

Europe, July to September 2026

August 26, Djupivogur

Another day, another small town in Iceland. This is our last day here, and the smallest town, about 500 people. This is it to the right, just about the entire town. The excursion today was a walking tour. Two hours. What can you do in a town of 500 people that takes two hours? Well, you can leave the town and walk on the roads. Which is what we did.



Here are some highlights. Our guide was an ex-school teacher whose specialty was geology and biology. There were some talks about the plant life, but the interesting points were when he picked up gravel stones from the roadway and explained their origin: volcanic and sedimentary. Maybe I am exaggerating a bit on my enthusiasm, but how many nature walks have you been on where significant time was spent explaining gravel? I can honestly say it was the most interesting of those types of walks I have ever attended.



There were two interesting points when we got back to town. One was a statue to Hans Jonathan, an escaped slave who became the first black person to settle in Iceland (early 1800s). He was welcomed by the community, even though no one had ever seen a black person before. He married, raised a family, and enjoyed life. He was honored by this statue. His descendants (who number in the 100s) took part in a modern-day DNA study to reconstruct his DNA even though they had no access to his remains. The story is [here](#).

The important point is that the people in this town are proud of the fact that he was treated like one of the villagers, ignoring his differences.

The other picture is completely different. The cliffs around town are nesting spots for fulmars. These birds lay one egg a year. They can afford to do this because fulmars have a life span of over 30 years. The parents spend the chick's early days overfeeding it. When it's time for the



newborn to leave the nest, we were told, flying lessons are often for naught. Some birds can be too heavy to fly and stumble down the cliff. We were also told that this is the reason most nests are near the sea, so the aquatic bird can still make it to water. I managed to get this picture, mother and child, by climbing only a few feet, or, in this case, a few meters.

Other facts about this area of Iceland. The town here has one policeman and he only started working two years ago. Before that, there were none. No need.

Also, towns like this originated as fishing villages, and fishing is still a major source of income. Over the years, the dangers of the sea took many fisherman when they failed to return. What was unusual is that some of them died after their boats capsized very close to shore. Turns out that very few Icelanders knew how to swim. Seems inconsistent.

A problem with an obvious solution is solved by legislation. Starting about 1940, Iceland passed a law requiring everyone to learn to swim. In 1943, swimming became a required course in all schools. Today, every village, even small ones like this, have swimming pools. Initially, it was to

facilitate instruction. Now, it's like a local pub. People who want to catch up with others in the village go down to the local swimming pool. Guides on all the excursions in Iceland make a point of identifying their local pool.

I leave you with one story, the biggest one even though it's about what we did not see. Two of the tours were booked as "Puffin Watching". Like the whale watching boat ride yesterday was really "Whale and Puffin Watching". Just that puffins leave in mid-July and we were a bit late. So, puffin-less.

We were told a story by a ship lecturer. There are many puffin stories. This one was neat. Puffins live in the colder northern climates that are, historically, not polluted by humans. When they finally leave the nest, they fly at night and rest during the day. With more and more humans in these parts, some islands now have lights at night and this confuses the puffins. They land prematurely and have trouble getting back in the air. Puffins can take off from land only if they have a slope or a cliff to jump from. They cannot gain lift from jogging down a roadway or field. The confusion caused by the lights is significant, and thousands of Puffins can get stuck.

One of the biggest places where this occurs is Westman Islands in Iceland. The puffin population there is estimated to be 1.5 to 2 million, and many of them get confused. So, the island has a puffin rescue operation. Almost everyone on the island, children and adults, go puffin-rescuing at night in late summer. They mostly rescue juvenile puffins called pufflings. There is a great video, fun to watch, right [here](#). If this link does not work, try searching for "Westman islands puffin rescue video." It's worth it.