

Snorkelling in Iceland

with Rebecca Douglas

When you think of snorkelling, images of tropical waters teeming with colourful fish might come to mind. But Iceland, with its rugged coastline, vast fjords, and crystal-clear waters, offer a snorkelling experience unlike any other. While many people flock to Silfra, a world-renowned snorkelling spot in a lake within a national park, there's an abundance of less-travelled locations: Iceland's coastline is waiting to be explored.

Whether you're an experienced snorkeler or simply curious about what lies just below the surface, snorkelling in Iceland rewards you with a sense of discovery, connection and awe. Here's how I make the most of this unique experience and celebrate the amazing encounters along the way.

Gear for snorkelling in Iceland

Snorkelling in Iceland's icy waters is a thrilling experience, but the extreme cold demands the right gear to ensure both comfort and safety. With water temperatures often in single digit degrees celsius, investing in high-quality equipment is essential for staying warm and protected while exploring these breathtaking underwater landscapes. Here's what I wear to make my snorkelling adventures in Iceland both manageable and enjoyable:

7mm winter freedive wetsuit

I rely on a 7mm winter freedive wetsuit, which is a two-piece design. This layering effect provides



Common harbour seal – Steingrímsfjörður, Westfjords, Iceland

Bloom of moon jellyfish in Ísafjarðardjúp, Westfjords Iceland – image of me captured by my friend Petr Slavík

an impressive 14mm of neoprene around my core, offering exceptional insulation in near-freezing waters. The thickness of this wetsuit makes a huge difference in retaining body heat and it's designed to fit snugly without restricting movement. Without





Prepping kit ready for snorkelling – little did I know we'd meet a seal under the sea!

this kind of protection, staying in the water for any meaningful length of time would be impossible.

7mm mittens

Thick neoprene mittens are my go-to for keeping my hands warm. Unlike gloves, mittens allow my fingers to stay together, helping to trap warmth and reduce heat loss in the cold water. They're not only practical but also a game-changer when spending extended periods in icy conditions. I need my hands to function to use the camera and I'm able to operate all I need with these thick mittens on.

7mm Boots

Keeping my feet warm and protected is non-negotiable when snorkelling in Iceland and 7mm neoprene boots are the perfect solution. They provide much-needed insulation and comfort while also offering a sturdy sole to navigate Iceland's rocky, often sharp and jaggy lava shorelines. These boots are as much about safety as they are about warmth, making them a critical part of my gear.

Snorkel and Mask

A properly fitting snorkel and mask are essential for a good snorkelling experience, especially in



My best friend Katie during our Silfra Snorkel – Thingvellir National Park – Iceland

Iceland's crystal-clear waters. The right mask ensures I have clear visibility to take in and shoot the underwater scenes, while a high-quality snorkel allows easy breathing in the often choppy or windy conditions.

Fins

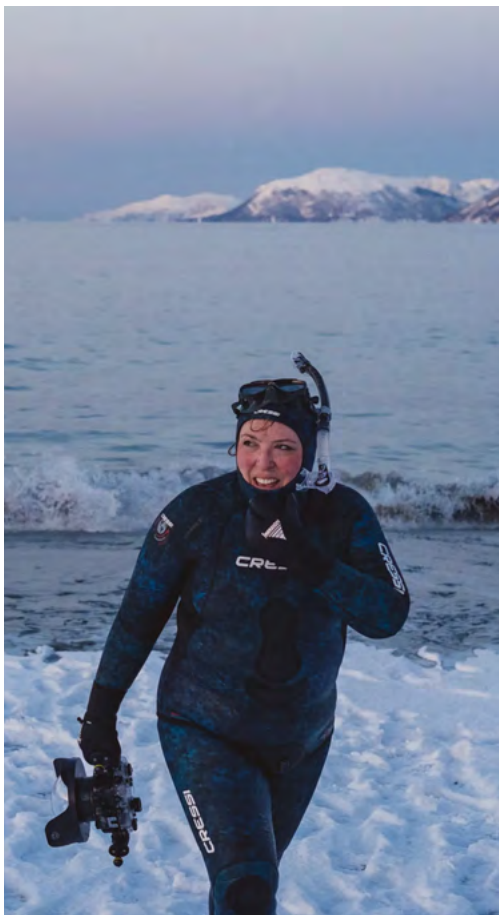
Fins might be bulky to pack, but they are absolutely worth it. They help me cover greater distances with less effort, giving me the chance to explore Iceland's underwater landscapes more thoroughly. Fins also provide stability in the water, especially when dealing with currents or waves, making them invaluable for both safety and comfort.

