



### **Fjallsárlón and Öræfajökull, Iceland**

The largest strato-volcano in Iceland, and second only to Etna within Europe, Öræfajökull rises to 2119 m adjacent to the south coast. It is now largely covered by ice that forms an extension to the great Vatnajökull ice cap. The volcano's eruption in 1362 was Iceland's largest in historical times. The event produced huge volumes of rhyolitic pumice that combined with jökulhlaups (glacier floods) from the melted ice cap to devastate the surrounding areas. A smaller andesitic eruption in 1727 created another series of jökulhlaups, but the volcano has been dormant since. Fjallsjökull is the main glacier that flows off its eastern flank to end in the moraine-dammed, proglacial lake of Fjallsárlón on the coastal plain. In this view, Fjallsjökull enters from the right, and the smaller, curving, Hrútár glacier does not reach the lake. Eastwards along the coast plain, Jökulsárlón (Glacier Lagoon) has long been famous for its spectacular icebergs that have calved from the largest single glacier flowing from the Vatnajökull ice cap. This proglacial lake is retained behind a retreat moraine forming a ridge that carries Iceland's ring road, with a bridge over the lake's outlet. Close to the bridge, a dock once housed small boats that took visitors to the glacier front and around the icebergs. Global warming has since seen the glacier front retreat a further six kilometres from the moraine dam, so that it is now too distant for a sensible boat trip, though icebergs do still drift across the lake to accumulate near the outlet bridge. Fortunately for the boat operators, the same global warming has seen the front of the nearby Fjallsjökull retreat from its terminal moraine to expand its own proglacial lake, Fjallsárlón. A spectacular suite of small icebergs now adorn this lake, and are easily accessible; so the boat trips have now moved to this lake, with the added benefit of its magnificent backdrop. © *Photographs and text by Tony Waltham Geophotos*