



Iceland, “Land of Fire & Ice”

There is no country in Europe more magical and enchanting than Iceland. A total change of scenery!

It is difficult to imagine this huge block of ice, crowned by volcanoes, cracked by boiling water springs that gush from the ground to impressive heights.

On Saturday 18 June 2016, with 3 travelling companions (including 1 Icelandic enthusiast for whom this trip was the 28th since 1995), we set off for Iceland, the country we know from the Journey to the centre of Jules Verne's land.

We covered 3,175 kilometres in 10 days.

Welcome/velkomið to Iceland... When we arrived in Iceland under heavy rain, we took the road to Gullfoss (163 km). First night at the hotel "Gullfoss" located 5 minutes by car from the Waterfalls.

Leg 1 – 19.06.2016 (140 km)

"**Gullfoss**" is a succession of two waterfalls located on the Hvítá River. 32 metres high and 70 metres wide, they impress above all by the intensity of their flow. They clutter up with a crash in a canyon, 2.5 kilometres long, creating a real foam wall. On sunny days, a rainbow crowns what are known as "the golden falls".

"**Geysir**" ("gush") is the gushing hot water spring that has given its name to all the other geysers. It is located in the Geysir geothermal field, a set of hot springs including another geyser, Strokkur. Strokkur currently gushes out every 5 to 8 minutes - at a height of more than 20 metres.

We took one end of the Kjölur trail to our next destination (about 90 km). The Kjölur trail is ideal for discovering the central deserts of Iceland without crossing rivers as it has bridges on all rivers.

"**Hveravellir**" is a nature reserve located on the Kjölur road, between the Langjökull and Hofsjökull glaciers.

Before visiting the site, we put on our bathing suit to immerse ourselves in the natural swimming pool fed by the hot water river. A fantastic moment of relaxation in an unusual setting, especially after the bumpy road that leads us here.

Hveravellir is one of the most beautiful geothermal areas in the world with small geysers, hot springs surrounded by geyserite deposits or coloured by multicoloured algae and mineral oxides, hot water river and fumaroles. We were surprised by the intense blue of some sources. This colour is due to the reflection of light on the silica flakes suspended in the water. The water that overflows the pool cools on contact with the air and the silica forms serrated terraces.

The main attraction of the site is Öskurhóll (howling mound), a roaring mound that spits out its steam jet in a furious whistle. The silica deposits eventually built a dome with finely chiseled slopes and a brimstone mouth.

One of the most famous 18th century outlaws, Fjalla Eyvindur (Eyvindur of the Mountains) lived here for some time with his wife Halla who had chosen to follow him on his escape. On the site, a stone sculpture of two hearts surrounded by bars pays tribute to this tragic love.

The "**Kerlingarfjöll**" (Old Lady's Mountains), is an Icelandic volcano forming a small mountain range dotted with thermal springs. The geothermal zone of Hveradalir (hot spring valley) is one of the main attractions of the Kerlingarfjöll mountain range. We walk in the middle of the rhyolite, the rock with red-orange tones of which the volcano is essentially made up. This colourful landscape, interspersed with jagged ridges and peaks - the

highest of which is the Snækollur (1,477m) - is spectacular. Spectacular indeed, but mystical, one has the impression of being on another planet, completely detached from reality, it is a fabulous feeling...

We spent our 2nd night at the "Highland Resort Kerlingarfjöll".

« *"A picture is worth a thousand words"*». Confucius

Leg 2 – 20.06.2016 (190 km)

"Seljalandsfoss", 40 metres high, is the only waterfall in Iceland behind which it is possible to walk along a small path. Impressive!

The village of "Vík í Mýrdal (300 inhabitants), located in southern Iceland, has a reputation as the wettest place in Iceland (a reputation to be discussed as far as we are concerned because the weather has been quite mild). It is the largest "agglomeration" in the vicinity of the Mýrdalsjökull glacier. Vík is considered particularly at risk in the event of an eruption of the subglacial volcano Katla, under the Mýrdalsjökull.

