

ICELAND: DIVING IN THE LAND OF FIRE AND ICE

Posted by California Diver Magazine on 02/27/2014

Whiteout!

Well, it shouldn't have been too much of a surprise. We were, after all, driving along the northern coast of Iceland at the end of winter. 50 MPH (25mps) winds, blinding snow and frigid temperatures? What did we expect?

Words and photos by Michael Salvarezza and Christopher P. Weaver

The destination was Nesgjá, a recently discovered "crack or fissure" in the Earth's surface, flooded with crystal clear water and home to some of the most awe-inspiring geological formations a diver will ever encounter.

© Eco-Photo Explorers



A giant stride into the Nesja fissure.

Iceland is a land of contradiction. Geologically and volcanically active, the land is scarred from recent lava flows and contorted and twisted by the spreading of the earth. Indeed, the mid-Atlantic ridge goes right through the center of Iceland, where volcanoes rise and the North American and Eurasian continental plates are ripping apart.

Our dives at Nesgjá took us through a winding corridor of boulders, created through a slow but jarring ripping apart of the Earth's crust. The water here is pure and clear. Although there is no marine life to speak of, the dramatic rock formations and crystalline water make for a truly memorable experience.

Iceland, the land of fire and ice, has much to offer.

After a dive at Nesgjá, an interesting option is to visit the nearby site known as Lita Á. Here, we dive in 63-degree water, which emerges from various spots along the bottom like so many miniature geysers.

In 1997, Erlendur Bogason and his friend Árni Halldósson discovered an amazing hydrothermal vent in the dark waters off the shores of Hjalteyri, a small fishing village located near the town of Akureyri.



Divers exploring Strytan's vents.

Hydrothermal vents have been discovered in many places throughout the world, usually along continental rift zones, but they are generally located many thousands of feet deep. Currently, Strytan is the shallowest known vent in the world.

Two hours outside of Reykjavik is Thingvallavatn Lake, home to a ruptured landscape torn apart by geological forces. In and around the lake are many fissures and tectonic cracks, many of them filled with glacial melt water from Iceland's second largest glacier, Langjökull.



A convenient staircase has been installed at Silfra.

At Silfra, divers descend a set of stairs installed for safety and access, and then enter a labyrinth of rock walls, boulder piles, cavities and crevices all filled with some of the world's purest water. In fact, divers are encouraged to taste the water along the way!



Divers explore the famous Silfra fissure.



Exploring the Blue Lagoon at Silfra.

Iceland's diving opportunities extend to shipwrecks, cod spawning activities and the chance to dive with seabirds off the northern coast.

Topside, Iceland is an amazing contrast between civilization, history and wilderness. With only 320,000 people residing in the entire country, many of them in the main city of Reykjavik, much of the country's landscape is natural and undisturbed.

In fact, visitors can experience the most exciting natural attractions Iceland has to offer in one afternoon by taking the Golden Circle tour. The Golden Circle is a very popular tourist route covering about 186.4 miles (300 km).

Home to more than 30,000 live volcanoes, the land is relatively young and is still being formed. It is also a country steeped in history, including strong cultural ties to the Vikings, and is home to the site of the very first Parliament meeting in the year 930 AD.



Preparing to dive at a geothermal hot spring.

We emerged from our final dives in Iceland to the crisp, cold winter air and scrambled over the jagged rocks of Silfra, feeling exhilarated and alive. This is what Iceland does to you...it gets under your skin and injects a sense of wonder about the natural world.

Getting There

International visitors arrive in Iceland into Keflavik Airport. Most passengers do not require a Visa to enter Iceland as long as their stay does not exceed 3 months.

Baggage

Baggage allowances vary for each international carrier, so check before you leave! Note: Some international carriers are now enforcing weight and size limits for carry-on bags as well that is considered a personal carry-on type of bag.

Weather

Iceland lies on the edge of the Arctic and, at its northernmost point, is only 30 miles south of the Arctic Circle. Accordingly, the winters are long, generally from September to April.

Currency

The local currency is the Icelandic Krona, but US Dollars and Euro are often accepted.

