

**VOYAGE INFORMATION**

Voyage Name	Iceland Circumnavigation
Voyage Code	ICE001G
Dates	14-24 June, 2021
Duration	11 days / 10 nights
Start	Reykjavik, Iceland
Finish	Reykjavik, Iceland
Ship	Greg Mortimer
Forms Due	14 March, 2021

**Welcome!**

Explore the 'Land of Ice and Fire', where snow-capped peaks rise above glaciers and active volcanoes rumble. Walk along a black sand beach and discover steaming hot springs in one of the most geologically active regions on earth. Explore spectacular fjords and picturesque waterfalls as they cascade into the sea. Our specialist naturalists and historians will reveal the Iceland below the surface, a land rich in wildlife, culture and fascinating human history.

**Important Note:** in order to experience some of Iceland's incredible scenery, a number of the shore excursions on this itinerary require overland coach travel away from the coast.

**ITINERARY OVERVIEW**

Day 1	Reykjavik
Day 2	Embark the <i>Greg Mortimer</i> / Hvalfjörður
Days 3	Stykkisholmur / Snaefellnes Peninsula / Snæfellsjökull National Park / Látrabjarg cliffs
Days 4&5	Westfjords
Day 6	Akureyri & Lake Myvatn
Day 7	Húsavik & Grimsey Island
Day 8	Mjóifjörður
Day 9	Hofn & Vatnajökull National Park
Day 10	Westman Islands
Day 11	Reykjavik

**VOYAGE HIGHLIGHTS**

- Keep watch for blows, breaching and tail flukes as we whale-watch in Húsavik
- Westfjords offer some of the remotest fjords, bays and pristine environments in Iceland – perfect for hiking and bird-watching
- Visit Vatnajökull national park featuring Europe's largest glacier, iceberg-speckled glacial lakes, black sand beaches, reindeer and rich birdlife
- Discover Mjóifjörður, a hidden gem of a fjord cherished by locals

## EXPEDITION INCLUSIONS

- One night hotel accommodation with breakfast in Reykjavik on day 1
- Transfer from the hotel to pier on day 2
- Transfer from the pier to downtown Reykjavik or to the airport on day 11
- On-board accommodation during voyage including daily cabin service
- All meals, snacks, tea and coffee during voyage
- Beer, house wine and soft drinks with dinner
- All shore excursions and Zodiac cruises
- Educational lectures and guiding services from expedition team
- Free access to our onboard doctor for consultations relating to sea-sickness. A standard fee of US \$60.00 (reclaimable through your travel insurance provider) applies for medical consultations not related to seasickness
- A 3-in-1 waterproof polar expedition jacket
- Complimentary use of muck boots during the voyage
- Comprehensive pre-departure information
- Port surcharges, permits and landing fees

## EXPEDITION EXCLUSIONS

- International or domestic flights, unless specified
- Transfers not mentioned in the itinerary
- Airport arrival or departure taxes
- Passport, visa, and vaccination charges
- Travel insurance or emergency evacuation charges
- Hotels and meals not included in itinerary
- Optional excursions not included in the itinerary
- Optional activity surcharges
- All items of a personal nature including but not limited to: alcoholic beverages and soft drinks (outside of dinner service), laundry services, personal clothing, medical expenses, gratuities, Wi-Fi, email or phone charges.

**Note:** A \$15 USD per person per day gratuity for the crew is automatically added to your onboard account. It is at your discretion if you would like to remove the tip (or increase/decrease the amount) when you settle your bill. It is not necessary to tip the expedition team members. This gratuity amount is included for suites as part of their 'Suite Benefits'.

## DETAILED ITINERARY

Flexibility is key, when joining us on our expeditions. Please refer to this itinerary as a guide only, as changes may occur due to issues beyond Aurora Expeditions' control, including but not limited to changes to permits required to visit national parks, political unrest, and unpredictable sea and weather conditions.

### Day 1            Reykjavik

Arrive in Reykjavik and make your own way to our group hotel.

Accommodation: Fosshotel (or similar)

### Day 2            Embark the *Greg Mortimer* / Hvalfjörður

After breakfast at the hotel, a transfer is included to the pier to board our ship the *Greg Mortimer*. Sail into Hvalfjörður, a beautiful fjord just north of Reykjavik with wide areas of flat verdant land along majestic mountains, and beaches cut with creeks. The fjord is approximately 30 km / 19 mi long and 5 km / 3 miles wide. The area is rich in bird life, home to seals, and perfect for zodiac cruising, kayaking and hikes.

Historically, Hvalfjörður was home to one of the main whaling stations in Iceland, with ships heading out into Faxaflói Bay. It was one of the most important naval stations in the North Atlantic during World War II, when Iceland was occupied by the Allies after the Nazis conquered Denmark. The old whaling station and a war museum can be found in the fjord.

