

ICELAND PHOTOGRAPHY TRAVEL

WINTER INFORMATION



NATURA
PHOTOTRAVEL



NATURA TRAVEL – www.natura.is

DANIEL BERGMANN – www.danielbergmann.com



This information document is intended to prepare participants for photography travel in Iceland with Natura Travel (Daniel Bergmann Photography) during winter.

TRAVELLING TO ICELAND

Icelandair has regular flights to Iceland from most major hubs in Europe, United States and Canada. A number of other airlines also fly to Iceland, including WOW air (from both sides of the Atlantic).

VISAS AND PASSPORT VALIDITY

Iceland does not require you to have a visa if you are a resident of EU or EFTA countries, the US, Canada or Australia. Citizens of other countries may need a Schengen visa to enter Iceland.

A valid passport is necessary for visitors to Iceland, except for citizens of the Nordic countries. The validity of a passport or a recognized ID card must be at least three months beyond the proposed stay.

See more about visas (including a list of countries that require one) and passports at:

iceland.is/iceland-abroad/uk/consular-services/visas

ARRIVAL IN ICELAND

Flights to Iceland land at the Keflavik International Airport. Most flights from North America operated by Icelandair land very early in the morning (between 6–7 a.m.). Flights from Europe arrive at different times throughout the day.

If a hotel in Reykjavik City is included in your tour then Natura Travel generally provides two pickups to the Keflavik airport at the designated arrival day; one in the morning and one in the afternoon. The driving distance from the airport into the city is about 45 minutes.

If a hotel in Reykjavik is not included in your tour then you will need to arrange your own transportation into the city upon your arrival. There is a regular bus service that takes you to the airport to your hotel for a fee of 3,000 ISK (about \$30). The bus can be pre-booked, skipping the need to cue for a ticket: www.re.is/flybus

Taxis are also readily available outside the airport terminal and the fare into downtown Reykjavik is about 15,000 ISK (around \$140).

If you are arriving on an early flight the same day as the tour is scheduled to leave Reykjavik, then we will pick you up from the airport. It is however strongly recommended that you arrive the day before and overnight in Reykjavik.



CURRENCY IN ICELAND

The Icelandic Krona is the official currency (ISK). You can exchange foreign currency for krona at the Keflavik airport upon arrival. The exchange rate is however not as good as at banks in Reykjavik City. All major credit cards, including Visa, Mastercard and American Express, are accepted everywhere for goods and services. You do however need a card with a digital chip and a pin number that you will be asked to enter at the time of purchase.

WHERE TO STAY IN REYKJAVIK CITY

With the expansion of tourism in Iceland the accommodation options are also expanding but the popularity is such that hotels become fully booked months in advance.

Most hotels and guest houses are located in or near the city center, in postal code areas 101 or 105. Using a general hotel booking website such as [Booking.com](https://www.booking.com) will give you a list of options and the best available prices.

MOBILE PHONE AND INTERNET

There is very good mobile coverage throughout Iceland. Prepaid SIM cards can be bought in various places and many of the major phone companies have contracts with Icelandic services so that your phone may be fully operational in Iceland. Please contact your service provider to make sure your phone will work while travelling in Iceland.

Wi-fi internet is available at all the hotels and guest houses that you will stay at during the tour. The N1 service stations also have free open internet.

YOUR LUGGAGE

Even though we use large vehicles, and in some cases also luggage trailers, we ask that you try to limit your luggage to three units; your checked bag plus a camera and laptop bag.

FOOD AND DIETARY REQUIREMENTS

Please be sure to advise us before arriving to Iceland if you have any special dietary requirements or food allergies.

Breakfast, lunch and dinner are included during the duration of the tour. Breakfast is in the form of buffet at the hotels, lunch is at restaurants or service stations (or in some cases packed) and dinner is generally in the form of a two course set menu at the hotels (with an optional dessert). Snacks can be bought at fuel stops but if you favour healthy ones,



such as granola or energy bars, then it's advised that you bring some with you from home as the options are limited, especially outside the city.

DRINKING WATER IN ICELAND

We drink it from the tap. It comes from local springs and is as pure and unpolluted as water should be. You could even drink straight out of mountain streams without worry. Bring a reusable water bottle with you and fill it at the hotels. Bottled water is available at stores but it's just the same water that comes from the taps.

ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES

The cost of alcoholic beverages is not included in the tour price. Wine and beer is available at all the hotels and stronger spirits at most of them. Alcohol is quite expensive in Iceland and can be bought duty free at the airport.

