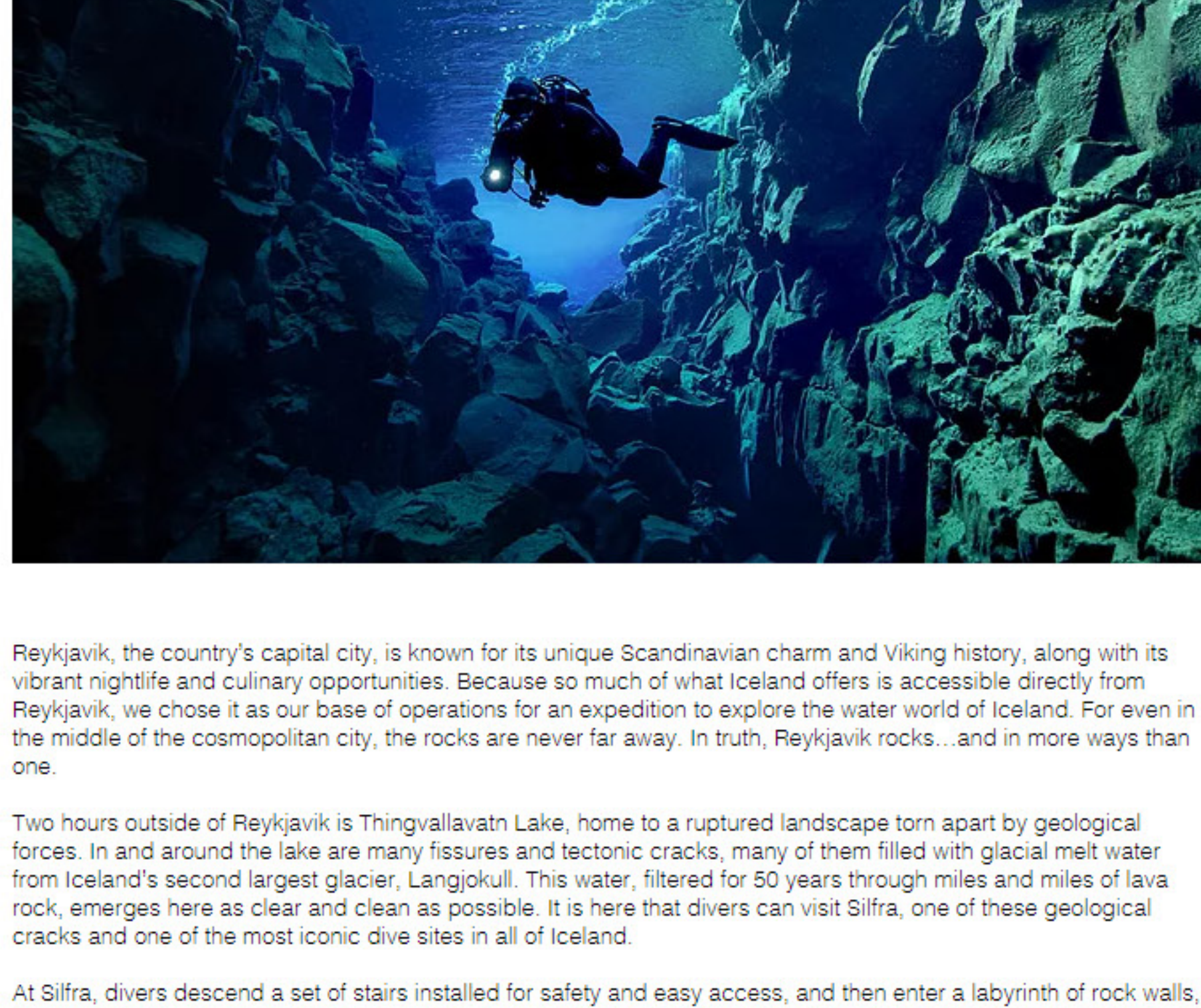


## Underwater Adventures with Eco-Photo Explorers

### Rockin' Reykjavik

November 12, 2018 | Article and photos by Eco-Photo Explorers Michael Salvezza and Christopher P. Weaver

Iceland is often thought of as just a rock located in the North Atlantic. Well, if that's the case, then what a rock it is! Sitting on the doorstep of the Arctic, Iceland boasts a cornucopia of natural wonders ranging from thundering waterfalls, smoldering volcanoes, steaming mud pots and fumaroles, explosive geysers, fresh lava flows and dramatic glaciers. It is a land 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.



