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ICELAND

WHERE FIRE MEETS ICE

VOLCANOES, GLACIERS AND LIFE ON A RESTLESS ISLAND



THE BIG STORY
A COUNTRY LIKE NO OTHER

LIFE
ON A VOLCANIC ISLAND

THE LANGUAGE EDIT
10 WORDS FROM THE STORY

A Country Like *No Other*

Stand on a black beach in Iceland and the country explains itself in one view. Behind you, a volcano has turned to stone. In front of you, the Atlantic arrives cold and powerful. Not far away, ice that is hundreds of years old is slowly moving towards the sea.

> *In Iceland, fire and ice do not just coexist — they create each other.*



Reynisfjara, on the south coast: black sand, basalt and the Reynisdrangar sea stacks.

ONE ISLAND, TWO WORLDS

Iceland is often called the Land of Fire and Ice, and for once, a nickname is simply accurate. About a tenth of the country is covered by glaciers. At the same time, Iceland is one of the most volcanically active places on Earth.

A CRACK THROUGH A COUNTRY

Iceland sits on the Mid-Atlantic Ridge, the boundary between the North American and the Eurasian tectonic plates. The two plates are slowly moving apart — by about 2.5 centimetres a year, roughly the speed at which your fingernails grow.

ICE ON TOP OF FIRE

The clearest symbol is Vatnajökull, Europe's largest glacier by volume. It covers around 8% of Iceland, and beneath its ice there are active volcanoes. When one erupts, heat melts ice, water moves fast, and the landscape can change in hours.

A Land of *Contrasts*

Iceland is a place where opposite forces work together. Ice, fire, water and wind shape a landscape that is always changing.







Breiðamerkurjökull glacier; icebergs at Jökulsárlón; lava from an Icelandic eruption.

GLACIERS

Slow rivers of ice

Vatnajökull has more than 30 outlet glaciers and covers about 8% of the country. Its ice averages hundreds of metres in thickness — around 380 metres.

VOLCANOES

New land in the making

When magma reaches the surface, it becomes lava. Cooled lava builds dark fields, craters and mountains — and some volcanoes even sleep beneath the ice.

GEOTHERMAL FIELDS

Heat you can see

In places like Geysir, the ground steams, mud bubbles, and Strokkur sends water high into the air every few minutes — a natural fountain powered by heat.

BLACK SAND

A beach made of lava

At Reynisfjara the sand is black basalt — lava broken down by the ocean over thousands of years. Offshore, the Reynisdrangar sea stacks rise about 66 metres.

Life on a *Volcanic Island*

What is it like to build everyday life on top of a restless landscape? In Iceland, the answer is surprisingly practical: use the heat, respect the forces, and watch the ground carefully.

~90%

of homes are heated with geothermal energy

GEOTHERMAL ENERGY

The heat beneath Iceland's surface provides hot water, heating for homes, and a large part of the country's electricity. It is a clean, renewable source that Iceland uses every day — the same heat also warms outdoor pools and greenhouses across the country.

~100%

of electricity is renewable



Homes in Reykjavík, the capital.

WARM HOMES FROM COLD GROUND

More than 90% of Icelandic households are heated with geothermal water, according to Visit Iceland. Almost all electricity is renewable too — about 70% from hydropower and 30% from geothermal energy. Swimming is part of daily life too: outdoor pools stay open all year, even when snow is falling.

PREPARED, NOT AFRAID

Volcanoes and weather are monitored day and night by the Icelandic Meteorological Office. Roads close and plans change when nature requires it — and that is the system working as it should. When an eruption begins, the goal is simple: keep people safe and let nature pass.



Geothermal water fills outdoor pools and lagoons all year — even when snow is falling. Greenhouses use the same heat to grow tomatoes and cucumbers.

The Language Edit

Real words from a real place. Here are some key words from the story, with simple meanings and examples.

glacier *(noun)*
a large, slow-moving mass of ice
Vatnajökull is Europe's largest glacier.



erupt *(verb)*
to explode and send out lava, ash or gas
When a volcano erupts under ice, meltwater can flood the land.



