



2017
Sprengisandur
Traverse of the Icelandic Highlands
IMG52

Cross-Country journey of a lifetime

– Expedition Manual –



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Expedition overview

A beautiful traverse on cross country skis over the Icelandic highlands, from high grounds above Akureyri in the North, over the deserted Sprengisandur, the ancient route between the Hofsjökull and Vatnajökull glaciers – to Landmannalaugar, an area of high geothermal activity. This is a journey through the center of Iceland, an area that is not easily accessible in the winter time.

Our reward is an incredible combination of wide open spaces and impressive mountainous landscape and geothermal activity; here snow, ice, fire and water come together to create an enchanting winter world. The snow covered vastness, unpredictable winter weather conditions, and the isolation make this tour a personal challenge for the participants.

This tour is challenging and weather can be harsh but we have rather good access to huts on the way. We recommend this tour as a preparation for the [Greenland](#) crossing. For beginners in cross country skiing we recommend the [Landmannalaugar ski tour](#) before attempting the Sprengisandur crossing.

Accommodation is in tents and huts.

Cross country skiing: Ten days

Walking per day: 7-9 hours

Total walking distance: 220 km (137 miles)

Altitude: 600–1100 m (1950-3600 feet)

Maximum ascent: 900 m (2900 feet)

Group size: 6 to 12 participants.

Level of difficulty: Demanding to strenuous



Further information and booking

Please contact us via expeditions@mountainguides.is for further information and bookings.

Itinerary overview

Expedition members need to be in Reykjavík no later than two days before departure. In the morning of the day before departure (Day 0), there is a meeting with the guide. NOTE: this meeting is obligatory so that the expedition leader can assess the equipment each member has brought and advise if there will be a need to replace anything.

Day 0: In the morning (day before departure) is a meeting with the guide to go over the equipment and the itinerary for the following week. If anything is missing, we have time to arrange for things or go shopping in the afternoon.

Day 1: Our Sprengisandur expedition begins with an early morning flight from Reykjavík to Akureyri, capital of the North. Entering Eyjafjörður, the first day's project is to get all the gear up to the mountain plateau at 800 m altitude. First night in a small hut.

Day 2: On the high plateau we head straight south to Laugafell, where a hot geothermal pool is ready for a moment of relaxation. Night in Laugafell geothermally heated hut.

Days 3 and 4: From Laugafell, we traverse a long plateau of small hills. We set course in the direction of a mountain mass crowned by the glacier Tungnafellsjökull. Our destination is Nýidalur that lies just under the glacier. Third night in a tent and the fourth in Nýidalur hut.

Days 5 and 6: From Nýidalur our route takes us closer to the great ice cap of the Vatnajökull glacier, Europe's largest, that dominates the skies to the east. Our route lies through Vonarskarð (Pass of Hope) and over snow covered lava fields to Jökulheimar at the edge of the south-west corner of the glacier. Fifth night in a tent and the sixth in Jökulheimar mountain hut.

Days 7 and 8: Jökulheimar (meaning literally "Glacier Worlds") is the source of one of the country's largest river, Tungnaá. At this time of year the mighty river is typically covered with ice and snow and is therefore like a highway leading all the way to Landmannalaugar a large valley surrounded by colorful rhyolite hills. In Landmannalaugar there's another extremely appreciated warm natural pool close to the hut. Seventh night in a tent and eighth in Landmannalaugar mountain hut.

Day 9: A rest day in Landmannalaugar, giving us a chance to explore this geothermal area in its winter coat. Lava fields, mud pots, geysers and hot springs decorate the landscape creating magical contrasts of ice and fire. This day also serves as an extra day in case we are delayed by difficult weather or snow conditions.

Day 10: Last leg will take us north-west towards Sigalda, where there is an open road for the vehicle to transport us to Reykjavík.

There are several ways to modify the route in case of persistent storms or lack of snow in certain regions. If conditions require, the guide will choose an appropriate route and modify the itinerary.



Expedition life

IMG put great effort into making the expedition as comfortable as possible for all members and by following a certain routine, expedition life acquires its desired rhythm. Each day is divided into different walking periods. Active skiing hours are from 6 to 8 hours per day. Each period may vary from 1 – 2 hours, the expedition leader deciding on the length of periods in accordance with the overall condition of the expedition members.

During each period there is brisk walking and IMG recommends wearing wind stopper clothing that allows for good breathing, such as a soft-shell. Between each period there is a short break, where expedition members can grab a snack and a drink. At midday there is a longer stop for lunch. It is not advisable to carry a backpack as all the gear should be stored inside the pulka however a small one may be ok if one chooses. The best thing is to keep all necessary gear for the day, such as the day's food, a down parka and other essentials, extra hats, gloves etc. on top of the pulka where this is easily accessible.

On this crossing there are three nights spent in tents and six in huts. The huts range from basic alpine huts with mattresses to large heated huts with fully decked kitchens and kerosine or geothermal heating.

When camping, snow is melted for plenty of tea/hot drinks and a communal dinner is prepared. After a hard day it can be pleasant to get into the sleeping bag early and get a good rest since the next morning has another day in store for all expedition members. After breakfast, camp is broken and the first walking period starts.

