

In the Path of the Vikings **ICELAND**

WITH DR STEVEN ASHBY



**FAR
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ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND CULTURAL TRIPS

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IN THE PATH OF THE VIKINGS: ICELAND

with Dr. Steven Ashby

Experience Dramatic Landscapes, Norse longhouses, Viking ships, and Learn about the Heroic Stories in the Ancient Sagas

Sitting in a remote corner of the North Atlantic Ocean, Iceland is a mountainous island nation celebrated for its dramatic scenery. Shining black sand beaches, stunning fjords, gushing geysers, majestic volcanoes, misty waterfalls, and massive glaciers create some of the most atmospheric landscapes on the planet.

During the Early Middle Ages, Norsemen traveled, traded, and established permanent colonies in many locations throughout northern Europe. As seafaring increased, either blown off course or intentionally exploring, Norsemen 'discovered' Iceland. Unlike other regions colonized by the Vikings, this new land had no indigenous population (although Irish hermit monks were probably on the island earlier than the Norsemen). Ancient sagas describe Iceland as a rich land filled with game and fish, birch and willow woodland, and forests that stretched from highland slopes to the valleys below.

Tales of this paradise spread, and in the 9th century, Scandinavian pioneers looking to start a new life arrived in Iceland. The people who inhabit Iceland now are direct descendants of the Vikings.

What are the 'Sagas'?

A unique contribution to Western literature, sagas are prose narratives written almost one thousand years ago. A unique form of medieval literature, these tales told of the adventures, struggles, and often bloody feuds of the great Norse families in both Norway and those who settled on this remote island a thousand years ago. First passed down orally from generation to generation, around 1190-1320, writers inscribed these stories into books. Among the most important are the Njáls Saga, a compelling story of a fifty-year blood feud, and the Gísla Saga, about a tragic hero who must kill one of his brothers-in-law to avenge another brother-in-law.

Daily Itinerary

Day 1

Arrive in Reykjavik, Viking World Museum, Blue Lagoon

Arrive at Reykjavik Airport by 7 am. Upon leaving the airport, stop by the Viking World Museum, home of the *Íslendingur*, the Icelander. Built in 1996, the vessel is a replica of the famous Gokstad, a remarkable archaeological find of an almost completely intact Viking ship, excavated in Norway in 1882. Additionally, the museum houses the Viking Millennium exhibition produced by the Smithsonian Institution. Called *Vikings: The North Atlantic Saga*, it reveals the Norse settlement and explorations of unknown lands.

Then it's on to the renowned Blue Lagoon. Here, geothermal waters keep the bathing temperature at 39°C (102°F) year-round and we will test the waters! Note: this stop is based on availability.

Our hotel for the next two nights is the boutique Apotek, housed in a historical building that was once a pharmacy and located in the heart of downtown Reykjavik. (L/D)

Day 2

Snorrastofa Research Center, Hraunfossar, Barnafoss

Snorri Sturluson was a 13th-century Icelandic historian, poet, politician, and the author of the *Prose Edda* saga. A renowned leader, he was twice elected as lawspeaker (*lögsögumaður*) to the Icelandic parliament, the Althing. His former estate at Reykholt, where he resided from 1206 until 1241, is now the Snorrastofa Research Center. While here, learn about the excavations of his home and inspect the 800-year-old, still functioning 'hot tub' that Snorri built for his bathing enjoyment.

Continue to Hraunfossar, where we'll see a series of vivid blue rivulets flowing out of this lava field. Then we wander to Barnafoss, a rapid waterfall just a short walk away. The Icelandic horse is derived from ponies brought to the island by Norse settlers in the 9th and 10th centuries. Due to archaeological excavations in Europe, we know that this equine is descended from an ancient breed. Markedly, it has been preserved in isolation and is extinct outside of Iceland. At Sturlureykir Horse Farm we will learn about these special animals.

