



Karu Thanu Kumar <karuthanukumar@gmail.com>

Formal Complaint – Iceland Winter Escape (March 23–28, 2025)

11 messages

Karu Thanu Kumar <karuthanukumar@gmail.com>

Sun, Mar 30, 2025 at 1:35 PM

To: support@efultimatebreak.com

EF Ultimate Break Team,

I am writing to formally submit a complaint and **request a partial reimbursement of \$1,400–\$1,500 USD** for the Iceland Winter Escape tour I participated in from March 23–28, 2025.

I chose this trip based on EF's promise of a stress-free, youth-focused, thoughtfully curated travel experience. What I received, however, was a disorganized, overcrowded, and shallow itinerary that consistently fell short of the standards EF advertises—and of what I paid for

1. Misrepresented Duration

Although the tour was listed as six days, we had only three days of scheduled activities (Tuesday through Thursday). Monday consisted of a short, informal Reykjavík walk, and Friday was solely a departure day. Our Tour Director even left the country on Friday morning, before most participants had checked out. For a tour priced at nearly \$3,000, I expected more than three core activity days.

2. Rushed, Incomplete Excursions

We were frequently given less than 30–40 minutes at major destinations such as Skogafoss and Sólheimajökull Glacier. These locations require more time to access and explore—hiking to the top of Skogafoss, for instance, takes at least 45 minutes. The schedule didn't allow for proper immersion or enjoyment, and the experiences felt surface-level at best.

3. Lack of Core Icelandic Experiences

Signature activities that are commonly associated with Iceland were completely absent, including:

- Snorkeling at Silfra
- Glacier hiking
- Puffin viewing
- Icelandic horseback riding
- Folk museums or cultural experiences

These were not part of the base itinerary nor offered as paid add-ons, despite EF's promotional language suggesting a well-rounded and immersive itinerary.

4. Minimal Cultural and Educational Context

The tour lacked historical depth and cultural engagement. No museums were visited, and the commentary provided was often minimal or inaccurate. There was very little effort to contextualize what we were seeing beyond logistics.

5. Basic Accommodations Misrepresented

We stayed in a single hotel, Hotel Klettur, for the duration of the tour. While clean, it offered very basic amenities and no variation in experience. EF's phrasing of "handpicked accommodations" implied a curated range of stays; that was not the case. Essential toiletries were not even provided.

Further, EF included "4 breakfasts" as a tour feature, but these were standard offerings from the hotel—not arranged or upgraded by EF. Presenting these as added value is misleading.

6. Repetitive and Inadequate Meals

The quality and variety of meals provided by EF were profoundly disappointing. As a vegetarian, **I was served just 4-5 pieces of fried cauliflower as the main course at both the welcome and farewell dinners**—the two meals that are typically positioned as highlights of any group tour. Repeating the same uninspired dish not only lacked effort, but signaled a disregard for dietary diversity and nutritional balance.

Additionally, one meal consisted solely of tomato soup and bread, which was **far from sufficient**. This lack of variety was especially frustrating given that Reykjavik *has a growing reputation for modern, inventive vegetarian cuisine, particularly in restaurants that cater to international travelers*. A responsible tour operator should be able to source meals that are both culturally relevant and satisfying—not repetitive and minimalist.

7. Misrepresented “Blue Lagoon Spa Day”

The itinerary allotted 90 minutes at the Blue Lagoon, but with time required for changing, walking, and waiting in long queues, our actual time in the lagoon was far shorter. I exited promptly at 3:00 PM as instructed, but due to the crowd, I was unable to change in time and had to run barefoot across volcanic rocks to avoid being left behind by the bus.

Additionally, **EF clearly booked the lowest-tier Blue Lagoon access**—one mask, one drink, one towel. No robe, no spa upgrades, and no wellness components. This experience did not resemble a “spa day,” but rather a tightly timed tourist stop lacking any comfort or luxury.

