

Sky & Telescope's 7th Iceland Northern Lights Tour

Iceland, October 2 – 8, 2021

(Departure from U.S. will be October 1, 2021)

Option to add-on full-day Snæfellsnes Peninsula Tour, October 8, 2021 with return flight October 9, 2021

Join *Sky & Telescope* for a one-week tour of Iceland — and the chance to see the Northern Lights! With our tour partner Spears Travel and a local Icelandic guide, we'll explore this fascinating island's unique culture and geology during the day, then each night we'll venture into dark areas away from city lights to view Iceland's *aurora borealis*. The subtly colored, ever-changing aurora is a truly awe-inspiring spectacle not to be missed!

Although the Northern Lights are elusive and unpredictable, we've chosen the time and location to maximize our chances of seeing one or more displays. Iceland always sits right under or near the auroral oval, the band around the Far North where auroras are most common. Late September/early October is a good time for aurora-watching, as the nights are full and dark, and the weather prospects are better than deep winter. We have selected a week when moonlight won't interfere with nighttime viewing.

The friendly people of this island nation have a culture that's a fascinating mixture of both ultramodern elements and customs that date back to the original Viking settlers more than a thousand years ago. We'll stay at premium hotels both in and outside the capital city of Reykjavík and sample delicious Icelandic cuisine. Iceland's tourist infrastructure is modern, and the nation is one of the cleanest and safest in the world. Most Icelanders speak at least some English, so it's very easy to interact with the local population.

During the trip, a *Sky & Telescope* editor will give lectures on astronomy, including a talk on the science of aurorae.

Iceland Northern Lights Astronomy Tour Itinerary: October 2 – 8, 2021

Day 1: October 2, 2021: Arrival in Iceland – Blue Lagoon

Welcome to Iceland! Once you've landed at Keflavík Airport in Iceland, head through customs to the baggage carousels where you'll collect your luggage. There is a duty-free shop located by the baggage carousels, which you can shop at on arrival, while waiting for your luggage. Many items such as candy, snacks, and drinks are less expensive here than at local shops. When you've collected your luggage, proceed into the arrivals hall where your tour guide will meet you and escort you to your private coach, which will be waiting outside for you*.

*(For group members arriving on an earlier date or on afternoon flights today, you will be responsible for your own transfer on your day of arrival and for any additional hotel nights that may be required. We can arrange these for you, at an extra cost.)

Transfer to local restaurant Vikingarheimar for a **group, buffet breakfast**.

Following breakfast, you will visit Gunnuhver Hot Springs and the Bridge Between the Continents before travelling on to the world-famous **Blue Lagoon** spa. A group admission and towel rental are included in your package. The Blue Lagoon is a man-made, unique wonder: a lagoon with pleasantly warm, electric blue, mineral-rich geothermal water in the middle of a black lava field. The high natural levels of silica and minerals give the Lagoon its rich blue color and its purported healing power. The facilities include modern changing rooms and showers, an indoor geothermal pool, a restaurant, and other services. Don't forget to pack your bathing suit (and water shoes, if you prefer to not go barefoot) in your carry-on luggage for easy access.

After you've enjoyed a couple of hours in the restorative, healing waters you'll be transferred to the nearby **Northern Light Inn** for check-in. The afternoon is free to have a rest, go for a walk in the surrounding lava fields, and freshen up for the **group dinner** this evening.

Watching the fantastic colors of the Northern Lights dance across the arctic sky is an unforgettable experience, and Iceland is one of the best places to see them. They are mostly observed on crisp, still evenings, and your location well away from the city lights gives you the best chance of witnessing this spectacular natural phenomenon. You will simply need to step outside of the hotel and look up into the sky. We can provide no guarantee, of course, as the aurora borealis is a natural phenomenon — it can be fickle and a bit unpredictable — but we have seen it on all six previous trips *S&T* and Spears Travel have taken to Iceland.

