

ICELANDIC TIMES

Tourism, Culture and Business • Issue 6, 2010

FEATURING



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Travel Highlights



www.icelandictimes.com



Photos from the Eyjafjallajökull Eruption by Ingólfur Juliússon



Iceland rolls out the winter carpet and puts on her holiday finery

The idea that Iceland might be a winter travel destination is a new concept in many people's minds. "What?" you are thinking to yourself, "Isn't it dark and cold, with snow storms and wild weather?" Think "exciting weather, invigorating coolness, spectacular landscapes... blissfully peaceful...and even cosy romantic northern lights-watching weather" and then you'll get a picture of all that awaits you in Iceland this winter.

This issue focuses on South Iceland and the myriad things to do throughout the year, which are easily accessible for day tours from the capital. You will find more and more accommodation and services

in Iceland open year round, making Iceland a very attractive destination for winter travel.

Be sure to check out our up-to-date information from Iceland's Civil Defence about the state of the Eyjafjallajökull Volcano and the surrounding areas that were affected by Iceland's most recent eruption.

So whether you are contemplating a short hop over to Reykjavik for some weekend holiday fun, or you're planning a longer summer tour to catch the midnight sun, we wish you a safe and pleasant journey.

Goða ferð! (Have a good trip!)

Other useful and informative links:

The Icelandic Met Office webpages are where you can get an up-to-the-minute weather forecast for your holiday. It is also an education in itself, with informative pages (in English) on earthquakes as well as information about the Eyjafjallajökull and Katla volcanoes. (There are no signs of Katla or Hekla erupting any time soon, by the way!) <http://en.vedur.is/weather/forecasts/areas/>
Links to the more scientific and reliable northern lights prediction sites:
www.swpc.noaa.gov/pmap/pmapN.html
www.raunvis.hi.is/~halo/leirvogur.html
www.swpc.noaa.gov/pmap/pmapN.html
www.gedds.alaska.edu/AuroraForecast/ShortTerm.asp

The Road Administration website provides hourly updates on road conditions for all roads in Iceland, whether they be gravel or paved. Some roads are only open in summer or are only passable with 4x4 jeeps. You can access that information here: <http://www.vegagerdin.is/english/>

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Northern Lights in Thingvellir
Photo by: Olgeir Andrésson

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Authentic Iceland

For over a 1000 years, Icelandic weather has been a key factor in developing a protective wool, a natural shelter from harsh conditions.





The Tourist Information Centre

The house at Adalstraeti 2, a beautifully restored 19th century timber house, is located in one of the oldest and most picturesque parts of Reykjavik. The building, known as 'Geysir Husið' to most Icelanders, was once used as a general store, stocked with goods of all kinds and quickly became the 'in' place to shop in Reykjavik's early days.

Today, it's the home of Reykjavik's official Tourist Information Centre and is brimming with all the latest information about Reykjavik culture, events, accommodation, tours and more. Carrying a wide array of maps and brochures covering the whole of Iceland, this is where you can change money or get your VAT refund on the spot. Friendly and knowledgeable multi-lingual staff will help you choose between the myriad of things to do and help you to get the most out of your stay in Iceland.

A sweet deal with the Reykjavik Welcome Card

One of the best offers available is the Reykjavik Welcome Card. Not just a discount card, but a card

that gives you rides on city buses, admission to many top museums, seven thermal thermal pools and the Reykjavik Zoo and Family Park. Sweet!



Did you know? The Reykjavik Tourist Information Centre received over 350,000 visitors in 2009.

The Reykjavik Welcome Card is available in 3 different 'sizes':
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 72 hrs. Card: Ikr. 2.500

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Have you seen those Yule Lads?

