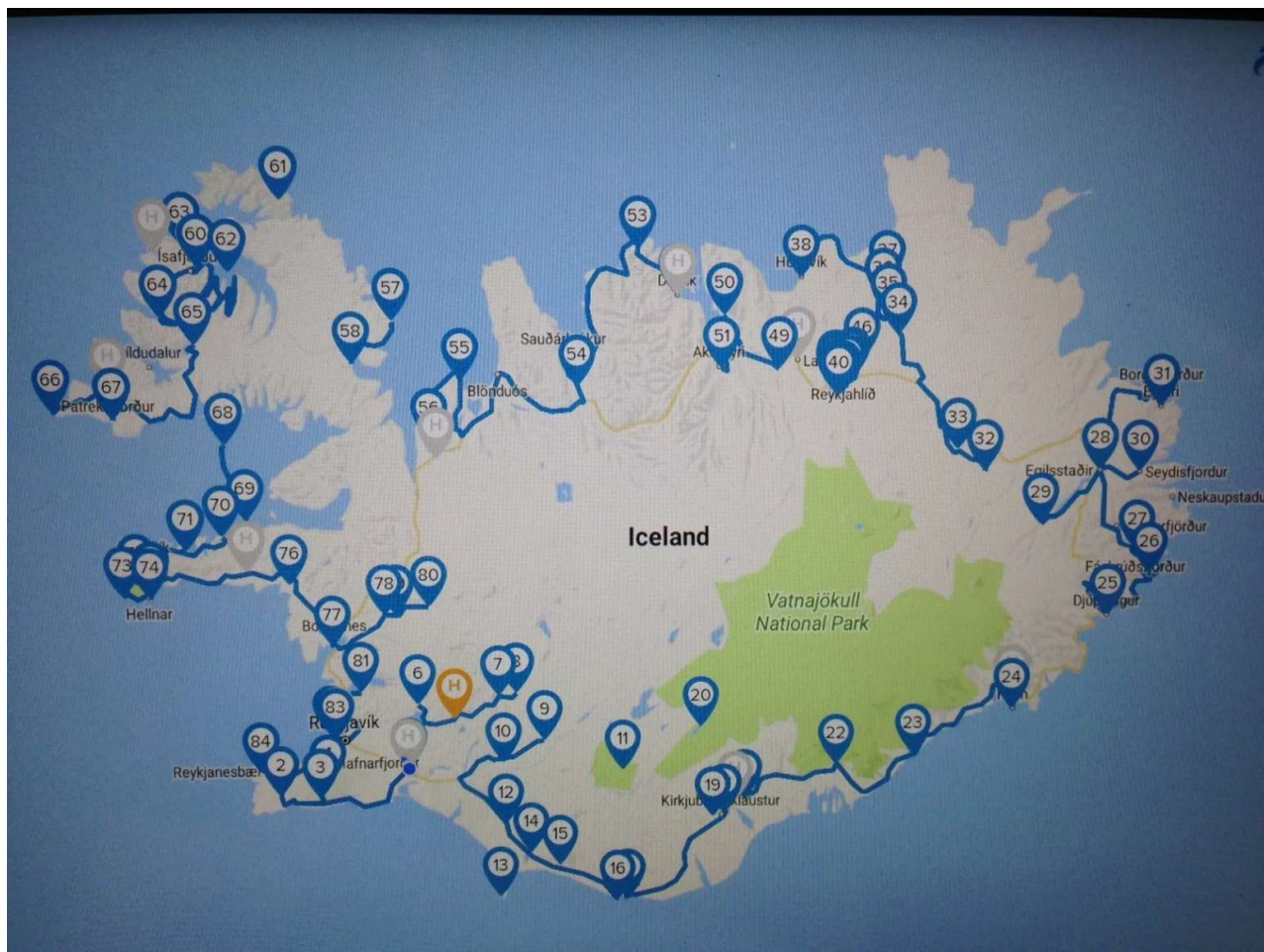


Northern Hemisphere Adventure – Iceland 2017

Day One – Sunday 2 July 2017



Our travel route for the 19 trip around Iceland

Firstly I have added an image of the travel route we are undertaking. The travel company – Iceland Travel – provide a Lenovo tablet that takes us on our travels giving us the route to take and points of interest. This is a new option the company is trying out and it is very good.

Well this morning we flew out of Heathrow to Reykjavik to start our Iceland adventure. We had a smooth flight and had some lovely images of the south coast of Iceland as we descended through the scattered clouds into Reykjavik. On arrival we cleared immigration which was a fast process and then proceeded to collect our bags. As we walked through the terminal I noticed that the airport has only one level for both arrivals and departures so both sets of passengers mix in the one area. Not a good option from an immigration perspective.

We purchased a couple bottles of wine duty free to start us off, collected the bags, cleared customs and we proceeded to the Hertz desk to pick up our vehicle. The queue was long but I noticed they had a special lane for Hertz Gold members, and as I am a Gold member, I quickly changed lanes and jumped into the Gold queue.

With keys in hand we left the terminal and headed for the car. Vehicles are left hand drive here so we had to get used to driving on the other side of the road. Not a major task but remembering to keep checking to the left at intersections and before turning was the main thing to concentrate on. Anyway after getting familiar with our vehicle, a new AWD Toyota RAV we were on our way. Before heading off I mounted our dash camera to the windscreen. I brought our dash camera from home so we can get continual views of the Iceland terrain as we drive along. There is some incredible scenery and at times there is nowhere to pull over to take photos so the dash camera is very useful. We actually came across one tourist who had stopped in the middle of the road and decided to reverse. No thought of other traffic and no hazard lights flashing on his vehicle. They do warn you in the guidebooks that some tourists will just stop in the middle of the road to take photos without thinking of the consequences.



First stop was the Blue Lagoon. It was packed with tourists but once in the lagoon you did have a lot of space to walk around in the chest height deep blue opaque waters. There was an area where you could put on a white silica mud mask and then after ten minutes you could apply the algae mask. Maree took advantage of the mud masks which are supposed to have rejuvenating powers. After Maree applied the white mud mask I had a good laugh. Her face resembled Robin Williams in the scene from "Mrs Doubtfire" where he put his head into the cake with the cream on top to cover his face. The stuff was dripping off Maree's face like the scene in the movie. So funny. Unfortunately no photos as we didn't want to risk damaging phone or cameras in the lagoon waters.



THE REYKJANES FISSURE SWARM

The Reykjanes peninsula volcanic zone is a direct continuance of the North Atlantic Ridge that surfaces from the ocean at Reykjanes. The peninsula has four volcanic systems that become active in eruptive series, approximately every 1,000 years. Each series lasts for around 200 to 350 years.

