Known as Europe’s “Land of Fire and Ice,” Iceland is famous for its extreme landscapes—thundering waterfalls, glacial rivers, sand deserts, geysers, volcanoes, black sand beaches, and otherworldly steaming lava fields that attract the more daring travelers. Since it derives much of its energy from geothermal hot springs and burns relatively little fossil fuel, Iceland also has some of the cleanest air in the world.

The 34-mile Laugavegur Trail was chosen as one of the “20 Best Hikes in the World” by *National Geographic*. We added the Skógar extension, which ends at the stunning 200-foot-high Skógafoss waterfall, giving us a spectacular 50-mile trek.

We met in Reykjavik early the first morning and explored Iceland’s capital city before enjoying a group dinner and planning meeting at a local restaurant. The next day we took a private shuttle to the start of the trek in the town of Landmannalaugar, in the Icelandic Suðurland, or Southland, known for its multicolored rhyolite mountains and hot springs. We spent the afternoon enjoying local hikes, basking in the nearby hot springs, and preparing for the rest of the trek. That evening, we cooked our first of many hut meals together in the huge Landmannalaugar bunkhouse that sleeps almost eighty people.

This was the start of a very international experience—meeting and getting to know people from all over the world at Landmannalaugar and all the huts to follow. With shared kitchen and bunk facilities, the huts served as a sort of multicultural hub. We mingled with people from many countries and cultures. It was refreshing to see such a diverse population cooperating well together.

Iceland was experiencing one of the rainiest summers on record since the 1950s. It rained parts of every day except one while we were there. Each of the huts provided both indoor bunks and tent areas for backpackers, and many nights we were glad to have reservations at the huts because the weather could be miserable for those sleeping outside. Some of the huts had shower facilities that offered a welcome clean-up after long days on the trail.

Our first day of trekking took us up to the Höskuldsskáli Hut in Hrafntinnusker, passing many fumaroles, volcanic vents, small geysers, and through huge fields of obsidian. High in the Icelandic Suðurland, this hut was still surrounded by many square miles of glaciers and snowfields in late July. The hut was most welcome as we weathered the first of several storms we experienced that raged outside all night long.

After the weather subsided, it was on across those miles of glaciers and snowfields and down to the Álftavatn Hut. This hut was down well below snowline again, but next to the Álftavatn Lake, and it gets blasted by the winds off the lake. We had arranged with our outfitter, Icelandic Mountain Guides (IMG), to shuttle our food and overnight gear from hut to hut so we only had to carry light day packs. Upon arrival at Álftavatn, we learned that our shuttle driver’s vehicle had experienced a major mechanical failure on the drive and would be late, resulting in a nail-biting wait for dry clothes and supplies. That night and the next day, the driver and his partner went to great lengths to fix the vehicle and meet us at the next hut, and all the other huts, on time.

Our shuttle driver, Kristjan, was a friendly Iceland native who was very helpful and informative at the huts, as well as dependable at shuttling our gear from hut to hut.
The food that Kristjan brought for us was delicious and plentiful. We had one member of our group who is an excellent cook and volunteered to be the head chef each night, with the rest of us rotating all the other kitchen duties. Our chef did a fantastic job of creating great, delicious menus from our ample supplies, which consisted of a wide variety of local foods, including frozen seafood, meats, fresh vegetables and salads, always filling the hut with great aromas! No one went hungry and everyone seemed to enjoy every meal.

The third day's trek included our first of many stream crossings, with two small streams and one major stream to cross. We were well prepared for these, with river shoes and trekking poles, and had no problems with them. This brought us to the Emstrur Hut, which is a group of four small huts. With our group of fifteen, we got one whole hut to ourselves.

The fourth day took us over many rolling hills, with great views of the huge Mýrdalsjökull volcano and glaciers, through another major stream crossing, and finally down below tree line, to the lush green valley of Pórsmörk, Thor’s Valley, bursting with many new fresh fragrances. This was a stark contrast to the rocky volcanic landscapes we had crossed so far. Here we enjoyed a very comfortable night at the very large Langidalur Hut.

The crux of the trip came the next day on the trek from Þórsmörk to the Baldvinsskali Hut. It started out with another easy stream crossing, followed by 2,800 feet of elevation gain, over the 3,000-foot pass between the glaciated Eyjafjallajökull and Mýrdalsjökull volcanoes. Eyjafjallajökull was the volcano which famously erupted in 2010, halting air traffic across Europe. This route took us back up well above snowline, crossing many more miles on snowfields and glaciers, and through dense fog across the pass, requiring careful navigation. During the whole trek we were heading south from the interior of Iceland and now, from Baldvinsskali, we got our first views of the ocean far below in the distance. This hut was again a welcome shelter from the cold wind and rain. We were rewarded the next morning with a beautiful complete rainbow that seemed to follow us for the first half-mile of the day!

The last day was a casual hike, all downhill, from Baldvinsskali to Skogar, passing dozens of spectacular waterfalls, miles of lush fields, and countrysides with grazing sheep, ending at the stunning 200-foot-high Skógafoss waterfall. It was a fabulous finish to one of the world’s great treks. To cap off the trip, we enjoyed a very comfortable night at a hotel in Vik and a well-deserved celebration dinner that we did not have to cook ourselves. The next day was a relaxing shuttle ride back to Reykjavik with sightseeing stops at the Reynisfjara black sand beach, the arch at Dyrhólaey, and the impressive Seljalandsfoss waterfall, which beckons people to walk behind it, a unique view unavailable at most waterfalls.