

POINTS BEYOND

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REYKJAVIK, ICELAND † MAY 2020

ENJOY WHALE WATCHING!

No matter where you depart from, the tours offer a rare and stunning opportunity to observe whales in their natural environment alongside white-beaked dolphins, harbor porpoises, seals, basking sharks, and various sea birds—including puffins, Gannets, gulls, Arctic Terns and others—depending on the season.

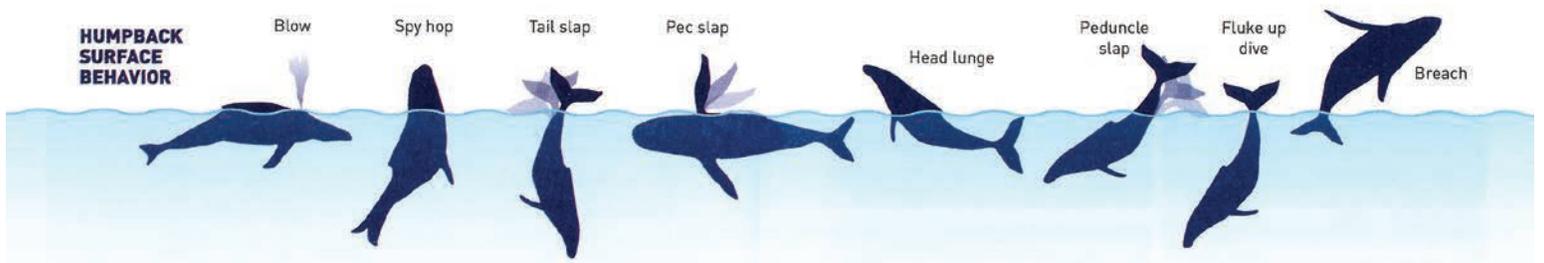
Whale watching tours are less frequent during the day in the winter months but come with the added bonus of beautiful and stark scenery; snowcapped mountains, sunsets, and possibly even the chance to see the Northern Lights.

Many species of whales can be seen in the waters around Iceland. The cool, clear North Atlantic Ocean encircling Iceland is rich with food for whales of various sizes and species. Most common are minke whales and white-beaked dolphins, but killer whales are also frequently seen. The most famous killer whale of all times, Keiko, perhaps better known as Willy, was born and caught in Icelandic waters.

Currently, 23 species of cetaceans are being spotted in Iceland. If you are lucky, you can see the huge humpback whales, waving their flukes and sometimes leaping, a sight that will amaze you. Humpback whale flukes are large, notched in the centre, and the whales nearly always show them when leaving the surface. Sperm whales are rarely spotted and pilot whales only at times. Porpoises frequently leap near the whale watching boats and follow them playfully around.

The most prolific time for whale watching in Iceland is during the summer months, from April through September, when over 20 species of cetacea—including the orca, minke, humpback, and blue whale—can be seen in the north Atlantic and Arctic oceans on either side of the island.





7 Whales In Iceland Facts

- Whale watching tours in Iceland have an incredible success rate
- Blue whales, the largest mammals on earth, migrate into Icelandic waters
- Humpback, minke, sperm, pilot and fin whales are seen most often
- Whales are not shy, they often swim very close to the whale watching boats
- Around 24 species of whale / cetacean swim in the oceans around Iceland
- Dolphins and porpoises are frequently seen
- Sperm whales are the largest-toothed whale – each tooth weighs around 1 kg



Whales In Iceland

Humpback whales

Humpbacks are the most vigorously acrobatic whales, appearing in large numbers from April to October. Although, they are now spotted far more often than they used to be in January, February and March. They are extraordinarily exciting to watch, their astonishing leaping antics make them great subjects for stunning videos and photographs. Adults usually reach 16 meters (52 feet) to 18 meters (59 feet) in length, they can easily weigh 30,000 to 35,000 kg, sometimes even 40,000 kg.



