

# A Guide to Waterfalls in Iceland: Geology, Regions, and Visiting Tips

**Iceland is a land sculpted by fire and ice, and perhaps nothing captures its raw natural power better than its countless waterfalls. From mighty glacier-fed torrents to delicate, hidden cascades nestled within lava fields, the waterfalls in Iceland showcase breathtaking beauty that will leave you awe-inspired.**

Iceland is home to over 10,000 breathtaking waterfalls. From iconic sites like Gullfoss to hidden gems deep in nature, each fall offers a unique experience. This guide explores how these [beautiful Icelandic waterfalls](#) form, what types you'll encounter, and how to visit them safely.

Make the most of your trip by joining [waterfall tours in Iceland](#), or plan your own adventure by [renting a car](#) and embarking on [self-drive tours](#). Some [vacation packages](#) even include waterfall-focused itineraries with lodging and transport. Whatever your travel style, this guide helps you plan an unforgettable journey.

## How Waterfalls in Iceland Are Formed

Iceland's waterfalls owe their existence to a unique combination of geological processes. The island sits astride the Mid-Atlantic Ridge, where the North American and Eurasian tectonic plates pull apart. This tectonic activity creates fissures, elevated cliffs, and deep valleys, which provide ideal conditions for waterfalls to develop.

[Iceland's glaciers](#) play a crucial role in feeding many of these waterfalls. [Vatnajökull](#), Europe's largest glacier, along with other glaciers, melts during the warmer months, sending torrents of water rushing down cliffs and through river systems.

The volcanic bedrock beneath these waters, often made of basalt and lava flows, shapes the falls' form and appearance. Over time, erosion carves out deep channels, gorges, and ledges, further defining each waterfall's character.

Seasonal variation is also a defining factor. In summer, meltwater swells, creating more powerful flows, while winter often transforms waterfalls into shimmering frozen sculptures, attracting photographers and adventurers alike.

## Types of Waterfalls in Iceland

Not all waterfalls are created equal! Iceland's geology gives rise to several distinct waterfall types:

- **Plunge Waterfalls:** Water drops vertically without touching the rock.
- **Horsetail Waterfalls:** Water maintains contact with the bedrock as it falls.
- **Tiered Waterfalls:** Water descends in a series of steps or stages.
- **Cataracts:** Powerful waterfalls with heavy flow.
- **Fan Waterfalls:** Water spreads horizontally as it falls.

Knowing the type of waterfall you're visiting adds a layer of appreciation and can help photographers or hikers plan their best angles and timing.

## Exploring Waterfalls in Iceland by Region

Iceland's waterfalls are spread across diverse landscapes, grouped naturally into regions. Exploring them by region helps travelers plan efficiently, especially when combining waterfall visits with other nearby attractions.

### Waterfalls in South Iceland

[South Iceland](#) is the most accessible and waterfall-rich region, with several iconic sites located just off the [Ring Road](#). It's ideal for first-time visitors and road trippers who want to see dramatic landscapes without long detours.

Many [South Coast tours](#) include stops at famous waterfalls like Seljalandsfoss and Skogafoss, making it easy to explore the highlights in a single day.

### Gullfoss Waterfall

[Gullfoss](#), meaning "Golden Falls," is one of Iceland's most popular natural attractions on the [Golden Circle](#) route. It has a two-tiered drop of 36 feet (11 meters) and 69 feet (21 meters) into a canyon over 230 feet (70 meters) deep.

The [Hvita River](#), fed by [Langjokull Glacier](#), powers the falls, creating a changing flow throughout the year. On sunny days, mist often produces vibrant rainbows over the gorge.

Visitors can enjoy well-maintained paths with upper and lower viewpoints offering stunning photo spots. Gullfoss is accessible all year, with summer greenery and a magical icy winter scene. Weather changes quickly, so dressing in layers and wearing sturdy shoes is advised.

#### Skogafoss Waterfall

[Skogafoss](#) is a majestic curtain waterfall on the Skoga River, dropping about 197 feet (60 meters) and stretching 82 feet (25 meters) wide. Its powerful cascade creates a constant mist that often produces rainbows on sunny days. You can walk right up to the base to feel the spray and hear the thunderous roar of the falls.

A staircase with over 370 steps leads to a viewing platform at the top, offering panoramic views of the waterfall and coastline. From there, hikers can continue along the Skoga River on the popular [Fimmvorduhals](#) trail to [Thorsmork](#). Nearby, [Skogar](#) offers a folk museum, adding cultural interest to this natural destination.

