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Arctic Coast Way
Norðurstrandarleið

Arctic Coast Way

Traveling the Arctic Coast Way means leaving the common routes behind and going off the beaten track to discover some of the remotest places in Iceland, a unique adventure following 900 km of coastal roads close to the Arctic Circle.

Here, where volcanic land meets the icy ocean, nature's force has carved a coastline of wild and pure beauty. The route includes six peninsulas reaching far out into the sea, taking you from black sandy beaches to spectacular cliffs, along glacial river deltas and fjords to high mountains. Going one step further into remoteness by visiting some of the six beautiful islands off the north coast offers unforgettable experiences, and you might even want to straddle the Arctic Circle on Grimsey island. Each of the 21 little villages along the way tells unique stories about life on the edge of the Arctic.

DIAMOND CIRCLE

The Diamond Circle is a magnificent circuit of 250km in North Iceland, including some of the most stunning sights and spots of mystical landscapes. The Diamond Circle has five key destinations, which include the historical and picturesque Goðafoss waterfall; the breathtaking blue and green landscapes of the Lake Mývatn nature paradise; the uncontrollable white energy of Dettifoss, Europe's most powerful waterfall; the crescent-shaped wonder of Ásbyrgi canyon; and Húsavík the buzzing whale capital of Iceland with deep blue seas ahead.

Diamond Circle

The Diamond Circle offers a variety of activities and attractions. Discover the stunning valley of Vesturdalur with the bizarre rock formations of Hljóðaklettur, the otherworldly volcanic fields of Krafla, the geothermal area of Hverir, the black lava formations at Dimmuborgir or the beautiful Tjörnes peninsula with its hidden trove of fossils and bird nests.

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Northern Lights

The Northern Lights – also called Aurora Borealis – are among the most spectacular shows on earth, frequently seen in North Iceland and its surroundings on clear and crisp nights. The Northern Lights can be seen in North Iceland from late August to mid-April. Enjoy the clear skies by simply looking upwards towards those colorful dancing and flickering veils of light. Or go on a guided Northern Lights tour, taking you to excellent locations for observation and photography. These tours often include visiting geothermal bathing areas, evening boat tours, snowcat tours, or sightseeing in unique places. The chances of seeing the Northern Lights are 90% during a five-night stay in North Iceland.

During summer, in June and July, when we have endless days, you can see the sun go down and then rise again in a matter of minutes. It is a genuine Arctic experience to witness this, especially recommended along the Arctic Coast Way, where visitors can see the sun setting on the horizon over the sea. Bright nights last from the first week of May until mid-August. In contrast, the days get shorter during winter. The shortest day is between 20-23rd of December, with a little over 3 hours of daylight.

Midnight Sun

Whale watching is one of the most popular activities among visitors in North Iceland. The number of species and favorable weather and sea conditions make North Iceland one of the best areas to spot whales. Skjálfandi is a sheltered bay, and Eyjafjörður is the longest fjord in Iceland, both offering perfect locations for a boat ride all year long, surrounded by birds and beautiful scenery. The experience is completed by spotting dolphins and minke, humpback, or even blue whales play beside the particularly appealing oakwood boats used exclusively in North Iceland. A RIB safari tour is ideal for those who choose closer proximity to the whales, and specially designed whale watching boats are also available. Sailing in an electric-powered schooner looking out for the giant humpback whales is also a unique experience. At the Húsavík Whale Museum, a 24 m long skeleton of the biggest mammal on earth, the Blue Whale is on display.

Whale Watching

Culture and Heritage

North Iceland is crisscrossed by traces and sites of its turbulent history and the Icelandic sagas. Storytelling has been essential in Iceland since the settlement, and there is hardly a waterfall, a mountain, or a lava field that is not linked to sagas, stories, and legends. Multiple museums showcase different aspects of life in Iceland, from Viking sagas to the golden era of herring fishing in the previous century. Visitors can discover how Icelanders lived in turf houses and learn about their crafts and designs, made from wool or other locally sourced materials.

