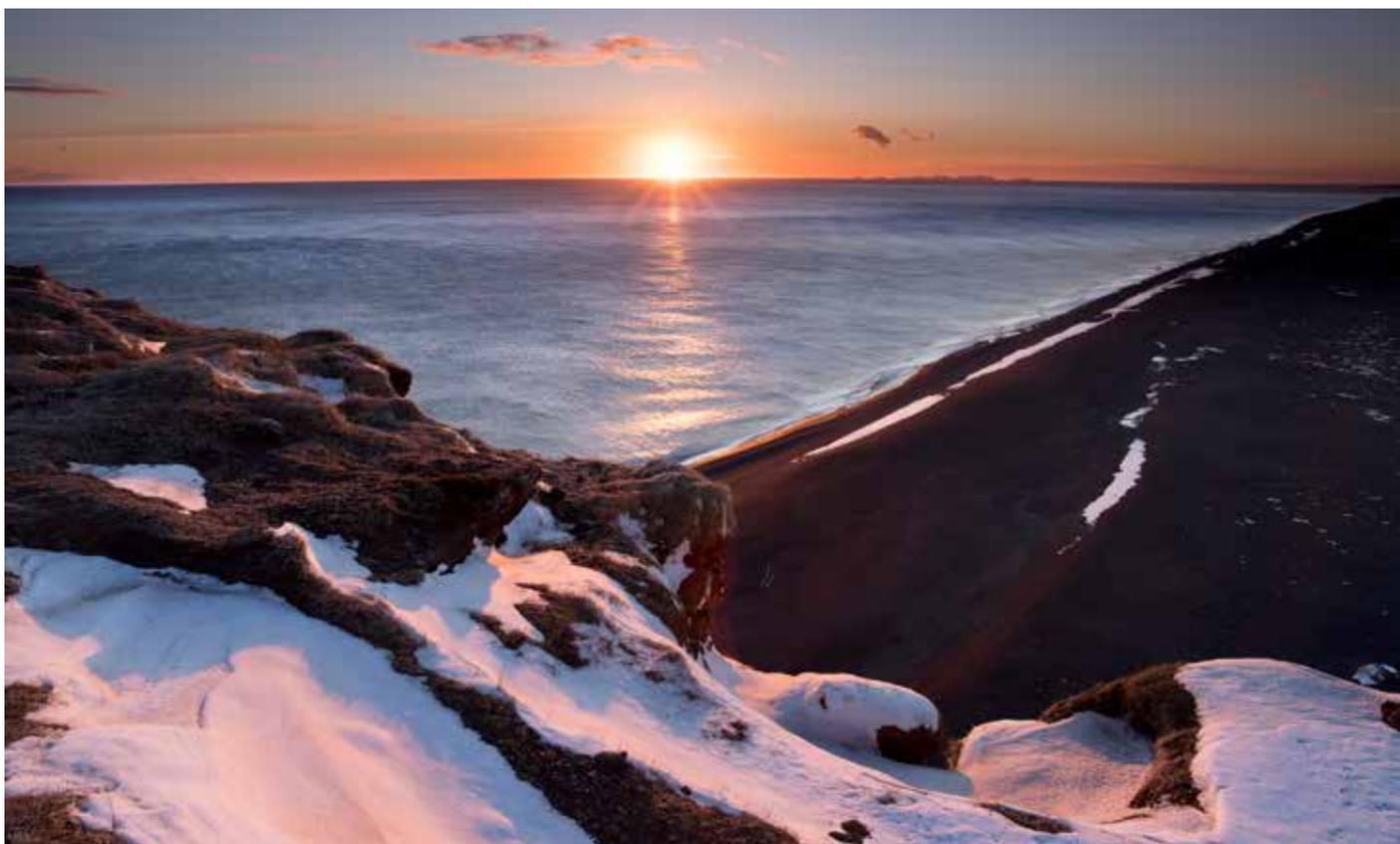




Icelandic Adventure



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At the beginning of March 2018 I joined a small group of amateur photographers on a five day photo-tour in the South of Iceland. It was run by Haukur Snorrason, a professional photographer, guide and driver in one. Although the daylight was rather short, our days were very long. We were ready at the locations to shoot the sunrise and we were chasing Aurora at midnight. Not much time to sleep, but the excitement of visiting this extraordinary place compensated for the lack of rest.

