

Iceland: Western Fjords with Bill Schwab

September 1 - 10, 2009

Hello!

I'm happy you will be traveling with me to Iceland in this coming year. There will be a lot of new territory covered for those that have been with me before and much wonder in store for everyone. What follows is a description of the trip, the planned itinerary as well as helpful tips to follow to make your trip most enjoyable. Please hang on to this and refer to it often as you plan the journey from your end. It will be very important that each person traveling with us be fully prepared for what lies ahead in order for all to enjoy the experience to the fullest. This document will also be updated as more comes into focus and these updates will be sent as they become available. By the time we travel have all lodging information and phone numbers so that you can keep others informed of your travel arrangements.

Also included in this document are costs and payment due dates for your trip. To soften the effect on each individual, we are spacing out the payments for your trip into four (4) intervals, the first that will be due the middle of March. It is very important that you keep aware of these dates. You will of course receive notice of each ahead of time, but failure to meet these dates will jeopardize not only your trip, but others as well. This is a cooperative effort and can only remain such if everyone keeps pace.

Before going on, I would like to add that as a cooperative effort, I encourage you to come forward with any suggestions you may have if you see anything I miss along the way. While I am trying to stay ahead of things, I expect I may not meet everyone's needs. I would appreciate any help you may afford in keeping your experience the best it can be.

Last, but certainly not least... I most likely do not have to tell you what an incredible place Iceland is, but at the same time it can also expose you to more dangers than are common in a more normal trip. Those that have been with me before already know, but I want each and every person on this trip to be well aware and constantly vigilant of this fact. Although the number of visitors increases by the year, Iceland is still a wild place for the casual traveler. Especially in the areas we will be traveling on this trip. Unlike many other places you have visited, "improvements" to handle large numbers have not yet been made in many places. Other than the few better-visited spots, there are no ropes and railings holding you back from edges of cliffs and waterfalls. There are no stairs and decks guiding you around treacherous lands. Much of Iceland is as it was created and it isn't going to watch out for your safety. As I like to say, Iceland is a place where natural selection is allowed to go about its merry way. I'm certainly not trying to scare you off or give the impression that danger lurks around every corner; I just want you to be aware that in certain places one small, careless step can ruin a great trip. It is also fairly remote in most places we will be visiting and help can be far off and very expensive. I can't say it enough. Be careful!

With this in mind, there will soon be a trip application sent to you to fill out and return with your deposit. In it you must state that do have medical insurance and that it will cover you when abroad. I am sure that if we are all careful, you will not need it. As it is said, better to be safe than sorry.

What to Expect

This trip will not be a traditional workshop of any sort. There will be no class structure or educational demonstrations, no critiques of work, etc. It is designed solely to be an intense, no frills photographic working experience for all involved. You will learn the importance of spontaneity and vigilance in such a sojourn and will be “on” so to speak from the time you wake-up in the morning until your head hits the pillow. More than mechanics of photography you will learn about what is involved in such a trip, adapting to different subject matter, lighting, landscapes, weather and travel conditions. Of course, you will be traveling closely with people who have vast and varying experience with photography and we cannot help but learn from one another along the way. Needless to say that although this is no traditional workshop, you will learn a great deal. You will also make some wonderful photographs.

While traveling in the more remote Western Fjords region, we will be making extended stays in several different areas. The Fjords region is more compact and somewhat removed from the rest of Iceland affording us a chance to move smaller distances than the Ring Road tours in the past. This will allow us to become more familiar with surroundings before having to move on. Even so, we will still be covering a lot of ground due to the roadway hugging the jagged coastline of the fjords. As with other trips, there will be ample opportunities to photograph. And, when not photographing, we will be scouting and planning on places to return. There will also be opportunity to be left alone in places of your choosing for scheduled periods. I want this to be as accommodating to each of our needs as photographers as is possible and like all photographic excursions, the trip will morph to our needs as we progress.