Art has a massive presence in the area, and you can choose between visiting the artists in their studios or viewing more prominent art galleries and exhibitions. Akureyri boasts one of Iceland's most vibrant music scenes, attracting local people and visitors into town each weekend.

Local food

Local products of North Iceland reflect their natural origin, the climate, the soil, the water, and the environment in which they grow. They stand for purity and freshness, demonstrate the diversity of producers, and tell others about the local food culture, heritage, and methods developed over centuries.

Whether in a fantastic contemporary restaurant or farm accommodation in the countryside, you will consume freshly landed fish within hours of its catch and the meat of lambs that spent long summer days free-roaming in a natural environment. There will be arctic moss, herbs, berries, and mushrooms foraged in mountains and valleys as well as auk from the sealiffs at the Arctic's edge and volcano bread – baked overnight, buried in bubbling black sand heated by a hot spring.

Geothermal baths

Icelanders love visiting outdoor swimming pools, and at least one is found in every village. Soaking in an outdoor hot pool after a day spent skiing or hiking is a magical experience. The Mývatn Nature Baths are surrounded by volcanic nature and the lava fields of the Mývatn district. In Húsavík, you can unwind in hot seawater at GeoSea geothermal sea baths. While the warm sea works its miracles, you can enjoy views of the mountain range to the west and Skjálfandi Bay beneath the cliffs, close to the Arctic Circle. In the Beer Spa in Árskógssandur, visitors bathe in both young beer and live beer yeast. If not showered off until some hours later, it has a potent effect on the body and skin. This treatment cleans the skin and has a highly positive impact on one's health. The newest addition is the Forest Lagoon, open from spring 2022 near Akureyri town.

Accommodation

Every one should find accommodation and services to suit them in North Iceland. Travelers will find many fine hotels with a wide range of prices and quality to match various needs. B&B's and guesthouses are all-pervasive, and many of them are privately run. They are generally smaller and more intimate than hotels. Cottages and apartments are convenient for families and groups of friends travelling together, who prefer to do their own cooking and want more privacy. Hostels are also available. Those who wish to disconnect from the busy city life might want to try staying at farms, getting to know the quiet farm life a little better. For those who want to connect with nature, camping grounds are available throughout North Iceland.

Guided hiking tours are offered widely in North Iceland, from accessible family tours to more advanced ones. Accessible trails can be found on northiceland.is. Various biking tours are also on offer.

Activities

Seal watching is an exciting option for those who want to connect with nature. Seals can be found along the Arctic Coast Way, especially around the Vatnsnes peninsula.

The Icelandic Horse is a unique breed, with five gaits instead of the usual four. Horses can be seen performing in horse shows, or you can enjoy both short and long riding tours.

Towns and villages

In North Iceland, you can visit 27 charming towns and villages, most of them small with only a few hundred up to a few thousands of people living there. Akureyri is the capital of North Iceland. Each village has its characteristics though they all prove hospitable hosts. Whereas agriculture is the mainstay of rural areas, the towns depend upon tourism, fishing, industry, trade, and services. The availability of food and accommodation and the possibilities at every location for recreation and entertainment make traveling between the villages informative and fun. In every case, the residents are lively and ready to welcome visitors.

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1 Hvitserkur

A 15 m high monolith just offshore on the eastern side of Vatnsnes peninsula. Many bird species live on the rock and leave their mark, which is evident in the whiteness of their droppings. Nearby Hvitserkur, you can find excellent locations to spot seals, relaxing on black sand beaches.



2 Kolugljúfur

In Viðidalur valley, the river Viðidalsá flows by the farm Kolugli down into a magnificent gorge, Kolugljúfur. The powerful waterfalls the gorge creates, Kolufossar, are named after the Troll-woman Kola.



3 Prístapar

Pristapar is a historic site, where the last execution of a convicted felon took place in 1830. Agnes Magnúsdóttir and Friðrik Sigurðsson were sentenced to death for two murders, and their story and the story of this execution is told on signs and monuments on the site.



4 Kálfsamarsvík

Kálfsamarsvík is a small cove in the northern part of Skagi peninsula, with unusual, beautifully formed sea cliffs of columnar rock, created about 2 million years ago. At the beginning of the 20th century, fishing boats plied the waters and there was a small community of about 100 inhabitants at Kálfsamarsvík. However, by around 1940 the village had become deserted.