Reykjavik, the country's capital city, is known for its unique Scandinavian charm and Viking history, along with its vibrant nightlife and culinary opportunities. Because so much of what Iceland offers is accessible directly from Reykjavik, we chose it as our base of operations for an expedition to explore the water world of Iceland. For even in the middle of the cosmopolitan city, the rocks are never far away. In truth, Reykjavik rocks... and in more ways than one.

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, Langjokull. This water, filtered for 50 years through miles and miles of lava rock, emerges here as clear and clean as possible. It is here that divers can visit Silfra, one of these geological cracks and one of the most iconic dive sites in all of Iceland.

At Silfra, divers descend a set of stairs installed for safety and easy access, and then enter a labyrinth of rock walls, boulder piles, canyons and crevices all filled with some of the world's purest water. Suitable for drinking, the water is crystal clear and visibility is often reported to exceed 300 feet. With water temperatures hovering around 54 degrees Fahrenheit, dry suits are the norm. One of the unique attractions of Silfra is the opportunity for divers to simultaneously touch both the North American and Eurasian tectonic plates as they dive in the mid current flowing through the fissure. The dive is simple to navigate and concludes in a place known as the Blue Lagoon, where the almost infinitely clear water takes on a dramatic cerulean blue hue. An exit platform and stairs have also been installed which makes the end of the dive a snap for divers. The dive at Silfra is all about the rocks and the water clarity... and it is unparalleled in the world of diving.

