

# 6 of the BEST

## NORTHERN ICELAND GETAWAYS

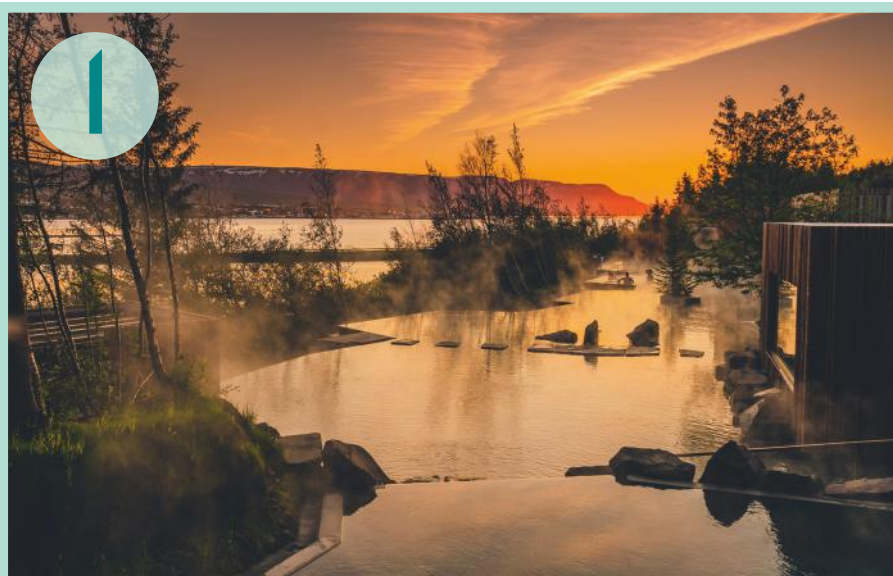
The launch of easyJet's Gatwick-Akureyri route opens up exciting new itineraries in Iceland's wild north, finds **Alice Barnes-Brown**

**B**rushing the edge of the Arctic Circle – which lies just 60 miles from regional capital Akureyri – northern Iceland's fjords are astonishing.

A trip here offers whale-watching in icy seas, hiking on empty paths over moss-scattered moonscapes and plenty of relaxation in spas and saunas after exploring the geological wonders along the Diamond Circle route.

A new easyJet service from Gatwick to Akureyri, departing on Tuesdays and Saturdays until March 2024, has made access easier than ever. And a number of tour operators have devised tempting new winter itineraries.

Visitors have been advised to avoid the Reykjanes peninsula in the southwest of the country due to volcanic activity, but the rest of the country is operating as normal.



### NORTH ICELAND WINTER FLY-DRIVE

This all-new, self-guided fly-drive package from Regent Holidays will appeal to clients who love nothing more than the open road. They'll journey through Iceland's landscapes for five days, covering almost 400 miles and stopping at the mighty Dettifoss waterfall, a frozen Lake Mývatn and snow-covered Icelandic horse ranches, before staying put for the final two nights in Akureyri. Here, adventurers can relax road-weary muscles at the Forest Lagoon (pictured), which opened in 2022, where stepping stones, Scandi-style spas and saunas, plus swim-up bars make this geothermal spa a uniquely Icelandic experience.

**Book it:** From November 1 to March 31, 2024 (excluding the Christmas period), Regent Holidays offers this package from £950 per person, based on two sharing. Includes flights, four nights' accommodation with breakfast, car hire and entrance to the Forest Lagoon. [regent-holidays.co.uk](http://regent-holidays.co.uk)



### WHALE WATCHING

Fred Holidays showcases this remote region in its signature adventurous style on a new four-night package based in Akureyri. On the day of arrival, clients will drop their bags at their comfy four-star hotel then head out for an evening at the Forest Lagoon, followed by a foray into the dark wilderness to go hunting for the northern lights. The next day, a whale-watching safari departing from Akureyri is on the agenda, where a boat takes wildlife fans into the heart of the Icelandic fjords to sight humpbacks breaching the almost-Arctic waves.

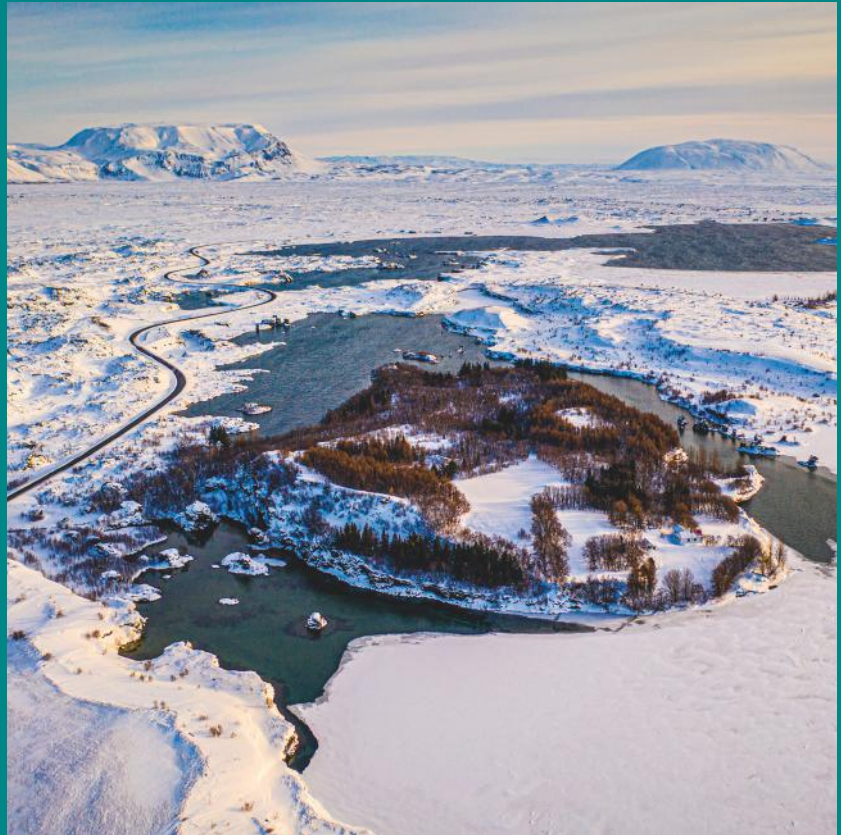
**Book it:** North Iceland – Northern Lights & Whale Watching starts from £899 per person, based on two sharing, departing January 9, 2024, including four nights' B&B, whale-watching safari, northern lights excursion and trip to the Forest Lagoon. [fredholidays.co.uk](http://fredholidays.co.uk)

