

Northern Lights

NOW IS THE TIME FOR
THRILLING OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES AND VIEWING
THE AMAZING AURORA BOREALIS.



**ICELAND
REVIEW**

SPECIAL SUPPLEMENT

DANCING QUEEN

The bright, dancing lights of the aurora borealis, or northern lights, are actually collisions between electrically-charged particles entering the earth's atmosphere from the sun, 100-320 km (60-190 miles) above us. They are best seen from early September to the end of March—when the skies are dark at night—at latitudes between 64 and 70 degrees north—exactly where Iceland is located.

How bright the northern lights are depends on solar weather. The sun has its own 11-year cycle and last year was the peak of the cycle. That means that this winter will be good, too, with regular great shows of dancing lights. Iceland has the best viewing opportunity until the mid-2020s, in fact.

SPECIAL PROMOTION

Northern Lights



Brúaráfoss waterfall, South Iceland.

On the cover: Northern lights at Þingvellir National Park.

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COZY COUNTRY HIDEAWAY

In remote West Iceland, at the foot of Iceland's second-largest glacier, Hótel Húsafell offers warmth and comfort—and wondrous winter excursions.



Víðgelmir cave.



The ice tunnel in Langjökull glacier.



From Húsafell.

Nestled in a valley below Langjökull glacier in historic West Iceland, an hour-and-a-half's drive from Reykjavík, and smack dab between the natural wonders of the Golden Circle and the Snæfellsnes peninsula, Hótel Húsafell is a perfect base for exploring Iceland in the wintertime. It's a cozy country hideaway with a touch of modern, a touch of luxury, under a big sky often filled with the dancing aurora borealis.

HISTORY, ICE AND FIRE

Hótel Húsafell is just outside the town of Borgarnes, which in the years following the settlement of Iceland was home to Egill Skallagrímsson, the warrior-poet at the center of *Egils saga*—a canonical Viking Age tale thought to be written by the author and chieftain Snorri Sturluson, who had his seat at nearby Reykholt, and was famously murdered there on the orders of the King of Norway in 1241. Today, both Borgarnes and Reykholt offer colorful exhibitions and artifacts painting a picture of early Icelandic history.

A much more ancient view of Iceland's history can be found just beneath the earth's surface. New attraction Into the Glacier takes visitors through a man-made ice tunnel that burrows

deep into the heart of Langjökull, giving a new, ever-changing view of the frosty blue core of an ancient ice cap. Guided tours leave via a free shuttle bus which departs from Hótel Húsafell.

That's the ice, now for the fire: Víðgelmir, Iceland's largest lava cave, is just a few minutes' drive past the hotel, on a friendly family-owned farm. Running a kilometer-and-a-half long, and more than ten stories deep into the earth, the cave was formed by the collapse of ancient lava flows, which have left behind traces in the form of painterly red, brown and deep blue sediment layers, contrasting with icy stalagmites that glitter in the darkness. At Into the Glacier, guided tours are offered several times daily, all year round. These and other excursions can be booked from the hotel's tour desk.



RECHARGING AND RELAXING

After a day's exploration, guests can enjoy a meal at one of Hótel Húsafell's two restaurants, offering bistro casual or fine dining with glacial views, and both plating up refined Nordic classics sourced from nearby farms and ports, as well as pouring a selection of classic cocktails with an Icelandic twist.

After enjoying a gourmet meal, the perfect end to your day can be a relaxing dip in the hotel's outdoor thermal pools. Hótel Húsafell is located in an area rich in geothermal energy—the mighty Deildartunguhver hot spring, which powers the nearby towns, will soon provide heated water for Krauma Nature Spa, due to open by the end of 2016.

Hótel Húsafell is powered by 100 percent renewable energy produced from on-site hydro plants and geothermally-heated water from the nearby volcanoes. As a special courtesy to hotel guests, the pool is open until late at night, and is the perfect spot from which to enjoy the northern lights season.

WINTER MAGIC AND NORTHERN LIGHTS

International scientists have been coming to West Iceland for decades to study the aurora phenomenon. With an average of around three sightings per week during the winter months, Borgarfjörður is among the country's best spots for watching the northern lights, as the high snowy domes of the nearby glacier ensure cold, cloudless skies and crisp winds.

Icelanders have been coming to Húsafell for decades: it's a beloved area for camping and warm-weather recreation. But the area is most beautiful in winter, and as a new year-round tourism infrastructure springs up all around West Iceland, Hótel Húsafell is right at the heart of it all.

hotelhusafell.com

BASKING IN THE GLOW

Experience the aurora on one of Gray Line's northern lights tours.

Situated right under the so-called Aurora Oval, Iceland offers a breathtaking vantage point from which to view the northern lights. In fact, it's the only country in the world where you can see the aurora from any location. But while it's entirely possible that you'll catch a glimpse of this natural wonder on a cold, clear winter night in downtown Reykjavík, the best views are undoubtedly to be found outside the city limits.

RAZZLE DAZZLE

Gray Line Iceland has 15 years' experience offering northern lights tours and has developed several different viewing excursions, each of which aims to provide a unique aurora experience.

For those visitors who simply want to spend a memorable evening basking in the glow of the aurora borealis, far away from the ambient glare of the city, Gray Line has two fantastic

and affordable options: The Northern Lights Mystery Tour and the Northern Lights Deluxe Tour.

Departing shortly after sunset, the Northern Lights Mystery Tour is a three-to-five-hour excursion that takes you on a multi-stop journey outside the capital area. En route, your tour guide will share interesting scientific information about this natural phenomenon and its manifestations around Iceland, as well as helpful tips and tricks about how to best photograph the northern lights—even if you don't have fancy photographic equipment.

The extended Deluxe Tour is not only longer (five to eight hours)—thereby allowing you even more viewing time at each location—it's also a bit more luxurious. You'll travel on Gray Line's most spacious and comfortable coaches and will be given hot beverages and a cozy blanket to keep you warm while you enjoy the dazzling show above.

Travelers interested in combining two quintessentially Ice-

Northern Lights

landic experiences will love the Secret Lagoon and Northern Lights Hunt. This tour begins at a natural open-air hot spring situated in a rich geothermal area. After a luxurious, mineral-rich soak, you'll enjoy an Icelandic buffet dinner. Sated and relaxed, you will begin your search for the northern lights.

WORLDS AWAY

Of course, nature is unpredictable and so, although Gray Line does its best to ensure that the conditions are ideal before taking guests out in search of the northern lights, it's possible that this mysterious phenomenon won't appear on a given night. Luckily, the company allows any guest who does not see the northern lights on a tour (except the Secret Lagoon and Northern Lights Hunt) to rebook for another evening, entirely free of charge.

You don't have to travel far outside the capital to enjoy great views of the northern lights, but once you're out of the city and gazing at the gorgeous purple and green lights above, you'll feel like you're worlds away.

grayline.is/tours/northern-lights



Northern Lights



A NIGHT OUT IN REYKJAVÍK

It's unusual to see the northern lights so clearly,
dancing over the capital center,
here from Laugarnes.



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