Electricity

Voltage: 220-240V/50Hz
Primary Socket: Europlug, Schuko
Travel Adapter: Round Pin Universal Plug

Scuba Diving

DIVE.IS (http://www.dive.is) is a Five Star PADI Dive Center, located in Reykjavik. DIVE.IS offers a variety of (http://www.dive.is) and single day dive opportunities, along with training and equipment rental.

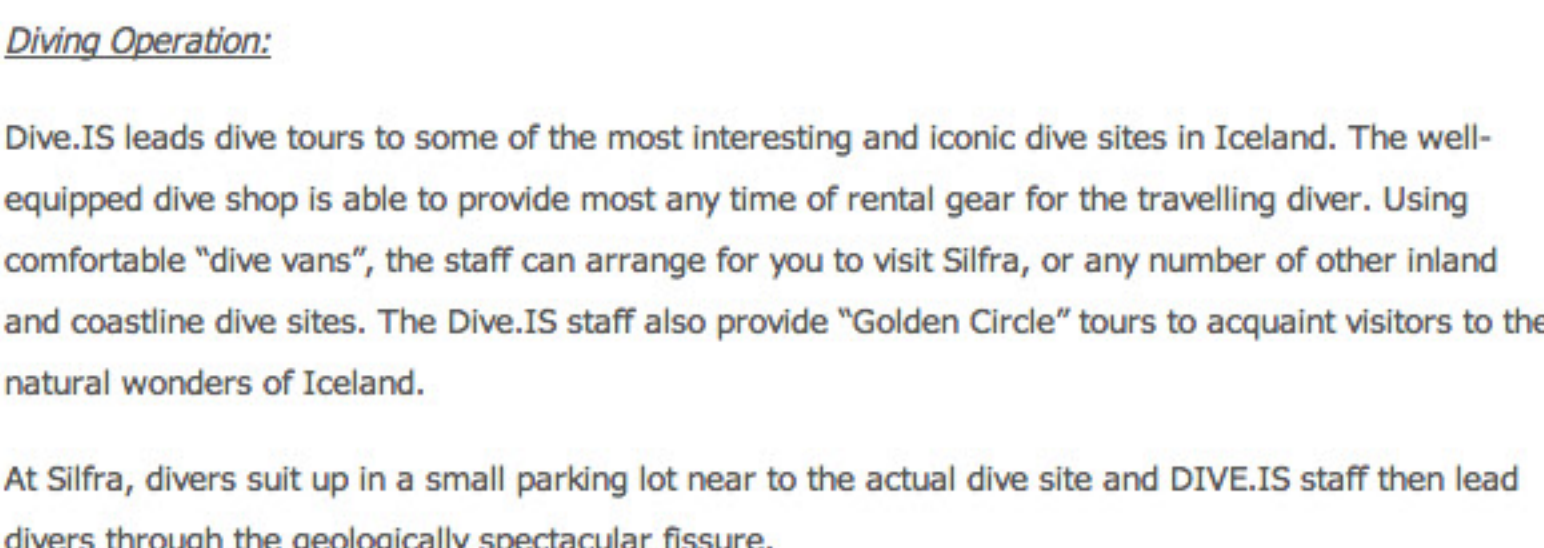
Strytan Dive Center (www.strytan.is) is located in Hjalteyri, nearby to Akureyri, and is owned and operated by Erlendur Bogason.

Reykjavik has a recompression chamber.

Spotlight on Dive.IS and Strytan Dive Center

Location & Getting there:

DIVE.IS is located in Reykjavik 15 minutes walking distance from the city center. Divers can meet at the shop, or at the National Park Thingvellir to dive Silfra.



Dive.IS provides excellent dive services in Iceland.

The Strytan Dive Center is located in the small fishing village of Hjalteyri, about 22 km north of the northern town of Akureyri. Dive.IS and the Strytan Dive Center often work together to provide seamless tours to the best dive sites along the entire Icelandic coast.

Diving Operation:

Dive.IS leads dive tours to some of the most interesting and iconic dive sites in Iceland. The well-equipped dive shop is able to provide most any time of rental gear for the travelling diver.

In addition to Silfra and Strytan, these dive operations can also arrange for dives in northern fjords to witness northern Codfish spawning, explorations of shipwrecks off the coasts and unique dive trips to dive with seabirds off the northern coast.