Perhaps its not just by coincidence that the Yule Lads or Jólásveinar, as they are known in Icelandic, are virtually unheard of outside Iceland! Their parents are Gryla and Leppalúði, trolls who live in the mountains with their black cat. They have all sorts of funny names like Skyr-gobbler, Window-Peeper, Gully-Gawker, Meat-Hook, Spoon-Licker, and Door-Sniffer, their names describing their modus operandi over the Christmas Season, starting on 12th December. Each one arrives in turn, leaving 2 weeks later, with the last one leaving on 6th January. I won't tell you here what kinds of mischief they have been up to over the centurieslet me tell you, you do NOT want to know what they have been up to!

Lately, it has been rumoured that these naughty guys are to blame for much of Iceland's economic woes. "We just thought the Yule Lads were rather harmless and had no idea they would have such disastrous effects on the moral fibre of our children,"

lamented one parent.

In 1857, around the time a man named Klaus from Finland was awarded the international "Best Choice Ever" for Santa Claus award, the Yule Lads noticed that they still had a ways to go if they ever hoped to compete for the pre-eminent role of Father Christmas in their latter years. It has been very touch and go for them in this department as the kind and benevolent qualities of Saint Klaus have been a bit beyond them. However, to their credit, we have noticed some changes over time, including the donning of the *de rigueur* red suit and the placing of gifts in children's shoes if they have been good. They who? The Yule Lads or the children? A profound question.

A few days before Christmas, two Yule Lads came to our house! These guys are still up to tricks and managed to pilfer a type of sausage that they helped themselves to from the fridge, - without asking mind you! After that, they opened all the kitchen cupboards and filled their sacks with canned goods!

Then, they got into the chest freezer and seized the leg of lamb that was meant for Christmas dinner! They don't bring you stuff at Christmas, like a proper Santa would. They march in and make off with your Christmas dinner! Can you believe these guys? Taking our Christmas leg of lamb in hopes of making off with it without me noticing?

Hey! That's our leg of lamb you got there! Note the sack bulging with



Here are two of them chatting together in a shop in Hveragerði where they were greeting customers and were overheard discussing the possibility of buying a much needed corset for their mother Gryla.

canned goods they are not bringing to us-- they are taking from us! This story does have a happy ending however. In a rare display of repentance they decided to give everything back, (except for two candy canes which they took from the Christmas tree). They also decided that putting all their loot back into the washing machine, was of course, the most logical place.

You see? I told you they are making progress in their moral development!

After doing somersaults, they roared off in their rescue jeep. That's the jeep that rescues them out of all their disgracefully un-Christmas-like behaviour.

The last one, named Candle-Beggar, steals candles or at least used to when they were made of tallow, which is edible. He must have been desperately poor to have to eat candles....but that was then and this is now. Really not sure what he does now with wax candles, but the good news is that he leaves on 6th January, when we can all rest easy.....sort of.... until next year.

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Birds of Southern Iceland

- A Birdwatcher's Paradise

Birds of Southern Iceland is a programme offering excellent year-round services for birdwatchers. Southern Iceland has a great deal to offer visiting birdwatchers with a wide variety of habitats, including wetlands, seabird colonies, highland oases and unique coastlines. The largest colonies of Puffin, Pink-footed Goose and Great Skua in the world are located within this region, together with the Europe's largest Leach's Storm-petrel colony. South Iceland has a wide range of accommodation from camp sites to 4-star hotels and some within a short driving distance from Reykjavik.

Hornafjörður and Stakksfjörður are shallow fjords or coastal lagoons on either side of the village of Höfn. The area is home to large numbers of birds all year round. Not only

is it an important staging area on migration, but breeding birds are well represented in spring and summer. It is also the region's main

wintering area for birds. A rich mosaic of wetlands stretches from Höfn all the way west to the glacial sands of Breiðamerkursandur.



The bird life of the great glacial sands of the south coast has a character all of its own. It is the kingdom of the Great Skua and is home to the largest colony of this charismatic species on Earth. Wherever there is sufficient water, vegetation sprouts up and attracts a range of birds. The spectacular Skaftafell area contains woodlands and a variety of species.

