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The ICELAND EXPERIENCE

CRYSTAL CLEAR WATER, STUNNING LANDSCAPES, FANTASTIC HOSPITALITY AND THE OPPORTUNITY TO CATCH SOME SERIOUSLY BIG FISH... **ANDY SMITH** SHARES THE SUPERB FISHING ICELAND HAS TO OFFER THE VISITING ANGLER.

Booking a fishing trip to Iceland has to be one of the best decisions any fly angler can make; the only trouble is it's going to be such a thrill! Iceland is so captivating and so rewarding I doubt anyone resists a second trip, followed by another and another. Honestly, if amazingly clean air, crystal clear waters, stunning landscapes and fantastic hospitality works for you, Oh and yes, knowing there's plenty of fish in the rivers for a change, then Iceland is the place to go.

What I think that few ever realise is just how accessible Iceland is and how as little as a four day round trip can give you one of the worlds finest salmon, sea trout, trout or Arctic char fishing experiences there is. So boarding a midday plane out of the UK will have you wading in some of Iceland's rivers and making your first cast by 6.00pm that same day, and with 24 hour day light on tap, its like you've just got up! In fact being asked to leave the water at 10.00pm on your first evening session to get back to the lodge can seem a bit weird at the time as you wade in the glorious evening sunshine, well until you remember there's long days of action ahead with food and sleep being essential to set you up for the next days exciting events.



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Short trips are possible as you can be fishing within six hours of leaving the UK.

UNIQUE EXPERIENCE

In my opinion what Iceland has to offer for anyone is a unique experience for anglers at every level, meaning you can be a veteran salmon angler with years of experience, a wild trout enthusiast, or even a relative new comer to still water fishing and believe me no one can fail to get a buzz out of every minute of being there. I've now got to know some serious names in angling trade who it appears choose Iceland as their only destination to go for their yearly fishing fix.

Like with fishing anywhere, it's not always plane sailing and there can be tough sessions in Iceland where the wind and cold blows in (some might say the clue is in the first three letters ICE-land), but it doesn't seem to matter on these Icelandic rivers as conditions can change in just an hour or so and bingo, its back to fishing heaven on the next session.

SUPER-SIZED FISH

For the salmon traditionalist amongst us you can fish using a normal, but short, double handed salmon fly rod on these rivers. However it's just not necessary and the reality is going light with a single handed 7-wt 9.5ft or 10ft trout outfit is the ideal set up providing its with a reel capable of holding plenty of line as some of these fish will run out with all of the backing.

Incredibly the fishing experience is mostly visible as so many of the pools hold fish you can see and the light tackle only goes to enhance the whole experience. For the most salmon are truly plentiful and whilst the average size is up to and around the 10lb mark depending on the timing of your visit, there's still many fish double that size to be had and once into mid July, large sea trout appear which will average well into double figures.

There are also some fantastic super sized wild brown trout to be targeted, however with all the salmon and sea trout action going on the trout tend to get forgotten until the moment one grabs hold of your fly and having landed it, a

Stunning landscapes and superb fishing in the crystal clear rivers of Iceland.



Iceland offers the opportunity to catch some exceptional sea trout.

huge wild brownie is quite a sight and certainly quite a battle. For those preferring just to fish for the trout, Iceland offers plenty of opportunities to go after wild brownies that regularly tip the scales at 10lbs.



A unique and unforgettable experience can be had by all no matter what level of experience you have.



RIVERS TO SUIT ALL

Several of the rivers as I have explained, can be easily reached well within two hours of leaving Reykjavik Airport, with Laxa í Kjos, possibly the closest to fish being just over an hours drive away. Here the lodge and the lower pools you fish can't be much more than a mile from the sea itself so you can imagine these fish have to be the freshest, fittest, hardest fighting salmon that you can ever experience, believe me you'll land a salmon or sea trout of 10lb and swear it fought like something double that size. However the choice of rivers is immense with simply the most fantastic fishing to be had on key rivers such as the Langa, Grimsa, Nordura, Thvera, Kjarra, Midfjardara; these are all easily reached for fishing on the same day you land. But there are many more rivers throughout Iceland to suit all preferences if you don't mind extending your journey with an additional stop over to take a longer drive or a domestic airline connection to have you exploring the north and west of Iceland. Stopovers in Reykjavik are great and can provide a perfect way to extend your trip by any amount of days before or after the main event and to take in some of the other Icelandic experiences.

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The guides are on hand to support you with your fishing throughout your stay.