Words and photos by Michael Salvarezza and Christopher P. Weaver

©2014 Photos and images may not be reproduced in any form without express written permission.

Facebook 298 Twitter 1 Email 0

LEAVE A REPLY

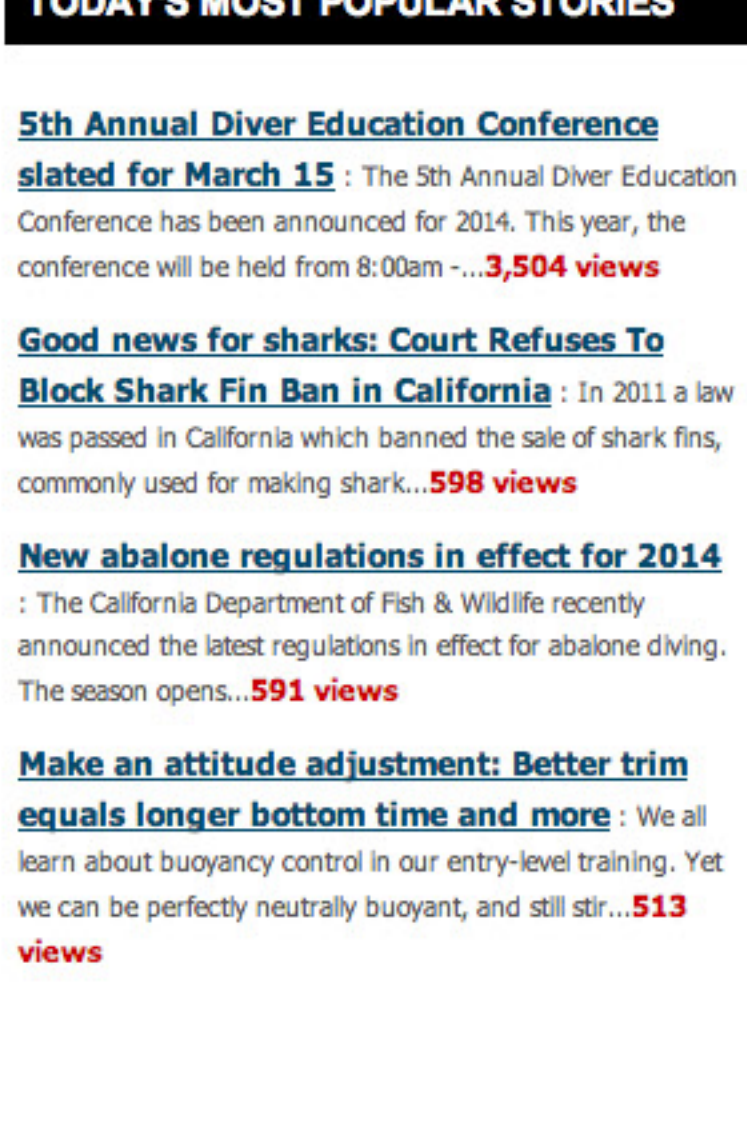
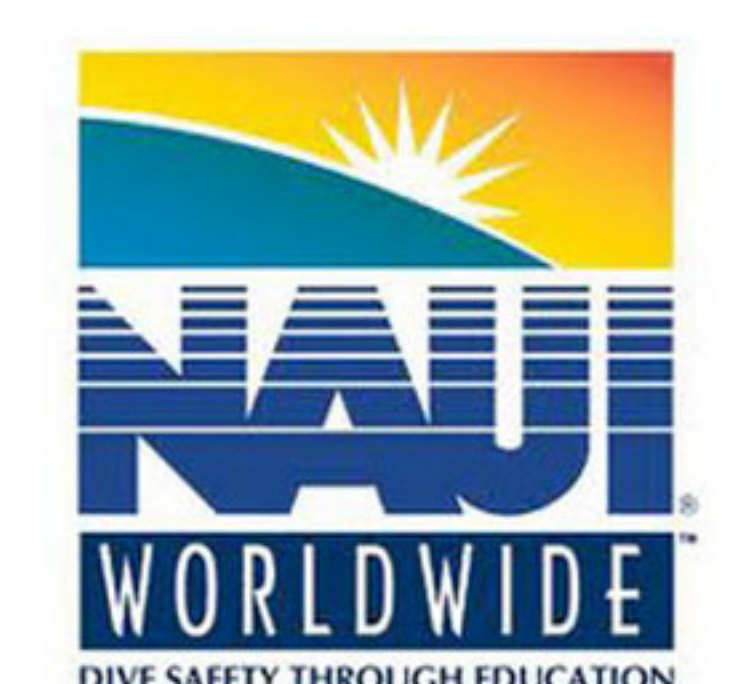
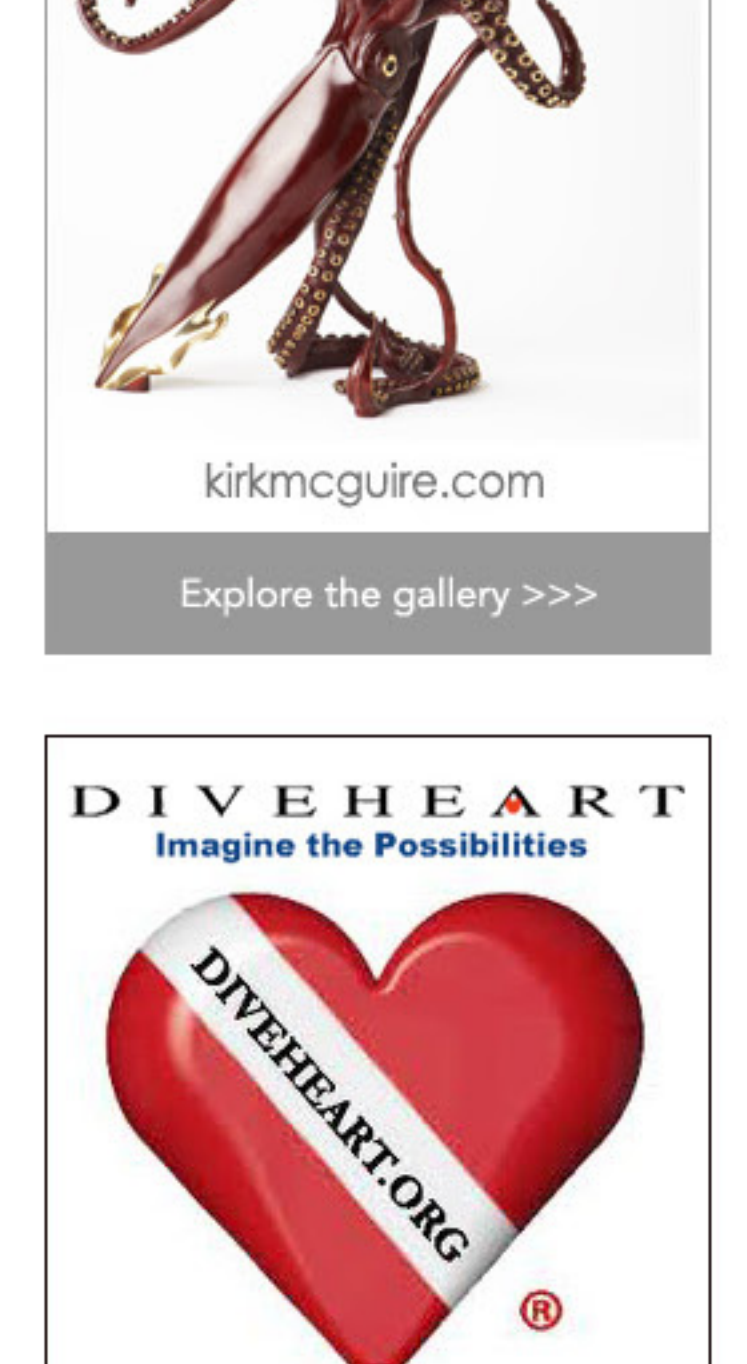
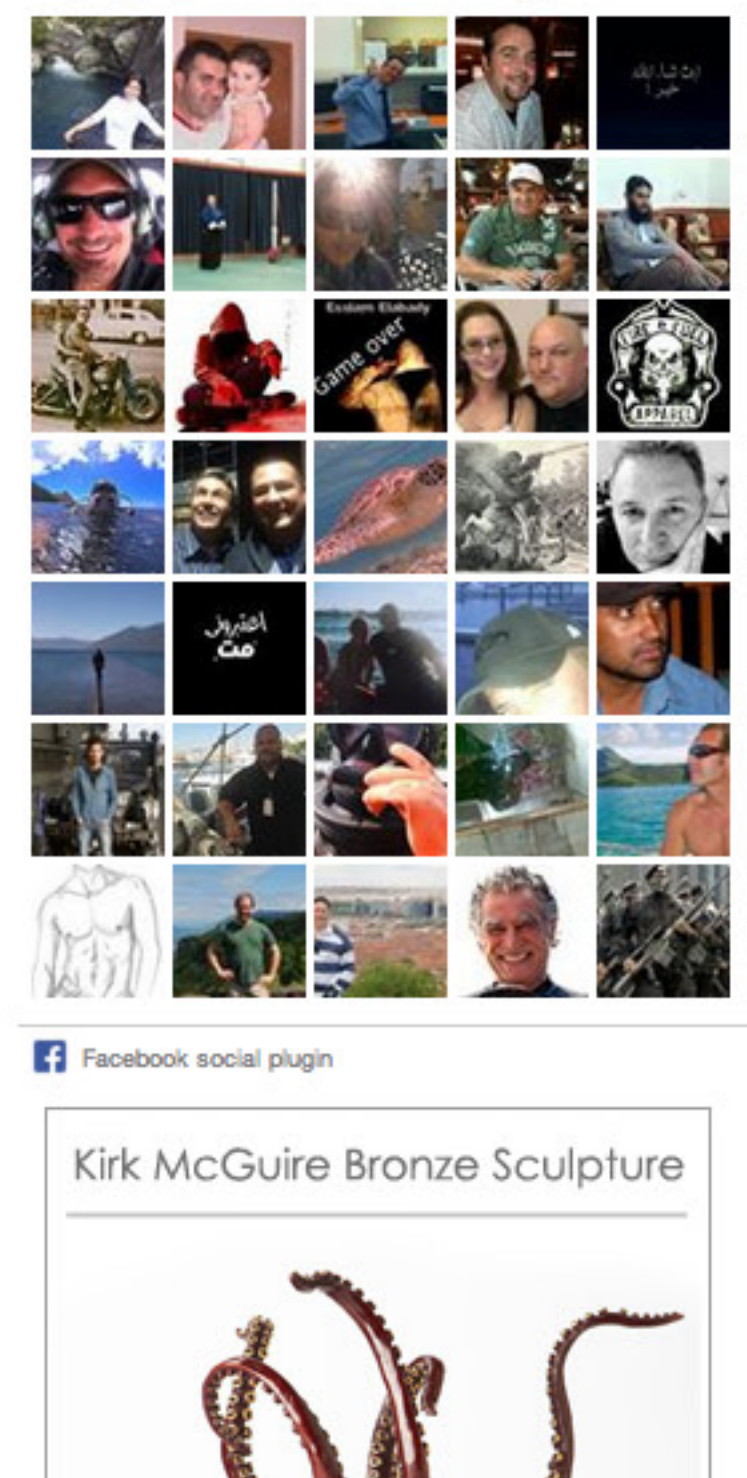
Name (required)

Mail (will not be published) (required)

Website

Submit Comment

JOIN US ON FACEBOOK



TODAY'S MOST POPULAR STORIES

5th Annual Diver Education Conference slated for March 15 : The 5th Annual Diver Education Conference has been announced for 2014. This year, the conference will be held from 8:00am ... 3,504 views

Good news for sharks: Court Refuses To Block Shark Fin Ban in California : In 2011 a law was passed in California which banned the sale of shark fins, commonly used for making shark... 598 views

New abalone regulations in effect for 2014 : The California Department of Fish & Wildlife recently announced the latest regulations in effect for abalone diving. The season opens... 591 views

Make an attitude adjustment: Better trim equals longer bottom time and more : We all learn about buoyancy control in our entry-level training. Yet we can be perfectly neutrally buoyant, and still str... 513 views