Top Ten Reasons to Love Iceland and Their Footballing Prowess

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The tiny country of Iceland, which defied the odds to even join the Euros, will have most of the world behind it on Sunday to reach the next stage of the championship. Most commonly known for its volcanoes, northern lights and other worldly landscapes, Iceland is now coming into the limelight as a nation of footballing champions, following the incredible 2 -1 England defeat on Monday night. Iceland has gone from having a minimal global footballing presence to being down to the remaining eight nations to play in the Euros and the country couldn't be more excited.

Here are the top ten reasons why we love Iceland's football team and the incredible country:

The Icelandic football team has defied the odds

With a population of only 332,750 (similar to the city of Leicester, home to current Premier League champions), Iceland has set the record for the smallest nation to ever qualify for a major international football competition. In contrast, England has a population of over 53m, according to the 2011 census.

There are no professional football clubs in Iceland

While all of Roy Hodgson's squad play in England, none of Iceland's Euro 2016 group play their football in their homeland. In fact, there are no professional clubs in the country.

The people's support for their national team

Nearly 27,000 Icelanders bought tickets to watch their national team play in the European Championship. That's more than eight percent of the population.

“It is like having your family at the game,” defender Kári Árnason said after the 2-1 group-stage win against Austria. “I probably know at least 50% of the people in the crowd.”

Best gender equality in the world, even for football
Iceland ranked number one in the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report for six years in a row, highlighting how frequently it is rated as one of the world's most equal countries. This gender equality can be seen in Iceland's national women's football team which has been ranked as the 16th best national team in the world by FIFA, whilst the men's team is ranked 34th. The woman's team also qualified for the quarter finals three years ago and are currently top of their group. Topping another chart, Icelandic player Harpa Thorsteinsdottir has scored the most goals.

The patriotism
While around 9.3 million British viewers tuned in for England's game against Wales – some 14% or so of the population of Great Britain – over half of all Icelanders are estimated to have watched Iceland v Austria, representing 99.8% of the nation's television audience.

The sun never sets in the summer and the northern lights glow in the winter

Iceland is an incredible country of light and dark with the mystical greens and blues of the aurora borealis shining in the winter months and almost 24 hours of daylight in the summer months with the midnight sun.

Iceland has an amazing naming system

There are no surnames or family names in Iceland – Icelanders use the traditional Nordic naming system, which includes a last name that is comprised from their father's (or mother's) first name with the addition of -dóttir (-daughter) or -son. For example, the football team have Hannes Halldorsson and Alfred Finnbogason.

Crime is low, peace is high
The Icelandic police don't carry guns. Crime in Iceland is very low and violent crime is practically non-existent. This low crime rate comes hand in hand with peace as Iceland topped charts as the most peaceful country in the world in the Global Peace Index 2015.

Beautiful waterfalls
Waterfalls in Iceland may not be the tallest in the world but they are the most diverse and beautiful. Dettifoss in north Iceland is the most powerful waterfall in Europe. The river dropping 45m has enough force to send spray hundreds of metres skywards.

Iceland is one of the happiest places on earth

Iceland frequently tops survey and annual indexes as one of the happiest places on earth. Why wouldn't they be with this current sporting prowess?

Learn about Icelandic culture, etiquette and safety with theIceland Academy

For further details on Iceland and how best to visit the country, visit the Inspired By Iceland website to see the *'Iceland Academy'*, an exciting new online tool to help visitors understand the best of Icelandic culture, etiquette and beautiful nature as well as how to stay safe on their travels. The online academy, which launched earlier this year features a series of video tutorials, covered by a panel of charismatic Icelandic experts and local 'tutors', offering a fun short course of advice and insider knowledge on a variety of aspects of Icelandic culture. Videos available include *How to Avoid Hot Tub Awkwardness*, *Responsible Travelling In Iceland*, *A Guide to Winter Sports in Iceland* and *Staying Safe In Iceland*. The academy aims to encourage informed behaviour from visitors, ensuring a happy and meaningful experience, whilst raising their awareness about how to travel in a safe and responsible way.

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