

## TSC Iceland Trip: Aug 21-29, 2017

Well, bottom line, we had a lovely time in Iceland. The tour promised beautiful vistas and it delivered us into a simultaneously lush and rugged country. As your Assistant Trip Leader I've been tasked with writing the trip article. If I'd known there would be a written essay assignment on this here field trip, I'd a paid better attention. I will strive to hit most of the highlights of this awesome country and landscape. Andrea Lovelace, my roomie extraordinaire and Keith Zimmerman, our dauntless Trip Leader have my gratitude for filling in with photos, details and major editing.

The CLASC contingent consisted of 13 members, which included 4 new members to the club. Together we were a well-oiled sight-seeing machine, the fun bus.

Aug 22, we arrived in Iceland the day after the partial eclipse in Texas, met up with our Tour Guide Gloomir, and our bus driver for the week, and struck off for Iceland's #1 destination, The Blue Lagoon. This was a very quaint, organized facility for splashing in and generally lounging around the thermal baths, which are shallow, midsize lakes continuously fed of mineral waters heated by volcanic activity at a nearby geothermal plant to a consistent 104 degrees F. This was a perfect activity to initiate our travels and uncramp our bodies, slap white clay-mud on our faces and squish our toes on the soft bottom after the 6 hour transatlantic flight on Delta, (Devoid Egregiously of Leg room on TransAtlantics), the airline boasting no leg room or graciousness in economy.



Once rejuvenated, we bused to Reykjavik, the Capital and largest city of Iceland. Reykjavik was quite charming, with a large harbor, modern Northern European ambiance organized in a grid pattern. Our

hotel, the Fosshotel was comfortable and convenient for walking to harbor and downtown. Our first TSC dinner at a nearby restaurant, served local fish and vegetable dishes. By random luck many of us got to see a classic car parade outside the restaurant window.



Aug 23, the next morning we set out for the sights, got on the tour bus and drove 3 blocks to some Reykjavik monuments and houses of mostly notable statesmen and poets. Iceland is apparently really big on their poets. After a walking tour of historical and modern sights, Andrea and I had a quick lunch at the World-Famous Burger Joint on the Pier. (Can you spot the contradictions? there's 3). Our lunch was made even quicker since Andrea and I got raw meat hamburgers and couldn't eat them. The others from the group fared much better. In the afternoon, most of the CLASC gang went whale watching, spotting several Minke whales and a few dolphins in open water just outside the Reykjavik Harbor. We hunted in small packs for dinner, avoiding restaurants that offered whale or puffin on the menu.

Aug 24, we had a long ride on the bus traveling Northeast to Husavik, with several notable stops along the way. First we viewed Hraunfossar. the first of many fantastic waterfalls.



We also hiked up to Grabrok crater and saw a severe landscape of small craters from an inactive volcano. This set the tone for the rest of the week's viewings.



The Northwestern areas were historically very remote, although now the towns and natural attractions are swollen with tourists, on bikes, rental cars and tour buses. Iceland is quickly responding with restroom facilities, restaurants and tourist knick-knacks, but apparently, not quickly enough to suit some Texans. Many on our bus found it curious that we needed frequent rest stops along the route, especially since the buses were equipped with a toilet, which was locked. During the long bus ride, our Tour Guide would tell us stories of the ancient Vikings and their deepest wish to die in battle, so they might then go to Valhalla and spend eternity drinking and dining and pitching woo and then fighting in battles, to the death, only to wake up the next day and start all over. It was the middle of the trip before I figured out “White King” was actually “Viking”. Heck, they’re flippin’ Norsemen, what other kind of king would they have? Discussions of the Vikings and Poets engendered the same level of reverence from our Tour Guide. We spent the day driving thru many glacier carved valleys lined with sheep ranches and tall waterfalls. We arrived in Husavik in the evening, to another Fosshotel and out to a local eatery for dinner. Husavik is a port city, reputed to have premiere whale watching off its shores. It also had a monument to the Apollo astronauts as many of them did their geology training in that part of Iceland.



Aug 25, we visited the extraordinary volcanic lava landscapes of Dimmuborgir walking along craters, pseudo craters, Krafla lava fields and the ash crater Hverfjall.



We saw the bubbling mud pools of Námaskarð and their clumped, stinky, steaming clay-like formations. Be glad the photo doesn't have the smell included. Truly like walking on the moon, or an alien planet.