The black sandy beach along the village of Vík í Mýrdal, facing the cliffs of Mount Reynisfjall, is one of the most famous in Iceland. In 1991, the American magazine *Islands Magazine* named it one of the ten most beautiful beaches in the world.

In the sea, at the foot of the cliffs, there are lava columns carved by the waters, the Reynisdrangar. Legend has it that they were ancient trolls who were surprised by twilight outside their caves.

Due to the size of the village, there is a restaurant that does not have a mine in a gas station, the "Víkurskáli", but it is a very good place to eat and has a magnificent view of the Reynisdrangar.

We stayed 4 nights at the Sólheimahjáleiga Guesthouse in Ytri-Sólheimar from where we went to discover the region every day.

To enhance our long evenings due to sleepless nights (sunset at midnight and sunrise at 3am, but needless to say that it is still day), we have very frequently played cards and slept very little.

Leg 3 – 21.06.2016 (250 km)

"Dyrhólaey" is a small peninsula (promontory) 120 metres high, located near the small town of Vík. This is the southernmost point of the island. This peninsula is characterized by the presence of a volcanic arch from which it got its name, which means: the high island with the passage ("hole") of door. It is a protected nature reserve, a paradise for birds, especially puffins, that nest there in May and June. A lighthouse built in 1927 dominates the sea to guide boats in bad weather and indicate where on the coast it is located because there are few landmarks and ports in this region.

"Skógafoss" waterfall is located near the small village of Skógar. The Skógá River rises 60 metres from an eroded cliff, forming a 25 m wide waterfall. Legend has it that there is a chest behind the waterfall, once deposited by a Viking.

"Landmannalaugar"

When you move away from the coast of Iceland, breathtaking multicoloured mountains, soothing hot springs, lava flows and light blue lakes, it is a unique and unavoidable site, the darling of Icelanders and foreigners alike....

Landmannalaugar is one of those magnificent places in Iceland where human beings seem to have no place. Provided that the meteorological elements, living embodiments of the anger of Thor, the Nordic god of lightning, thunder and thunder, are brought into play, and the landscapes take a twilight turn like the lost lakes that surround Landmannalaugar.

Unfortunately the Fjallabak track (F208) was closed and we were only able to do part of it.

"The mission of art is not to copy nature, but to express it." Honoré de Balzac

Leg 4 – 22.06.2016 (180 km)

"Þórsmörk" ("Thor Forest") is bounded by several valleys carved by large rivers. This nature reserve is home to a green kingdom of sheltered forests and flowering valleys, rugged gorges, icy rivers and three imposing

glaciers of the Eyjafjallajökull, northwest of Mýrdalsjökull and south of Tindfjallajökull. These 3 glaciers protect the area from the harshest weather conditions; it is often milder and drier than the surrounding area.

"Snowmobile on the Myrdalsjökull Glacier"

We left from Ytri-Sólheimar. The "Arcanum" company (whose owner is a long-time friend of our travel companion) organizes many adventure tours in the region (treks, snowmobiling, climbing, glacier hiking, quad biking, Super-Jeep rides, etc...) 3 hours of snowmobiling...

Mýrdalsjökull, literally meaning "the marsh valley glacier", is an ice cap located in southern Iceland. With an area of 596 km², Mýrdalsjökull is the fourth largest glacier in the country.

Its highest point is an ice dome, the Góðabunga, overlooking the Þórsmörk valley at an altitude of 1,512 metres.

Leg 5 – 23.06.2016 (450 km)

"Fjaðrárgljúfur" is a canyon of dark beauty, carved by the Fjaðrá river is 2 million years old. A path runs along its shoreline for 2 km, allowing on several occasions to observe its vertiginous depths (up to 100m deep).

"Svínafellsjökull" is an Icelandic glacier that is a glacier tongue of the Vatnajökull.

"Skaftafell National Park" is the result of the merger of the South-East Iceland National Park with Jökulsárgljúfur National Park and most of the Vatnajökull Glacier. It is possible to admire the Skaftafellsjökull glacier or other glacier languages that extend the famous Vatnajökull.

