

Mike Ferris

Some people!

Mike Ferris won't be taken for a ride.

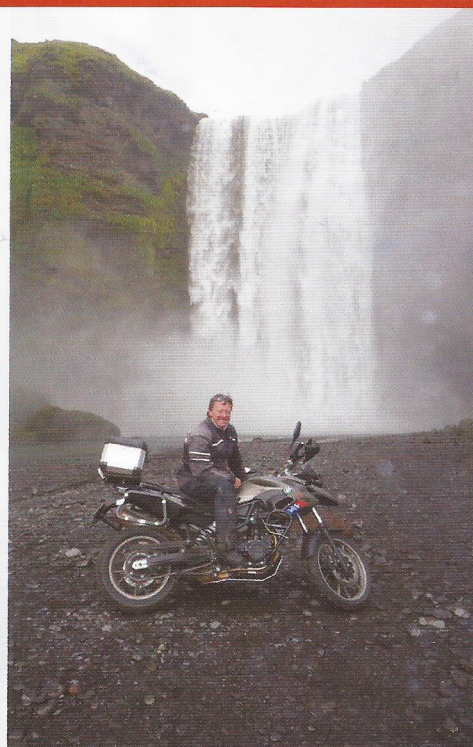
Words and images: Mike Ferris

We had been running our Iceland tour quite successfully for several years when early in 2014 we had an email from the United States. The rider was enquiring for 2015 and wanted to know the length of our tour, the price, the route and all sorts of details. They were all the usual questions which could be answered easily enough by reading the fully detailed itinerary on our webpage, but I politely answered all his queries. I also sent him the printer-friendly version of the detailed itinerary.

We had a few more email exchanges over the next few months and he wanted to know what would be the tour price if he brought his own bike. He lived on the east coast of the USA and was thinking of shipping his bike over to join us. I'd did the math' and came up with a price for him, excluding the bike hire, but keeping all our other inclusions like meals, fuel, accom and so forth. It would've been awkward pulling the group into a petrol station and having to say to him, "Hey, sorry, but you're buying your own gas."

We received another enquiry from the US at around that same time.

That was a little unusual because Americans normally



constitute only a small percentage of our clientele in any one tour. This gentleman was named Scott, and he said he was also trying to talk a cousin into coming on the tour with him. It looked like we might've ended up with three Americans on the tour!

However, the first guy's response to my calculated price was a pretty flat: 'Thanks, but no thanks'. I guessed he didn't much like the price I offered him. I thought nothing more of it and put it out of my mind.

Scott signed on for the tour a little later, but advised his cousin wasn't really interested, so the potential of three Statesiders turned out, in reality, to be only one.



MIKE FERRIS

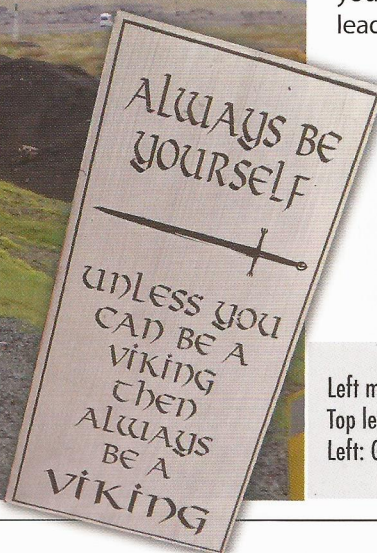
Warm reception

Our group of 12 subsequently met up in Reykjavik in June 2015. We spent a pleasant day taking in some of the local sights of the beautiful little capital, then proceeded with the commissioning of the motorcycles and had a short introductory ride around the city's foreshores in preparation for the first proper riding day the following morning. A few of the riders commented on the luxury of the BMW's heated handgrips – the air had a distinct chill, even at the height of an Icelandic summer.

Latecomer

We headed out the following day to the south coast, stopping briefly to take in the Seljalandsfoss waterfall before reaching our very nice hotel at the foot of the even more impressive Skogafoss waterfall. This simply stunning volume of water throws itself over a 100m cliff in thunderous display. In keeping with the wonderful, relaxed attitude of most things Icelandic, there are no safety barriers, fences or 'Keep Out' signs. You could literally walk right up to the base of the falls and get totally saturated if you felt so inclined. In fact, a certain tour leader has some great photos of himself sitting on his GS, parked in the middle of the riverbed at the foot of the falls, enveloped in spray. Just about anywhere else in the world that would see fluoro-clad security guards blowing whistles and barking at people to stay on the track.

