredictability similar to reaching blindfolded into a bowl of m&m’s just to pull out a handful of blue ones!

**Villages**

The Westfjords were built up around fishing and therefore, the region though very sparsely populated has many small villages. Now many of the villages have changed from the typical Icelandic fishing village and developed a new identity. Þingeyri with a historical connection to vikings has become Westford’s go to village for all intrigued by viking related history, you can get dressed up in the appropriate clothing, handle swords and shields or even try the classic Viking bread.

Hólmavík is the home of the Museum of Witchcraft and Sorcery due to its connection to the saga of the witch craze. The museum is a combination between historical facts about what happened in Iceland in the 17th century concerning to the witch craze in Iceland, a period of approximately 50 years and Icelandic folklore connected to magic and sorcery.
In the small village Bíldudalur you will find the Icelandic Sea Monster Museum, the location of the museum is not random. It is situated by Arnarfjörður, a fjord which is perfectly shaped for these creatures of the sea and happens to be the area with the most sightings of sea monsters in Iceland. In the interactive museum you can get information about different types of monsters sighted, so a believer or not, it is worth the visit.

These are just three of many diverse villages in the Westfjords, we recommend visiting as many of them as you can, so you can take in the different feel, history and people of each place.

**RingRoad No. 2**

Iceland’s famous ring road has a rival: the ring road no. 2, around the Westfjords is a little shorter, but no less spectacular than no. 1. Tackle it at your own pace and embrace the adventurer within!

The term ‘ring road’ conjures up the image of a perfect circle; maybe a round pebble, smoothed by the sea. The Westfjords ring road, however, gets its rugged beauty from the snaking fjords, the skirted marshlands, the traversed mountains and the by-passed hillocks. As a result, the map of it looks more like the teeth of a rotating saw blade than a golden wedding ring. And it’s all the better for it.

This Ring Road is partially closed during winter due to snow but in two short years we see that annual closing coming to an end with a new tunnel, finally making this Ring Road an all year destination. However, it should be noted that most of the roads are open all year round so even if you cannot do a full circle you can easily travel around the Westfjords during winter.

**Waterfalls**

Iceland is well known for its abundance of waterfalls and the Westfjords are no exception, if anything you will find more waterfalls in the Westfjords than anywhere else in Iceland. Dynjandi waterfall is one of the best known waterfalls in Iceland and one of the most popular attractions of the region, but we have so many more. Around the corner, up the hill, hidden in ravines or simply showed in your face right by the side of the road, there is always another stream of water falling off an edge somewhere creating a new waterfall to have a look at. During your stay in the region we recommend you give yourself time to stop and walk up to waterfalls you see along your journey. Just remember, park your car in a safe place, not on the road!
A little fun fact about waterfalls; In the Westfjords we have a waterfall called Waterfall (Foss), stood by it is an old farm called Waterfall (Foss) and it is in Waterfall-fjord (Fossfjörður). Foss by Foss in Fossfjörður.

**Play of light**

The annual rhythm of people’s lives in the Westfjords changes with the light. Houses are bright, warm and cosy in winter and it’s no hardship to snuggle down inside with candles, cocoa, cookies and Casablanca (or any movie beginning with C).

In the summer, people barely feel the need to go inside at all. Why not tend the garden at midnight, or take the dog for a walk in the wee smalls? Work and daily life may get in the way a little bit… but the visitor has no such worries! Watch a 3am sunrise on the beach. Take a midnight hike up a mountain. Marvel at the millpond stillness of the fjord water on a sunny summer’s night. And don’t, whatever you do, forget to soak in a natural hot spring, with absolutely no-one else around, under the midnight sun.

Any time of year when the night actually gets dark in the Westfjords, you might be lucky and glimpse the enchanting northern lights. That’s roughly August to April. Of course, the longer the night, the better the chances – and this means midwinter is the top time to come and worship the aurora. In case you’re wondering: the northern lights are totally worth the effort. A good show will stay with you for life. Even a mediocre show is worth looking up for. And if you don’t see any at all, at least the near total lack of light pollution provides a great view of the stars.

**Top 5 trending**

**Breath**

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. The Westfjords are great to enjoy some solitude!

Park your car in one of the many pull offs along the road, please don’t stop or park on the side of the road. We know the surroundings are scenic and views to die for, but we prefer you don’t! Parking on the side of the road is very dangerous, both for you and others driving along the winding scenic roads. Now, back to the breathing. Park your car in a safe place, walk a couple of hundred meters away from the car, sit down on a rock and breath. Take in the noise of nothing. Just you, chirping
birds and prickling fresh streams. Fill up your water bottle from the nearest stream and listen carefully, if lucky you might catch the sound of a spouting whale or the call of an arctic fox.