#### Seljalandsfoss Waterfall

[Seljalandsfoss](#) is a 213-foot (65-meter) waterfall and one of the few [waterfalls you can walk behind](#), offering a rare view from inside the cascade. It drops from an ancient sea cliff and is a favorite among photographers, especially at sunset. The trail behind the falls offers stunning vistas.

The Seljalands River, fed by the [Eyjafjallajokull Glacier](#), powers this iconic waterfall. Seasonal changes shape its flow, from misty summer veils to roaring torrents after rain. Trails wind through lush cliffs and greenery, adding to the scenic experience. Well-maintained paths make it accessible and safe year-round.

#### Gljufrabui Waterfall

Just a short walk from Seljalandsfoss, [Gljúfrabúi](#) is a hidden waterfall tucked behind a moss-covered cliff. Visitors reach it by walking through a narrow gorge and wading a shallow stream. This sense of discovery makes it a rewarding stop for those willing to explore off the beaten path. Waterproof shoes are recommended due to the wet terrain.

Inside the gorge, water drops nearly 131 feet (40 meters) into a rocky chamber. Sunlight often creates beautiful beams and rainbows through the narrow opening. The quiet, secluded setting offers a peaceful experience away from crowds. It's a favorite spot for photographers and nature lovers seeking a more intimate encounter with Iceland's waterfalls.

### Kvernufoss Waterfall

Just a short walk from Skogafoss, [Kvernufoss](#) is a 98-foot (30-meter) waterfall tucked into a narrow canyon behind the [Skogar Museum](#). The trail to the falls is easy and takes about 15 minutes through a grassy valley. It's much quieter than its famous neighbor, making it ideal for a peaceful nature stop. Few visitors venture here, so it often feels like a hidden treasure.

What makes Kvernufoss special is the path that leads behind the waterfall. From this unique viewpoint, you can watch the water plunge in front of you. The canyon's mossy walls and natural acoustics enhance the sense of seclusion. It's a favorite for photographers and those looking for an off-the-beaten-path experience.

## Waterfalls in West Iceland

[West Iceland](#)'s lava fields, volcanic craters, and rivers create waterfalls that often pour straight from porous rock. Exploring the region's waterfalls is one of the [best things to do in West Iceland](#) for those drawn to unique landscapes and fewer crowds.

### Hraunfossar Waterfall

[Hraunfossar](#), or "Lava Falls," spans about 2,300 feet (700 meters) where water seeps through porous lava rock into the Hvita River. Instead of a vertical drop, dozens of gentle streams flow sideways across the dark lava field. This unique formation creates a calm and almost surreal visual effect. It's one of Iceland's most distinctive and photogenic waterfalls.

The site is easy to reach and features walking paths and viewing platforms. It's family-friendly, with short trails that offer excellent views. During autumn, the vibrant colors make this area especially picturesque.

### Barnafoss Waterfall

Located just above Hraunfossar, [Barnafoss](#) is a narrow, powerful waterfall that rushes through a twisting lava channel. The water forces its way through rock formations, creating a turbulent, foaming effect. The name means "Children's Falls," tied to a local folktale about two children who tragically fell into the river. The story adds a haunting layer to the natural beauty of the site.

Visitors can view Barnafoss from marked trails and observation points near the bridge above the river. Unlike the gentle streams of Hraunfossar, this waterfall is loud, fast, and dramatic. Its contrast in both sound and appearance makes visiting both falls a rewarding experience. The area is accessible year-round and ideal for a short scenic stop.

### Glymur Waterfall

At 650 feet (198 meters), [Glymur](#) is Iceland's second-highest waterfall and a favorite among adventurous hikers. Reaching it involves a moderately challenging trail with river crossings, steep slopes, and a cave passage. The hike typically takes 2.5 to 3.5 hours round-trip. It's best attempted in summer when conditions are safer and the river levels are lower.

The effort is well worth it. At the top, hikers are rewarded with breathtaking views of Glymur plunging into a deep, narrow canyon surrounded by dramatic cliffs. The area offers stunning photo opportunities and a peaceful atmosphere away from busier tourist sites. Proper footwear and preparation are essential for this route.

## Waterfalls in North Iceland

[North Iceland](#) offers raw natural beauty and powerful rivers fed by the highlands. Its dramatic waterfalls are less crowded than those in the south, making them some of the [must-see destinations in North Iceland](#) for visitors seeking solitude and stunning landscapes.

