

Skaftafell National Park

Vatnajökull is the largest glacier in Europe and covers approximately 8% of Iceland. About 2/3 of the glacier is inside the parks boundary. The National Park is divided into three different areas: Skaftafell and Skeiðarársandur, Lakagígar, and the glacial cap itself.

Skaftafell & Skeiðarársandur

The Skaftafell area is an oasis surrounded by sands and glaciers. The climate there is favourable as it is sheltered by Skeiðarárjökull and Öræfajökull glaciers that are two of Vatnajökul's many outlet glaciers. Volcanic eruptions, glaciers and water have shaped and created a variety of geological formations in the area. Approximately 250 species of higher plants can be found in Skaftafell, and over 30 species of birds nest there. Bæjarstaðaskógur is an old woodland, and birch grows taller there than elsewhere in Iceland. Skeiðarársandur is the largest sand desert in Europe and the most important breeding area of the great skua (*Stercorarius skua*) in the North Atlantic. There are interesting cultural remains in the National Park,



for instance the old farm Sel, and the home power station below Magnúsarfoss waterfall. The National Museum of Iceland is responsible for the preservation of the old buildings in the park. Many hiking trails, fit for all hikers, have been marked, and a brochure with descriptions of the trails is available at the information centre. The trail to Skaftafellsjökull is accessible to wheelchairs. An interesting trail takes you to Svartifoss waterfall, which is renowned for the basalt columns which surround it. During the summer months (15 June to 15 August), wardens offer guided walking tours. In the Skaftafellsstofa visitor centre hosts an exhibit about the culture, history and nature of the area. A video of the volcanic eruption in Gjalp in 1996 can also be viewed in the visitor centre. There is a large campsite by the information centre.

Information about the National Park, accommodations and recreation:

Visitors Information Centre at Kirkjubæjarklaustur, tel. 4874620
Kirkjubæjarstofa, Research and exhibit of nature and history, open all year, tel. 4874645; www.kbkl.is
Skaftafellsstofa Visitor Centre, exhibit of nature and history, open all year, tel. 4781627
Information Centre at Höfn, tel. 4781500
ÍS-land, an exhibition about Vatnajökull and the interplay between glacier and man, tel. 4782665
<http://www.visitvatnajokull.is>, <http://www.southeast.is>, <http://www.ust.is>

Recreation:

Öræfaferðir - wilderness tours in southeast Iceland, hiking, skiing, ice-climbing, tel. 8450894; www.hofsnes.com
Icelandic Mountain Guides, Mountain guide, hiking, skiing, ice-climbing, tel. 5879999; www.mountainguide.is
Glacier jeeps, ice and adventure, snowmobiles and jeep-trips of Vatnajökull, tel. 4781000; www.glacierjeeps.is

Lakagígar craters

Lakagígar craters were formed in the "Skaftáreldar" volcanic eruptions in 1783. A veil of black ash (tephra deposits) produced by the eruptions caused climate changes and crop failure in different parts of the world ("Möðuharðindin"). Hiking trails, which give a good overview of the area, have been marked. The area is very vulnerable, the tephra cover is loose and breaks easily, and marks left in the moss take a long time to heal. The F206 road leads to Laki, but some rivers must be crossed on the way there, and the water level in these rises when it rains. Camping within the protected area is not permitted, but camping is allowed in Blágil. There are cabins in Blágil and in Hrossatungur. During the summer months, wardens provide travellers with information about the area. A special brochure on Lakagígar is available.



Wardens

Warden at Kirkjubæjarklaustur, tel. 8224028; karik@ust.is
Warden at Laki (in Blágil), tel. 8551095
Warden at Höfn, tel. 8224036; helgadavids@ust.is
Superintendent at Skaftafell, tel. 8224033; ragnarf@ust.is



Public transportation and planned trips:

Excursions, scheduled trips, tel. 5621011



Vatnajökull glacier

Vatnajökull is the largest glacier in Europe, and from the dome of the glacier, valley glaciers descend down into the lowlands. Beneath the ice, a few active volcanic areas lie hidden, among them Öræfajökull and Grímsvötn. Hvannadalshnúkur in Öræfajökull is Iceland's highest peak (2110 m). The research on the glacier is undertaken by the Iceland Glaciological Society. In Höfn is an exhibition about Vatnajökull and the interplay between glacier and man (ÍS-land, tel. 4782665). It is imperative that those who plan to travel in the Vatnajökull area get guidance from those familiar with the region!