Dinner is on our own to enjoy one of Reykjavik's excellent restaurants. (B/L)



Day 3

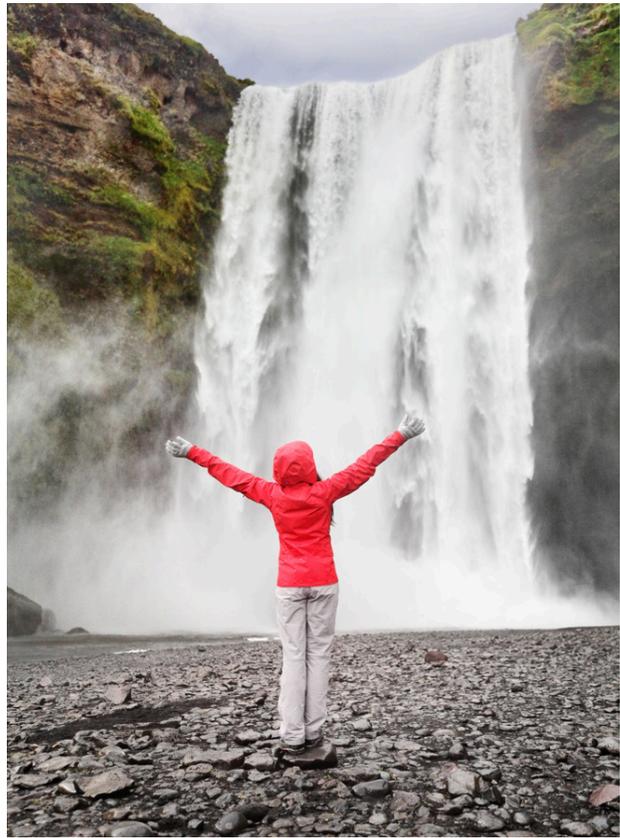
Keldur at Rangárvellir, Skógasafn Museum, Skógafoss

As we traverse the southern edge of Iceland, we will take in several interesting sites. Keldur at Rangárvellir is an 11th-century farm that has over 20 still-standing turf structures. This historic settlement once belonged to Ingjaldr Höskuldsson, a character that appears in Njál's Saga and elsewhere in medieval literature. Keldur Hall was constructed in the old stave method with lovely carved moldings decorating the old wood and turf house. Interestingly, from the hall, there is an underground tunnel thought to date from the 12th to 13th century. Certainly, it was an escape route during times of conflict. If available, we meet with the curator who will discuss the lengthy history of the farmstead.

The extraordinary Skógasafn Museum is a collection of 18,000 regional folk crafts exhibited in three museums and six historical buildings on the property. Handsomely displayed are old bibles, ornate gold and silver jewelry, hundred-year-old cars and farm equipment, and other items from everyday life. Particularly of note, are the 18th and 19th-century national costumes worn by women along with their elaborately decorated side-saddles.

Our final stop is at Skógafoss, one of Iceland's biggest and unquestionably most beautiful waterfalls. Any time the sun emerges, a rainbow is produced by the voluminous spray of the cascading water.

In the town of Vik, on the southern tip of the island, we spend two nights in the lovely [Hotel Kría in the town of Vik](#). (B/L/D)



Day 4

Reynisfjara, Vatnajökull National Park, Skaftafellsjökull Glacier

Today's all-day excursion takes us further east. Our first stop is Reynisfjara where ebony basalt columns dominate a sparkly black sand beach. In 1991, National Geographic voted Reynisfjara as one of the top 10 non-tropical beaches to visit on Earth.

Our ultimate goal is Vatnajökull National Park, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, which includes the national parks of Skaftafell and Jökulsárgljúfur along with the Vatnajökull ice cap. At Skaftafell there is a short, easy trail leading to the base of Skaftafellsjökull Glacier. Bordering Vatnajökull, we will see the glacial lagoon of Jökulsárlón where still waters are dotted with aquamarine icebergs from the upstream glacier. Generally, seals cavort among the icebergs in search of dinner.