Dryrobe

This is an absolute non-negotiable for me. With Iceland's cold water, low air temperatures, and famously strong winds, a Dryrobe makes all the difference when getting in and out of the water. It keeps me warm while I change and offers vital protection from the wind. It's the piece of kit that ensures I can transition comfortably back to dry land after my snorkelling session.

Waterproof Bumbag

I carry a waterproof bumbag made by RED to store essentials like my keys and phone. It's compact, easy to wear, and keeps everything



The joy on my face after my first ever snorkel at Silfra in Iceland – air temp -10 deg c!

dry and secure while I'm in the water. Having this peace of mind allows me to focus fully on the snorkelling experience without worrying about my belongings.

Quick-Dry Towel

A quick-dry towel is another must-have. Lightweight and compact, it's perfect for drying off efficiently



after a session in the water. It takes up minimal space in my bag but does a fantastic job, ensuring I'm warm and comfortable as soon as I'm out of the wetsuit.

With this gear, snorkelling in Iceland's cold waters becomes an adventure I can embrace rather than endure. Each item plays a crucial role in keeping me warm, comfortable, and safe, allowing me to fully enjoy the magic of Iceland's unique underwater world.

What I use to shoot underwater

Capturing the underwater magic of snorkelling is one of the most rewarding aspects of my adventures. The surreal landscapes, vibrant colour, and incredible marine life deserve to be documented in a way that conveys their true beauty. Over time, I've curated a kit that helps me achieve



just that. Here's what I use to bring these underwater scenes to life:

My primary tool for underwater photography is the Fujifilm X-T5, a lightweight and powerful mirrorless camera. Its compact size makes it ideal for snorkelling, where space and weight can be limiting factors. I typically pair it with a 16mm f1.4 lens, which provides a wide field of view to capture expansive underwater scenes or close-ups of marine life.

To protect my camera in icy waters, I rely on a dedicated Seafrogs underwater housing. This housing is robust, watertight, and designed specifically for my camera, ensuring it stays safe while allowing full control over all camera functions. The combination of this housing around my X-T5 and the 16mm lens lets me create storytelling images of our magical underwater world.

In addition to my main camera, I often bring along a GoPro for capturing behind-the-scenes footage. Compact, durable, and easy to use, it's the perfect companion for snorkelling adventures. I attach it to the hot shoe of my Seafrogs housing, which keeps it secure and aligned with my primary camera. The GoPro provides dynamic video clips that offer a different perspective, whether it's the moment I enter the water, the ripples of sunlight through the waves, or a wider view of the environment. This dual setup allows me to document the entire experience, from creative compositions to candid moments.

This kit gives me the flexibility to focus on both the artistic and storytelling aspects of underwater photography. Whether I'm capturing the play of light beneath the surface, the textures of life on the lava rocks or the quiet grace of marine life, these tools help me bring stories from beneath the surface and share it with others.

How I pack my snorkel kit to fly

Flying with snorkelling gear can feel like a challenge, especially when trying to balance protection for your equipment with the need to minimise bulky, heavy items. Over time, I've developed a system that keeps my gear safe, organised and easy to transport, ensuring nothing gets left

behind. Here's how I pack my snorkel kit for air travel:

Snorkelling equipment can be bulky, so I opt for an additional hold bag to carry the essentials. In this bag, I pack:

Wetsuit
Gloves and Boots
Snorkel and Fins
Dryrobe
Waterproof Bumbag
Quick-Dry Towel

By dedicating a separate hold bag to this gear, I ensure my snorkelling essentials are protected and easily retrievable when I reach my destination.

My camera equipment is the most fragile and valuable part of my kit, so I always carry it with me in my hand luggage. I divide it across two bags for maximum protection and compliance with airline restrictions:

1. Main Rucksack: This is where I carry the bulk of my camera gear, including my Fujifilm X-T5 mirrorless camera and lenses. Each piece is padded and secured in compartments within the bag to prevent damage during travel. I use a camera-specific backpack with reinforced padding for extra protection.

2. Underseat Bag: My Seafrogs underwater housing, which can be disassembled for travel, fits perfectly into a small underseat bag on most airlines. Breaking it down into its

components allows me to pack it more compactly, and I wrap each piece in protective cloth or foam to avoid scratches.

Keeping my camera and housing with me ensures that even if my checked luggage is delayed or mishandled, I'll still have everything I need to capture my snorkelling adventures.

