

## Virtual Photos from Iceland

LuAnn and I recently returned from a long-planned trip around Iceland. I can't bore you with our photos in person, but I'll bet I can do it with just the descriptions.

- At the bar in the lounge of the Explorer, this overdressed lady with way too much jewelry (for a National Geographic cruise) looks out of place. This may have been her first free-booze trip – note the remains of three vodka gimlets and the bartender bringing her a fourth.
- A thousand years ago, 99% of Iceland's forests were cut down by Viking settlers, and only relatively recently have reforestation projects like this one been underway. We had different guides on each of our land tour excursions, and each one told the same joke: "If you get lost in an Icelandic forest, just stand up."
- Contrary to modern myth, Vikings are not known to have worn helmets with a horn on either side. This guide is wearing one anyway, with one horn turned up and the other turned down, claiming he only took "half a pill" that morning.
- This is Karen, our staff ornithologist. She said during her biology studies she kept birds in her kitchen freezer for later dissection. A few months ago, she visited her mother in a memory care facility and found her trying to bury a dead bird under the plastic moss in her artificial plant. After some persuading her mom said it was OK to "put it in the freezer with the others."
- A 2016 Icelandic study indicated that foreigners caused about a fourth of all accidents at roundabouts like this one, which are everywhere. The local joke is that planners accidentally set wet coffee cups on their road plans, and the numerous resulting circles were accidentally constructed.

- Here's a photo of one of our Zodiac boat pilots on duty. The radio on his hip broadcasted all voice traffic, and we could all hear when one of the other Zodiac pilots radioed the Expedition Leader concerned that every time he let his outboard engine idle, it died. "Don't let it idle," came the response.
- Icelandic horses are a thing – they are specially bred and have five-gaits instead of the usual three. Icelandic law makes it illegal to import horses of any kind, and exported horses are not allowed to return. We went riding along a fjord one day, and this is a close-up photo of LuAnn and her horse. LuAnn is the one on the left.
- We were asked to divide our bus of 32 into two groups of 16 for the ride, and the first effort resulted in these two uneven lines. Two self-appointed leaders began moving groups of different sizes from one line to the other - both at the same time – in an attempt to equalize them. Several minutes later the lines were still uneven, to everyone's great amusement.
- Grace, the naturalist pictured here, was very concerned about the prolific blue lupine which was beautifully in bloom but is also considered an invasive species in Iceland. Originally imported and planted to prevent erosion, it now threatens many native species which cover the vast lava fields. She asked our teenage female riding guides how concerned they were about this problem and one answered brightly, "Not at all!"
- LuAnn and I made a point of sitting with different couples for dinner each evening. When I asked this gentleman what his "claim to fame" was, he revealed he was the inventor of the flexible fiberoptic sigmoidoscope and colonoscope. This made for somewhat less than ideal dinner conversation.
- We had drinks one afternoon with this woman, Thora Arnorsdottir, a renowned Icelandic national media personality and runner-up to the incumbent in the presidential election of 2012. When asked what the

Icelandic peoples' reaction was to the election of Donald Trump, she thought for a moment and said, "horrified."

- This last photo is of the Boeing 757 which carried us from Reykjavik to Chicago on Icelandair. I managed to upgrade us to business class via the airline's perverse bidding process, whereby you submit a blind bid, and a few days before the flight you're notified if you were successful. Even though our bid wasn't much higher than the minimum it was accepted, which was a significant favor to my knees on the six-hour flight.

Writers Group Member Dave Parsons recommends saving your pennies and visiting Iceland someday.