



Expedition

ICELAND: VATNAJÖKULL ICECAP CROSSING



This information should answer some of your questions about the trip and give you a better idea of what we do day-to-day. It doesn't hope to answer everything. If you have any questions please get in touch.



On the summit of Hvannadalshnukur. Photo Ingthor Bjarnasson

- **An ambitious ski crossing of Vatnajökull Icecap**
- **Climb Hvannadalshnukur, Iceland's highest peak**
- **Have a sauna in a geothermally heated hut on the icecap!**
- **Well known Icelandic guide with much Antarctic and Arctic experience**
- **'....because it's there.....'**

Trip summary

An adventurous crossing of the largest icecap in Europe. After a gear check and a warm up in the hills near Husavik, we set off for the highlands in loaded jeeps, crossing lava fields, rivers and snow to reach a comfortable hut near to the icecap. Each day we will cover around 25 - 30km at a slow & steady pace, staying in huts or tents. We head initially SW towards Grimsvötn and from there we head SE towards Hvannadalshnukur (2119m). There is flexibility within our plan to allow for bad weather (or volcanic activity!), and our itinerary may need to change.

High Places in Iceland

We have been running trips in Iceland for 17 years, and have a long history of ski trips based around the east, at Myvatn in the north as well as in the highlands based at Snaefell and Kverkfjöll mountain huts. This trip will be led by Ingthor Bjarnasson, Iceland's best known polar ski mountaineer, who has also crossed Antarctica and Greenland.

What experience do I need?

On this trip, stamina is needed, as is the ability to cope with adverse weather. Some skiing experience is necessary, but the terrain is undulating not steep, so winter experience and stamina are more important than technical expertise on skis. You need to be able to control your skis on easy slopes off piste, traverse, sideslip and make basic turns. Kick turns are useful when skiing with a sled.

When we descend from the glacier at the end of the trip, skis will be carried and we will rope up wearing crampons. If you haven't used these before you will be shown how to do so.

Instruction in crevasse rescue, the use of ice axe and crampons and advice re skiing with a sled will be given as and when needed – you do not need to have previous experience in these areas, though it will be an advantage if you have familiarity with one or more of the above.

Just as important is a 'go for it' frame of mind!

What clothing & equipment do I need?

At this time of year we would expect to encounter anything from sunny alpine weather to a blizzard from the north, with a possible temperature range of 0° to -15°. Your clothing needs to be suitable for virtually any weather, but be economical with gear as more clothes = more weight.

You need to provide your own metal edged nordic touring skis, touring boots, sticks and skins. The skins are needed for purchase when pulling sleds. You also need an ice axe and crampons, climbing harness and a good sleeping bag. See kit list for full details. Sleds (1 per person), tents (2 or 3 to share), stoves and cooking gear will be provided.

How much will I have to carry?

At the start of the trip, each person will carry/haul approx 25-30 kg, including the weight of the sled. You will probably end up with some on your back and the rest on the sled. Hauling is a lot easier than carrying so don't be put off by the weights, which consists of personal gear, tents, communal cooking gear, food, fuel and emergency gear. When Ingthor crossed Antarctica his sled weighed 125 kg, which makes this seem lightweight!



Ingthor in Antarctica

Emergency contacts

A satellite phone and emergency beacons will be carried.

Accommodation

Reykjavik	Guesthouse. (B&B)
Husavik	Local hostel.
Kverkfjöll Hut	Spacious heated hut with several communal sleeping areas.
Glaciologists Hut	A tiny hut perched on the edge of Vatnajökull.
Grimsvotn Hut	Hut with sauna.
Skaftafell	Camp ground.

Weather

We have picked the best time of year for the crossing – before mid May the weather can be severe on the icecap and by the end of June the snow will be softening.

On a good day you will be down to your base layer, but if the wind comes from the north, temperatures could drop to -15°C so you need to be prepared for any weather.

Transport & luggage

We fly between Reykjavik and Akureyri and transfer by bus to Husavik. 4 x 4 vehicles will take us to a hut close to Kverkfjöll. At the end of the trip, we will have a 4 x 4 jeep pick up. We return from Skaftafell to Reykjavik by schedule bus.

Food

On the trip itself, all meals are included, and you will be expected to help with communal chores. If you require a special diet, you should advise us well beforehand and specify exactly what you can/can't eat. Vegetarian dehydrated food is in short supply in Iceland so you may be asked to bring a few items. Anything used will be refunded, so please keep receipts.

In Reykjavik B&B is provided, so you will have the chance to check out local restaurants. See day to day itinerary for which meals you will have to buy.

Maps

You can purchase maps for this trip directly from *Landmælingar Islands* (National Land Survey of Iceland). Most of the trip is covered by the 1:250,000 Austurland map which comprises two sheets back to back: Adalkort 8 Midausturland and Adalkort 9 Sudausturland.