At the end of our long day, we will return to Vik and the Hotel Kría. (B/L/D)



Day 5

Seljalandsfoss waterfall, Ferry to Heimaey, Eldheimar Museum, Stave Church (replica)

Begin today with an opportunity to walk behind the curtain of water at Seljalandsfoss waterfall (we'll wear raincoats here!).

After that, we board a ferry to Heimaey off Iceland's south coast and visit the only occupied island in the Westman Archipelago. In Icelandic called Vestmannaeyjar, these land masses were formed by underwater volcanic eruptions. In 1973, Eldfell Volcano on Heimaey erupted. The lava flow destroyed buildings and forced a months-long evacuation of the entire population to the mainland. The fascinating Eldheimar Museum reveals the results of this eruption's destruction. As we walk through the town, stop to admire the church. This is a replica of the Norwegian Haltdalen stave church which was built around 1170.

Return to the mainland and continue to Reykjavik and the Hotel Apotek for five nights. Lunch is on our own. (B/ /D)



Day 6

The Golden Circle: Geysir, Gullfoss, Kerið, Þingvellir National Park

Our explorations take us into the mountains and river valleys east of Reykjavik through stunning landscapes to early Old Norse sites. Situated in the lower part of the Biskupstungur Valley, Skálholt was one of two episcopal seats in Iceland. Certainly, the first cathedral was built here in the 12th century. Subsequently, as many as ten churches have stood in this spot. Finally, the present sanctuary dates to the 1950s. While excavating for the foundation, a sarcophagus was found. Inside were the remains of Páll Jónsson, a bishop who died in 1211. Today, the coffin is on display in the church crypt. We continue into Haukadalur Valley to the Geysir Geothermal Area. Within the region are a plethora of hot springs and geysers. Here, we will watch Strokkur Geyser shoot jets of boiling water high into the air every few minutes. Nearby, view Gullfoss Waterfall's dramatic show produced by the melting waters from Langjökull Glacier. Along the way, stop to see Kerið volcanic crater lake. Þingvellir (Thingvellir) National Park, on the UNESCO Tentative List, is a rift valley. Remarkably, this gorge marks the crest of the Mid-Atlantic Ridge and the boundary between the North American and Eurasian tectonic plates. A venerated spot to Icelanders, this is where the open-air gathering of the National Assembly, called Althing, was established in 930. The Althing continued to meet at this spot until 1798. Over two weeks a year, the assembly met to set laws and settle disputes. Significantly, it was here that the nation abandoned the Old Norse pagan belief system and, in 1000, converted to Christianity. Nearly a millennium later, in 1944 on this spot, Icelanders declared their independence from Denmark and confirmed their first President. Greenhouses in Iceland use geothermal waters of hot springs to grow vegetables. At Friðheimar Greenhouse Farm we will learn about the cultivation of tomatoes. Moreover, 30% of the tomatoes eaten in Iceland are cultivated here! Afterward, we will lunch on produce grown on this farm. On our way back to Reykjavik, we will dine on lobster at Fjöruborðið Restaurant. (B/L/D)

Day 7

Reykjavik: National Museum of Iceland, Settlement Exhibition Museum

This morning, we will visit two splendid museums in Reykjavik. The National Museum of Iceland displays enthralling exhibitions illustrating the story of Iceland's past, from the medieval days of Viking settlements to current contemporary culture. Unquestionably unique, the Valhjófsstadur Door, a medieval church gate dated to 1200. Beautifully carved, it displays the legend of the lion-knight that appears in several Icelandic sagas.