The western-most system is the Reykjanes system. This system extends from the west side of Reykjanes to Grindavík in the south and thence to the north-east over the peninsula along Vogar to Kúaagerði. Approximately 35 km of the system is on land (40–45 km if the undersea part is included), and is 5–15 km in width, broadest in the south. The system is believed to extend 5–10 km under water to the south-west.

The most recent eruptions in the system were the Reykjaneseldar (Reykjanes Fires), which were in 1210 to 1240. The preceding eruptive series occurred 1,500 to 1,800 years ago.

There are between 40 and 50 volcanic outlets in the system from several drift and eruptive series, as well as 14 shield volcanos or shield volcano tops. Signposted hiking trails lie to Háleyjabunga and Skálafell shield volcanos. Picrite, a rare, primitive basalt variant akin to that which forms in Earth's mantle can be seen near Háleyjabunga mountain.

The surface within the system is rather fissured. The system contains numerous faults, including the large rift valley near Valahnúkur and another that lies alongside the Reykjanesbraut highway near Vogastapar.

The most active part of the system is here, in the south-west, where volcanic rock quickly piles up and where the geothermal area is liveliest.

“DARKNESS IN THE MIDDLE OF THE DAY”

The Sturlunga Saga and several other compilations mention the winter of 1226–1227 as being the “Sand Winter” and a significant “Winter of Famine”.

There was an undersea eruption off the coast of Reykjanes, and the ash-fall was so great that in some places, it was pitch dark in the middle of the day. Numerous farm animals in Iceland were killed, and it was said that Snorri Sturluson lost 100 cattle that he owned in Svignaskarð in Borgarfjörður. Karlinn (the Man), a 51 m sea pillar just off the coast of Reykjanes, was formed in this eruption.

From here we went to the Reykjanes area. First to Hafnaberg where there is a long line of sheer sea cliffs south of the old fishing village of Hafnir. Then we backtracked to Sandvík and Gunnuhver, a thermal area. The area is named Gunnuhver after a female ghost that was laid there. Folklore has it that she had caused a great disturbance until a priest set a trap for her and she fell into the spring. This happened about 400 years ago. The mud pools take form where steam from boiling geothermal reservoir water emanates and condenses and mixes with the surface water.



There are two ramps that you can walk along where you can look down to the spring and hear and see the boiling water and feel the power bursting from the ground and the steam on your face. The odour of sulphur is not as strong as those of Rotorua, New Zealand.

From here we headed to our first nights' accommodation – Hveragerði. We stayed at the Ork Hotel. Not your usual 4 or 5 star rating but very comfortable. No blackout curtains which was surprising as it doesn't get dark at all at the moment. At 01:00am it was still daylight. No sun but still bright – just like an overcast day. I was too tired to grab the camera and take a picture – perhaps tomorrow night.



Our room Hotel Ork Hveragerði

Day Two – Monday 3 July 2017

After a reasonable night's rest – it was a long day yesterday – we had breakfast at the Ork (included). We went down for breakfast at the wrong time as the bus tour groups were having breakfast and it was chaotic. After they left things became more civilised. The servers also replenished the food and cleaned up the mess left by the group. Remind me never to take a bus tour if I ever contemplate doing so.

We left and headed off to have a quick look at Reykjavik before driving on to do the Golden Circle route which takes you up to the (1) Þingvellir National Park, (2) Geysir and (3) Gullfoss.



Þingvellir National Park

Þingvellir is a national park in southwestern Iceland, about 40 km northeast of Iceland's capital, Reykjavík. Þingvellir is a site of historical, cultural, and geological significance, and is one of the most popular tourist destinations in Iceland. The park lies in a rift valley that marks the crest of the Mid-Atlantic Ridge and the boundary between the North American tectonic plate and the Eurasian. To its south lies Þingvallavatn, the largest natural lake in Iceland. Þingvellir is associated with the Althing, the national parliament of Iceland, which was established at the site in 930 AD. Sessions were held at the location until 1798. Þingvellir National Park was founded in 1930, marking the one-thousandth anniversary of the Althing. The park was later expanded to protect the diverse and natural phenomena in the surrounding area and was designated as a World Heritage Site in 2004.

The next stop along the Golden Circle is the highly active Geysir Hot Spring Area with boiling mud pits, exploding geysers and the lively Strokkur which spouts water 30 metres into the air about every eight minutes. The geothermal field is believed to have a surface area of approximately 3 km². Most of the springs are aligned along a 100m wide strip of land running in the same direction as the tectonic lines in the area, from south to southwest. The strip is 500m long and culminates near what once was the seat of the lords of Haukadalur. The area became active more than 1000 years ago and comprises more than a dozen hot water blow holes. Just before the Geysir starts a large blue water dome appears. It is frustratingly difficult to get an image of the blue dome as the Geysir erupts.

After about an hour and setting my camera to take 8 frames a second and continuously taking images for several minutes before you expect the Geysir to erupt, you do actually get the opportunity to get a picture of the blue dome.



Dome forms as Geysir erupts.



Dome dissolves into fury of hot water and steam

Next is Gullfoss. Gullfoss is also one of the most popular tourist attractions in Iceland. The wide Hvítá (white river) rushes southward, and about a kilometre above the falls it turns sharply to the right and flows down into a wide curved three-step “staircase” and then abruptly plunges in two stages into a crevice 32 metres deep. As you approach the falls, the edge is obscured from view, so that it appears that the river simply vanishes into the earth. During the first half of the 20th century and some

years into the late 20th century, there was much speculation about using Gullfoss to generate electricity. During this period, the waterfall was rented indirectly by its owners, Tómas Tómasson and Halldór Halldórsson, to foreign investors. However, the investors' attempts were unsuccessful, partly due to lack of money. The waterfall was later sold to the state of Iceland, and is now protected.



Gullfoss waterfall



Gullfoss waterfall

On our return we stopped at the Geysir and had a bite to eat. From here we drove to our accommodation for the evening – Hotel Edda ÍKÍ Laugarvatn. The hotel chain has a unique story of practicality and hospitality towards travellers in Iceland as boarding schools in the countryside, vacant during summer breaks, assume a new role as hotels offering a good place to stay. The rooms are individual dormitories that have ensuite facilities. This is the first Edda we have stayed at. Room is fine but it is very hot and stuffy even with no heat switched on – Not sure if heating is done by another method but I can't find any vents and there are no warm spots on the floor. The in-room water heating is also switched off. There is a very small window that we opened but you needed the room door open to draw the outside air into the room. OK while you are up but not an option for sleeping.

We went to a local restaurant – The Lindin – and we were served excellent food. All courses were tasty and well presented. The price for the two-course meal with glass of wine and a beer was ISK17140 (AUD 220). As they say it isn't cheap to visit Iceland, so we have a travel budget of AUD 450 a day which is meeting all requirements. Hopefully with spare change at the end.