The areas Landbrot and Meðalland support a wide range of birds. The region's wetlands are varied and include flood-meadows, lakes, springs, streams and lava fields. Breeding birds include Horned Grebe and various ducks. The freshwater springs attract numerous birds in the winter and form important wintering grounds for Barrow's Goldeneye, Common Goldeneye and Goosander. White-fronted Geese are common visitors on spring and autumn passage.

Some of the best birding sites are the lake Skúmsstaðavatn and surroundings, Oddaflóð (protected) and lake Lambhagavatn. Large numbers of wildfowl and waders breed in the area and pass through in the spring and autumn.

The valley of Mýrdalur is a rich birding area, with Reynisfjall, Reynisdrangar and Dyrhólaey the chief birding sites. Puffins breed on the cliffs at Víkurhamrar above the village of Vík (the furthest colony from the sea in the world), on Mt Reynisfjall and the headland Dyrhólaey, while Common Guillemot and Razorbill breed at the sea stacks Reynisdrangar and at Dyrhólaey. There is a huge Arctic Tern colony at Vík and a smaller one at Dyrhólaey.

Þjorsárver to the south of the glacier Hofsjökull is the most expansive oasis in the central highlands. It is an area of spectacular scenery, with rich swathes of vegetation alternating with barren sands and glaciers. The area represents very important breeding and moulting grounds for Pink-footed Geese. Other breeders include Great Northern Diver, Whooper Swan, Long-tailed Duck, Purple Sandpiper, Red-necked Phalarope, Arctic Tern and Snow Bunting. Part of Þjorsárver is protected and a Ramsar site.

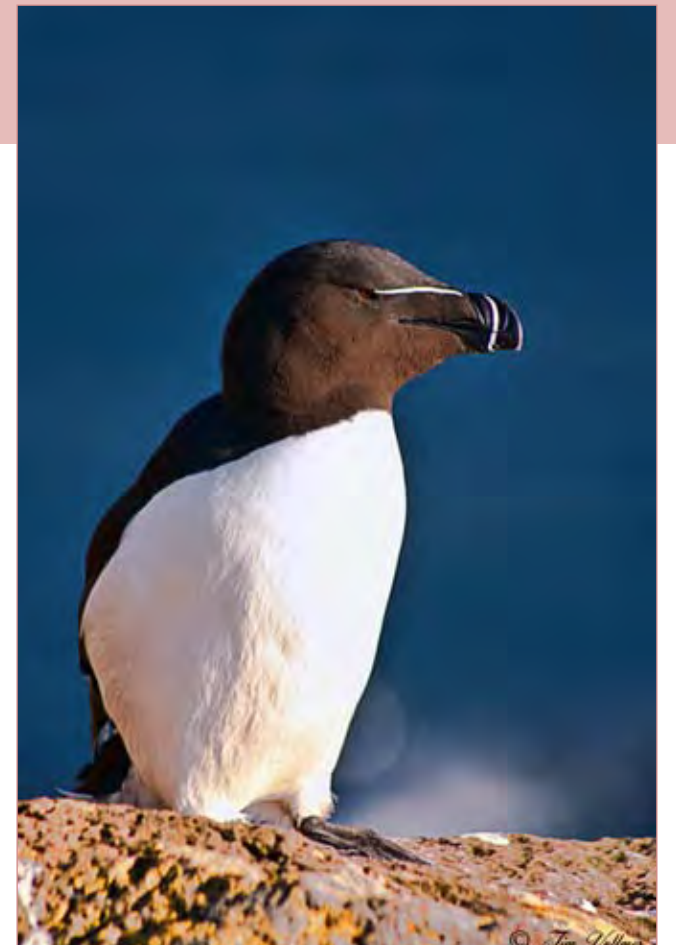
Another key birding location in the highlands is the chain of lakes called Veidivötn. This beautiful and unusual landscape has been shaped by repeated volcanic activity and most of the lakes are located in craters. Great Northern Divers are particularly common, and other breeding birds include Whooper Swan, Pink-footed Goose, Scaup, Long-tailed Duck, Harlequin Duck, Ringed Plover, Purple Sandpiper, Arctic Tern and Snow Bunting. Barrow's Goldeneye winters here and has recently bred.

