

By Dan Friesen

After a near-perfect day yesterday hiking in south Iceland, we stopped en route to our hotel for what we thought would be a grand slam way to finish the day. Tim and I had visited Reynisfjara, a beach near the village of Vik, on our planning trip before the group arrived. Puffins had been out in force, roosting above the iconic basaltic rock formations found throughout so much of Iceland, then diving off the cliff into the air en route to perch on a wave from where they dove even deeper on fishing expeditions.

We'd expected that only a week later, they would still be there. But puffins come and go according to the time of day, the fish available nearby, and perhaps a ton of other puffin whims and variables about which I am completely ignorant. So...no puffins! Bummer! We had not really seen them yet on the trip, and tomorrow was our final full day.

But we examined the stunning basalt sea cave called Hálsanefshellir (say that fast 10 times), then trudged across the black pebble beach, through the beautiful evening sun, back to the bus.

This morning, our plan was to drive back to the same general area, but this time to Dyrhólaey Rock, the southernmost point in Iceland. Skies were gray and it looked like it could rain. Still, we offloaded and started walking out along the edge of the cliff to the lighthouse. Below us to the west lay a perfect black-sand beach that seemed to stretch forever. As we rounded the point, we saw the massive stone arch ahead and Gummi talked about the private plane that had flown through the arch.

At this juncture, we had the option of continuing down onto the promontory that protruded even further into the sea, directly above the arch. As we did so, we started to see the puffins, roosting in groups of two or three. We were mesmerized! They were clustered along the edge of the cliff and didn't seem overly concerned about us being there. We got quite close - maybe 15-20 feet - to get even better looks.

After about 30 minutes of puffin-gazing, we coaxed the last of the group off the rock and continued our loop hike down to the beach at the east end of the Rock where the bus was waiting. Once there, we discovered that this is where the real puffin action was happening. Puffins galore!! We watched and snapped photos and laughed at their comical flight pattern. What a great way to start our last full day in Iceland!

Puffin paparazzi were everywhere popping pictures of a plethora of patronizing, posing puffins!
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