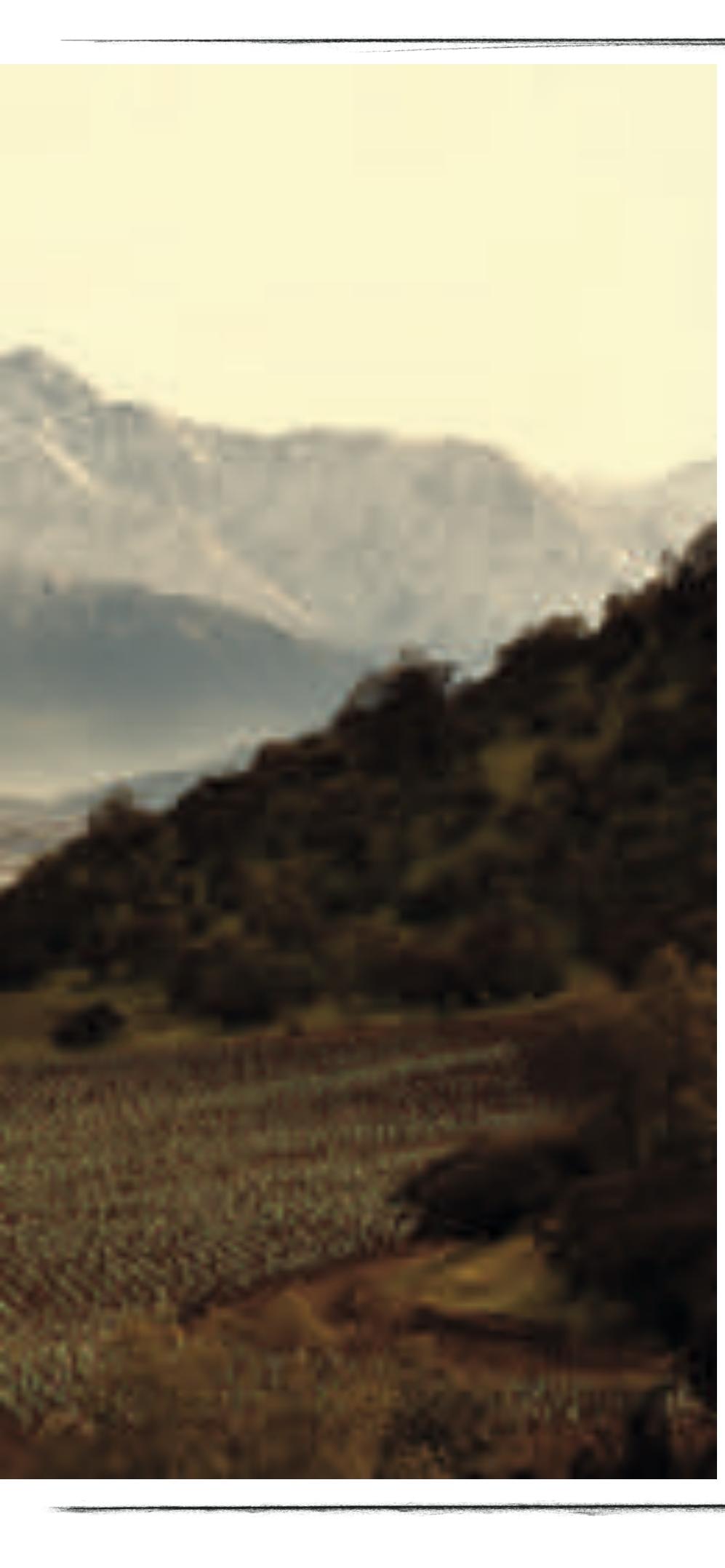


# READY TO RAMBLE

HORIZON-BROADENING ADVENTURES TO EXPERIENCE AS A TEAM





## ROAD TRIPPING IN CHILE

Replacing the depths of a British winter with the technicolour high of a Chilean summer is delightfully disorientating. The sky is steeped in blue, the roads are lined with saucepan-sized hydrangeas and avocado trees dangle their fruit as we make for the wild Pacific Coast. Our sons, aged three and five, were born in Santiago – this is a much-anticipated trip back to a country that owns a chapter of our life. Our first stop is a two-hour drive north-west of the city, and the view from the car window switches from bucolic to Sahara-like with goats nibbling on squat trees. Then, abruptly, the land drops away and the cliff-clinging road leads down to Zapallar, a horseshoe cove where butterscotch-coloured sand spreads out before fantasy houses separated by woodland and agapanthus-filled gardens.

To my mind, it's Chile's prettiest beach town. We're staying in a green-and-white doll's house, Hotel Isla Seca, its walls hung with photographs of 1880s society and a guest-book entry from Margaret Thatcher's visit in 1994.

Days are spent ordering Pisco Sours and ceviche at El Chiringuito as the boys watch jumping dolphins and wave at pelicans. The smells tug at the strings of nostalgia – salty seafood, citrusy pine trees, sun-baked stone. Next up: Santiago, a city that is like a magic box where all the best bits are tucked away in hidden compartments. We race to Metissage, our favourite bakery in Vitacura – its hot chocolate is so thick you eat it with a spoon – and have lunch at Mestizo with a view of flamingos. Then it's time to move south-west, to the beach at Matanzas – but first lunch at Santa Rita, where French vines first took root more than 150 years ago. Waiters like the penguins from

*Mary Poppins* appear with cloche-covered dishes. We go on a tour of the immense gardens, nodding admiringly at South America's tallest bougainvillea while trying to keep the boys from dive-bombing into the Roman baths.

From old world to surfer's paradise, we arrive at Hotel Surazo in the early evening. The next day we delight in dragging ourselves up the steep sides of sand dunes only to whoop back down again, free and weightless. Evenings

