

MindStormPhoto Iceland 2014



Burt and Evelyn Johnson

Iceland 2014

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Iceland 1 – Where’s The Ice?

Iceland 1 – Where’s The Ice?



We arrived in Iceland a couple days ago, expecting freezing weather and ice everywhere. Instead we find 50 deg weather and rain. The only ice in sight it at the top of that mountain in the background here -- and most of that was gone by our third day. Though the temperature is warm, it is raining with a very strong cold wind, and the chill factor makes it feel like 22. We are dressed warmly, but my face feels like it is freezing off whenever we walk around Reykjavík and face into the wind.



The **language here** is pretty much unpronounceable. Even when someone says the name to me, I have no idea what I am looking for. If it is written down, I can then find a matching sign somewhere, but the text does not match the sound, and the names for most places are **really long!** We later discovered that the words are often compound, where Icelanders combine 2 or more basic words into a single word, with no spaces. That makes the word seem even longer.

Iceland 1 – Where's The Ice?

Fortunately, everyone here even vaguely related to tourism speaks fluent English, so the language is only an issue when trying to find places. Everyone is friendly, and efficient. We first saw that coming off the plane in Reykjavík. The luggage was on the baggage conveyer by the time we reached it, we were waved through immigration with a quick stamp in our passport, and there was nobody in Customs to even talk to. That was the fastest I have ever gotten from an international airplane to the bus into town.

The days are short here in November, with only 6-1/2 hours of daylight (9:45AM to 4:15PM), but you can add half an hour of twilight to that. In February, it gets down to only 3 hours of daylight, and in July reaches 21 hours, so the length of day changes rapidly this far north.

, November 13, 2014

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Iceland 2 – Northern Lights

Iceland 2 – Northern Lights



Iceland 2 – Northern Lights

This photo tour with [Lurie Belegurschi](#) had a busy first day -- culminating in success on a key goal. We had never seen the Aurora Borealis (aka Northern Lights) before, and scheduled this trip specifically to have a chance at them. It has been raining for days, and no chance for them until tonight. Weather was bad, but Lurie took us out anyway -- and a clearing in the clouds allowed us to see them! Rather faint, and in an area with boring foreground, but we can now say we have seen them. Chalk one more item off our bucket list! The day started with no real chance of a sunrise photo, when suddenly the clouds parted and the sun gave an indication of the day we were about to have -- our first without constant rain since we arrived in Iceland 5 days earlier. Our first stop was the Seljalandsfoss waterfall we walked behind, then Skogafoss waterfall. Both were fairly impressive, though I must admit that waterfalls are not high on my target list.



Iceland 2 – Northern Lights

Clouds and rain covered us again as we moved to the Reynisfjara beach to reluctantly photograph waves crashing on the basalt shore. We learned a valuable lesson though -- even in bad weather, there's always something to photograph. You can look for patterns and turn an image into a powerful black and white photograph. We had 12 photographers along, and we traveled in a plush full sized bus, giving each of us a seat, so we could spread out our gear between stops.



As the sun went down (at 4:45PM this far North), we stopped to catch the sunset. It didn't look hopeful, as there was solid cloud cover -- until just minutes before sunset, when the clouds cleared just enough to give us some nice color and variation to the sky.

, November 15, 2014

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Iceland 2 – Northern Lights

Iceland 3 – Glacier



Waterfalls are everywhere in Iceland, formed either by the frequent rains or by melting glaciers. We stopped at a farm this morning that has several waterfalls on the property, for a short session.



We then visited our first real ice -- in the form of a glacier. It produced some interesting near-abstract photos by zooming into the details of the flow.



We finished the day with a quick sundown trip to Jokulsarlon Glacier Lagoon. There was no sun to be seen (the clouds had returned in force), but it gave us a first preview of what the lagoon had to offer.

Iceland 3 – Glacier

Iceland 4 – Ice Cave



Iceland 4 – Ice Cave

The highlight of today was entering a massive ice cave in the Vatnajokulpjodgardur National Park (see, I told you those names were long and unpronounceable!). Just a week ago, the interior river that carved the cave was frozen solid and crampons (spikes you put on your shoes to walk on ice) were needed. This week was a Big Thaw though, the river was flowing fast and the ice was melting fast enough to seem like it was raining inside. Some of the images in here are my favorite from the trip, and after some additional post-processing will be put in our travel gallery and on 500px.

