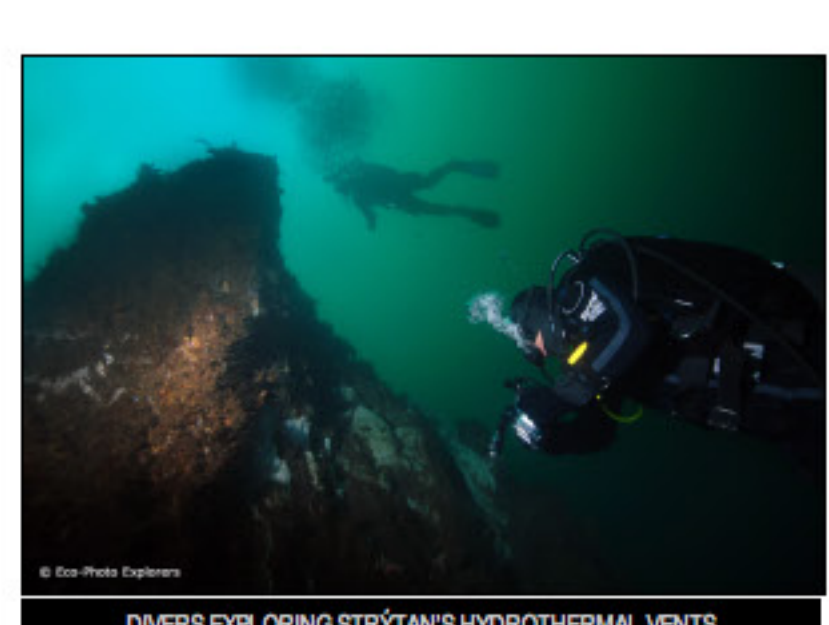


### Strytan: Diving Iceland's Hydrothermal Vents

Details Published on Tuesday, 06 August 2013 12:11 Written by Eco-Photo Explorers Hits: 1050

The waters of the Eyjafjörður Fjord were still and calm. There was a sharp crispness to the air and snow covered the hills lining the shore. Except for the gentle lapping of water against the sides of our inflatable dive boat, the world around us was silent. To the north we could see heavy grey clouds hanging low to the horizon, the first signs of an approaching storm undoubtedly born in the arctic wilderness just a few miles away. In a few short hours, the weather would turn bad and diving would become impossible. For now, all was calm and we were focused on preparations for an underwater adventure to an alien world.



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DIVERS EXPLORING STRYTAN'S HYDROTHERMAL VENTS

PREV 10 of 21 NEXT

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In 1997, Eriundur Bogason and his friend Árni Halldósson discovered an amazing hydrothermal vent in the dark waters off the shores of Hjalteyri, a small fishing village located near the town of Akureyri. Strytan, as this location has been named, is a towering chimney-like geological formation rising to over 200ft (230m) from the ocean floor to nearly 50ft (15m) below the surface.

Hydrothermal vents have been discovered in many places throughout the world, usually along continental rift zones, but they are generally located many thousands of feet deep. Currently, Strytan is the shallowest known vent in the world and the only place where scuba divers can actually dive on an active hydrothermal vent. A "White Smoker", Strytan is a set of chimneys that continually emit very hot water (167°F/75°C) at an estimated rate of 26-gallons/100 Litres per second. These geological formations are formed by smectite, a white clay material that mixes with other crustal elements and minerals as it circulates through the oceanic crust under very high pressure and temperature. When this material mixes with the cold ocean water after emerging from the ground, it coagulates, hardens and forms the chimney. Strytan started forming at the end of last ice age 10,000 years ago. At Strytan, divers can explore these towering formations and will marvel at the marine life that abounds in these waters.

Our dive began with a routine back roll into the teeth-chattering 34-degree water. Instantly, our eyes adjusted to the dim light of the greenish-black water. Peering down through 50-foot visibility and searching for something to orient ourselves, we focused first on the down line. Bogason, who operates the nearby Strytan Divecenter, has installed a mooring buoy to ensure the protection of this delicate environment and to help divers find their way to the site. Descending into the waters of the fjord, our eyes opened wide as the first glimpse of the chimney came into view.

At first, Strytan appears as a tall, narrow spire...rocky, covered with multi-colored Plumose Anemones, but otherwise somewhat uninteresting.

Until you get close.

After just a few minutes, we became aware of hazy, "out of focus" water...the tell tale sign of hot fresh water mixing with cold salt water. These haloclines and thermoclines were easy to spot and were the best evidence of the rushing geothermal water flowing into the fjord. Scientists studying this phenomenon estimate that the water emerging from the cone is about 1,100 years old.

Normally, divers in very cold water never remove their gloves...but at Strytan, things are a bit different! Divers here can carefully remove their gloves and warm their hands in the hot water flowing out from the cone...a unique method of hand warming on a cold-water dive!

In addition to geological marvels, Strytan is home to a wide array of interesting marine life. Macro enthusiasts will spot colorful Flabellina nudibranchs, along with crustaceans, sponges, starfish and anemones. Swirling around the chimneys are schools of Cod and Pollack, and sharp-eyed divers will also encounter Starry rays, the curious Lumpucker fish and the ferocious looking Wolffish.