are for eating: plates piled high with grilled octopus followed by meaty white kingklip and creamed polenta, toes in the sand, bodies warmed by the fire pit. We've saved Matetic Vineyard in the Casablanca Valley for our

last stop. Again, the smells draw me in – here it's sun-drenched terracotta tiles and the olive-oily woodiness of the plants. I sit in dappled shade by the pool with a glass of Sauvignon Blanc as the children learn to leap in like little frogs. I think of the popular saying '*más chileno que los porotos*' (more Chilean than beans). It may not be as charismatic as Argentina or as legendary as Peru, but Chile is wholesome, understated and genuinely nourishing for a family. GABRIEL O'RORKE

**BOOK IT** Journey Latin America offers a 12-day trip to Santiago, Zapallar, Matetic and Matanzas from £3,018 per person, including flights, transfers, excursions and some meals. [journeylatinamerica.co.uk](http://journeylatinamerica.co.uk)

# BEST FAMILY *holidays*



## TEMPLE HOPPING IN LUANG PRABANG

Some places leave their mark, so much so that you find yourself longing for them years later. I had always wanted to return to Luang Prabang in Laos, with my pre-school daughter by my side. The heavy, fragrant air and quiet streets, packed between the muddy banks of two rivers, combine to create a bewitching effect. Wandering its dusty, forest-fringed lanes is such an escape from modern life. When I finally booked a trip for us I was delighted to find that she too was entranced. She loves treasure maps, so Luang Prabang was hers, with dozens of temples to explore. ‘Buddha!’ she would shout triumphantly in the delicious freshness of the mornings as she darted between blossom-laden frangipani trees, spying statues beneath pointy roofs, or leapt up steps guarded by many-headed serpents. This was a magical kingdom where orange-robed monks padded around on business of great importance. She learned to remove her shoes before sitting quietly at a Buddha’s feet and staring up into his wise eyes. Enlightenment was perhaps some way off, but we achieved moderate success at least on the road to sitting still, if only for a minute. The city has a cosy café culture and our favourite haunt was Le Banneton, where I would linger under cooling ceiling fans over organic Laotian coffee, my daughter wolfing down