Day 2: October 03, 2021: Golden Circle

After **breakfast** and after check out you'll be picked up at the **Northern Light Inn** to start the day of touring by visiting Þingvellir, a remarkable geological site and the most famous historic site on the island. Þingvellir is the site of the world's oldest democratic parliament, founded in 930AD. Located by Lake Þingvallavatn, the largest lake on the island, Þingvellir is now a National Park. The beautiful canyon running through the park is actually the meeting point of two of the Earth's tectonic plates, giving you the chance to see the dividing line between North America and Europe. Þingvellir's combination of natural phenomena and historical significance have made it a symbol of Iceland's national identity.

After spending time in Þingvellir, head on over to the fertile farmlands of the South Coast. Continue to Gullfoss, the Golden Waterfall, one of the most impressive waterfalls in Europe. Here you will see thousands of tons of icy water thunder majestically down in double falls into a deep canyon.

Only a few minutes' drive from Gullfoss is the famous Geysir, which has given its name to spouting hot springs all over the world. You will see one of the most active geysers in the area, Strokkur, shooting up to 30 meters (90 feet). A **group lunch** will be provided in the Geysir area.

After an eventful day we head to our hotel, Landhotel, with views east towards Hekla. We'll be based here for the next two nights.

Note: Landhotel is currently confirmed for two nights, the 03 and 04 October. We are also holding the Hotel Ranga confirmed for one night, the 03 October with a waitlist for the 04 October. Should the 04 October clear from the waitlist then the group will stay for two nights at Hotel Ranga instead of the Landhotel. We are still hoping we can clear two nights at the Ranga.

This evening you'll enjoy a **group dinner** at the hotel followed by an astronomy lecture by your *S&T* expert. Afterwards, have a look outside to see if the Northern Lights are on display.

Day 3: October 4, 2021: Iceland's South Shore

After breakfast we head towards the south coast and explore the land of Njal's Saga — a region of breathtaking scenery and legendary stories. During your guided tour you'll encounter the wonderful variety of the south, from the wide plains formed by glacial rivers, to the sheer sea cliffs of Dyrhólaey and the spectacular waterfalls of Seljalandsfoss and Skógafoss. We'll pay a visit to the Skógar Folk Museum and Reynisfjara, a wide black-sand beach on the South Coast of Iceland, beside the small fishing village of Vík í Mýrdal. A **group lunch** will be served in Vík.

We return to the Landhotel or Hotel Ranga with time to freshen up before enjoying a **group dinner** at the hotel.

If the Northern Lights decide to make an appearance, all you have to do is step outside and marvel at Nature's own lightshow!

Day 4: October 5, 2021: Skaftafell and Jokulsarlon Glacier Lagoon

After breakfast and check out we depart from the hotel and head along the south coast, through the alluvial plains, over sea inlets with views of volcanic mountains and moss-covered lava fields, on to the stunning Skaftafell, located in Vatnajökull National Park. You can get up close to the glacial tongue of ice pushing down the valley from Vatnajökull glacier. After our visit to Skaftafell we will take a boat trip on the stunning glacial lagoon at Jokulsarlon, where icebergs float in a lagoon of icy, azure-blue water that is running off a huge glacier.

A **group lunch** will be served at the Fosshotel Glacial Lagoon.

After lunch we will retrace our steps a little bit to the west, to the charming town of Kirkjubæjarklaustur (Kirk, for short) where we check in to Fosshotel Nupar. There will be time to freshen up before our **group dinner** which is served at the hotel.

Have a relaxing evening at the hotel or go for a walk and hope to see dazzling aurora overhead.

Day 5: October 6, 2021: Reykjavík

Following **breakfast**, check out of the hotel and enjoy the countryside scenery on the drive to the capital city of Reykjavík. A rest stop will be made in Vík for lunch (on your own account) and perhaps a visit (time permitting) to the shop Icewear/Vik Wool, where woolen items and jewelry featuring Icelandic lava are at better prices than you'll find in Reykjavík.