If you crave even less company than this, you could always climb a mountain. The mountains of the northern Westfjords are steep, tall and potentially dangerous – but follow a walking map and you can get to the high plateau safely. Once up there, you’ll probably not see anyone at all, and you will find the solitude your soul has been craving. No people, no birdsong, no traffic, no sheep. Just the whisper of the breeze (or the roar of the wind), and a wide summit of pebbles and small, hardy flowers and plants here and there. Just remember to breath!

With views stretching literally hundreds of kilometres, this is solitude. This is as close as humans get to being plugged into a battery charger.

**Produce**

The Westfjords were built up around fishing and the seafood industry, but the Westfjordians are also very proud of their lamb, some say it has a hint of ocean taste due to its pastures being so close to the sea. When visiting the Westfjords we highly recommend you enjoy some of our local products, and there is more to it than just fish and lamb.

The Westfjords are the home of two salt factories that use the 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 flavoured salt, liquorice, lava and birch salt as an example.

If you have a sweet tooth we give our highest recommendations to local chocolate made in the small village Súðavík. The mouth-watering Sætt og Salt chocolate with its mix of salt, locally picked berries and seeds is the perfect dessert. And not to forget our lactose free dairy products from Arna in Bolungavík. Multi flavoured yoghurt, skyr and greek yoghurt is perfect for breakfast, on the go or as a roadside dinners. The most recent addition to our local cuisine is the local brew from Dokkan brugghús in Ísafjörður, the Westfjords first local beer has finally joined the already extensive and delicious beer market in Iceland. Word on the street is that shortly we’ll have a local winery as well, with great plans of blueberry wine being made in Súðavík. We keep our fingers crossed, you prep your taste buds for one tasty tour around the Westfjords!
Events
We often say the Westfjords are a region for those willing to entertain themselves, but we actually have an abundance of events all over the region, all year around. Are you a music buff? Over Easter we have a musical melting pot of all genres Aldrei fór ég suður music festival in Ísafjörður, during summer we have the blues festival Blús milli fjalls og fjöru in Patreksfjörður and all year around we have concerts with a variety of musicians, so everyone should be able to find something to their liking. Are you more of a sporty type? Just as a little preview we have running, hiking and yoga events happening all throughout the year. But our biggest event would be Fossavatnsngangan cross country ski race in May, Iceland’s oldest and largest ski race with thousands of visitors joining us every year. Or do you fancy something a little bit more out there? The annual ram groping competition is held in Strandir every year, if you are not brave enough to compete you can always watch and join the festivities.

We highly recommend checking out the calendar on the Visit Westfjords website once you have set the travel dates of your Westfjords trip. See if there are some events that might tickle your pickle while here.

Travel on your own energy!
The Westfjords are a calm and quiet region where locals like to use their own energy to motor their travels, we highly encourage visitors to do the same, to embrace the stillness and sound of nothing. Some of the most popular activities in the Westfjords region are perfect for it; hiking, biking, kayaking and skiing are all fuelled by your own body and a perfect way to get around the region and experience the calmness of nature. Hiking paths are all over and with a good variety of difficulties, so everyone should find a fitting hike for them. Kayaking in the calm fjords can be a good way of getting a different view, but the peace and quiet can be interrupted by the seals and occasional whale swimming by. Cross-country skiing is the perfect way to get around in winter and an activity for the traveller willing to self-fuel his sightseeing tour around the valleys or high plateau on top of our mountains.

People and culture of the Westfjords
The Westfjords have a long history. The area was among the first settled by the Vikings in Iceland and there has been permanent settlement here ever since. Even the land is over 10 million years old; which by Icelandic standards is very ancient indeed. Westfjordians have been living off the bounty of the sea for hundreds of years. Long before other Icelanders left their farms and took up fishing, the people of the Westfjords had no other choice than to eat fish. Westfjordian men were farm labourers
in the summer and fishermen in the winter. Their open rowing boats were no match for winter storms and they drowned in disgusting numbers. The women were left to do almost everything else, often as widows.

The harshness of life out west, and the remoteness from the rest of the country, saved the population several times from volcanic ash and famine, as well as from some epidemics. The region’s fishing heritage and rich waters also made it a big initial winner when Iceland started trading openly with the outside world. The modern legacy left by grinding poverty and countless lives thrown cheaply to the sea, is a region with strong identity and a unique culture. The people of the Westfjords are deeply connected to the landscape and respectful of the dangers they live with.

Wealth and comfort came late to the Westfjords, so to this day the people don’t take it for granted. The people are worldly, well-travelled and welcoming, but they don’t view expensive holidays, big cars, or flat screen televisions as necessities.

