# ICELAND



## Pingvellir

The area's geophysical magnificence and the fact that this was where all the major traditional travel routes met meant that Pingvellir became a natural meeting place in ancient history. Local leaders ruled from here but in the end had to yield to the power of the kings of Norway and then of Denmark. Eventually the centre of administration shifted to Reykjavik.

Pingvellir boasts the biggest lake in Iceland and the watery world around here is home to a huge array of wild life - particularly migratory birds. We took time to watch many geese waddle and swim by us - mum and dad with lots of ducklings in tow.

The other observation Heather made was the large number of horses. We saw them everywhere

## Fire Steam Water

The plan today was to delve more deeply into Iceland's fascinating history in Pingvellir; come fact to face with the geyser after which all geysers are named, and get up close and personal with the majestic Gullfoss waterfall.

We set out this morning for a 50km drive to the north. The day was chilly but the sun was shining. We were always looking forward to experiencing the geographic wonders of Iceland but were concerned that the weather might be a problem. The closer we got to our destination the warmer the day got. When we finally arrived in Pingvellir, Iceland's first national park and a UNESCO World Heritage Site, we jettisoned our coats and stripped down to our T shirts - it was actually very pleasant. Pingvellir is Iceland's most important historical site and we were blown away with its natural beauty. In the 9th century the Vikings's established the world's first democratic parliament on this site. No structures remain but the site has a superb natural setting inside an


LITTLE GEYSER Not sure why they call this the little geyser. No bigger than the kitchen sink and for the 30mins we were in the area it never blew its top.

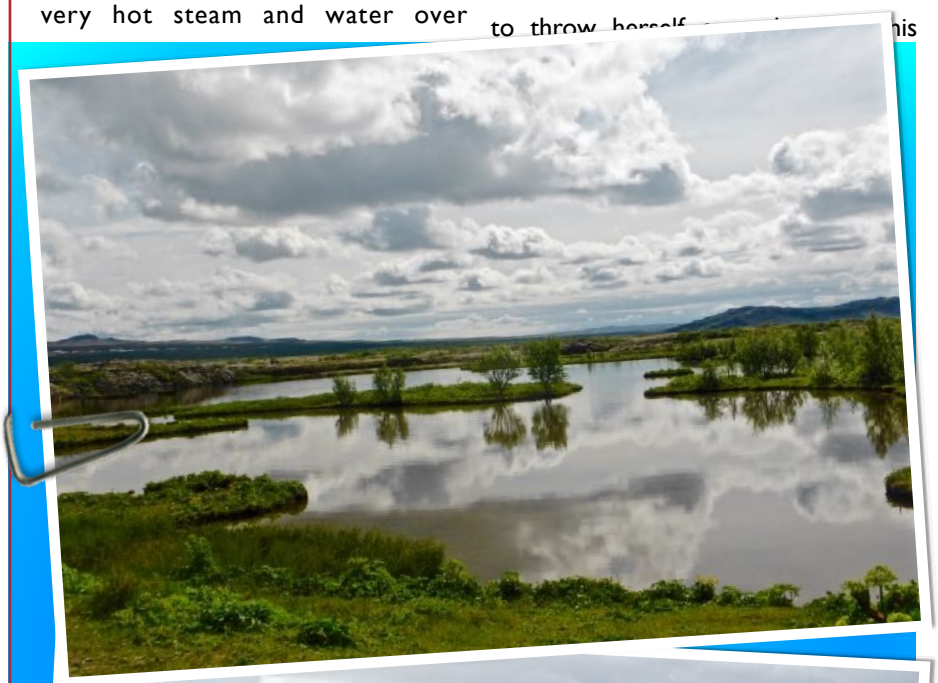
THE WALL The stark outline of the large number of people silhouetted against the sky made it look like a movie set.

DRENCHING We heard the screams of onlookers as the wind direction changed. People standing down wind got totally

# Middle Earth

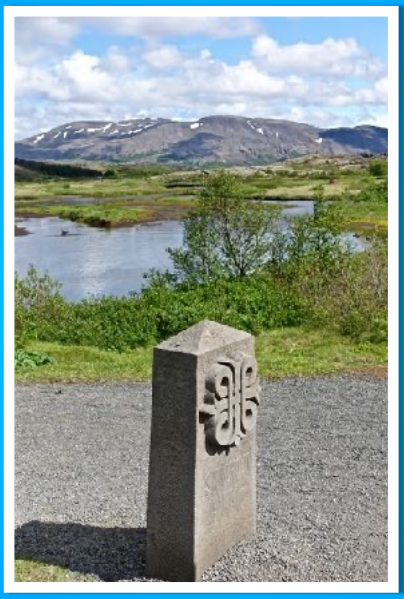
After a couple of delightful hours walking around Pingvellir we drove on to find the world famous Geyser geothermal water spout. Much to our surprise it was crawling with tourists. Evidently the spout would regularly shoot to 80m high but in the 1950's some stupid tourists threw rocks into the spout and it blocked its output and ferocity. Its now clogged. Next door to it though is a sibling which is not only impressive but spouts every 5 minutes. We sat and watched from a distance as this spout blew its top and sprayed very hot steam and water over onlookers (the wind changed direction many times).