8. Overcrowded Group Size

Our group included nearly 40 participants, **making the trip feel chaotic and impersonal**. We were frequently unable to hear the Tour Director during excursions. For a destination with physical movement, variable terrain, and natural landmarks, EF should cap groups at 25 to ensure a manageable and higher-quality experience.

9. Mismatched Age Demographic

EF brands this tour as one for “young travelers,” **but over 75% of our group was 30 years or older**. As someone in my early 20s, I felt socially disconnected. The energy did not align with what EF markets. A clearer and more realistic age range—such as 18–28—would ensure a more cohesive group dynamic.

10. Inappropriate and Excessive Tipping Expectations

EF recommends tipping the Tour Director \$10–\$12/day, totaling \$60–\$72 per person. While I understood this upfront, the reality was uncomfortable. Our Tour Director, Joana, referenced tipping before the trip began, repeated it multiple times during the tour, and again in a message sent near the end.

Tipping should never be requested—especially not by the recipient. It should be based on merit, not solicited repeatedly. **For a group of 40, this created an unspoken pressure to contribute to a \$2,400+ tip pool, on top of a \$2,839 tour fee.**

I am from Singapore, where tipping is included in a flat service charge, and even in U.S. service industries, tipping is voluntary and performance-based. **I’ve traveled to 27 countries and have never experienced this kind of persistent pressure from anyone!**

To be clear, this is not a personal criticism of Joana, who was kind and did her best under difficult conditions. But it is not feasible for a guide to build meaningful relationships with 40 individuals in under a week, especially on a rushed itinerary. If she felt the need to ask so frequently, **it suggests EF is not compensating its Tour Directors adequately—which is a systemic problem, not a personal failing.**

11. Mishandled Northern Lights Experience

Northern Lights viewings were cancelled on both Tuesday and Wednesday, and no serious effort was made to reschedule. On Wednesday night, I ran into university friends traveling independently who saw the lights clearly from Þingvellir. They even shared photos with me.

When we finally went “chasing” on Thursday night, we were taken straight from dinner to a cold, open field and stood around for over an hour. We could have easily returned to the hotel, regrouped, and left later—when it was actually dark enough to see the lights. **The entire process was poorly timed and poorly managed.**

12. False Scarcity and Price Inconsistency

In February, EF texted me stating that only two spots remained. This created urgency and pushed me to book at \$2,839. However, while on the trip, I checked EF’s site and saw the tour still being offered—with “2 spots left”—now for \$2,400.

This suggests EF uses artificial scarcity as a marketing tactic. This is misleading, manipulative, and unacceptable for a company that promotes transparency and trust.

13. Inappropriate Solicitation of Reviews and Tips

On the final day, Joana sent a group message requesting positive reviews. She specifically asked that we give her a 10/10 rating—even in questions not directly related to her—and linked it to personal satisfaction rather than tour quality.

She also used the same message to again mention tipping, directing us to EF’s suggested amount. **By that point, tipping had been brought up multiple times, which created a sense of obligation rather than appreciation.**

Both of these behaviors—soliciting specific review scores and repeatedly requesting tips—are **inappropriate and unprofessional**. Reviews should be honest. Tips should be voluntary. Neither was respected.

Request for Reimbursement

I am requesting a partial refund of \$1,400–\$1,500, based on the following:

- *A 3-day experience charged at 6-day pricing*
- *Rushed, shallow activities and major omissions*
- *Low-quality meals and misrepresented accommodations*
- *Excessive group size and poor demographic matching*
- *Repeated and inappropriate tipping pressure*
- *Mishandled Northern Lights tour*
- *False urgency in pricing and limited transparency*

Please respond within 10 business days with a proposed resolution. If no satisfactory outcome is provided, I will move forward with:

- A formal complaint to the Better Business Bureau
- Public reviews on Trustpilot, Reddit, Google Reviews, and travel platforms
- A social media documentation of the experience
- Attached below is a draft of my review that I will publish

I have full documentation of the itinerary, messages, and screenshots to support these claims.

