

Viking Itinerary - Days 1-5

Reykjavik – National Museum of Iceland – Thingvellir National Park – Gullfoss – Haukadalur – Icelandic Settlement Centre – Reykholt – Hraunfossar and Barnafossar waterfalls – Deildartunguhver hot spring – Stockholm

Day One

We commence our tour of Iceland in the afternoon with a visit to the National Museum of Iceland in Reykjavik, the capital of Iceland. At the Museum you can focus on the Viking Settlement period, 870-930AD and the Commonwealth period, 1180-1264AD. You will see rare and intimate objects displaying Norse and Celtic cultural influences such as stunning amber necklaces, trefoil broaches, coins and armbands. Also see examples of the tools and riding gear used by the pioneer farmers and of course their weapons, sometimes beautifully ornate but huge and heavy.

In the evening we will have our welcome dinner preceded by orientation.

Day Two

We will spend the morning on a tour of the city of Reykjavik. This fascinating excursion will give an excellent overview of the Reykjavik area with our guide sharing interesting facts about Europe's northernmost capital city. We will see many of the city's major attractions including its main landmark, Hallgrímskirkja Church, and the viewing platform of the Perlan glass dome providing a 360° view over the city. The afternoon and evening will be free.

Day Three

We leave Reykjavik and firstly visit Thingvellir National Park, a World Heritage site. Famed for its rugged, stunningly lovely wilderness and beautiful rift valley, it was the meeting place of Iceland's first general assembly or Althing, the national parliament of Iceland, in 903 with sessions being held on the site until 1798. The valley was formed when two tectonic

plates gradually drifted apart between the North American tectonic plate and the Eurasian.

We then continue on to the spectacularly beautiful Gulfoss or "Golden Falls", where the wide, rushing waters of the Hvítá River plunge abruptly into a crevasse. When first approaching the falls, the edge is obscured from view so that it appears that the river has simply vanished into the earth. It is one of the many locations where Game of Thrones was filmed.

After lunch, we will visit the spectacular geothermal area of Haukadalur, a geological wonder of mud pools, hot springs and geysers. It is home to the Geysir where the word "geyser" originates. Nearby, you will be able to see the regular eruptions of Strokkur as the hot springs burst skyward. Hissing steam vents are ringed with colourful algae and minerals.

We will then return to our hotel where we will have a free evening.

Day Four

We will first visit the interactive Icelandic Settlement Centre in the town of Borgarnes and learn how the Norwegian Vikings made their perilous longship journeys to Iceland. Built around an excavated 10th century longhouse once inhabited by the Vikings and their slaves, we will see interactive media displays about Viking architecture and how the Vikings lived. Also on display are rare ancient manuscripts relating to Iceland's history.

We will then journey to Reykholt, once one of the intellectual centres of Iceland. The poet, historian, saga writer and chieftain Snorri Sturluson lived here during the Middle Ages. The quality of his writing made him the foremost historical writer of his time in the whole of Europe. We are eternally grateful to him for his records of the Old Norse language and mythology that are invaluable to modern scholars. He was the author of such important and famous works as Heimskringla, one of the most important sources of Scandinavian history, Snorra Edda, a handbook on poetry and mythology and probably one of the very best sagas of Icelanders, Egil's Saga, the story of the Viking poet Egill Skallagrímsson. The Snorrastofa Cultural and Medieval Centre is built on the site of Snorri's home.

We then journey to view the very beautiful Hraunfossar and Barnafossar waterfalls. The Hraufossar is a series of waterfalls formed by rivulets streaming over a distance of nearly a kilometre from a lava field and pour into the Hivita River. Close by is the lovely waterfall of Barnafoss also formed in the same way as Hraunfossar.

Our last stop of the day is Deildartunguhver, a hot spring characterised by its very high flow rate of 180 litres per second. A fern called the "deer fern" grows near here and is not found anywhere else in Iceland.

We then return to our hotel where we will have the evening free.

Day Five

We will have an early start to fly to Stockholm and then check into our hotel. The afternoon will be free and we will have our welcome dinner to Sweden in the evening.