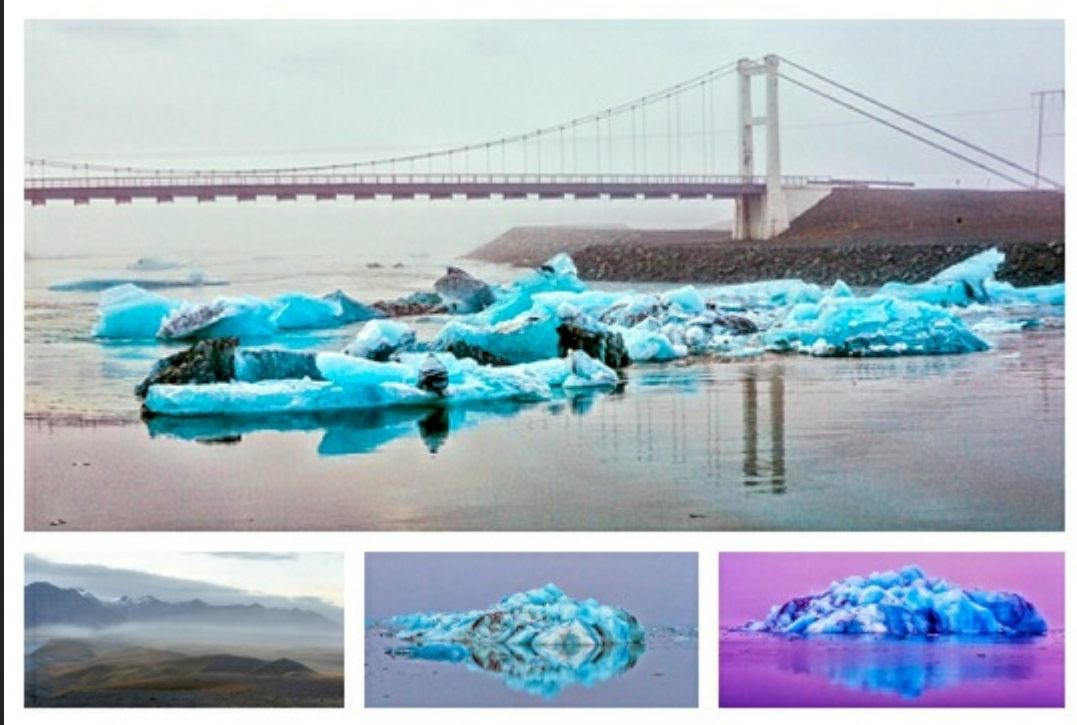


Next stop was our first look at the Jokulsarlon glacier lagoon. This is an area where ice breaks off a local glacier, then floats out to sea. As the tide comes in and out, the ice is shifted between the ocean beach (across the road) and the lagoon. We only had a short time here for sunset photos. Though the day had been cold and overcast, the sky cleared just enough to give some color to the sunset, making for some nice final images of the day.

, November 17, 2014

Iceland 4 – Ice Cave

Iceland 5 – Glacial Lagoon



We returned to Jokulsarlon glacier lagoon today for a second day of shooting of the ice orphans that are sloughed off the glacier, then head out to sea through the tidal lagoon. The interesting ice chunks from yesterday were all gone, but in their place was a lot more ice that had newly broken off the glacier. Iurie (our primary photo guide) told us that the lagoon changes every day, so we had a new collection of ice to shoot.

Iceland 5 – Glacial Lagoon



As we drove from the glacier lagoon to our next target location, we passed a field with horses, and stopped to photograph them. I walked down with a telephoto lens, expecting to shoot them at a distance. Once the group approached the fence though, they all came up to nuzzle us and be petted. I had to switch quickly to a wide angle lens to get them!

Iceland 5 – Glacial Lagoon

Our last stop for the day was a lagoon with attractive clumps of grass growing on black lava sand. The wind had died down for a couple hours, and the lake provided a nice mirror surface, so I found myself more interested in that scene.

, November 18, 2014

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Iceland 5 – Glacial Lagoon

Iceland 6 – More Ice and Churches



Today was our third and last visit to Jokulsarlon Glacier Lagoon. As we saw yesterday, the ice blocks here change constantly. There was so much ice here today that it was hard to find isolated chunks to make the kind of photos I had envisioned (as seen in the two lower left images above).

Iceland 6 – More Ice and Churches



We then stopped at a couple of church locations, one in Vik and the other in Hof. The first was a traditional "turf church" that was built partly buried in the ground, then covered with turf to form natural insulation, and surrounded by a mounded, ancient grave site. The second church down the road was a more modern version. Unfortunately, I neglected to catch the name of either -- the names are so long and complex that they are silicon to my memory, slipping away as soon as they are voiced.

, November 19, 2014

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Iceland 6 – More Ice and Churches



We started today at a geyser field on the Golden Circle, which were reminiscent of Yellowstone in the US, though much smaller. There were busloads of people wandering through, making the photography a bit tricky. From the parking lot markings though, I am glad I am not here in the summer, when there were spots for 50 buses to park, in addition to the cars.

Iceland 7 – Geyser and Waterfalls



Iceland 7 – Geyser and Waterfalls

There is only one erupting geyser in the park. Similar to "Old Faithful" in Yellowstone, this one erupts every 5 to 7 minutes. A gas bubble first forms (lower right), then the gas proceeds to force an upward rush of steaming water. The time from the first bubble to the full eruption is roughly one tenth of a second, so it takes quick reflexes to catch the stages.



