Visit South Iceland

KATLA GEOPARK

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Katla UNESCO Global Geopark

SOUTH ICELAND
THE OFFICIAL
TOURIST MAP

Welcome to South Iceland

The Icelandic nature is magnificent, but fragile. The vegetation is easily breached. It suffers greatly from too much trampling and its wounds are slow to heal.

Police regulation for municipalities in South Iceland states:

"It is forbidden to stay the night in tents, campers, caravans, collapsible campers, tent trailers and other compatible equipment, outside of designated camping areas."

Please be considerate of our beautiful and fragile nature and only camp over night in designated camping areas.

Enjoy your travels - drive safe!

More information on camping in South Iceland:
south.is/campingwinter
south.is/camping

You can find more information about South Iceland in these regional tourist maps

Katla UNESCO Global Geopark

UNESCO Global Geoparks are single, unified geographical areas where sites and landscapes of international geological significance are managed with a holistic concept of protection, education, and sustainable development.

Katla UNESCO Global Geopark is on the Eastern Volcanic Zone, the most active volcanic area in Iceland. The geographic region is characterized by central volcanoes, eruption craters and fissures, lava fields, SW-NE trending hyaloclastite ridges and tuff mountains. Glaciers are prominent in the landscape as they cover the highest mountains and volcanoes in the area. Active volcanoes under glaciers can produce gigantic glacial outburst floods which have formed large outwash plains in the lowlands.

Travel safely

- Traveling on F-roads: These roads are only for large 4x4 cars. Take note of www.weather.is for weather forecast days prior to entering the highlands and www.road.is for road status as rivers swell in the days after heavy rain.
- The highland regions are vast and wild and pose many natural hazards. Plan ahead, get information from trusted sources and respect all safety notices.
- Monitor safety notices by using the Safe Travel app or visiting www.safetravel.is

1 Gluggafoss

Gluggafoss is a waterfall in the Merkjá River. The river has several beautiful waterfalls, but the most outstanding is Gluggafoss or Window Falls. The upper half of the cliff is made out of palagonite tuff rock and the lower ledge is basalt. The river has formed a tunnel through the softer palagonite rock and a series of "windows" in the tunnel, thereby earning its name. At the very top of the falls, the river passes under a stone arch.

2 Markarfljótsgljúfur/ Markarfljótsaurar

West of Mýrdalsjökull Glacier lies the impressive 200 m deep Markarfljótsgljúfur canyon carved out by one of South Iceland's largest glacial rivers, the 100 km long Markarfljót. Markarfljót has carried large amount of sand and sediments down to the lowlands and out to sea, mostly during glacial outburst floods created by subglacial eruptions, which have formed the flat lowland areas in front of and west of Eyjafjallajökull. The flood plain west of Markarfljót is known as Markarfljótsaurar. This is an internationally important breeding ground of Whimbrel (Neumenius phaeopus) as nowhere else in the world does the species nest in such high density and numbers. This is also a dense nesting ground for graylag goose and white fronted goose in spring and autumn and is protected by local legislation.

3 Landeyjasandur

Landeyjasandur is a large sand plain (sandur) on the south coast of Iceland. The sand plain has been built up by sediments from the glacial river of Markarfljót and repeated glacial outburst floods due to subglacial eruptions in Katla and Eyjafjallajökull volcanoes. Landeyjahöfn harbor is on the eastern side of the sand plain, where you can catch a ferry to the Westman's islands. The view of the area from the harbor is breathtaking, with a magnificent view over Eyjafjallajökull and Tindfjallajökull volcanoes to the north and the Westman's islands to the south. It is lovely to walk on the beach west of the harbor and many ships have shipwrecked on the coast there in the last few centuries so you never know what you might find sticking out from the sand.

4 Seljalandsfoss

Seljalandsfoss is an impressive 65 m high waterfall which cascades over ancient sea cliffs into a pool below. It is possible to walk behind the waterfall and come out the other side, but the path can be slippery so please be careful. There is a short walk along a path to the neighboring waterfall Gljúfrabúi, 40 m high, tucked into the cliff. There is a certain mystique over the waterfall and if entering the narrow opening in the cliff utmost caution is advised.

Do you need information about accomodation, activities, dining and culture in South Iceland?