Sincerely,
Karunya



EF ultimate break blog draft .pdf
204K

Karu Thanu Kumar <karuthanukumar@gmail.com>
To: tejal.salhotra@gmail.com

Sun, Mar 30, 2025 at 9:54 PM

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 **EF ultimate break blog draft .pdf**
204K

Karu Thanu Kumar <karuthanukumar@gmail.com>
To: support@efultimatebreak.com

Thu, Apr 3, 2025 at 9:01 AM

Dear EF Ultimate Break Team,

I'm following up on the formal complaint and partial refund request I submitted regarding the *Iceland Winter Escape tour* from March 23–28, 2025. It's been over 48 hours since my email, and I have yet to receive any response or acknowledgment.

This silence is disappointing—especially considering the depth of the issues I outlined, from the misrepresented itinerary and overcrowded group size to the lack of core Icelandic experiences and repeated tipping pressure. I took the time to document everything clearly and expected a timely reply.

As mentioned in my initial message, I am requesting a partial reimbursement of \$1,400–\$1,500 USD due to the significant shortcomings in EF's service compared to what was advertised. I ask again that you respond within 10 business days from the original complaint.

I hope to resolve this professionally, but I will escalate if necessary. I'd prefer not to, but I'm prepared to file a BBB complaint and share my experience publicly if this continues to go ignored.

Please confirm receipt and let me know when I can expect a formal reply.

Sincerely,
Karunya

John V (EF Ultimate Break) <support@efultimatebreak.com>
Reply-To: EF Ultimate Break <support@efultimatebreak.com>
To: Karunya Thanu Kumar <karuthanukumar@gmail.com>

Thu, Apr 3, 2025 at 11:25 AM



Hello Karunya,

My name is John and I am a supervisor here on the Ultimate Break customer service team. Thank you for your patience here. I have carefully read your email and reviewed your feedback. I'm really disappointed to hear you had such a negative experience on tour! I actually think it would be super beneficial to address things with you over the phone as opposed to via email. When convenient, please use this [link](http://bit.ly/3YMN8AP) to set up a time on my calendar and I will give you a call!

Best,
John

There is no wrong form of potato.

BTW, we have a new FB group for Ultimate Break travelers to connect 'n get hyped. Join the convo: <http://bit.ly/3YMN8AP>

P.S. – don't forget to check out our Help Center – you will find tons of useful information: <https://bit.ly/3UP6Evo>

Office Hours: Monday - Thursday: 9:00am - 7:00pm EST Friday: 9:00am - 5:30pm EST

[7PLGE1-J3X79]

EF Ultimate Break <support@efultimatebreak.com>
Reply-To: EF Ultimate Break <support@efultimatebreak.com>
To: Karunya Thanu Kumar <karuthanukumar@gmail.com>

Fri, Apr 4, 2025 at 6:03 PM

Hi Karunya,

This is a friendly reminder regarding your open ticket. Please email me back regarding the following message so I can make sure you are good to go:



John V (EF Ultimate Break)

Apr 3, 2025, 11:25 EDT

Hello Karunya,

My name is John and I am a supervisor here on the Ultimate Break customer service team. Thank you for your patience here. I have carefully read your email and reviewed your feedback. I'm really disappointed to hear you had such a negative experience on tour! I actually think it would be super beneficial to address things with you over the phone as opposed to via email. When convenient, please use this [link](#) to set up a time on my calendar and I will give you a call!

Best,

John

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If I don't hear back from you over the next day this email will automatically close out, but don't worry you can respond back and any time if you have any questions and we can start up right where we left off!

Thank you,
John

[7PLGE1-J3X79]

Karu Thanu Kumar <karuthanukumar@gmail.com>
To: EF Ultimate Break <support@efultimatebreak.com>

Sat, Apr 5, 2025 at 9:23 AM

Hi John,

Thank you for your response.

While I appreciate your offer to discuss the matter over the phone, I would prefer to keep all correspondence in writing for clarity and documentation purposes. This ensures transparency and allows both parties to accurately refer to the issues raised.

