

Iceland – 2007

Introduction: Iceland had been on the list of interesting sounding places for quite awhile. So, when a time slot opened up (sort of) in July, and after debating a bit on Iceland or Galapagos or a couple of other candidate places, we decided to go there. Unfortunately there are presently no Icelandair flights from the West Coast which makes it a pain to get there; and also rather expensive since it is the short summer/tourist season for Iceland. But then's the breaks. We made some arrangements over the Internet; like flights, a rental car, and places to sleep at the start and end of the outing, and off we went. The general game plan was to go around the Island counterclockwise, ending with at least a day in the capital city (Reykjavik).

Monday/Tuesday-1: Nathan picked us up prior to 8 PM, dropped us at SFO, and we checked in for the redeye flight to JFK. One either had to do a redeye to the East Coast or a redeye from the East Coast to Iceland and this approach seemed the lesser of those two evils. Due to the recent terrorist activities in the UK and heightened security at US airports we went to SFO a bit earlier than we might have and found no lines anywhere so had quite a bit of time to kill after getting to our gate area. The plane left on time (10:30 PM) and we had a two seat (window/isle) combination. Tried to get some rest and were soon at JFK with a half dozen hours to kill; the painful part of the outing. Wandered around, had a meal, went through another security checkpoint, semi-napped, and eventually were in the air again. This time on Icelandair where we had 2 seats of a three-seat combo so could spread out a little, with me looking out the window (as always). The route was interesting as we basically flew northeast up the coast of the US and Canada only eventually getting over water. Landed on time (11:30 PM local or 4:30 PM in Cupertino). The cool thing was seeing the Sun still above the horizon as we flew into the airport and landed; yup basically at midnight.

Went through customs somewhat slowly, picked up the one bag we had checked (had treated our suitcase backpacks as carry-on so could survive if the checked bag never made it) and went through Security again. Weird/Surprising to go through Security on the way into a country and we had to give up our water bottles, which we had gotten through at SFO and JFK by having them empty when going through Security but certainly never thought to do it as we entered Iceland itself. Got some local money (had to use US dollars because the ATM wasn't right for either of our cards) and took a cab to our hotel. About a 10 minute ride as we had deliberately gotten something very close to the airport, which itself is 45 km from R. In theory our hotel Internet "package" included the cost of a taxi (~\$25) and that worked out quite smoothly. Into bed for a needed stretchout and rest.

Wednesday-1 (4th of July): Got up slowly and had breakfast (included with the room). Got some more money from an ATM (it only wanted a 4 digit code but the first 4 digits of our 5 digit code worked; so no repeat of our problems with ATMs in Panama) and then went back to the airport to pickup our rental car. That trip was free too since the hotel person said we could ride with someone who was using their one-way chit to go to their plane. Picked up our car, a small Toyota, and off we went. Our general approach was

going to be to circle the island taking a variety of offshoots along the way. The first of these was basically right away as we cut through Reykjanesfjallavangur reserve – “three showpieces are Kleifarvatn, a deep gray lake with submerged hot springs and black-sand beaches; the spitting, bubbling geothermal zone at Seltun; and the southwest’s largest bird cliffs, the epic Krysuvikurberg” – these quotes, and those throughout the letter, indicate the words are from Lonely Planet or perhaps some other tourist information. Stopped at the first two of the noted items, the third was too hard to find this early in our outing. Did some walking amongst the geothermal zone. Enjoyed various wildflowers along the road. Much to our happiness it was not rainy and in fact the car got too warm what with the Sun on it and no A/C. Hadn’t even checked on A/C when we made our reservation and wouldn’t expect to use it very much in any case. Bought a few staples (water, cheese, crackers) at a gas station store along the way and continued onward stopping whenever something interested appeared, such as scenic views, lava fields, seaside villages, glacier views, waterfalls, you name it.