This packing system allows me to transport everything safely and efficiently, balancing the needs of fragile camera equipment with the bulk of snorkelling gear. With careful organisation, I can hit the ground running, or swimming (!!!) ready to explore and share the stories of the ocean.

Snorkelling in cold water

Snorkelling in Iceland's icy waters, or any cold-water, is an unforgettable experience, offering glimpses of unique marine life and breathtaking underwater landscapes. However, the extreme temperatures demand preparation and mindfulness to ensure a safe and enjoyable outing.

This article reflects my own experiences and personal process with cold-water snorkelling. It is not an exhaustive guide to cold-water safety. Everyone's body and capabilities are different, and it's essential to approach cold-water activities with careful consideration of your own



So many moon jellyfish – Ísafjarðardjúp, Westfjords Iceland

limits, skills and physical condition.

This information is shared for inspiration and reflection, not as a substitute for professional advice or preparation.

The main thing I consider when snorkelling in cold water

Acclimatise Slowly:

When I enter icy waters, I am deeply aware shock to the body is a real concern. To avoid this, I step into the water gradually and take deep, slow breaths to stay calm and help my body adapt to the cold. Sudden immersion can cause cold water shock, if an involuntary gasp reflex

happens underwater you can breathe in water and it can lead to drowning. To find out more about this visit the RNLI.

Stay Warm:

Keeping warm is essential and also having an awareness of how cold I am getting whilst snorkelling is just as important. I wear a 7mm wetsuit following hiring one the first time I snorkelled in Silfra and found it to be super cosy! With 7mm gloves and boots, I stay well insulated, though my hands and feet are the first places I start to notice the cold. When I get out it is important to change as quickly as



Snorkelling out to Silfra

possible, with my dryrobe putting a layer of warmth around me straight away!

Listen to my body:

Recognising my limits is crucial. I tune in to my body and when I start to feel cold, because ignoring these signs can lead to hypothermia or other complications. I always choose prioritising my safety over extending my snorkelling session as this guarantees I'll have more opportunities to explore in the future!

A few other things I take into consideration when snorkelling in Iceland:

1. Tide times and water conditions: I research tides and currents before entering the water, I check the forecasts line up with what I can see to avoid dangerous conditions.
2. Sewage awareness: Be cautious of potential sewage contamination in remote areas, not all villages and remote properties have sewage removal into a treatment process and release into the sea, so I select snorkelling spots carefully.



Snorkel crossing at Silfra

***Snorkelling locations in Iceland:
ICONIC SILFRA***

Silfra, located in Þingvellir National Park, is a stunning snorkelling spot, renowned for its crystal-clear glacial waters filtered through lava rock. With visibility up to 120 metres, it offers one of the most remarkable snorkelling experiences in the world. The water is as cold as it is pristine, typically hovering around 2°C. I've snorkelled here in the snow, at temperatures that dipped to -10°C! There's something magical about floating in water that is this clear. It is visibility I've never witnessed anywhere else! When you get in, the only thing that feels cold is your face, but the rest of your body stays warm inside the 7mm freedive wetsuit

Exploring beyond Silfra

Silfra is just the beginning of Iceland's snorkelling adventures. If you have your own gear, Iceland's coastline offers a wealth of hidden gems where you can explore the wild edges of its waters and encounter marine life in its purest form. Here are just a few of the amazing snorkelling locations you can discover:



The clear blue lava filtered glacier waters at Silfra at Thingvellirvatn

NAUTHÓLSVÍK GEOTHERMAL BEACH

Located near Reykjavík, Nauthólsvík which is already a popular spot for sea swimming and Iceland's unique geothermal energy heats the water, supplying a local hot pot, creating an ideal place for a quick snorkel even in the colder months as you can snorkel and then warm up in the hot pot!

I snorkelled here one March and the water is

so clear! Given the time of year I wasn't sure if there would be much to see, however, while snorkelling, I encountered so many mussels clinging to the rocks and a couple of striking purple starfish on the sea floor. My curiosity piqued when something swam under me that I'd never been before, it was moving pretty quickly and on getting back to land I have identified it as some kind of isopod, perhaps a sea slater or sea woodlouse. This area served as a beautiful reminder that even the more accessible spots in Iceland hold hidden marine wonders. While it's often potluck as to what you might find wherever you snorkel, the calmness and clarity of the water make it a peaceful place to explore.