As outlined in my initial email, I am requesting a **partial refund of \$1,400–\$1,500 USD** due to significant discrepancies between EF's advertised tour experience and the reality of the Iceland Winter Escape trip from March 23–28, 2025. These discrepancies include—but are not limited to—misrepresented tour duration, rushed and shallow excursions, lack of core cultural experiences, subpar accommodations, dietary neglect, overcrowding, tipping pressure, and misleading pricing tactics.

This is not simply a matter of personal preference but a pattern of structural failings that do not reflect the service I paid nearly \$3,000 for.

I kindly request that EF Ultimate Break provide a **written response within 10 business days** outlining a proposed resolution. If a satisfactory outcome is not provided, I will move forward with filing a formal complaint with the **Better Business Bureau**, as well as sharing a **public review** across platforms including **Trustpilot, Reddit, Google Reviews, and social media**.

Please confirm that my case will remain open and that I will receive a written follow-up within the stated timeframe.

Best regards,
Karunya Thanu Kumar
karuthanukumar@gmail.com

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John V (EF Ultimate Break) <support@efultimatebreak.com>
Reply-To: EF Ultimate Break <support@efultimatebreak.com>
To: Karunya Thanu Kumar <karuthanukumar@gmail.com>

Tue, Apr 8, 2025 at 10:46 AM



Hi Karunya,

While I do believe it would be beneficial to chat through things over the phone, I'm happy to continue with you here via email if you prefer. First off thank you for taking the time to share such comprehensive feedback. I am very sorry to hear that the trip didn't live up to your expectations. I understand how important it is to feel that a trip lives up to its promise, especially when you've invested your time and money into traveling a long way from home. We recognize that not every element resonates the same way with every traveler but it's clear that aspects of the itinerary and group experience didn't align with what you personally hoped for.

There are a few points from your feedback that I'd like to specifically address.

- Regarding tour duration, we do list the number of days (including travel days) like that for good reason. On our website the total trip length reflects the total time a traveler will need to set aside, including travel and transition days. It isn't intended to deceive anyone or misrepresent what is offered! For this reason, we list the day by day on the website so that travelers can see an outline of what each day entails before booking.
- As far as tipping goes, our recommendations align with widely accepted travel industry standards and are clearly communicated prior to departure so travelers can plan accordingly. We recognize, however, that tipping practices

vary globally, and it's never our intent to make anyone feel uncomfortable or obligated. Tour Directors are encouraged to mention it, but it should always remain voluntary and based on a traveler's experience. We have provided this feedback to the Tour Director as a reminder to approach those conversations with sensitivity and balance.

- Regarding the meals included on the trip, I recognize that the lack of variety was frustrating! It is certainly an aspect of this tour that we're working on improving. While Iceland's food scene, particularly in Reykjavik, has made strides in offering more vegetarian-friendly options, we understand that pre-arranged group meals, especially in a fast-paced itinerary, can sometimes fall short in variety and substance. This is something we're actively addressing with our local partners to ensure that dietary preferences are not only accommodated but thoughtfully incorporated. As a gesture of acknowledgment, we'll be reimbursing you for the three included meals (1 lunch and 2 dinners) provided by EF during the tour, at \$50 per meal, for a total of \$150.

All that said, we here at EF Ultimate Break do strongly believe that this tour offers a meaningful and balanced introduction to Iceland. We stand behind the tour's structure and experiences that it provides. While we will not be able to provide any further cash reimbursement, we'd love the opportunity to help you travel again in the future. I will personally be available to help you select a future tour with us that might be a better fit or I'm happy to connect you to our enrollment team to help you select a tour itinerary that works for you. We'd also like to offer a future travel credit for another \$150 that can be combined with your \$250 repeat traveler discount.

Thank you again for your thoughtful and thorough feedback. We truly appreciate your honesty and hope to have the opportunity to welcome you on a future trip.

Best,
John

There is no wrong form of potato.