"Svartifoss basalt organs"

Located in Skaftafell Park, Svartifoss "the black waterfall" is a superb, almost melancholic waterfall, surrounded by geometric columns of black basalt. It owes its popularity to the magnificent basalt organ formations. These organs were built in lava streams, cooling very slowly, crystallizing. They inspired Icelandic architects, especially the one at Hallgrímskirkja Church in Reykjavík.

"Jökulsárlón Ice Lagoon"

Jökulsárlón, "glacier lagoon", is the best known and largest proglacial lake in Iceland. It is located south of the Vatnajökull glacier between Vatnajökull National Park and the town of Höfn. It is in fact the arrival of one of the glacial tongues of the Vatnajökull glacier.

It appeared between 1934 and 1935, and nowadays its surface area is about 25 km². Its maximum depth of 260 meters gives it the first place among the deepest lakes in the country.

Many spectacular bright blue icebergs drift across the lagoon, then reach the sea via Iceland's smallest river (1.5 km) that connects the lake to the Atlantic Ocean or float for up to five years in the lagoon, melting, freezing and sometimes collapsing in a loud noise that frightens birds, but finally we too! They frequently wash ashore on the black sandy beach.

The colors of these small icebergs range from turquoise to dark blue, from yellow from volcanic sulphide to black from the ashes of volcanoes and white in several shades. This lagoon has been the subject of numerous film shoots, including two James Bond films.

No matter how much we prepare for it, the scene is surreal. We spent several hours on site admiring the superb ice sculptures, watching for seals and and..... inflating a canoe, rowing in the lagoon surrounded by icebergs! Unforgettable experience, physical and a little stressful because you can feel the current but a magical moment!

"He who waits until all danger is removed before setting sail will never set sail." Thomas Fuller

Leg 6 – 24.06.2016 (325 km)

"Quad Tour" on the black sandy beaches stretching west of Dyrhólaey towards Selfoss.

"Snaefellsjökull"

Snaefellsjökull is an Icelandic stratovolcano topped by an ice cap that peaks at an altitude of 1,446 meters. It is located at the western end of the Snaefellsnes peninsula.

Snæfellsjökull is one of Iceland's most famous volcanoes thanks to Jules Verne, who located the entrance to the centre of the Earth at the top of this mountain in his novel *Voyage au centre de la Terre*.

To our great despair, it was raining cats & dogs, there was a very thick fog, a time not to take out the sheep, conclusion: no photography, dolce idleness ;-)

"Life isn't about waiting for the storms to pass; it's about learning how to dance in the rain". Vivian Greene

Leg 7 – 25.06.2016 (380 km)

"Reykjavík" is the capital of Iceland and was for a long time the only city on the island. Within sight of the icefields and volcanoes, fishing and trading port, animated by the comings and goings of ships, Reykjavík has a strange character of quiet familiarity and majestic grandeur, a small modern and ancient town, so typically Scandinavian with its painted wooden houses, gateway to the mysteries of Iceland.

"Hallgrímskirkja" is a Lutheran church located in the southeast of Reykjavík city centre, it is made of concrete and its spire is 75m long. Its architecture is reminiscent of the basalt organs, which are found in large numbers in Iceland.

We strolled through the streets of Reykjavík and bought souvenirs. Then we dropped off 2 travelling companions at the airport and continued our journey with 2 of us, but it didn't last long because we met a charming French couple with whom we continued our journey.

We stayed at the Sólheimahjáleiga Guesthouse.

Leg 8 – 26.06.2016 (130 km)

As indicated in leg 3, the Fjallabak runway (F208) was closed, but this time we were with the Arcanum owner and long-time friend of our travel companion and officially opened the runway! Absolutely fabulous experience! 3 4x4 vehicles equipped for all events....

We had the privilege of sleeping in a private shelter (the only one) "Gladheimar" in the "Landmannalaugar". There I really had the impression that the landscapes were taking a twilight turn like the lost lakes that surrounded us!