The laidback quirky Westfjordians are great story tellers, the atmosphere of the region is quite contagious and travellers normally fall into to the easy rhythm of life pretty easily.

**REYKJANES TOP FIVE**

**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.

**Top 5 trending**

**Reykjanes Unesco Global Geopark**

A geopark is about sparking people's curiosity about the Earth by providing a variety of activities for them to participate in and hopefully teaching them to care for the Earth. 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 that makes up the peninsula 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. In many places, there are lava stacks that formed in fissure eruptions, when large volumes of lava flowed from craters in the faults. Eruptions in Reykjanes are rarely accompanied by ash except where the volcanic fissures opened underwater or in the sea. The Reykjanes Geopark visitor center is located in Duus culture center in Reykjanesbær.

**Sunset/ The Twilight of Reykjanes peninsula**

On the boundaries of the town of Garður lies the old lighthouse of Garðskagi. It has become the perfect spot to enjoy the sunset in the evening and even the northern lights.

**Hiking and exploring**

On the Reykjanes peninsula one can enjoy over 230 km of hiking trails, whether it is an easy and short walk into the lava fields or by the coast, or a more challenging hike in the mountains.
Local treats – Geofood
The Reykjanes peninsula is surrounded by the Atlantic Ocean and for centuries the fishing industry has shaped the culture of the region. Today the restaurants in the area enhance their history and the fish. Freshly caught by the local fishermen and prepared by the chefs you can enjoy the local specialties like the salted cod in Grindavík and crab fiest in Sandgerði.

The Icelandic music scene
Icelandic musicians have been making a good impression on the world and to honour them and other Icelandic musicians a museum has been opened. The Icelandic museum of Rock ‘n’ Roll opened in Reykjanesbaer in 2014. The exhibitions within the museum gives the guests an opportunity to see how the music scene has been developing for the last hundred years. What could be more appropriate than opening a museum in the town that often was called the Liverpool of Iceland by the locals.

NORTH ICELAND TOP FIVE

North Iceland is wast and is in total 35.785m², which equals to 1/3 of Iceland, including 28 towns and 36.530 inhabitants. The capital of the North is Akureyri. It serves as the service center for the area and from there day tours are operated in all directions. In Akureyri are 30 restaurants, various hotels, a professional theatre, an international airport and more. Lake Mývatn is one of the most visited destinations in Iceland and is only about 100 km away from Akureyri.

Let’s talk about winter, energy, magic, and tranquility.
The Northern Lights in the Arctic North is something you need to see. Travel through fjords and between the mountains down by the sea to catch the aurora. The likes of Hvítserkur sea cliff help you to catch wonderful pictures that include both nature and the aurora.

Waterfalls
We have some of the most beautiful waterfalls of Iceland. Dettifoss is the most powerful waterfall in Europe and is for example showcased in Ridley Scott's Prometheus. Godafoss, the waterfall of the gods, is a picturesque waterfall and its location plays a vital role in Iceland's history.
**Home of the Whales**

In Skjálfandi bay you'll find Húsavík, the capital of Whale Watching in Iceland. Eyjafjörður is the longest fjord in Iceland and in both places, you are highly likely to spot the whales. There are **Humpbacks** and even **Blue whales** just to mention a few. The Icelandic Whale Museum is in Húsavík and there you can see a skeleton of the **biggest animal that has lived on this earth**, the Blue whale.

**Winter wonderland**

Winter is an opportunity to explore the North in a new way. You can ski in ski areas, drop down from a helicopter or use big snowcats to get up the mountains and then ski down to the Arctic ocean. Note that there are no trees in the mountains, or at least way too few to mention. Snowmobiles are a fun way of exploring and snowshoe walking gives you the ability to go to places only "the Bigfoot" could enter before these things came around. Super Jeeps get you where you want to go with a hint of adrenaline while traveling. Dog sledding in the aurora connects you with nature in a way you just can’t describe.

**Soak in hot water, or beer!**

We have **fantastic local food** and spa-like facilities all around. The "musts“ include the famous **Nature Baths, The Beer Spa**, and the local swimming pools. The **Hofsós swimming pool** is known to be one of the world’s most beautiful spots to take a dip in, located on the cliffs of Skagafjörður. **Geothermal hot water** is in every town, so there usually is a warm swimming pool, jacuzzies, and saunas one can enter for around 5 pounds.

**Top 5 trending**

**GeoSea**

GEOSEA opened in 2018, offering access to unique natural baths and steam rooms in Húsavík North Iceland. The baths are filled with geothermal sea water creating a healthy, natural and unique experience complimented with a spectacular view. GEOSEA geothermal sea baths are situated on the edge of the Húsavík cliffs overlooking the Arctic Sea. Whales and various birds are a common sight in the bay and the mountains on the other side welcome you as you relax in the warm seawater.