BTW, we have a new FB group for Ultimate Break travelers to connect 'n get hyped. Join the convo: <http://bit.ly/3YMN8AP>

P.S. – don't forget to check out our Help Center – you will find tons of useful information: <https://bit.ly/3UP6Evo>

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[7PLGE1-J3X79]

Karu Thanu Kumar <karuthanukumar@gmail.com>
To: EF Ultimate Break <support@efultimatebreak.com>

Tue, Apr 8, 2025 at 11:18 AM

Hi John,

I've read your response carefully, and I need to be direct: your offer is unacceptable.

This is not a matter of meals or future discounts. I will not be traveling with EF again, so your travel credit holds zero value to me. The reality is that this trip was misrepresented—both in terms of duration and content—and that I paid nearly \$3,000 for a disorganized, underwhelming, and at times uncomfortable experience that failed to match what was promised.

Offering \$150 as reimbursement for included meals barely scratches the surface of what went wrong. From the misleading itinerary structure to the lack of meaningful cultural or natural engagement, to the inappropriately handled tipping discussions, this was a deeply disappointing and frustrating experience.

Let me be clear: I am requesting a **partial refund of \$1,400–\$1,500 USD** to reflect the serious shortcomings of this tour. If EF believes in its brand integrity and claims to care about customer experience, this is the moment to demonstrate that.

If this request is not met with a revised, adequate resolution, I will escalate this issue. That includes filing formal complaints with the Better Business Bureau, public review platforms, and consumer protection bodies, where I will outline the misleading marketing, poor delivery, and lack of appropriate restitution.

I expect a follow-up within 3 business days.

Sincerely,

Karunya Thanu Kumar

[Quoted text hidden]

Karu Thanu Kumar <karuthanukumar@gmail.com>
To: Krithika Radhakrishnan <krithika.radhakrishnan@gmail.com>

Tue, Apr 8, 2025 at 11:18 AM

[Quoted text hidden]

Karu Thanu Kumar <karuthanukumar@gmail.com>
To: EF Ultimate Break <support@efultimatebreak.com>

Wed, Apr 9, 2025 at 1:57 PM

Hi John,

Following my earlier email, I've re-read both your response and mine, and I want to be absolutely clear: your offer was inadequate and dismissive, and it failed to meaningfully address the majority of the concerns I outlined.

This isn't about dissatisfaction with one or two moments—it's about paying nearly \$3,000 for a tour that delivered a fraction of what was promised, and receiving a response that minimized or sidestepped the core issues.

You offered \$150 in reimbursement "at \$50 per meal" for the three included meals. Here's what I actually received:

- Tomato soup and five pieces of fried cauliflower
- Just tomato soup and a slice of rye bread
- Beetroot carpaccio with the same cauliflower

If EF places a \$50 value on these, that doesn't resolve the issue—it only reinforces it. Nowhere in the world is a bowl of tomato soup and a slice of rye bread worth \$50. If this is how EF internally assigns value, it only proves how inflated the rest of the tour pricing was by comparison.

You also wrote, "We do list the number of days (including travel days) like that for good reason." That doesn't hold up. This trip began on Monday, March 23 and ended on Friday, March 28. That's five days total—not six. And of those five days:

- Monday was solely arrival and a short walk through Reykjavík
- Friday was a departure day—no activities
- Tuesday through Thursday were the only real tour days

EF marketed this as a six-day immersive experience but delivered just three days of actual scheduled activities, padded on either end by logistics. Calling that a "six-day tour" is, at best, misleading.

You also wrote, "Tipping practices vary globally... Tour Directors are encouraged to mention it, but it should always remain voluntary." That response avoids the real issue. Our Tour Director repeatedly brought up tipping—**before departure through email, during the trip verbally, and again afterward via a group message**. This wasn't one polite mention; it was persistent, sustained pressure that made many of us uncomfortable. That's inappropriate.