A typical mountain dish: lamb, served with vegetables with friends in a friendly atmosphere!

"Look at life through the windshield, not the rearview mirror." Byrd Baggett

Leg 9 – 27.06.2016 (300 km)

"The Eldgjá" ("the fire gorge"), is an eruptive crack in Iceland. It belongs to the Katla volcanic system in the south of the country.

The Eldgjá consists of a series of elongated craters and gorges stretching a total of 75 kilometres in length, between the Mýrdalsjökull in the southwest and the Vatnajökull in the northeast, east of the Fjallabak Nature Reserve.

"Fjörugarðurinn, the Viking Restaurant" - Hafnarfjörður

Typical Reykjavík restaurant. Closing meal of an unforgettable trip of friends and travel companions.

Icelandic horses :

Icelandic is the only breed originating from the country, and indeed the only one present on the territory. Imports of these animals have been prohibited since the 10th century, so these horses have not been crossed for more than 1000 years! They have therefore developed robustness and resistance to all weather conditions in the country. Their little something for them alone: this 4th pace called the tölt, which is between trotting and galloping. You can observe them in small herds in the pastures, (they wear an impressive array of colors).

The tölt

The Icelandic Horse's allure par excellence, the tölt is a natural allure, walked four times like a step. The horse always has one or two feet on the ground. This is the secret to incomparable comfort. The horse can have a slow tölt, gathered or lying down with a speed that allows it to compete with a galloping horse!

The sheep

White and curly, there are 3 per capita (the country now has more than 320,000 inhabitants). The Icelandic sheep have provided for the subsistence and clothing of the inhabitants. They will look at you with an inquisitive look when you get a little too close. Most of them do not live in enclosures and can therefore walk as they please through the mountains and valleys.

Flowers

In 2004, the eight-petalled "buttercup" in Icelandic "buttercup of the moors" was elected as a national flower.

Lupin

Flowering lupins delight our visions of Iceland, especially in June and early July.

This plant does not belong to the natural flora of Iceland. They were introduced (from Alaska) in 1945, with the aim of stopping the desertification of certain areas, particularly in the interior of Iceland, but in some areas lupins have completely colonized the soil and have become a nuisance.

The birds

The birdlife is rich in Iceland especially during nesting between May and August. The most famous is the Atlantic puffin with its small round head and orange beak.

Geysers, springs and fumaroles

Geysers are quite rare phenomena since there are only about a thousand of them on Earth. In Iceland, water that has percolated through the rock before being overheated by magma can surface in several other ways. Sources basins or rivers at high temperature. Fumaroles are the points where water at very high temperatures reaches the earth's surface in the form of steam. The coloured giclée of some pots are due to the presence of minerals.

Glaciers

Glaciers and ice caps cover 11% of Iceland. The Vatnajökull covers 8% of the island's surface and this ice cap is in 3rd position worldwide after those of the two poles.

Volcanoes

The thinness of the earth's crust and the movement of the plates cause exciting volcanic phenomena. Some are active, some are off or in sleep. Active cracks and craters are probably the most common type of eruption in Iceland. Some of the most active volcanoes are found under glaciers. In this case, eruptions of molten lava are accompanied by melting ice and floods and mudslides that can still be devastating. This was the case with the eruption of the Eyjafjallajökull in 2010, which damaged part of the Circular Road before grounding the planes of the Northern Hemisphere for 1 week.

Conclusion:

The most difficult thing for me in this adventure is the fact that, despite my exhibition project, I can fully enjoy and abandon myself to the beauty of the landscapes without always having my eyes fixed on my objective.

I thank my fellow travellers for their patience and our guide without whom this trip would never have been possible.

"To photograph is to put the head, eye and heart on the same line of sight." Henri Cartier-Bresson

Careful: *

- Be careful with your cameras near falls and geysers shower assured.
- Be careful when using rental vehicles on roads, tracks as many potholes/ruts/rivers deep enough to swallow a car, damage the chassis and the ride will be slow and bumpy. Rental companies are very picky and so are insurance companies!

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