In 2001, the remains of a 10th-century Viking longhouse were found during excavations in downtown Reykjavik. To preserve this historic discovery, The Settlement Exhibition Museum was built around the remains of the hall. After seeing the exhibit, we will lunch in a typical restaurant serving Icelandic cuisine. The afternoon is free to explore Reykjavik's historic area with dinner on our own. (B/L)

Day 8

Þjórsárdalur Stöng Excavations, Þjóðveldisbærinn Stöng House

One thousand years ago, Viking farmers settled in Þjórsárdalur Valley unaware of a nearby volcano. Unfortunately, Mt. Hekla erupted in 1104, and twenty-two settlement farms were destroyed. As a result, one of these farmsteads, Stöng, had been hidden under massive layers of pumice for 835 years. In 1939 archaeologists excavated the exceptionally well-preserved ruins and today, the remains of the longhouse are protected by an enclosed building. In the 10th century, according to the Saga of Njáll, the Viking Gaukur Trandilsson lived at Stöng. Consequently, a reconstruction of the Viking-era farming complex where he lived, Þjóðveldisbærinn Stöng, was developed. Dinner is on our own. (B/L)

Day 9

Landnámssetur Settlement Exhibition, Stykkishólmur Village

A variety of cultural and natural history awaits us today. Located at the head of the fjord in Borgarnes, Landnámssetur Settlement Exhibition tells the Saga of the Settlement of Iceland. Additionally, an exhibition of Egil's Saga profiles one of the most colorful of all the saga heroes.

Following our visit, we drive north to the picturesque fishing town of Stykkishólmur, overlooking the natural harbor of Breiðafjörður Bay. While here, see Stykkishólmur's graceful church, which opened in 1990. It was designed by the Icelandic architect Jón Haraldsson and the altarpiece was painted by Kristín Gunnlaugsdóttir.

Our last stop is Eiríksstaðir, the former homestead of Eiríkr Þorvaldsson, known as Erik the Red. After being exiled from Iceland for committing a murder, he is remembered in medieval and Icelandic saga sources as having founded the first settlement in Greenland. Most compelling evidence points to Eiríksstaðir as the birthplace of Leif the Lucky who is said to have discovered America.

Return to Reykjavik in the evening. Gather this evening for our final dinner party in one of the city's exceptional restaurants. (B/L/D)



Daily Itinerary *(cont'd)*

Day 10

Depart Iceland

Transfer to the airport for our morning flights home. (B)

PLEASE NOTE: This is a sample itinerary that is typical of our trip offerings. In general, you can expect a very similar program, though days may be swapped depending on availability, opening hours, and other affecting factors.

Pre and Post Trip Extensions

Far Horizons offers pre or post extensions for many of our trips. We can also arrange extra nights at the arrival and departure hotel should you wish to arrive early or depart later. Please contact us for details.



Why Take This Tour?

Led by Dr. Steven Ashby, a Viking specialist

Enter the Snorrastofa Research Center

See the UNESCO World Heritage Sites of Skaftafell and Thingvellir

See the Keldur turf house, occupied for a 1,000 years

Learn about the unique Icelandic horse at a breeding farm

Travel by ferry to Westmann Islands

Dine on produce at a geothermal greenhouse farm

Visit Erik the Red's homestead

Tour Information



Pricing

For current pricing, please visit farhorizons.com and navigate to our trip page.

Inclusions

Price based on double occupancy and includes:

- Internal flights during the trip (if applicable/unless otherwise noted)
- The accompaniment of your scholar throughout the entire trip
- Local English-speaking guide
- Hotel accommodations (3 or 4 stars; or best available based in the area)
- Ground transportation
- Airport transfers for arrivals and departures
- Most meals as noted in the itinerary
- Entry fees to all included sites and museums
- Gratuities to guides, drivers, and restaurant and hotel staff
- Coordination for any private presentations or tours

Trip prices are based on a minimum number of participants. If this minimum number is not met, trip prices are subject to change. Should the prices need to change, Far Horizons will reach out to registered guests to discuss directly.

Single Supplement

Should a roommate be requested and one not be available, the single supplement will be charged.