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**DIAMOND CIRCLE DREAMING**

Intrepid adventurers looking for an explosive alternative to the well-trodden Golden Circle route in the south of Iceland will love this budget flight and hotel deal from easyJet holidays, which bases travellers at the start of the Diamond Circle route in sleepy Húsavík. From geothermal sea baths ideal for Instagram lovers to horse riding, wooden churches and retro car museums, there's plenty to do in town. Húsavík has a thriving fishing industry, so foodies will want to try the fresh catches in seafood shacks along the harbourfront – or perhaps just below their rooms at the Fosshotel restaurant. Bellies full, they can then head out to explore the volcanic Lake Mývatn (pictured), complete with boiling mud pools, and the sheer, horseshoe-shaped sides of Ásbyrgi canyon, which Icelandic folklore tells us was formed by the hooves of Norse god Odin's eight-legged horse.

**Book it:** EasyJet holidays offers three nights' room-only at the three-star Fosshotel Husavik in Akureyri for £316, including flights from Gatwick on March 2, 2024. [easyjet.com/en/holidays](https://www.easyjet.com/en/holidays)



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**AKUREYRI AURORA ESCAPE**

For a more relaxed way to see the region, suggest this tailor-made short break from Best Served Scandinavia. Clients have their first evening at leisure to explore Iceland's northern capital – think art galleries for culture buffs and geothermal, warm-watered waterparks for families – before joining a small-group tour the following day. They'll venture to the biodiverse, bright blue Lake Mývatn, a prime spot for birdwatching. Luxury lovers can soak up the waters at the Mývatn mineral pools. The final day is for clients to spend exactly as they choose, whether that's delving into lava caves, revving up for a snowmobile safari or combining craft ales with bathtubs at the Beer Spa.

**Book it:** Best Served Scandinavia is selling this three-night package from £920 per person, based on two sharing, including flights on January 13, 2024, B&B accommodation at the Berjaya Akureyri Hotel and excursions to Lake Mývatn and aurora watching. [best-served.co.uk](https://www.best-served.co.uk)

## DESTINATIONS

### SHORT BREAKS | ICELAND

#### ASK THE experts



**Andrea Godfrey,**  
head of Regent Holidays

"North Iceland is close to the Arctic Circle, which means that, during the winter months, it experiences longer periods of darkness, affording more opportunities to see the northern lights. This, coupled with amazing activities such as whale watching, snowmobiling or bathing in geothermal water, makes Akureyri a perfect base for the outdoor adventurer. There's more information at Visit North Iceland's trade website, which is a really useful resource."



**Roy Stratford,** head of  
commercial partnerships,  
easyJet holidays

"We're delighted to see our first batch of customers taking off on their brilliant package holidays to Akureyri, Iceland's 'Capital of the North'. The city gives holidaymakers the chance to go whale watching, which is a great steer for our agents when selling package holidays there."



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#### NORTH ICELAND WINTER BREAK

Clients can squeeze in a trip to Iceland over a long weekend on another of Regent's new offerings, which takes place over three nights in the bright lights of Akureyri (quite literally, if the aurora borealis makes an appearance). Day one brings an independent adventure in the city – suggest its botanic gardens, one of the northernmost in the world, or the uniquely styled 20th-century Lutheran church in the city centre. There will be the chance to go aurora hunting after dark too. The next day, there's an early start as clients explore the Diamond Circle. They'll see the icy mists at Goðafoss – which in Icelandic means 'God's waterfall' – before having the chance to catch it again in comfort at geothermal spa Geosea (pictured). The last day is another day at leisure, which could mean relaxing in town or exploring Iceland's desolately beautiful Arctic Coast Way.

**Book it:** From £995, based on two sharing, including flights, three nights' accommodation with breakfast, plus transfers and most excursions.

[regent-holidays.co.uk](http://regent-holidays.co.uk)

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#### CROSS-COUNTRY SKIING

The inaugural flight prompted easyJet holidays to release a selection of hotels that were new to the brand, including the waterfront Siglo Hotel in Siglufjörður. Fill up for the chill in one of the hotel's three restaurants, which range from bar-restaurants stocked with ales from a microbrewery in town to family-friendly establishments with simple menus. Using the four-star as a base, travellers can stroll around Siglufjörður's picturesque harbour, visit the quirky Herring Era Museum to discover how the town's fishing community once lived (the ballgown of a female herring-gutter is particularly fascinating), or even take one of the Siglo Hotel's cross-country skiing courses, where an instructor leads skiers of all levels into the frosty embrace of the Siglufjörður valley.

**Book it:** EasyJet holidays offers three nights' B&B at the Siglo Hotel, flying on January 6, 2024, for £457 per person, based on two sharing. [easyjet.com/en/holidays](http://easyjet.com/en/holidays)



PICTURES: Visit North Iceland