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TravelQuest International
305 Double D Drive
Prescott, AZ 86303 USA



This tour has completed!

There is growing thought among the solar scientific community that the Sun isn't behaving in what we've come to perceive as "normal." This new, low solar activity means that the days of grand aurora displays over the lower 48 American states, southern Canada, and Europe are at least temporarily gone. Even sightings of a basic green auroral arc in these regions have become infrequent. This means if travelers want to see the northern lights, they now have to travel to where the lights still dance — to Iceland!

The stunning, stark beauty of Iceland — its volcanoes, geysers, soothing hot springs, and majestic waterfalls — along with the culture and friendliness of the Icelandic people, create the perfect backdrop for our annual Aurora Borealis viewing journey. Days are spent with our expert local guide exploring scenic natural wonders and learning of the unique ancient and modern cultures of Iceland. By night, in the darkness of the new Moon, we'll stand watch for the amazing Aurora Borealis from our beautiful lodge in the remote countryside.



Photos courtesy Thorir Kjartansson



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Program Itinerary

TRIP OVERVIEW				
Day 1	Sat.	Oct. 2, 2010	Arrive Reykjavik	
Day 2	Sun.	Oct. 3	Free day exploring Reykjavik	
Day 3	Mon.	Oct. 4	Thingvellir, Geysir Thermal Area and Gullfoss Waterfall	
Day 4	Tue.	Oct. 5	Landmannalaugar Volcanic Zone	
Day 5	Web.	Oct. 6	Thjorsadalur Valley & Icelandic Highlands	
Day 6	Thu.	Oct. 7	Iceland's Scenic South Shore	
Day 7	Fri.	Oct. 8	Thorsmork Nature Reserve	
Day 8	Sat.	Oct. 9	Scenic drive and flights onward	

Day 1 Saturday, October 2, 2010 **Breakfast**
Arrive Reykjavik - Reykjanes Peninsula - Blue Lagoon & City Tour
 After our early morning arrival at Keflavik Airport, we'll clear customs and travel by private motor coach to the nearby Reykjanes Peninsula to see ancient lava flows, hot springs, sulfuric vents, mud pools, and fissures. After breakfast, we're off to the world-famous Blue Lagoon to relax in the warm aqua-tinted, mineral-rich water known for its curative powers. In the morning light, the lagoon's steaming water is unforgettable.

Later this afternoon, we'll enjoy a private bus tour of the city. Weaving our way through narrow alleys framed with old timber houses, we'll learn about the city's history from its origin in 874 AD. We'll visit the harbor and Hallgrimskirkja, whose church tower offers a panoramic view of Reykjavik, the nearby fjord, and distant mountains. This evening is yours to enjoy on your own in Reykjavik.

Overnight: Hotel Odinsve, Reykjavik (2 nights)



Reykjavik pre-night hotel - October 1

TravelQuest has reserved a limited number of rooms for those interested in arriving in Reykjavik one night before the tour begins. The rate for October 1, including breakfast and tax, is \$195 USD per room, based on 1 or 2 people in a room. (Airport-hotel transfers are not included.) Contact [TravelQuest](#) for details.

Day 2 Sun, Oct. 3 **Breakfast**
Free day exploring Reykjavik

Today you're free to explore Iceland's picturesque capitol city of Reykjavik on your own. Reykjavik's museums, shops, cafes, galleries, quaint downtown, and scenic waterfront are just a short walk away from our centrally located hotel.

Day 3 Mon, Oct. 4 **Breakfast / Lunch / Dinner**
Thingvellir ancient Viking parliament, Geysir Thermal Area, and Gullfoss Waterfall



After checkout this morning, we'll travel to Thingvellir National Park to stroll around Althingi, Iceland's most sacred site and the home of the old Viking parliament. Thingvellir (located near Iceland's largest lake, Thingvallavatn) is known for its fascinating natural beauty and, set on a vast plain flanked by large fissures, is geologically spectacular. Later, we'll explore the otherworldly hot spring area of Geysir and see multicolored pools of water and mud. Here the geyser Strokkur erupts to a height of about 80 feet (25 meters) every 5 to 7 minutes.

After lunch, we will drive to the mighty Gullfoss (Golden Waterfall), perhaps the most beautiful waterfall in the country. We'll walk to the edge of Gullfoss, where the Hvitá River tumbles 100 feet (32 meters) in a double cascade. When the Sun is shining, we may see a rainbow through the massive spray from the falls.

Late this afternoon we'll arrive at our 3-star Iceland Highland Lodge, our home base for the next two nights. Situated in Iceland's stark highlands, far from any settlements, our lodge offers perfect dark-sky, aurora-viewing opportunities. After dinner this evening, join us for a discussion on the aurora and night-sky photography techniques, followed by the first of five nights of aurora viewing and stargazing.

Overnight: Iceland Highland Lodge (2 nights)

A few words about the Aurora Borealis by your trip leader Paul Deans`

If you think it's difficult predicting the weather a few days in advance, consider attempting to forecast the appearance of the northern lights as far ahead as October 2010! That's a tough assignment, and it's impossible to be completely accurate, but we can make some generalized comments about what we expect to see.

