

Iceland on Film

by Dr Joy Ang Jing Zhi, House Officer, KKH O&G

Like many around the world, I have not had the opportunity to travel since the COVID pandemic. As travel restrictions eased up in late 2021, the thought of travelling probably never crossed any of our minds, given that we were all working hard towards one common goal at that point in time – completion of MBBS. Most of us wouldn't risk any chance of catching COVID prior to MBBS, nor would we have been able to enjoy ourselves had we taken the two weeks prior to MBBS to travel.

However, the rigour of preparing for MBBS and the social media posts of other friends outside of medicine slowly but surely got to us. In between the short breaks I took between studying, I started looking up travel restrictions and testing requirements to explore my options for travel post-MBBS. This then slowly led to me bouncing off ideas with one of my batchmates, Dionne, with whom I have taken a few dive trips during the earlier years of medical school. We had a good three weeks that we could use to travel after our Student Assistantship Programme (SAP) and prior to the commencement of Housemanship, and we decided on our destination – Iceland.

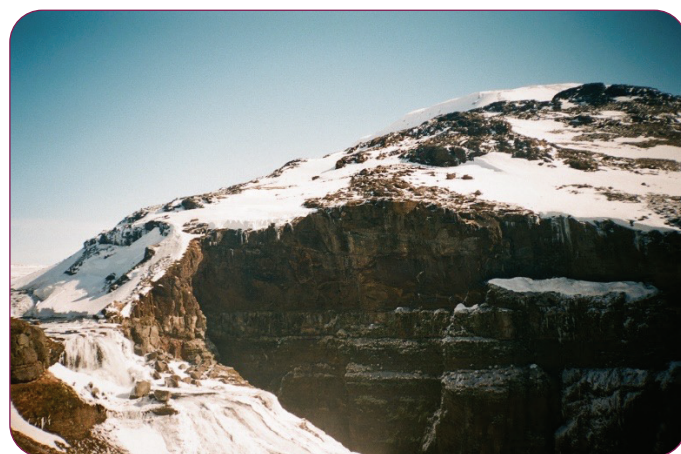
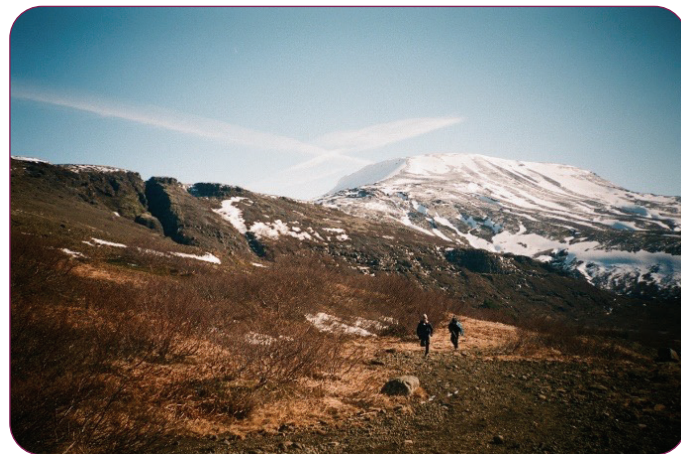
After a full day of travelling and countless rounds of Monopoly Deal at the Finnish Airport during our layover, we finally arrived in Iceland. As we pulled into the city centre of Reykjavík, we were greeted by the majestic sight of Hallgrímskirkja, easily the most iconic building in Iceland.



The infrastructure of Hallgrímskirkja initially reminded me of a normal distribution curve – but on reading up, it was interesting to find out that the infrastructure was largely influenced by the landscape of Iceland, mainly the glaciers and mountains, further reinforcing its status as an important symbol of Iceland's identity.

During our trip, we rented a car, which allowed us to have the freedom to pick the places that we wanted to explore

at our own pace. We planned several day hikes during the trip, one of which was a 3-hour hike up to Glymur Waterfall.



