Vikings and Volcanoes: Gay Iceland Adventure Tour

2020 August 9 to 16

A Gay Travel Iceland Adventure Tour

Physical challenge:

Join this gay tour and witness the extremes of Iceland: friendly Viking descendants; unspoiled lush
wilderness; fuming volcanic craters, geysers, and natural hot springs; rainbow-festooned waterfalls; playful puffins; and a rich history including some of folklore’s strangest sagas.

$5898

A special thanks to Ernest Monceaux for sharing beautiful photos from his 2017 vacation.

- Highlights
- Overview
- Itinerary
- Price Includes
- Testimonials
- FAQ

- **Hike** up lava flows to the top of a volcanic crater, deep into a lava tube, and along the top of dramatic sea-cliffs to see nesting puffins.
- **Enjoy** a short ferry ride to the Westman Islands, among the earth’s newest places, where the island of Surtsey emerged from the sea in 1963
- **Visit** the ruins of Pompeii of the North, a town half-covered in lava and ash.
- **Experience** a glacier hike across the ever-changing terrain of rivers of ice flowing from frosty summits toward the sea.
- **Explore** the raw, geologic beauty of the national reserve Landmannalaugar.
- **Trek** to the edge of the America tectonic plate, then through the rugged chasm where the European plate is ripped away from it.
- **Stroll** across a landscape so moonlike that NASA sent astronauts for practice walks before the first Apollo moon landing.
- **Swim** in natural hot springs dotted across the Icelandic wilderness.
- **Climb** around, behind, and into a variety of waterfall wonderlands.
- **Savor** delicious seafood, lamb, and even that Icelandic delicacy, Hákarl, putrid shark!
- For those with extra time, come a couple of days early to experience the fabulous Reykjavik Pride Festival!

### Eerie Landscapes and Extraordinary Fun

During our gay Iceland adventure week explore many of the country’s natural wonders and its unique Nordic history and culture. We’ll take day hikes through the amazingly green countryside, across steaming rivers, around waterfalls, into volcanic craters, on top of icy glaciers, and even through rift valleys, not to mention ferry boat rides and natural hot springs! Optional activities on your free day include horseback riding, arctic rafting, and whale watching.

Consider beginning your holiday week by arriving a day or two early to join Reykjavik’s Pride parade and celebrations. Opening ceremonies begin Thursday evening. The Pride parade usually begins at 2 pm Saturday, followed by an outdoor festival and midnight dance parties. At the end of our tour, we’ve allowed time to enjoy the nightlife of gay-friendly Reykjavik.
The small island of Iceland offers enormous contrasts and variety: unspoiled landscapes, uncrowded parks, and unique geology. Iceland has a small, friendly gay and lesbian community in the capital, but you’ll find few signs of gay life outside Reykjavik. In true Scandinavian tradition, people don’t feel it’s any big deal whether you’re gay or straight.

If you have a little extra time, consider adding a day or two BEFORE your trip to join Reykjavik’s gay pride celebrations. These begin with opening ceremonies Thursday evening and conclude in the early hours on Sunday. The Pride parade is usually on Saturday, around 2 PM, followed by an outdoor festival and midnight dance parties.

Map:
Day 1: Volcanic Craters and Welcome Dinner

If you are arriving on the first tour day, plan for an early morning arrival in Iceland so that you can join our pre-tour, two-hour guided walk of Reykjavik’s main sights.

And we can’t miss one of Iceland’s most unique hot spots, the much-famed Blue Lagoon! Enjoy this sprawling outdoor pool on the Reykjanes Peninsula with a long soak and a therapeutic swim. Immerse yourself in the geothermally-heated waters, which are naturally blue from heavy mineral content, as steam fills the air.

In fact, it would be hard to find a water heater anywhere in Iceland. Enjoy taking a long shower every morning — the hot water is piped right from the earth, and there’s plenty more where it came from. We will return to our hotel in the afternoon and have our welcome dinner this evening.

Day 2: Where the Continents Divide, Geysers Erupt, and Mighty Waters Fall
Today we’re off to explore some amazing geology:

- See where the North American tectonic plate is pulling away from the European tectonic plate, creating rifts in the earth’s crust – sheer cliffs pulling from each other, creating gorges and canyons that get wider each year. We’ll hike in between the continents.
- Visit “Geysir,” the original spouter, whose name is now used around the world as a generic term for all, well, geysers. Next to it, at “Strokkur”, we’ll see the pool rise and fall, as if panting hard. Then the surface swells like a giant blue egg emerging from the earth, and finally, it spews, bursts, and jets into the sky.
- Marvel at waterfalls galore this week, beginning today with huge Gullfoss, a huge double-decker that entices us into its misty veil.

