



### An Excursion of a Lifetime: Untamed Iceland

This past year, I embarked on my third [GWT](#) trip, and as a return Gutsy Woman traveler, I qualified for a 5% Past Traveler savings in addition to various other savings [offers](#). Having traveled with GWT to [Morocco](#) and [Peru](#) previously, I chose to head north to Iceland on the “women only” [Untamed Iceland](#) trip. For 11 days and 10 nights along with twelve women from the United States and Canada, I experienced the excursion of a lifetime that most people only read about. Upon return, I can wholeheartedly say, “ladies, book your [GWT](#) trip NOW!



Iceland was never on my top ten list, but in the last year friends, family and every major travel destination writer touted this “entry point into the center of the earth”. What was fueling this change in traveling trends? Was it concern over traveling to political “hot spots”, the teetering value of the dollar, or just the need for a new and cool spot to vacation? I am glad I decided to find out.

Let’s first decode one major myth about Iceland; While the Island is located just a mere 40 miles from the Arctic Circle, winter temperatures are actually warmer than New York,

London and Paris, with summer temperatures you’ll only need a light sweater for. One of the first things you learn about Iceland, is that as long as you remember your *girl scout preparedness* and travel with light layers of outerwear and good footwear, Iceland hosts decent weather year round for travelers to experience all there is to see and do, and *wow* is there a lot.

From the capital city of Reykjavik to the incredibly flat and desolate, thousand-year old lava fields, to some of the most spectacular and dazzling natural wonders...GWT makes traveling to uncharted territory easy and effortless. No pre-trip planning and research is necessary, no combing through tour books, searching out the secret sights, best restaurants or local attractions. GWT and their experienced on- the-ground regional

operator OAT have been in existence for decades, offering worldwide operations and local connections that set them *well* above other tour operators. When traveling with GWT, everywhere you go you feel as if you are getting special and exclusive access. With the guaranteed small group size, you bypass the overcrowded tour and ditch the “touristy” feel that most of us avoid like the plague. From the moment you land to your departure gate you are in the capable hands of an GWT’s expert Travel Director from the region, a local who not only knows all the ins and outs of your destination, but provides exclusive “experiences” that set your trip apart. Visiting authentic neighborhoods, mingling with resident Icelanders, and eating not at the newest Michelin Star restaurant, but in the home of a host family allows travelers to experience the real heart of the locale in a way that tourists on double-decker buses never can.

GWT also provides the opportunity for “wiggle room” and spontaneous adventure with guides that allow the flexibility to stumble upon something/someplace in the moment and the time to explore.



Iceland provided many memorable moments including The Golden Circle, the circuit of about 300 kilometers, ranging from Reykjavik, then dipping south toward Iceland's uplands, and back. With the small group, our tour guide revealed many secret sites and off road adventures (including a spontaneous RV ride along the rugged black beaches). Here we experienced a ring of natural highlights. Thingvellir National Park, where we walked the location of a major rift between two tectonic plates—the Eurasian and North America, along with Gullfoss Waterfall

with sights so incredible, its almost indescribable. Photos and videos of these locations don’t do them justice and its best to just soak in the wonder as you walk down the side of the cliff towards the waterfall, or climb the stairs to see an overview of the site. At a stop at Geysir Hot Springs, we experienced steam pouring off the hot springs and natural eruptions that took our breath away.

Throughout Iceland, GWT provided hotel accommodations that were spacious and



modern and offered all the necessary amenities needed. Many of my travel mates took advantage of GWT's waiver on single supplements enjoying private rooms at no extra cost.

The timing of our trip coincided with the start of some of the best viewing of the famed Northern Lights and each night our tour guide suggested asking hotel staff to wake us when there were sightings. I won't easily forget throwing a warm coat, gloves and hat over my pajamas and venturing into the clear dark night to see the magical light show of the Aurora Borealis as the electrically charged solar particles collided with the earth's atmosphere, and generated ripples of green, yellow, blue or violet light in the distant sky.



Another stellar experience included a Whale watching tour up close and personal with humpback, blue and minke whales, harbor porpoises and white-beaked dolphins. As if that wasn't enough, we capped the day with a fishing lesson and an on board competition and a barbecue of our day's catch!

On one of last days, we went to the Blue Lagoon Thermal Spa. Bypassing the lines, our guide quickly and effortlessly directed us to our reservation and a couple of hours in the famed waters...don't miss some well deserved rest and relaxation and a great time to drift off alone or mingle with spa goers from around the world. I experienced a Silica Mud Mask as well as the Algae Mask (both thoroughly recommended).

Iceland is definitely on my list to return to. I enjoyed such a warm welcome everywhere I visited and the food was amazing. Highly recommend the Icelandic lamb – it's free range, delicious and the fat content seems so much lower than at home. Fish like haddock and halibut are in abundance, and shellfish is impossibly fresh. My favorite, were the flavorful, plump langoustines.



Cheeses are also in abundance, though the country's most notable, Skyr, bears more of a resemblance to yogurt. Thick and rich, the dairy product barely moves when you turn its container upside down. And a must have souvenir to take home; Icelandic natural licorice in every shape, form and flavor from chocolate-covered to infused ice cream, and even licorice flavored salt that when whipped with butter turns bread into a gastronomic treat.



Carol A. Ientile owns C.I. Visions Public Relations in NYC, is an avowed Gutsy Woman who loves to venture off the beaten path, discovering uncharted experiences all over the world connecting with fellow travellers and making new friends.

### **Gutsy Women Travel**

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