At one very picturesque village (Eyrarbakki) we had lunch at an upscale place. Excellent halibut. Near Vik we took a side road “down to the black volcanic beach at Reynisfjara, which is backed by an incredible stack of basal columns, which look like a giant church organ.” Really neat. Turns out basalt columns are all over Iceland; they are somewhat similar to the Devil’s Postpile in the Eastern Sierras. This black-sand beach was also one of the best places we’ve ever found for Dawna to hunt for the perfect sphere rock; so our wandering along it was done slowly. The weather had now gotten overcast and somewhat spitty. Too bad as it distracted from seeing the upper extent of some of the glaciers. Did view several excellent waterfalls and some fields of lupine (larger fields later on, actually). Drove on to Kiirkjubaejarklaustur (gosh, wonder if these names were created by a monkey at a keyboard?). I had made reservations at a place near there figuring that we didn’t need to be hunting for a place on our first real night on the road when we’d be tired, etc. Was out in the countryside a few kms from K and kinda strange (good for retreats I gather) but certainly comfortable. Our room looked out on a small lake and then countryside and across to some mountains with glaciers. We enjoyed the view as we snacked a bit and opened the box of wine we had brought from California. Dawna got a good night’s sleep, having not done so well the prior night.

Thursday-1: Up a bit early (since breakfast was like 8 AM) so took a walk down to the lake. Nice scenery. Then had breakfast in the dining room looking out a window at the scene; pretty nice way to start the day. Good coffee by the way, which turned out to be the case every day of the entire trip, and a variety of cheeses, meats, bakery goods, and pickled herring. Filled up and then headed onward, stopping in K to see a different basalt configuration. Headed east looking at waterfalls and glaciers and the Sandar as we went (“the drive from K to Hofn is truly mind-blowing”). Sandar areas are very flat and desolate having been caused by glaciers sliding from the mountain to the sea and leaving gravel everywhere (“The sandar here are so impressively huge and awful that the Icelandic words is used internationally to describe this topographic phenomenon.”). Only in the last 50 years have they built a road through here, including impressive bridges that still sometimes get washed out by torrents of water coming down from the glaciers. Another aspect of the drive was the large number of one-lane bridges; so had to keep our

eyes open for traffic from the other direction and determine who got to go across first (albeit usually there was no traffic coming). Other roadside comments: (a) many of the gravel looking slopes were at very steep (like 45 degrees) angles, wildflowers continued, many waterfowl, and many sheep (all true for most of the trip so I'll not repeat it too often).

Stopped at Skatafell National Park and did a modest hike to a super waterfall; where more basalt columns made it extra picturesque. More wildflowers as well. Overcast but not rainy. Onward with the cloud cover (or fog, but I'll not try to distinguish between them during the rest of this epistle) harming our views. In fact it was quite thick when we got to our next stopping point, Jokulsarloin, where the river is full of icebergs calving and sending pieces out to the ocean. We were going to take a boat out into this river outlet but it was spitty, cold, and cloudy plus one could walk along the shore and see the icebergs up close so we did that instead. Very neat but would have been better without the clouds/fog. Attempted to get supposedly good fish soup at the café there but it was so crowded with tourists we just left and continued down the road. At Hofn we decided it was time to stop for the day; and got a room in a Guesthouse. Had dinner at about the only option in town (probably OK fish, don't remember) and then did a bit of walking around.

Friday-1: There was a bakery associated with a supermarket and we had a pastry and coffee there. Learned that the custom was refills were free (the first cup cost plenty) and what with the coffee being quite good we did it up well. Plus Dawna chatted with a local lady with a baby who was sitting next to us. Then, off we went, heading over and up the coast. Many many fiords, fine ocean and mountain scenes; too cloudy for great mountain scenes, however. Discovered that although Hiway-1 was the only round the island road various long strips of it were gravel; which was in good condition, however. Checked out various fishing villages, usually driving off the main road to investigate the harbor and its boats. When Hiway-1 turned inland to go to the major town in eastern Iceland (Egilsstadir) we stayed on the ocean/fiord stretch of road. Couple of spectacular fiords what with a village at the most interior point, mountains with snow on both sides, picturesque water, etc. At one of them (Eskifjodour) I did a local fishing museum while Dawna took a little rest in the car. The museum was quite good by the way. The road then goes inland to the edge of Egilsstadir and then back to the water to a village named Seydisfjordur ("If you visit only one town in the Eastfjords, this picturesque place should be it"). There was a spectacular mountain pass to cross getting there; rushing river, many waterfalls, etc. but unfortunately we could see very little of this due to heavy clouds/fog. Got to town, found accommodations, walked around in some drizzle with our umbrellas up, etc. Couldn't fully appreciate the setting as the clouds sat in on the surrounding mountains. Had dinner at the nicest place in town and it was a good meal (maybe lamb) in a nice atmosphere.