### Day 3            Stykkishólmur / Látrabjarg Cliffs

Stykkishólmur is the starting point of our adventures on the Snaefellnes Peninsula, gateway Snæfellsjökull National Park. Stykkishólmur is located by Breiðafjörður Bay on the north of Snæfellsnes peninsula and is surrounded by wonderful views of the innumerable islands. One of the defining landmarks in Stykkishólmur are the old houses in the old city centre, some of which were owned by Danish traders, and every year in August there is a Danish town festival in Stykkishólmur called *Danskir dagar* or Danish days. The oldest house in Stykkishólmur is the Norwegian house, which dates back to 1832. The inhabitants take great pride in preserving the old houses and walking in the centre of town is like walking in another era.

An area of diverse landscapes, characterised by lava fields and glistening fjords and home to bird-rich Breiðafjörður Bay. The area is crowned by the magnificent, ice-capped Snæfellsjökull volcano, a 700,000-year-old dormant subglacial volcano, visible from Reykjavik on a clear day and immortalised in Jules Verne's *Journey to the Centre of the Earth*.

Disembark the ship at approximately 8.30 am to commence today's full day (7 hours) shore excursion visiting the following areas:

**Arnarstapi** was an important trading post in the past and had a much bigger population than it has now. Columnar basalt, ravines and grottoes surround the Arnarstapi pier. There is a large arctic tern colony in the village itself, and a walk along the coastline is a great way to see birds such as kittiwake, Arctic tern and fulmar. You will also pass magnificent lava formations. The seaside and the cliffs between Arnarstapi and Hellnar were made a Natural Reserve in 1979. A sculpture of Bardur Snæfellsas by Ragnar Kjartansson stands by the beach at Arnarstapi.

At **Bjarnarhöfn** you will enjoy a guided tour of the shark museum and have the opportunity to taste the famed cured shark.

Though Grundarfjörður is not the most well-known town in Snæfellsnes, Mount Kirkjufell is certainly one of the most famous mountains in Iceland, if not the world. It is not unusual for photographers from all over the world to make their way to Grundarfjörður for the sole purpose of photographing this unique landmark which has even starred in a number of films. However, there is a lot more on offer in Grundarfjörður than just Mount Kirkjufell. Nature abounds, with vibrant birdlife and spectacular waterfalls.

En route to Isafjordur, we sail past the immense Látrabjarg cliffs, Iceland's westernmost point and home to a huge population of razorbills and puffins.

## **Days 4-5      Westfjords**

Over the next two days, explore the Westfjords region featuring outstanding landscapes with jaw-dropping views of dramatic fjords carved by ancient glaciers, sheer table mountains that plunge into the sea and pristine North Atlantic vegetation. The region features attractive towns such as Isafjordur, the famous Dynjandi waterfall, and spectacular fjords offering kayaking excursions, hiking trails, and bird-watching.

In true expeditionary style, we keep our itinerary flexible to allow for spontaneity based on weather and sea conditions. We plan to visit Hornstrandir peninsula, one of Iceland's remotest and most pristine regions filled with many deep and dramatic fjords, towering bird cliffs, stunning natural beauty and opportunities for wildlife encounters. Enjoy the bountiful silence and magnificent landscapes seen only by the few adventurers that make their way here.

## **Day 6      Akureyri and Mývatn**

Picturesque Akureyri is Iceland's second largest city outside the capital area with a superb snow-capped mountain backdrop. Explore the old town, with its beautifully maintained period houses before heading inland to nearby Mývatn region – an area said to be the most geologically active area in Iceland.

### Shore Excursions (choose one of the following)

#### Option One (up to 9 hours)

The **Goðafoss waterfall** is one of the most spectacular waterfalls in Iceland. In the year 1,000 the Lawspeaker Þorgeir Ljósvetningagoði made Christianity the official religion of Iceland. After his conversion, Þorgeir threw his statues of the Norse gods into the waterfall earning the waterfall its name - waterfall of the gods.

**Námaskarð** is well-known for its sulphurous mud springs called solfataras and steam springs called fumaroles. Even though you won't find any pure spring water in this wonderful geothermal site of Iceland, the beauty of the colourful minerals and the gigantic mud craters are truly impressive.

**Dettifoss** is a waterfall in northeast Iceland and is reputed to be the most powerful waterfall in Europe. The falls are 100 metres / 328 feet wide and have a drop of 44 metres / 144 feet down to the Jökulsárgljúfur canyon.

**Ásbyrgi** is a forested horse-shoe shaped canyon in Oxarfjordur. Asbyrgi is a part of Jökulsárgljúfur, within the Vatnajökull National Park.

#### Option two (up to 7-8 hours)

### **Akureyri Public Park and Botanic Garden**

The garden is one of the northern most botanical gardens in the world. The Public Park was opened in 1912 but the botanic gardens section was open in 1957. There are about 6,600 different species of plants grown in the garden, of which, 430 species are native to Iceland.

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**Dimmuborgir** is an area strewn with enormous lava rocks and cliffs. The formation of these extraordinary lava cliffs and pillars are the result of molten lava flowing over a pond in the eruption of Lúdentborgir and Þrengslaborgir some 2,300 years ago. The most famous of these formations is "The Church", aptly named, as this is a cave, open at both ends and with a dome-like ceiling.