5 Drangey

This rocky island in Skagafjörður is a flat topped mass of tuff, rising almost 200 metres out of the ocean. The cliffs serve as nesting sites for millions of sea birds and have been used throughout Iceland's history for egg collection and bird netting. Guided boat tours are available to Drangey from Sauðárkrúkur.



6 Grímsey and Hrísey islands

Grímsey is the northernmost inhabited island of Iceland and lies on the Arctic Circle, while Hrísey is in the middle of Eyjafjörður fjord. On each island, the population is tiny but there are millions of birds. Find puffins in Grímsey and the ptarmigan in Hrísey, and many more species. Flights to Grímsey are available from Akureyri, and the Grímsey ferry sails from Dalvík. The ferry to Hrísey sails from Árskógssandur every two hours, and the trip only takes 15 minutes.



7 Godafoss

The "Waterfall of the Gods" is in the glacial river Skjálfandfjót, just off the Ring Road by Fosshóll. The name of the waterfall refers to an incident in one of the Icelandic Sagas where Þorgeir the Lawspeaker threw his symbolic likenesses of the old Nordic gods into the waterfall.



8 Aldeyjarfoss

In upper Bárðardalur valley, in the glacial river Skjálfandfjót, one of Iceland's most photogenic waterfalls flows over a layer of intriguing basalt columns.



9 Lake Mývatn

In the Lake Mývatn region, located on the Mid-Atlantic Ridge, the most exciting sights are of a volcanic or geothermal nature, the centerpiece being the 37 km² lake Mývatn itself. Places of interest include the pseudocraters at Skútustaðir, Höfði peninsula, Dimmuborgir lava formations, Hverfell crater, Hverfi hot spring area, Krafla volcanic area, and Mývatn Nature Baths. The site is also considered to be one of the best bird-watching locations in Iceland.



10 Dettifoss in Jökulsárgljúfur

Dettifoss has the greatest volume of any waterfall in Europe, 500 cubic metres of water per second plunging over its edge. Dettifoss is 45 m high and 100 m wide. A pleasant hiking trail, 34 km in length, winds along the canyon from Dettifoss to Ásbyrgi.



11 Ásbyrgi

Ásbyrgi is a densely wooded horse-shoe shaped canyon in Óxarfjörður, where you find numerous hiking tracks. Ásbyrgi is part of the Vatnajökull National Park. Informative visitor's centre, shop, golf course and camping site are located by Ásbyrgi. Many hiking tracks are in the vicinity of Ásbyrgi.



12 Askja

Askja is a 50 km² caldera in the Dyngjufjöll mountains. In an eruption in 1875, an area of 11 km² on the south-eastern side of Askja caved in to form Lake Öskjuvatn, which is 217 m in depth making it the deepest lake in Iceland, and, to the north of it a tephra crater known as Víti (Hell).



13 Langanes

A narrow peninsula, where a rough road leads to Fontur at the tip of the peninsula, where you'll find the steep sea cliffs Skoruvíkurbjarg and a sea stack called Stórikarl, Iceland second largest Gannet colony. Above it is a viewing platform, extending about 10 m out from cliff. The Langanes peninsula is known for its rich birdlife and excellent birdwatching spots, where it is possible to watch the Northern Gannet and Brúnnichs Guillemot from land.



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Discover what life was like
Glaumbær - the historic turf farm

There are three historical buildings on the Glaumbær museum grounds. The **old turf buildings** are a fine example of building construction on larger farms in Iceland in times past. In the old turf farmhouse you find the museum's main exhibition depicting everyday life at a 19th century manorial estate.



Áshús is a late 19th century timber building. It houses an exhibition on daily life in the early 20th century and the museum's café, which offers traditional cakes as well as soup. In **Gilstofa**, a mid 19th century timber building, you'll find other exhibitions.

The museum is **open daily** from May 20th to September 20th, from **10:00-18:00**. Visit the website for further information about the opening hours off-season.

Skagafjörður Heritage Museum
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