**Biking**

Get yourself a good excercise by biking around the nature of North Iceland, taking in the fresh air and enjoying the views. Various companies now offer bikes for rent or fully guided tours for riders on all levels. The mountain bikes offered include e-bikes, full suspension, regular hardtails and even
fatbikes. Riders can go on paths through lava fields, rocky roads or stay on smooth singletracks in the mountains, or simply just enjoy a quick town tour.

Whitewater rafting
Enjoy the excitement of whitewater river rafting in Skagafjörður, in Vestari-Jökulsá, (West Glacial River) or Austari-Jökulsá, (East Glacial River) which has earned the reputation of being one of the most exciting rivers in Europe. Besides the excitement of white water river rafting there are more relaxed family tours on offer in Vestari-Jökulsá (West Glacial River).

Lake Mývatn
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, which averages a depth of only 2.5m. The lake contains over 50 islands and islets, mostly pseudocraters formed when molten lava flowed into the lake. Places of interest include the pseudocraters at Skútustaðir, Höfði peninsula, Dimmuborgir lava formations, Hverfell Crater, Hverir hotspring area, Krafla volcanic area and Mývatn Nature Baths. The area is also considered one of the best bird watching places in Iceland during the summer months.

Culture and art
Learn all about the Icelandic culture by visiting the numerous museums, art and handcraft galleries and exhibitions in North Iceland. In the summer of 2018 the Art Museum in Akureyri was renovated and expanded, making it one of the biggest in Iceland. Located in the heart of the towncenter, it is a good place to experience the art in North Iceland and afterwards you can enjoy a cup of coffee in a brand new café.

WEST ICELAND

TOP FIVE

Snaefellsnes Peninsula; “Iceland in a Nutshell”
This 90- km long peninsula comprises a world of diversity. Friendly towns and villages, spectacular mountains, a multitude of bird species nesting on treacherous cliffs, beaches of sand and pebbles popular among horsemen and rock skimmers, remnants and relics scattered here and there of times and ways of life long past. Saga sites and hiking trails. The Snaefellsjokull National Park is at the
westernmost part of the peninsula, including the mystical glacier Snaefellsjokull, as well as other unique sites. In 2008, the communities of Snaefellsnes Peninsula were the first in Europe to receive certification from Green Globe, an international benchmarking system for sustainable travel and tourism.

**Glymur Waterfall**

Iceland’s second tallest waterfall at roughly 198 m / 649 ft high is located in Hvalfjordur and not visible from the road. Until 2007, Glymur was the tallest waterfall in Iceland and some people still talk about it being the tallest one, since the newly discovered one hasn’t gained any popularity yet. Leading up to it is a good hiking path but should only be attempted by those not daunted by heights or challenging hikes. Standing by Glymur you’ll have a good view of the surrounding landscape, which is both jaw-dropping and breath-taking. The adventurous hike, approx. 4 hours roundtrip will take you from the trailhead at Botnsa river through spectacular scenery including a rock arch, a cave and will have you crossing a crystal-clear river on a strategically placed log.

**Flatey Island; “Frozen in Time”**

In a charming way, Flatey Island feels very much like a movie set. And it is. Many movies are set on the island, most notably The Honour of the House based on a short story by Nobel Prize winner Halldór Laxness, and White Night Wedding, a movie by Baltasar Kormakur. In fact, Baltasar’s father painted the unusual altar piece in the island’s church, making it worthy of a visit. During the summer, a ferry goes to Flatey twice a day from Stykkisholmur and Brjanslaekur. Please note that no cars are allowed on the island. Beautifully kept old houses in cheerful colours line the dusty path through the settlement of Flatey. Walk through it, and at the end of the settlement, the path becomes even narrower and more crooked, taking you through a dense population of birds, consisting mainly of Arctic terns. Visiting Flatey is a relaxing experience, everything is quiet and even the sheep on the island move slower than their friends on-land. Two families stay on the island throughout the winter, but many more migrate during the summer, mainly for leisure but also to serve visitors. We suggest combining your visit to Flatey with a tour of Snaefellsnes or the Westfjords.