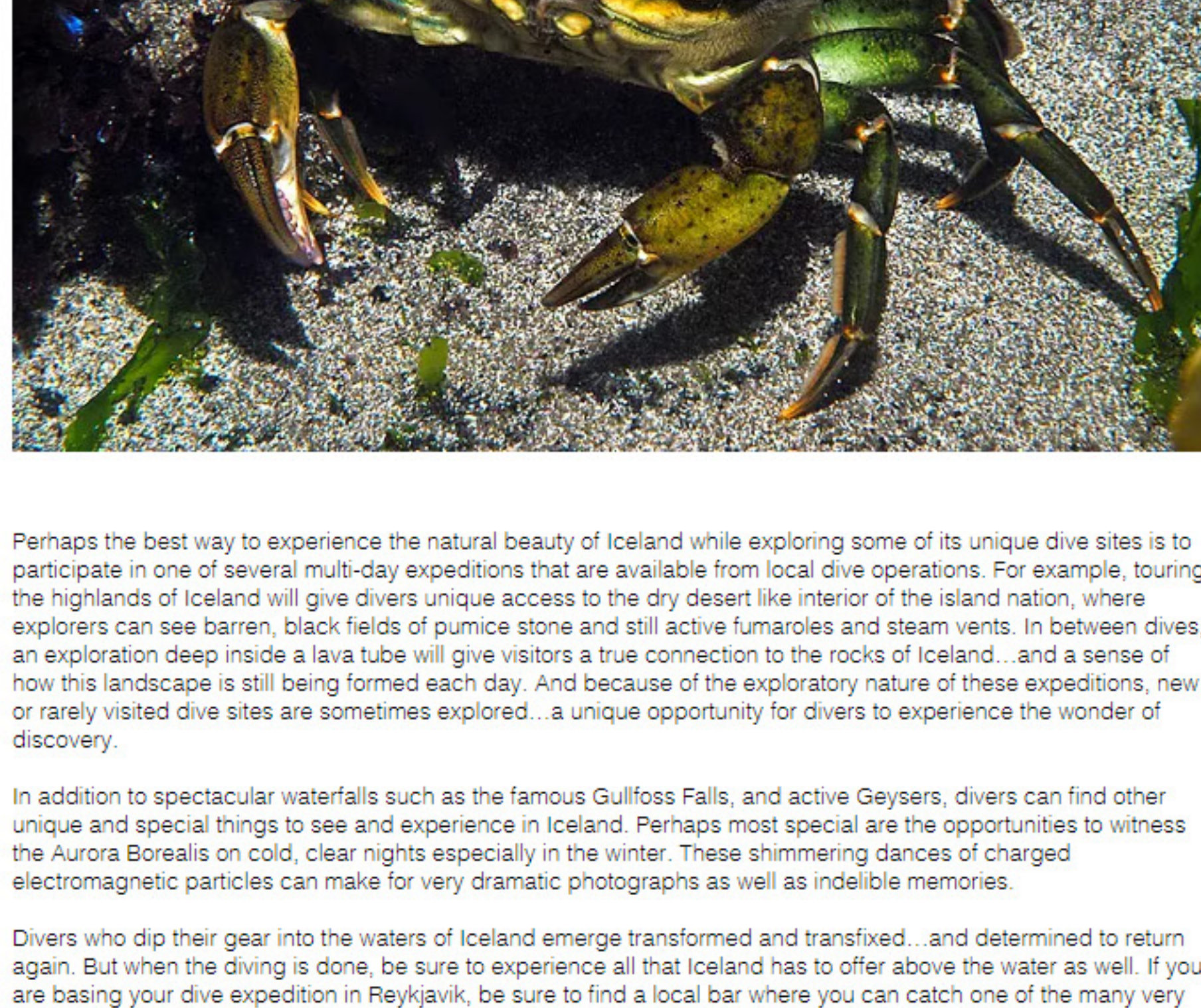


While Silfra is the iconic dive in Iceland, there are other fissures and geological cracks that can be explored which offer similar jaw-dropping experiences but without the diver traffic often present at Silfra. For example, a short distance from Silfra is David's Ravine. Here, divers need to hike a short distance through uneven terrain and underbrush before arriving at this pristine dive site. Once entering the water, divers are transported to an otherworldly scene of rifted geological formations lining a fissure filled with indescribably clear water. Again, this dive is really about the rocks but once through the ravine, divers then enter a hydrothermal lake, which affords the opportunity to observe bubbling hot water vents under the water. Stick your hands too close and you will scald yourself... but it is a fascinating way to witness the Earth's geological forces in action.

About 4 1/2 hours drive north of Reykjavik lies the town of Akureyri. This is the gateway to the unique dive opportunities available along the dramatic northern coast of Iceland. One such dive is known as Nesjia, or "Little Crack". This is yet another geological fissure in the Earth's crust that is filled with lava filtered glacial melt water. The rock formations in Nesjia resemble the fallen boulders of an ancient temple.

Perhaps most notable in the north is the dive site known as Strytan. Here, in 90 feet of water, divers can reach the only known underwater hydrothermal vent in the world that lies in diveable depths. An entire marine ecosystem has formed around this towering chimney of extruded minerals and hot water and divers can encounter Wolf Fish, Lump sucker fish, Nudibranchs and other marine organisms. Nearby dives include Little Strytan and French Gardens, all active hydrothermal sites with fascinating geological formations and thriving marine life.