And I was explicit from the start: this isn't a cultural misunderstanding. I'm from Singapore. I've traveled to 27 countries. I understand tipping etiquette. What happened on this tour was solicitation, not suggestion. This isn't about one Tour Director. It's about EF's compensation structure. If your business model relies on guests to subsidize staff income through pressure, that's a systemic issue—not a cultural one.

Your reply also ignored several of my original points, including:

- Rushed excursions with only 30–40 minutes at major sites like Skógafoss and Sólheimajökull
- The absence of key Icelandic experiences: glacier hiking, Silfra snorkeling, puffin viewing, horseback riding, and folk museums

- No educational or historical context provided throughout the itinerary
- Group size of nearly 40 people, most over 30—contradicting the “young traveler” branding
- Mishandled Northern Lights outing—no serious effort to reschedule, despite confirmed visibility that night at Þingvellir
- Price inconsistency and false urgency—I booked under pressure (“2 spots left”), yet saw it still listed mid-trip for less, with the same claim
- Inappropriate review solicitation—10/10 review requests tied directly to tipping

Here’s what I actually received in tangible value:

- Hotel Klettur – a basic 3-star hotel (~\$100–\$130 per night), shared rooms, no amenities or variation. Total: ~\$500–\$650
- Transportation – a modern bus, yes, but overcrowded with nearly 40 people. No comfort or flexibility. ~\$200 max
- Meals – minimal and repetitive. ~\$50–\$75 total value
- Blue Lagoon – Lowest-tier Comfort access: 1 drink, 1 mask, 1 towel. We had just 90 minutes total, including time spent waiting in line, changing, and rushing out to avoid being left behind. No robe, no spa services, no time to unwind. Unless a day now lasts 90 minutes, this was not a spa day—it was a tightly scheduled photo-op. Value: ~\$75
- Activities – only three days of real touring, each rushed and surface-level
- Cultural/educational engagement – essentially nonexistent

Even using generous estimates, the trip delivered ~\$1,000–\$1,100 in total value. I paid \$2,839. That’s why my request for a \$1,400–\$1,500 partial refund is not just fair—it’s conservative. It still leaves EF with a significant profit margin despite the substandard delivery.

I am not asking for a favor—I am asking for accountability. If I do not receive a revised and adequate resolution by Friday, April 11, I will move forward with the following:

- Filing a formal complaint with the Better Business Bureau
- Posting verified reviews on Trustpilot, Reddit, Google Reviews, and other travel forums
- Publishing this full email exchange publicly for the benefit of future travelers

You wrote, “We here at EF Ultimate Break do strongly believe that this tour offers a meaningful and balanced introduction to Iceland.” With all due respect: it didn’t.

Customers are not idiots. We know when we’re being sold a six-day immersive experience and handed a three-day shuttle tour with soup. This refund request isn’t about emotion. It’s about basic fairness.

Sincerely,
 Karunya Thanu Kumar
 karuthanukumar@gmail.com
 [Quoted text hidden]

John V (EF Ultimate Break) <support@efultimatebreak.com>
 Reply-To: EF Ultimate Break <support@efultimatebreak.com>
 To: Karunya Thanu Kumar <karuthanukumar@gmail.com>

Thu, Apr 10, 2025 at 4:41 PM



Hello Karunya,

Thank you for your follow-up. I understand that you’re still feeling disappointed with your experience.

At this time, we believe the resolution offered is fair and appropriate based on the nature of the tour and the services provided. We will not be making further adjustments to the meal reimbursement or voucher amount offered.

We understand you may choose to share your experience publicly or file formal complaints. While we regret that you feel this is necessary, that is of course your right. We remain confident in the value and structure of this tour and believe the resolution we’ve provided is a fair reflection of the experience delivered.

Thank you again for traveling with us and for taking the time to voice your concerns.

Best,

John

Best,

John

There is no wrong form of potato.

BTW, we have a new FB group for Ultimate Break travelers to connect 'n get hyped. Join the convo: <http://bit.ly/3YMN8AP>

P.S. – don't forget to check out our Help Center – you will find tons of useful information: <https://bit.ly/3UP6Evo>

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