We next drove to Gullfoss Waterfall, which is the second largest falls in Iceland (the largest is far up North, where we did not reach on this trip). This is an impressive display of multiple drop levels, carved from a glacier flood roughly 8700 years ago.

Iceland 7 – Geyser and Waterfalls



There are waterfalls at almost every turn in Iceland. Many farms have multiple falls on their property. Our last stop of the day was also the last stop of the originally arranged photo tour with Lurie. One more waterfall before we headed back to our own barn (hotel) in Reykjavik.

, November 20, 2014

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Iceland 7 – Geyser and Waterfalls

Iceland 8 – Icelandic Horses



Iceland 8 – Icelandic Horses

After the original photo tour with Lurie was complete, we hired Johnathan Esper for a private 3 day tour extension. He had been the co-leader of the initial tour, and is an excellent photographer and leader, so we decided hiring him would be better than blundering around the island on our own. A few hours into the private tour, we saw a field of horses and stopped for some photographs. As we saw before, the horses gravitate to people, and the problem is getting enough distance to be able to photograph the entire animal. Apparently, the Icelandic horses have 5 different gaits, and are like children who are curious and are very playful with the visitors.

Iceland 8 – Icelandic Horses



We then visited some waterfalls and a tiny crevice with interesting images around it that we would have never found on our own. Score one for Johnathan!

, November 21, 2014

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Iceland 8 – Icelandic Horses

Iceland 9 – Major Aurora!



Success! We really came to Iceland to see a good aurora borealis show. After 11 days of solid overcast and frequent rain, we were beginning to think we would have to settle with that little distant bit of Northern Lights color we saw on Nov 15. The forecast for tonight was clear from 10PM to 2AM in the Snæfellsnes Peninsula, with solid cloud cover before and after that window. We decided to drive out to Kirkjufell mountain and waterfall that Johnathan knew of and try our luck. It turns out that there are several NASA aurora forecast sites in addition to <http://en.vedur.is/weather/forecasts/aurora/> to forecast both aurora activity as well as cloud cover on an hourly basis.

Iceland 9 – Major Aurora!



Iceland 9 – Major Aurora!

The clouds cleared and the wind died down (the wind had been blowing strong for the past 11 days too). Suddenly the light show started, and we had ringside seats. The still winds meant that we even had rare reflections in the lake below the falls. We had four hours of excellent viewing. Just as the show was dying out around 2AM, the clouds came in again and the wind began blowing. Time to go home and edit what we captured!



Earlier in the day we had visited a lighthouse and the surrounding beach. It was a nice day of exploring, but couldn't hold a candle to that aurora display later that night...

, November 22, 2014

Iceland 9 – Major Aurora!

Iceland 10 – Waterfalls



After a late night editing aurora photos, we got off to a leisurely start today. We began by visiting the same mountain and waterfall (Kirkjufellsfoss) where we had been the night before for the aurora session. The place looked so different in the day that we didn't even realize it was the same place until we had moved into the shooting position. (Yes, Johnathan had told us we were going there, but somehow we thought it must be later in the day because it didn't look familiar from the parking lot.)

, November 23, 2014

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Iceland 10 – Waterfalls - MindStormPhoto Blog and Gallery



Today was a fairly short shooting session in the Reykjanes Peninsula located 45 minutes west of Reykjavik. They say that weather changes rapidly in Iceland, so you have to be prepared. The cold wind was gusting, and we were repeatedly struck by rain, hail, then more rain, however there was wonderful low angle light. I got soaked through to the skin, and was shivering so badly I had to return to the car while Evelyn continued shooting.

We visited one of the thermal power plants, but went around behind it to an area very hard to find. You can see the plant in the background of these images. We then came across a newly formed geyser of hot mud, presenting an unexpected opportunity.

Iceland 11 – Wrap-up With Thermal Vents

We are now done photographing Iceland and ready to pack up and head back to New Jersey to spend Thanksgiving with some long-time friends. Was Iceland all we expected? Not really. We had not expected such foul warm weather (it felt *cold* because of the wind, but was actually in the 40's F) and constant overcast. We had expected to see aurora displays every night, and only saw a tiny one once then a better display on a single night.

Was it worth the trip? Yep! We did end up with that aurora display I coveted, though only one real night instead of the dozen I had expected. We saw an ice cave and glacier ice lagoon that presented photo opportunities I have never had before. Yes, I would shoot them a bit different if given another chance, but that is almost always true after any first session in a new environment.

Will we return to Iceland soon? Probably not. I am glad we went this time, but there is so much left in the world to see that we will almost certainly be moving on to other adventures, and keep this blog as a memory jog to keep this trip fresh.

This was our 55th country we have visited or lived in. The UN says there are 193 recognized countries (more than I realized...), so there is still a lot of the world to be explored!

, November 24, 2014

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Iceland 11 – Wrap-up With Thermal Vents