Though the trail up was largely without tree cover, it was rather tolerable given the low temperature of Iceland. The trail was unlike anything in the tropical countries, with patches of frozen streams and vast fields of dried flora and mountains in the background. We prepared some kimbap (Korean dish made from cooked rice and ingredients such as vegetables, fish, and meats that are rolled in dried sheets of seaweed) for the hike. Those made for the perfect lunch during the hike, given the natural refrigeration; we didn't have to worry about the food going bad. As we approached the waterfall, we could hear the burble from the waterfall, which built up our anticipation to what would greet us. As we turned the corner, the view up top was nothing less than a reward for our hike. I don't think any photo or image would ever do the waterfall justice. It was probably at that point in time that it dawned upon me how lucky I was to be able to be there, taking everything in.

While we did choose a few off beaten trails to hike on, we were not about to miss the various tourist attractions like driving through the Golden Circle. Here we have Þingvellir National Park featuring Oxarfoss Waterfall, the Geysir Geothermal Area, and the Gullfoss Waterfall.



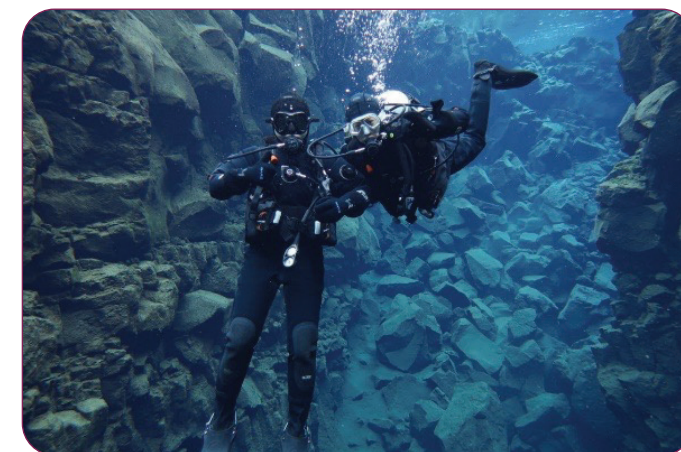
The other two locations that I thought were rather intriguing included the Diamond Beach and the Sólheimasandur plane crash. Looking at the photo, do you have any idea as to why the beach may be called a Diamond beach? While sporting black sand, the beach takes its name from the glittering icebergs scattered across its shore like a field of diamonds – nothing like what we have back home! The very next day, we stopped by the Sólheimasandur plane crash site. We had to walk about an hour in the wind-gushed open sand to get there. The story behind this wreck makes for a good dinner table conversation – only because everyone in the wreck had supposedly survived, and it happened purely due to the pilot switching over to the wrong fuel tank.



You may have noticed that the photos appear to have some filter applied to it. The truth is that they aren't filtered! These are film photos that I took during the trip. During lockdown in COVID, I was looking for something to learn to occupy my time, and chose to learn more about film photography. The beauty of film is that you can never predict how your photos will turn out – without a screen and the gridlines to guide you, you will never know if the photos are over- or under-exposed or if they are even straight!

Unfortunately, the highlight of the trip could not be captured on film. Iceland sits on two tectonic plates – the North American and Eurasian tectonic plates. The edges of

the plates can be appreciated in Þingvellir National Park and it is the only place on Earth where you can dive in between two tectonic plates. Having scuba-dived in many tropical countries where temperatures are well above 20 degrees Celsius, I was shocked to learn that one could dive in between the tectonic plates where the water temperature stays at 2 degrees Celsius all year around. Nevertheless, I took up the suggestion of my friend, and both of us signed up for a dry suit certification course with the help of a Singapore-based dive company that we had previously dived with. We soon found ourselves in 2-degree waters for more than 30 minutes, without any frostbites. Naturally, there were no living organisms to appreciate but the visibility was like no other dive sites – our dive master said that visibility could be as good as 100 metres on a good day (in comparison to Singapore waters where a 3-metre visibility is considered a good day).



Photos will never do the sights in Iceland justice, but they serve as a good way to remember the good times we had there. I find myself looking back at those times, and counting my blessings, knowing how fortunate I was to be able to make a trip there prior to starting work.



Dr Joy Ang (first from right).