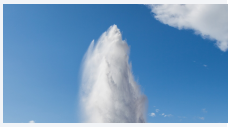
lava *(noun)*
hot, liquid rock on the surface of the Earth
Cooled lava formed the black sand at Reynisfjara.



tectonic plate *(noun phrase)*
a large piece of Earth's outer layer that can move
Iceland is between two tectonic plates.



geothermal *(adjective)*
related to heat from inside the Earth
Iceland uses geothermal energy to heat homes.



landscape *(noun)*
the appearance of an area of land
Fire and ice together shape Iceland's landscape.



melt *(verb)*
to become liquid because of heat
In spring, ice begins to melt and feed the rivers.



contrast *(noun)*
a clear difference between two things
The contrast between white ice and black lava is unforgettable.



powerful *(adjective)*
very strong
Visitors must respect the powerful waves at Reynisfjara.



shape *(verb)*
to form or influence something
Volcanoes and glaciers shape almost everything you see.



LANGUAGE IN CONTEXT

side by side • shaped by • thanks to • not only … but also … — patterns from this issue's story.

Five Things *You Didn't Know*

Iceland is full of surprises. Here are five interesting facts that show just how unique this country is.



The northern lights over Kirkjufell, in west Iceland.

1. **A day that almost never ends — and one that barely begins**

   Around the summer solstice, Iceland enjoys almost 24 hours of daylight. In midwinter, Reykjavík receives only about four to five hours of light.

2. **You can snorkel between two continents**

   At Silfra, in Thingvellir, glacial water filtered through lava for decades fills the fissure between the plates. Visibility can exceed 100 metres; the water stays at 2–4 °C.

3. **Your surname would work differently here**

   Most Icelanders do not inherit a family surname. A child takes a parent's first name plus -son or -dóttir: Jon's daughter Anna is Anna Jónsdóttir.

4. **The northern lights need darkness, not cold**

   The aurora is caused by charged particles from the Sun meeting Earth's upper atmosphere. Watch for it under clear, dark skies, most often between September and April.

5. **An eruption can happen under ice**

   Several active volcanoes sleep beneath Vatnajökull, including Grímsvötn. An eruption there can melt huge amounts of ice fast, producing glacial floods — jökulhlaup.

THINK ABOUT IT

If fire and ice both create and destroy, which one has shaped Iceland more? Why?

Your Perspective

Now it's your turn. Read, think, speak and write about Iceland.

READ & THINK

1. Why is Iceland called the Land of Fire and Ice?
2. What is happening to the two tectonic plates, and how fast?
3. How does geothermal energy change everyday life?
4. Why can Reynisfjara be dangerous?
5. Which fact surprised you most?

SPEAK

Discuss with a partner:
• Would you like to visit Iceland? Why or why not?
• Is it a good idea to live near a volcano? Explain.
• What natural place in your country is similar to Iceland?

SPEAKING CHALLENGE (60–90 seconds): speak as a guide in Iceland — Point → Reason → Example → Point.

WRITE

Write a short paragraph (100–120 words):
Imagine you are in Iceland. Describe a place you visit, what you see, and how it makes you feel.
Start with: “You wouldn't believe this place…”

Word bank: glacier • lava • landscape • powerful • contrast • geothermal • melt • shape • first • in contrast • thanks to



Thingvellir National Park — the rift valley between two continents, where this issue's story begins.

REFLECT

If you could live for one month in a landscape shaped by nature's extremes, would you choose Iceland? What would you gain — and what would you miss?

EDITORIAL SOURCES

Visit Iceland — Renewable Energy in Iceland: visiticeland.com/article/renewable-energy • Icelandic Meteorological Office: en.vedur.is

Natural Science Institute of Iceland: natt.is/en • Vatnajökull National Park: vatnajokulsthjodgardur.is • UNESCO — Thingvellir National Park: whc.unesco.org/en/list/1152

Photographs: Wikimedia Commons contributors (Litli-Hrútur, Jökulsárlón, Thingvellir, Reynisfjara, Strokkur at Geysir, Breiðamerkurjökull, Kirkjufell, Reykjavík, Blue Lagoon).

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