French pastries. For sheer beauty, Wat Xieng Thong was our favourite, offering a great haul of ‘treasure’ – rows of gilded figures propped up against red ochre walls brimming with colourful glass tiles. We’d go for strolls, spotting smaller compounds behind tangles of vines or following the rhythmic chanting. At Wat Choumkhong, we found a golden monkey in the garden and at Wat Xieng Muang, we watched statues being restored in the shade of crinkly banana leaves. Wat Pa Phai was tiny but had the most gorgeous setting, surrounded by feathery tamarind trees, towering palms and spiky bromeliads. When the sun began to sink behind forested hills on

the far side of the Mekong, we ordered ice cream at rustic riverbank bars and watched barges idle past. We blinked like magpies at exquisite tribal jewellery and browsed indigo-dyed blouses and patterned jackets, whooping as the tuk-tuk bounced over bumpy roads on the way to the night market. Just opposite, the royal temple shone in the darkness, its tiered roof swooping upwards to meet the stars. Luang Prabang had fed my daughter’s imagination. NATALIE PARIS

**BOOK IT** Red Savannah offers a seven-night private trip in Laos for a family of two adults and one child from £1,458 per person.  
Excludes international flights. [redsavannah.com](http://red.savannah.com)





PHOTOGRAPHS: LAURYN ISHAK; CHLOE SINANOGLU; CHRIS WISE

## ISLAND ROAMING IN MADEIRA

We were a family in transition: illness, teenage break-ups, leaving school. An escape was needed, quickly, so I did something I'd never considered before and booked a five-day trip to Madeira. There was no chance to plan – we just threw some clothes in our bags and set out for this island trying to shrug off its reputation as holiday hotspot for octogenarian ladies. In Funchal we took the cable car to the tropical gardens at Monte and whizzed back down in wicker sledges. The sturdy rental car managed to rev up precipitous tracks past Cadillac-pink belladonna lilies, eucalyptus and UNESCO-protected pockets of laurel forest to hike to waterfalls and lagoons. One afternoon we headed up the mountain of Achada do Teixeira, arriving in the early evening just as the sun was doing spectacular things with shades of pink and gold. We walked to the highest peak, Pico Ruivo, through an amphitheatre of jagged summits while beneath us the clouds shapeshifted into dragons and whales. It would have made a great picture: the five of us striding towards the horizon, children up front, faces like trailblazers. On past holidays they have demanded downtime, screen time, pool time – but now there was no such request. Lockdown had made us all greedy for experience; they wanted to feast on the foreignness of everything. One night we found ourselves on a street framed in drifts of bougainvillea:

purple, magenta, blazing orange. We settled at a restaurant with chequered tablecloths and devoured plates of soft Azeitão cheese, limpets in a garlicky marinade and ferocious-looking black scabbard-fish. My son ate this – the same boy who a few years ago was prone to throwing a fit over a fish finger. Another evening we shared a table with a local family in Câmara de Lobos and in faltering Portuguese engaged in a lively conversation punctuated by nods while a stray feline did figures of eight through our legs. The proprietor insisted that we try *poncha*, a tooth-achingly sweet liqueur, and my eldest became tipsy and revealed secret crushes she later denied. On the last day we took another cable car to Fajã dos Padres. Some 450 years ago, an intrepid band of Jesuits arrived here by boat. Beneath the towering rock, they grew figs, mangoes, sweet potato and prickly pears. Today, this jewel-green spit of land still sparkles with flowers and flashes of birds and butterflies – the perfect place to pass the day. The children padded off to find a cool spot under a mimosa tree, lazily keeping an eye on the shimmering sea – unwittingly putting sights and sounds into their pockets to sustain them when we returned home. EMMA INGLIS