This can be to give you more fishing or a way of experiencing some of the culture such as visiting the Blue Lagoon, hiking, horse riding and what some would consider crazy specialty dining, or perhaps I should say non-PC dining? Get yourself into a quality restaurant in the capitol and you can expect to find an RSPB or environmentalist's nightmare listing of minke whale and puffin regularly on the menu, along side cormorant and shag.

SUPERB GUIDES AND SERIOUS CHEFS

Anyway getting back to the really important part the "fishing" Another plus for fishing these Iceland rivers are the guides, guides that will work their socks off to get you on the fish, and if you are a total novice to river fishing, these guides really will support you through the whole process of being both competent and successful on moving water and how to connect with your first fish. The lodges I've stayed at so far have been fantastic. Very comfortable rooms, lovely staff and truly amazing food cooked by serious chefs. Honestly the food has been so good it's really been worth having to stop fishing for!

As suggested, 7-wt rods, floating lines and quite small flies seem to be the most successful for the salmon and sea trout and it's an absolute delight to work these magical waters with such light tackle. As is true if you decide to just fish for the trout on rivers such as the Laxadal in the north. In recent years Iceland has gained a serious reputation as one of the worlds top wild brown trout destinations, where dry fly fishing using a 5-wt as the go-to set up will have you targeting hungry WILD brownies of up to 10lbs, even 20lbs in some cases and there are also lakes where fish of 30lbs are landed each season.

Short Icelandic summers mean trout have to feed hard, in preparation for the next long winter ahead of them, making this a time of major fly fishing opportunity capitalizing on their voracious



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appetite. Early in the season the fish actively take nymphs even bait fish patterns, but with the onset of mid-summer and 24 hour daylight the fish soon move to the surface to gorge on midge and caddis fly. Yes I did say midge, and yes that means you'll take these big trout on buzzers, on a river.

SALMON OFF THE TOP

One incredible experience to look forward to when targeting the salmon is that in these Icelandic rivers the fish will rise from depth to take a fly off the surface and not just once, as if the miss they'll often have another go chasing after the fly. This method of fishing is called "Hitch" or "Riffling Hitch and basically its a tube fly with a hole half way up one side. The line is threaded down through the side hole and out the back where you can then tie on the hook, which makes the fly sit sort of offset. The fly is fished with the rod held high enough to have the fly skimming across the top causing drag through the surface water creating a disturbance wake which when seen by the fish and becomes irresistible. So with the addition of small "Hitch" tube flies in your box, salmon will often take hold for some amazing top water surface action. This way of fishing a fly skimming across the surface has to be seen to be believed as the salmon come up right up on top and take the fly off the surface, such a truly amazing thrill.



Iceland is very protective of its environment and something you will notice as you travel around, no litter!

PROTECT THE ENVIRONMENT

Something to point out is you will need to have all your tackle disinfected before you can fish. Iceland is very protective of its environment and something you will notice as you travel around, no litter! no plastic! I don't think I've ever seen any litter or rubbish anywhere, you don't even see a guide flicking a cigarette butt into the water.

You can get the disinfecting done while you wait at Reykjavik airport, however if there's a big party you could end up waiting an hour or so and holding up the main group from getting off

to the river. Enough information can be gained about the required disinfection treatment well before you go, to enable a good vet in the UK to treat everything for you and give you a certificate. When I say everything, I mean everything, waders, boots, rod, reel, and line, even flies, that is unless it's all brand new. This I appreciate can all seem like a bit of a pain, but once you're out there and see the water quality, the overall environment and care provided from your guides it really becomes something so obvious to do, and maintain.



FOUR-DAY ADVENTURE

A four-day trip might not seem at all long enough for some, but on my most recent visit our group landed more than seventy salmon and sea trout and lost just as many if not more. There is no issue about not having enough time in a four-day trip to get into fish. Then factor in the addition of the northern hemisphere 24 hour daylight, you can and will end up fishing four or five hours longer per day than you could ever expect say on a Scottish salmon river. Nevertheless this kind of short action packed trip is a stunner, where you'll no doubt be pinching yourself whilst out there as to how good it really is and I guarantee a week after your return you'll be thinking of nothing else other than wishing you were back there again, reflecting on why you hadn't done Iceland years ago.



So, if you don't like catching plenty of fish, hate lovely food, great accommodation powerful scenery and fantastic hospitality – Iceland isn't for you!

FACT FILE

For more information on fishing in Iceland with Andy Smith visit:
www.aardvarkmcleod.com
www.reelflyfishing.co.uk

