

Iceland glacier national park named World Heritage site

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The park is named after Europe's largest glacier

UNESCO on Friday added Iceland's Vatnajökull National Park, Europe's largest with a landscape of "fire and ice," to its World Heritage List.

Shaped by volcanoes and surrounded by lava fields, the park is also home to the largest glacier in Europe, after which it is named.

The protected area of some 14,500 square kilometres (around 5,600 square miles)—or 14 percent of the whole country—is "an exceptional example of both the interplay of ice and fire and of the separation of earth's [tectonic plates](#) on land," according to UNESCO.

"This recognition of the outstanding universal value of the Vatnajökull National Park will benefit the area and further ensure its integrity," Education Minister Lilja Alfreðsdóttir told AFP.

"We are all responsible for its magnificent nature and history."

The glacier, which covers more than half of the park and eight percent of Iceland's surface, reaches over several [volcanic systems](#), including two of the most [active volcanoes](#) on the island, Grimsvotn and Bardabunga.

Iceland's highest point, Hvannadalshnjukur at 2,110 metres, is located at the southern edge of the glacier.

Tourists often flock to the peak to admire the view, when they aren't found at the Jökulsárlón lagoon, located at the foot of the ice cap with its characteristic small turquoise blue icebergs.

The [park](#) also contains the Lakagigar, a row of craters formed in a violent eruption in 1783, when lava spewed out of the mountain for months.

The spread of toxic ash ruined pastures leading to sickness and death of livestock and a subsequent famine killed around 10,000 people.

Some have argued that the event, which also had an impact on much of

Europe, was one of the triggers of the French Revolution of 1789.

Vatnajökull National Park is the third Icelandic site to join UNESCO's World Heritage List, after Thingvellir National Park in 2004, where the oldest parliament in the world was established, and the volcanic island of Surtsey in 2008.

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