Visit us at: www.south.is

Visit South Iceland

Published by Visit South Iceland and the municipalities 2024.
Photos: Páll Jökull Pétursson, Þórir Níels Kjartansson, Snorri Baldursson, Snorri Sævarsson, Hörður Bjarni Harðarson, Katla UNESCO Geopark, Rangárþing eystra, Mýrdalshreppur, Skaftárhreppur, Vestmannaeyjar, NORNIK.
Design and layout: Páll Jökull Pétursson. **Map:** Hans H. Hansen. **Printing:** Prentmet Oddi.

SÓKNARÁÆTLUN SUÐURLANDS

5 Nauthúsagil

Nauthúsagil is a ravine carved into the side of Eyjafjöll mountains. The ravine is locally known for the rowan tree (Sorbus aucuparia) that grows on its ridge and whose multiple trunks lean over the ravine. The tree is said to be holy and it is considered bad luck to cut it. Although the ravine is deep and narrow, you can walk along the river while keeping your feet relatively dry until you come to a 2-3 meters high waterfall. If you continue your way, there is another larger waterfall. You can also walk along the western edge of the ravine where you have a good view of the ravine and a third, beautifully shaped waterfall.

6 Þórsmörk

Þórsmörk is a nature reserve, carved out by glaciers and glacial rivers, surrounded by beautiful volcanic landscape, canyons, and floodplains, and with views over the volcanoes of Tindfjallajökull, Katla and Eyjafjallajökull. There are several huts and other accommodation available there, along with multiple hiking trails that extend around the area. This wild spot is protected from harsh weather and is often warmer and drier than nearby areas. Þórsmörk may seem relatively close to the ring road but it is only accessible by super-jeeps or by bus due to unbridged rivers with strong currents.

7 Steinahellir

A protected cave next to road no. 1 by the estuary of Holtsós. The cave was mostly formed by wave erosion into the rock but was later made larger by man to make it more habitable and is now 6 m wide and 4 m high. An outstanding feature of the cave are the ferns that grow on the cave ceiling. The opening of the cave faces south and has been closed with wooden panels like it used to have when the cave was an assembly place for the local population from 1820 to 1902.

8 Eyjafjallajökull

The ice-capped volcano Eyjafjallajökull (1651 m) is located at the borders of the South Icelandic highlands. It featured prominently in the world news in 2010 when ash from its eruption halted air traffic in Europe. An ice cap with several outlet glaciers covers the caldera of Eyjafjallajökull with a diameter of 3-4 km. The outlet glaciers, Steinholtsjökull and Gígjökull, descend from the main glacier and can be visited by 4x4 trucks along the F-road to Þórsmörk. The best place to see Eyjafjallajökull is from the viewpoint near Þorvaldseyri farm.

9 Rútshellir

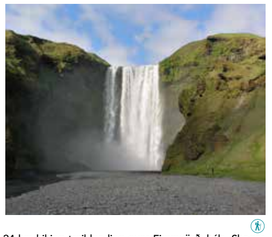
Rútshellir at Mt. Hrútafell is a protected cave with a renovated sheep pen attached in front of it. Said to be the largest man-made cave in Iceland, Rútshellir has two parts. The upper half contains an adjoining cave, which is so high that at one time a 2nd floor was installed making it a double story cave. Further in, there is a ledge that was likely used for sleeping. Legend claims a man called Rútur once lived in the cave but his slaves intended to kill him. They carved a hole under the ledge where Rútur slept, so they could kill him with spears while he was sleeping. One night on arriving home and preparing to sleep, Rútur discovered their plot. He chased the slaves into the mountains and killed them all.

10 Drangurinn

Drangurinn is a large rock formation, most likely an old sea stack, that stands alone on the grazing land of Drangshlíð farm, at the foothills of Eyjafjöll. A folktale tells of a strong man named Grettir Ásmundsson who was showing off and ripped the giant boulder right out of Hrútafell cliff, leaving a chasm which is now above Skarðshlíð. The rock formation has several caves and passages to which additional buildings have been added throughout the centuries, some of which are still standing. The site has been used in the filming of Icelandic movies and in various documentaries. Drangurinn, and its immediate surroundings, is a protected natural site and is on private land.

