

Episode 83: Summer in Iceland

Summary

Nick and Wendy talk about Iceland, which Wendy ranked as her fourth favourite country in the world. They discuss the extraordinary natural beauty of Iceland and doing a hike that didn't exactly go according to plan.

Transcript

Nick: Today Wendy and I are continuing with our little series on some unusual countries that we chose as among our favourite countries. And your number four was Iceland, which we went to about four or five years ago, and spent a few weeks there. So why did you choose Iceland as your number four country?

Wendy: Iceland is like no other place on earth, and to me it really almost feels like going to another planet because the landscapes are just so surreal. It's like nothing that I've ever seen before. And, like you said, it was probably about five years ago when we were there. I think since then, it's become kind of a trendy¹ destination, I hear lots and lots of people talking about wanting to go to Iceland, just like Portugal has become a trendy destination, uhh, since we've moved here. But back then, not that many people knew about it and it was just such a surprise. Umm, yeah, I loved it so much.

Nick: Yeah, it is interesting that it is sort of on the radar² now of tour groups and things like that. We have a friend who has a tour company and Iceland is the big tour that he's pushing for this year. And, you know, among the things that he's really pushing is going to Reykjavik, which is the capital, and doing foodie tours and all these other types of entertainment-type things in Reykjavik. But, really, Iceland is all about nature.

Wendy: Mmm, absolutely!

Nick: And basically every single highlight for us in Iceland was related to nature and, uhh, landscapes, beautiful scenery and things like that. So whether or not you go on a foodie tour in Reykjavik ... that doesn't really matter to us I guess.

Wendy: Yeah, umm, I mean, Reykjavic, you know, it's a fine city, but it's not what I remember, really, from Iceland. And it's pretty much the only city, I would say,

¹ trendy: fashionable, cool. See also: Episode 21.

² on the radar: within someone's awareness or consideration. See also: Episode 70.

because almost all of the country is just very, very rural. Umm, it has a very small population and so a lot of the places where we stay, they would be tiny villages of about three hundred people. And, umm, yeah, the real highlights are the landscapes, the scenery and it's all different kind of scenery. There's lots of waterfalls, there are beautiful beaches - not beautiful, I mean, not for swimming, because it's very, very cold there - umm, mountains, incredible mountains, these, kind of, lunar³ landscapes with volcanoes that are just covered in lava and then there's the animals as well, the puffins, I really loved. Umm, yeah, but it's definitely about the nature and not about cities for me.

Nick: Yeah, I think the volcanoes are what have shaped the entire geography and topography of the whole country. So people might remember in 2010 that one of the volcanoes went off and then that cre- ... all the smoke from it went all over Europe and caused all these delays and all these planes ... flights to be cancelled and everything and it created this huge problem. And it was funny that we went after then and what the local people told us was that there's this other volcano, and that's much bigger than the one that went off, and the other volcano, it's kind of ready, or they think it's going to go soon. It hasn't, uhh, gone off, uhh, since then yet, but, you know, they basically were saying, "You haven't seen anything yet! Like, once this thing goes, you'll have real problems." I even read once that, uhh, it has been argued by some people that a similar volcanic eruption shortly before the French revolution, uhh, in the eighteenth century, in Iceland, was what caused some poor, uhh, crop yields⁴ and things like that in France, which was one of the things that led to the revolution. So it's a small factor there but it shows that, yeah, when volcanoes go off in Iceland, there are consequences for other countries as well.

Wendy: Yeah, absolutely.

Nick: Umm, and so, yeah, you have active volcanoes, you have dormant⁵ volcanoes. These volcanoes have been erupting for centuries and that's just created this bizarre, incredible landscape. Like you said, very otherworldly. So you have a lot of black rock, but then you also have some ... you also have dried lava so you have reds and browns in the rocks as well. And then you have this very, kind of, bright green which comes from moss⁶ and things like that that have regrown on top of the lava I guess, umm, and it's just this surreal⁷ landscape. And so if you get a chance to get some hiking or to, you know, go up to a viewing point, you just see all these strange colours and all these mountains all mixed up together and it's just, yeah, it's really, uhh, amazing.

³ lunar: of or like the moon. The equivalent for the sun is solar.

⁴ yields: production by a natural process (plural)

⁵ dormant: sleeping or inactive (from Latin), especially used with volcanoes

⁶ moss: flowerless, green plant that often grows on rocks, trees etc

⁷ surreal: dream-like. See also: Episode 64.

Wendy: Yeah. And then there's also the ice, as well. You know, it's the land of fire and ice. So you can also see icebergs and glaciers and things like that.

Nick: Yeah, we went to one place in particular and - one of the things we're not doing here is saying the names of the places that we went to in Iceland because they all have very long names and they're very difficult to pronounce for us - but we went to one place which is known as an iceberg lagoon. And so you go and it's kind of a lake that then goes out into the sea. And so you go to this lagoon and you see these icebergs that are just floating there, and I think they've come down, they've broken off a glacier that's a little bit further up. And that's really amazing just to see these icebergs floating in this lake, and then eventually, uhh, some of them go through this small, uhh, little inlet⁸ and then they go out into the sea, and then you see the icebergs in the sea.

Wendy: Yeah.