The 11-year solar cycle has been in a protracted minimum for more than two years. This doesn't mean there's no aurora activity; it simply means that we have to travel closer to the Earth's north



magnetic pole to see it. (During the past year, there have been numerous impressive auroral displays visible from Iceland and other far-northern countries.)

As of early 2010, sunspots appear to be slowly returning to the solar surface, which means the Sun may gradually become more active as the year progresses. But the occurrence of sunspots and flares will remain low, and we're unlikely to experience a Coronal Mass Ejection — a major outburst from the Sun that often results in spectacular displays of the northern lights.

More likely, we'll see auroral activity thanks to coronal holes, which are quite common during periods of low solar activity. These holes are openings in the Sun's magnetic field that let its powerful solar wind escape into space. When one of these holes is pointed toward Earth, the result is a lovely show of the northern lights at high-latitude locations such as Iceland. While we can't predict the appearance of coronal holes far in advance, they occur often enough that it's likely we'll see some aurora in October 2010.

One more thing. For reasons unknown to astronomers, aurora activity peaks following the spring and autumn equinoxes. This is why we plan to be in the dark skies of the Icelandic countryside shortly after the autumn equinox.



Day 4 Tue, Oct. 5

Landmannalaugar Volcanic Zone

Today we will travel to Landmannalaugar, a volcanic zone with a mixture of colorful rhyolite stones and black obsidian stones, which at this time of year are sometimes covered by a dusting of snow. We'll see Mt. Hekla, the most active volcano in Iceland (last eruption: Feb. 2000), and Ljótípollur (Ugly Lake), a huge crater formed in the 15th century. Take a dip in a natural hot water spring and enjoy a picnic lunch in an Icelandic mountain hut that's heated year-round with the natural hot water flowing in the nearby brook. After dinner back at the lodge, join us for our second night of aurora viewing.

Breakfast / Lunch / Dinner



Day 5 Wed, Oct. 6

Thjórsádalur Valley & Icelandic Highlands

After checkout today we'll further explore the Icelandic Highlands as we travel through the Thjórsádalur Valley, where we'll get a better idea of the rugged volcanic landscape that comprises more than half of Iceland. We'll stop at Hjalparfoss, a waterfall framed by twisted basalt columns, and then at a reconstruction of a 12th-century Viking farmhouse. We will end our day at the hotel where we'll be for our last three nights in Iceland. With your choice of expansive, dark grassy areas (perfect for photography), and two geothermally heated hot tubs — perfect for star- and aurora-gazing — you could not ask for a more beautiful place to experience Icelandic nights! After dinner, join us for our third night of aurora viewing.

Overnight: Iceland Aurora Lodge (3 nights)

Breakfast / Lunch / Dinner



Day 6 Thu, Oct. 7

Iceland's Scenic South Shore

This morning will begin with a visit to the thundering 180-foot (55-meter) Skógafoss waterfall and the village of Skógar — a living folk museum where old homes are preserved in their original state and a modern building is filled with a vast collection of household items that depict Iceland's past. After lunch, we will continue east to see the Myrdalsjökull and Solheimajökull glaciers. We'll also visit the beautiful volcanic, black-sand beach of Reynisfjara, with its massive basalt columns and rock formations. Join us tonight for our fourth evening of aurora viewing.

Breakfast / Lunch / Dinner



Day 7 Fri, Oct. 8

Thorsmork Nature Reserve

This morning we'll drive inland from Iceland's southern shore along the Markarfljót River to the picturesque Thorsmork Nature Reserve. Surrounded by three glaciers, it is one of Iceland's most beautiful areas. With its scenic setting and glacial rivers, Thorsmork is a place of unique natural beauty and ruggedness. A picnic lunch at a mountain hut is included. On our way back to the lodge, we'll go for a walk behind the towering Seljalandsfoss waterfall (conditions permitting). Join us for a special farewell dinner and our fifth and final night of aurora viewing.

Breakfast / Lunch / Dinner

Day 8 Sat, Oct. 9

Scenic drive and flights onward

After checkout this morning, we'll travel west to the geothermal town of Hveragerdi and make a number of scenic stops on the way to Keflavik. Following lunch, we'll reach Keflavik airport in time for our late-afternoon flights onward.

Breakfast / Lunch

Note: Extreme weather conditions in Iceland may affect access to some areas. We reserve the right to change this itinerary as conditions require.

WHAT TO EXPECT . . .

Weather in Iceland is 100% variable, both day and night. It is possible for us to experience sunshine, rain, and snow — all in one hour's time! Travelers need to be able to climb into and out of high-suspension buses, and carry their own luggage. Participants must be able to enjoy comfortably paced, easy-to-moderate walks over varied terrain, including uneven trails that may be unpaved and muddy. Walks tend to be short in duration, but are often up and down hills.

Daytime temperatures in October typically hover between 4-10°C (40-50°F), with evenings a few degrees cooler. Rain, sleet, or snow can be expected. Evenings at our Iceland country lodge tend to be clear and cold, with temperatures hovering between -2° and +2°C (25-35°F). Although many locales claim that if you don't like the weather, wait five minutes — this is actually true in Iceland! Travelers must be prepared for any type of weather, even clear sunny autumn days.