YOUR SAFETY IN ICELAND

With a population of just 320,000 people Iceland is a country with a very low crime rate by world standards. However, there are an increasing number of tourist visiting every year and it is therefore



prudent that you exercise common sense for the security of your personal items and camera equipment. While in the field the vehicles will be locked so that extra equipment can be safely stored there.

Many of the locations that we will visit are true wilderness areas that have no safety barriers or fences of any kind. While that is a boon for photography it means that you need to keep a good eye on your surroundings and exercise caution. Some of the places we visit require extra care, such as beaches with strong waves, edges of waterfalls or river canyons, geothermal areas and glaciers.

Your guide will have extended experience in evaluating location safety and travelling through the Icelandic landscape. It is vitally important that you listen to and act within the safety advice of your guide at all times.

THE CLIMATE OF ICELAND

The weather in Iceland is fickle and constantly changing. We are likely to experience everything from sunshine on cold clear days to pouring rain, snow and blizzard. Although the Icelandic winter is mild for its latitude it can be bitterly cold when the Arctic wind howls down from the north. The southerly lowlands of the island average around 0°C (32°F) in winter, while the lowest temperature in the northern part of the country is about -25°C (-13°F). As there is such a strong variability in the Icelandic climate it is very im-

portant to be prepared for cold and bad weather.

For winter in Iceland layered clothing is recommended with a base, mid and thermal outer waterproof shell. Waterproof jackets with core-loft, duck or goose down are ideal. It is easy to get cold standing around in the field, especially at night when photographing the Aurora. Additional warm clothing is therefore recommended and even chemical hand warmer if you are prone to getting cold.

Micro spikes that can easily slip on and off your boots are necessary, as much of the ground will likely be covered in snow and ice. Something like the Kah-toola MICROspikes Pocket Traction System is ideal and can be purchased from most outdoor stores or on-line from Amazon.

WINTER CLOTHING

- Water- and windproof jacket
- Water- and windproof pants
- A sturdy pair of waterproof trekking boots
- Secondary footwear: fully waterproof (Arctic Muck boots or similar) or thermal lined boots (Sorel Caribou or similar)
- Comfortable outdoor pants (at least 2 pairs)
- Warm windproof jacket
- Fleece or wool sweater
- Wool base layers (at least 3 pairs)
- Socks in variable weights (from thick and warm to lighter – a few pairs)
- Warm hat and gloves

LAUNDRY SERVICE

It is rare that laundry service is available at hotels in Iceland so be sure to pack enough clothes to last throughout the trip.

PHOTOGRAPHIC INSTRUCTION

Each tour or workshop is different in terms of having scheduled lectures and image reviews or not. Most of them don't as we always put the emphasis on field work and try to spend as much time as possible in the field making images. If we however have extended downtime due to weather we will provide lectures or image reviews.

Participants are encouraged to ask questions and ask for advice from the leaders at any time during field work. We are there first and foremost for your benefit and our photography is secondary. If you would like advice on post processing then please approach us with your request and we'll try to find suitable time to sit down in front of the computer. Iceland tours and workshops can however become a quite intense experience and we might not find much downtime at all. But by working closely together in the field we all learn from each other and hopefully walk away with a rich experience.



CAMERAS AND OTHER EQUIPMENT

What camera equipment you choose to bring is a personal decision but whatever you bring it is strongly recommended that you have 2 camera bodies. Due to the elements we work in cameras can fail or break and we will be a long way from any repair facilities.

The landscape and nature photography opportunities in Iceland are varied so lenses with focal lengths of 16–300mm (in 35mm terms) will be useful.

A sturdy tripod that can stand up to high wind is a must and so is a similarly sturdy tripod head. If you have a choice of weights then bring your heavier tripod.

Batteries can be charged every day at the hotels but make sure you have enough to last a couple of days. Working in the cold quickly drains batteries.

It is likely that at some point we'll be photographing in rain or waterfall spray so even if your camera is fairly well weather sealed it can be a good idea to have some kind of rain cover.

Make sure you bring enough memory cards and also a way to back them up, either to a computer or portable drive. One of the best backup is to have the camera write to two cards simultaneously.