Steve had Char for the main

Day Three – Tuesday 4 July 2017

Maree has planned today's activities. We headed off around 09:30 this morning from Laugarvatn and headed towards Hjalparfoss. Hjalparfoss is one of several waterfalls in the south of Iceland situated in the lava fields north of the stratovolcano Hekla near the point where the rivers Fossá and Þjórsá join. Hjalparfoss is located about 30 kilometres east of the village Fludir and we had to travel on gravel roads to reach the site. The road also winds its way through the Vikrar lava fields. Just downstream from Hjalparfoss is Iceland's second-largest hydroelectric power station, Búrfellsstöð.



Waterfall with the flies

We reached the site and thought we would walk down the path to get a closer view of the waterfall. Well as soon as we got out of the vehicle we were covered by a swarm of insects. They were like small flies but not even the great Australian salute was good enough to get rid of these little buggers. So, we got back into the car and positioned the car so we could view the waterfall through the windscreen and took photos.



View after crossing the river down from the Sultartangalon Reservoir

From here we continued on to Hella after crossing the river just south of the Sultartangalon Reservoir. The road was once again gravel, and our vehicle was AWD so handled the road well. After several kilometres we reached the sealed section and made our way to Hella. The trip from Laugarvatn to Hella was interesting as the route took us through the Icelandic countryside and the lava fields. I am also getting great footage of the Iceland countryside as we drive along on my dashcam which I am saving daily.



Waterfall

On the way we stopped to view another waterfall. We stopped for lunch at a little restaurant in Hella and they were serving a special for lunch of asparagus soup, beef stroganoff, mash and coffee (Nescafé) all for ISK1,200. We opted for a real coffee as it is difficult to get a real coffee served by a barista. Most coffee comes out of installed machines that serve the coffee cold and tasteless. This place made coffee using capsules and from a proper coffee machine and it was so nice to again experience real coffee.

From here we travelled on to Dyrholaey, famous for its black sand beaches and the Arch. You can see from the images that they views are breath taking. Dyrholaey is a former island of volcanic origin created by an eruption thousands of years ago. Dyrholaey also serves as a bird sanctuary. There were scores of Arctic Terns, but alas, no Puffins. I'm yet to see my first puffin in the wild.

Apparently due to the size of the arch, ships and even small aircraft can pass through it at certain times of the year! The ocean has worn the black basalt into this 120-metre-high arch. There is also a century old lighthouse at this location. The

lighthouse has been renovated on the inside and converted into a private luxury hotel.



Dyrholaey Rock Arch



Dyrholaey Black Sand Beach



Dyrholaey Basalt Rocks



Dyrholaey Basalt Rocks



Dyrholaey lighthouse

From here we proceeded on to the town of Vik. This is a small town with quite a nice souvenir shop carrying things manufactured in Iceland and not China. Then it was an hour's drive to our accommodation at Horgslund Cottages located seven kilometres east of Kirkjubæjarklaustur. The accommodation is quite nice at this location. The cottages are very nice.



Horgslund Cottages with view of outcrop

Later we headed off to a restaurant in the Icelandic Hotel for dinner. This restaurant has a good write up and the reviews are not wrong. It isn't cheap but then again nothing in Iceland is. We had a great dinner, a bottle of Australian wine (Jacobs

Creek Chardonnay AUD71) all for a total cost of AUD220. As I said, not cheap but the food was so good we have booked to go again tomorrow evening.

OK it is time to hit the sack and try and get a good night's sleep. Just looked at the clock and it is 23:00. Looking out the window and I see the sun is shining brightly. I enjoy the 24 hours of daylight, but blackout curtains would be a great idea in the hotels we are staying at. Wearing an eye mask just doesn't cut it at times.

Day Four – Wednesday 5 July 2017

We are actually spending two nights in Kirkjubæjarklaustur, so we have the opportunity to travel around the local area looking at the sights. The first location we decided on was the Fjaðrárgljúfur Canyon. The canyon is up to 100 metres deep and about 2 kilometres long, with the Fjaðrá river flowing through the middle. The canyon has beautiful steep walls and creates extraordinary serpentines. Its origin dates back to the cold periods of the Ice Age, about two million years ago. The canyon was created by progressive erosion by flowing water from glaciers.



Fjaðrárgljúfur Canyon



Fjaðrárgljúfur Canyon



Maree wrapped up warm at the canyon

From here we decided we would drive up to Skaftafell to take a look at the glaciers. Skaftafell National Park is situated between Kirkjubæjarklaustur and Höfn. In 2008, it

became a part of the larger Vatnajökull National Park. Before its inclusion into Vatnajökull National Park, it measures about 4,807 square kilometres, making it Iceland's second largest national park. It contains the glacier Skaftafellsjökull (a spur of the Vatnajökull ice cap). The landscape is very similar to some of the Alps, but it has been formed over thousands of years by different influences of fire (volcanic eruptions of Öræfajökull), water (the glaciers Skeiðarájökull and Skaftafellsjökull) and the rivers Skeiðará, Morsá and Skaftafellsá.



Glacier at Skaftafell



Glacier at Skaftafell

Skaftafell is renowned in Iceland for its agreeable climate and the sunny days in summer, uncommon in the south of Iceland. There is a natural birch wood, Bæjarstaðarskógur, as well as many species of birds and arctic foxes. The scenery around Skaftafell is full of stark contrasts. The various glacial tongues are flanked by jagged mountains, with the glacier-topped peak of Hvannadalshnjúkur rising the highest. Evidence abounds of the erosive forces exerted by glacial ice and rivers. The Skaftafell vicinity has experienced considerable volcanic activity, with the 1362 Öræfajökull eruption producing the most ash of any Icelandic volcano since the

settlement and another, smaller Öræfajökull eruption occurring in 1727. As shown once again in 2011, the sub glacial volcano Grímsvötn is the country's most active volcano and is also famous for the huge jökulhlaups or glacial floods that originate from it.

After having a good look around the area we had a quick bite for lunch and headed back to Kirkjubæjarklaustur. After a few hours of rest, we headed out for dinner, again at the Icelandic Hotel, and yes, another great meal.

Day Five – Thursday 6 July 2017

Today we are staying in Höfn for the night and unfortunately the weather is rain, rain and more rain. As we drove towards Skaftafell we could not see the large mountainous cliffs that we saw yesterday. However, when we approached Skaftafell we were amazed at the sudden clearing of the weather; the rain ceased, and the air was clear. We saw some great views of the glaciers that were not visible yesterday. We had some great photo opportunities, and the dash cam has captured some great images.



Glaciers at Skaftafell



Glaciers at Skaftafell

On the way to Höfn we stopped at the Jökulsárlón glacier lake where we had a RIB tour arranged.

