

The Grand North & West: 96 Hours in Iceland

A Local's Guide to Whales, Canyons, and West Coast Wonders

This 4-day journey is designed for those who want to see it all without the exhaustion. We combine the dramatic fjords of West Iceland with the volcanic "Diamond Circle" of the North.

Local Rule #1: Start by 08:00 AM. This itinerary covers a lot of ground, and the morning light is the best for photography.

Local Rule #2: Book your Whale Watching in Húsavík weeks in advance. It is the whale capital of Iceland for a reason!

Day 1: The Magic of West Iceland

Route: Reykjavík – Hraunfossar – Deildartunguhver – Akureyri

Driving time: Approx. 5.5 hours.

08:00 | Departure: Head north through the Hvalfjörður tunnel.

10:00 | The Silver Springs: Visit Deildartunguhver, Europe's most powerful hot spring. Right next to it is Krauma, a sleek geothermal spa.

11:30 | The Lava Falls: Stop at Hraunfossar and Barnafoss. These waterfalls trickle out from under a solid lava field into a turquoise river. It is one of the most unique sights in the West.

14:00 | Lunch in Borgarnes: Grab a meal at The Settlement Center before the long drive over the mountains to the North.

18:30 | Arrival in Akureyri: Settle into your hotel and take a walk through the charming downtown.

Where to Stay (Akureyri): Hótel Kea or Sæluhús Apartments.

Day 2: Giants of the Ocean & The Horseshoe Canyon

Route: Akureyri – Húsavík – Ásbyrgi – Lake Mývatn

Driving time: Approx. 3 hours.

09:00 | Whale Watching: Drive 1 hour to Húsavík. Board a traditional wooden boat for a 3-hour tour. Húsavík has a nearly 99% success rate for spotting Humpback whales.

13:00 | Lunch at the Harbor: Eat fresh fish at Slippurinn or Gott in Húsavík.

15:00 | The Footprint of Odin: Visit Ásbyrgi Canyon. Walk to the back of the horseshoe-shaped cliffs to see the serene Botnstjörn pond. It is the quietest place in the North.

18:30 | Mývatn Sunset: Drive to Lake Mývatn for your second night.

Recommended Stay: Vogafjós Farm Resort (Dinner next to the cows) or Mývatn Berjaya Hotel.

Day 3: Volcanic Earth & The Blue Lagoon of the North

Route: Mývatn – Goðafoss – Akureyri

Driving time: Approx. 2 hours.

09:00 | Martian Landscapes: Explore Hverir (bubbling mud pools) and Dimmuborgir (lava "castles").

11:30 | A Secret Cave: Visit Grjótagjá, the hidden hot spring cave (famous from Game of Thrones). Note: You cannot swim here, but it is beautiful for photos.

13:00 | The Nature Baths: Spend 2 hours soaking in the Mývatn Nature Baths. It's the perfect mid-trip relaxation.

16:00 | The Waterfall of the Gods: Stop at Goðafoss on your way back to Akureyri for your final night in the North.

Day 4: Canyons & The Scenic Return

Route: Akureyri – Kolugljúfur – Reykjavík

Driving time: Approx. 5 hours.

09:00 | Morning Coffee: Grab a coffee and a famous "Brynja" ice cream in Akureyri before heading west.

12:00 | The Hidden Gorge: Stop at Kolugljúfur Canyon in the North-West. It is a spectacular, multi-tiered waterfall just minutes off the Ring Road.

14:00 | Seal Spotting: If you have 30 extra minutes, take a detour to Hvítserkur, the "Dragon Rock" on the shore of the Vatnsnes peninsula.

18:00 | Arrival in Reykjavík: Return to the capital with your 4-day loop complete.

Local Secrets for the 96-Hour Loop

Tunnel Toll: Don't forget to pay the Vaðlaheiðargöng toll (near Akureyri) at tunnel.is within 24 hours.

Húsavík Tip: If you want a more modern soak, visit GeoSea in Húsavík. It's a geothermal spa on a cliff overlooking the Arctic Ocean.

Food Tip: In Akureyri, try the Akureyri-style hot dog (pylsa með öllu)—it's different from the Reykjavík version!