



## Iceland: A Photo Destination that "Has It All" by Andy Long

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**Lot of small churches paint the countryside, providing plenty of opportunities for picturesque settings.**

around most of the island? Choosing two of the coastlines can provide you with a week or more of photographic opportunities, but weighing the cost of traveling to Iceland against what you want to gain, a loop trip may be a superior choice.

Since Iceland is about the size of Kentucky, visiting all the great spots can be a real feat. You're challenged with traveling to the main attractions that lie

You would like to take a photo trip, but to where.....

**The Plan:** Find a new photo destination with the potential for [great photography](#). (You're thinking, "That's a no-brainer, because that's the goal of every photo trip.")

**The Target Subjects:** Birds, landscapes, glaciers, waterfalls, or travel that highlights an unfamiliar cultural history. ("Hmm, why not a bit of each—or, for that matter, a lot of each?")

**The Solution:** Travel to Iceland.

There are plenty of shooting locations the expression "it has it all" can apply to, but not many with the true diversity and incredible opportunities found on this small island in the North Atlantic. The first dilemma that arises when you [plan a trip](#) to Iceland involves picking which one or two parts of the country you want to visit—or should you plan a loop trip

around the perimeter of the island. Why? Because, while there are some very good photographic subjects and accessible roads in the interior, there are no facilities for food and lodging throughout much of it.

Regardless of the particular subject matter you're concentrating on, you're going to find it in abundance in Iceland. If your preference is waterfalls, there is no better place to go for the number of falls, the dynamics of them, or their form, shape, or color. In fact, there are so many that you can spend an entire trip just shooting waterfalls and never see every one. The only problem is that moving from one to the next can mean a three or four hour drive. Even so, the time you spend is well worth it.

For sheer beauty, Hraunfossar is the nicest waterfall in Iceland. Any trip to Iceland has to include a stop there for a couple of hours. It's a good place to start a loop tour as it's not too far from Reykjavik. While it doesn't have a lot of height, it's about 1,000 yards long, cascading over several ridges of rocks. The best thing about it is the icy blue color in the pool below.



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**Hraunfossar – One of the nicest falls in the country, because of the design and color of the water.**



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**Gullfoss – The step shape of this waterfall can be brought out from several vantage points.**

The two most famous waterfalls (“foss” is the suffix for all waterfalls) are Gullfoss and Detifoss. While Detifoss is the largest waterfall in Europe, it can be a bit difficult to photograph due to the massive amount of spray that blows up from it. By making a trek through the spray to the top of a bluff, you can take some interesting shots. If the light is right, the staircase design of Gullfoss can provide you with very interesting opportunities. A short walk away, you'll find Selfoss, another fall worth a look. Also, as you drive from one destination to another, you'll discover countless unnamed falls that merit inspection. If you like tall waterfalls, Seljalandsfoss will please you. A perfectly placed bench in the foreground adds to the appeal of this spot.

Do you want to photograph birds? Then there are several areas in Iceland that belong in the “do not miss” category. Depending on the time of year you visit, you can witness some of the largest gatherings of birds on the planet. Latrabjarg is well known for its huge gathering of Kittiwakes and Atlantic Puffins. The Kittiwakes will hover at eye level just a few yards away

due to the way the cliffs and nest sites are situated. Just don't go too close to the edge, as it's a long way down and not a soft landing.



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**Hovering Kittiwake – Flight shots at Latrabjarg are as easy as you can find anywhere, because of the wind coming up the cliff face.**

protected area. The guide will permit you to remain in one spot for only a limited amount of time. However, participation in an organized workshop/tour will allow you to enter the area much earlier in the morning and later in the afternoon when you'll have no other people in the area to contend with.

You'll also discover quite a few Skua nests at the rookery. The best thing about these birds is they nest on the ground, unlike the puffins that nest on cliff faces and in other hard-to-view spots. The best shots of the Atlantic Puffins happen when they're gathered together on the edges of the cliff, because flight shots of these flying missiles are tough to come by.

The other major spot to find birds is the Puffin Rookery at Ingólfshöfði, where you'll have an endless supply of puffins to photograph. In the June/July time frame, you'll see adults flying in with their bills full of fish to feed to their young in their nests. This location requires a fairly long ride to the cliffs on a tractor-pulled sled, but it's worth the effort. Also, even if you take this trip on your own, you must join one of the guided tours during the day, because the rookery is a



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**Skua mother and baby – With no fear of humans, getting close to the birds is not a problem, even when they have chicks nearby.**



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**Wind blown Atlantic Puffin – At Ingólfshöfði, you'll see more Puffins than almost anywhere else in the world. An almost ever-present wind makes for a fun shot of the Puffin with a meal for a**

### young in the nest.

As you continue driving along the coast, you'll come upon an area where hundreds of swans congregate, a place appropriately named Swan Fjord. At times the swans will allow you to come close to them, but the weather has to be good for you to be able to photograph this interesting sight. When I took my trek through this area, I had the misfortune of being buffeted by wind and rain, so I could only slow down to observe the mass gathering of Whooper Swans.

Not far from Ingólfshöfði waits one of the most unique spots in the country, the Glacial Lagoon (Breiðarmerkurhlón). The southeast portion of Iceland is filled with glaciers, and at this spot that empties into the Atlantic, a lagoon lies among several icebergs that are working their way out to sea. Photos you see of this area are dynamic, so you'll want to spend the better part of a day there. Your big hope is the weather will cooperate and let you capture the beauty that is laid out in front of your camera. Even on a below average weather day, you can make great shots. Boat tours through the lagoon are available at the visitor center to enable you to have an up-close view of the unique ice formations in the water. Several of the glaciers in this part of the country are easily accessible, and a visit to at least one will repay your trouble. The glacier tongue of Svínafellsjökull offers unique opportunities and is the easiest glacier to reach when you're doing the loop tour.

Some of the most unique landscapes on earth can be found in numerous locations around Iceland. In fact, before the first moon flights, on-land rover training was held there due to the rugged terrain. Along the southern coast, a unique lava field decorated with growth that has covered the lava. Mountains, rock formations, rivers, and other settings offer great landscape possibilities.



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**Glacial Lagoon – No matter what the weather conditions are, there are lots of interesting ice forms to shoot.**

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**With so much rain in the country, even the lava fields are green.**

“Quaint” is a word that can be used to describe some of the scenery in Iceland composed of churches, farmhouses, and centuries-old buildings that turn nice settings into great travel photo ops. Many of the settings are so seductively pastoral that you have to be careful to limit the number of times you stop to grab a few shots, so you can reach your next destination. As with the waterfalls, searching out and photographing only these lovely scenes can easily fill a whole trip.

In addition, while not on the scale of the geo-thermals in Yellowstone, the geysers of Iceland rate a visit. Geysir Center is a spot that attracts quite a few visitors and is not far from Gullfoss, so that you can readily create numerous photos in both locations in a short period of time.



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**There are lots of places to stop to capture the centuries old buildings and homes.**



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**You’ll never know what will appear around the next bend in the road as you travel from one spot to another.**

A word of caution when you’re thinking about taking a trip to beautiful, remote Iceland: it is expensive in a variety of ways, but it’s worth every dollar. If you arrive there in the summer, you won’t be able to help noticing how green the land is just about everywhere you turn. You’ll have to answer for yourself the age-old question posed by most visitors: “Why is this country called Iceland when it’s so green during the summer, while Greenland is mostly ice?”

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