**Into the Glacier**

Into the Glacier offers various tours to Iceland’s most significant new attraction, the man-made ice cave. The ice tunnel and caves are located high on Iceland’s second largest glacier, Langjokull. You will get an amazing opportunity to explore the glacier and see it from the inside. This is a once-in-a-lifetime experience where you will be taken to the hidden beautiful ice.
Hraunfossar; “Lava Falls”

Hraunfossar waterfalls or “Lava Falls”, are a very picturesque, beautiful and an unusual natural phenomenon, formed in an eruption, approx. 900 AD and have been protected since 1987. Clear, cold springs of subterranean water seep through the lava of Hallmundarhraun and run as countless cascading waterfalls and rapids into the glacial Hvita River. There’s a certain magical sense to seeing the turquoise water appear from under the rough lava field as if it’s appearing out of thin air. There is an easy-access viewpoint at the car park offering an amazing view over the waterfalls and a coffee shop on the grounds is open during the summer months.

Top 5 trending

Ride the Icelandic Horse in the Land of the Sagas

The Icelandic horse is a favourite of many and known around the world for its five gates and as an excellent steed. West Iceland has a large selection of riding tours whether you are an experienced rider or a beginner. These friendly creatures with their willing nature are a pleasure to ride in their natural environment. You can ride for example with Ashestar in the beautiful surroundings along the banks of Hvita River. Another option is going riding in the mountains or on Iceland’s most beautiful horse-riding area, Longufjorur, golden sandy beach. Go for a riding tour and enjoy nature at the same time. You can always visit Sturlureykir Visiting HorseFarm, meet the horses in person and take a selfie with their friendly horses. One thing is for certain, you will be mesmerized by this unique, charismatic horse that was brought here by the Vikings and is still Iceland’s only horse breed.

Explore Lava Caves

Experience the opportunity to explore two of Iceland’s unique lava caves, a perfect all-year activity. In 2018, West Iceland was awarded the Winter Destination of the Year, which puts an even more emphasis on visiting the region!

Vidgelmir is a lava tube located in the lava field Hallmundarhraun, near the farm Fljotstunga in Borgarfjordur. Also, in Hallmundarhraun are the famous Hraunfossar (Lava Falls) which were formed in the same eruption, approx. 900 AD. Vidgelmir is about 1600 m / 5250 ft long and as high as 16 m / 52,5 ft making it the largest of its kind in Iceland. The Cave is a family owned business, offering tours of Vidgelmir year-round.

Exploring Vatnshellir cave is truly amazing and unforgettable experience. This 8000-year-old lava tube reaches over 200 m / 656 ft and goes 35 m /115 ft below the surface. Summit Adventure Guides
will take you on a journey to the center of the earth, in one of the most easily accessible caves in Iceland. Be aware that you are walking up and down a 2-3 story building!

Visit Geothermal Baths
If you want to embark on a journey to explore every natural pool or hot spring in Iceland, you might as well consider moving to Iceland, since it will probably take a lifetime to find them all. Some are even family secrets and are kept secret for generations. Iceland has an abundance of easily accessible natural pools and of course, geothermal spas. Whether you want to pamper yourself at a spa, sipping on a glass of wine or be alone in nature, basking in the waters of a natural pool; West Iceland has it all. Experience nature from its core by visiting Krauma geothermal baths & spa. The hot water of Krauma originates from Europe’s most powerful hot spring, Deildartunguhver. Mixed with water from the small glacier, Ok, the baths are at a comfortable temperature, a perfect way to rewind after a day of traveling.

Gudrunarlaug – natural pool or “The Pool of Gudrun” is located by Laugar in Saelingsdalur valley, in the region Dalir. The pool is mentioned in Sturlunga saga and it seems to have been used a great deal. The pool is named after Gudrun Osvifursdottir, one of the heroines of the Icelandic Sagas. Gudrunarlaug is one of West Iceland’s “hidden gems” and unlike many natural geothermal pools, there is a small turf house, overlooking the pool, where guests can change into their swimwear. A VERY Instagram-friendly environment *hint*hint*. Remember to hashtag us at #visitwesticeland or #westiceland!

Hike Craters & Lava Fields
The crater Saxhóll is located in Snaefellsjokull National Park, formed about 4000 years ago. Saxhóll is one of the most popular craters on the Snaefellsnes Peninsula and is a fantastic hike, not so strenuous and fits most fitness levels. The crater is approx. 100 m / 328 ft high and probably one of the most accessible places in Iceland to see a crater and its surrounding lava field, with a panorama viewing dial at the top. Recently, the staircase up the crater was nominated for the Rosa Barba Landscape Architecture International Prize.

The majestic Londrangar are two rock formations, just east of Malarrif at the southern edge of Snaefellnes Peninsula. From Svalthufa hill you can take an easy (but careful) walk along the seabird cliff down to the Londrangar pillars. The hike back and forth is only about an hour, so a perfect way to stretch your legs, and breathe in the fresh ocean air. Once a week during the summer, the park rangers offer guests a guided walk to explore the life of the cliff.
Grabrok crater was formed about 3000 years ago and is 170 m / 560 ft high and can be ascended by a marked trail from the Ring road and offers beautiful views from the top over Borgarfjordur and the beautiful lake Hredavatn, which was formed in that eruption. This hike has been popular among Icelanders for decades, due to its proximity to the Ring Road.