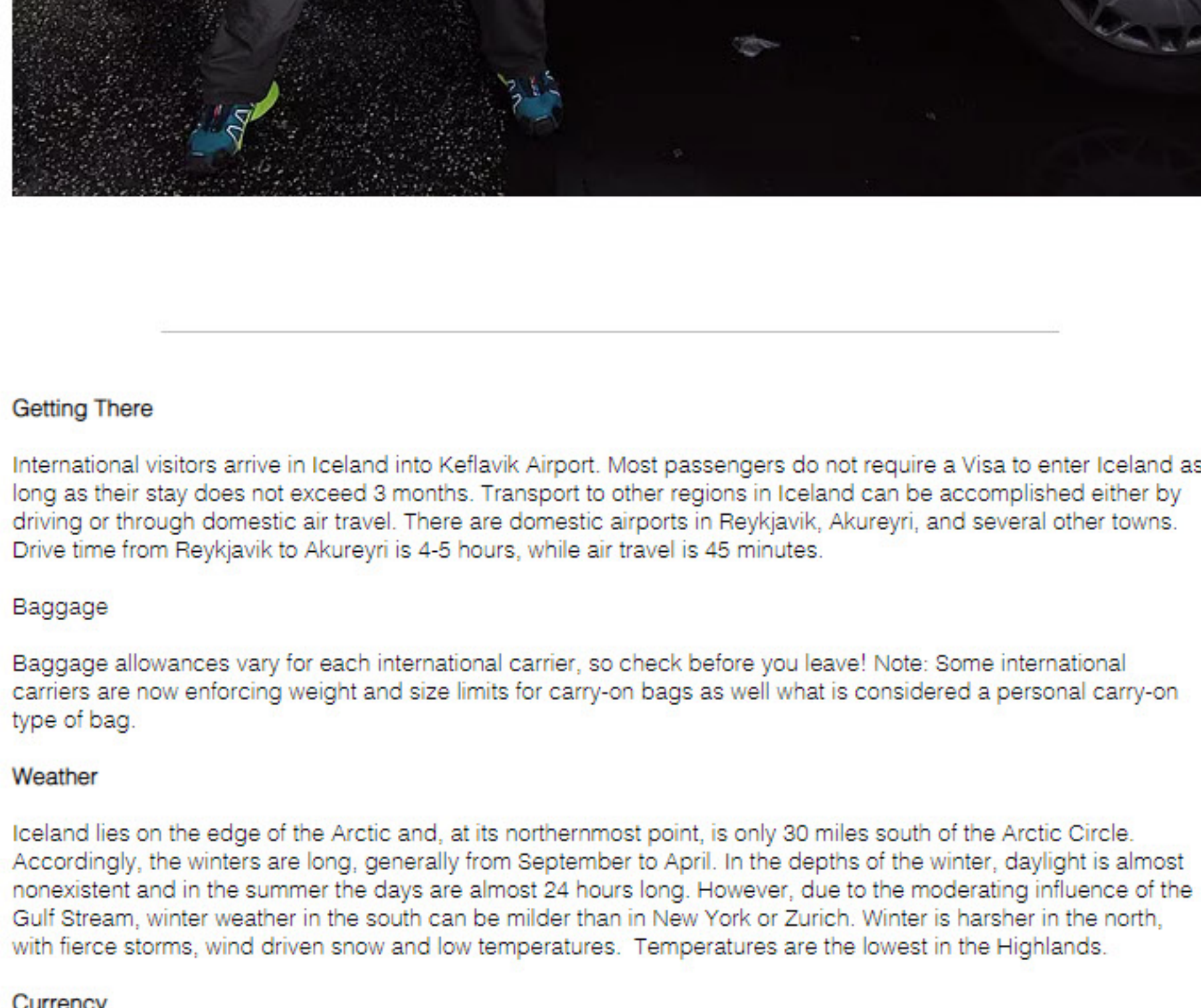
Divers in Reykjavik can also experience the marine life of Iceland by diving in Gardur, or "The Garden", a shore diving site in the ocean about an hour away near the Keflavik Airport. Here, divers descend to about 50 feet into a kelp garden and can find interesting fish and crustacean life in these weedy clumps. Colorful flounder, crabs, anemones and nudibranchs are some of the critters making their home in the kelp.