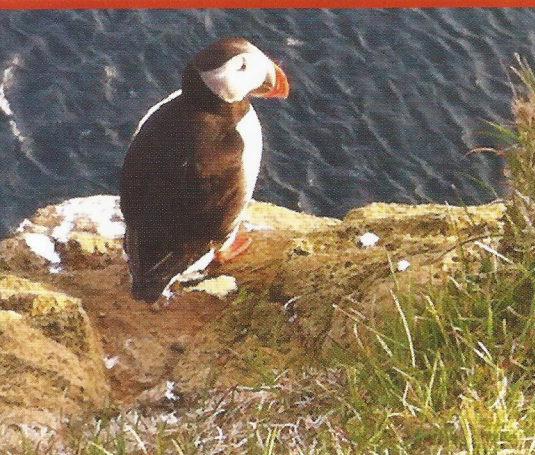
There was a nearby puffin colony ▶



Left main: Iceland. Just incredible.

Top left: Parked in the riverbed at the foot of the falls.

Left: Good advice anywhere in the world.



which I took people to see. These birds are hilarious. In the sea they're amazingly acrobatic and very skilled hunters, but when they take to the sky it always looks like it's their first time learning to fly. They have short stumpy wings which don't seem to have enough flight feathers to support their weight, and when they come in to land they hit the deck like they've been tossed from a passing car.

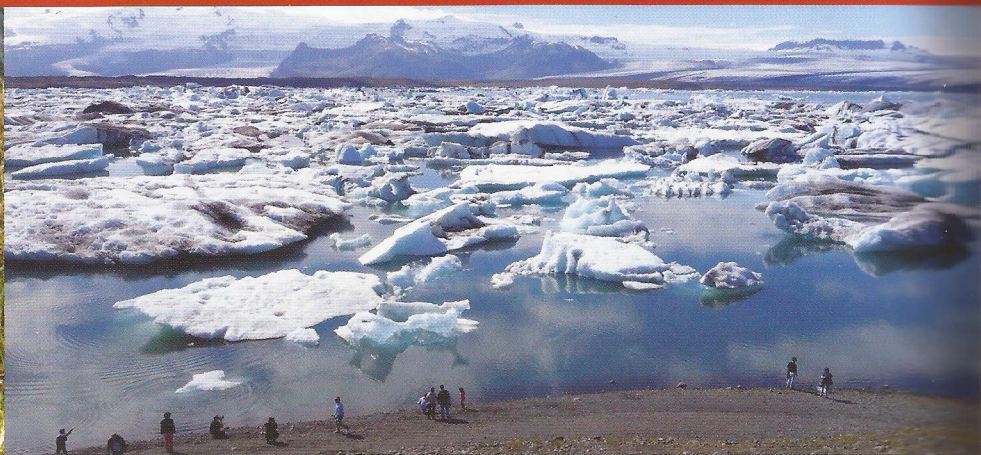
The group then had some free time to wander and explore before we convened in the hotel restaurant for dinner and a beer or two. Most then said goodnight and turned in.

But even at 11:00pm it was still broad daylight at the Arctic Circle in June, so it took some willpower to actually climb into bed. I was in my room tapping away at my keyboard when I heard another bike pull into the hotel carpark and I wasn't surprised to see the rider park right alongside our group. We riders are a pretty sociable bunch as a general rule.

Two or three of our chaps were still outside on the deck having a final beer, and I saw our American guy, Scott, walk over and shake hands with the new-comer. They engaged in quite a lengthy conversation which culminated in an invitation to join their table. I shut my computer and drew the blinds to keep out the midnight sun and nodded off to sleep.

A bit sus

The following morning we had breakfast at differing times and then met at the bikes for our 9:00am departure. The new-comer was there as well, and Scott



introduced him as 'Joel'. I shook his hand and said, "Hi. I'm Mike".

His motorcycle had a US plate on it. No wonder he and Scott were getting on.

He asked if it would be okay if he tagged along with us on that day as he was riding in the same direction. I had a quick think about this because I didn't want him gatecrashing our tour, but I decided just the one day could probably do no harm and agreed he could join us.

Joel not only rode with us all day, taking in the various sightseeing side-trips I'd developed over the past few years, he joined us at our hotel that night and sat at our dinner table. I made sure he paid for his own meal, but he was definitely beginning to outstay his welcome, especially when I saw him carrying his bags into Scott's room a little later. Scott had paid the single-room supplement for the tour, but most hotel single rooms actually had two beds.

The guy was freeloading, big time.

