Travel Grant report

Exploring the remote landscape of Iceland

Bernadette Devilat

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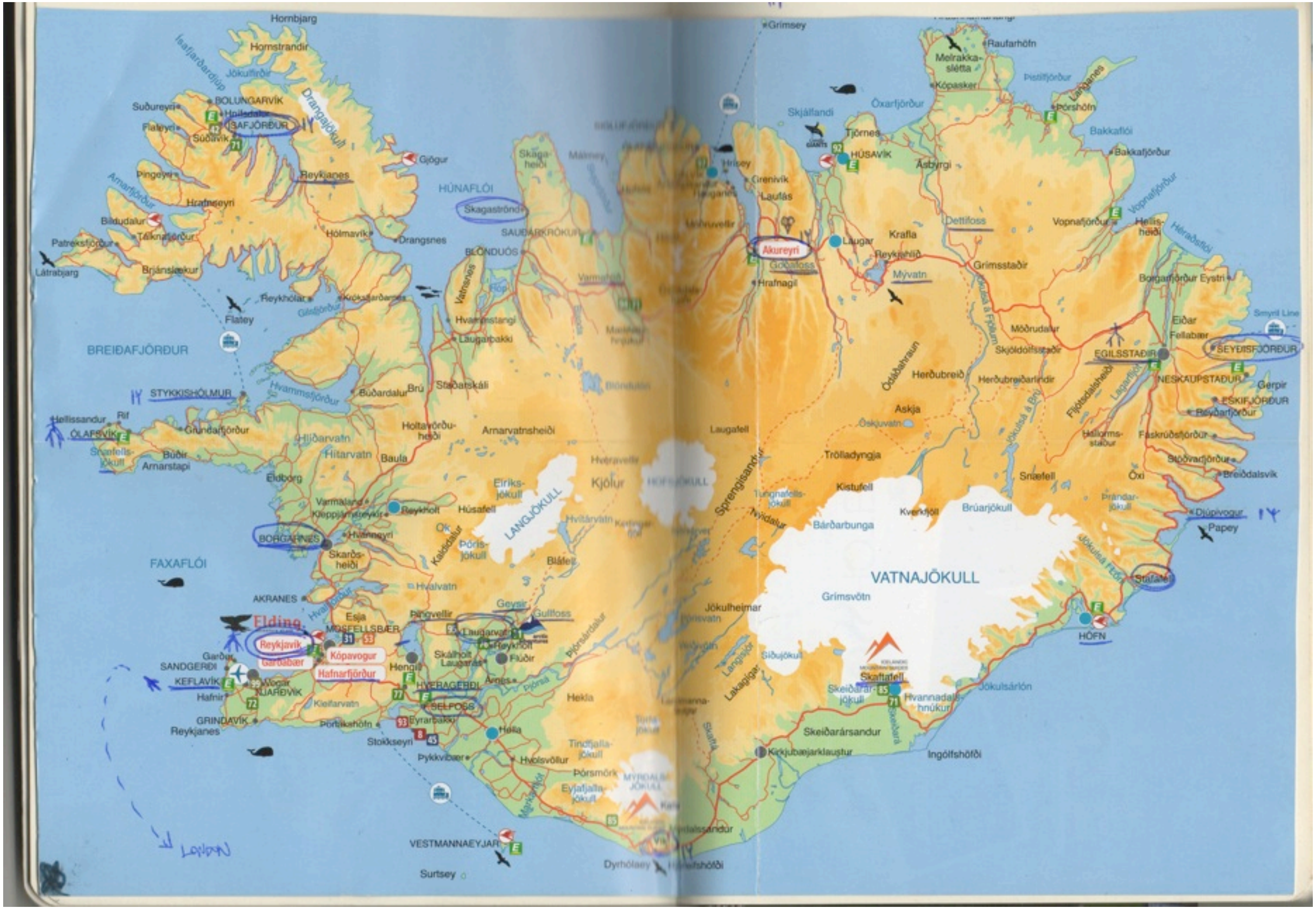
1. Introduction

The destination of was the country of Iceland. The trip aimed to complete the round to the island, starting from the capital *Reykjavík* to the north, rounding the island mainly by it coastline to discover its remote landscapes.

I have been always interested in knowing new and remote places, which I have done before in my home country, Chile. Chile have some amazing landscapes, I have travelled through the country in order to discovered some them, both in the northern and southern areas. I have been in the southern area of Chile, which is the more extreme southern area in the world too (excluding Antarctica). Iceland was the possibility of exploring the other extreme of the world: Iceland, one the most northern and remote areas in Europe.