Erpsstadir Dairy Farm
Erpsstaðir (The place of Erpur), is run by farmer Thorgrimur and his family. Erpsstadir is best known for their artisan ice cream but they also produce a range of small-batch dairy products, such as skyr, blue cheese, Greek cheese, and their unique confectionary chocolate “skyr-konfekt” (shaped like an udder), which the "Cream Shop" at Erpsstadir produces. All the milk for the production is from the cows on the farm. For other ingredients the family strives to use local, seasonal flavours whenever possible, such as rhubarb, dandelion honey, blueberries and bilberries from the Westfjords. The family at Erpsstadir is pleased to offer visitors the chance to take a closer look at the world of milk production by seeing and learning the different shapes the milk can take. Here you can experience a real Icelandic farm, meet the cows in person and buy homemade products made with love.

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.

Top 5 trending

Amazing ice caves
Ice caves are amazing wonders of nature, hiding under the glaciers. If you are into photography or just interested in exploring adventures things in Iceland, you should book an ice cave tour in South Iceland.

Stokkseyri / Eyrarbakki / Ölfus - Þorlákshöfn
Stokkseyri, pop. 497, is renowned for its beautiful seashore, breaking waves and birdlife. Rich handicraft and cultural life is held in high esteem in Stokkseyri. Workshops and galleries, a Ghost Center and the Elves, and Northern Lights Museum are all situated in a Cultural Center - an old fish processing factory that has found a new role due to changes in the fishing industry. The Wildlife Museum is dedicated to hunting and wildlife, it contains a large number of mammals and birds, and the bunkhouse Þuríðarbúð shows an excellent example of how fishermen had to make use of what nature provided. Stokkseyri also offers a splendid seafood restaurant, an outdoor swimming pool, kayak sailing tours and a campsite

Eyrarbakki, pop 526, is a friendly village that, in earlier times, used to be the largest commercial community and the main harbor on the South Coast of Iceland. A large number of preserved houses
from the period 1890-1920 are situated in Eyrarbakki and therefore a visit is like reveriting a 100 years back in time. Other popular tourist attractions are The Eyrabakka Martime Museum and the Árnessýsla Folk Museum, located at legendary “The House” in Eyrarbakki, built in 1765. A fine campsite, hostel, guesthouses and restaurant, are also in Eyrarbakki. On the rocky shoreline you can witness an amazing view of the Atlantic Ocean, as well as watching the surf break. It is an ideal spot for hiking and bird watching. The Flói Bird Reserve lies northwest of Eyrabakki. It is an important nesting area, especially for wetland birds and is listed in The Bird Life International Association.

Ölfus municipality is located on the south west coast of Iceland, approx. 50 km from Reykjavík capital. The population is slightly over 2000 inhabitants and is growing. The fishing village Thorlákshöfn is the largest in the municipality with approx. 1600 inhabitants.

Ölfus offers a wide range of beautiful landscapes with black sand beaches, cliffs, lava formations, caves, geothermal areas and vivid hot springs. From Thorlákshöfn village and all over the municipality you have sensational panoramic views over most of the south coast e.g. over the volcanoes Mt. Hekla and Eyjafjallajökull and to the Westman Islands. In Thorlákshöfn you can find the best surfing spot in Iceland. For beginners the black sand beach is perfect and for advanced surfers the waves by the lighthouse are superb. Ölfus municipality is a popular viewing point for the Northern Lights in the south due to little to no light pollution. The tourist information centre is located in the library in Thorlákshöfn and is open from 12:30 to 17:30 on weekdays. The campsite in Thorlákshöfn is situated next to the church, behind the swimming pool.

Þjórsárdalur

Þjórsárdalur valley contains amazing natural and cultural attractions. The valley is rather flat and has much pumice, due to volcanic eruptions from Hekla. In Þjórsárdalur valley, one of the hidden treasure of Iceland, the breathtaking place Gjáin can be found. When visiting Þjórsárdalur, one should not miss the magnificent waterfalls, Háifoss and Hjálparfoss.

Þjóðveldisbærinn is a reconstructed farm based on the excavated farmhouse Stöng from the commonwealth era in Iceland. It gives you the opportunity to study the buildings of our ancestors and learn about their background and daily life.
**Katla Geopark**

Katla Geopark is Iceland’s first geopark and it opens up a natural wonderland to the visitors. The Geopark got its name from one of its most known volcanoes, Katla which is under the glacier Mýrdalsjökull.

