

INTRODUCTION

A TESTIMONY OF MY PHOTOGRAPHIC JOURNEY

I have been wanting to see and experience a volcanic eruption for as long as I have been old enough to understand what it is. Inspired by the beautiful and spectacular footage of many documentaries, I've always dreamt of witnessing a volcanic eruption myself. Even to this day, I consider this to be the most powerful natural phenomenon on this planet. Just the idea that, when seeing an eruption, you are witnessing a glimpse of how this planet was moulded out of liquid rock, completely baffles me.



After I moved to Iceland in 2016, it was set in stone that one day I would witness an eruption. On average, there's a volcanic eruption in Iceland every 5 years. But what kind of eruption would I experience first? Would I even be able to see the next eruption? There are so many volcanoes tucked away underneath glacial ice or at the bottom of the ocean which makes them less interesting from a photographic perspective. Then there's also the question if I would even be able to get close once an eruption starts without going on an ill-fated quest. After all, most volcanoes are so violent in nature that it makes it nearly impossible to see their eruptions in close-up.

When the eruption of the Fagradalsfjall volcanic system started in Geldingadalir, the scenario I had only thought possible in a dream came true. Everything lined up perfectly. It was a small fissure eruption, relatively safe, easy to access, located only a 45 minute drive from my house... What more could I have really wanted? When reality sank in and I understood what had started, I grabbed the opportunity with both hands. I spent as many hours as I humanly could documenting the eruption. I went from taking care of my one-year old daughter during the day, whilst being on paternity leave, to having close encounters with scorching hot lava during the night. From diapers to molten rock and back. I put all of my energy in getting the shots I had dreamt of for such a long time. I completely devoted myself to the privilege I had been given.

That's exactly what it felt like to me: a true privilege. As the eruption evolved, I had taken it up as a moral duty to experience and photograph it as often as possible. A moral duty to those who were not as fortunate as I was, to those who could not be there and enjoy this once-in-a-lifetime event as it unfolded.

Because the more I thought about it, the more it became exactly that: a once-in-a-lifetime event. What were the odds that I happened to be there when the Fagradalsfjall volcanic system awoke from its 7000-year-long slumber? Especially when you consider that, on top of that, a pandemic had taken the world by storm, limiting travel around the world to a bare minimum. I was one of the fortunate few who got to experience this from a front row seat on day one.

The months leading up to the writing of this book turned into an experience that did not only reinvigorate my love for photography but also greatly grew my awe and respect for such powerful forces of nature. This book is my testimony as a nature photographer. A testimony of my experiences while documenting the volcanic event in Geldingadalir. A testimony of a photographic journey which will remain forever engraved in my memories. This book is the culmination of months of perseverance and dedication to photographing this new landscape, this new earth.



BIRTH OF THE NEW EARTH

THE AWAKENING OF THE REYKJANES PENINSULA

On Friday March 19th 2021, after weeks of a seemingly unstoppable swarm of earthquakes on the Reykjanes Peninsula in Iceland, the ground ruptured in the Geldingadalir valley. A magma intrusion had gradually found its way up to the surface and a volcanic eruption had begun. Reykjanes Peninsula had awoken after a 700-year-long slumber. I didn't realise it yet at the time but it was the start of one of the greatest experiences of my life.



That same Friday evening is when my volcanic photographic journey begins. The weeks-long seismic activity had died down after a big earthquake hit the area several days prior. Therefore it looked like an eruption wasn't on the table for now. I decided to stop waiting and leave town for a weekend to photograph on Snæfellsnes Peninsula. So that Friday evening, I arrived in Grundarfjörður, about 240 kilometres from Reykjavík, to kick off the weekend with a night of photographing the northern lights.

While I was setting up my gear in front of Kirkjufell, I received a message from my mother in law telling me an eruption had started. "What?! Is this for real?!" I couldn't believe it! I was totally caught off-guard as I had given up hope an eruption was going to happen any time soon. I packed up my gear, jumped back into the car, checked out of the guesthouse I had planned on staying at and drove straight back to Reykjavík. Once back in Reykjavík, I spent several hours driving around the Reykjanes Peninsula trying to get closer to get a look at it - not knowing the eruption was in fact in a secluded valley. All the roads had been closed off and it seemed practically impossible to get to it that same night.

The day after, when it was slowly becoming clear how you could approach the eruption, I grabbed my photography gear, packed my gas mask and headed off to Reykjanes. Finally I could set off to fulfill a lifelong dream.

I left my car at a small parking lot near the Svartsengi geothermal plant and started walking - using my smartphone as a GPS. I hiked for 4 hours over very rough terrain whilst getting soaked by the pouring rain. My quest took me over loose lava rocks and thick moss. The terrain was extremely uneven. After I made it across the lava field, the hike ended with a steep climb up Fagradalsfjall. The mountain side consisted of loose rock on top of thick mud. It was a frustrating bit as my shoes kept sinking into the mud, making the hike to the top very difficult and tiring. The entire time, I kept thinking and wondering what I would see when I reached the eruption on the other side of the mountain.

When I finally got to the top of Fagradalsfjall and saw the eruption appear in front of me, the struggle had been completely worth it. My mind was blown. I had craved to experience this for such a long time. It felt like I had achieved this huge milestone, like I could finally offload all this desire cropped up inside of me.

From the top, I could see other people standing in the valley below. They were all standing incredibly close to lava flows and the cones. This got me excited. I wasn't only going to see the eruption, I was going to smell it, feel it and experience it on a level I had not dared to imagine before.