And we’ll learn a bit about politics, too:

- High up in the hills along the shores of the Oxara River we find Iceland’s most historic spot: Thingvellir (Parliament Plains). This is where the rowdy Vikings formed the world’s oldest true parliament, in A.D. 930.
After an exhilarating day, we head for two nights to a lovely country guesthouse sitting in a steaming valley, with multiple hot pools to relax and soak in while enjoying the late-setting sun.

**Day 3: Fire and Ice**

Just up from our guesthouse, we enjoy a longer hike, this time into an area that is still warm from geologic faulting and tremors. We will hike across serene, green hills with only the Icelandic sheep and beautiful vistas to keep us company.

Then through volcanic valleys and past hot spots, hot springs, fumaroles, mud pots, and steaming rivers. We may reward ourselves half-way through the mountain hike with a wilderness soak in a steaming river.
After lunch, we’re off for deep lava on an afternoon tour to the Reykjanes Peninsula, including spelunking through a lava tube and a relaxing soak in the wonders of a geothermal spa located on top of a lava flow. Lava Tube Leidarendi: we will enjoy a 1-hour hike deep into a lava tube, a tunnel that was created by swift running lava. Bending, twisting, and, for the hardy, squeezing our way through the unworldly shapes, we’ll pop out into daylight bedside the entrance!

And we will likely soak again once we arrive back to the geothermal pools at our guesthouse.

Day 4: Puffins, Glacier Hike and Pompeii of the North on the Westman Islands

This morning we have a 30-minute ferry ride to Heimaey, the main town of the Westman Islands. We will offer a variety of things to see and do in the Westman Islands, depending on time, weather, and ability. These include:

- **Tour** of the various natural sites around the island and the amazing effects of the Eldfell volcanic eruption that buried half the town of Heimaey in 1973.
- **Visit** the buried section of town and the new museum “Pompeii of the North”
- **Hike** up the Eldfell cinder cone to its still-warm summit.
- **Look for** puffins nesting at Storhofdi and hear about puffin traditions: puffin hunting; and the egg hunting tradition is known at Sprangan (collectors would dangle themselves from long ropes over cliffs, swinging from side to side as they gathered eggs). And also the annual Puffin Patrol, usually mid-August, when baby puffins wander aimlessly into town, following the night lights, instead of heading to sea. The locals collect, weigh, and feed the babies, then release them the next morning, into the sea.

Next, we return to the mainland and journey underneath the great volcano that disrupted so much of Europe’s air traffic in 2010, Eyjafjallajökull. Nearby is the glacier Sólheimajökull.
There we meet our mighty Viking glacier guide who outfit us in our glacier gear and then instruct us how to walk on ice before taking us to explore both the smooth and the rough and tumble terrain of a constantly moving and eroding glacier. The cerulean blue of the dense ice is revealed in its crevasses, ice caves, and towering seracs.

After our glacier hike, surprise, we visit more waterfalls, hopefully with the evening sun perfectly angled to allow for fantastic views and pictures. The main waterfall, Seljalandsfoss, is special because you can actually walk behind it and revel in its mist. Afterward, we continue to our next country lodge.

**Day 5: Exploring Colorful Landmannalaugar**

After breakfast, we will have a magnificent drive across at first barren lands — all white with pumice, then suddenly brittle black rock strewn everywhere by the might volcano Hekla nearby. It’s a scene out of the film
Prometheus, filmed here a few years ago.

But things brighten and begin to green as we approach the beautifully-sited national reserve known as Landmannalaugar, mysterious land of multi-hued mountains of yellow, white, red, green, gray, and black. These two, of course, have their own volcanic creation but are much different from anything we’ve seen this week. And we’ll delight in a day of hiking in the area. Half hell, half Garden of Eden, it’s an amazing land with an eerie mystical bent, made even more so by multiple steam vents and the occasional whiff of sulfur coming from deep within the Earth.

We’ll have hikes of varying lengths and reward ourselves with a wonderful soak in one of Iceland’s best natural hot springs, with fantastic views, before venturing on to our more casual, but well-suited, wilderness lodge for the night.