It was an amazing adventure in a country with such different and amazing landscapes, cities and villages. Icelandic people were friendly, kind, and always willing to help. Their culture is based on honesty openness and trust, which made every part of the journey worth it. I also managed to stay in different types of accommodation, to experience every different possibility, from renting a bedroom in the capital *Reykavík* to stay in a farm in an isolated place, and also staying in hostels sharing with other young people. Because it was difficult and expensive to get to the most amazing landscapes by public transportation, I decided to cover by my self the cost of renting a car, which allowed for an independent and comprehensive trip. That was very important as some of the most beautiful part of the trip was between one place and the other, not to mention the spectacular surprises of nature that are marked on maps. The trip was done during summer, so the days were much longer than our usual experience, as Iceland is almost in the Polar Circle. Thus, there were almost no night, so travelling to the different places was done all way long the day, from 8 to 1 am in some cases, as some destination were extremely remote, such as the West fjords, for example. The trip lasted two weeks, starting from the end of July to the beginning of August.



Hornbjarg
Hornstrandir
Ísafjarðardjúp
Jökulfirðir
Drangajökull
BOLUNGARVÍK
Suðureyri
Flateyri
ÍSAFJÖRÐUR
Súðavík
Gjögur
Þingeyri
Reykjanes
Arnarfjörður
Hrafnseyri
Bíldudalur
Tálknafjörður
Patreksfjörður
Látrabjarg
Hólmavík
Drangsnes
Brjánslækur
HÚNAFLÓI
Skagaströnd
SAUÐÁRKRÓKUR
BLÖNDUÓS
Varmahlíð
Vatnsnes
Flatey
Reykhólar
Gilsfjörður
BREIÐAFJÖRÐUR
Hvammstangi
Laugarbakki
Hvammsfjörður
Búðardalur
Brú
Staðarskáli
STYKKISHÓLMUR
Hellissandur
Rif
ÓLAFSVÍK
Grundarfjörður
Snæfellsjökull
Búðir
Arnarstapi
Hlíðarvatn
Hítarvatn
Baula
Holtavörðuheiði
Arnarvatnsheiði
Eldborg
Varmaland
Reykholt
Húsafell
BORGARNES
Hvanneyri
Skarðsheiði
FAXAFLÓI
Ok
Kaldidalur
Eiríksjökull
LANGJÖKULL
Þórisjökull
Hvítárvatn
Kjölur
Hveravellir
HOFSJÖKULL
Bláfell
AKRANES
Hvalvatn
Hvalfjörður
Esja
Elding
MOSFELLSBÆR
Reykjavík
Garðabær
Kópavogur
Hafnarfjörður
SANDGERÐI
Garður
KEFLAVÍK
Vogar
NJARÐVÍK
Hafnir
GRINDAVÍK
Reykjanes
Kleifarvatn
Þorlákshöfn
Stokkseyri
Eyrarbakki
HVERAGERÐI
SELFOSS
Hengill
Þingvellir
Laugarvatn
Geysir
Gullfoss
Skálholt
Laugarás
Reykholt
Flúðir
Árnes
Þjórsá
Þjórsárdalur
Hekla
Hella
Hvolsvöllur
Þykkvibær
Þórsmörk
Tindfjallajökull
Eyjafjallajökull
MÝRDALSJÖKULL
VESTMANNAEYJAR
Surtsey
Dyrhólaey
Grímsey
Hrísey
Grenivík
Laufás
Akureyri
Goðafoss
Hrafnagil
Skjálfandi
Tjörnes
HÚSAVÍK
Öxarfjörður
Ásbyrgi
Laugar
Krafla
Reykjahlíð
Mývatn
Dettifoss
Grímsstaðir
Raufarhöfn
Melrakkaslétta
Kópasker
Þistilfjörður
Langanes
Þórshöfn
Bakkaflói
Bakkafjörður
Vopnafjörður
Hellisheiði
Héraðsflói
Borgarfjörður Eystri
Smyril Line
Eiðar
Fellabær
SEYÐISFJÖRÐUR
EGILSSTAÐIR
NESKAUPSTAÐUR
Gerpir
ESKIFJÖRÐUR
Reyðarfjörður
Fáskrúðsfjörður
Stöðvarfjörður
Breiðdalsvík
Djúpivogur
Papey
Möðrudalur
Skjöldólfsstaðir
Herðubreið
Herðubreiðarlindir
Ódáðahraun
Askja
Öskjuvatn
Laugafell
Sprengisandur
Trölladyngja
Kistufell
Tungnafellsjökull
Nýidalur
Bárðarbunga
Kverkfjöll
Brúarjökull
Snæfell
Hallormsstaður
Fljótsdalsheiði
Lagarfljót
Öxi
Þrándarjökull
VATNAJÖKULL
Grímsvötn
Jökulheimar
Síðujökull
Lakagígar
Skaftafell
Skeiðarárjökull
Hvannadalshnúkur
Jökulsárlón
Skeiðarársandur
Kirkjubæjarklaustur
Ingólfshöfði
HÖFN
Stafafell
Jökulsá í Lóni
LONDON

2. Exploring Iceland

2.1. London-*Keflavík*

I arrived to the Keflavik International airport, located 40 km west of the capital city: *Reykjavik,* where I rented a car to start the adventure. The first days I stayed in *Reykjavik,* which had an interesting architecture.