**BOOK IT** Doubles at Reid's Palace, A Belmond Hotel, Madeira from about £285. [belmond.com](http://belmond.com)



PHOTOGRAPH: SIVAN ASKAYO

# BEST FAMILY *holidays*



## OFFBEAT EXPLORING IN ANTIQUA

When Queen Elizabeth II came to visit this Caribbean island in 1966, the roads she travelled on were freshly tarmacked so that her driving experience could be as pleasing as possible. And in that spirit, the something-for-everyone hotels, white beaches and shallow waters are what has made Antigua an evergreen winter-sun retreat. But my two boys and I wanted to get closer to local life. We wanted to travel the pot-holed roads, the ones the Queen did not see. We'd already joined the fishermen at Keeling Point and pulled up lobster from cages. We'd talked to the white-haired Englishman who had been shipwrecked 20 years ago, living in his boat with a broken mast ever since. We'd sat down with the fruit sellers on Old Road who'd set up stalls piled high with whatever they'd picked that day, and eaten at the no-name place. But here we were, on a Saturday night, and the capital St John's seemed oddly deserted. The air was filled with frogs chirping in the bulrushes; a cow crossed the street. Otherwise it was empty. Our taxi dropped us off at a restaurant where a waiter led us to a small tilted table with insects whirling around. 'Do you have wine by the glass?' I asked, opening the C&C Wine House menu. 'Alas, no wine,' the waiter informed us. I ordered a beer. He wafted his hand dismissively, disappeared then reappeared with our food – seared tuna with toasted sesame, fresh as the breeze. Just as we were finishing,

I became aware of drumming. 'Jump up,' the waiter said. 'There's a street party on the boardwalk.' We followed him towards the quay, straining to hear. As we rounded the corner the music hit us – a steel drum, a saxophone, nimble fingers stringing a guitar. People twisted and jived, welcoming us to join in. We did. Local life, it turns out, is actually easy to find amid the glitz. This is what makes the island unique – the paved and unpaved roads running into each other, wherever you go. LINDSAY HAWDON

**BOOK IT** British Airways flies direct from London Gatwick to Antigua. [ba.com](http://ba.com)

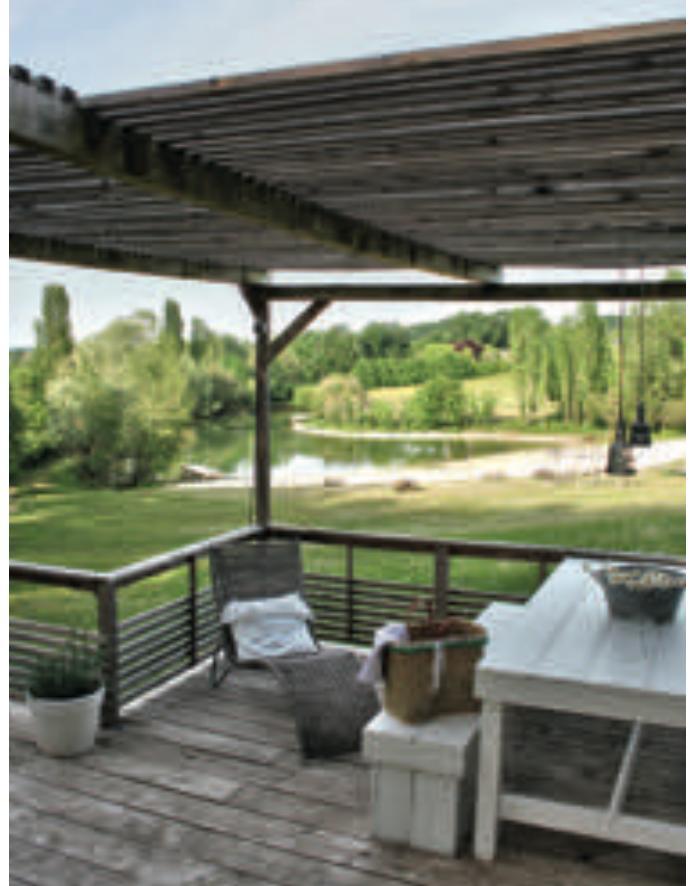
## FISHING IN THE SELOUS

The red path ribbons through bush that is blushing green at the first rain. We don't see another vehicle; it's like we've got the land all to ourselves. Originally called the Selous after the English conservationist who inspired novelist Henry Rider Haggard's Allan Quatermain, Tanzania's Nyerere National Park was renamed in 2019 in a nod to the country's first president.