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**Mývatn Nature Baths:** Drawing on a centuries-old tradition, the tastefully designed complex offers bathers a completely natural experience that begins with a relaxing dip amidst clouds of steam rising up from a fissure deep in the Earth's surface, and ends with a luxurious swim in a pool of geothermal water drawn from depths of up to 2,500 metres / 8,200 feet.

Both options will end with a transfer to Húsavík, where you can explore the small town at your own leisure before reboarding the ship to sail to Grímsey Island.

### **Day 7 Grímsey Island / Húsavík**

Located approximately 40 km (25 miles) off the mainland, Grímsey is a verdant grassy island, probably best known for its proximity to the Arctic Circle, which cuts across the island. Many people travel to Grímsey just to say they have stepped across the imaginary line. With a tiny population of approximately 100 inhabitants, it's a fantastic place for Zodiac cruising, kayaking, and photographing seabirds such as guillemots, gulls and puffins.

Leaving Grímsey to return closer to the mainland, we spend time scanning the waters of Skjálfandi Bay around Húsavík, a town known as the Iceland's 'whale watching capital', home to up to 24 different whale species, as well as dolphins and 30 variety of birds. The largest animal on earth, the blue whale, has also been spotted in Skjálfandi Bay, and if you are lucky, you might catch a glimpse of this magnificent creature as well as others, such as orcas, fin whales and pilot whales.

### **Day 8 Mjóifjörður**

Mjóifjörður (meaning narrow fjord) is an 18 km (11 mile) fjord on Iceland's east coast length is a little-known gem cherished by locals. Hidden between Nordfjörður and Seydisfjörður mountains that provide shelter and pleasant weather, the fjord is known by locals as an excellent place to soak in the peaceful surroundings and for its spectacular waterfalls – ideal for kayaking and Zodiac cruising.

Mjóifjörður is an exceptionally beautiful, tranquil and remote area with spectacular cliffs, and because of the fjord's still weather it has lush green hills and exceptionally rich flora lining its shores. It also has the impressive Prestagil (The Priest's Ravine) and the Hofsjárgljúfur Canyon with delightful rivers and waterfalls. If it weren't for the weekly ferry that comes here once a week in the winter, the local people would be completely isolated. At Asknes are the remains of an old whaling station, the largest in the world at the time, built by the Norwegians around 1900, with over 200 hundred workers. Today, on the way to the tiny village, Brekkuborpp, where only about 20 people live, a shipwreck on the shore acts as a haunting reminder of the town's whaling past.

## **Day 9**      **Vatnajökull National Park**

Höfn is a lively fishing town with a healthy population of 1,800, and gateway to Vatnajökull National Park – one of the most spectacular and special parts of Iceland, home to Europe’s largest glacier, Vatnajökull - our shore excursion for the day. We’ll also hike in Skaftafell National Park, which was established in 1967, but from 2008 it became part of the larger Vatnajökull National Park, Europe’s second largest after Yugyd Va in Russia. The park also boasts colourful mountains and deep valleys, as well as rich birdlife, reindeers and seals.

Inside the national park you can find glacier tongues resting on the green fields of the lowland, Jökulsárlón glacier lagoon, a glacial lagoon filled with floating icebergs that wash up on shore and stand gleaming on the nearby black-sand beach, dubbed Diamond beach. Enjoy an amphibian boat excursion on the lagoon to photograph the icebergs.

## **Day 10**      **Westman Islands**

Located off Iceland’s south coast, the Westman Islands (Vestmannaeyjar) were formed by volcanic eruptions around 10,000 years ago. Sail past Surtsey Island, a UNESCO World Heritage site that emerged from the sea in 1963 and is one the youngest land masses on earth. Westman Islands are surrounded by 15 other uninhabited islands and around 30 rocks and skerries offering refuge for rich array of seabirds. Westman Islands are considered to have the largest Atlantic puffin colony in the world, and when sailing around the islands it is not uncommon to see puffins but also whales and seals.

Heimaey is the main island in the archipelago and it has the population of around 4,200. Ashore on Heimaey, the only inhabited island in the archipelago, we see half-buried houses that remain from a violent 1973 eruption of Eldfell volcano, which you can hike up if you wish. A visit to the weather station offers bird-watching opportunities and splendid views of the surrounding islands.

Eruptions are a big part of the history of Westman Islands where there are two volcanoes – one that erupted around 6,000 years ago and of course, Eldfell that erupted in 1973, forcing all of the island’s inhabitants to evacuate for the mainland. Serendipitously, due to bad weather the day prior to the eruption, all the fishing boats remained in the harbour and were able to help transport Heimaey’s inhabitants to the mainland. You can learn more about the story of the eruption and the aftermath at the fascinating Eldheimar museum, which includes a display of a house that was buried in ash during the eruption.

## **Day 11**      **Disembark Reykjavik**

After breakfast, bid farewell to the expedition team, crew and newfound friends as you disembark in Reykjavik, where the voyage ends. A transfer to Keflavik airport is included.

**NOTE:** At the conclusion of the voyage, we do not recommend booking flights departing prior to 12.00 pm on the day of disembarkation in case there are delays.