

Iceland 2019 Trip
By David R. (10M4)

The trip began at 8 o'clock on Thursday 23rd May 2019. We gathered at school to sort out our passports and luggage labels, ready for an intercontinental hop across the pond. Soon after, we were trundling along the M4, approaching Britain's biggest hub for air-travel: London Heathrow.

Once we'd been dropped off at Terminal 2, and we'd navigated check-in, security and departures, and we were seated comfortably on Icelandair flight FI454 to Reykjavík, we were ready. A nudge of inertia pushed us back into our seats, and suddenly we were 10km in the air. The two-and-a-half hours passed uneventfully, until we touched down on Icelandic soil—or tarmac, in this case.



At arrivals, we met Hallþór (also known as "Thor"), our guide for our time in Iceland. He took us to Iceland's most famous tourist attraction: Blue Lagoon. The water is opaque azure blue, due to the dissolved silicas and salts. Everyone enjoyed themselves, and relaxed with a face-mask, enjoying Iceland's unusually good weather.

After that, we followed the coastal road from Grindavík (where Blue Lagoon is located) to a town called Hveragerði, where we stayed our first night in a cute little hotel called Hjarðaból. Lots of us participated in a game of Frisbee, and we managed to rescue it from the roof a few times. For dinner was a well-made meal of spaghetti bolognese; thus, the first day ended.



Having woken up in a comfortable bed, we ate an Icelandic breakfast (in a style similar to that of mainland Europe—a selection of bread and meat) and loaded our luggage on to the coach, where Thor greeted us and took us to Hellisheiði Power Plant, the biggest geothermal plant in Iceland and the third biggest of its type in the world. The plant generates enough electricity for the entire city of Reykjavík by pumping high pressure- and temperature steam from almost 2km underground and using it to turn turbines which generate electricity.

Our next stop took us to the bottom a Reykjadalur, which means "smoky valley"—for good reason. The river that carved it is naturally heated to around 30°C. Hot springs dot the landscape, with rising columns of steam obscuring the view at points. Here, dipping our feet in the stream, we ate our lunch that we'd prepared at breakfast.

After walking back down the valley, we visited Hveragerði's geothermal area in the centre of the town. Here there are also hot springs and pools, and they use the free heat to cook rye bread and to boil eggs, which we were allowed to taste. We visited a shopping centre next, where in 2008, an earthquake opened a fissure in the ground which is now covered in glass and visitors can look deep inside the ground. After that, we travelled to our hotel for the next two nights, at Hella.

Árhús Cottages is a small site, located right next to the (extremely cold!) river "Ytri-Rangá". Here we ate lasagne and went to sleep. Much to our surprise, we found that at two o'clock in the morning, it was still light enough to see by, due to the visit being very close to the summer solstice, when the days are longest of all. This did mean, sadly, that we did not get to see the Northern Lights.



Day Three was certainly the busiest day of the trip. On the way to Vík, we visited a waterfall called Skógafoss. It's 60m high and 30m wide, and there's a path up to the top where you can view the water hurling itself off a cliff.

After this mighty waterfall, we travelled to a monolith made in ice: Sólheimajökull. This is a glacier, 8km long, that comes off the much larger Mýrdalsjökull, the third largest ice cap in Iceland. We walked to the glacier's lagoon, the place where the meltwater forms a river where icebergs float.

We travelled a total of 120 miles, ricocheting around to the south coast of Iceland, where we visited a cute town called Vík. It's known for its black sand beaches, and the petrified trolls (or as the non-believers might say... "sea stacks") who were caught out by dawn and frozen into stone. We also visited the sea arch Dýrhólaey, where in 1993 a daredevil pilot flew his plane through the hole.



On the way back to our hotel, we stopped off at Seljalandsfoss, a waterfall 60m high. Famously, this fall has an impressive undercut caused by erosion, and visitors can walk behind the falls—while getting extremely wet.

The next day we travelled Iceland's most famous tourist route, the Golden Circle, which takes guests to Gullfoss, a huge waterfall that's 32m high. This waterfall thunders over two drops, before falling into a huge gorge that's about 2km long, carving through the ground. On the horizon, we could see Langjökull, another glacier.



The next stop on the route was Geysir. This area is famous for its geysers—a word that we get directly from Icelandic. Strökkur is a famous geyser that erupts on average every 5 minutes. We all got some pretty impressive photos of this spectacular display of boiling water.

We then stopped off at a family-run farm called Efstidalur II, where we all had an amazing ice-cream. If you were brave enough, you can try liquorice ice-cream: a delicacy for Icelanders!

Many would say that our last stop on the tour was the most dramatic: Þingvellir. Here, visitors can walk between the North American and the Eurasian tectonic plates, and there's a cliff formed by the rift that appears in *Game of Thrones*. Thor even showed us the church that he was baptised at, it being a few hundred meters from where we were. We all hopped back in the bus, and we drove to the capital city of Iceland...

Reykjavík. Here we ventured along the main high street, Laugavegur and bought all the souvenirs anyone could ever want. Soon after, we went on a spontaneous walking tour around the city: we went to the magnificent Hallgrímskirkja (the large concrete cathedral); the sculpture called the Sun Voyager; the concert hall, Harpa; all topped off with a lovely meal at the Hard Rock Café in Reykjavík.

After a short walk back to the hotel, we slept well before our long journey back home.