Strytan is the first protected underwater area in Iceland, gaining this status in 2001. This unique location has received worldwide scientific attention as well as being filmed by Bogason for National Geographic. Despite the rugged appearance, it is actually a fragile environment. Careless divers who don't pay attention to proper buoyancy can quickly damage rock formations that have taken thousands of years to form. Visitors are strongly advised to be careful and respectful.

Nearby in the same waters are other dive sites worth visiting.

**Arnesstrýtur**, sometimes referred to as "Little Strytan", is a cluster of smaller hydrothermal vent cones covering an area 1312 feet (400m) by 3281 feet (1000m) with an amazing variety of marine life. Arnesstrýtur was protected in 2007 and became the second protected underwater area in Iceland.

**The French Gardens** is a sublimely beautiful, though rarely visited site consisting of additional cones and vents.

Diving in Northern Iceland is a unique adventure. Here, divers can experience the wonders of Earth's geological forces by visiting the underwater hydrothermal vents or by diving in **Nesglá**, a crack or fissure in the Earth's crust formed through tectonic activity and flooded with water of unbelievable clarity. Opportunities also exist to dive with spawning cod fish in early April, and to experience diving sea birds off Grimsey Island, a small island north of Iceland and located right on the Arctic Circle. In the harbor near **Akureyri**, the wreck of the "Standard" lies in shallow water. A German bark, Standard was built in 1874, sunk in 1917 and discovered in 1997.

If you are an experienced cold-water diver in search of underwater geological adventures, put northern Iceland high on your list. Where else can you take a thermos on your dive, fill it with hot, geothermal water, and make some hot chocolate with 1100 year old water with it before returning to the dock?

#### Getting There

International visitors arrive in Iceland into **Keflavik Airport**. Most passengers do not require a Visa to enter Iceland as long as their stay does not exceed 3 months. Transport to other regions in Iceland can be accomplished either by driving or through domestic air travel. There are domestic airports in Reykjavik, Akureyri, and several other towns. Drive time from Reykjavik to Akureyri is 4-5 hours, while air travel is 45 minutes.

#### Baggage

Baggage allowances vary for each international carrier, so check before you leave! Note: Some international carriers are now enforcing weight and size limits for carry-on bags as well what is considered a personal carry-on type of bag.

#### Weather

Iceland lies on the edge of the Arctic and, at its northernmost point, is only 30 miles south of the Arctic Circle. Accordingly, the winters are long, generally from September to April. In the depths of the winter, daylight is almost nonexistent and in the summer the days are almost 24 hours long. However, due to the moderating influence of the Gulf Stream, winter weather in the south can be milder than in New York or Zurich. Winter is harsher in the north, with fierce storms, wind driven snow and low temperatures. Temperatures are the lowest in the Highlands.

#### Currency

The local currency is the Icelandic Krona, but US Dollars and Euro are often accepted.

#### Electricity

Voltage: 220-240V/50Hz  
Primary Socket Type: Europlug, Schuko  
Travel Adapter: Round Pin Universal Plug

#### Scuba Diving

**DIVE.IS** ([www.dive.is](http://www.dive.is)) is a Five Star PADI Dive Center, located in Reykjavik. DIVE.IS offers a variety of multi-day tours and single day dive opportunities, along with training and equipment rental.

**Strytan Divecenter** ([www.strytan.is](http://www.strytan.is)) is located in Hjalteyri, nearby to Akureyri, and is owned and operated by Eriundur Bogason. The **Skjaldaarvik Guesthouse** ([www.skjaldaarvik.is](http://www.skjaldaarvik.is)) is a good place to stay when diving Strytan. Good homemade food, with comfortable rooms.

Reykjavik has a recompression chamber.

#### Spotlight on Dive.IS and Strytan Divecenter

#### Location & Getting There:

DIVE.IS is located in Reykjavik 15 minutes walking distance from the city center. Divers can meet at the shop, or at the National Park Thingvellir to dive Silfra. For longer tours, Dive.IS will arrange pickup and transport from the international airport at Keflavik.

The Strytan Divecenter is located in the small fishing village of Hjalteyri, about 22 km north of the northern town of Akureyri. Dive.IS and the Strytan Divecenter often work together to provide seamless tours to the best dive sites along the entire Icelandic coast. Divers can meet at the Strytan Divecenter by driving about 4 hours from Reykjavik or by flying domestically to Akureyri. The Strytan Divecenter can arrange to meet at the airport and provide transport to local lodging.

#### Diving Operation:

Dive.IS leads dive tours to some of the most interesting and iconic dive sites in Iceland. The well-equipped dive shop is able to provide most any time of rental gear for the travelling diver. Using comfortable "dive vans", the staff can arrange for you to visit Silfra, or any number of other inland and coastline dive sites. The Dive.IS staff also offers "Golden Circle" tours to acquaint visitors to the natural wonders of Iceland.