### Godafoss Waterfall

Known as "The Waterfall of the Gods," [Godafoss](#) is a stunning horseshoe-shaped waterfall. It drops about 39 feet (12 meters) into the [Skjalfandafljot River](#) and stretches nearly 98 feet (30 meters) wide. The turquoise water contrasts beautifully with the dark volcanic rocks, making it a favorite spot for photographers and nature lovers.

Godafoss also holds deep historical significance. According to [Icelandic sagas](#), the lawspeaker Þorgeir Ljósvetningagoði threw his pagan idols into the falls around the year 1000, marking Iceland's conversion to Christianity. Visitors can explore walking paths and viewpoints on both sides, enjoying views of the river's rapids and the surrounding lush landscape.

### Aldeyjarfoss Waterfall

Located deep in Iceland's [Highlands](#), [Aldeyjarfoss](#) features a dramatic 65-foot (20-meter) drop into a turbulent pool, framed by dark basalt columns. Its unique contrast of white water against geometric lava rock makes it one of the most photogenic waterfalls in the north. The surrounding scenery is rugged and remote, offering a sense of isolation and raw beauty.

Access to Aldeyjarfoss requires a 4x4 vehicle, especially in summer when Highland roads are open. The final stretch includes a gravel path that can be rough in places. Visitors can enjoy the falls from a viewpoint or hike closer for a better look. It's a great stop for those looking to avoid crowded sites.

### Dettifoss Waterfall

[Dettifoss](#), located in Vatnajökull National Park in North Iceland, is Europe's most powerful waterfall. It drops 144 feet (44 meters) and stretches 330 feet (100 meters) wide, with a powerful flow creating a thunderous roar and mist for an unforgettable experience.

The waterfall can be accessed from both east and west sides, with the west offering easier access and safer viewpoints. The surrounding landscape features striking volcanic rock formations and deep gorges, adding to the rugged, otherworldly atmosphere. Well-marked trails and gravel roads make it ideal for hiking and photography year-round.

### Waterfalls in East Iceland

[East Iceland](#)'s waterfalls are often framed by colorful rhyolite cliffs and forested hills, creating a peaceful and less-visited setting. Exploring these falls is among the [best places to visit in East Iceland](#) and a highlight of many [Eastfjords tours](#) for travelers seeking quiet natural beauty.

### Hengifoss Waterfall

[Hengifoss](#) stands at 420 feet (128 meters) and ranks among Iceland's tallest waterfalls. The hike to the falls takes 45 to 60 minutes each way along a well-marked trail through forest and rocky terrain. Along the way, hikers can also visit the smaller [Litlanesfoss Waterfall](#), known for its impressive basalt columns.

The highlight of Hengifoss is its striking cliff walls, layered with vivid red and black volcanic rock. These colorful stripes create a dramatic backdrop that is rare among waterfalls in Iceland. The sound of the water plunging into the pool below adds to the atmosphere. The site offers excellent photo opportunities and a peaceful escape into nature.

### Fardagafoss Waterfall

Located just outside [Egilsstadir](#), [Fardagafoss](#) is a 66-foot (20-meter) waterfall that rewards visitors with a short, easy hike. The trail takes about 20 minutes and leads through peaceful woodland before reaching the falls. It's among the waterfalls where you'll be able to walk behind the cascading water.

From the trail, visitors can also enjoy stunning views over the surrounding fjord and mountains. The peaceful setting makes Fardagafoss a great spot for a quiet nature break. It's ideal for families and those looking to explore the Eastfjords without a long trek. The well-maintained path ensures accessibility in most seasons.

### Klifbrekkufossar Waterfall

Located in the remote [Mjoifjordur Fjord](#), [Klifbrekkufossar](#) is a stunning series of tiered waterfalls cascading down a lush hillside. The full height is around 300 feet (90 meters), flowing in multiple steps that create a layered, elegant appearance. It's especially beautiful in early summer when snowmelt enhances the flow and the surrounding greenery is at its peak.

Reaching Klifbrekkufossar requires driving a narrow gravel road into one of Iceland's least-visited fjords. The journey itself is part of the adventure, offering dramatic mountain and

ocean views. There are several pull-off points along the road for photos and quiet appreciation. This hidden gem is ideal for those looking to explore Iceland's more untouched regions.

## Waterfalls in Westfjords

The [Westfjords](#) are Iceland's most remote region, where untouched nature and isolation inspire awe. The dramatic waterfalls here are far from crowds, making them a top highlight on many [Westfjords tours](#) for travelers seeking solitude and wild landscapes.