11 Skógafoss

Skógar is a small village located below the Eyjafjöll mountains. There you can find Skógafoss and Skógasafn. Skógafoss flows from the river Skógá and cascades evenly over the 62 meter high cliff making the waterfall very majestic. You can walk into the canyon to get closer to the waterfall, or you can walk the steps to the top of the cliffs to get a view from above. The steps are the start of the 24 km hiking trail leading over Fimmvörðuháls. Skogar Museum - Skógasafn is one of the most impressive museums in Iceland and stores many interesting items, including an iron ring linked to a local myth about Skógafoss. Kvernugil canyon is about 500 meters east of Skógar Museum. A hiking path leads you through the canyon and to Kvernufoss waterfall. A walk to Kvernufoss takes about 20 minutes.



12 Fimmvörðuháls

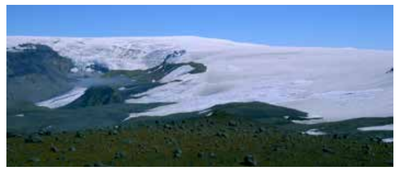
Fimmvörðuháls is the area between the two glaciers of Eyjafjallajökull and Mýrdalsjökull, where two volcanic craters, Magni and Móði, were formed during the first stage of the Eyjafjallajökull eruption in March 2010. The famous Fimmvörðuháls hiking trail runs between Skógar and Þórsmörk and takes you past the two craters. The hike requires good equipment as it is 22 km long (14 mi) and involves 1,000 m (3,300 ft) of climbing and due to extreme weather conditions is only accessible between mid-June and late August.

13 Sólheimajökull

Sólheimajökull is an 8 km long outlet glacier from Mýrdalsjökull glacier (covering Katla volcano) with a pro-glacial lagoon in front of it which drains into the glacial river Jökulsá. Surrounded by glacial formations, this is a fantastic location to witness the effect of climate change. Easy to access, there is a path from the car park taking you on an easy walk to a viewpoint close to the glacier with magnificent views. Never go on a glacier without an experienced local guide and safety equipment for glacial hiking.

14 Sólheimasandur plane wreck

The Sólheimasandur outwash plain has been formed by successive glacial outburst floods due to eruptions in Katla volcano. In 1973, a US Navy airplane of the type Douglas C-117 was forced to make an emergency landing when icing caused both plane's engines to shut down. The crew members escaped unhurt. The plane was stripped by the Navy and left behind on Sólheimasandur. Visitors can park their car and walk 3,5 kilometers each way or opt to take a shuttle bus to the wreck.



15 Katla, Mýrdalsjökull, Mýrdalssandur

Katla volcano is a geological feature of international significance and is the dominating volcano in the Geopark,with eruptions twice a century on average. The caldera of Katla is 600-750 m deep and 10 km wide and is covered with up to 700 m thick ice, the Mýrdalsjökull glacier. Eruptions within the caldera of Katla are most common, where fissures tend to open up beneath the ice. Mýrdalssandur, the outwash plain east of the glacier, used to be home to a fertile farming community but has been laid to waste by successive glacial outbursts from Katla over the centuries. The last eruption in Katla occurred in 1918 causing a flood which extended the coastline east of Vík by several kilometers with its jökulhlaup flood deposits. Public safety: Katla volcano poses a real threat in the area and is under constant monitoring. A warning (text message) will be sent to every mobile telephone in the area in case of an impending eruption and rescue shelters positioned along the main road will be opened.

16 Dyrhólaey

Dyrhólaey, a protected bird reserve and until the 1918 eruption of Katla, the southernmost point of mainland Iceland, is a 120-meter-high headland with a lighthouse on its highest point. The Headland was created in submarine eruptions, where beautiful formations of palagonite tuff, cube-jointed lava and lava flows were formed. Since its creation, both glaciers and marine erosion have shaped the headland, reduced its size, and created the two arches and the numerous sea stacks on its southern side. During ideal weather conditions Vestmannaeyjar islands, including Surtsey, can be seen offshore to the southwest. Enjoy a hike across the headland and keep an eye out for the puffins from late April to early September.