Saturday-1: Considered a hike to a couple of waterfalls but still very cloudy so we just left town, back across the pass with only a couple of waterfalls being seen by parking and walking a tad to see them; otherwise that heavy fog/clouds. Really too bad as I'm sure it was spectacular, but must admit LP warned that it is often fogged/clouded in. Gassed up

at Egilsstadir and then headed westward towards the Myvatn area. The road goes through some interior highland area, which the books says is boring but we enjoyed; hard for us not to enjoy new scenery, especially with a fine river, some waterfalls, farm/ranch land, moonscape-looking areas, etc to look at. A bit before Lake Myvatn we stopped at Krafla, a splendid geothermal area as well as “Iceland’s most awesome lava field.” Did a fair amount of walking around checking out things and then headed into town. First place we tried for a room, no one answered; second place, which handled 3 spots, was full. So we went a bit southward to another spot. It seemed to be mainly camping. A bit further down we saw a bed sign next to the road to a farmhouse, pulled in and got a room in the chap’s house. He had 4 cabins or so but the folks who pulled in right in front of us got the last one of those. This chap, and wife and dad, also had a smoked fish store on the premises and we agreed to having breakfast there the next morning if we could have smoked trout, which looked and tasted like lox to us.

After settling in we headed on southward doing the drive around the lake and stopping at special places along the way. This having sunlight for as long as you want it sure makes touring easy. First stop was about a km from our bed – “The giant lava field at Dimmuborgir is one of the most fascinating in the country with oddly shaped pillars, natural arches, caves and weird formations”. True enough and we had a quite nice walk through all this. One highlight of that walk was seeing 4 falcons on a high lava tower that let us watch them with our binoculars for as long as we wanted and from a variety of angles. The lava arches and caves were also quite neat. A bit further south, we did a short walk in a very pretty nature preserve, seeing a variety of birds in the waters next to the preserve. Then it was to the bottom of the lake where we checked out a series of pseudocraters near Skutustadagigar. This is black-fly country so I wore the hat I had purposely bought for the occasion as it has a net that unfolds from it and protect your face quite nicely. Had a hamburger for dinner there at a spot with a view. Oh, yes, the weather was quite nice over in this part of the country having pretty much cleared up once we headed westward across the interior; it’s supposed to be the drier part of Iceland. On around the lake we went, looked at various birds although won’t claim to have accomplished the following quote of “... incredible number of eider ducks, harlequin ducks, red-breasted mergansers, mallards, long-tailed ducks, pintail ducks, tufted ducks, wigeons, goosanders, teals, shovellers, shoooper swans, horned grebes, great norther divers, red-throated divers, black-headed gulls, ptarmigans, arctic terns, great skusas, several species of geese, ravens gyrfalcons, golden plovers, snipe, whimbrels, wheaters and lots of other species.” We did sit in our car and watch a mother duck and her 8 chicks cross the road single file and head off through the grasses in the same parade-like manner. Bought some gas, having to actually buy a gas card, via our Visa card, and use that at the pumps, and then back to our farm. At the farm we sat looking out at the lake, drinking some wine, and watching the fog form. Very peaceful/scenic and I stayed up a read awhile while Dawna hit the hay.

Sunday-1: Breakfast at our farm with a fine view and all the lox (or whatever it was) we could eat. Quite a treat. Then left town backtracking (eastward) a bit, stopping to explore an excellent area of mudpots and such. Then it was northward on a gravel road to Jokulsargljufur National Park. The highlight at this southern end of the park is Dettifoss

waterfalls, which has the “greatest volume of any waterfall in Europe” and is truly spectacular. You do a short walk to it and then can (and we did) a 1.5 km walk, sometimes over boulders, to a different (Selfoss) waterfall. All VERY spectacular and although it is quite a ways off the beaten track there were still quite a few people there. A bit further north there is a deeper canyon with some fine black sand beaches along the river. Onward to the top end (north) of the park where we checked out a new, and nice, Visitor Center plus an entirely different box canyon affair; which also involved a bit of walking/hiking. Next stop was a do-it-yourself investigation of some fine “giant cracks, fissures and garbens (depression between geological faults, this being part of the country where Iceland is being split in two as the two plates (North American and Eurasian) move opposite one another.” Neat to find some fissures ourselves, even if Dawna did take one stumble (not into a fissure) as we were exploring.