**Day 6: Wonderfalls, Ruins, and the Central Highlands**

Today we explore more of the pristine secrets of the Highlands region, with hikes through native Icelandic forests and farm ruins, and a bevy of amazing waterfalls in the Thorsa river valley.
We’ll enjoy a beautiful, towering set of twin falls, 400+ feet high, in a side tributary before working our way downriver to the idyllic nature scape of Gjain, with its series of springs and waterfalls from all sides, before wandering down to the Viking ruin of 1103 at Stöng.

And soon afterward, we visit the modern replica of that 11th century Viking long-house, called Pjodveldisbear (you may have seen it in a few scenes of the Game of Thrones).

Afterward, we’ll enjoy another double waterfall before we work our way back to the bright lights and energy of Reykjavik, where we’ll stay for two nights.

Day 7: Free Day in Reykjavik
Explore Reykjavik, the northernmost capital city of Europe, and perhaps the most eclectic. It’s a working harbor and a cultural center; you can fish for salmon right here in town, or dine on salmon at a fine restaurant. (Likewise, and perhaps more discomfiting to some: you can see puffins at the zoo, from a boat – or eat them at a fine restaurant.)

It’s easy to fill a whole day strolling the streets, plazas, and waterfront of Reykjavik. While many imported items are expensive, travelers with a yen for shopping can find several bargains, most notably the strikingly-patterned wool sweaters. You can rent a bike to explore on your own or join a two-to-three-hour city tour or a longer mountain biking tour just outside the city.

Reykjavik has several outdoor, naturally-heated pool complexes that are a mainstay of Icelandic social life, which provide a tempting way to relax. More impressive yet, they have a warm-water beach where they’ve pumped the geothermal water in to warm the cooler North Atlantic waters in a crescent-shaped, golden sand beach. Whale-watching trips are another option as is returning to the countryside to scuba dive in one of the tectonic rifts or try for a horseback ride. Hop onto a handsome palomino, a purebred descendant of the horses that arrived with the Vikings. This is the only horse in the world able to achieve the remarkably smooth, yet fast, 5th gait known as the tolt.

Tonight, our last evening together, a wonderful dinner awaits our whole group. As always, there are alternatives for vegetarians and those with special dietary requirements. Then, Reykjavik's gay disco awaits those who still have some energy!

**Day 8: Departure**

The hardest thing about our trips is saying goodbye to a wonderful group of new friends, and the magic of Iceland. But you’ve seen parts of Iceland that most travelers miss; you’ve interacted with the country and its people in ways that give you an extra appreciation for it.

We’ll bet you’ve made some new friends. Thank you for joining us — and we hope to see you again!

**Price includes:** All group transportation within Iceland; All accommodations; Tour guide accompanying the group at all locations; Breakfast every day, 2 lunches, and 4 dinners; Hiking, glacier hike, boat ride to/from Westman Islands (weather permitting), entry to Pompeii of the North Museum and the Viking House recreation, and other outdoor activities. Services of a knowledgeable HE Travel tour host (with a minimum number of participants). HE Travel provides complimentary Medical & Evacuation Insurance for every US Resident on our group tours who does
not have other coverage.

**Not included:** Airfare; Airport transfers on arrival and departure; Souvenirs, snacks, admissions; Meals not listed here; Alcoholic beverages; Optional activities (bike tours, horseback riding, and whale-watching are available.); Gratuities for guides and host.

**Optional Tour Choices:**

$1200 Single Supplement in a European room(for solo travelers who wish to enjoy a private bedroom and bathroom)

$2000 Single Supplement upgrade to a larger Double room(for solo travelers who wish to enjoy a private bedroom and bathroom)

“The most fun I’ve had in a beautiful place in a long time” – Fred H., PA

“A life-changing exhilarating experience.” – Craig B., NY

“This was the best experience of my life.” -Marc T., CA

“Our Iceland trip was great. What a unique and fascinating place to visit—from the glaciers and the tectonic plates to the waterfalls, geysers, and lava tubes. Great guides and a great group of guys.” – Ron Roman, Oak Park, IL

“Visiting Iceland is like a trip to another planet. Majestic, unique, a land that is living and breathing before your eyes and stunningly beautiful. And the people are great too! Puffins rule!” – Brian Farmer, San Francisco, CA

