

## Soaking in nature : Iceland's geothermal bathing culture earns global recognition

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Dhaka : Iceland's dramatic volcanic landscapes have shaped more than just its scenery - they have created a bathing culture that is now gaining global recognition. The country's centuries-old tradition of geothermal bathing has been nominated to UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage list for 2025, highlighting how natural hot springs have become an essential part of Icelandic life, wellness, and social culture.

Fed by underground volcanic heat, Iceland's geothermal waters have long been used to restore both body and mind. Across the island, mineral-rich hot springs, lagoons, and public pools offer spaces where people can relax while surrounded by the country's rugged natural environment.

Geothermal energy plays a central role in Icelandic life. Naturally heated water is widely used to warm homes, power industries, and

supply bathing facilities throughout the country. For many Icelanders, soaking in hot pools is not an occasional luxury but a daily ritual that reflects a close relationship with nature.

### Highlands' natural spa

In Iceland's remote central highlands, the Kerlingarfjöll mountain range offers one of the country's most striking geothermal landscapes. Steam rises from vents in the earth while bubbling hot springs and sulphur-rich mud pools dot the colorful Hveradalir valley.

Nearby, the Highland Base Kerlingarfjöll resort allows visitors to experience this environment through outdoor geothermal baths. The water in these pools is drawn from deep beneath the valley and is naturally rich in iron, giving it a distinctive orange hue. The mineral content is believed to help soothe skin irritation and inflammation, making the baths both relaxing and therapeutic.

### Blue Lagoon: From power plant to global icon

Among Iceland's most famous geothermal attractions is the Blue Lagoon on the Reykjanes Peninsula. The lagoon formed in the late 1970s when mineral-rich water from the nearby Svartsengi geothermal power plant flowed into surrounding lava fields and gradually collected into a large pool.

Scientists later discovered that the lagoon's silica-rich waters could help treat chronic skin conditions such as psoriasis and eczema. This finding led to the establishment of a specialized psoriasis treatment clinic in 1994 and helped transform the Blue Lagoon into one of Iceland's most well-known wellness destinations.

Today, its milky-blue waters attract visitors from around the world seeking relaxation, spa therapies and the reputed healing properties of its minerals.

### More than wellness: Social ritual

While geothermal waters are widely valued for their health benefits - including improved circulation, muscle relaxation and stress relief - the practice also carries strong social significance.

Public swimming pools and hot springs across Iceland function as

community gathering places where people meet, talk and unwind together. Whether in urban neighborhood pools or remote natural baths, the experience encourages social connection while embracing the surrounding natural environment.

### Recognizing cultural heritage

The UNESCO nomination acknowledges how geothermal bathing has become deeply embedded in Icelandic identity. It represents a tradition that combines nature, wellness and community life in a way that is unique to the country.

From the steaming valleys of the highlands to the iconic lagoons along the coast, Iceland's bathing culture continues to draw visitors seeking both relaxation and a deeper connection to the island's powerful geothermal landscape.