The trip continued then to *Borgarnes*, passing to hot springs in the way and *Barnafoss* waterfall.

From *Borgarnes*, I continued the trip to the *Snæfellsnes Peninsula.*

Snæfellsnes glacier

This included visiting *Hellnar* and exploring the western point of the peninsula by foot, experiencing the abrupt coastline and passing by lava fields.

Then the trip continued bordering the north route of the peninsula, passing trough *Ólafsvik,* and then to *Stykkishólmur* to finalize the peninsula trip.

Ólafsvik church

In the way

Stykkishólmur

Then the trip continued to *Ísafjörður,* in the west fjords, the most beautiful but also the most difficult to get, as there is only way to do it, by bordering the fjords.

This trip was long in time, but the most rich in landscapes and one of the most rich in natural flora and fauna.

Driving with the midnight sun.

Ísafjörður, 2 am

Ísafjörður

Ísafjörður

Ísafjörður was surrounded by hills and it is the most important town of the west fjords. Then the trip continued going back to the main island, to *Reykjanes*. In this opportunity, I took advantage of the day trip to experience bird and seal watching in the way.

Reykjanes

The journey continued to the east, to *Skagaströnd,* where the next accommodation was. Early in the morning I continued the trip to *Varmahlíd,* where I did rafting in the canon-shaped river, the only way to explore it because of its shape. Then the trip continued to *Akureyri*. There were houses built with vernacular building techniques in the way, using clay and grass to insolate the dwellings.

Akureyri

Next day, the trip continued to *Gođafoss,* Lake *Mývatn,* and *Detifoss.* All these places where explored by walk and hiking.

Gođafoss waterfall (above)

Dimmuborgir lava fields (right)

Pseudocraters at Lake *Myvatn* (above) and *Hverfjall* crater (below)

Then the trip continued to *Selfoss* and *Detifoss* waterfalls, passing by *Hverir* hot mud pods.

Hverir hot mud pods.

Sellfoss (left) and *Detifoss* (below)

The next accommodation was *Seyðisfjörður*, a small village at the coastline. In order to arrive to it, it is necessary to descend to the sea level, passing a dense layer of clouds, giving the impression of a grey and cold atmosphere, as opposite to the rest of the villages that were visited. Local people told me that the climate has been like that since almost three years.

From there, the trip continued to the south, passing through *Egilsstaðir,* and stopping several times in the way, as the landscapes were absolutely amazing. Then, I arrive in the next accommodation: a farm in *Stafafell.* The experience of staying in a farm was completely different, and allowed for exploring the area by walk following the advice of the farm's owner.

Egilsstaðir

In the way

Stafafell farm

Hiking to the canyon near the farm.