Lakes, ponds and marshes can be found across the lowland areas of Landeyjar and Rangárvellir. Some of the best birding sites are the lake Skúmsstaðavatn and surroundings, Oddaflóð (protected) and lake Lambhagavatn. Large numbers of wildfowl and waders breed in the area and pass through in the spring and autumn.

Two of the larger lakes in the area, Apavatn and Laugarvatn, along with adjoining wetlands and rivers, are among the best sites for ducks in southern Iceland. Barrow's Goldeneye, Common Goldeneye and Goosander winter here. Harlequin Ducks breed locally and hundreds of Scaup, Tufted Duck and Red-breasted Merganser stop off on passage and are also common breeders.

Sogið, the river which flows out of lake Þingvallavatn, is one of Iceland's best locations for winter ducks. It is home to the largest flock of Barrow's Goldeneye outside Mývatn and is the main winter site for Common Goldeneye in Iceland. Goosander, Red-breasted Merganser and Tufted Duck are common. White-tailed Eagles are often seen in winter and Harlequin Ducks move up the river in spring. Lake Þingvallavatn itself is known for its breeding Great Northern Divers.

The coastline between the mouths of the great glacial rivers Ölfusá and Þjorsá is the largest lava shoreline in Iceland and forms the southern end of the vast Þjorsárhraun lava field which flowed 8,000 years ago and is the largest post-ice age lava flow on Earth. Inland there are myriad lakes and ponds. The area hosts an



array of birds all year and it is of particular importance for migrants such as Knot, Dunlin, Sanderling, Turnstone, Brent Goose, Eurasian Wigeon and various other ducks.

On either side of the estuary of the Ölfusá river there are two large wetlands: BirdLife Iceland's reserve at Flói on the east bank, and Ölfusforir on the west bank. Both are large expanses of pools and lakes which attract numerous birds in the breeding season and

on passage alike. The Red-throated Diver is the characteristic bird of the Flói reserve and Dunlin and Black-tailed Godwit are particularly common here. Ölfusforir is an excellent birding location in winter, attracting large flocks of Teal, Mallard and Goosander, as well as Iceland's largest concentration of Grey Heron.

www.facebook.com/birdsofsouthiceland
Visit South Iceland www.south.is





REYST

Educating the next generation of specialists in sustainable energy

The Reykjavik Energy Graduate School of Sustainable Systems or REYST opened its doors in August 2008, with its first class of international students graduating in January 2010. The school, a cooperation between Reykjavik University, the University of Iceland and Reykjavik Energy, offers a full Master's programme in sustainable energy including geothermal energy, hydro-electric power, wind power and others.

The programme is unique in that it brings together 3 disciplines: Engineering, Earth Science and Business, giving students an opportunity to not only learn the theory behind sustainable energy but to also be involved in all aspects of practical hands-on energy projects and problem solving, business application and implementation.

The Pioneers of Sustainable Energy

Because of the country's special geographic location, Iceland has developed into one of the world pioneers in the use of renewable energy. It is remarkable that in just the last century, Iceland has gone from

Did you know?

- Iceland's water is of such high quality and purity that no treatment is needed whatsoever.
- Several restaurants and bakeries in Iceland make traditional steam-baked rye bread cooked in steam boxes right in the ground.
- The first geothermally heated greenhouses in Iceland were built in 1924 and now account for 2% of geothermal energy consumption.

being one of the poorest countries in Europe, dependent on peat and imported coal for its energy needs, to a country with a high standard of living where almost 82% of its energy is derived from geothermal and hydro-electric sources.

Happy Birthday, Geothermal Energy!