Rounded the top of the peninsula, getting to within 40 km or so of the Arctic Circle, to Husavik, the best place for whale-watching cruises; which had little interest to us. Instead we had a light lunch of soup; after finding out that the place advertising a reindeer special meant that was the special of yesterday, much to our disappointment, but the soup and beer were good. Drove on to the second largest city in Iceland, Akureyri (population 17,000!). Went to a guesthouse that I had previously communicated with but not made a reservation at and he had one room left so we took it. Nothing special really. Walked around the city, thinking we could do some shopping even though it was early evening; but it was Sunday and the store were closed. Had dinner at an Italian place that was fairly upscale and crowded. Dawna had catalonni and I had lasagna; with hers being the better of the two but neither being great; mine was like with minced beef (or maybe not even beef).

Monday-2: Walked the couple of blocks back to the city center but nowhere was open for breakfast yet. Tried to get into a written up church (Akureyrarkirkja) with a 3200-pipe organ, “a suspended ship hanging from the ceiling”, and a few other interesting sounding items, but it was locked; still fun looking at the exterior, however. Walked some of the area near the church, and decided not to check out the botanical garden that was relatively close by. Tried the church once more (still locked) and by now the Paris Cafe was open and we had fine coffee and a good apple-filled pastry. Then, hit the road again with a turn north to go around yet another mini-peninsula/fjord. The Sun was out, the grass was green, the water was blue, and all was well. In one village/place we watched a mother duck lead a half dozen ducklings across a road again. At the top of this peninsula is the village of Siglufjordur, which was once the herring capital of Iceland, and maybe the world, with a population of 10,000 people. Now it has 1,300 folks and a herring museum. We didn't do the museum but did enjoy the fine setting. Also, it meant we had now been in the most northern “city” in Iceland; some 40 km below the Arctic circle. Didn't play golf in the supposed most far north golf course (in Iceland or the world?) by the way. Then it was back down/south on the western side of the peninsula with more fine scenery.

Maybe this is a good time to speak of the countryside. Sheep, sheep, and sheep; along with horses and horses. A few cows, never saw a pig or a chicken. Much hay raising and cutting and bundling was in process. They rack it up into a pile, shape it into a cylinder

like item and then wrap it with a plastic. We saw all the equipment in use and were really impressed with the wrapping machine that put many many layers of plastic wrap around the hay bundle. The fields then had these white, cylinder-like, bundles all over them, which looked nice against the green ground. Never did see the trucks that must pick these bundles up and take them somewhere. The farms were picturesque with typically white walls and then colored roofs with all building of a farm having the same roof color, usually red or blue or yellow. The houses often had metal sides and we learned later that the wooden structure under the metal was typically made from driftwood (there aren't many trees on Iceland). That describes the countryside near the road looking inward, while if you looked towards the horizon you'd almost always see some mountains with snow/glaciers on them. Looking outward was blue ocean and lots of waterfowl along with nice cliffs and rocks. Yes, very NICE.

Back to the travel flow. We then took an offshoot to go to Hollar, a place that was quite important religion-wise from 1106 to nearly the present. It has the oldest stone church in Iceland, and the stone is a nice red sandstone. And the church has a fine interior, as do so many of them. Although I've not mentioned it the countryside is filled with fine looking, usually small and rather plain/simple, churches. At a museum in Reykjavik we learned that basically every large farm had a small church and how this fit into the economics of the system in terms of tax collection from the workers. Next down the road was the turf farm at Glaumbaer where the "fascinating collection of turf houses here are some of the finest remaining examples of early Icelandic buildings you'll see." It is now part of the National Museum and restored nicely and with a short guide sheet (in English) in hand we took our time seeing everything. We had previously seen a few turf houses and a quite neat turf church but this was the first time we saw an extensive set of rooms, furnished in a realistic manner. Next we headed west wanting to get a few miles under our belt before calling it a day. Picked Blonduos as a place to stay because it was the right time to stop and LP made it sound like a reasonable choice. Stopped at one spot where they had some cabins but couldn't find anyone to inquire of, went to a Guesthouse and had the same result, hunted down the hotel and finally found it, and learned that the person there handled all three facilities. We took a room in the Guesthouse; actually switching rooms midstream because the key for the assigned room didn't work right. An average Guesthouse but with a quite nice view of an inlet from the ocean that we watched while having a glass or two of wine. Then we went to dinner at the hotel where I had a traditional lamb broth thing and Dawna had a bargain special that was based on smoked pork. Both were OK and neither was great. I think this was the night that I woke up around 2 AM and looking out the window it was like a pretty sunset, but must have been a sunrise.