Jökulsárlón is a large glacial lake in southeast Iceland, on the edge of Vatnajökull National Park. Situated at the head of the Breiðamerkurjökull glacier, it developed into a lake after the glacier started receding from the edge of the Atlantic Ocean. The lake has grown since then at varying rates. It is now 1.5 kilometres away from the ocean's edge and covers an area of about 18 km. It recently became the deepest lake in Iceland, at over 248 metres as glacial retreat extended its boundaries. The size of the lake has increased fourfold since the 1970s. It is considered one of the natural wonders of Iceland. The lake appears as "a ghostly procession of luminous blue icebergs". Jökulsárlón has been a setting for four Hollywood movies: A View to a Kill, Die Another Day, Lara Croft: Tomb Raider and Batman Begins, as well as the reality TV series Amazing Race. The tongue of the Breiðamerkurjökull glacier is the major attraction for tourists and is quite impressive.



The glacier flowing into Jökulsárlón lagoon



Jökulsárlón glacier lagoon iceberg



The RIB boat tour



Jökulsárlón glacier lagoon iceberg



Jökulsárlón glacier lagoon iceberg



Jökulsárlón glacier lagoon iceberg



Jökulsárlón glacier lagoon iceberg



Jökulsárlón glacier lagoon iceberg



Jökulsárlón glacier lagoon iceberg

After a great tour and some great scenery and views of the icebergs in the lake we carried on to Höfn.

We are actually staying at the Seljavellir Guesthouse which is located seven kilometres outside of Höfn. The accommodation is the best we have stayed in so far.



The Guesthouse



Our room at the Guesthouse

After checking in and having a short rest we headed out to the Pakkhus Restaurant in Höfn for dinner. This restaurant has some great reviews and after tonight's dinner we know why. The food was excellent. Höfn is famous for langoustine so we made sure we tried all the locally prepared dishes, the langoustine soup, and the grilled langoustine tails.

After a great meal and another tiring, but a really great day, we headed back to the Seljavellir Guesthouse for a well-deserved night's sleep.

Day Six – Friday 7 July 2017

Today we travelled from Höfn to Egilsstaðir. We travelled the coastal road all the way and we saw some magnificent scenery, all captured on my dash cam.



Coastal mountain range at Stokksnes

On the way we stopped in at Stokksnes to have a look at the magnificent scenery of the mountains along the coast. From here we continued along the “Lon” which is stated as being the most scenic part of Iceland. Can’t argue with that but every time we round a bend you get even more magnificent, but different, scenery. So where does it all end; probably doesn’t. We won’t know until we get to the end of the ring road, and we still have another 13 days in front of us before that occurs.

The next stop was a little fishing village called Djupivogur. We stopped for lunch and enjoyed a nice, tasty chicken burger. This is the view of the harbour from the café.



Djupivogur lunch stop

From here we drove through to Egilsstadir via the towns of Stodvarfjörður, Faskrudsfjörður and Reyðarfjörður. Next trip I’m going to pick a location where I can at least spell the town names without having to check the map all the time.

The following photos were taken on our route from Djupivogur to Egilsstadir, along the coastal route.





On arrival at Egilsstaðir we checked in to our accommodation at the Hotel Edda and then headed off to do some necessary chores – washing. There are no laundromats outside of Reykjavik but in Iceland everyone just goes to the local camping grounds and uses the washing machines and dryers if they have them. The camping ground management has no issues with people using the facilities even if they are not staying at the site. Not sure you would get the same response in Australia.

Washing done and off to dinner. We decided on the local Icelandic Air Hotel restaurant here as we had such a good experience at the one in Kirkjubæjarklaustur. We were not disappointed.



This is what it is like from sunset 22:40 to sunrise 02:50 in Iceland at this time of year.

Another great day and now it is time for bed. Oh, I woke up at 1am and took a photo of the view above from our room. As you can see it is still daylight. Ohhhhh, give me some darkness. Nite everyone.

Day Seven – Saturday 8 July 2017

Today is an exciting day for me (Steve). We are off to see the “Puffins”. This is one of the reasons why I wanted to come to Iceland. We started off heading to Bakkagerði which is located in the Borgarfjörður Eystri. The Borgarfjörður Eystri is the most northerly fjord in the Eastern Fjords region. It is 4 kilometres across and 5 kilometres long and is very exposed to onshore winds, particularly north-easterlies. There is low-lying land along the coast and at the head of the fjord where there is a broad, verdant valley 8 km in length. The valley is surrounded by an imposing and colorful range of mountains, making Borgarfjörður one of the most beautiful settlements in the country. The mountains are some of the oldest in Iceland at 10-15 million years old and form the second largest area of the rock rhyolite in the country.

Traversing these mountains today was a bit intimidating, especially when we returned to Egilsstaðir as the clouds in the area had descended and had covered the mountain and we ended up driving in thick fog with steep drops over 200 metres on either side. We were only doing about 20 kph at this time and we had our hazard lights on. I wish the car we encountered in the fog had had its hazard lights on as he had broken down and we came across his vehicle suddenly; even at 20 kph.

The village of Bakkagerði is a picturesque seaside village which is home to around 130 people. While most people live off fishing and agriculture, tourism is becoming increasingly important. The puffin colony here certainly assists to attract the tourist, including us.

On arrival at Bakkagerði we climbed into our warm weather gear; waterproof and warm over-pants, ski jackets, beanies, and gloves – yes including me. It was cold for me so you can only imagine how cold it really was. We spent an hour in this area looking at the puffin colony. There were lots of puffins and I took lots of pictures as you can see below.