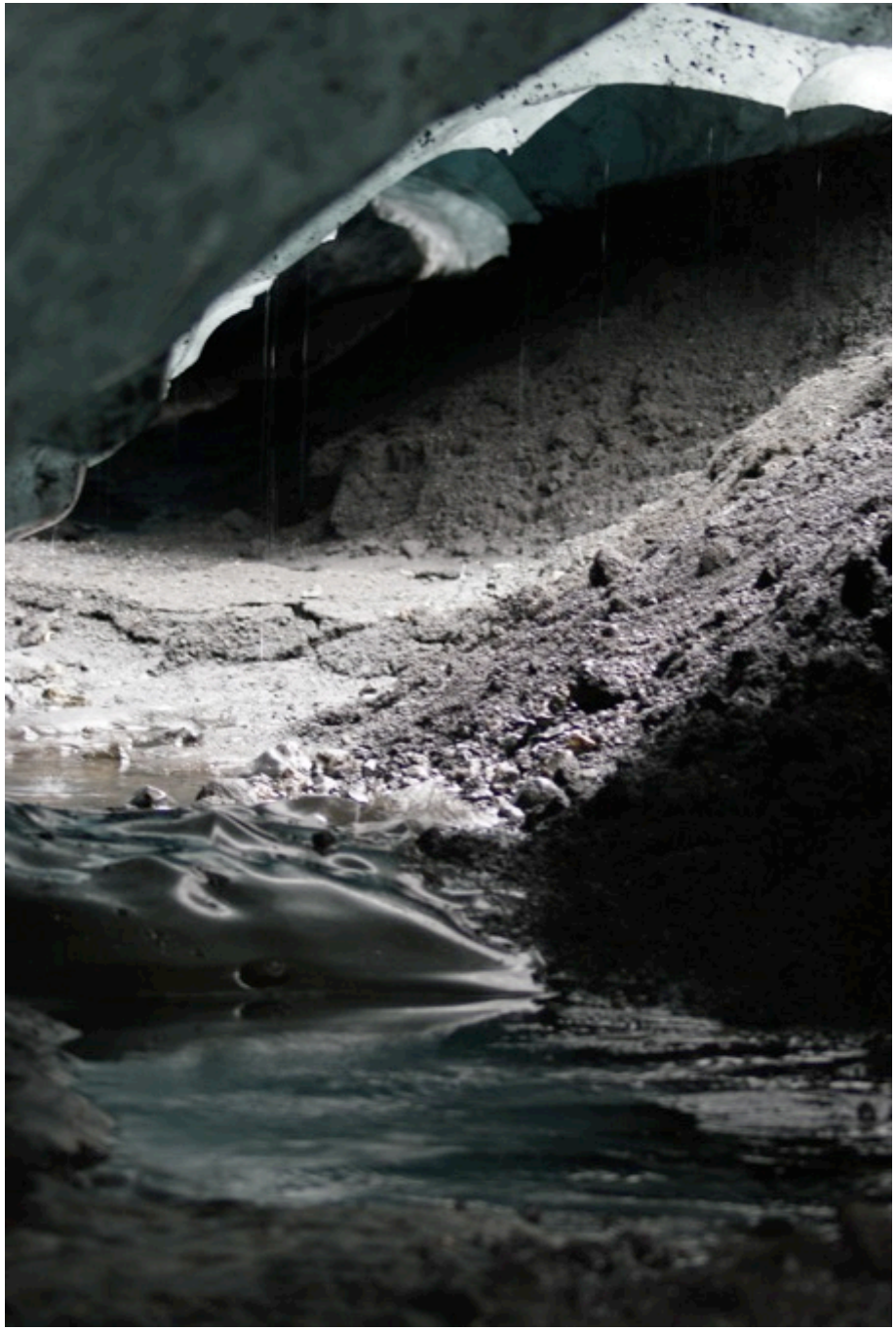
The next day was to explore the biggest glacier in Iceland and Europe: *Vatmajökull.* There are several possibilities to get there, but I decided to travel by glacier edges and hike to get a better view of it through the *Skaftafell* National Park. One of the firsts stops is *Jökulsarlon*, where it is possible to see the icebergs that come from the glacier melting.

Jökulsarlon

Vatmajökull from *Skaftafell* National Park hiking

That hiking was absolutely breath-taking, every view was impressive. After that, I continue to *Vík,* where the next accommodation was. This village is famous for bird watching, especially puffins that are close to the coast.

Approaching to the last part of the trip, the next day the trip continued to *Selfoss*, to start visiting what is denominated *The Golden Circle,* as it has several places that worth to visit and are much closer between them than any other area in the country. This last long journey had several stops, as I was interested in making the most of it. Close to the main road, I visited *Skógarfoss,* a waterfall that was possible to see from the bottom, and not only from above, which had been the case with the other waterfall visited. Then, I tried to reach one of the sides of the glacier *Myrdalsjökull.*



The next day after sleeping in *Selfoss* I explored the first part of *The Golden Circle*, walking and spending more time in places as travel times within each one was less than I was used to by that time of the journey. I also tried to have a better view of the glacier *Langjökull*, by deviating from the original route, but it was not possible to get close to it as the roads were not good enough for car and there were no hiking routes.

Kerid crater and *Skálholt* church.

Some snapshots in the intent of approaching to the glacier

Gullfoss waterfall (left) & *Geysir* (right and below)

The next accommodation was a hostel in *Laugarvatn.* During the next and almost last day, the places visited were *bingvellir*, which is right on the edge of North American continental plate. Then, I surrounded the lake *bingvallavatn*, to finalize by hiking to *Reykjadals* River, which has hot waters because they are mixed with several hot springs that are among the mountains. At the end of the day, I went back to the capital, *Reykjavik,* where I spent my last night, taking the flight back to London the next day at *Keflavik* airport.

Bingvellir (left)

Reykjadals river (right and below)

To conclude, it has been difficult for me to explain the amazing adventure that I had the opportunity to experience, and that is why I have included several photographs that I took, so they can express the richness and sense of owe of Iceland's landscape. The aim of the trip was to discover and register remote places of one of the most northern areas in the world, and to experience nature by discovering it without a fix itinerary. I can say that this aim has been achieved by far more. The experience was very rich and important for me, and I am grateful of the Travel Grant scheme that helped me to complete it.