After our lunch stop, we visit the Hellisheiði power station for a guided tour of the facility.

We arrive to Hotel Borg late afternoon and have time after check-in for a walk and some dinner (on own account) before being picked up for our evening Northern Lights Tour. We head out into the countryside, far away from the light pollution of the city, watching the night sky and hoping the aurora will dance for us.

Day 6: October 7, 2021: Reykjavik City Tour and free time

Enjoy a Reykjavík city tour (approx. 3 hours) with stops at Hallgrimskirkja, Perlan (with admission to the observation deck), and the National Museum (with admission and guided tour).

Hallgrimskirkja (Hallgrim's Church) is Reykjavík's signature landmark, and its tower can be seen from almost everywhere in the city. The 1937 design was inspired by the shapes and forms created when lava cools into basalt rock. Construction took place from 1945 to 1986, with the tower being completed long before the main building. A singular feature is a

gargantuan, German-built pipe organ, finished in 1992, whose powerful notes are capable of filling the huge interior space with a range of uplifting tones.

Standing directly in front of the church is a fine statue of Leifur Eiriksson (c. 970-1020), the first European to land on the shores of the New World in what is now North America in the year 1000 A.D. (about 500 years before Columbus).

Perlan or The Pearl was built in 1988 and is a remarkable building, unique in Iceland and probably the whole world. It consists of a glass dome constructed atop huge tanks in which natural hot water is stored for heating the city. The Pearl offers the visitor great scenic views of the capital area and beyond.

The National Museum showcases objects that provide insight into Icelandic cultural history - displays that encourage visitors to dwell on the past, present, and future. Reopened after extensive refurbishment, the museum houses new, dynamic exhibitions that fulfill all the modern standards required of such an establishment housing the nation's treasures.

After the conclusion of the guided tour you may choose to stay at the National Museum to have a better look at the items there.

The rest of the afternoon is free to explore the city, with lunch on your own today. Reykjavík has a wide range of restaurants to choose from, with various types of cuisine and price points.

Here are a few suggestions for places to see on your free time:

Art & Culture. Reykjavík Art Museum also known as Hafnarhús (translating as Harbor House) which serves as the institute of contemporary art. New developments in art are explored through diverse exhibitions of Icelandic and international artists. An exhibition of paintings by the Pop artist Erró is a permanent feature.

Shopping. Reykjavík has become known for cutting edge design, international and design jewelry, hip fashion, art galleries, and a vibrant music scene. The trendy 101 quarter in the city center around the main shopping street of Laugavegur and the nearby Skólavörðustígur offers fabulous shopping at very affordable prices.

For the taste buds. Stop by at the local hot-dog stand and try the famous Icelandic hot-dogs or *pylsur* with all the special trimmings. This is very popular amongst the local people, and you will see the long queue, especially on weekends.

There will be a **group farewell dinner** this evening at a local restaurant, Caruso Harbour or similar. Our main tour ends tomorrow and some of our group, those not taking the Snaefellsness Peninsula tour, will be leaving us.

Tonight, following our group dinner, is our back-up Northern Lights Tour if the weather didn't co-operate yesterday evening.

Otherwise, the evening is free to walk around the city center, along the harbour and enjoy a final, relaxing nightcap after your busy day.

Day 7: October 8, 2021: End of Main Tour and Departure

All good things must come to an end, including your visit to Iceland. After **breakfast** and check-out our driver will pick you up at the bus stop by Hotel Borg and take you to Keflavík airport for your departure flight. We schedule your airport transfer to be 2.5-3 hours before the earliest flight departure of the group members.

Should you be leaving substantially earlier or later than the main group, individual transfers can be arranged for you at a small extra fee.