### Dynjandi Waterfall

[Dynjandi](#), also known as Fjallfoss, rises 330 feet (100 meters) and widens dramatically from top to bottom, giving it a unique triangular shape. Its name means "thunderous," reflecting the deep, resonant sound that echoes through the valley. Unlike many Icelandic waterfalls, Dynjandi is part of a protected natural monument and is untouched by hydropower development.

The trail to Dynjandi passes seven smaller waterfalls, each with its own name and distinct flow. Informational signs along the path explain the geological and cultural history of the area. There are also traces of old turf foundations nearby, remnants of historic settlement. Facilities are basic, so visitors should come prepared for a remote and tranquil experience.

### Thingmanna Waterfall

Hidden in the remote [Arnarfjordur](#) area, Thingmanna is a striking yet rarely visited waterfall, dropping over 98 feet (30 meters) through a narrow, mossy canyon. The surrounding valley was once a historic gathering site, with its name meaning "River of the Thingmen," referring to early Icelandic assemblies. Few tourists make it this far, making it perfect for solitude and quiet reflection.

Getting there requires a drive on gravel roads and a short hike, making it ideal for those with a 4x4 vehicle and an adventurous spirit. The river above the falls offers excellent trout fishing, a fact known mostly to locals. With no visitor facilities, it's best to bring supplies and enjoy the untouched natural beauty at your own pace.

### Reykjafoss í Fossdal Waterfall

Tucked away in Fossdalur valley in the southern Westfjords, this little-known waterfall drops about 65 feet (20 meters) down a lush hillside. Surrounded by rare patches of natural birch forest, it offers a peaceful setting that feels worlds away from Iceland's more crowded attractions. The area is especially scenic in late summer when the vegetation is at its peak.

The valley was once home to a remote farmstead, and the remains of turf walls can still be spotted near the trail. Getting there requires a drive along gravel roads followed by a short, easy hike. It's an excellent stop for photographers, birdwatchers, and travelers looking for quiet, untouched landscapes.

## Hidden and Lesser-Known Waterfalls in Iceland

Beyond Iceland's popular sites, many hidden waterfalls in Iceland offer quiet beauty and untouched surroundings. These lesser-known spots provide a more personal connection to the landscape, often without another visitor in sight. Reaching them may require a short hike or drive off the main roads, but the reward is well worth the effort. They reveal a side of Iceland many travelers never get to see.

### Reykjafoss Waterfall

Located in the [Skagafjordur](#) region of North Iceland, [Reykjafoss](#) drops about 66 feet (20 meters) into a calm river surrounded by lush farmland. While not as tall as some other waterfalls in Iceland, its charm lies in its peaceful setting and easy accessibility. The nearby gravel road and short walking path make it a convenient stop for road trippers exploring the north.

What sets Reykjafoss apart is its proximity to [Fosslaug](#), a natural geothermal pool just a few minutes' walk from the falls. Visitors often enjoy a warm soak with views of the river and cascading water nearby. The area is popular among locals but still relatively unknown to international tourists. There are no changing facilities, so it's best to come prepared.

### Faxafoss Waterfall

[Faxafoss](#), also known as Faxi, is a wide and gentle waterfall about 23 feet (7 meters) high and 260 feet (80 meters) across, located along the Golden Circle route. Unlike its more dramatic

neighbors, its broad, steady flow creates a peaceful atmosphere. It's an ideal stop for those seeking a quiet break from busier tourist sites like Gullfoss Waterfall or [Geysir Geothermal Area](#).

There is a small parking area and a viewing platform, making it easily accessible. A fish ladder alongside the falls allows salmon to swim upstream, which is a rare sight at Icelandic waterfalls. Nearby picnic areas and minimal crowds make it a great spot to relax, take photos, or enjoy a meal with a view.

## Ofaerufoss Waterfall

[Ofaerufoss](#) is located in the dramatic [Eldgja Canyon](#), a massive volcanic fissure in Iceland's Highlands. The waterfall drops around 130 feet (40 meters) in two tiers over layered basalt rock, framed by steep cliffs and vivid green moss in summer. It's best accessed from June to September via the F208 mountain road, which requires a 4x4 vehicle.

Though remote, Ofaerufoss rewards adventurous travelers with quiet trails, panoramic views, and geological wonders. The area was once home to a natural stone arch that spanned the waterfall until it collapsed in the 1990s. Today, hikers enjoy peaceful surroundings and minimal foot traffic, making it a standout stop for experienced explorers.

