New Depths in...
by Yvonne Gordon

As cold as Iceland

I can’t feel my hands. I check that they’re still there, my heart pounding, everything else a blur. I am a very cold Aggie — dying of frostbite, getting swept away by the incoming waves of icy water. I feel so cold, but I feel alive.

The Silfra Fissure is the gap between the Eurasian and North American tectonic plates, on the Mid-Atlantic Ridge. As the plates pull apart, the land between drops down and forms an enormous rift. This one is filled with water from the Langjökull glacier. That water moves slowly too — taking 50 to 150 years to travel here through the lava fields that lie beneath.

The water is clear enough to drink. Cautious along its gentle current of glacial water, I see no colourful fish or pieces of seaweed, everything is blue. Some parts are shadowy, with grey bent sprouting seaweed. Others are rocky. At one point, I see a huge white boulder wedged between the two plates. It looks like it could topple hundreds of metres into this otherworldly abyss. The light shines down like shafts in an underwater cathedral.

Adventures like this are one of the reasons people go to Iceland — all year round. For so long, this piece was pricey enough to put out of reach of many tourists. It’s still relatively expensive, but since the financial crisis of 2008, its currency has been devalued. That makes a difference.

Iceland in winter is not for everyone — and this is not for everyone. But it is for those who love the adventure of it all. A place where you can snorkel between the two tectonic plates, or hike across the frozen landscape. And for me, it is a place of extremes.

Snorkelling in the Silfra Fissure with Arctic Adventures costs from €150 per person, including a guide, drysuit and snorkelling equipment.

NORTHERN LIGHTS HUNT
WHERE: The tour visits the Icelandic countryside for a chance to see the Northern Lights. Including hotel accommodation, the tour departs from Reykjavik.

JEEP SAFARI
WHERE: The Golden Circle and Langjökull Glacier are just two of the many activities offered by JEEP SAFARI. The tour departs from Reykjavik and includes all equipment.

SnoCruises, and a stop at the mighty Godafoss waterfall.

Iceland’s capital is a good base, but it’s not the only one. You choose to put away from the bright lights of the city in the fun hotel, for example — located beside Thingvellir, to the southwest of the city. It is surrounded by volcanic lava fields and low, snow-covered hills.

Here, random clouds of steam raw from geothermal pools under the land. Hotel staff keep a watchful eye on the Northern Lights. They wake us in the middle of the night when the aurora starts to show. Another novelty is that, under the hotel (which is partly on either side of an outdoor hot tub). We try it in one morning before sunrise — in the pink dusk with an air temperature of -2°C — but the heat of the geothermal water is just too lovely.

If we’re all there, the sky lights a little, hazy pink with orange and gives us a glimpse of the otherworldly beauty. Several bursts of pink and yellow make our eyes water at the sight.

I get out, and run back into the building. The water left by my footsteps freezes into foot-shaped puddles on the wooden floor. Iceland in winter can be cold, but it’s refreshing. It’s fascinating.

It’s the place for adventure… and it makes me feel alive.