In the afternoon we had options to visit another thermal spa or go horseback riding. While most elected to go to the thermal baths, Andrea, Mary, and Julie went horseback riding with other TSC members. The riders returned absolutely raving about the trails, so they won the prize for best selected activity.

Aug 26, we drove from Husavik back to Reykjavik with a few stops along the way. First we saw Godafoss, the waterfall of the gods. This is where they threw away all of the idols of the old gods when they converted to Christianity.



At lunchtime we visited the folk museum and turf farm at Glaumbær. The buildings of the collective farm dated from the 18th & 19th-centuries and had walls and roofs of turf. Later, we stopped at Gauksmyri horse farm and learned about the history and special gaits of the Icelandic horse. Most notable was a gait with an interval where no hooves of the horse are touching the ground. Another gait is unique to the Icelandic horses and was so steady the rider was able to hold a glass of beer in her hand without spilling a drop. We had a tour of the stable and saw these magnificent animals close up.



Aug 27, another day that will live in infamy. Hurricane Harvey came ashore South of Galveston and pummeled Houston and Dickinson and other areas. We had a long touring day and a bus full of anxious Texans. Thanks to helpful neighbors, most had pretty good ideas what our neighborhoods were experiencing back home. At least three of us from CLASC lost cars flooded in the storms (Ken, Velma, Terry). That day, we toured Þingvellir (Thingvellir) National Park and UNESCO World Heritage Site, home of the oldest existing parliament in the world, the Alþingi, a major convocation site in Iceland's early history. It's also the location where the Mid-Atlantic Ridge is on land and you can literally walk between the US and European tectonic plates.



Later, we drove through the geothermally active valley of Haukadalur and strolled briskly through the active geyser park featuring Geysir and Strokkur. This is where the English word “geyser” actually comes from. Strokkur geyser erupted every several minutes to impressive heights of over 70 ft.



The highlight for many of us this day was the stunning Gullfoss (the Golden Waterfall).





Eventually we went back to Reykjavik to the Fosshotel, (false advertising alert: no waterfalls at the hotel even though Foss means waterfall).

Aug 28, was our day to visit the South shores of Iceland, which had its own unique brand of stunning. We drove past beautiful farms and villages with brief glimpses of the Eyjafjalla and Mýrdalsjökull glaciers. We stopped and walked behind the Skógafoss waterfall, looming at 200ft, one of the largest waterfalls in Iceland. There were also several lesser waterfalls along the cliffs.



The highlight for most of us was the stop at Reynisfjara, a very scenic volcanic black sandy beach with gigantic volcanic stones of basalt. The contrasts of black sandy beach, and dark blue ocean reminded me of our own Galveston Island coast after an oil spill (OK, that's pushing it). The basalt formations on the beach and lining the coastline had uniformly similar geometric patterns caused by deep volcanic activity and pressures, then jutting upward and outward into unique formations. The area is also known for its bird species including puffins. At long last we were spotting definitive puffins winging overhead from water to their high cliff perches.



Our last stop was Seljalandsfoss, a graceful ribbon-like waterfall, again dropping from an overhanging lava cliff. We looked up to see the long cascades of water, and on the steep, green sides of our “canyon”, cows were idyllically grazing on the steep slopes.



We drove back into Reykjavik to pack and ready ourselves for the farewell TSC dinner. The dinner and company were fabulous, although our evening was again deeply impacted by Hurricane Harvey and consequently Delta’s less than perfect or even defensible plan for bringing the Houston area members home. Members, trip leaders and vendors spent a fair portion of the evening working to improve our chances and at least got us back to the US on schedule. Most of the club members made it as far as Minneapolis where we got stuck for three days waiting for the Houston airports to reopen. We took advantage of the delay to visit the Mall of America as well as the Minnesota state fair. Fortunately, most of us had trip insurance which ended up paying for the hotel and meals in Minneapolis. Terry parted from the group at the airport and escaped the harsh realities of the Texas Coast by seeking refuge in Barcelona for a week of art and architecture. Again, apologies that I couldn’t bring the rest of you with me. We will have many travails, expenses, delays, inconveniences over the next several months, maybe years due to Harvey, but we’ll always have beautiful Iceland. Thanks to all for making this a trip to remember. -Terry McNearney