Puffins at the Hofn colony in Borgarfjörður

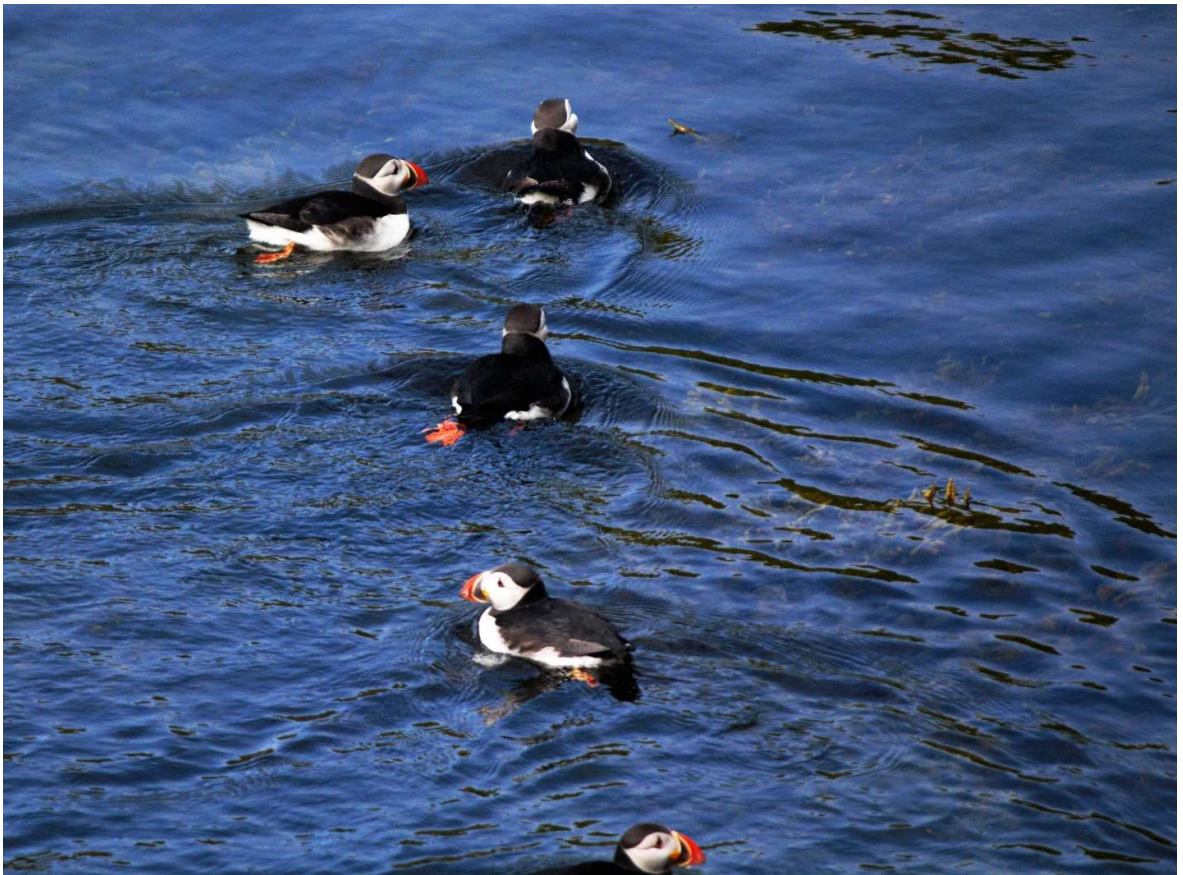














Following a great viewing of the puffins we had lunch at a local cafe. They serve great fish soup at this cafe, and we had a lovely lunch.

After lunch we started the drive back and as I said earlier, we had to drive through thick fog on the mountain. Scary stuff but it wasn't long before daylight prevailed, and we were driving in safer conditions again.

After arriving back in Egilsstaðir we decided to head off towards the town of Seyoisfjörður. Seyoisfjörður is the location where the car ferry from Europe arrives. The drive has some great views. During the drive we had to climb through the mountains again and snow was still lying around at the upper levels. We noted in the distance cloud moving across the mountains in the direction we were going to descend into Seyoisfjörður.



Mountain view on the way to Seyoisfjordur

As we started our descent, we saw that we would be driving through thick fog, and I have to say the drive down the mountain in fog on our return from Borgarfjörður Eystri was enough for the one day. So, we turned around and headed back to Egilsstaðir. The views on our return drive were spectacular and once again all caught on our dash cam.

Well, we have just finished dinner, having a few reds (white for Maree) and we are off to bed. Once again, another great day.

Day Eight – Sunday 9 July 2017

Today we left Egilsstaðir and travelled to Laugar where we are staying for two nights at the Hotel Laugar.

Once again on route we saw some great scenery, despite there being some rain and low cloud as we travelled high through the mountains. Before stopping for lunch, we pulled into Námaskarð and Hverarönd. Located a short distance from the spectacular volcanic mountains, Krafla, Námaskarð and Hverarönd, is an expanse of hot springs, fumaroles, mud pools and mud pots. Everything is at a boiling point in the stunning arctic desert. No vegetation in sight. The constant emission of fumes has made the ground completely sterile and acidic, thus unfit to sustain flora and fauna. But the colourful minerals are impressive. Námaskarð is a short distance from Lake Mývatn, our next stop, where we saw rich vegetation and refreshing spring water. At Námaskarð, you will be hard to find pure spring water. Everything is permeated with sulphur, even the air, making the smell from the area quite distinct – same as Rotorua.

Images of the Namafjall mud pools, Namafjall volcanic mountain and the Namafjall volcanic steam vent follow.







From here we headed to Myvatn and the Nature Baths Lagoon. The water supplies for the lagoon run straight from the National Power Company bore hole in Bjarnarflag. The water has a temperature of about 130°C when it arrives to the huge basin beside the lagoon itself forming an impressive, man-made hot spring. Altogether, the lagoon and the basin contain around 3.5 million litres of water with a temperature of 36 – 40°C. The lagoon itself is a man-made construction, its bottom is covered by sand and gravel. The characteristics of the water are unique in many ways. It contains a large amount of minerals, is alkaline and well suited for bathing. Due to its chemical composition, undesired bacteria and vegetation do not thrive in the lagoon making chloride or any other disinfectant redundant. Geothermal water in Iceland usually contains some sulphur. In this area the strength of the chemical is greater than others.

From here we stopped for lunch at Reykjahlíð before driving on to Laugar.

The drive from Reykjahlið took us along Lake Mývatn. Lake Mývatn was created about 2,300 years ago by a large fissure eruption pouring out basaltic lava. The lava flowed down Laxárdalur Valley to the lowland plain of Aðaldalur where it entered the Arctic Ocean about 50 km away from Mývatn. There was a large lake in the area at the time, a precursor of the present-day Mývatn. When the glowing lava encountered the lake some of the water-logged lake sediment was trapped underneath it. The ensuing steam explosions tore the lava into small pieces which were thrown up into the air, together with some of the lake. Repeated explosions in a number of locations caused groups of craters to build up which now dominate the landscape on the shore of Lake Mývatn and also form some of the islands in the lake. The lava eventually drained from the lakes, leaving behind a forest of rock pillars. The biggest of these formations is named Dimmuborgir.

The following images are of Lake Myvatn and the craters.





From here we travelled on to Laugar where we are staying two nights so we can look around the local area.

Day Nine Monday 10 July 2017

Today we left the small town of Laugar for the day to drive around the local area to look at the sites. The first stop was the fishing village of Húsavík. Húsavík harbour once boasted a large fishing fleet, bustling with activity in this industry. It still serves as a fishing harbour but today's activity revolves more around the successful whale watching businesses that have been established. The first organised whale watching excursions in Iceland started from here in 1995. Since then, whale watching has become a major attraction and Húsavík continues to be the leading destination for whale watching. We considered doing the whale watching on the RIB tour but taking into consideration Maree's recent back issue we decided not to do the tour.



Húsavík harbour

Above the harbour runs the main street with a variety of shops and services. In the town centre stands the church of Húsavík which many consider one of Iceland's most beautiful churches. The state architect, Rognvaldur Olafsson, designed the church. It was built in the form of a cross with wood imported from Norway and consecrated on June 2nd, 1907. The tower is 26 metres high.

