

## 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 park boundaries. The National Park is divided into three different areas: Skaftafell and sandur, Lakagígur, and the Vatnajökull ice sheet itself.

### Skaftafell & sandur

The Skaftafell area is an oasis surrounded by sandur and glaciers. The climate is favourable as Skaftafell is sheltered by Vatnajökull and Öræfajökull glaciers. Volcanic eruptions, glaciers, glacial rivers and jokulhlaup have formed the landscape specific to the park.

Approximately 250 species of higher plants can be found in Skaftafell, and over 30 species of birds nest there. Skeiðará gives name to two geological terms: "jökulhlaup" and "sandur".

Skeiðarársandur is the largest sandur in the world 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 Visitor centre. The trail to Skaftafellsjökull is accessible to wheelchairs. An interesting trail takes you to Svartifoss waterfall,

which is famous for the basalt columns which surround it. 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. There is a large campsite by the Visitor centre.

#### Information about the National Park, accommodation and recreation:

Visitors Information Centre at Kirkjubæjarklaustur, tel. 4874620 Kirkjubæjarstofa, research and exhibit of nature and history, open June to August and on demand at other times, tel. 4874645; [www.kbkl.is](http://www.kbkl.is)

Skaftafellsstofa Visitor Centre, exhibit of nature and history, open May-September and on demand at other times, 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](http://www.hofsnes.com)

Icelandic Mountain Guides, Mountain guide, hiking, skiing, ice-climbing, tel. 5879999; [www.mountainguide.is](http://www.mountainguide.is)

Glacier jeeps, ice and adventure, snowmobile and jeep-trips on Vatnajökull, tel. 478 1000; [www.glacierjeeps.is](http://www.glacierjeeps.is)



## Lakagígur craters

Lakagígur craters were formed in the "Skaftáreldar" volcanic eruption in 1783. A veil of black ash (tephra deposits) produced by the eruption caused climate changes and crop failure in other parts of the world ("Móðuharöndin").

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 for ever to heal. The F206 road leads to Laki, but 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 Lakagígur is available.



#### Wardens:

Warden at Kirkjubæjarklaustur, tel. 822 4028; [karik@ust.is](mailto:karik@ust.is)  
Warden at Laki (in Blágil), tel. 855 1095  
Warden at Höfn, tel. 822 4036; [helgadavids@ust.is](mailto:helgadavids@ust.is)  
Warden at Skaftafell, tel. 4781946, 8224034; [hafdis@ust.is](mailto:hafdis@ust.is)  
Superintendent at Skaftafell, tel. 822 4033; [ragnarf@ust.is](mailto:ragnarf@ust.is)

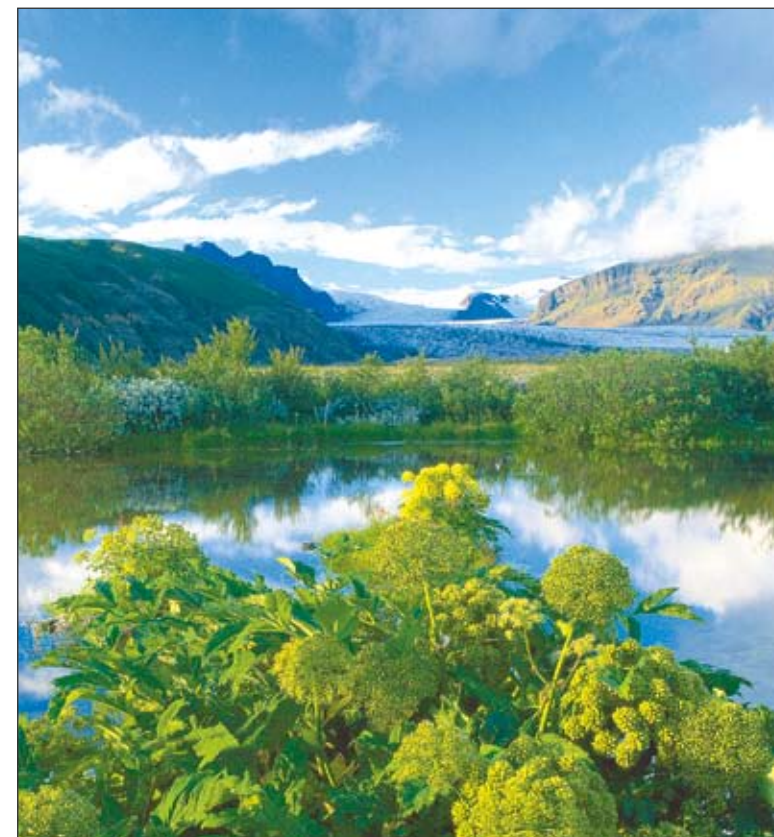


#### Public transportation and planned bus trips:

Excursions, scheduled trips, tel. 562 1011

### 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, great active volcanoes 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 there 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 seek guidance from those familiar with the region!



### Environment and Food Agency of Iceland

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**1** **Grímsvötn** is the most active volcanic area in Iceland. The glacier melts because of geothermal heat and water collects in a caldera beneath the ice, 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 **Geirlándaá** 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 river outlet.

**4** **Skeiðarársandur** is the biggest sandur in the world 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 repair works 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 living room above the cowshed. The National Museum of Iceland owns and is responsible for the preservation of the farmhouse.

