



ICELANDIC ADVENTURES

The Nordic country offers plenty of opportunities for scenic exploration, finds **Alice Barnes-Brown**

Epic experiences in the Land of Fire and Ice aren't hard to come by. In Iceland's volcanic interior, hiking opportunities abound – whether clients prefer a gentle wander behind waterfalls or a 35-mile trek through the remote landscapes of Laugavegur – while the coast is prime territory for whale watching and aurora sighting.

Iceland's star has been rising rapidly in recent years, with Keflavik airport reporting in January that it was expecting a bumper 8.5 million arrivals in 2024 – meaning spots that would once have seen barely a soul are now bustling tourist

destinations. That's particularly true in summer, when natural wonders such as the spouting Geysir and the black basalt beach at Reynisfjara are seeing more visitors than ever.

Yet thanks to Iceland's challenging geography and sparse population, there are still plenty of places where adventurous clients can get off the beaten track and experience the subarctic island's wilder side.

Operators are responding by building Icelandic itineraries that go beyond the traditional tourist trail – here's our pick of trips for clients with a burning desire to explore an often otherworldly great outdoors.



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GOLDEN CIRCLE

Iceland's most iconic route, the Golden Circle, takes in unique geothermal and geological features, such as Geysir – which gave its name to hot water spouts around the world – and the section of the Atlantic ridge known as Thingvellir, where the first Icelandic parliament was held in 930AD, making it the oldest in the world. The 200-mile route can be completed in a day from capital Reykjavik on a self-drive trip.

WESTFJORDS

The Westfjords area, north of Reykjavik, is an even more rugged road romp, with geothermal hot springs and waterfalls. It's generally best explored in warmer weather, as roads can get icy.

For a relaxed ride through the Westfjords' highlights, new trade-friendly tour operator Iceland Travel has devised a cool self-drive trip that departs from Reykjavik and weaves its way between untouched fjords, where the only sound is the wind or the seabirds soaring overhead. One of the first stops is the Latrabjarg cliffs, Iceland's largest seabird colony, where millions of razorbills, kittiwakes, guillemots and puffins build their nests on the 440-metre-high rock face that looks out over the Atlantic. Other stops include the wedding-cake-like Dynjandi waterfall (pictured, below) and the Martian red-sand beach at Raudasandur.

BOOK IT: Iceland Travel offers the six-night Spectacular West itinerary from £1,900, including B&B accommodation, car hire, in-car Wi-Fi and 24-hour support, but excluding flights. Based on a September departure. icelandtravel.is

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REYJKANES PENINSULA

Also within a single day's drive from Reykjavik is the Reykjanes peninsula, defined by its craggy lava field landscape, fishing villages and 55 'geosites'. These demonstrate the sheer power of nature, from sulphur springs to active volcanoes, though recent volcanic eruptions have seen visitor numbers dip. It's also home to the Blue Lagoon (pictured, above) – a warm, milky aquamarine mineral pool that's a popular tourist spot.

EASTERN ICELAND

Though eastern Iceland has fewer sulphur springs than the Reykjanes area, it does give the Blue Lagoon a run for its money with the Myvatn Nature Baths, a natural geothermal pool where hot water is drawn up from 2,500 metres below ground.

G Adventures' Trekking Eastern Iceland tour is a great way for active clients to explore the isolated region. There are at least three full days of trekking on the six-day itinerary, covering a total distance of about 36 miles. Clients will see the steaming lava fields of Leirhnjúkur and have a soak at Myvatn lake (pictured, below) on one of the days and wander to canyons, puffin colonies and black-sand beaches near Brunavik on another.

Based in the fishing village of Borgarfjörður, clients will also gain a real insight into Icelandic culture, eating at fish restaurants, sharing home-cooked dinners and enjoying stories from the hosts about the area's legendary population of elves.

BOOK IT: G Adventures' Trekking Eastern Iceland is priced from £1,699, including B&B accommodation, most meals and local transport; flights excluded. Based on an August 25 departure. gadventures.com

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VATNAJOKULL

The largest glacier in Europe, Vatnajokull (pictured, above) covers an area of 3,000 square miles – a little larger than Devon – located within a national park that covers 14% of Iceland. For those who have setting foot on a glacier on their bucket list, it's a must, and clients can tick it off at any time of the year. Guides provide the necessary equipment, such as helmets and ice-picks.

SOLHEIMAJOKULL

Within easy reach of Iceland's south coast, the Sólheimajokull glacier (pictured, below) is a beginner-friendly alternative to the vast Vatnajokull. Regent Holidays' Iceland Mountains and Glaciers Adventure itinerary makes it easy to get to as it takes guests to the crinkled blue-and-white ice cap by coach before a 90-minute hike to the glacier's melting mouth.

The next day, a specially modified vehicle drives travellers up to the Langjokull glacier, where the main attraction is not above ground, but rather involves delving 300 metres into the heart of the glacier to explore a man-made cave carved out of the blue ice – complete with pew-like benches to take a breather on.

However, glaciers aren't the only spectacular sight on this five-day trip: there's also an aurora-hunting coach excursion out of Reykjavik and a chance to drive a quad bike as part of a daring convoy that climbs to the summit of mount Feslarfall.

BOOK IT: Regent Holidays sells the four-night holiday from £1,545, including B&B accommodation, flights, transfers and all listed excursions. Price based on a November 1 departure. regent-holidays.co.uk

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