Exclusions

- International round trip airfare
- A separate donation check of \$150.00 per person to a designated donation project
- Passport or visa fees
- Required vaccines or tests
- Airport or departure taxes
- Alcoholic drinks, beverages or food not included on set menus
- Excess baggage charges
- Personal tips and hotel incidental expenses
- Laundry or other items of a personal nature

Donation Checks

As a tour company that benefits from the cultural and natural riches of our destinations, we have a policy of donating to the scientific and cultural sites and projects which we visit. This has created a bond between Far Horizons and the academic and local communities that has helped us establish an extensive list of lecturers and contacts in each of our destinations. We ask that each participant donate to the noteworthy project we designate. The donation amount is \$150.00 per person. Note that the donation is required as part of your registration for the trip and that it is non-refundable.

Exchange Rate Fluctuations

Prices are based on currency exchange rates keeping below a projected level. While it is unlikely, if the exchange rates should change substantially, Far Horizons reserves the right to charge an additional amount to the trip cost.

Registration

A deposit of \$1000 per person is required along with your registration & health forms, which will be linked in the email confirmation you receive once you pay your deposit on our booking platform. Final payment is due 120 days before departure. Prior to departure, you will be sent a reading list and a tour bulletin containing travel information.



Cancellation

Cancellations received in writing at least 120 days before departure will receive a refund less a \$500 per person administrative fee.

Cancellations received less than 120 days before the departure date will not receive a refund. If for any reason you are unable to complete the trip, Far Horizons will not reimburse any fees.

Upon registering for the tour, the purchase of travel protection with both trip cancellation and emergency evacuation is strongly advised. Links to recommended insurance policies will be included in the email you receive confirming receipt of your deposit.

Expectations During Travel

Our trips are designed for flexible, energetic people who like to be active, have a spirit of adventure and a positive attitude. We have designed this trip to be as comfortable as possible, while also aiming to visit some remote or unique sites that other companies do not attempt to include in their itineraries. There may be days where we have very long drives and the conditions of the roads may vary. Hotels and transportation in some remote areas may not be up to western standards. There may be times when no bellhops are available; please pack with the understanding that you need to be able to handle your own luggage at times. Sometimes we may be walking over uneven trails for a mile or more; hiking boots are strongly recommended. Not every meal will be haute cuisine and several lunches may be picnics or box lunches. By maintaining a flexible attitude we will soon be captivated by the beauty of the natural scenery, the hospitality of the local people, and the fascinating sites we will see. Your flexibility and patience will be appreciated.

Air Ticketing

International round trip flights are not included in the cost of the trip. If Far Horizons must change the trip dates or cancel the trip for any reason, Far Horizons is not responsible for any air ticket you may have purchased. Please send your complete air schedule as soon as you have it. NOTE: Please contact Far Horizons if you would like for us to handle your air ticketing.

Private Tours and Talks

The private tours of archaeological sites and talks by specialists are scheduled in advance and include a donation to each. Specialists working at these sites are excited about showing their work to interested enthusiasts. However, please be aware that there may be times when the director or a member of the staff may not be on site when our groups arrive due to other commitments.

Walking and Standing

Far Horizons expects all participants to be physically active and able to walk and climb independently throughout the full touring days. This includes walking over uneven terrain (uphill and downhill) for 2 miles or more at each site. You should expect to be on your feet for much of each day, averaging as much as 5 miles of walking per day. **As such, each participant should be able to walk unaided at a pace of 3 miles per hour for at least an hour at a time, and to stand unsupported for at least 60 minutes.** Bearing this in mind, we suggest that, if you have not already done so, you begin walking several miles every day, ideally including stairs and hills. If you have questions about your ability to keep up with the group or the strenuous nature of this trip, please contact the Far Horizons staff.



Travel Insurance

We strongly recommend that you consider purchasing travel insurance. Should illness or an unforeseen event force you to cancel your travel plans after your final payment or during your trip, it would be doubly unfortunate to incur a significant financial loss. Trip cancellation protection will enable you to be reimbursed for the loss of your payment if you are unable to travel for any of the covered reasons in the "Outline of Coverage" section, or should you have an accident or suffer from any medical conditions during the trip.