In addition to a most beautiful environment and landscape in which to make photographs you will also be afforded on this adventure the peace of mind in knowing that you will have a warm bed to sleep in at night, a private room, breakfast and all transportation arranged for you ahead of time. This will eliminate much of the planning that comes with travel to an exotic place such as Iceland while also allowing cooperative pricing and keeping costs lower than travel as an individual. Iceland has, until recent economic strife, been one of the most expensive countries in which to travel. Even though many things have gotten less expensive there, things like lodging and car rentals are starting to be adjusted to equalize with world rates. However, food and fuel prices are lower than when I have traveled in the past, so I am hoping that once in country the costs of meals, food and other items will be lower. Considering our trip is some months off, we will have to see what happens with the Icelandic economy.

Before going on I want to once again emphasize the cooperative nature of this trip. We will be spending a lot of time together in close quarters, some of which may be in less comfortable conditions. It is my hope that we can all immerse ourselves in the situation knowing that, although it won't be your average vacation, the work created along the way will be worth the effort.

What is Included?

The price of your trip will include round trip airfare from Boston* on Iceland Air, private accommodations each night with private washrooms in most rooms and breakfast each day. There may be several meals included in more remote regions, but otherwise all meals other than breakfast will be up to you. Your fee also includes all transportation and ferries as a group in Iceland. We will all be traveling in a large van and will be in complete control of our destinations.

What is Not Included?

*You are responsible for all travel to and from the departure city. It will be up to you to get to the departure airport in time for your flight. Tickets will be purchased well in advance so that you can make these arrangements to best suit your needs. Boston has been chosen as the main departure city due to its east coast location and ease. In most cases your baggage can be checked straight through from your home airport for international flights eliminating the need for claiming and re-checking.

Unless otherwise noted, all meals other than breakfast will be up to you. Like all else in Iceland, food is more than you may be used to and variety in places we will be visiting can be limited as well. Fear not as we will not starve! There is always somewhere to get a meal and we will make certain all get a chance to eat more than breakfast each day. Other than food, there will not be a whole lot of places to spend your money outside of the more populated areas. We will be spending our last day in Reykjavik however and there are plenty of places to spend your money there!

There is the possibility in good weather that we can take a ferry over to Hornstrandir from Isafjordur. This is an otherwise inaccessible region that is known for its cliffs and sea birds. If enough are interested in this, arrangements will be made. You will be responsible for the extra cost at that time if you choose to go. I will find out and publish costs in the upcoming newsletters.

Itinerary

September 1, 2009 – US group departs from Boston for the overnight flight to Reykjavik. European travelers will depart from their origin city to arrive in Iceland before the US contingent. Your travel from the airport to a local hotel will be arranged as well as your first night's lodging. You will be picked up by the rest of the group on the morning of September 2nd.

September 2, 2009 – Arrival at Keflavik International Airport outside Reykjavik, Iceland. We will pick-up the van and travel to rendezvous with the European contingent. Once together we'll begin our journey north through Reykjavik to Stykkisholmer in the Snaefellsnes Peninsula. There we will catch a ferry across the Briedafjordur into the Westfjords. This ferry crossing will save many hours of driving and get us into the heart of our journey before the end of our first day.

September 3, 2009 – Due to the long journey of the day before and the richness of the area we now find ourselves, we will be staying an extra night here in the southwest fjords region. There is much to see and photograph including the Bardastrond coastal region and Raudesandur, a vast area of red sand beach. There are also the famous bird cliffs of Latrabjarg that stretch for over 14 kilometers at this far western edge of Iceland and Europe. We will continue to scout and photograph the area throughout the day and evening.

September 4, 2009 – Today we will not have a great distance to travel, but the roads will not be as good and will wind and climb over mountains, rivers and valleys. There will also be a lot to take including the great Dynjandi Waterfalls, among the largest and most beautiful in Iceland. Our destination for the next 2 nights will be Isafjordur, the largest town in the Westfjords region. We will have plenty of time today to do some scouting and shooting before checking into our hotel, resting up and getting back out again.

September 5, 2009 – Staying another day in this area, we will continue to explore and photograph. We will have the opportunity to backtrack to the town of Flateryi and to travel northwest to the end of the road past the fishing village of Bolungarvik. On a clear day it is said that you can see the east coast of Greenland from here. It is a very wild area and we will have many possibilities here.