Perhaps the best way to experience the natural beauty of Iceland while exploring some of its unique dive sites is to participate in one of several multi-day expeditions that are available from local dive operations. For example, touring the highlands of Iceland will give divers unique access to the dry desert like interior of the island nation, where explorers can see barren, black fields of pumice stones and still active fumaroles and steam vents. In between dives, an exploration deep inside a lava tube will give visitors a true connection to the rocks of Iceland... and a sense of how this landscape is still being formed each day. And because of the exploratory nature of these expeditions, new or rarely visited dive sites are sometimes explored... a unique opportunity for divers to experience the wonder of discovery.

In addition to spectacular waterfalls such as the famous Gullfoss Falls, and active geysers, divers can witness the unique and special things to see and experience in Iceland. Perhaps most special are the opportunities to witness the Aurora Borealis on cold, clear nights especially in the winter. These shimmering dances of charged electromagnetic particles can make for very dramatic photographs as well as indelible memories.

Divers who dip their gear into the waters of Iceland emerge transformed and transfixed... and determined to return again. But when the diving is done, be sure to experience all that Iceland has to offer above the water as well. If you are basing your dive expedition in Reykjavik, be sure to find a local bar where you can catch one of the many very talented rock bands. There is a vibrant musical culture in Iceland and whether you are rockin' out to an awesome band, or exploring the rocks deep inside a lava tube, or swimming amongst the rock formations in the geological fissures or hydrothermal lakes and vents, we think you'll agree that Reykjavik definitely rocks!



### 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. Transport to other regions in Iceland can be accomplished either by driving or through domestic air travel. There are domestic airports in Reykjavik, Akureyri, and several other towns. Drive time from Reykjavik to Akureyri is 4-5 hours, while air travel is 45 minutes.

### 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 as what 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 50 miles south of the Arctic Circle. Accordingly, the winters are long, generally from September to April. In the depths of the winter, daylight is almost nonexistent and in the summer the days are almost 24 hours long. However, due to the moderating influence of the Gulf Stream, winter weather in the south can be milder than in New York or Zurich. Winter is harsher in the north, with fierce storms, wind driven snow and low temperatures. Temperatures are the lowest in the Highlands.

### Currency

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

### Electricity

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

### Scuba Diving

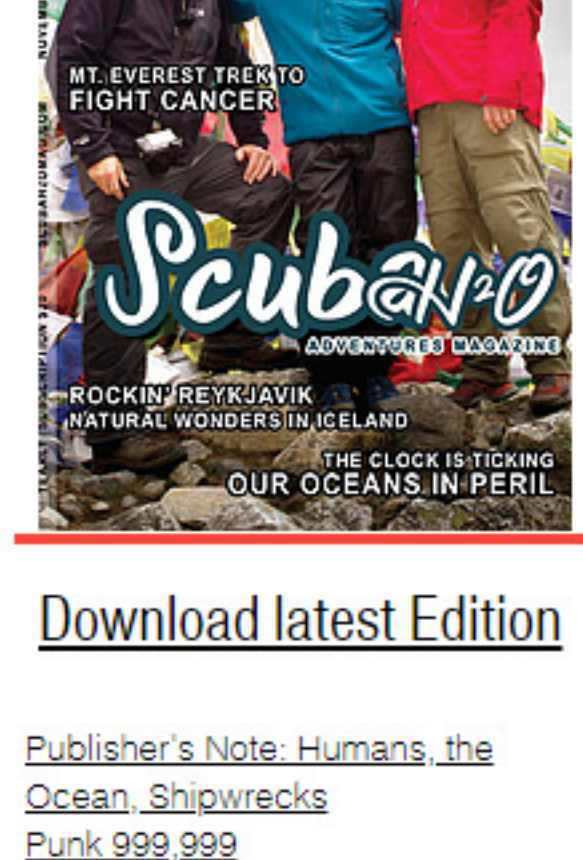
Iceland Dive Expeditions (<https://www.facebook.com/icelanddiveexpeditions/>) is a specialized dive operator offering multi-day expeditions throughout Iceland. They are based in Reykjavik.

Reykjavik has a recompression chamber.

Tags: iceland europe



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