



## *Fire, Ice and... Penises, Anyone?*

*BEAUTIFUL, BAFFLING AND  
UTTERLY INTOXICATING,  
ICELAND WILL HAVE YOU  
AT HALLÓ.*

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BY ANDREA TOMAZ

The temperature outside is achingly sub zero and bitter enough to freeze your facial expression solid. But inside this late-night Reykjavik bar, all woollies have been abandoned. The men are in short-sleeved shirts and the women are wearing teeny mini-dresses and stilettos that seem fabulously inappropriate for tottering home through snowy conditions at 6am. But hey, this is Iceland. Ask any local and they'll tell you that crazy optimism lies at the heart of the national psyche.

To my right stands a huge, scruffy guy who's rocking a Viking look and drinking enough to explain his massive crop of chest hairs. To my left there's a girl with an asymmetrical jet black hairstyle, fishnet stockings and a gold handbag hanging from her pale shoulder. She looks like a punky fashionista crossed with someone from The Jetsons. The barman pours us frosty vodka shots that burn all the way down. It seems appropriate enough; after all, this is the land of fire and ice.

Seductive Iceland definitely burns and freezes at the same time. Here, hot springs, exploding geysers, volcanoes, lava chasms and Northern Lights are mix-n-matched with snow, icy glaciers, fjords and colossal waterfalls that are bound to make your teeth chatter and your body tremble - in a good way.

Yep, Iceland is a stunner. But before you toss your parka and thermal undies into a suitcase and book your flight, take note. This is also one of Europe's most expensive destinations. Say goodbye to your savings and get ready to give your credit card a sadistic thrashing. Still, some experiences are priceless. Am I right? Here are a few itinerary highlights.



### **Bathe In The Blue Lagoon**

Want to soak yourself silly in hot geothermal waters while snowflakes fall on your head? This is the place to do it. And don't forget to slather white silica mud on your face as well. It's all fabulously soothing, as long as the idea of swimming in miscellaneous substances doesn't freak you out. Carved out of a lava field, this a hotpot of milky blue water and rising steam clouds. Occasionally the mist parts, revealing all sorts of surprises; an Icelander floating next to you offering face mask tips; the outline of a power plant materialising in the distance; a pack of Scottish bucks party boys wading around wearing wrestling masks and novelty g-strings. You've been warned. It's all possible when the steam lifts in the right (or wrong) places.

### **Explore The Golden Circle**

Embark on a tour of the Golden Circle which includes a trip to a volcano, waterfall and hot springs. The biggest corker is definitely Strokkur geyser in the Haukadalur Valley town of Geysir, which blows more or less every five minutes. Sure, this usually happens when you're busy chatting and haven't got your camera ready, but that's beside the point. Stand clear and avoid the wind, unless you fancy getting your face burnt off. If the Golden Circle tour doesn't quench your need for adventure, then there's always horseriding, snowmobile tours and scuba diving off the coast.

### **Sleuth out the Northern Lights**

If the night sky is squeaky clean and it's the right time of year (ie not summer) then clap on your warmest earmuffs and go hunting for the Northern Lights. Guided night tours don't offer guarantees or refunds, but if weather conditions and luck are both on your side, you'll see pink, green, yellow and orange swirls ignite the sky, smudging together an acid trip sans the acid. Think of it as weird natural science, Icelandic style.

### **Explore Town**

Remote outpost, seaside town and cosmopolitan hotspot? Well, why not. Reykjavik has its own defined sense of offbeat style. Would you expect anything less from Bjork's hometown? The city's homes and hotels are colourful and blocky (a lot like Monopoly board development pieces you add when you're winning). Reykjavik is jam-packed with vintage clothes shops, punk stores, designer boutiques, cafes, restaurants, museums, art galleries and even hot spas where you can schmooze with local 'hotpotters'. Friday and Saturday nights are unequivocally all about boozing and bar-hopping. Icelanders drink to get drunk and party until 5am, at the least. Dress to impress and don't be offended by the general pushing and shoving inside clubs. It's just part of the hands-on fun.

### **Get Quirky**

Did you know that certain highways in Iceland have been diverted in order to protect local fairies and elfin folk? It's true. So start your day with a fairy-spotting tour. Once that's ticked off your list, take a trip to the Icelandic Phallogical Museum, which showcases the preserved penises of various animals. There's even a human appendage in the collection available for your inspection. After that, maybe it's time to stop for lunch. Fuel up on some Icelandic delicacies. Putrified shark, anyone? Sheep's head? Ram's testicles? Then, once you're completely satisfied, embark on a lava tube tour. The possibilities are endless in Iceland, as long as you have a sense of adventure.