If your camera has limited dynamic range then bring Graduated Neutral Density filters. As a minimum we recommend a 2–3 stop hard and 3 stop soft filters. The LEE system is generally regarded as the primary filter system for landscape photography and it requires adapter rings for your lens threads (one for each thread, 77, 82, etc. – and wide angle versions for use with lenses wider than 24mm), filter holder and filters. Even if your camera has high dynamic range it is preferable to get the exposure right during capture so this kind of filter setup is a very useful tool. If you don't have much experience with filter use then the tour leaders will be able to assist you with the first steps into the world of ND filters.

A solid ND filter is also very useful, such as the LEE Little Stopper (6 stops) or any of their 3–4 stop filters. We carry a Polarizer for the LEE system (on a separate filter holder) but find limited use for it in Iceland. It is however an important tool to control reflections on water surfaces so it stays in the bag as part of our filter setup.



We will be doing some walking on uneven ground and a camera bag that is specifically suited for hiking with your gear is the most comfortable solution. We have used a wide selection of camera bags and have the best experience with f-stop packs: fstopgear.com

PHOTOGRAPHING THE NORTHERN LIGHTS

A solid tripod is a must for night photography in Iceland as it is often windy and so is a cable release (or the use of a few second delay self-timer with mirror lock-up). A bubble level that goes in the flash shoe is handy to keep the horizon straight (or on newer cameras the digital horizon level).

The intensity of the lights varies but the exposure time is usually between 2–20 seconds. The ISO rating is between 1600–6400 and a fast wide-angle lens is also needed, which is used at its largest aperture. My primary lens for photographing the Northern Lights is a 21mm f/2.8 but some people I know that are more committed to this type of photography use faster lenses. Nikon users have had good success with the 14-24mm f/2.8 lens. The focus needs to be set at infinity and unfortunately true infinity focus is not always at the infinity mark of a lens. Live-view can be used to focus on a star or the moon.

The foreground is an important element in Aurora photography. The ice in the Jokulsarlon glacial lagoon provides a fantastic foreground if it's frozen solid. Mountain ranges and bodies of water, that have reflections, are also nice elements. Trees, which are seen in so many Aurora images from Alaska and Scandinavia, are not present in Iceland.

If I'm sitting around for a long time, waiting for the lights to appear, I'll sometimes set up the camera on a tripod outside the car and take out the battery and keep it with me inside the car.

A headlight or flashlight (torch) is essential when working

ICE CAVES

On every winter tour we aim to make at least one visit to an ice cave. Such a visit can not be guaranteed though, due to the nature of ice caves. They are extremely weather dependant. Even in winter it sometimes rains heavily on the south coast, where the caves are located (mostly in Vatnajokull glacier) and flooding inside a cave can prohibit entrance. In warm weather they can also become dangerous to enter due to falling ice or the possibility of collapse.

We never compromise on safety. If we feel it's risky, we don't go. Having said that we have been able to photograph inside an ice cave on almost every winter tour so far. For ice cave visits we provide safety gear, such as helmets.

The exact location and condition of ice cave changes from season to season. They form as water tunnels in summer, when meltwater finds its way beneath the glacier. In early winter the water has receded, leaving a cave of ice. Some of them are wide and short, others are deep and narrow. The longest ice cave we have been inside was about 300 metres long and the shortest a mere 10 metres. Some of the caves are quite photogenic, others are not although visiting them is still a thrill. If you see images of ice caves that are older than from the current season, then that cave does not exist anymore. They melt away in summer and a new, sometimes completely different cave, is formed in autumn.

GETTING AROUND – OUR VEHICLES

During our winter tours we use specially modified 4x4 vehicles that can get us to where we want and need to be. Our main vehicle is a Mercedes Sprinter 519 (see image below) that was modified in Iceland by Breytir, which specialize in modifying cars to drive on

snow. New axles and 4x4 system was put in and the vehicle raised to be able to take 46" tires. These big tires are needed to drive through snow. The air pressure is then lowered, which gives a wider footprint. Although off-road driving in Iceland is strictly prohibited, it is allowed in winter if the ground is snow covered. Even on the main highways conditions can get very serious in winter so having a unique vehicle like this one makes the trip safer and more enjoyable.

The Super-Sprinter seats 12 passengers in comfortable and adjustable seats. It has USB ports by the seats so that gadgets can be charged on the go. On larger tours, when we have more than 12 participants, we add a smaller Nissan Patrol 4x4 on 38" tires. Another specially modified super-jeep that has the same off-road snow driving capacity as the Sprinter.

CONTACT

If you have any questions then please e-mail us at: daniel@danielbergmann.com

Or call +354 697 9515.

All photographs © Daniel Bergmann
www.danielbergmann.com