In November of 2010, Reykjavik Energy celebrated the 80th anniversary of the first use of natural hot water being piped directly into two primary schools, several swimming pools



REYST Graduating class of 2008 with director Edda Lilja Sveinsdóttir, centre

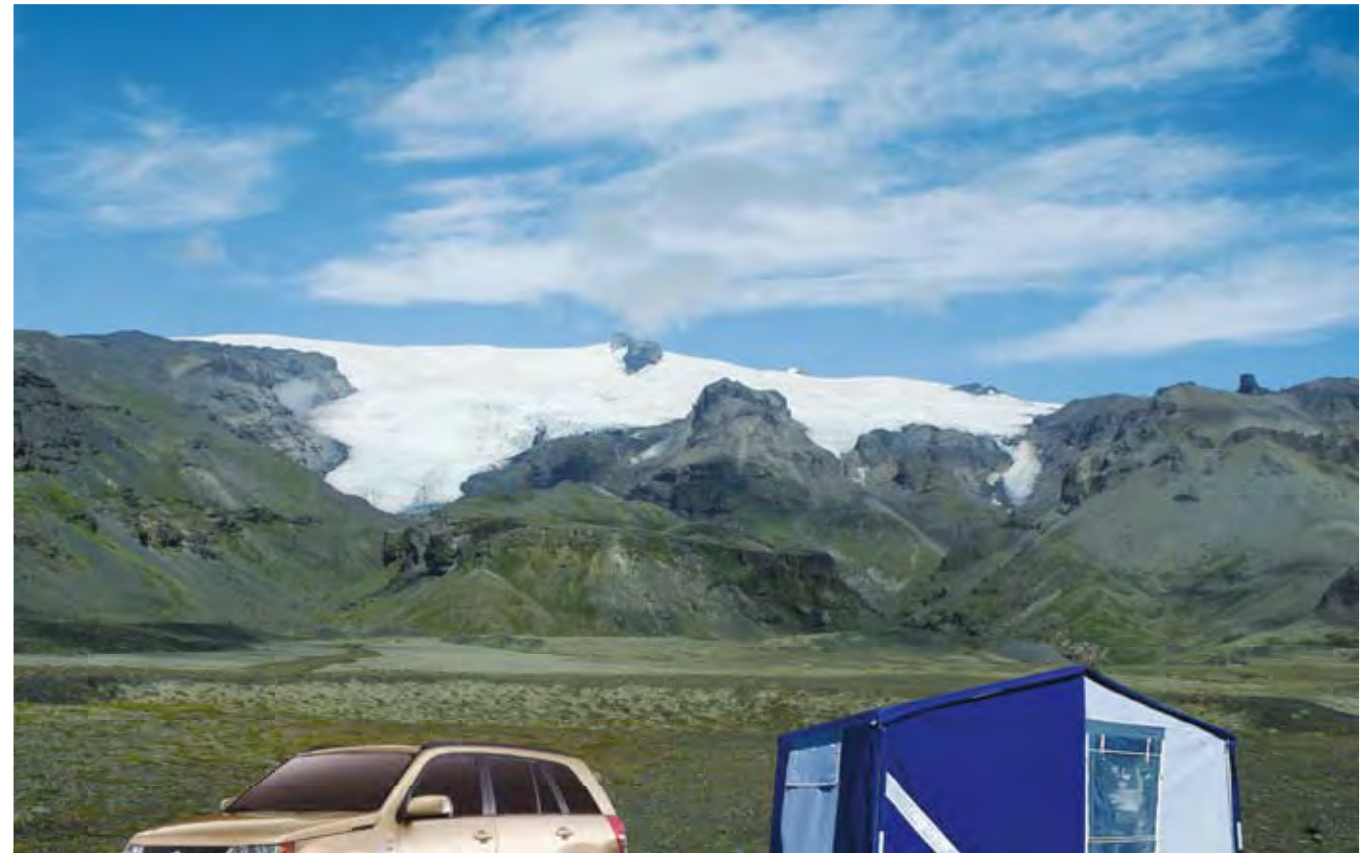
and 60 homes in 1930. Today almost 90% of Iceland's houses, buildings and swimming pools are heated by geothermal sources.