An image of the church follows.



Húsavík Church

From Húsavík we headed off to Dettifoss. Dettifoss is a waterfall in Vatnajökull National Park and is reputed to be the most powerful waterfall in Europe. The water comes from the nearby Vatnajökull glacier where the sediment-rich runoff causes the water to be greyish white. Dettifoss is situated on the Jökulsá á Fjöllum River, which collects water from a large area in Northeast Iceland. The falls are 100 metres wide

and there is a drop of 44 metres down to the Jokulsárgljúfur canyon. It is the largest waterfall in Iceland in terms of volume discharge, having an average water flow of 193 cubic metres per second. Following are images of the Dettifoss Waterfall.



From here we travelled back to Reykjahlíð for lunch. After lunch we drove around Lake Myvatn as we headed back to Laugar for the evening.

Images of Mývatn and the lake and rivers flowing to the lake.

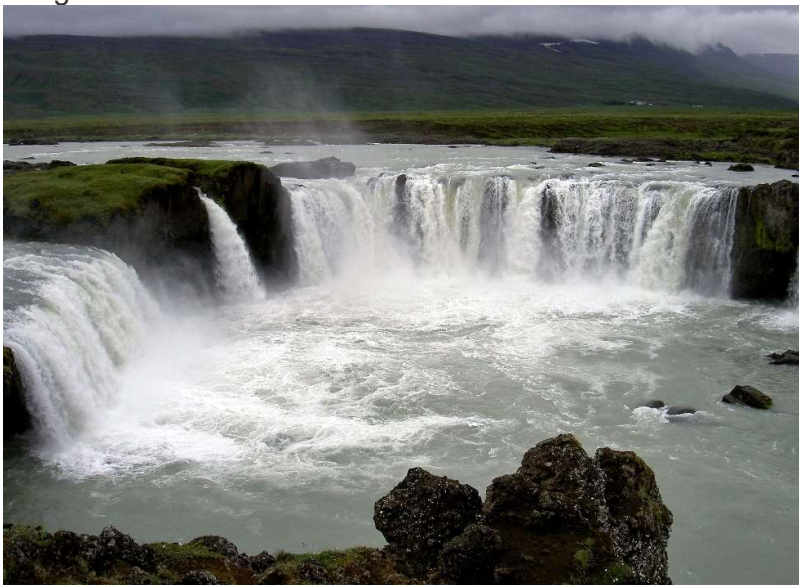




Day Ten – Tuesday 11 July 2017

Today we travelled from Laugar to Dalvik. The distance is relatively short for today's travel but still some spectacular scenery to be seen. On the way we visited the Goðafoss waterfall. The Goðafoss is Icelandic for "waterfall of the gods" and is one of the most spectacular waterfalls in Iceland. It is located in the Bárðardalur district of North-eastern Region. The water of the river Skjálfandafljót falls from a height of 12 metres over a width of 30 metres.

Images of Goðafoss Waterfall





From here we travelled through the township of Akureyri, where we stopped for a bite to eat. Akureyri is Iceland's second largest urban area (after the Capital Region) and the fourth largest municipality (after Reykjavík, Hafnarfjörður, and Kópavogur). Nicknamed the Capital of North Iceland, Akureyri is an important port and fishing centre. The area where Akureyri is located was settled in the 9th century. The town was the site of Allied units during World War II. Further growth occurred after the war as the Icelandic population increasingly moved to urban areas. The area has a relatively mild climate due to geographical factors, and the town's ice-free harbour has played a significant role in its history.

From Akureyri, we drove to Dalvík. Dalvík is a small fishing village and has its own fish processing plant. There is, unfortunately, an extremely unpleasant strong fish smell in the centre of town near the fish processing sheds. Fortunately, our hotel is about a kilometre away from this location so there is no odour. As it was only a short drive today, 90 kilometres, we were able to take a longer break from travel and recharge the batteries.

Images of the Dalvik fishing village



View of the mountain range from the foreshore.



We went to a quaint pub (Gregors' Pub) for dinner that is run by a polish chap serving lamb or fish.



The Pub



Chef Gregor cooking his salmon.

The menu has soups, salmon for entrees and lamb, cod, or salmon for mains. A short menu but the chef prepares the food exceptionally well. The place is small, and chef came to our table to ensure we were enjoying our food, which we were. We both had fish soup which had large chunks of salmon and cod and for mains Maree had salmon and I had the lamb loin. Really great food. Had we known beforehand how large the serves were going to be we would have only ordered one dish. Oh, and they have a specialty – which we didn't try – check the following image for the specialty.

Brennivín & hákarl



Dare to try an Icelandic
specialty

shot of **brennivín** vodka
(called Black Death)

&

a few pieces of **hákarl**
(fermented shark)

1000 KR

Day Eleven – Wednesday 12 July 2017

Today's route takes us from Dalvík to Laugarbakki. We are taking route 76 that takes through the towns of Ólafsfjörður and Siglufjörður. Each town was at the end of the highway until the government built a series of three tunnels to connect these towns.



One of the tunnels between Olafs fjordur and Siglufjörður



Driving inside the tunnel

The object was to solve the isolation issue for the town and to try and stimulate tourist traffic going north from Dalvík. The tunnels are 3.4, 7.9 and 3.9 kilometres in length respectively. The first tunnel is a single lane with layover points to allow oncoming traffic to pass. The layover points are at approximately 150 metre intervals. The remaining tunnels allowed for full two-way traffic.



Sauðárkrókur Town

From here we proceeded along the coastline to Sauðárkrókur where we enjoyed a nice lunch at a local restaurant. Sauðárkrókur is the largest urban area in Skagafjörður. Local industry includes an insulation manufacturing factory, fur skinning factory and of course the usual fishing industry. Other than this there isn't much to write about.

We then travelled onwards via Blönduós to our overnight stop at the Hotel Laugarbakki.

Blönduós is the largest urban area in Húnaflói bay. Employment in the area is connected to agriculture and the fishing industry. Lakes and Rivers are found all around Blönduós and there are many good locations to fish for both salmon and trout. The river Blanda, which runs through the town, is the longest and is reported as the “most dominant salmon river in Iceland”. The source of the river Blanda is in the southwest side of the glacier Höfsjökull, and it runs into Húnaflói bay at Blönduós. The catchment area of Blanda is estimated to be 2,370 square kilometres and is among the longest rivers in the country with a length of around 125 kilometres. As stated above the river is one of the main salmon rivers in Iceland and has often yielded a catch of almost 3,000 salmon in one summer. In the river Blanda is the Island Hrótey. This island is protected as Hrótey has a wide variety of vegetation and bird life being the habitat of geese and many other species.



