Memories of “Iceland: Land of Fire and Ice”

From September 28 to October 6, 2018, five travelers took advantage of RAQ’s offer of a tour of Iceland. They were invited to submit paragraphs of their reactions to the tour.

The “RAQ Five” at Ice Lagoon on Iceland’s east coast. From the left: George Brandie, Trudy Elston, Anne Croy, John Dorland and Ruth Bailey.

Here are those memories:

“An individual’s expectations determine vacation destination choice and evaluations of the experience. I sought a unique, escape experience. I had not had a holiday in over 3 years, had experienced retirement, the sudden and unanticipated death of husband, the stress of trying to maintain and sell a heritage-designated estate property and wanted to be “out of my world” without making a study and doing individual bookings. I also looked forward to getting to know new individuals with knowledge of the Queen’s working environment that I had loved, but wanted to avoid crowds and cities. My prior travels had taken me multiple times above the Arctic Circle to tundra and to volcanic islands as found in Japan, Hawaii and Haida Gwaii but Iceland was supposed to be different. My late husband had been a sailor who crossed the Pacific with a crew of one (not me!!), and I needed a destination he had never desired to see. Iceland was it!
I attended Dr. Brandie’s RAQ lecture on Iceland and was hooked. The rift valley geologically and the early parliament of the Commonwealth at that site historically were anticipated highlights that were fully engaging as a walking experience. In addition to meeting all of my emotional needs and need for new friends, Iceland was hugely educational, every day on a different topic. Two geothermal plants on the same volcano, the vastness of the ranges for Icelandic sheep and horses, the differences in volcanos and the information about them you can read in the lava deposits plus cruising on the lagoon filled with calved icebergs eddying in an incoming tide were captivating for me. The folk museum exhibit of the earliest housing (about 900AD) struck me as replication of an igloo but in stone. Identical design; there was a low, crawl-in entry passage to a domed living space that contained 2 sleeping platforms to either side of a narrow passage way the extended into a tiny storage alcove. The Icelandic version however was never heated, so there was no smoke exit hole. How could anyone survive? At this site we also learned that driftwood collection eventually enabled the use of wood in homes and the museum example, again a tiny dwelling for 10+ people, was a house that had 2 walls made of salvage from the wreck of the regional hospital ship. Such a special landscape and experience that far exceeded my expectations.”

Anne Croy DVM, PhD

“Entering the rift separating the North American and Eurasian geological plates

Icelandic horses and riders gave us a show to remember

“It’s a very special vacation when you can go to a place that seems like no other on Earth, but that is what Iceland feels like. Lava fields as far as the eye can see, (barely) dormant volcanoes, daily earthquakes, glaciers, waterfalls pouring over cliffs, black sand beaches, clockwork geysers, thermal hot springs. And where else can you stand on a fissure where the planet’s surface is literally splitting in two? Every day offered a new and spectacular experience.”

John Dorland
“The Collette trip to Iceland offered a wealth of unique sites and fascinating learning experiences. One of these was our visit to Friðheimar, a family farm, where we were treated to a demonstration and explanation of the five difference gaits of the Icelandic horse. On the same premises we toured one of the four large greenhouses in which, year round, they grow tomatoes and cucumbers using state-of-the-art technology in environmentally friendly ways and using Iceland’s geothermal energy. The Friðheimar farm visit concluded with a bowl of scrumptious fresh made tomato soup and a variety of delicious home baked breads. This was truly an exceptional and tasty learning experience.”

Ruth Bailey

“I had been to Iceland in March, 2015, and for me what was exciting was what was new, and there was a lot. We saw things from the whimsical “Monument to the Unknown Bureaucrat” to the excellent new LAVA Centre (Iceland Volcano & Earthquake Centre) with its interactive displays, and the new and enlarged the Folklore and Transportation Museums at Skogar, and Iceland’s largest ice sheet which feeds many glaciers (now retreating, thanks to global warming). Even familiar places took on a new look: in 2015 it was snowing when we visited
Gullfoss and it was impossible to see its full extent. That was not a problem this time, as the above picture shows. There were also new experiences, most notably the tasting of fermented Greenland shark and cruising among icebergs. Thanks to our English Tour Manager, our tireless Icelandic bus driver, knowledgeable local guides and personable travelling companions, it was a truly enjoyable trip.”

George Brandie

The “Unknown Bureaucrat” heads toward Reykjavik City Hall

We tried it and we survived! It’s now so costly Icelanders have it only once a year

Relatively fresh lava (no moss on these rocks) on both sides of the coastal highway

Icefield and (shrinking) glacier

Pictures by George Brandie