With the worldwide demand for energy expected to increase 50% by the year 2030, the need for trained specialists in sustainable energy around the globe is greater than ever and Reykjavik Graduate School of Sustainable Systems is prepared to help meet this growing need.

Icelandic experts participate in geothermal projects worldwide, and have contributed to the world's best known geothermal projects in the United States, China, Indonesia, the Philippines, Germany, Hungary, Djibouti, Eritrea, Nicaragua, India, Dubai and El Salvador to name but a few.

For more information about REYST please see their website: www.reyst.is

For more information on geothermal energy in Iceland please see the National Energy Authority website: www.nea.is



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National Museum of Iceland

—A state-of-the-art museum that any curator would be proud of

The Making of a Nation - Heritage and History in Iceland

The Permanent Exhibition at the museum takes you on a journey through time, wending its way through the centuries from the Settlement Period right up to the present. Nearly 1,200 years of Iceland's history is divided into 7 periods of time, presented in chronological order and is vividly portrayed by a collection of some 2,000 historical objects and 1,000 photographs throughout. The exhibition starts with the arrival of Settlers to Iceland by boat and ends at a modern-day luggage conveyor belt from Keflavik Airport, loaded with memorabilia from each decade of the last century.

Those cute little turf houses...

The National Museum has a collection of over forty historic buildings scattered around Iceland which are under its care and protection. In South Iceland one of the best preserved turf buildings is the ancient farm Keldur in Rangarvellir, which is mentioned in Njall's Saga, and is easily accessible in the summer. These unique turf houses were the principle type of dwelling from the 11th century until well into the 20th century, even as late as the 1950s. There are only a few remaining in South Iceland whereas many surviving turf houses and even a few turf churches are to be found in North Iceland. Good examples of turf farms are at Laufás in Eyjafjörður (near Akureyri) and Bustarfell in Vopnafjörður (North West Iceland). These are open to the public in the summer.



publishes Icelandic heritage and history books in several languages that are available for purchase in the museum shop.

Temporary Exhibitions

Throughout the year there are numerous temporary exhibits and



events in the museum dedicated to various themes about life in Iceland.

The Christmas Programme (5 - 24 December 2010)

5th-6th Dec.: Exhibition of Christmas trees in Iceland from different periods.

5th-6th Dec.: The 13 Yuletide Lads' Christmas House exhibition gives a complete picture of the Icelandic Yuletide Lads or Jólaveinn.

12th-24th Dec.: Live Happening - "The Yuletide Lads are Coming" - a succession of Yuletide Lads arrive at the museum (in order of appearance) to the delight of young and old alike with humorous tales from their mountain home.

19th Dec.: The Icelandic Yule - an

entertaining lecture in English by Terry Gunnell, Professor of History at the University of Iceland

The Museum Cafe

A pleasant café with floor to ceiling windows is situated on the ground floor just opposite the Museum Shop: sandwiches, light lunches, cakes and pastries, tea and coffee are served.

Opening Hours:

Summer:
(1st May - 15th September)
Daily 10 - 17

Winter
(16th September - 20th April)
Daily except Mondays 11 - 17

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Go to www.seasontours.com for a complete list of tours offered.



Enjoying Icelandic cuisine with Season Tour's dining tour

Did you know? Season Tours also offers guided day tours by jeep or minibus to popular destinations around Iceland

Season Tours

A Tour for all Seasons

Friendly and informal tours for two to eight people make Season Tours perfect for small groups or couples. The folks at Season Tours are all experts at ferreting out fascinating facts about Iceland. Each guide has a diploma in tour guiding from the University of Iceland and they make it their business to know their country and to know it well! You will come away from a Season Tour more knowledgeable and have a better understanding of the people, the culture and the history of Iceland.