Out for the count

It dawned on me slowly. I put two and two together and came up with a baker's dozen.

I trawled back through my email

correspondence from 18 months earlier and found the guy who'd wanted to bring his own bike to Iceland, and guess what? His name was Joel and he lived in the same US state as Scott.

The guy was Scott's cousin!

I'd been well and truly set up. It was 'buy one, get one free'.

No pay, no play

My breakfast conversation with the two of them started something like, "So Joel, it's pretty obvious to me you want to do our guided tour with your cousin Scott here, but you don't want to pay our guided-tour price..."

Joel exchanged a quick glance with Scott before saying, "Well, I was kinda hoping, um, I might be able to come to an arrangement with you, ah, whereby I pay you something under the table, as it were, to keep it from your boss..."

"Excuse me?" I found myself using an Americanism.

"I wrote to that Ferris guy and told him I wanted to bring my own bike, but his price was way high. I'm hoping I can just slip you a cash incentive."

By this stage Scott was choking on his hash brown but he managed to



Top: Puffins are hilarious and amazing.
Top right: Postcard scenes are everywhere in Iceland.
Right: Turf houses give excellent insulation.



Left: Chilly, even in summer.
Above: Trolls feature in Icelandic folklore.

intervene, "Ah, Joel, um, this is actually Mike, um Ferris, you're speaking with. Um." "Oh," Joel blushed. "Oh crap. Okay. I'm sorry. I thought you were just the tour guide."

"I am the tour guide," I smiled, "and I also happen to own the company. But I'll tell

you what, now you're here, let me look again at a special price for you. Seeing as how it's now cash..."

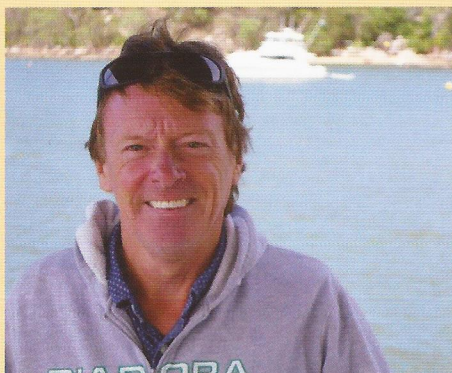
Within half an hour I came back to him with a 'cash' offer. He blinked twice, smiled a sarcastic smile, and declined. So I told him he was no longer welcome

A word from Mike Ferris

Anyone and everyone in the travel industry is obviously doing it very tough at present with the advent of the Coronavirus pandemic. We're all singing from the same songbook, *The Covid Blues*. Quite simply, leisure travel has ceased to exist for the foreseeable future.

For the next six months World On Wheels has had to cancel tours to Morocco, Iceland, the Himalaya, the Baltics, and the Dalmatian coast. We are preparing for the worst but hoping for the best. Realistically, we think the rest of this year is probably a write-off, but we're ready to swing back into action if a miracle happens and travel restrictions are lifted – provided, of course, we are confident the relevant destination is safe.

Our clients have been very loyal and understanding. We have offered refunds but over 90 per cent have told us to hold their deposits over until their deferred tour can be run, whenever that may be. If the re-scheduled tour date does not suit, then obviously we will honour a full refund.



to ride with us.

Rather predictably, he blustered, "You can't stop me riding where I want to ride."

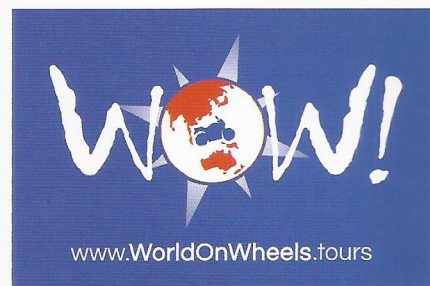
I'd anticipated such a response, and rather than escalate to a possible confrontation, I just shifted my gaze to Scott. He picked up on the cue immediately, and said, "Hey Joel, you know what? Maybe it's better I just catch up with you back in Reykjavik in 10 days or so."

Back again

When our group stopped for gas on the way out of town a short while later, Joel didn't. We didn't see him again for the rest of the tour, but when we arrived back in Reykjavik there was a familiar bike with a US plate parked at our hotel. Joel had obviously obtained from his cousin the list of hotels we were using on the tour. I'm prepared to bet he didn't pay for a room that night.

Really, some people do try it on.

ADV



Inspiring Iceland is one of the tours in the World On Wheels portfolio.

Check out the website at:
www.WorldOnWheels.tours