Orcas

Orcas are most often seen around Snæfellsnes, a craggy and beautiful peninsula in West Iceland. Orcas are also known as killer whales, so are they aggressive? They are certainly very friendly towards groups of whale-watching tourists, often swimming really close to the boats! However, they have a very strong killer instinct when it comes to other whales, they sometimes suffocate humpback whales by leaping onto their backs, which covers over their blowholes! In whale terms killer whales/orcas are not that large, weighing between 3400 kg and 5600 kg.



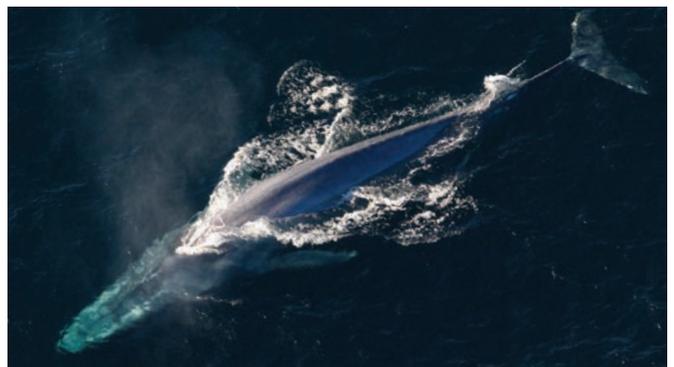
Fin whales

Fin whales are the second largest mammal inhabiting the earth, they can often be seen in the waters around North Iceland. These glossy marine giants can be up to 26 m (85 ft) in length, and grow to weights of around 80,000 kg, although there have specimens which were estimated to weigh as much as 114,000 kg. Their elegant bodies are proportionally slightly more slender than other whales, they have a greyish brown color, their undersides are paler.



Blue whales

These giants of the deep are the largest animals on the planet, they can reach lengths of 33 meters (108 feet) and weights of up to 190,000 kg. Blue whales can live to 90 years, surviving on a diet of krill and plankton. It is hard to imagine the vast quantity of these foods which is required to sustain a creature of this size! North Iceland is a particularly good location for sightings of blue whales, the bay of Skjálfandafló, Eyjafjörður, the longest fjord in Iceland and Húsavík are all particularly famous locations. They have been spotted in South Iceland as well.



Minke whales

Like humpback whales, minke whales are very frequently spotted all around the coast of Iceland. They can grow to around 8.5 meters (28 feet) in length and weigh between 5,000 kg and 10,000 kg, so, in whale terms they are beautiful but not large. When they are in Arctic waters they eat small fish such as sardines, herring and cod, in the Antarctic they are nourished, almost exclusively by krill. They can be found all around the coast of Iceland.





The Best Places To See Whales In Iceland

Whale watching tours are operated from many of Iceland's harbors. All tour operators have a high success rate, however, those in the north can boast the best success rates of all. Two stunning tours on Eyjafjörður, a magnificent fjord in North Iceland, are operated from Dalvík, giving you the best chance in Iceland of spotting acrobatic humpback whales. The standard whale watching boat trip (whales sighted on 98% of trips) will take you across this long mountain-framed fjord. The fast and exciting whale watching adventure by super-fast rib boat tour has an even higher whale-sighting rate of 99%. If you want the best ever chance of seeing humpbacks this is the tours to opt for, on this fast boat you will also see more of the stupendous Eyjafjörður scenery.

Whale watching tours from Reykjavík are hugely fun and also enormously successful when it comes to sighting whales, dolphins and other ocean wildlife around the bay of Faxaflói. The top places to see killer whales/orcas is around the Snæfellsness peninsula but they can certainly be seen from other locations. My choice would be a whale watching tour on Eyjafjörður!

South -vs- North for whale watching

Boat tours from North Icelandic ports have a slightly higher sighting rate than tours from South Iceland. Another advantage is fin whales are often spotted on whale watching boat trips from North Iceland. There are probably no more than 50,000 to 100,000 fin whales in the North Atlantic Ocean, so it is remarkable they are sighted as frequently as they are. Incredible Blue Whales are, also, far more prevalent in the waters around North Iceland.