## Sigöldugljúfur Canyon ("Valley of Tears")

[Sigöldugljúfur](#), often called the "Valley of Tears," is a hidden canyon in Iceland's Highlands filled with dozens of delicate waterfalls and bright turquoise streams. It stretches nearly 1 mile (1.5 kilometers) and is surrounded by moss-covered cliffs and rugged volcanic terrain. The vivid color of the water comes from glacial melt filtered through lava rock.

Reaching Sigöldugljúfur requires a 4x4 vehicle and a short hike from the F208 mountain road. Despite its beauty, it remains lightly visited due to its remote location. The area has no marked trails or signs, giving it a wild, untouched feel. It's a favorite among photographers and hikers seeking Iceland's quieter, more magical side.

## When to Visit Iceland's Waterfalls

Waterfalls in Iceland are captivating year-round, but the best time to visit depends on the kind of experience you're after. Each season brings unique scenery, accessibility, and photographic opportunities:

- **Summer (June to August):**
  - Full access to all regions, including the Highlands
  - Long daylight hours for extended exploration
  - Lush green landscapes and strong water flow
- **Autumn (September to October):**
  - Vibrant fall colors and fewer tourists
  - Cooler temperatures and shorter days
  - Some remote areas may begin closing due to the weather
- **Winter (November to February):**
  - Frozen waterfalls and magical icy formations
  - Popular sites like Gullfoss and Godafoss waterfalls remain accessible
  - Limited access to remote or Highland falls due to snow and road closures
- **Spring (March to May):**
  - Melting snow creates powerful water flow
  - Fewer crowds and increasing daylight
  - Trails may still be muddy or icy, especially in early spring

Some waterfalls, such as Gullfoss, Seljalandsfoss, and Godafoss, are accessible all year. However, Highland waterfalls (like Aldeyjarfoss or Ofaerufoss) are typically only reachable in summer due to road conditions.

Many [Highland tours](#) operate during this short season, offering access to these remote and spectacular natural sites that are otherwise inaccessible the rest of the year.

## Safety Tips for Visiting Waterfalls in Iceland

Waterfalls in Iceland are among the country's most spectacular natural attractions. However, the combination of powerful water flow, slippery terrain, and unpredictable weather means that visitors should take basic safety precautions. These tips will help ensure a safe and enjoyable experience at any waterfall, from well-known sites to remote locations.

- **Stay on marked paths:** Trails near waterfalls can be uneven, steep, or muddy. Wandering off-trail increases the risk of falls or accidents.
- **Watch for spray and wet surfaces:** The constant mist around waterfalls makes rocks and pathways extremely slippery. Wear sturdy, non-slip footwear.
- **Respect all signs and barriers:** Safety signage and fences are in place for a reason. Avoid crossing them for photos or shortcuts.
- **Check the weather before you go:** Sudden rain, wind, or flooding can make certain waterfalls dangerous or inaccessible. Always consult local forecasts and road conditions.
- **Protect your equipment:** Waterfalls generate heavy spray that can damage phones and cameras. Use waterproof bags or covers, and carry a dry cloth for lenses.

Taking these precautions will allow you to enjoy Iceland's incredible waterfalls while minimizing risk to yourself and others.

## FAQs About Waterfalls in Iceland

Here are some of the frequently asked questions about waterfalls in Iceland.

### How many waterfalls are there in Iceland?

Iceland is home to an estimated 10,000 waterfalls, ranging from small seasonal streams to powerful, thundering cascades. Many of these waterfalls in Iceland remain unnamed, and the island's unique geology means new ones form regularly due to glacier melt or volcanic activity.

### Do waterfalls in Iceland freeze in winter?

Some do partially or fully freeze, creating beautiful ice formations. However, water often continues flowing underneath.

### Are there entrance fees to visit waterfalls?

Most are free, but some popular sites now charge for parking or maintenance.

## Can I swim near Icelandic waterfalls?

Generally, no, due to strong currents and cold water. However, some, like Fosslaug have nearby hot springs.

## Final Thoughts

Iceland's waterfalls are more than just spectacular sights—they are vivid reminders of the island's raw geological forces. Whether you are drawn to the thunderous power of a giant cataract or the quiet allure of a hidden cascade, the country offers countless opportunities for discovery.

**Are you ready to plan your ultimate Icelandic waterfall adventure and uncover the hidden gems waiting beyond the well-known paths?**