“Friends asked me before the trip, “Why Iceland?” After they saw my pictures, they answered their own question.” – Alan Meyer, Lincoln, NE

“I didn’t know what I was getting myself into. It turned out to be one of the best vacations I’ve ever had.”— Jimmy Halpin, New York, NY

“I liked that we were able to go to many places off the beaten path and get away from the huge crowds of tour bus operators. The hotels were all very nice, and I liked the company of the other guys on the tour.” – Brian M., Boston, MA

**What if I am traveling alone?**

Most of our trips draw more single travelers than couples. When couples do join us, it’s usually because they’re looking forward to interacting with a gay group; if they wanted a holiday by themselves, they wouldn’t have signed up to travel with us. Furthermore, the activities included with our trips serve as natural ice-breakers. Within a day, you’ll be traveling with friends.

You don’t need to pay the single supplement if you’re traveling alone. We’ll be happy to match you with a
roommate. Pay the single supplement only if you want a bedroom to yourself.

Where and when does the tour start and end?

This tour starts and ends in Reykjavik, Iceland, with flights in and out of the nearby international Keflavik Airport (KEF).

Consider arriving early to enjoy a well-supported, fun Gay Pride near the Arctic. Pride is on the several days leading up to our tour, with the grand parade in Reykjavik Saturday afternoon, the day before our tour starts. And there is a large outdoor festival following the parade, as well as parties and other activities through the night.

The tour lasts 8 days and 7 nights. On our first day, Day 1, there is an optional, city tour beginning at 9 AM at our main hotel in Reykjavik, if you happen to arrive early enough. Otherwise, be sure to be in Reykjavik in our hotel lobby by 12:30 PM for an afternoon of touring and geothermal soaks. We’ll have 7 nights in Iceland, with most people flying back home on the afternoon of the last day. If you have a couple of extra days, we encourage you to join the Reykjavik Pride celebrations, usually the weekend before our tour.

How do I get there?

From North America, Icelandair offers flights from several gateway cities: Boston, New York JFK, Newark, Washington Dulles, Minneapolis/St. Paul, Denver, Seattle, Toronto, and Halifax. Delta also offers a daily summertime flight between JFK and Reykjavik. You can check flight options at www.icelandair.com, www.delta.com or call our office and ask to speak to our flight specialist.

From Europe, Icelandair offers flights to Reykjavik from several cities. Since airlines regularly change their routes, you should check with Icelandair, a travel agent, or online for up-to-date schedules.

At the airport, small islands have their advantages: it takes only minutes after your plane touches down outside Reykjavik before you’ve collected your baggage. The most convenient way to get to our hotel in downtown Reykjavik is with one of the shuttle buses. They will take you to a central location on a large bus, but as part of the same ticket, you’ll switch to a smaller van for dropoff at our hotel, but some may deliver you directly to our central hotel.

What is the Activity Level of This Tour?

1 2 3 4 5
In Iceland, we have several hikes over sometimes rough terrain, so a decent amount of walking/hiking ability over uneven and sometimes slippery surfaces is required. If you can comfortably hike for half a day, you’re ready for this trip; those eager to do more will have plenty of opportunities. Your guides on the tour will help you access what is appropriate and reasonable given your desires and abilities each day.

What’s gay life like in Iceland?
Iceland is a Scandinavian country, with similar attitudes: Most people have better things to do than worry about whether you’re gay or straight. There are strong civil rights protections for gay people (including the right to marry), and homophobic attitudes have never really taken root.

Perhaps because of this generally accepting attitude, there has never been a strongly developed gay culture as in some other world capitals. Reykjavik has a few gay organizations, a gay disco, and several clubs that serve a mixed clientele. Things don’t really get moving at the clubs until after midnight, so most of us are more likely to go out for a night at the end of the trip, rather than the beginning.

What’s the weather like in Iceland?

The Gulf Stream has a moderating influence on Iceland’s climate. Expect daytime summer temperatures in the southwest to range from the fifties to the low seventies, Fahrenheit. Odds are, you’ll experience a full gamut of these temperatures. You can also count on some clear, sunny days, with blue sky from one horizon to the other; and some overcast or rainy days.

And you can count on variability. A day that begins with a grey cloud cover can give way to blue sky by noon. Be prepared for this range: pack a warm fleece jacket, and something waterproof, as well as a few t-shirts.

Additional Questions

For answers to your additional questions, please email info@hetravel.com or call 305-294-8174