17 Reynisdrangar and Reynisfjara

The famous "black sand beach" along with its basalt columns and magnificent sea stacks. The waves here are deceiving and have caused the death of a number of visitors in recent years, even in the best of weather. Please take great care and keep a good distance from the sea. The car park is equipped with good facilities, a restaurant and wc.

18 Reynisfjall

The village of Vík is huddled along eastern side of Mt. Reynisfjall (340 m). There is a path leading up the mountain where you can enjoy a beautiful view over Vík to the east, Reynisdrangar sea stacks to the south, and Reynisfjara beach and Dyrhólaey to the west.

19 Höfðabrekkuheiði, Þakgil

Höfðabrekkuheiði is a moorland south-east of Katla volcano, offering breathtaking landscape shaped by Katla volcano and glacial outburst floods created by subglacial eruptions in Katla. Þakgil canyon is not far from Höfðabrekkuheiði and the road leading to the canyon offers views over extraordinary palagonite tuff formations, Hjörleifshöfði, Múlakvísl glacial rivers and Mýrdalsjökull glacier. There is a lovely campsite in Þakgil and numerous hiking paths around the area. The road is closed during the wintertime. The vegetation in this area is extremely vulnerable to trampling, always keep to the trails when hiking in the area.

20 Hjörleifshöfði

A 220 meter tall mountain (tuya) that stands alone on the outwash plain of Mýrdalssandur. The tuya was originally formed offshore, but has since been partially buried by the advancing Mýrdalssandur sand plain. A large jökulhlaup from Katla buried the fjord of Kerlingarfjörður, probably in 1179, and subsequent jökulhlaups have driven the shoreline several kilometers further south, the last one occurring in 1918. Easy to reach during summer, you can hike to the top from the west side where one of the first settlers is believed to be buried as well as the last farmers from the farm of Hjörleifshöfði. There is also a large sea eroded cave on the south side and numerous nesting fulmar in the cliffs.

21 Álftaversgígar

Álftaversgígar is a protected natural phenomenon of international geological significance. An area of rootless cones (pseudocraters) formed by the Eldgjá lava flowing over wetlands in 939 A.D. A side road south of road no.1 takes you to a panoramic spot with information panels. There is an easy hike along the signed sand track to Dýralækjasker geosite, a former shelter for travelers crossing the sands of Mýrdalssandur on foot or on horseback before the time of automobiles. Another nice place to experience these cones is in a farming district at Þykkvabæjarklaustur.

22 Þykkvabæjarklaustur

Þykkvabæjarklaustur is a present and historic church site snuggled in the Álftaver rootless cone field. In medieval times this was the location of a catholic monastery, which was founded in 1168 and remained active until the reformation in the mid-16th century. Recent archaeological findings (2015) show that there used to be a large building, with about 1800 m² ground floor. It was a rich convent of monks with large farm and a school.

23 Laufskálavarða

Laufskálavarða is a lava mound covered by cairns at the eastern part of Mýrdalssandur flood plain, near road 1 midway between the villages Vík and Kirkjubæjarklaustur. It is believed that an outburst flood, due to the 894 A.D. eruption in Katla, laid waste to the lush farm- and woodland that was in the area. From then onwards, travellers crossing the Mýrdalssandur flood plain for the first time would pile a rock cairn to bring them good fortune on their future journeys over it. WC facilities are at the site.

24 Eldgjá

Eldgjá is the fissure swarm of Katla volcanic system where a large eruption in 939 A.D. took place. The Eldgjá vents form a discontinuous 75 km long volcanic fissure extending from the Katla volcano in the west to Vatnajökull in the east. The 939 eruption takes its name from a spectacular 150 m deep, and 8 km long graben called Eldgjá (fire fissure) that occupies the central part of the vent system. Part of the fissure is under the protection of the Vatnajökull National Park. There you can take a walk along the bottom of the fissure and witness the sheer scale of it. An easy hike takes you from the car park (with WC facilities) along the bottom of the fissure to Ófærufoss waterfall, which is a distinctive two-tiered waterfall cascading into Eldgjá. This is a site of international geological significance. To get there you need a large 4x4 vehicle for crossing several unbridged rivers and is only accessible during the summer.

