

Europe, July to September 2026

August 24, Isafjörður

Our stop today was in the northwest corner of Iceland in the “western fjord” region. This is the oldest part of Iceland, geologically. It is about 10 million years old and was formed before volcanoes formed the rest of Iceland, about 1 million years ago. We booked a bus tour, and an informative guide told us some interesting facts about the area.

First, a picture of the town. Do you notice a road just above a patch of green vegetation at the base of the mountain in the background. You do? Wrong. It's not a road; it's an avalanche wall. The towns in this part of the country are all built near the end of fjords, which are usually located between two mountains, one on each side of the inlet. Avalanches can severely damage a town. One recently destroyed about 20% of the houses in a smaller local village. Many villages now have avalanche walls, which are actually long trenches to catch the snow as it comes down, and the depth of the trench significantly stops the forward momentum.



For our outing, we started a bus trip through town on the way to a waterfall. The guide's talk was interesting. She pointed out some main attractions of the town, like the only gas station and only supermarket. The fact that these were highlights became more significant when we were told this was the only large grocery store within 400 kilometers (about 250 miles). And that's just for groceries. To get something significant like a new pair of glasses, one has to go to Reykjavik, which is a 40-minute plane ride or a 7-hour car drive. And it is often the case in

winter that neither are available. The local airport is very dangerous as the runway is right next to the water, and crosswinds are often too severe to try landing.

We next passed a retirement home and a kindergarten. These two buildings were next to each other and the members of the retirement community often helped out by reading stories to the children. The communities became friends and the tradition arose where they all have lunch together every Friday.

Wildlife facts. (1) The arctic fox is the only land mammal native to Iceland, and (2) The eider duck uses its feathers as nesting material. When nesting season is over, locals gather the feathers and sell them to manufacturing houses for quite a bit of money. The feathers of the eider duck are called eider down. It's one of those things you probably knew, but maybe not where eider ducks lived. I always thought they were from Austria. Kind of has that "ring" to the name for me.

OK, on to Dynjandi waterfall. Had to go through two long tunnels on the way there (and also on the way back). One tunnel is about 5 miles under a mountain and is one lane for most of the trip. There is a turnout every 200 meters, big enough to let one bus or two cars pull over. Vehicles going into town have priority. Cars leaving town always pull over until the road is clear. I think we stopped about 5 times leaving town. Priority is given to cars entering town in case there was a medical emergency. The only hospital in the area is in Isafjörður.

After seeing a bunch of eider ducks and a few seals, we got to the falls.





They do a good job of making waterfalls in Iceland. It's actually a series of several falls, with the highlight being the big one at the top. It was possible to walk up to the base of the top falls, and we walked most of that way. Here is a picture near the top looking down.

And here is a picture of one of the smaller falls near the bottom.



And, finally, here is a picture of a display inside the bus showing the outside temperature.



It sounds better before I tell you it was in centigrade, but still cold. To me, it was very cold. To the people here, it was warm.

Which brings up a story about a local game they play called swamp football. It is kind of like soccer, but played in a swamp. The annual Mýrabolti championship is played in Isafjörður. It's kind of similar to soccer and played in two very short halves. There are no yellow or red cards, but the referees can hand out pink and black cards.

A pink card is given to a player who (accidentally or on purpose) slightly injures another player. The recipient of a pink card must kiss the injury, which is called "kissing the booboo". A black card is given for a more serious offense and the offender must wear a muddy black headband for their next two minutes of play. Unfortunately, we just missed the championships by a couple of weeks. Darn!

All this is true and documented many places online.

Last fact I just remembered. It was almost the "I forget" lead-in for tomorrow, but I remembered. Iceland is near the arctic circle, which is about 25 miles north of Isafjörður. Places north of the arctic circle experience at least one day a year when the sun never sets. Isafjörður, and towns like it in the fjord region live next to mountains, mountains to the north of the town. Although they are south of the arctic circle, the sun may rise but, in the middle of winter, not very high. For a long time, the sun never rises above the mountain shadowing the town. These towns have a long time in the winter when they never see the sun. When the sun finally appears, sometime in late January, the town people all get together for a big celebration. The holiday is called Sólardagur (Sun Day) and the celebration is Sólarkaffi (Sun Coffee).

In reading about this, I also learned that the arctic circle is not a fixed line. It moves by 3 to 5 degrees as it goes around the Earth. This is due to the tilt and wobble of the Earth's axis.

Remember that the arctic circle is defined as the area north of which the sun will not rise for at least one day. This distance seems to fluctuate with axis orientation, make the circle location variable.

Enough science for one day.