Our next destination was Gullfoss. We had heard and seen the falls on TV documentaries but it was only when you got close to it that we realised how impressive it is. The amount of water flowing over its two drops of 32m is incredible. The spray can be seen some distance away and the place is very wet. In 1920 a private consortium wanted to turn the falls into a power generation site but the daughter of the land owner threatened to throw herself [illegible] his



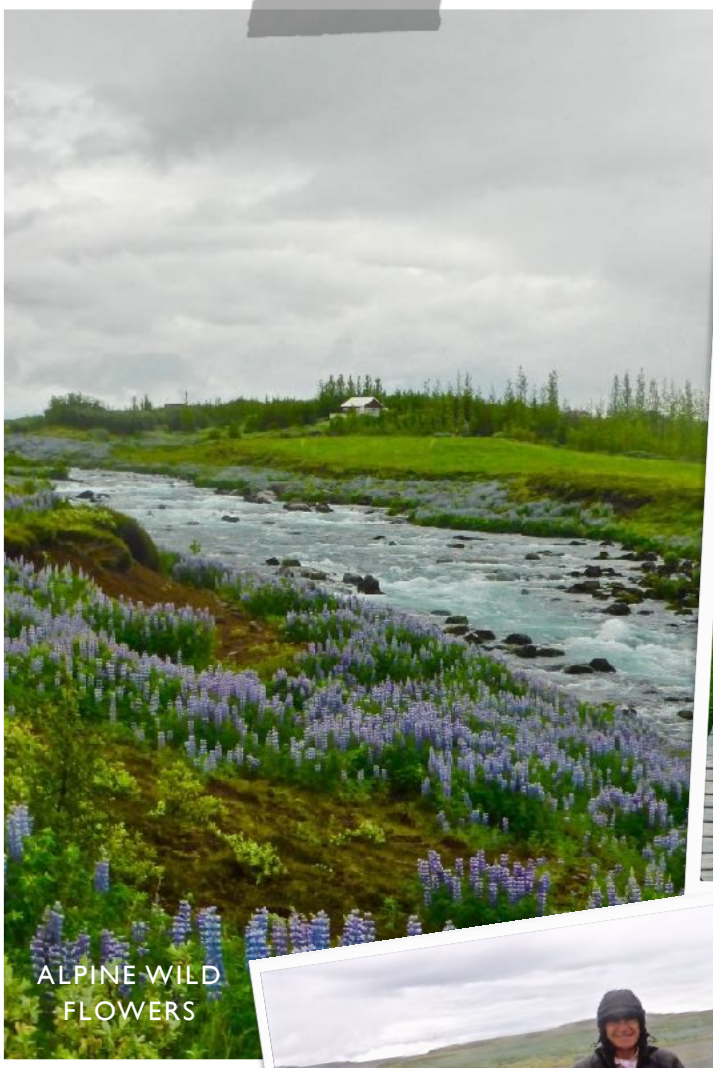
GULLFOSS

EAST MEETS WEST

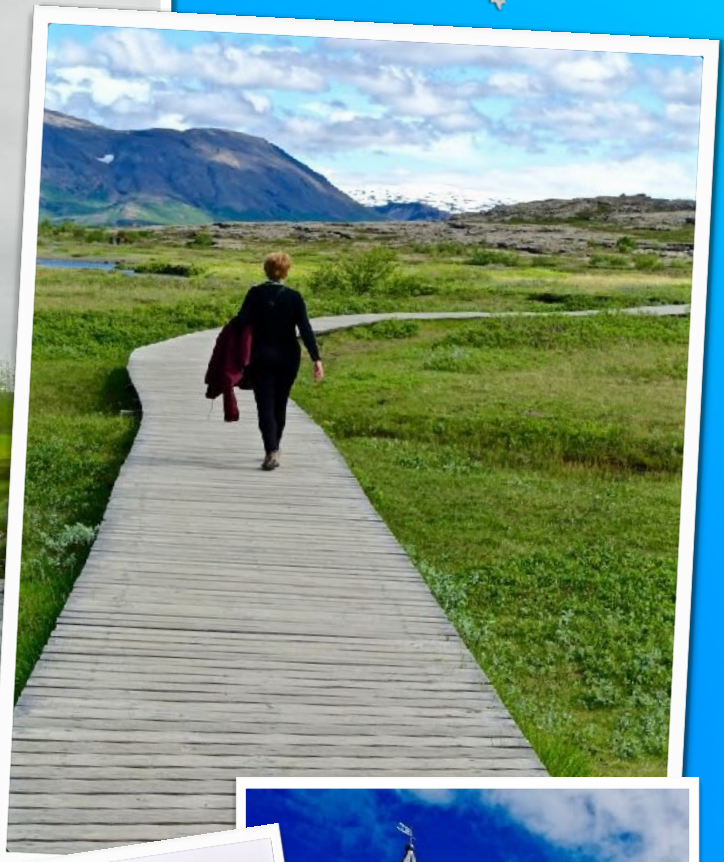


THE WALL

# PHOTOS



ALPINE WILD FLOWERS



ICELAND'S FIRST CHURCH

DISTANT HORIZONS

STARK LANDSCAPE

EYJAFJALLAJÖKULL - THE VOLCANO THAT BLEW ITS TOP IN 2010/11.