25 Langisjór, Fögrufjöll, Grænifjallgarður

Langisjór is a long narrow lake, wedged between Fögrufjöll and Grænifjallgarður hyaloclastite ridges. The ridges are the sub-glacial equivalent of large fissure eruptions, such as the eruptions that created Eldgjá and Lakagígar, where an eruption underneath a glacier will form ridges instead of crater rows and lava fields due to water and lava interactions. These ridges can be up to 40 km long, with multiple peaks, and create a magnificent and unique volcanic landscape. This is an area of international geological significance. To get there you need a large 4x4 vehicle for crossing several unbridged rivers and is only accessible during the summer.

26 Skaftáreldahraun

Skaftáreldahraun lava was produced by the Lakagígar eruption and is one of the two largest basaltic lava floods in historical times, the other is from Eldgjá. Today the lava is in large parts covered by woolly fringemoss (Racomitrium lanuginosum) and lichens forming Stereocaulon lava heath, endemic to Iceland and particularly vulnerable to trampling. The top 5 cm are the only living part of the moss, which grows 1 cm per year. Do not walk on the moss!

27 Fjaðrárgljúfur

Fjaðrárgljúfur is a 100 m deep canyon with steep walls of beautifully water-eroded palagonite tuff formed during the Ice Age about two million years ago. The river Fjaðrá flows from the highland heath forming this stunning canyon and merges with Skaftá river on the lowlands. A 1 km long marked path with 3 viewing platforms takes you along the edge of the canyon and offers spectacular views. A path from the upper parking area to a scenic viewpoint is accessible for wheelchairs, with assistance.

28 Fagrifoss

Fagrifoss is a scenic 80 m high waterfall in Geirlandsá River. A viewing platform is near the waterfall with a lovely view over the beautiful canyon that the river has cut into a 140 m thick hyaloclastite layer. Fagrifoss is situated on the F206 road to Lakagígar craters, a rugged road with rivers that can be treacherous to cross if the water level rises due to rain and thaw.

To get there you need a large 4x4 vehicle for crossing several unbridged rivers and is only accessible during the summer.

29 Lakagígar

Lakagígar crater row was formed during a large eruption in 1783-84. The Lakagígar vent system (27 km) consists of 10 SW-NE trending volcanic fissures, which together host more than 140 vents. The eruption caused effect well beyond Iceland, pumping huge amounts of sulphur-rich plumes over the Eurasian continent and north into the Arctic. There is an array of paths where you can witness the rare beauty of the landscape and craters and the scale of the eruption. The Lakagígar craters are under the protection of the Vatnajökull National Park which provides information and basic facilities. To get there you need a large 4x4 vehicle for crossing several rivers and is only accessible during the summer.

30 Landbrotshólar

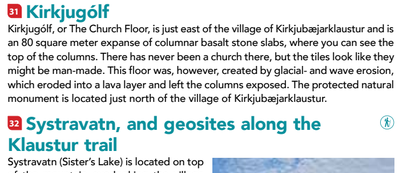
Landbrotshólar is the largest area of rootless cones in Iceland, covering an area of 60 km². Formed when lava from the Eldgjá eruption flowed over wetlands. The numerous cones range from 2-40 m high, and 5-450 m wide. Part of the crater area is now buried beneath the Laki lava and it may originally have covered 150 km². The cones are now covered in moss and heath vegetation. An easy hiking trail takes you into the luring landscape, starting from the petrol station at Kirkjubæjarklaustur, crossing the river Skaftá by foot and following waymarkers into the unusual landscape. Another hike starts from Hótel Laki.

31 Kirkjugólf

Kirkjugólf, or The Church Floor, is just east of the village of Kirkjubæjarklaustur and is an 80 square meter expanse of columnar basalt stone slabs, where you can see the top of the columns. There has never been a church there, but the tiles look like they might be man-made. This floor was, however, created by glacial- and wave erosion, which eroded into a lava layer and left the columns exposed. The protected natural monument is located just north of the village of Kirkjubæjarklaustur.

32 Systravatn, and geosites along the Klaustur trail

Systravatn (Sister's Lake) is located on top of the mountain overlooking the village of Kirkjubæjarklaustur. From Systravatn, Systrafoss (Sister's falls) cascades down into the Fossárgil canyon in Kirkjubæjarklaustur. Gullmolinn, or the Gold Nugget, is an environmental artwork by the art duo YottaZetta. The Gold Nugget, which is next to the Systravatn lake, aims to remind people of the small hydro-electrical power plants in Iceland, which many were made in this area. There is a hiking trail that leads to the Nugget. The nuns of the Kirkjubær convent often went up to the lake to bathe. One day, two of them saw a hand emerge from the lake, wearing a fine golden ring. They seized hold of the hand and were dragged down into the depths.