It is one of the biggest on the continent – more than twice the size of Kruger. We're on the Rufiji River to catch tiger fish. Africa's most exciting freshwater species, they run a hard, fast fight. They'll whip the line so that it whines, breaking the surface then darting beneath the boat. It lurches but the tigers only yield when they tire, and often they don't. When we can't get them, we catch enormous catfish with fingernail-pink skin and whiskered heads. My eldest daughter explains her passion for fishing – 'time to think', she says. Which is why her brother isn't keen. But tigers are never dull. And there's always something to watch here. Hippos glare at us. They look like fat labradors, except less friendly. Crocs litter banks like driftwood. When they become aware of us, they scuttle into the water and lurk like submarines. Sandy banks yield to steep cliffs; hyrax scream and fish eagles cry, combining in a scary movie soundtrack. This is one of the few parks where you can walk and fly-camp – all that's between you and the dark is a sheet of canvas. I worry the children will get bored on a game drive after the river's excitement, but our guide is used to engaging youngsters, pointing out tracks. We watch birds on Lake Tagalala. A pair of lapwings furiously defend their nest from an egret picking its way towards a fishing spot. Ducking the lapwings' dive-bombing, it comes at its prey from a horizontal angle, folding its neck gracefully so the head is almost at water level and the shadow doesn't give its position away. Then it strikes. Perhaps we should approach the tigers with more cunning too. ANTHEA ROWAN

**BOOK IT** Nomad Tanzania offers a seven-night safari in southern Tanzania from about £3,985 per person, including activities such as fishing, meals and domestic transfers. Excludes international flights. [nomad-tanzania.com](http://nomad-tanzania.com)





## CAMPING IN SOUTH-WEST FRANCE

The cross-Channel camping holiday is an age-old tradition that launches a thousand roof racks at dawn, military-grade packing lists fluttering in their wake. Six hundred years ago, English pennants were raised at Crécy and Agincourt; now multi-coloured settlements appear each summer around rural France, punctuated by the clack of paddleball and young voices in faltering French asking for croissants. Camping here was until recently of the pitch-your-own variety, or of ready-pegged sites under the

Eurocamp banner, but that's been changing over the past few years as smaller, more individual glamping spots have emerged. The Loire, Brittany and Normandy are well-mapped, but we headed south to Lot-et-Garonne, a region tucked beneath the Dordogne with few claims to fame. Framed in part by the two rivers that give the area its name, the landscape was defined by the Hundred Years' War, with *bastides* crouching on hilltops

amid a sea of fields, orchards and woods. La Parenthèse campsite is positioned around a gaggle of old farm buildings a few miles north of the town of Monflanquin. Alongside individual pitches, there's a herd of safari-style tents set on raised wooden decks with kitchen spaces and bunk beds, and a couple of chairs on the terrace. The best campsites aren't just fields with enough space for tents but little worlds that have their own centres of gravity, their own rituals and myths. La Parenthèse could be plotted out like Pooh's map of 100 Acre Wood. The steep ascent from the trees, past meadows to the goats of the petting zoo and the pétanque court; the short-cut down ditches to the pool and bar for baguettes and *citron pressé*; behind it the lake with its white-sand beach and leaky boat that crews of children row to the middle then yell to be rescued. On Friday night it's the mussel-and-frites beach party, excitable small helpers dispatched to gather branches for toasting s'mores. One afternoon, tipsy with the heat, I swung with our son in hammocks and saw a travelling circus arriving in the field below – a miraculous intrusion from the outside world. Within striking distance are pools for wild swimming, and

the nearest town, Villeréal, a medieval time capsule with absinthe-coloured shutters and a covered market where locals have been buying farm food for the past 700 years. But for the most part we kept to the slow rhythms, embracing the midday *langueur*, watching our son slip away with new friends, an absence of any real plans. Campsites may have evolved since my own childhood trips in the early 1980s, but at places like this that decade's sense of children being able to roam free, without supervision, remains. RICK JORDAN