Optional Extension:

Day 7: October 8, 2021: Snæfellsness Peninsula Day Tour

After breakfast our coach and guide will collect us and take us north of the capital city, along the west coast. Explore the stunning scenery and landscapes of the Snæfellsness Peninsula, a “must see” for nature lovers. The Snæfellsnes peninsula in the west of Iceland is almost like a miniature version of the whole country. You’ll see the emblematic Snæfellsjökull glacier, white and black sand beaches, bird cliffs, spectacular mountains and volcanic craters, incredibly rich trout lakes and salmon rivers, lush valleys, and unique harbours in charming fishing villages. The stunning landscapes of the peninsula have captured the imagination of people all over the world ever since Jules Verne wrote the famous science fiction novel “Journey to the Centre of the Earth” in which the amazing Snæfellsjökull glacier is where the journey begins. Recently Ben Stiller filmed parts of his critically acclaimed blockbuster “The Secret Life of Walter Mitty” here, notably in the charming village of Stykkishólmur.

A **group lunch** and **group dinner** will be provided during your tour today.

Be on the lookout for Northern Lights on the drive back to Reykjavik.

Return to Hotel Borg at approximately 10:00pm.

Day 8: October 9 2021: End of Extended Tour and Departure

All good things must come to an end, including your visit to Iceland. After *breakfast* and check-out our driver will pick you up at the bus stop by Hotel Borg and take you to Keflavík airport for your departure flight. We schedule your airport transfer to be 2.5–3 hours before the earliest flight departure of the group members.

Should you be leaving substantially earlier or later than the main group, individual transfers can be arranged for you at a small extra fee.

We wish you a great trip home and hope you will bring back many great memories of Iceland. We look forward to seeing you in the Land of Fire and Ice again!

Góða ferð!

Included:

- Private coach with driver and English-speaking guide for the program as outlined
- Breakfast buffet at Vikingarheimar Restaurant
- Blue Lagoon Comfort Entrance (use of towel, one drink of your choice, silica mud mask)
- 1 nights’ accommodation at Northern Lights Inn
- 2 nights’ accommodation at Landhotel & Ranga Hotel
- 1 nights’ accommodation at Fosshotel Nupar
- 2 nights’ accommodation at Hotel Borg
- Breakfast daily at hotels
- VAT on accommodation and lodging fee
- Three 2-course group lunches including coffee/tea*
- Five 3-course group dinners including coffee/tea*
- Golden Circle Tour (guided, approx. 8 hours)
- Visit to Skogar Folk Museum
- Jokulsarlon Glacier Lagoon boat tour

- Visit to Hellisheidi Power Plant
- Reykjavík City Tour (guided, approx. 3 hours with stops at Hallgrímskirkja, Perlan with entry fee to the observation deck, and the National Museum with entrance fee and guided group tour)
- Unguided transfer Reykjavík to Keflavík Airport on day of departure
- Free WiFi on the coach

***Please inform us of any special dietary requirements including food allergies*

Additional Inclusions for optional Snaefellsness Peninsula Tour:

- Full day guided tour, including 2-course group lunch and 3-course group dinner
- Free WiFi on the coach
- One additional night of accommodation at Hotel Borg, including breakfast

Not included:

- International airfare
- Drinks with lunches and dinners other than coffee/tea and meals not mentioned
- Guide on day of departure
- Extra fees for portorage, grab & go lunches, room service, items of a personal nature
- Unexpected fees introduced for access to nature sites on private land
- Transfers for individual arrivals
- Entrance fees not mentioned above
- Optional tours
- Travel insurance (highly recommended – we can send you a quote)
- Room outside of normal check-in/check-out times
- Tips and gratuities
- Anything else not mentioned under “included”

Tour Note: In rare cases a change of itinerary may be necessary during your program in Iceland should weather or road conditions not allow for operation of the scheduled itinerary. Certain outdoor activities may be cancelled. Proposed visits to venues may not be possible due to alterations in operating hours. In this case no refund will be given but a reasonable alternative will be substituted where and whenever possible.