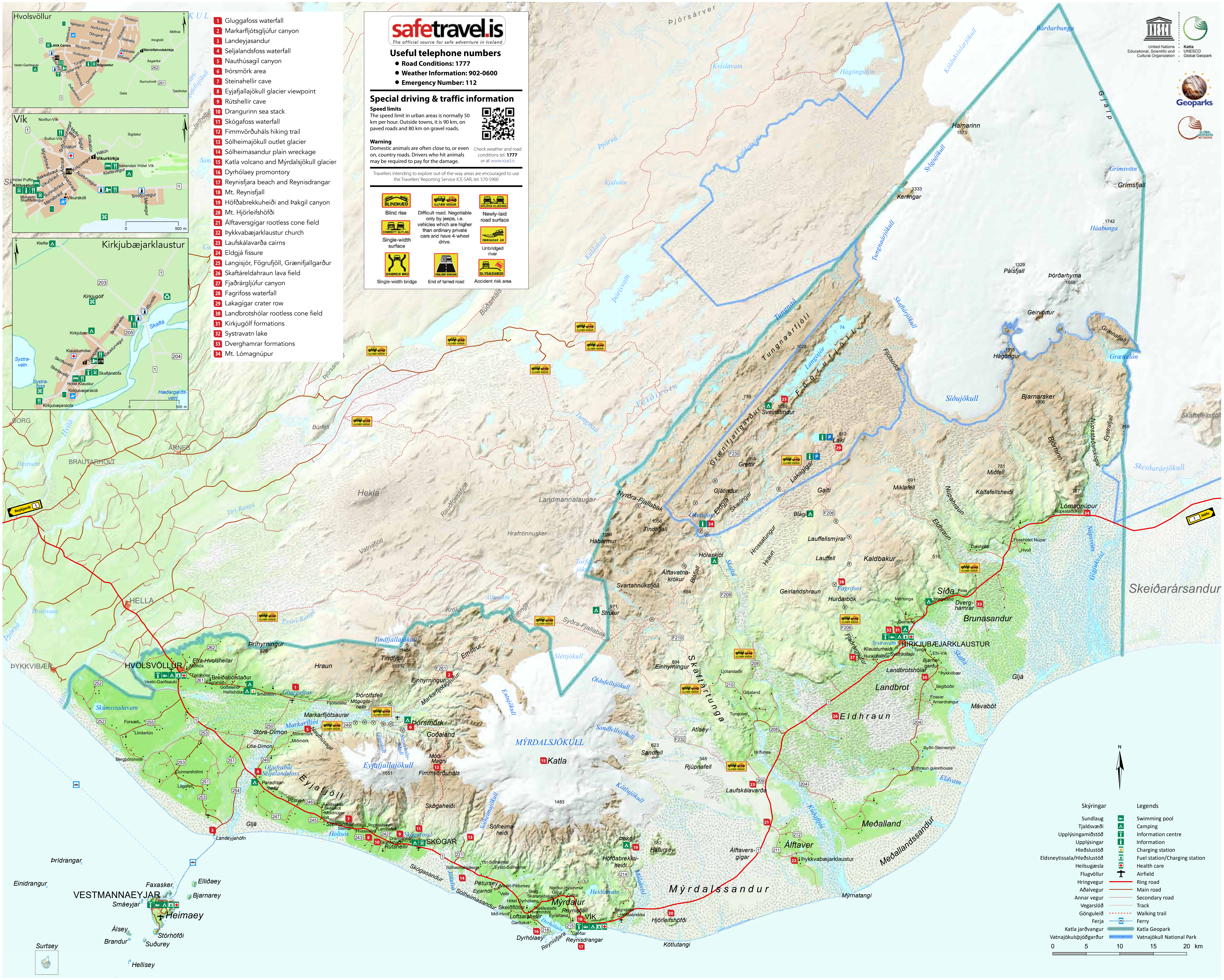


33 Dverghamrar

Dverghamrar (Dwarf Rocks), just east of the farm Foss, are beautiful columnar basalt formations with cube-jointed basalt on top of them. The area has been eroded by both glaciers and waves, creating the landscape at and around the rock formations. Columnar basalt is formed when lava cools and contraction forces build up. Cracks then form horizontally and the extensive fracture network that develops results in columns forming, often hexagonal. Dverghamrar is a protected natural monument.