The UK was covered by snow while it was raining in Iceland. The prospects for the trip were not too good. Many flights were cancelled, including those from Edinburgh to Reykjavik, the route I was to take on Monday, 5 March. On Sunday some of the flights were still not taking off. Fortunately, the weather had improved by Monday and Edinburgh airport was fully functional. I was greeted by Iceland with a beautiful sunset; warm light over the snowy mountains enhanced the varied landscape which I could see from the aeroplane's window. After all, a good start, I thought. Indeed, the

weather surprised all of us. Over the whole week, it was frosty and sunny. Wind added considerable chill, but we were prepared for that.

We travelled by a truck and I was sitting by the driver. This was splendid, as I had all the vast views of rough landscape, mountains covered by snow, mossy lava fields, waterfalls, high rocks and cliffs just in front of my eyes.

Water in various forms is a great feature of Iceland. Snow stays in the tops of the mountains all year round, huge glaciers cover a big part of the land (there are about 300 of them), waterfalls are numerous and dramatic, hot springs bubble away happily providing warmth to the houses all across the country. Sea fjords and bays with floating icebergs add to the diversity of the water bonanza in Iceland.

Although the snow was mainly in the higher parts of the mountains, there was frost and the waterfalls were partially frozen. The frost created various forms of icicles, some hanging down, some stuck to grass or stones. Also, ice was created by water spray falling on

the neighbouring rocks or on grass. Many waterfalls in Iceland are huge and spread on several levels. It was easier to take pictures of some fragments of the waterfalls rather than the whole.

One morning we visited the famous Great Geysir. It erupts very rarely, but the neighbouring hot spring, Strokkur, does at pretty regular, short time intervals. Interestingly, the eruption starts with building a gigantic bubble of hot water which then breaks with enormous impact to about 20-30 meters high. We were photographing the bulb at sunrise and it was great fun trying to get it right.

Another great feature of the place are the lava fields and black beaches. Over 500 square kilometres of the thick layer of volcanic lava field, called Eldhraun, hides the tragic story of eruption of the Laki craters in the eighteen century when thousands of people were killed. Being aware that this may happen again at any time gives a bit of a chill. In fact, seismographs record earthquakes in Iceland every day, fortunately; usually small enough not to be disruptive.



In winter the Icelandic horses add some colour to this very monochromatic place. They are very varied in appearance and in character and are very friendly. On a couple of occasions we wandered among the horses in their pastures. They are inquisitive creatures and not afraid of people, so it was easy to get close to them, sometimes even a bit too close. I was amazed by their very long fur; they seem well adjusted to the tough conditions they live in.



The penultimate day of the trip was a real treat. After a long walk on the glacier we visited two ice caves. The light in the caves was coming from a few holes in the ice, otherwise it was rather dark. I was fascinated by the colour of ice. It varied from a light aqua to green and blue and then very dark, almost black. Younger ice formations have a lighter colour and the old ones are very dark. The light coming through the holes was illuminating parts of the cave and reflecting from the ice in a playful way.



Every evening we were checking the conditions for the Northern Lights. The sky was clear and full of stars each night, but the Sun was quiet. However, it rewarded us during the last night with high activity and a good display of green light. We were in the area of Jökulsárlón bay and when we noticed the light we quickly drove towards the bay to photograph the Aurora. It was a powerful feeling to be in this vast landscape with the mountains and the glacier flowing to the bay, all under the starry sky and dancing green ribbons.



Although my visit to Iceland was very short, I came back home enriched by the wonderful experience of this wilderness unspoiled by humans.