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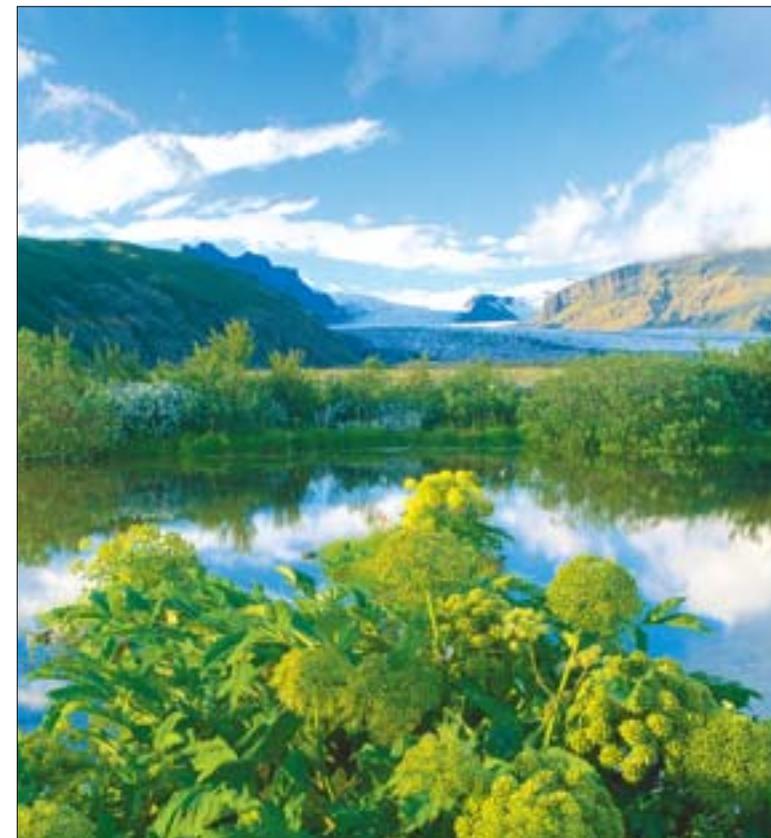
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1 Grímsvötn lakes is the most active volcanic area in Iceland. The glacier melts because of geothermal heat, and water collects in a caldera beneath the ice, forming a lake which drains every few years and causes outburst floods, Skeiðarárhlaup.

2 Lakagígur is a row of craters on a 25 km-long volcanic fissure. There is an excellent view of the craters from the mountain **Laki**. In **Tjarnargígur** crater there is a pond. Fagrifoss is a beautiful waterfall in Geirlandsá river.

3 Skeiðarárjökull is Europe's largest valley glacier. It has retreated 2 km since 1930. After big floods, Skeiðará was often impossible to cross and travellers had to go over the glacier above the area where the river emerges from it.

4 Skeiðarársandur is a vast sand area, the biggest desert in Europe and the main breeding area of the great skua in Iceland. On the Skeiðarársandur east of the bridge across Skeiðará are information signs describing the volcanic eruptions in Grímsvötn, the Skeiðarárhlaup outburst floods, building of the bridges and remedy work after outburst floods.

5 Skaftafell: Svartifoss is surrounded by basalt columns. The hiking trail to **Skaftafellsjökull** is accessible to wheelchairs. **Sel** is a turf farm special for its communal living room above the cowshed. The National Museum of Iceland owns and is responsible for the preservation of the farmhouse.

18 Svínafellsjökull glacier. East of Skaftafellsá river is a road leading to the snout of Svínafellsjökull. There is a hiking trail along the snout of the glacier.

17 Hoffellsfjöll the nearby mountains are rich in secondary minerals, eg. opal, jaspis found in cavities in the rock formations. An interesting hiking trail takes you along **Hoffellsjökull** to **Gjávatn** lake. Old coastlines indicate that when the glacier was thicker, there was a great glacial lagoon in the Gjávatn area.

16 Höfn, Jöklaýningin ÍS-land: An exhibition with information about the nature of glaciers, their effects on the environment, and the interplay between man and glacier.

15 In **Fláajökull** glacier are prominent black patterns caused by volcanic ash (tephra). A good road, accessible to all cars, leads from the highway past the Hólmur farm to the snout of Fláajökull. The recreation and woodland area **Haukafell** and a camping area are east of Fláajökull.

14 From the hill Eskey, west of Hólmur, is an excellent view of Mýrar and the valley glaciers which flow down to the lowlands. On Eskey are information signs describing the glaciers and glacier lakes which have long threatened habitation in Mýrar.

