Sandy’s Trip to Iceland

We were on a tour of Iceland for retirees organized by a local bank, and they had us fly into the capital, Reykjavik, where we did a short city tour by bus to get us acclimated before going to our hotel on the harbor, Icelandair Hotel Marina.  It is quite new and quirky in a nice way--reflective of the ambiance there of young and independent types of people. We walked around on our own to the lovely Lutheran Church that towers over everything else, museums, a pedestrian shopping street, and on the way to a 7-course dinner of native delicacies (??) noticed the large town center swarming with young people watching the France-Germany soccer game on the big screen there. They had been so happy to beat England, but then were dashed by France in the next game.

A day trip from the capital included a bus tour of the Reykjanes peninsula in the SW, featuring bubbling hot springs, dramatic lava field, lighthouses, and the bridge between the Eurasian and North American continental tectonic plates. Cod abounds off the shores of Iceland, and there is a salted cod museum in Grindavik, a fishing village. And then the Blue Lagoon, which is a tourist trap of sorts, but a totally unique one. One relaxes in geothermal seawater and, with the aid of a silica face mask followed by algae goop, is supposed to emerge with rejuvenated skin. And you are holding a drink all the while!

We were supposed to fly to Greenland for a day, but the flight was cancelled, so we saved a lot of money and were taken instead on a trip to the east to Pingvillir National Park, site of the origins of government dating back to the 900s, and a scenic wonder.

The next day we changed from the bus to smaller Mercedes sprinters, big 4-wheelers that can go off road and drive on anything, the most rustic of roads included. We headed to the northwest and a much less populated but no less beautiful area, lava fields, volcanic craters, rivers, and a visit to a dairy farm where the cows are all milked by robot (fascinating!). Lunch was at a horse farm where the delightful small Icelandic breed of 5-gaited horses gave a demonstration. This breed is carefully guarded; if taken abroad, they are never allowed back to Iceland! Up north we stayed at a new hotel Siglo, which is built into a fisherman's marina--very nice! We traveled along the north shore close to the Arctic Circle, sampling the local food products as we went, and finding out a lot about how their industries in preparing them. A quick stop in the lovely town of Akureyri too--I could have spent more time there.

On our last full day we drove south again, but in the central highland desert between two glaciers. The land is virtually uninhabited, but populated by sheep and horses, all allowed to roam free but fenced off from the roads. An oasis with hot springs and geothermal wonders in the middle of all this is a real surprise! And then a drive on a glacier, followed by a trip to see the Gullfoss golden waterfall--huge and lovely. The day ended with dinner and a stay at the Hotel Geysir with a real geyser right there.

I will be happy to talk to anyone who is interested in knowing more {:>)