

Icelandic lava trek, Iceland



Iceland hosts some of Europe's greatest wilderness areas, which are home to active volcanoes, sheer cliffs, glaciers, thundering waterfalls, steaming lava fields, plunging fjords, boiling mud pools and spouting geysers! This is the stunning terrain that your 'long weekend' challenge will cross.

The challenge is to walk the Landmannalaugar route across the Southern Highlands through one of the most actively volcanic areas in Iceland. Most striking of all is the sheer vastness of space with far reaching visibility, crystal clear northern air and the geological diversity of the multi-coloured volcanic rocks.

Although this is a short European trek, don't be fooled into thinking it is not challenging! The days are long, the terrain is difficult, and you will be expected to get involved in helping to set up camp in the evenings.

Whilst the trek is not technically difficult, you will have to be prepared for some steep climbs and descents on rough ground, as well as walking across snowfields. Such awe inspiring terrain is rarely crossed by adventurers. Before returning home, you will have the chance to visit the Blue Lagoon and take a dip.

Day 1: International travel and transfer to the interior

You will fly from London Heathrow on Iceland Air to Reykjavik's Keflavik Airport. Our Charity Challenge representative will be at Heathrow to assist you with the check-in and any last minute questions. You will then be met at Keflavik airport by a Charity Challenge local representative who will transfer (4-4.5hrs) you immediately by bus to the Southern Highlands about 150 miles east of Reykjavik. The barren lava fields that surround Iceland's international airport are an eye-

grabbing introduction to this near-Arctic island, home to many volcanoes (some still active), glistening with glaciers, geysers, hot springs and waterfalls. There will be a refreshment stop en-route – the last shop you will see for several days! You will pass by the lower slopes of Hekla, Iceland's most famous volcano, which erupts about every ten years, (the last eruption was in 2000). The area around Hekla is covered with a mix of lava fields and black pumice (dust). It looks like the lunar surface. After a further hour, you will arrive at Landmannalaugar where you will camp for the night. Here you will help pitch your tents for tonight (as you will on each night of the challenge). Landmannalaugar is in the heart of Southern Iceland's thermal area on the mid-Atlantic rift and surrounded by multicoloured rhyolite mountains and lava fields. It is starkly beautiful. The camp lies in a flat valley, surrounded by hills and encompassing a fairly unforgiving landscape of rocky open ground. The campsite has good facilities though, with plenty of showers and toilets. Before you turn in, you will have the opportunity to bathe in the hot springs in the area. Darkness will last for only 2-3 hours and even then it is only a grey twilight awash in midnight sun. Overnight dinner, clear up and camping.



Day 2: Landmannalaugar to Álftavatn (24 kms)

The following morning, you will wake up early and after breakfast, will start your hiking challenge. Today is an extremely challenging first day. You will climb up

through the rhyolite, cross lava fields, pass steaming vents and in total contrast to the steam - you will cross snow fields as you wander these high lonely hills. Walking in the snow will be your biggest challenge today as it moves and slides beneath your feet. Near the highest point (3,600ft) you will pass Storihver – a big hot spring amongst a field of vents. This is a strange and sinister hot spring. After lunch you will walk through fields of glistening black opsidium rock with spectacular views back across to Hrafninnusker, the valleys and the snowfields. Continuing along the Jokultungur Ridge the views remain fabulous – Tindfjallajokull, Eyjafjallajokull and Myrdalsjokull glaciers and the Álfvatn Valley. Finally, you will have a long downhill descent over scree finishing with a river crossing to Álfvatn, a huge volcanic lake where you will camp overnight. The stunning surroundings make this long and very challenging day really worthwhile – if you've still got any energy you can have a swim in the lake or otherwise simply relax and take in the beautiful scenery. Overnight dinner, clear up and camping.



Day 3: Álfvatn to Emstrur (14km)

The scenery will change as you leave the rhyolite and enter a glacial area with fast running glacial streams off the Myrdalsjokull Icecap, with steep deep gorges. You will start by walking along a 4WD dirt track but soon you will return to a mountain track. You will experience river crossings, both by wooden bridges and wading through ice-cold streams, possibly up to your thighs in the Bláfjallakvisi! You will then climb down to the oasis Hvangil and the then trek across 'Sahara Like' passes and hills to the Emstrur hut. This signifies the end of your day and your accommodation for the night. Overnight dinner, clear up and camping next to stream at a small campsite.

Day 4: Emstrur to Thorsmörk and transportation to Reykjavik (15km)

Completing the journey today, you will cross more rivers and have views of the amazing Markarfljót gorge and the bridged Ljorsa fissure. The distance walked today will be approximately 15 kms, making the total distance walked about 58 kms (35 miles). You will begin by crossing a river by a footbridge that you will need to climb down to using ropes. You then climb up out of the valley crossing shallow and deep river all the way. The trek ends with a long steep drop into the main valley of Thorsmörk, which is surrounded by giant glaciers and raging rivers. It is regarded as one of Iceland's most well known beauty spots. An hour later you arrive at your final camp, you

can start to celebrate your achievements and marvel at the spectacular scenery all around. From Thorsmörk you will be transported back to Reykjavik (about 3½ hours) via a beautiful waterfall when you can stop and take pictures and stretch your legs. On arrival in Reykjavik, if you still have the energy, you can experience the late night bars before retiring to bed. Reykjavik boasts all the trappings of a modern European city, as well as an interesting old town, whitewashed wooden buildings, and rows of brightly painted concrete houses. Nearly everything of interest is within walking distance of the old settlement. Overnight hostel / guest house in Reykjavik.

Day 5: Reykjavik, the Blue Lagoon & return to UK

Reykjavik, the world's most northerly capital, a jewel of a city, set spectacularly on a broad bay and surrounded by stunning mountains, is completely smokeless and hence one of the cleanest cities in the world with its own natural central heating system from its geothermal hot springs. As an apparent contradiction, Reykjavik means 'Smoky Bay' derived from the steamy hot springs but in fact the air is crystal clear with vistas often extending to 100 miles! Reykjavik also has a growing reputation as a vibrant European city with a lively nightlife of nightclubs and discos. In 2000 it was elected as one of the European Cities of Culture. This morning you will have some time to stroll around Reykjavik before being transported to the famous Blue lagoon - one of Iceland's pools of pure, mineral-rich, geothermal seawater, set amongst fields of lava against a spectacular backdrop of green rolling hills - after which you will return to Keflavik airport for your afternoon flight back to London Heathrow on IcelandAir to London.

N.B. The itinerary is there as a guide and may change due to unusual weather patterns, wildlife movements, the strength of the group and so on. We will do our very best to keep to the set itinerary however we cannot be held responsible for any last minute changes that might occur. In all such circumstances, your challenge leader will have the final say.

Should you suffer from vertigo, it is worth considering that on most mountain treks there will be occasional exposure to sheer drops. Therefore you should discuss the particular itinerary of your choice with a member of our team.



Optional extension:

Golden Circle & Whale watching (3 days, 2 nights)

- Overnight in guesthouse at Reykjavik
- Golden Circle excursion. You will see beautiful waterfall of Gullfoss, geothermal area, Skálholt church, the immensely powerful old implosion crater, Kerið, etc.
- Drive to the harbour for an exciting whale watching excursion.



To find out more information, visit the Icelandic lava trek challenge page on our website or click on “extensions” in your member’s area.