34 Mt. Lómagnúpur

Mt. Lómagnúpur (764 m) is located on the eastern end of the Geopark and rises over the surrounding area of Núpsvötn and the Skeiðarársandur sand plain. The rock layers at the bottom of the mountain are about 2.5 million years old, which are the oldest surface rocks within the Geopark, while the top part is about 1 million years old. The mountain was therefore mostly formed by volcanic eruptions under the Ice age glacier, where thick palagonite- and blocky lava layers were formed during glacial periods and lava fields during interglacial periods. This has created a beautiful stratigraphy that is exposed at the forefront of the mountain and can be viewed from a parking lot next to the bridge over Núpsá river.


Hvolsvöllur
Vík
Kirkjubæjarklaustur
1 Gluggafoss waterfall
2 Markarfljótsgljúfur canyon
3 Landeyjasandur
4 Seljalandsfoss waterfall
5 Nauthúsagil canyon
6 Þórsmörk area
7 Steinahellir cave
8 Eyjafjallajökull glacier viewpoint
9 Rútshellir cave
10 Drangurinn sea stack
11 Skógafoss waterfall
12 Fimmvörðuháls hiking trail
13 Sólheimajökull outlet glacier
14 Sólheimasandur plain wreckage
15 Katla volcano and Mýrdalsjökull glacier
16 Dyrhólaey promontory
17 Reynisfjara beach and Reynisdrangar
18 Mt. Reynisfjall
19 Höfðabrekkuheiði and Þakgil canyon
20 Mt. Hjörleifshöfði
21 Álftaversgígar rootless cone field
22 Þykkvabæjarklaustur church
23 Laufskálavarða cairns
24 Eldgjá fissure
25 Langisjór, Fögrufjöll, Grænifjallgarður
26 Skaftáreldahraun lava field
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31 Kirkjugólf formations
32 Systravatn lake
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Weather Information: 902-0600
Emergency Number: 112
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Speed limits
The speed limit in urban areas is normally 50 km per hour. Outside towns, it is 90 km, on paved roads and 80 km on gravel roads.
Warning
Domestic animals are often close to, or even on, country roads. Drivers who hit animals may be required to pay for the damage.
Check weather and road conditions tel. 1777 or at www.road.is
Travellers intending to explore out-of-the-way areas are encouraged to use the Travellers' Reporting Service ICE-SAR, tel. 570-5900
Blind rise
Difficult road. Negotiable only by jeeps, i.e. vehicles which are higher than ordinary private cars and have 4-wheel drive.
Newly-laid road surface
Single-width surface
Unbridged river
Single-width bridge
End of tarred road
Accident risk area
United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
Katla UNESCO Global Geopark
Geoparks
Global Geoparks Network
Reykjavík 1
Höfn 1
Hekla
Landmannalaugar
Mýrdalsjökull
Katla
Eyjafjallajökull
Vatnajökull
HVOLSVÖLLUR
HELLA
VÍK
KIRKJUBÆJARKLAUSTUR
SKÓGAR
VESTMANNAEYJAR
Heimaey
Mýrdalssandur
Skeiðarársandur
Skýringar / Legends
Sundlaug / Swimming pool
Tjaldsvæði / Camping
Upplýsingamiðstöð / Information centre
Upplýsingar / Information
Hleðslustöð / Charging station
Eldsneytissala/Hleðslustöð / Fuel station/Charging station
Heilsugæsla / Health care
Flugvöllur / Airfield
Hringvegur / Ring road
Aðalvegur / Main road
Annar vegur / Secondary road
Vegarslóð / Track
Gönguleið / Walking trail
Ferja / Ferry
Katla jarðvangur / Katla Geopark
Vatnajökulsþjóðgarður / Vatnajökull National Park
0 5 10 15 20 km