

## Impressions of Iceland

By Doug Brandy

After our June stay in Denmark it was on to Iceland where we toured in a rented car and stayed in a comfortable cabin surrounded by grazing sheep. If you go in the summer tourist season you should arrange accommodation and a car several months in advance. For a rental car, pay extra for zero deductible insurance and/or check the vehicle thoroughly for existing damage before driving away. If you're preparing your own meals you might want to look for a Kronan or Bonus supermarket. As with most destinations, Google maps will guide you. Iceland is no bargain; expect everything to be expensive. 1 Icelandic kroner (ISK) is about 1 cent Canadian. Diesel for our rented car was 286/L ISK. Everyone understands and speaks English. Visa is accepted everywhere.



We arrived on a perfectly sunny day, temperature 10. That was not typical weather, though, as the next days featured the more expected low cloud, drizzle or rain with daytime temperatures near 10. Rolling along in the car we saw steaming vents now and then. The roadside is tidy, free of the ubiquitous plastic bag.

We admired, but did not want to emulate, hardy cyclists venturing through the rain and the spray from passing motorists. Rest stops are few and far between. The same brave souls could be seen later beside their tiny tents, pitched in the open with no shelter as most of the island is barren of trees.

In common with most Europeans, Icelanders are not uptight about nudity. Lindy and I enjoyed a public pool in Selfoss. Before entering the geothermal heated waters, patrons are required to shower. While I was so engaged in the men's shower area, a young father helped his equally naked preschool son and daughter perform the pre-swim ritual. None of the other men took particular notice.

Most visitors head to the well publicized Blue Lagoon. Don't be fooled. If you go there you'll pay up to 20 times what it costs for the municipal pools. Plus, you'll be shoulder to shoulder with other tourists bathing in water that has been used as coolant in a nearby power plant. Check out "Blue Lagoon (geothermal spa)" on Wikipedia.



We were among many tourists visiting Þingvellir (first character is like “th” in “think”) where the North American and Eurasian tectonic plates are separating. The Alþingi, first parliament, was established here around 930 AD. Not far away we witnessed, within 10 minutes, two hot water and steam eruptions of Geysir. The two place names I mention are relatively easy. Most place names in this land of the Vikings are almost impossible for us to pronounce but Google maps will accept, then correct, your spelling errors. The difficult to learn Icelandic language has a cadence similar to English but that’s where the resemblance ends.



If you’re interested in geology go to the excellent Lava Centre to learn all about volcanoes. Did you know some erupt beneath the sea and below glaciers? Like swimming? Many towns have pools and hot tubs with geothermal heated water. Expect an entry fee of 500 ISK per person.

We were there on June 22. All Icelanders we’re wearing the colours of their soccer team but they had to accept the 2-0 loss to Nigeria in the FIFA World Cup.

The next day we toured a lesser known route recommended by our landlady. Apart from the typical weather, Route 47 is a winner with spectacular scenery as it circles Hvalfjörður. At the end you’ll find a tunnel leading you to the capital, Reykjavík.

I would go to Iceland again but would undoubtedly enjoy it more in better weather.