September 6, 2009 – We will make an early start going east out of Isafjordur on a spectacular drive that will wind us back and forth along 6 fjords including the beautiful and stark Kambsnes peninsula. Although again not too great a distance as the Crow flies, it will be a challenging drive hugging the coastline on our way to the eastern side of the Westfjords region along the Strandir coastline. We will be staying these next 2 nights in the Drangsnes area. This area of Iceland is thought to be a place of great spiritual power.

September 7, 2009 – Continuing in the Strandir region we will continue north toward the end of the road in these parts. Drangsnæs, an abandoned farm in Kaldbakur, Djúpavík and its ruins of a Herring factory built in the early 1900's and ending in Gjógur, a fishing village long abandoned. There will be plenty to see and photograph in this area and the extra night in the hotel will allow us to catch-up on some needed rest.

September 8, 2009 – Early departure for points back west and then south into an area famous in Iceland's Sagas and where Leif Eriksson is said to have been born. Although not as striking as some of the areas we have been, there is still much to see and photograph and this will be our last wilderness experience before heading back into Reykjavík and civilization.

September 9, 2009 – Today's drive will be a fairly long one with the final destination being Reykjavík, so the plan is to leave early so that we can stop along the way to shoot and still make the city with enough time for each of you to split off and see the sights. Once in the city, we check into our hotel and all our then free to roam the city at will. There is a lot to see and we will be close to the city's most famous street, the Laugavegur. Along here are some of the most chic shops in Europe, some great book stores, bars and restaurants. This will be a great time to shop for any gifts and souvenirs you may desire as well as take in a little of the unique culture of this very modern city.

September 10, 2009 – Departure day. We will make a leisurely check out before departing for the Keflavík peninsula and the airport, but not before a stop at the world famous Blue Lagoon. For those of you who wish to relax in the hot, healing volcanic waters of this man made wonder, we will have a couple hours to kill before our flights and this is a perfect way to close out any trip to Iceland. For those that wish to stay dry, there is a very nice gift store and cafe here as well. We will then travel the short distance to the airport to begin our journey home.

Suggested Reading

There are several books about Iceland available, but I have found my favorite to be the Insight Guide to Iceland by Jane Simmons. You can get a copy at most Barnes and Noble and Borders stores as well as on Amazon (www.amazon.com). There are also a lot of Websites that will help in gaining knowledge of this incredible place. I will be sending you a links list soon. A simple Google search is a good place to start.

Cost and Due Dates

Cost for the trip and payment due dates are as follows. As was stated earlier, it is very important that all involved follow these dates in order to keep things running smoothly. We are spacing out the payments over a 6 month period in order to make it easier for all involved.

Total cost of trip:

\$3150.00 for US travelers

\$2650.00 for European travelers

1st payment due date: March 15, 2009 - \$750.00

2nd payment due date: May 1, 2009 - \$1000.00

3rd payment due date: July 1, 2009 - \$750.00 (\$450.00 for Eurotravelers)

*Final payment due date: August 1, 2009 - \$650.00 (\$450.00 for Eurotravelers)

(* Due to volatile gas prices and financial strife in Iceland, there may be a slight surcharge added at the end to meet financial needs that may arise due to these developing matters. I don't anticipate this, but as we all know, things change.)

Payment can be made via Paypal or by check or money order. We prefer the latter, but if you plan to use a credit card, Paypal is the way to go. There will be a small surcharge added to Paypal payments to cover their fees.

Send Checks to:

North Light Press, LLC
21533 Nowlin Street
Dearborn, Michigan 48124

Please make checks payable to **North Light Press, LLC**. You will receive a receipt for payment of each installment. You are welcome to pay the full amount at any time, but we must have at least your first payment by the March due date in order to secure airline tickets. There will soon be a trip application sent to those registered. Please include this at some point along the payment schedule. It will be required.

As I said earlier, this document will change and expand as the trip nears. Additions will include internet links, hotels and contact numbers as well as helpful tips on what to bring, weather to expect, etc. You will be notified of each update to come. There will also be a regular newsletter sent to all travelers that will provide useful information and links that will aid in your trip being a successful one. Clothing and equipment suggestions, etc. If you've traveled with me before, you know what to expect in the coming months.

Again... I look forward to traveling and photographing with you! All the Best,

Bill Schwab