Far Horizons offers customized protection plans through Travel Insured International (a Crum & Forster Company) with the following benefits:

- Trip Cancellation and Trip Interruption for covered reasons
- Trip Delay
- Baggage Loss and Baggage Delay
- Emergency Medical Expenses and Emergency Medical Evacuation
- 24-Hour Accidental Death & Dismemberment
- 24-Hour Travel Assistance & Concierge Services
- Option to upgrade to 'Cancel for Any Reason (CFAR)

We recommend reviewing the language in detail so you are aware of specific parameters; Depending on the policy, to waive the Pre-Existing Medical Condition Exclusion or to upgrade to CFAR coverage, the plan must be purchased within 14 to 21 days of the initial trip deposit, full trip cost must be insured, and traveler is medically fit at time of plan purchase. Otherwise, coverage may be purchased at any time prior to departure.

To obtain a personalized quote and/or purchase a plan through Far Horizons/Travel Insured International, simply click [HERE](#). For specific questions regarding the Worldwide Protector Plan, please contact Travel Insured International's Customer Care Center at 1-800-243-3174 or by email at customercare@travelinsured.com, and refer to Far Horizons' account number: 54070.

Itinerary Changes

Changes in our itinerary, accommodations, and transportation schedules may occur while traveling. While we are committed to keeping as close to the published details as possible, sometimes it is simply not possible. Weather events, government affairs, or other factors out of our control sometimes come into play. A good book to read as well as patience, flexible attitude, and a sense of humor are essential.





Meet Your Study Leader...

Dr. Steven Ashby

Steven Ashby is a Senior Lecturer in Medieval Archaeology at the University of York in England, where he has won several prizes for teaching. He has also run research projects on craft, trade, and domestic activity in Viking-Age Britain and Scandinavia

He received his MSc in Zooarchaeology, and his PhD in Archaeology from the University of York. A specialist on the Vikings, Dr. Ashby is the author of numerous articles and books including *A Viking Way of Life* (Amberley); *Pocket Museum: Vikings* (Thames and Hudson); and *Crafts and Social Networks in Viking Towns* (Oxbow). He is also the founding editor of the scholarly book series *Viking Europe* and has acted as consultant on a number of popular interest and children's books on the Viking world.

His research focuses on everyday life, craft, and long-distance trade in Viking-Age Scandinavia, as well as Britain and Ireland. He co-founded the Viking Craft Network and the [Vikings Studies Research Group](#), and has been a featured speaker and historical consultant on TV and radio in the U.K. and internationally. Most notably, he worked on *Real Vikings*, co-hosting a film based in arctic Norway with members of the cast of the History Channel's *Vikings* series. Dr. Ashby's knowledge of the Vikings, along with his enthusiastic teaching style and love of Scandinavia makes him an ideal study leader for this trip.





Why Travel with Far Horizons?

With over forty years of experience, and an 85% customer return rate, we have stood the test of time. Remind yourself what makes Far Horizons so unique.

✦ Scholar Led Tours

Every tour is led by a well-respected PhD scholar with expertise in the subject & regions we visit.

✦ Trusted Partnerships

Trusted Partnerships: Every tour is led by a well-respected PhD scholar with expertise in the subject & regions we visit.

✦ Behind the Scenes Access

Our groups have private access to closed areas and on-site specialists.

✦ Unique Trips

Our itineraries are designed to showcase sites that are off-the-beaten path; we explore places that many travelers never see.

✦ Personalized Service

We love knowing our guests and helping with the decision process. We are here to assist you.

✦ Small Groups

Our tours have a maximum of 14 travelers. So you can trust that you will have a boutique experience every time.



READY TO TRAVEL WITH US? ICELAND

WITH DR CHRISTOPHER CALLOW

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