At Silfra, divers suit up in a small parking lot near to the actual dive site and DIVE.IS staff then lead divers through the geologically spectacular fissure.

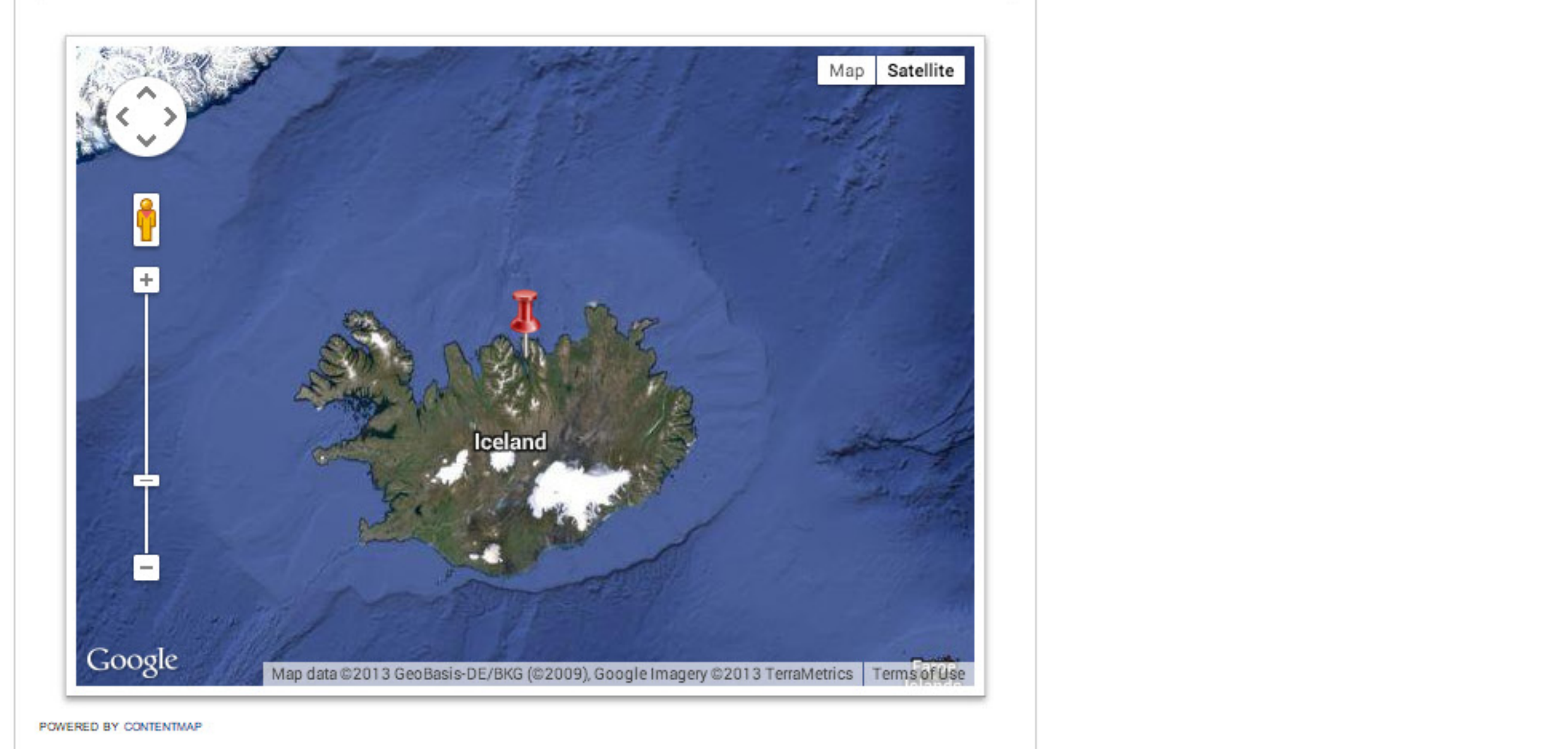
Strytan Divecenter employs a small RIB for transport to and from Strytan and the other sites nearby. The boat is docked a very short distance from the shop, and the dive sites are no more than 15-20 minutes by boat. The dive center will also arrange for tours of geological fissures and hot lakes further east and north and will transport divers to these sites over land. Dive briefings are conducted inside the dive shop before departures.

In addition to Silfra and Strytan, these dive operations can also arrange for dives in northern fjords to witness northern Codfish spawning, explorations of shipwrecks off the coasts and unique dive trips to dive with seabirds off the northern coast.

*Eco-Photo Explorers, a New York based organization, was formed in 1994 by Christopher Weaver and Michael Salvarezza to help promote interest in protecting our oceans by creating awareness through the use of their underwater photography.*

#### Special Thanks to Our Network Area Sponsors:

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| <b>Strytan Divecenter: Diving In Iceland</b><br><a href="http://www.strytan.is/">http://www.strytan.is/</a><br>+(354) 862-2949 | <b>DIVE.IS</b><br><a href="http://www.dive.is/">http://www.dive.is/</a><br>+(354) 663-2858 |
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