As a slight aside, on one of our peninsula/fiord loops we had the pleasure of going through a 3.2 km long one-way tunnel that was bored straight out of the mountain. Rather fun/spooky, but there were some pullouts in case you met an oncoming car.

Tuesday-2: Continued westward to our destination of the Snaefellsnes Peninsula, much of the traveling being on a gravel road; have I mentioned that these gravel roads were in great/graded shape with basically no washboarding. Although the day started out with

clouds it go nicer and nicer and when the Sun broke out the prettiness improved significantly what with the ocean now being bluer, the fields greener and being able to see the snow/mini-glaciers in the mountains. Went to the main town (Stykkisholmur) and inquired about a room at a guesthouse I had once communicated with a bit by e-mail. They only had a couple of single rooms left. The lady called two other places but they were full as well. So, we went over to the hotel and they had a room. The lady running the place only wanted our name in order to hold the room until later after it got made up, this being around noon; and we gave her our name. We then explored a bit, went into a book-mentioned place for lunch, wasn't impressed with the offerings and even less impressive with the slow service, so got up and walked out. Simply put, we were wanting to play tourist in the nice weather not sit inside a cafe waiting to give our order to someone. Headed out of town and towards another nice village. Right before we got there we pulled off where a sign said the farm had rooms and they did. It was basically like a long narrow cabin with three rooms and a kitchen and a bathroom. We took the only open room, moved our stuff into it, and continued onward to explore the peninsula.

Had a picnic lunch at a spot with a fine view in all directions, actually sitting at a picnic table. Up until now we had typically had our picnics in the warm car at sites that had picnic tables but it was too cool or windy or moist to want to use them. This time it was nice out and we had ocean and mountains and glaciers and sunshine. Took a road across the peninsula from the north side to the south side and once there we viewed a fine waterfall and then a nice church whose 'backyard' led to a fine beach after a nice little walk. Drove a bit westward to Hellnar where we took a walk along the top of some cliffs looking at fine formations below us as well as at a lot of birds. Continued around the peninsula with the view of the Snaefellsjokull glacier being outstanding from all directions. At the tip of the peninsula we followed the books suggestion of taking a bumpy road to some black cliffs but they weren't really worth the 6 km each way of rough road. Did get in another short exploratory walk at the end of the road however. By now we were headed back (east) along the top of the peninsula. Explored a couple of fishing villages, finally ending up having fish and chips at a cafe; OK but not great. Then it was back to our farm. The view of the bay/inlet from our farm was outstanding and we wandered around looking at things nearby and on the farm and at the view of our quite nice fiord. Still excellent weather. Eventually went to bed.

Wednesday-2: Began to work our way to Reykjavik but in no hurry. Back across the peninsula and onward to the village of Borgarnes where after asking two or three times we found the place for coffee and a pastry, overlooking an inlet (now being the Atlantic rather than the Arctic ocean I guess). Next checked out a nice city park "where the burial mound of the father and son of saga hero Egill Skallagrimsson can be seen" as we were now in the major area for all the Saga stuff; which we weren't up on enough to really spend much time on but we had to do a little bit and we did (both here and at a few other spots). Some folks spend their entire vacation doing the Saga stuff up right. A bit later we did visit a spot with a fine old church, a Sago Learning Center, and some nice grounds. After that we headed inland a bit to see a couple of fine/interesting waterfalls; one of which, Hraunfossar is "a series of trickling cascades that emerge as if by magic from beneath an ancient lava flow." We thought this was really neat to look at. Getting on a

less good gravel road we then went to investigate some lava caves. Got in a nice walk on the lava but weren't impressed with the caves aspect of the neatly barren landscape. We then headed further into the interior on worsening gravel/rocky roads. Had a picnic lunch staring at some wonderful glaciers, slow driving on a rocky surface but with grand views, probably caused a hole in the car's muffler, and eventually came into the north end of Pingvellir National Park. Various things to see at this park but we were getting somewhat eager to get to R and the main thing we wanted to see was "a series of dramatic fissures, including the great rift Almannagja" and we did it up nicely with a couple of walks along/in it. Really spectacular/fun. Then took a paved road and raced into R.

