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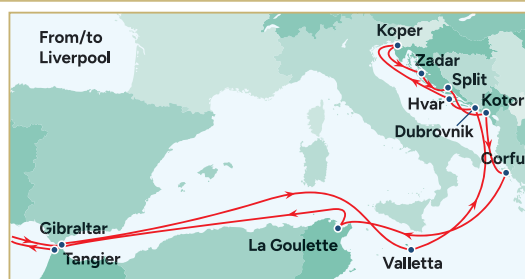
Inside from £2,899pp

Ocean View[†] from £3,879pp

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Terrace from £5,399pp

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WEDNESDAY
3 DECEMBER 2025

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Travel

“A major eruption could happen literally any day now; it's about 50-60 years overdue.” Paulina Anna, a geologist at the aptly-named Lava Centre in Hvolsvöllur, on Iceland's southern coast, is matter-of-factly replying to my question about when the country's most dangerous volcano, Katla, might go off.

Her last eruption – Katla is one of only two volcanoes here with a female name, after a mythical sorceress – was in 1918. She dislodged flood water equivalent to the world's four biggest rivers combined, as lava and rocky debris melted the thick ice cap that had covered the crater since her previous eruption in 1860. There was significant damage to nearby property and farmland.

Throughout my five-day trip following the Volcanic Way, developed last year, I find most experts I speak to united in the belief that another significant eruption is only a matter of time. It adds a frisson to the experience.

But this route was conceived to give visitors a reason to spend longer in, and explore more deeply, southern Iceland, notably the Reykjanes peninsula. It has been highly impacted upon by volcanic activity – there have been 12 eruptions since 2021 – that most recently concluded in August.

Volcano tourism is both a boon and a bane here, attracting curious visitors to witness explosions, but also curbing arrivals when activity has become particularly violent – for example, when earthquake swarms and lava flows closed the Blue Lagoon in 2024.

Right now, things are relatively quiet, although magma accumulation beneath the Svartsengi volcanic system, next to the Blue Lagoon, is currently being monitored by the Icelandic Meteorological Office.

The full Volcanic Way is 700km across the entire south coast of Iceland, from Reykjanesbær in the south-west to Höfn in the south-east. Divided into eight stages, it takes you (safely) into the proximity of several volcanoes, encouraging you to better understand how the landscapes have evolved over millions of years.

The full route takes just over a week there and back, but I'm doing a slightly shorter snapshot of four stages over five days, as far as the mid-point town of Vík.



Volcano road trip is a blast

The Volcanic Way through Iceland's south gives visitors the chance to experience the land of fire and ice in all its glory. By **Laura Millar**

While cold, the weather stays dry and bright. As I learn at the Lava Centre, an immersive exhibition about Iceland's unique geological history (tickets £30), volcanic activity occurs here every day. This ranges from minor earthquakes (“we get up to 100 tremors a day, but Icelanders only really start noticing them when they're three

or above on the Richter scale,” remarks Paulina, casually) to occasional wafts of whiffy sulphuric gas or scalding steam rising from fumaroles.

When I stand in the room that emulates the biggest recent quake, which measured 6.3 in 2008, I almost lose my footing. My trip had got off to a thrilling start when I was roused by the “aurora wake-up” call in my room at the charming Hotel Ranga in Hella, just before midnight. It was the first time I'd seen them, and I was mesmerised.

I last visited Iceland in 2021, hoping to see the eruptions of Fagradalsfjall but was thwarted by fog. This time, I stop at a viewpoint overlooking Eyjafjallajökull, the stratovolcano near Katla whose ash cloud brought hundreds of planes to a standstill in 2010. It looks like an innocent mountain, draped peacefully with ice and snow.

My journey is similarly tranquil. When I collect my hire car at Reykjavik Airport, I am reassured that it is fitted with winter

“There aren't many roads so navigating is straightforward... there's little traffic

tyres, essential for grip on snow and ice. There aren't many roads, so navigating is straightforward, particularly when there's very little traffic and plenty of places to pull in and admire the landscape.

The route is a masterclass in dramatic, volcanic scenery, from hot springs such as the famous Blue Lagoon, to lava fields, black ash beaches, and hexagonal basalt columns. Skogafoss, one of Iceland's largest falls, thunders and the twisted sea stacks of Reynisdrangar, off Reynisfjara beach, are Tolkienesque.

Jökulsárlón is an impressive lagoon dotted with chunks of blue-white ice broken off from a glacier, and Diamond Beach's coal-black shore glitters with ice.

Icelanders have to live with uncertainty, but they're pragmatic. “Two key words describe our

Travel essentials

Getting there

The writer was a guest of **Icelandair**, which flies from Gatwick to Reykjavik from £119 return, icelandair.com

Staying there

Skyrhusid guesthouse near the Vatnajökull Glacier has doubles from £114, skyrhusid.is. **Hotel Ranga** has doubles from £300, hilton.com.

More information

The Lava Centre has tickets from ISK5,200 (£30), lavacentre.is. The Lava Show costs ISK6,590 (£39), lavashow.com/vik. Crystal Ice Cave treks start at ISK21,900 (£130) for a half day, glacieradventure.is/tour/crystal-ice-cave-adventure/

More information

south.is/volcanicway

The Reykjanes peninsula has experienced a lot of volcanic activity - there have been 12 eruptions since 2021



situation,” explains Vala Hauksdóttir from Visit South Iceland, who helped develop the Volcanic Way. “Resilience, and humility towards nature. There's a popular saying here, ‘þetta reddast,’ which means ‘it will all work out okay in the end.’”

Driving through the town of Grindavik, on the Reykjanes peninsula, I see that resilience in action. Grindavik was nearly destroyed in the winter of 2023 after earthquakes split roads and lava from the Sundhnúkur volcano gushed to its edges, burying several houses.

All 3,700 residents were safely evacuated, and to date, only a quarter have returned. But homes are still inhabited and businesses are open, including the Bryggjan café by the working harbour, where I stop for a bowl of tasty lobster soup.

I join a hike on Vatnajökull, Europe's biggest glacier. It sits above several volcano systems and is riven with ice caves and crevasses. The ice is at first grubby-looking thanks to the ash lying underneath it. As it gets purer, light refracts into myriad shades, from teal to electric blue.

This land of fire and ice is constantly changing, and no matter how many times you visit, you won't see the same landscape twice. I know I'll be back.

The Volcanic Way winding through Vatnajökull, Iceland's largest ice cap