ÍSAFJARÐARÐJÚP

The vast fjord of Ísafjarðardjúp, located in the Westfjords, is rich in marine life and I had the incredible privilege of snorkelling among a bloom of moon jellyfish. These jellyfish, with their ethereal, translucent bodies, drifted gently through the water, creating a surreal and dream-like atmosphere. It felt like swimming in another world, surrounded by hundreds of these beautiful creatures. Alongside the moon jellyfish, I also encountered comb jellyfish with its cilia refracting rainbow colours in the light and the biggest cross jellyfish I've ever seen, adding to the magickal underwater experience. This location highlighted the diversity of Iceland's marine ecosystem and the unexpected moments of wonder that come with exploring its waters.

HÖRGSHLÍÐARLAUG

Before soaking in the hot pot at Hörgshlíðarlaug, I decided to jump into the nearby fjord for a snorkel. The water here was rich with plankton blooms, a clear indicator of a thriving



On my way to snorkel at Nauthólsvík Geothermal Beach in Reykjavik, Iceland

ecosystem. The density of the plankton added a dreamy quality to the water, with tiny specks of light illuminating each movement. Snorkelling here was an invigorating and humbling experience, reminding me of the importance of healthy waters and the life they sustain. There is nothing quite like snorkelling in 7 deg c water and then whipping your wetsuit off and jumping into the hot pot to soak in the warmth, a truly Icelandic adventure in nature!

HVERAVÍK

Snorkelling in Hveravík is another incredible experience that combines the beauty of Iceland's clear waters with its fascinating marine life. The area was filled with moon jellies, creating a calming, ethereal scene as they floated gently in the water. As we explored, a curious common harbour seal appeared and began to interact with us, we were transfixed letting the seal lead this encounter. It was an awe-inspiring moment, with the seal gracefully swimming closer and closer, playfully swimming in the water. It is moments like this where you really



Plankton Bloom Hörgshlíðarlaug, Westfjords, Iceland

wonder who is watching who. Just as we were about to leave, it almost seemed as though the seal was waving goodbye, a moment that will forever leave me full of wonder about how amazing the natural world truly is.

DRANGSNES

On my last day in the Westfjords, I ventured into the kelp forests near the village of Drangsnes. Even with a short snorkel, I was rewarded with beautiful sights, vast forests of huge kelp swaying in the water and vibrant purple sea urchins clinging to the rocks. The water here was so clear, it was like looking through glass, and the marine life was thriving in its undisturbed habitat. It's a reminder that even brief moments spent exploring Iceland's waters can lead to awe-inspiring moments.

STEINGRÍMSFJÖRDUR

Steingrímsfjörður, another fjord in the Westfjords, greeted me with thick plankton blooms that initially limited visibility. However, as I swam

deeper, I encountered a bloom of cross jellyfish, moon jellyfish and other underwater life thriving in this nutrient-rich ecosystem. The presence of plankton blooms here is a clear sign of a healthy and thriving marine environment, one that supports the whales that are so abundant in this fjord. Witnessing the building blocks of this complex food chain firsthand was a humbling reminder of the interconnectedness of life beneath the surface.

Let's rewild our connection to nature & slip into the liminal space, trusting in the alchemy of the moment.

Rebecca Douglas
www.rebeccadouglas.co.uk



Rebecca Douglas is a visual storyteller, her work captures the beauty and fragility of our blue planet. A finalist in the Ocean Photographer of the Year competition, Rebecca earned second place in the Conservation and Impact category, recognising her ability to illuminate critical marine issues through her lens.

With a deep connection to the ocean, Rebecca's storytelling celebrates the wild edges of nature and inspires others to reconnect with its rhythms. Her snorkelling adventures in Iceland embody this ethos, as she explores its icy waters and vibrant ecosystems, sharing tales of moon jellyfish blooms, curious seals and the magic just beneath the surface.

Rebecca's work goes beyond imagery, she is a trustee at Whale Wise, a Marine Mammal Medic with BDMLR and a passionate advocate for conservation. Through her photography, videography, writing and speaking, she seeks to create impact by sparking awe and curiosity, rewilding our connection to nature to empower people to take action to protect the planet.

For those captivated by the natural world, Rebecca's fine art prints bring the wonder of nature into your home, while her workshops and storytelling inspire a deeper connection to the sea, sharing some of the secrets it holds.



Rebecca Douglas

PHOTO || VIDEO || DRONE
SPEAKER || WRITER

Radically authentic visual storyteller

FOR NATURE CONNECTED VISIONARIES,
CHANGEMAKERS & CONSCIOUS BRANDS

Every brand has a story to
tell, let's co-create & share
yours with the world.

WWW.REBECCADOUGLAS.CO.UK

hello@rebeccadouglas.co.uk