Nick: And so that was, you know, one of the great, umm, scenes for me. And it's all very accessible, because there's a ring road that goes around the country in a circle, and then most of the things that you want to see are just off this ring road or on the ring road itself. And so you can just make these little detours for waterfalls and for the iceberg lagoon and things like that. Uhh, one of the towns that you mentioned, one of the small towns, is called Vik. And, yeah, when you look on a map, you think, 'Oh, OK, this looks like a pretty big town or a small city or something,' but, yeah, this is one of the towns with three hundred people. And that's where we saw the puffins that you mentioned and also there's a black sand beach there - and again, this is caused by the volcanoes - and there's also these black rocks that are hard to describe. But they're very sharp rocks, they're almost like columns. They look perhaps a little bit like the Giants' Causeway in Northern Ireland which is a famous thing, uhh, place, that we haven't been to but we've seen photos of it and there's similarities there. And so, yeah, everything in Iceland is a bit different. You think, 'OK, we're going to go to visit a beach,' and you think of yellow sand or white sand, but no, it's black sand, there's black rocks and everything like that. So it has its own character in every way.

Wendy: Yeah, but there are lots of different things to see like we said before. There's the beaches and the glaciers and icebergs and, umm, volcanoes and geysers as well, like hot, you know, waters springing up out of the ground. And it is all pretty accessible because of this ring road and so that makes for a pretty obvious itinerary, where you would just do a whole circle around the island. Of course, Iceland is an island. And you can do that either by renting a car and driving a car and driving yourself or there's also a bus, uhh, that takes you around, that's kind of like a hop-on, hop-off bus for the whole country as opposed to just, you know, a sightseeing bus that you would typically have in a city. So that's what we did and that worked out pretty well, I think.

⁸ inlet: narrow water passage

Nick: Yeah, and then the thing that we did right at the end was we did a four-day hike, which is a very famous hike, again with a very long name, umm, and a very difficult to pronounce name. And that basically takes you through all of this volcanic mountain scenery that we were talking about. And we were there in August, which is the high season and summer in Iceland, and there's a very short window of the high season in Iceland, and so there are a lot of other tourists there. But we did this hike, and we were camping - in fact we camped a lot in Iceland because it was hard to get accommodation.

Wendy: Yes.

Nick: Or at least reasonably priced accommodation in this high season. And on the first night, uhh, it snowed!

Wendy: Yeah, in August. It snowed! Umm, so I was not prepared for that. I mean, I knew, 'OK, the name of the country is Iceland, so it's probably going to be cold,' but I didn't think that it would be that cold in August. So, yeah, we didn't have proper, you know, cold weather clothing and gear⁹, really. And I was freezing. I was absolutely miserable and I do remember saying on that hike, 'This is the stupidest thing we've ever done!'

Nick: Yeah, it was funny, that hike, 'cause the first day the weather was very bad. It rained a lot and then it snowed overnight, so we were in our tent. Umm, but then the next day was beautiful. We woke up and all the clouds had cleared, it was blue sky, there was still snow on the ground, snow on our tent. Uhh, and so, it was amazing the difference. We were so happy that second day, after having been a bit miserable the first day. Umm, but it's good that now you can look back and still see Iceland as one of your favourite countries, even though we had one day where we were a bit cold.

Wendy: Yeah, and I'm glad that we did the hike. You know, looking back, it was definitely worth doing. But I would bring warmer clothes next time for sure.

Nick: Yeah, I mean we saw from day to day, even during days, the weather can just change so quickly in Iceland. Umm, so it is an amazing country but you're not going to get beautiful weather, you know, for days and days on end¹⁰. That just does not happen in Iceland.

Wendy: No, but it's all part of the fun.

Nick: Right, so if we go back, we'll be a bit more prepared.

Wendy: Yes, I think so.

⁹ gear: specialised equipment

¹⁰ on end: without interruption

Comprehension Questions

1. According to Nick, what do Icelandic people say in response to the 2010 volcano that caused significant flight delays in Europe?
2. Why do Nick and Wendy say that Iceland is 'accessible'?
3. Why is the beach at Vik unusual?

Exercises

Use the words and expressions in the footnotes of the transcript to fill in the gaps.

1. The exact date of Chinese New Year changes every year because it is based on the _____ calendar.
2. He's really gotten into photography lately. He's bought a bunch of professional _____ like a tripod, extra lenses and things like that.
3. In a rainforest, even the rocks are green because they're often covered with _____.
4. The volcano has been _____ for many centuries but there are signs that it might be ready to erupt.
5. There's an _____ between the sea and the lake, and depending on the time of day, you can float on it as the tide comes in or out.
6. Some people think cricket is a boring sport. It goes on and on for hours _____.
7. Yemen is a fascinating country to visit but it is no longer _____ for many potential tourists because of the war that is currently going on there.
8. The crop _____ have been poor for several seasons in a row due to a lack of rainfall. They might need to create better irrigation techniques.
9. She's not very _____. Her classmates are into clothes and fashion but she wears scruffy clothes and plays sport with the boys.
10. There's an ancient Egyptian temple in Madrid that was brought there when the Aswan Dam was built. It's quite _____ to see an Egyptian temple in the middle of a modern European city.

Discussion Questions

Discuss these questions with a partner or in the [English in 10 Minutes Listeners group on Facebook](#):

1. Would you like to go to Iceland? Why or why not?
2. Which of the things that Nick and Wendy talked about - waterfalls, glaciers and icebergs, volcanoes or black sand beaches - are you most interested in? Why?
3. Nick and Wendy said they camped a lot in Iceland. Do you like camping? Why or why not?

Answers

Comprehension Questions

1. That another volcano will erupt soon and cause even greater disruption.
2. Because there is a ring road that goes around most of the island and many attractions are on or close to the ring road.
3. Because it has black sand and black column-like rocks.

Exercises

1. lunar
2. gear
3. moss
4. dormant
5. inlet
6. on end
7. on the radar
8. yields
9. trendy
10. surreal