Blönduós Town



Blanda River

A short drive of a further 50 kilometres and we reached our accommodation for the night. Nothing of significance at this location. Just a hotel (nice one at that) built in the middle of farms and mountains.

Day Twelve – Thursday 13 July 2017

This morning we departed the hotel Laugarbakki and headed off to Isafjordur with the sun shining. Yesterday it rained for most of the drive from Laugar to Dalvik.

Once again, the scenery was intense with the mountains towering over us on the left side and the fjords dropping away to the right. The scenery is just incredible. It is hard to do the scenery justice with a camera, even when I attach the zoom lens, but fortunately the dash cam is capturing it all.



The Westfjords

About an hour into the five-hour drive (380km) the clouds appeared again and the rain started. This continued for around the next three hours before the sun started to break through the clouds. It was from this point that we could really take in the scenery. The first stop on route (for Maree's coffee) was Hólmavík. Hólmavík is the largest town in the Strandir region in the West Fjords Region, an area with an exciting and tragic history of witchcraft, witch-hunting, and sorcery. Inhabitants in the countryside surrounding Hólmavík live mostly on sheep farming while economic activity in town revolves around the fisheries and the service sector.



Hólmavík

There is a Museum of Sorcery & Witchcraft which supposedly takes visitors on a tour into the mystical world of the supernatural. The history of witch-hunting in 17th century Iceland is presented at the exhibition as well as various aspects of magic from more recent sources. However, the most shocking and remarkable piece is easily the so-called "necropants" which is the dried skin of a man from the waist down. These horrifying leggings were used in a spell that would supposedly bring the caster more money. Unfortunately, the cafés in town do not open to 11:30am and as we were in the town at 10:30, Maree missed out on coffee. Oh well we will try at the next decent sized town (there aren't many between Hólmavík and Ísafjörður).



Reykjanes Hotel

The next restaurant symbol appearing on our GPS was a hotel at Reykjanes. This is a geothermal area in the Westfjords. We stopped here for lunch as we were uncertain when the next food stop would appear. The hotel didn't overly impress as we drove up, as you can see, but the food looked alright, so we stopped for some soup and of course for Maree to have her coffee – not great coffee but we are starting to accept that most places in Iceland do not do coffee like they do in Europe or Australia.



Sudavik Township from the mountain

At this point the weather started to brighten with blue skies appearing. So, we started to enjoy the scenery again with the high mountains and the blue fjords. The next town we stopped at was Sudavik. This town is about 30 minutes from our final destination. The town is small but has a sad history. On January 16, 1995, an avalanche fell on the village early in the morning (around 6:25 am) and destroyed several buildings, most of them residents' houses. Fourteen people were killed (including eight children) and twelve were injured. Severe snowstorms made the rescue work difficult and dangerous. The final survivor was rescued 23 hours after the avalanche had fallen, and the search continued into the evening of January 17. A disaster relief fund was established, and within a week, the Icelandic public had donated 300 million kroner to the relief effort. The same winter, two more avalanches fell from Traðargil, destroying several houses; the areas hit had already been

evacuated, so no more lives were lost. Avalanches fell from many other gullies and mountainsides during the avalanche cycle that winter.

At a public meeting on January 23, 1995, it was decided that the village should be rebuilt at a safer location. The existing properties within the danger zone were sold to the Icelandic government, and construction work on the new village began on August 23. By winter of 1996, 51 new houses had been built, and eight more had been moved from the old residential area. The industries in the area were relocated along with the residents, with the exception of the freezing plant, which continues to operate in a similar manner as it did prior to the avalanche. Many of the properties in the old town are now rented out to tourists in the summer months. The village's main industries now are fishing, fish processing and tourism.



Sudavik Township view before our descent down the mountain



Sudavik Township

From here we travelled on to Isafjordur. We checked into the hotel – another Edda – and then drove around the town. We actually found a cafe at last that makes good coffee and it was good to see Maree satisfied. Tonight, we have booked in to the Restaurant Tjörhúsið. This restaurant has a great reputation as the best seafood restaurant in town and we found it fully booked when I asked for a table at 19:30.

However, as we didn't want to miss out on this great fish restaurant, we booked in for a 21:00 time slot. Late but it is daylight all night so what the heck – we will sleep in tomorrow as our next destination for two nights is only 25km away in the same area so we can check out of tonight's hotel later in the morning. And yes, the seafood dinner was great.



Ísafjörður harbour



Tjörhúsið Restaurant



Ísafjörður harbour

Day Thirteen – Friday 14 July 2017



Ísafjörður – view of the town and surrounding mountains

Today we had a sleep in as it was only a short drive from Ísafjörður to our next destination, Suðureyri. Suðureyri is a small Icelandic fishing village perched on the tip of the 13 km long Súgandafjörður in the Westfjords. The community was isolated for years by the huge mountains and rough road that led over them. Now it is connected to Ísafjörður by a five km tunnel. Before heading off to Suðureyri we did some local sightseeing.

The first destination was to Bolungarvík and Mt Bolafjall which is accessed via the five km tunnel. Bolungarvík is a fishing village and the only built-up area in the municipality of Bolungarvíkurkaupstaður (you've got to love these names) in the northwest of Iceland, located on the Westfjords peninsula, approximately 14 kilometres from the town of Ísafjörður and 473 km from the capital city Reykjavík. It was one of Iceland's oldest fishing outposts, well positioned close to abundant fishing grounds. The quiet countryside attracts tourists and mainly in summer. The bay Skálavík can be reached by gravel road over a mountain pass which also leads to the top of the Bolafjall Mountain at 638 metres offering magnificent views. The guidebook suggested that if you had an issue with heights (as I do) that you may not want to take the route to the top as it is described as "a scary drive". So, we didn't go to the top.



Lighthouse and Mt Bolafjall in the background



Mountain views from Bolungarvik West Fjords



Mountain views from Bolungarvik West Fjords



Turf Huts in Osvor West Fjords

We then went to Ósvör which is a couple of kilometres outside of the town of Bolungarvik. Ósvör is replica of an Old Icelandic fishing station from the 19th

century. On display are a rowing boat, a crew hut with tools and equipment, a salt house and a drying shed. The curator welcomes you in a traditional fisherman outfit. There are also a couple of original huts where the roof is covered in turf. Icelandic turf houses were the product of a difficult climate, offering superior insulation compared to buildings solely made of wood or stone, and the relative difficulty in obtaining other construction materials in sufficient quantities. 30% of Iceland was forested when it was settled, mostly with birch. The native birch had to serve as the primary framing material on the remote island. However, Iceland did have a large amount of turf that was suitable for construction. Some structures in Norway had turf roofs, so the notion of using this as a building material was not alien to many settlers. The common Icelandic turf house would have a large foundation made of flat stones; upon this was built a wooden frame which would hold the load of the turf. The turf would then be fitted around the frame in blocks often with a second layer, or in the more fashionable herringbone style. The only external wood would be the doorway which would often be decorative; the doorway would lead into the hall which would commonly have a great fire. Another interesting aspect of the Icelandic turf house was the introduction of attached toilets, which were communal, and the act of going to the attached toilet was often done in large groups.