Alternatively, 100,000 Atlaskort Map series, sheets 76, 85, 86, 87 cover the whole of the ski trip. (sold separately)

Landmælingar Islands, Stillholt 16-18, 15-300 Akranes, Iceland,
Tel 00 354 430 9000 Fax 00 354 430 9090 Web site <http://www.lmi.is> E-mail sales@lmi.is

What our clients say....

"We had a great time on the Vatnajökull Icecap Crossing and were very impressed with Ingthor's preparation and attention to detail and general all round knowledge of dealing with the crossing. We did have high winds for a few days which delayed us at Grimsvotn but Ingthor made the right decision in carrying on and we ended up with a superb day on Hvannadalshnjukur in perfect conditions." DC 2005



Hvannadalshnjukur. Photo Ingthor Bjarnasson

DAY BY DAY ITINERARY

This itinerary is flexible and should be seen as a guide only. Local conditions, weather or fitness could lead to changes in our daily plans. All times and distances are approximate. 'B,L,D' refers to meals included in the trip cost, i.e. Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner.

Most people will fly to Iceland from the UK. However some of you may prefer to meet up with the group in Reykjavik.

- DAY 1 Flight to Keflavik and transfer to the domestic airport for an evening flight to Akureyri and bus transfer to Husavik.
- DAY 2 A day to find out more about the trip and check that our gear is all functioning properly. We will take a short warm up ski trip near Husavik (B,L,)
- DAY 3 Our 4x4 high wheeled vehicle arrives and we set off into the interior towards Vatnajökull, crossing lava fields, rivers and snow. The journey should take from 5-7 hours, depending on road conditions. We stay at a spacious mountain hut close to Kverkfjöll, where a glacier tongue flows down between two rocky mountainous cliffs. (B,L,D)
- DAY 4 Time today for packing sleds and a local recce. (B,L,D)
- DAY 5 We're off! We cross the glacier tongue and head up a snow slope towards a wisp of steam caused by geothermal activity within the icecap. After a slow and steady pull we emerge at a crazy combination of ice caves and steaming sulphur. From here, Herðubreið, 'The Queen of Mountains' stands alone to the north, the most distinctive and shapely peak in Iceland.

We continue on up to a tiny hut perched on a rocky promontory with first exciting views across Vatnajökull. 8 hours. (B,L,D)

- DAY 6 Following a wide snowy ridge, we ski SW towards Grimsvötn, camping about half way between the hut and Grimsvötn. Remember, this is Iceland approaching summer so there is very little darkness, especially on the glacier – bring eye shades if you need them to sleep! 7-8 hours. (B,L,D)



*Camping on Vatnajökull.
Photo Ingthor Bjarnasson*

- DAY 7 We set off for Grimsvötn, which announces its own presence with the smell of sulphur in the wind. This lake within the glacier is caused by geothermal activity. The hut, situated on a high point at 1719m, is geothermal heated, and we plan to spend two nights in this historic spot. 7-8 hours. (B,L,D)
- DAY 8 A day at Grimsvötn to relax and gather strength for the next few days. For those with the energy, a foray on skis without the sleds will be relaxing too, as will a visit to the sauna. (B,L,D)
- DAY 9 The direction changes here and we turn to the SE in the direction of Hvannadalshnukur. With fitness increasing and sleds lightening, the going is

easier, and we camp at Hermannaskarð (1400m), a wide col, after 7-8 hours. (B,L,D)

DAY 10 A tough skin up to Tjaldskarð (Tent Col, 1900m), approx 5 hours, where we pitch tents. If everyone feels good, we will sleep a while here, then set off up Hvannadalshnukur in the evening.....(B,L,D)

DAY 11to reach the summit by early morning. We leave our sleds underneath the summit and climb to the top in crampons. In clear weather, the view from the top is memorable, with dramatic colours as the sun rises, and views over the south coast as well as back across the interior. The main descent off the glacier is on foot with crampons, for which we will rope up. Our transport will meet us and take us to the campsite for a welcome cuppa and perhaps a sleep. Campsite.(B,L,D)



Leaving Tent Col. Photo Ingthor Bjarnasson

DAY 12 Spare day in case of bad weather, OR extra day in Skaftafell. (B)

DAY 13 The scheduled bus service picks us up around 1100 and we arrive in Reykjavik at 1700, for a final evening in Reykjavik. (B)

DAY 14 Flight from Keflavik or continue with your own arrangements. (B)

NB: Please be aware that this trip is dependent on suitable weather. Time has been allowed within the itinerary for delays, but in the case of prolonged bad weather, we may not be able to embark upon the crossing. Additional charges may apply if unscheduled transport, activities or alternative accommodation are required.

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