



STORY & PHOTOGRAPHS

ARCHI VIRA

A Journey to the **Iceland**

Some dreams take months, others take years. For me, Iceland was a two-year plan, meticulously researched and eagerly awaited. Finally, in March 2025, I boarded the flight with my heart racing and expectations soaring. This was my dream destination – a land of fire, ice, and magic. And yet, no matter how much you read online, Iceland has its own way of surprising you.

HITTING THE ROAD – THE ONLY WAY TO SEE ICELAND

There's no better way to explore Iceland than on the road – and that means self-drive. But as an Indian driver, switching to the opposite side of the road was the first challenge. Add in unpredictable weather, slippery roads, and strong winds, and you've got yourself an adventure before you even reach the first waterfall.

A FEW HARD-EARNED LESSONS:

BUDGET FOR PARKING

Almost every tourist spot has paid parking. Factor this into your costs.

INSURANCE MATTERS

Skip buying it online. Locals will still insist you take Icelandic insurance, and trust me, it's worth getting complete coverage.

GET A 4X4

Weather can turn in minutes, and those extra wheels are worth every penny.

OBEY THE RULES

Fines are steep. We learnt the hard way – ₹10,000 for unknowingly parking in the wrong zone for two hours. And yes, locals will report lane-cutting or speeding. We were lucky enough to get away with a warning once.

Despite the strict rules, the Icelandic people are some of the kindest you'll meet. If you're lost, just ask – they'll help with a smile.

THE HIDDEN COSTS – PETROL PITFALLS

Filling fuel in Iceland is a self-service, card-only affair. What we didn't know was that each transaction comes with a hefty security hold – for us, around ₹18,000 – which should release in 24 hours but took 15 days with our Niyo debit card. Imagine that being deducted every time you fill up. Definitely something to factor into your budget.



STAYS – AIRBNB OVER HOTELS

My advice? Choose Airbnbs. They give you space, kitchen facilities, and the warmth of a local host. Hotels, while comfortable, often lack room service, cutlery, or even a microwave, which means no flexibility if you want to cook. Plus, they cost more.

One last-minute hotel stay drove this point home – the location was great, but the lack of amenities meant we were out searching for meals in freezing weather.

FOOD – VEGETARIAN STRUGGLES

Vegetarian food is expensive in Iceland, and options are limited. Carry ready-to-eat packets – they'll save your budget and your appetite.



WHEN TO GO – PICK YOUR ICELAND

We chose March for the Northern Lights, but that meant battling snow and shorter days. If your heart is set on lush green landscapes, long daylight hours, and more wildlife, visit in spring or summer – though you'll trade the aurora for endless golden sunsets..





ADVENTURES WORTH FREEZING FOR

Iceland is a playground for thrill-seekers. We braved the icy waters of Silfra, snorkelling between two continents in 2°C water – an otherworldly sight where the tectonic plates create shimmering blue depths. Fingers numb, heart full.

We explored Langjökull's ice caves – nature's own glass sculptures, glowing in shades of blue as sunlight filtered in. Sadly, weather cancelled our glacier hikes, snowmobiling, and whale watching. But there was one adventure left.

THE NIGHT THE SKY DANCED

For nine nights, the Northern Lights eluded us – snow, rain, and clouds hid them away. On our second-last night, we booked a guided tour, our final hope.

In the middle of nowhere, under a blanket of stars, the sky began to shimmer. Green and purple lights swayed above us – a moment beyond words. And then, as if the night wasn't magical enough, my husband proposed. Iceland gave me not just my dream sight, but a memory for life.

NATURE'S WONDERS – AND WILDLIFE CAMEOS

From countless waterfalls to black-sand beaches (thanks to volcanic lava), Iceland feels like another planet. Diamond Beach sparkled with chunks of ice scattered on its shore. Along the way, we saw Icelandic horses trotting freely, puffins dotting the cliffs, and even a few reindeer.





ICELAND

DON'T LEAVE WITHOUT

End your trip in one of Iceland's many hot springs. We tried the famous Blue Lagoon and Sky Lagoon with their seven-step spas and mineral-rich mud masks. For a quieter, cheaper option, ask locals for hidden geothermal pools.

We also stayed in a so-called "glass igloo" in Ölvisholt – more of a plastic bubble, with shared toilets and no kitchen, for a staggering ₹36,000 a night. Romantic in theory, overpriced in reality.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Iceland is breathtaking, challenging, and humbling all at once. It taught me that no amount of research prepares you for its wild beauty or unpredictable moods. It's a country I want to return to – next time, in summer – to see its other face.

Because Iceland is not just a destination. It's an experience, one that changes with the seasons, but leaves the same mark on your soul.