Turf Huts in Osvor West Fjords



Turf Huts in Osvor West Fjords

From here we decided to drive on to Flateyri. This required driving back through the five-kilometre tunnel and then taking another 5.4 kilometre tunnel under the mountains. This tunnel is interesting as it has a “T” intersection halfway in that you take to get to Suðureyri, our overnight stop.

Flateyri has been a trading post since 1792, and temporarily became a major whaling centre in the 19th century. In October 1995 an avalanche hit the village, destroying 29 homes and killing 20 people. Since then, a “deflecting dam” has been built to protect the village from any further avalanches. In the 1990s, Flateyri prospered as a fishing village but after the 2008–11 financial crisis hit its main fishing companies shut down and many people left.



Flateyri Township



The Flateyri deflecting dam.

From Flateyri we headed off to Suðureyri. We are staying here for two nights. Not certain why we were booked in here as there is very little to do or see; Ísafjörður would have been a better option. So tomorrow we will head back into Ísafjörður or Flateyri and have lunch as it has nice spots along the fjord.

Day Fourteen – Saturday 15 July 2017

Just a few images from today's travel around Suðureyri and Ísafjörður. We have seen most of the things in this area, so we just drove around today taking some more photographs. Maree thought about going for a swim in the geothermal baths but said she was getting the "evil eye" from the locals, so she decided against it. Tonight we headed back into Ísafjörður to have dinner at Husid Restaurant. We decided that tonight for dinner we wanted a change from the Icelandic food of fish and lamb, so we settled for a pizza; and a good pizza at that.



Isafjodur Fishing Wharf



Isafjodur Mountain view from Fishing Wharf



Isafjodur Mountain view from Fishing Wharf



Maree with Isafjodur Mountains in the background



Isafjodur Fishing Museum



Isafjodur Caravan Park – It appears any place you can park an RV is classed as an RV park.

Day Fifteen – Sunday 16 July 2017

Today we travelled from Suðureyri to Patreksfjörður, passing through some of the most dramatic scenery the West Fjords has to offer. Route 60 is the access route for the southern and western sections of this region. It's predominantly a mountain road winding through narrow passes and deep-green valleys as it rounds the heads of fjords, past the handful of tiny villages which mark the way down the west coast south of Suðureyri (once again I have it all on my dash cam). It arrives on the south coast at Brjánslækur, where the car ferry crosses Breidafjörður Bay to Stykkishólmur (we do that trip tomorrow).

Despite Route 60 being one of the West Fjords' main roads, once you're south of the small sleepy fishing villages of Flateyri and Þingeyri, it's little more than an unsurfaced and badly potholed dirt track, where driving requires slow speeds, and lots of patience and nerve as we again had to drive through thick cloud with drops either side. Things improved as we descended, and the scenery was spectacular. The climb being in cloud meant there was nothing to see, except the road thank goodness. We then headed into Hrafnseyri, the birthplace of Jon Sigurdsson who led Iceland's nineteenth century independence movement.

From Hrafnseyri, we stopped at the triangular Dynjandi waterfall, at the head of the Dynjandavogur fjord.



Waterfall Dynjandi

After viewing the waterfall, we headed down the mountain to Brjánslækur and then on to the West Fjord's southwestern tip at Látrabjarg. From here we headed into the small township of Patreksfjörður which is our stop for the evening.

We are staying in the Foss hotel tonight which is part of a chain of hotels in Iceland. The hotel is very nice with a restaurant with a good selection on the menu with fish and lamb – of course. Maree had salmon, and I had lamb. We have learnt, finally, not to have an entrée and main course as the servings of each are large. We both enjoyed the menu tonight. And would you believe it, we met a couple from Canberra having dinner in the same restaurant. A small world it is.



View of Patreksfjörður from the hilltop.



View of Patreksfjörður from the hilltop.



View of Látrabjarg Cliffs in the distance.

Day Sixteen – Monday 17 July 2017

Today we travelled from Patreksfjörður to the ferry port of Brjanslaekur where we boarded the ferry for the trip across Breidafjörður Bay to Stykkishólmur. The trip took three hours and the ferry stopped at the small island of Flatey for about 15 minutes. On the island are beautifully kept old houses in cheerful colours that line the dusty path through the settlement. At the end of the settlement the path takes you through a dense population of birds, consisting mainly of Arctic terns. Two families stay on the island throughout the winter, but many more travel to the island during the summer, mainly for leisure but also to serve tourists.



Baldur Ferry at Brjanslaekur



Settlement on Flately Island



Settlement on Flately Island

On arrival in Stykkishólmur we drove to our accommodation for the night. We stayed at the Hotel Rjúkandi, and the place is well set up with a cafe where you can sit in cosy chairs and have coffee and cake or a meal. We chose a coffee as we were dining in the restaurant later that night.



Stykkishólmur harbour and town



Hotel Rjukandi

Day Seventeen – Tuesday 18 July 2017

Today we made our last drive in Iceland from the Snæfellsnes peninsula down to Reykjavik. The Snæfellsnes peninsula is situated to the west of Borgarfjörður, in western Iceland. Many national sights can be found in the area including the Snæfellsjökull volcano, regarded as one of the symbols of Iceland. With its height of 1446 m, it is the highest mountain on the peninsula and has a glacier at its peak (jökull means “glacier” in Icelandic). The volcano can be seen on clear days from Reykjavík, a distance of about 120 km. The mountain is also known as the setting of the novel Journey to the Centre of the Earth by the French author Jules Verne. The area surrounding Snæfellsjökull has been designated one of the four National Parks by the government of Iceland.

On arrival in Reykjavik, we found a nice bistro for lunch where we had three servings of lobster tails (langoustine, the Icelandic delicacy). We enjoyed the langoustine so much when we were in Höfn that we just had to have some more for our last lunch in Iceland. For dinner we had Icelandic lamb as the other Icelandic delicacy. It was of course a great meal. Oh well off to bed now as we have an early start in the morning to the airport.

Day Eighteen – Wednesday 19 July 2017

Today we travelled from Reykjavik down to London. We are staying at Heathrow tonight at the Sofitel as we have a departure tomorrow afternoon for Helsinki. There is nothing more to report today as it was just the usual travel – Drive to the airport, hand in the rental vehicle, check-in for the flight, wait for the flight, enjoy some wine and lunch on the flight, check in to the Sofitel and have a relaxing night before our departure to Helsinki in the morning.

We hope you enjoyed reading about our Icelandic travels. This is a country I definitely want to come back to and explore further.