Katla Geopark is in every sense the land of ice and fire, with its towering glaciers and active volcanoes. These forces have been shaping the land for thousands of years and the nearest examples of that are the powerful eruptions in Eyjafjallajökull 2010 and Grímsvötn 2011. But there is also more amazing landscapes in the area, mountains, lakes, black sandy beaches, green pastures and meadows, powerful glacial rivers, beautiful waterfalls and vast lava fields.

These versatile landscapes makes various activities and adventures possible as ice climbing and glacier walking, hiking, caving, horse-riding, sight seeing, angling, jeep safaris and golf. The area is accessible all year round where each season has its own magical charm.

**Caves**

For spelunkers and potholers, Iceland has scores of caves, large and small, deep and shallow, to be explored. Some caves may be explored without a guide and many agencies offer cave exploration tours for others. Here are a few of many caves in South Iceland:

**Raufarhólshellir** is a lava cave and is the fourth longest cave in Iceland.

**Gjábakkahellir** lava cave has breathtaking sights with its many beautiful lava formations and ice sculptures. The cave is located near Þingvellir National park.

Steinahellir is a cave 36 km east from Hvolsvöllur under Eyjafjall just off the National Road #1 by the Bay of Holtsós. It is thought to be a natural cave that was later enlarged by man to make it more habitable. An outstanding feature of the cave is the grass that grows on the ceiling. The cave was used as an assembly place for local parliamentarians from 1820 to 1902. Old photographs show a wooden wall was once built inside the cave.
REYKJAVÍK

TOP 5

Reykjavik Museums & Galleries
Experience the history of Reykjavik in a lively and engaging way at the Reykjavik City Museum and Reykjavik Art Museum, which is Iceland’s largest network of art museums and displays both modern and contemporary art, paintings, sculptures and works in different media by established local and international artists. Visit as well one of our wonderful galleries and museums and connect with our culture on a deeper level. It will greatly transform your escapades to the countryside too, where those gorgeous green valleys and magnificent mountains become more than just beauty spots on the pretty face of Iceland, but places of legendary events and fascinating folklore.

Viðey Island
Apart from its ancient ruins and rich historical background, other attractions include impressive works of art by Yoko Ono (the Imagine Peace Tower) and Richard Serra (the Milestones project). With an extensive network of trails and a population of various bird species, the island can be explored both on foot and bicycle. No matter which path you take, you’ll be rewarded with spectacular views of the surrounding mainland, and to the west you’ll be able to see the impressive outline of the Snæfellsnes peninsula.

Whale Watching
The ocean around Iceland is a natural habitat for many different types of whales. Commonly sighted on whale-watching tours from Reykjavik are Minke whales, White-beaked dolphins, harbour porpoises and Humpback whales. Don’t miss out on an unforgettable experience with up close encounter with some of the world’s largest and magnificent animals.

Downtown Reykjavik
Downtown Reykjavik has an astounding variety of restaurants offering both traditional and international cuisine cooked using the finest ingredients. The pride of Icelandic cuisine is the fresh fish and the delicious lamb, which we cheerfully claim to be one of the best in the world. For the best shopping experience in Reykjavik we recommend you hit the downtown area of the city which is where most of the shops and boutiques are concentrated. A wander around the city’s famous shopping streets of Laugavegur and Skólavörðustígur will lead you to some gorgeous little boutiques and charming shops where you’re sure to discover fashion treasures ranging from the ultra-modern and concept-driven to vintage classics from the golden era. Stay up late and make your way down to the
impressive Sólfar, Sun Ship, sculpture by the waterfront in Reykjavik to watch one of the best nature shows on Earth – a sunset over Reykjavik.

Mt. Esja
Dominating dramatically the Reykjavik city skyline and providing a stunning backdrop to the capital area is the impressive Mount Esja, a popular destination for day-trippers and riddled with well-worn hiking trails. Once surmounted, the view from the top of this 914 metre high mountain is breath-taking. Approximately 200 from the top, there's a point marked with a big rock called "Steinn". Most inexperienced climbers choose to stop here and take in the view before going down again, as the path becomes increasingly difficult from there on. If you do get to the top, don't forget to sign the guestbook.

Top 5 trending

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, Hallgrímur 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 Reykjavik's best kept secrets is Mt. Úlfarsfell, which is a small mountain, around 296 meters high, located south of Mosfellsbær, one of Reykjavík'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 Reykavík 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

Pure Food
Gastronomic experiences are plentiful in Austurland, provided by internationally renowned chefs or by quality conscious cooks who represent the local food culture. The fact is that you can dine at some of Iceland’s finest restaurants situated here, serving innovative and unique local delicacies.