After various e-mail interactions I had reserved a Guesthouse (Odinn) in R but had never given them a credit card or anything so we were a tad bit nervous showing up at 7 PM. No problem. Checked into our quite reasonable room, took all our suitcases and junk from the car up to our room for eventual sorting and packing for going home, drank some wine, and then went to dinner at a place Dawna picked out of the book. Upscale (for us) and a bit put-on (especially the head waiter) but also "wonderfully distinctive – it feels like a quirky upper-class 1950s drawing room." Excellent meal with my sole being outstanding and Dawna's fish (Monkfish?) being fine as well. A good splurge. Bit of after dinner walking and then back and to bed. The weather was excellent, it is light forever of course, so the evenings tended to get on the late side. Nevertheless I took advantage of the wireless service at the guesthouse and spent a bunch of time on the Internet both that evening and a couple of times during the next day. When it comes to major cities my approach is to pick 3 or 4 places from Lonely Planet and/or some other source, e-mail them, and then make a selection trying to get a place that is within easy walking distance of the main part of town but still residential enough to be quiet. This seems to have worked out quite nicely the last half dozen trips or so, and did so again.

Thursday-2: Breakfast that came with the room, and a view out onto the city and another fine weather day. Walk, explore, walk, explore; our typical day in a new city. Twas like spring out and people were sitting at sidewalk cafes everywhere; very European in feel. Highlights, but secondary to just the whole scene, were (a) a very unique church (and open) named Hallgrimskirkja that has such a tall profile and "is visible from 20 km away" and has a "vast 5275-pipe organ, which has a strangely weapon-like appearance" and (b) the National Museum with fine/new displays, and (c) a city hall with controversial architecture (we liked the interior, which had a "fabulous 3D map of Iceland – all mountains and volcanoes, with flecks of nothing-towns disappearing between the peaks" but not the exterior, and (d) the harbor area, and more. Even did a little shopping, both for souvenirs and for some fish – Dawna was determined to cook at our guesthouse that night. Ended up with some fish on skewers, which turned out to be OK but not sensational. Took a mid afternoon relax back at our place and then walked back to the harbor area for a one-hour boat trip on the Puffin Express. It goes out to, and around, an island full of puffins plus provides the always nice view back to a coastal city. Strolled back to our place, enjoying the total scene and eventually had our cooked-in and relaxing dinner. Did various packing for our return trip.

Friday-2: Hit the road before the Guesthouse breakfast time, had no trouble getting to the airport, had coffee and a pastry at the airport, as well as a somewhat crazy time checking in. They took our bags (three now, as we often check our major carryons on the return trip home) but the baggage ticket they put on the bags said Chicago. I said, hey grab those and change it to San Jose, they for some reason we never understood wouldn't do the change (and one bag was already down the shoot) even after a supervisor came over to debate it with me. Best I could do was to get them to change the labels to Boston (our city of entry). And we were trusting that she went and got the already moved bag and relabeled it as well. Weird. Anyway, the plane did leave on time. Was full and we were in different rows but I had my window and Dawna had her isle. Wrote about half of this trip letter. Arrived Boston, all 3 bags were there, went through customs as usual but then because they had been only checked to Boston we couldn't just dump them on the transients/continuing baggage spot but had to take them with us and totally checkin again with American Airline. Stupid and inconvenient but we had adequate time to do it, and we did. Flew from Boston to Chicago, changed planes, then to San Jose. This last leg feels really long on outings such as that but it went as well as could be expected even arriving a half hour early or so. Contact with Kristina via cell phone and she picked us up a minute after our bags (all 3) arrived and we were soon back in Cupertino.

Summary: Iceland was all that we expected. Fantastic scenery (ocean, mountains, glaciers, farmland, birds, lava, fissures, and all the other things I've mentioned). Easy to get around what with excellent road and trail and highlight signs posted everywhere; plus everyone speaks good English. Food adequate but only sometimes good; although always fine coffee and pastry. Prices overall were 2-3 times what one would pay for the same item in the US (\$8 per gallon gas for example and \$10 for a beer; we didn't actually buy any wine having taken a box from California). People are friendly/fine although we didn't have a series of discussions with them like we did in South Africa or even Panama. Weather worked out pretty reasonably being great near the end but too bad we didn't have it great for a couple of the earlier days in the East. Definitely a good trip and I'd say it was about the right length of time; certainly never go bored.