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

**17** **Hoffellsfjöll** are rich in eg. opal, jaspis found in cavities in the rock formations. An interesting but strenuous trail takes you along **Hoffellsjökull** to **Gjávatr** lake. Old coastlines indicate that when the glacier was thicker, there was a great glacial lagoon in the **Gjávatr** basin.

**16** **Höfn, Jöklasýningin ÍS-land:** A grand 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 edge of **Fláajökull**. The recreation and woodland area **Haukafell** and a camping area are east of **Fláajökull**.

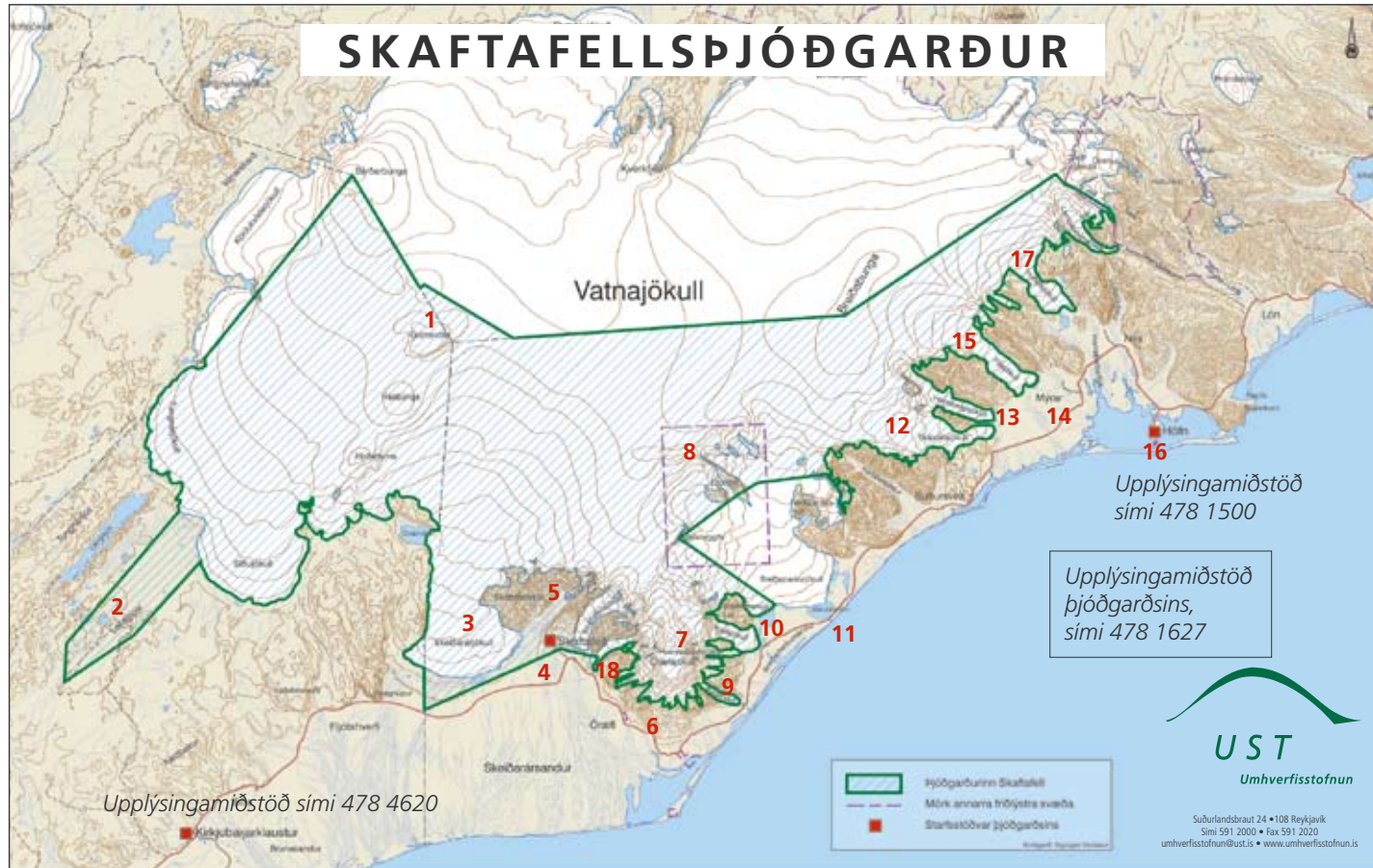
**14** From the hill **Eskey**, west of **Hólmsá**, is an excellent view of **Mýrar** and the valley glaciers which flow down to the lowlands. On **Eskey** are information signs describing the glaciers and glacial rivers which have long threatened habitation in **Mýrar**.

**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.** **Jöklajeppar** snowmobile and jeep tours of **Vatnajökull** glacier leave from **Skálafellsjökull** glacier. A jeep road takes you from **Smyrlabjargavirkjun** power station to the restaurant **Jöklael** at the glacier's edge. There is a marked path through interesting scenery from the farm **Skálafell** to the border of **Skálafellsjökull**.

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

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



**6** **Háalda** is an alluvial fan south of **Sandfell** mountain. In it is a kettle hole formed by an iceberg during the **Öræfajökull** volcanic eruption of 1727.

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

**8** **Esjufjöll** mountains are surrounded by a glacier. Vegetation has evolved here without influence of man and domestic animals.

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