**BOOK IT** Visit [la-parenthese-camping-les-ormes.com](http://la-parenthese-camping-les-ormes.com)  
or [coolcamping.com](http://coolcamping.com)

## NATURAL-SPRING SWIMMING IN ICELAND

Last summer I realised that all of my daughter's friends could swim – some really well – but we'd totally missed the memo about booking lessons. We thought that a few weeks at a villa with a pool would fix the situation, but before we knew it, borders were closing and our choice of destinations dwindled. But just as limitations

foster creativity, the lack of options led to an incredible counterintuitive idea. They took us to a land where naturally hot springs flow straight out of the ground, with dramatic waterfalls, glacial pools and the famous Blue Lagoon. A place where the swimming culture is so strong that the community gathering place is the hot tub at the local pool, rather than the pub. If you can learn to swim anywhere in the world, why not do it in Iceland? We hatched a plan: rent a campervan, drive round the 800-mile Route 1 and hit the water twice a day. Every hour or so along the way, there was somewhere exceptional to plunge into: hot springs and rivers, municipal pools and no-frills spas, off-the-beaten-track spots. Into our luggage went multiple towels, a pair of swimming costumes and a very warm jumper each. Our first dip was in Reykjadalur Valley, an hour from Reykjavík. The perplexed look on the children's faces at the bath-warm temperature was worth 45 minutes of moaning about the walk up a steep dusty path – the fast-flowing river was hidden up a slope beyond bubbling mud patches and sharply defined alpine valleys that cut the sky in half.

Later at Seljalandsfoss, a waterfall that tumbles 200ft down to a deep, dark pool, we watched circular rainbows veiled in cold mist dance in the late-afternoon sun. Early the next day we sought out Seljavallir. It looks like an ordinary outdoor lido, except that it is moored to the base of a mountain, a 15-minute walk along

a stony path. We sank into its warm mossy waters, luxuriating in having it all to ourselves. Further along the route, the glamorous hexagonal floating pools at Vök Baths near Egilsstaðir called to us. There are legends about a lake-dwelling creature but that didn't deter the locals from taking a brisk immersion before returning to the steamy spa. The kids squealed with delight when their father attempted the same. Mývatn Nature Baths, along the northern stretch of the circular route, was a delirious splash of blue in a lunar landscape with an eggy whiff. It was just deep enough for my eldest to stand on tiptoes – ideal if you're learning to swim – and the sky was so bright we needed sunglasses. But the best moments of all were also the strangest: the tin bath by the side of the road, filled with natural spring water too hot to sit in; the falls at Dettifoss, where 100,000 gallons per second thundered by; the clifftop Geosea spa in Húsavík, where we strained our eyes looking for whales far out at sea while the wind blew the sand from the shore below up into our faces. With the children asleep in the campervan one night, I sat under the midnight sun and soaked up the scenery. There was a black-sand beach before me and shadows of dark islands offshore. Kittiwakes wheeled around the sea-thrift-dotted cliffs. I thought about how my memories of swimming lessons are tinged with chlorine and too-tight goggles, but theirs will be lost in this: mountains, magic and the scent of sulphur. LAURA DIXON

**BOOK IT** Check out Indie Campers ([indiecampers.co.uk](http://indiecampers.co.uk)) for campervan tours and use the Hot Spring Iceland app to locate swimming spots.



LOCATION: MÝVATN NATURE BATHS