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Iceland is often referred to as ‘The Land of Ice and Fire’, and it doesn’t take visitors long to discover why. The country boasts ice-caps and glaciers, volcanoes and hot springs. The bleak and barren landscape is sparsely populated, yet visitors can travel day after day visiting amazing waterfalls, admiring huge bird colonies on coastal cliffs, going trekking from hut to hut, or camping along scenic trails. Iceland is an intensely ‘outdoor’ country, with changeable weather, so it needs to be approached with forethought and careful planning in order to enjoy it safely and to the fullest extent.

The population of Iceland is barely 320,000, and two-thirds of the population live in or near the capital – Reykjavík. Bearing in mind that well over 500,000 tourists visit Iceland each year, the chances are that visitors are more likely to meet other visitors than Icelanders! A few small towns and villages, with scattered farms in between, are dotted around the coastal fringes, while the interior is uninhabited, and even regarded as uninhabitable.

Many visitors motor around the Ring Road, which encircles Iceland in 1340km (835 miles), but this doesn't reach the best walking areas, as it avoids the whole interior and the fascinating Westfjords. The bulk of Iceland's roads are dirt roads, requiring special care to explore, although there are bus services along some of them.

Over 10 per cent of Iceland is permanently glaciated. The largest ice-cap is Vatnajökull, followed in size by Langajökull, Hofsjökull, Mýrdalsjökull, Drangajökull, Eyjafjallajökull and dozens of smaller ice-bound peaks. There are three national parks – Þingvellir, Snæfellsjökull and the mighty Vatnajökull, the largest national park in Europe.

The country offers an incredible variety of landscapes, from the desert-like interior to the green coastal margins, from cliff coastlines and occasional sandy beaches to towering mountains capped with ice. Canyons carved by furious torrents suddenly give way to broad floodplains. Powerful waterfalls abound, as do unique geothermal areas.

There are 100 days of walking in this guidebook, stretching over 1722km (1070 miles), split almost evenly between day walks and long-distance trails. The walks are loosely grouped into a dozen areas, with enough variety to satisfy all kinds of walkers. They range from easy nature trails to challenging treks, spread all around Iceland, from sea level to the highest peaks. Facilities are sparse around the country, and more so on the longer trails, where trekkers need to be completely self-sufficient. The descriptions in this guidebook help with choosing appropriate routes and highlight walking opportunities throughout the country, so that walkers will want to return time and time again.