

Alternative Service Break in Iceland: The Land of Fire and Ice

During my Alternative-Service Break experience exploring the natural beauty of Iceland, I was consistently impressed with the breathtaking views. Everything from the majestic waterfalls to the larger-than-life glacier with which we trekked across, the sheer magnitude of it all was inspiring. However, what may have been more inspiring than snow-capped mountains and black sand beaches was the character of both my fellow ASB participants as well as the other volunteers of our service partner, Worldwide Friends, who came from around the globe to work towards making the world a better place.



worldwidefriends
V E R A L D A R V I N I R

Reasons for Getting Involved with Alternative Service Breaks at NC State

Ever since my service-learning project with Interfaith Food Shuttle Farm in Raleigh through the Caldwell Fellows program, I knew that I wanted to continue being of service to others. I am also very passionate about the environment and doing everything we can to combat the effects of climate change while learning how we can ultimately mitigate its effects entirely. This is what compelled me to apply for the ASB in Iceland, as Student Leadership and Engagement has consistently impressed those around me with their life-changing service trips throughout the world. After getting accepted to the trip, I couldn't have been more excited. However, as this was only my second time abroad, it was still nerve-racking to step foot outside the country again. I found it useful to channel this anxiety as motivation to step out of my comfort zone and really "think big". My goals at the end of the trip were ultimately to learn more about how service and sustainability come together, while getting the chance to meet new people both at NC State and from other regions throughout the world. I figured the more informed I could be about other people's experiences with environmental service, the better servant I can be in sustainability.

The Experience of Being Abroad

One of the largest challenges on this trip was actually not what you may expect... It wasn't hiking the highest mountains to get awe-inspiring views of the capital city Reykjavik, or trying not to get seasick while whale watching, but it was expanding my food palette. I've historically been a very picky eater, so needing to try new food and also try my hand at cooking was a challenge. However, I was pleasantly surprised by many of the dishes people came up with, and food quickly became less of an issue. Instead, I got to truly enjoy the amazing geological wonders Iceland has to offer. Some of the highlights of the trip were:

- Spying a humpback whale coming to the surface for air during a two-hour long whale watching expedition
- Witnessing the majestic natural beauty of the Northern Lights
- Beholding the sight of larger-than-life waterfalls originating from glacier runoff
- Getting to strap on crampons and hike across the Sólheimajökull glacier
- Touring a geothermal power plant, as geothermal energy a primary source of energy in Iceland





You really appreciate nature more when you can experience it first-hand, and Iceland certainly does not disappoint in immersing you in natural wonders you will never find elsewhere.

The Personal Impact of Community

The impact this experience had on me was quite profound. Not only did I have the opportunity to bond with a small group of NC State students that are all extremely inspiring in their unique upbringings, but I also got to meet some incredible volunteers from countries such as the Netherlands and Italy. These individuals were gracious enough to allow us to stay the week in the volunteer house, go on grocery runs to provide us the vital ingredients we needed to cook our recipes, and both suggest as well as drive us to all the amazing places we got to see during our trip. Additionally, our nightly reflection activities curated by SLE were inspiring, as they gave us the opportunity to be vulnerable with one another in a safe space. These activities allowed us to truly bond in a way that not many other experiences can offer.



The Communal Impact of Service

The impacts of this service experience on Iceland were that we were able to make their beaches just a tad cleaner while also making their soil just a little more viable for reforestation. However, I believe what this really taught us all was how important small impacts are, and how when added up they can create larger impacts that are felt on a larger scale. The trash we picked up on the beach may return in two weeks' time, however every time volunteer groups return to clean it up, they spread awareness of the larger issue of plastic pollution. When we prepare landscapes for reforestation, we spread awareness of the larger issue of deforestation. And to anyone who is considering engaging in an ASB experience with the NC State Student Leadership and Engagement Office, I highly encourage them to do so, because even if it seems you can't make a difference, patience and perspective is a virtue. If you're lucky, one day you may look back and see the difference your service has truly made, and it may not be where you first expect.