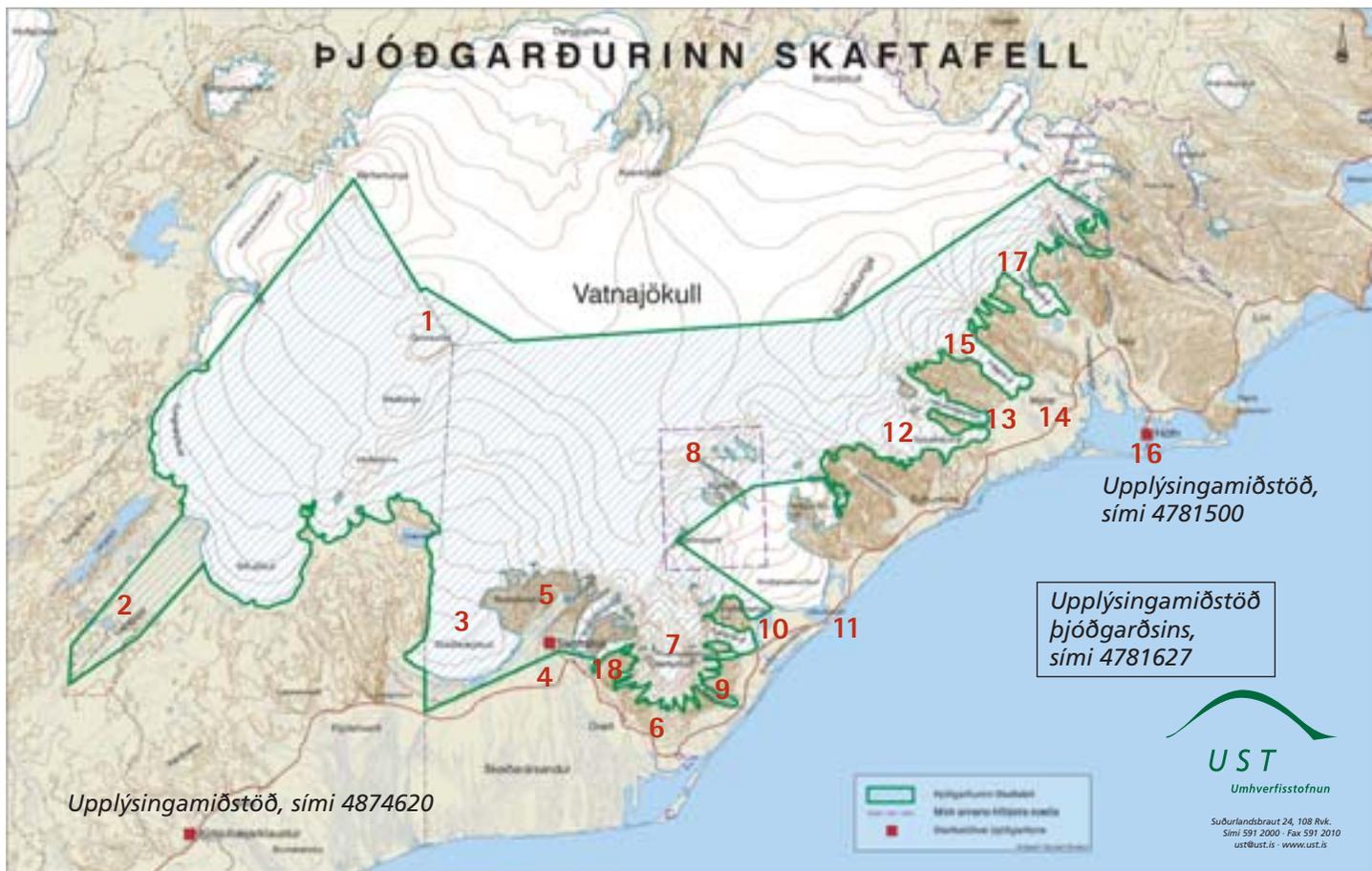
13 Heinabergsjökull glacier dams Vatnsdalur valley, and a lagoon has formed there. It drains out regularly. Earlier, the floods caused great damage to vegetation in the area. A hiking trail leads to the lagoon.

12 Skálafellsjökull. Jökla-jeppar snowmobile and jeep tours of Vatnajökull glacier leave from **Skálafellsjökull** glacier. Tel. 4781000. A jeep road takes you from Smyrlabjargavirkjun power station to the restaurant **Jöklašel** at the glacier's snout.

11 Breiðamerkurjökull glacier began retreating in 1930, and a deep lagoon was formed at the edge of the glacier. Jökulsárlón lagoon is covered with icebergs which break away from the glacier snout. By the restaurant at Jökulsárlón is an information sign describing the formation of the lagoon. Boat trips on the lagoon are offered daily. Tel. 4782122

9 Kviármýrarkambur is a glacial moraine rising 173 m above its surroundings. It is believed to have been formed approximately 2500 years ago. Around 1870, Kviárfjökull glacier loomed higher than the moraine.

10 Fjallsjökull and Hrutárjökull glaciers flow down from the east side of Örafajökull glacier. A lagoon, **Fjallsárlón**, has formed next to Fjallsjökull, and it is frequently covered with icebergs.



6 Háalda is a drumlin south of Sandfell mountain. On it is a maar formed by an iceberg during the Örafajökull volcanic eruption of 1727.

7 Örafajökull glacier erupted in 1362 and 1727. At the rim of the Örafajökull caldera is Hvannadalshnúkur, Iceland's highest peak (2110 m).

8 Esjufjöll mountains are surrounded by a glacier, where vegetation has evolved without influence of man and domestic animals.



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