Equipment list

A detailed equipment list will be sent to all participants upon confirmation.



The expedition time frame

When choosing the time for the Sprengisandur traverse there are always certain things to consider. IMG has decided that late March is in fact the best time. The days are getting longer after being very short during the middle of the winter. It's risky to do this traverse much later since then we could have areas without snow.

Baggage transport

All baggage is transported in pulkas (sleds). At the beginning of the expedition each member should expect to be hauling a pulka weighing about 35 kg. This is the total weight of both the personal and the communal gear (i.e. clothes, sleeping bag, food, fuel, stoves, tents etc.). As the crossing progresses the weight will be reduced, allowing us to travel lighter.

Weather

In March the weather is in transition from winter to spring conditions. The dominant wind directions are southerly winds and that is also where most of the precipitation is expected from. Our route goes through the central highlands and we can expect high winds in exposed mountainous terrain. We can expect temperatures ranging from +2°C to -12°C during the day but wind chill will make the temperature feel even colder. During the night, temperature ranges from 0°C to -15°C, occasionally colder.



Snow conditions

It's very hard to predict how the snow conditions will be in the Sprengisandur traverse. If cold the snow is dry and light, easily blowing about if it's windy. If it's warm, the snow is wet and heavier. At this time of year we should have plenty of snow covering all our route.

The snow conditions will most likely be quite variable and we recommend bringing warm temperature ski wax for wax skis (no "fish scales"). Note: If someone likes to use klister for his skis, he has to bring his own klister and know how to use it. The guide will most likely not have any klister with him. The crown type of skis (with "fish scales") are usually the most care free and work very well. Due to temperature fluctuations and winds the snow surface can easily crust over night so skis with steel edges are key to safe travel and therefore necessary.

We do not use alpine/ski-touring skis since they are not practical in a crossing like this.

Level of experience of expedition members

Expedition members need to be physically fit and in good mental shape, ready for team work and a flexible itinerary when weather is less than ideal. Take note that the mental aspect is often more challenging on expeditions like this than the physical one.

The Sprengisandur traverse is a great preparation for bigger ski expeditions. It offers challenging terrain with the comfort of several huts along the way. Participants can expect long days and sometimes challenging weather, an isothermal snowpack or full on winter.

Expedition members must be prepared to be confronted with cold weather, strong winds, fresh snow and even blizzards. Also expedition members should be ready for very challenging camping and camp life in the worst of scenarios present, not to mention dealing with the unexpected and unwanted, such as blisters and other bodily aches.

A high level of fitness is indeed an asset for everyone considering the Sprengisandur traverse. Endurance and self motivation works wonders as well.

A short résumé is required to apply for joining the expedition.



General preparation

The best preparation for an expedition like this is to engage in longer hikes in the mountains or cross country skiing, even with a backpack or a pulka. It is good that participants are familiar with their personal gear and equipment (skis, boots, and clothes etc.). The more comfortable you are with your gear the easier everything becomes when adjusting to the communal gear and the expedition as a whole.

Hauling the pulka can be strenuous for the lower back so exercises that will strengthen both the abdominals and the back muscles are a good preparation. Strong back muscles make hauling easier, as well as shoveling when the necessity for building protective walls for the tents arises. Tent life can also be hard on the back and the better we prepare ourselves the better the outcome will be.

Booking and payment

When booking, a confirmation fee of 80.000 ISK has to be paid. Note, this fee is part of the total price. The confirmation fee will be paid back fully in case IMG has to cancel the trip for example because of lack of participants. Full payment has to be paid at least 6 weeks before departure. Booking can be made until 6 weeks before departure if there is still availability. Full payment then has to be made when booking. Cancellation terms can be seen [on our website](#).

If IMG has to cancel the expedition for some reason, full refund will be given.

Included in the expedition price

- Guide for 10 days for groups up to 6 participants and an assistant guide for groups from 7-12 participants
- Transfer from guesthouse to IMG's headquarters where the preparatory meeting with the expedition leader will take place and assistance with last minute shopping after the meeting if needed
- Food for 10 days (from lunch day 1 to lunch day 10)
- Domestic flight from Reykjavík to Akureyri
- Transportation from Akureyri to the starting point in Eyjafjörður
- Hut fees
- Tents, cooking equipment and fuel
- Pulka, pulka harness and a pulka bag (big bag around the luggage on the pulka)
- Transportation from Sigalda to Reykjavík
- Shovels and snow saws
- First aid kit
- Satellite phone and an emergency beacon
- Solar panel to charge the satellite phone (priority) and other gadgets

Not included in the expedition price

- The flights to and from Iceland
- Hotel/guesthouse and personal expenses in Reykjavík
- Personal gear (clothing, shoes, skis etc.)
- Personal travel insurance and trip cancellation insurance
- Any costs associated with leaving the expedition early
- Personal use of satellite phone
- Any cost resulting from delayed flights to or from Iceland
- Everything else that is not mentioned in the "Included in the expedition price" list.

Permits and insurances

We recommend that all participants have their own travel insurance. A personal travel insurance should cover the loss of equipment due to evacuation and any medical costs in hospitals and towns. Most regular travel insurances should be sufficient.



All expedition photos by Róbert Þór Haraldsson