The food culture of Austurland is authentic and constantly developing, benefitting from the access to fresh raw ingredients from the coastal climate that owe their quality and flavor to nature itself. Austurland prides itself on its culinary culture and the freshness of its ingredients. Food comes directly from the sea, farm or the field, and straight to the table. As we like to say to ourselves, “we want to know where the food comes from”, and we’d like our guests to know it as well.

World Class Coastal Drive
The East Fjords of Austurland. Where shall we start? The coastal drive in Austurland is densely strewn with magnificent viewpoints, and it seems like a surprise is waiting for you each time you turn a corner. Everything in life just seems instantly “Instagrammable”. Plus the villages in each ford, snuggled between mountains and sea, remind you that the trappings of modern life have yet to reach this unspoilt, barren outpost of the world. And we think it’s all the better for it.

Vibrant Culture
Creative people and entrepreneurs bloom in Austurland. Broadmindedness and offbeat understanding and all sorts of people living together in harmony in a happy melding pot. Visit some of the vibrant
towns of Austurland where you have art galleries, outdoor sculptures and recharge your batteries and get creative energy from the mountains.

**Close Encounter**
You have not been to paradise before you meet the puffins up close and personal. Borgarfördur eystri offers one of the best staircases and viewing platforms to view the cute clumsy creatures. Enjoy midnight sun viewing with the friendly puffin and listen to the bird calls. The nature and its wildlife is always present in Austurland. Explore the dramatic coastline and hike over dappled green hills, and without much hassle you will venture into some of Iceland’s most remote wildernesses.

**Wild Wild East**
They say you can’t travel back in time, but you can experience the spirit of a bygone age in Austurland. For all the things going on in the world, in Austurland you can find places of relaxation, peace, and timelessness, on the edge of the biggest wilderness in northern Europe. Spend your days riding and trekking, and the nights cocooned in history; you will feel refreshed in a totally new way.

**Top 5 Trending**

**Hiking Treasures**
“Hiking treasures in Egilsstaðir region” is the name chosen for 28 carefully selected walking trails and treasured destinations in the municipalities of Fljótsdalshérað and Fljótsdalsherppur. The premises of the area covers about 10% of Iceland. The destinations are waterfalls, lakes, creeks, canyons, small caves and inlets by the sea side. Yet, most of the trails include mountain tracks and peaks with a great view.

**Go Green in Austurland**
Vallanes is known for its pioneering role in Iceland in re-introducing barley for human consumption when Eymundur Magnússon started organic farming in 1985. Together with his wife, Eygló Björk Ólafsdóttir, they focus on growing grains and vegetables, and on producing specialty food products made from local, Icelandic ingredients. Just try the hearty breakfasts, including barley pancakes and homemade rhubarb jam and let Green Austurland take you by surprise!
July is the Mother of Music Festivals!
The music and the art you’ll witness in an instantly “Instagrammable” setting like Austurland becomes an experience you will never forget.

If you want to feel alive come by in July we have EISTNAFLUG in Neskaupstaður, “The World’s Friendliest Heavy Metal Festival”, starting out as a labour of love in 2005, paying performers in gas money and beer. Now it has hosted international acts and is staple festival every summer in Iceland.

Then we have LUNGA in Seyðisfjörður, the art capital of Austurland. This festival is one of a kind and it is fantastic to see young people gather around artistic practices. LungA has had a lot of impact on the village and has added greatly to the already blossoming art life of Seyðisfjörður.

BRÆÐSLAN IN BORGARFJÖRÐUR EYSTRI! In an old fish factory, this miniscule village’s population multiplies many times over the last weekend in July every year with the biggest music festival in Austurland. Even if not everyone gets tickets to the main event, people camp out, meet and have fun. The festival is a popular scene for reunions and the surroundings are ideal for hiking.

Puffins – Up Close and Personal
You have not been to paradise before you meet the puffins up close and personal. Borgarförður eystri offers one of the best staircases and viewing platforms to view the cute clumsy creatures. Enjoy the midnight sun viewing with the friendly puffin and listen to the bird calls. The nature and its wildlife is always present in Austurland.

Tranquility
Austurland offers nearly unlimited opportunities to interact with and get close to dramatic nature. In fact, you can stay in the very middle of it. The unspoiled nature makes you forget about the time constraints of everyday life, enjoy the serenity, and rejuvenate in a sophisticated yet familiar environment. Imagine the mind calming sound of the river whistling outside. It is an experience all year around. Enjoy northern lights and scenic panoramic view of the surrounding mountain ring. Who knows? You might even spot a reindeer or two!

More information:
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