El BikeTour* of Reykjavik

Some people's idea of travel is to zip through a city/area/country so fast you wonder if they really see anything! Season Tours, on the other hand, offers the traveller a slower and a more healthy approach to seeing the

sights using electric bicycles, leaving you refreshed but not breathless. The tour starts at the old harbour and takes the 'long route' around the city, stopping at all the major sites and on to the highest point in Reykjavik: Hallgrímskirkja Church, finally culminating downtown. * El Bike Tour is not Spanish...it just means 'electric bike tour'

Hiking Tours

Lots of people hike Mt Esja, that beautiful mountain that overlooks Reykjavik, but Season Tour's Guided Mt. Esja Hike, offers no less than four separate Mt. Esja tours. They each vary in their degree of difficulty and length and are jam-packed with tidbits of geology, history old and new, plus information about elves & trolls in the area...stuff that even your average Icelander doesn't know!

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We encourage you to pay us a visit in the Tourist information centre. We provide a wide variety of services, combined with the services of the library where the information office is located.

Our services include:

- Tourist information (15. may- 31. august)
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East Iceland – Only an hour away

From sparkling glaciers, across black deserts and volcanic craters, to emerald valleys and dramatic fjords – much of what makes Iceland so unique can be found in the East of the country. Mysterious and seemingly remote, it is in fact only an hour away on one of the frequent domestic flights. Make sure you get a window seat! Egilsstaðir, the region's largest town with an excellent airport, makes a good starting point for any trip. It is situated on the banks of lake Lögurinn, a beautiful 35km-long lake whose milky glacial waters are said to be home to Iceland's ancient equivalent of the Loch Ness monster, the terrifying 'Lagarfjósormur' or Wyrm.

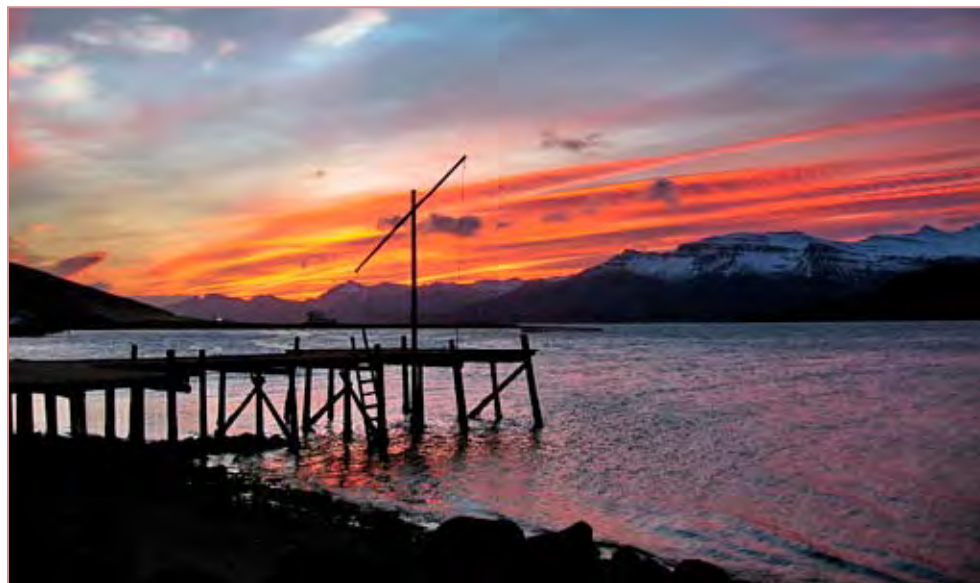
Winter wildlife

Characterised by turbulent rivers, the area encompasses Iceland's

largest forest and rolling highlands

inhabited by herds of wild reindeer, something quite unique to this

corner of the country. Home to a large population of seals, which are most easily seen along the coast



Characterised by turbulent rivers, the area encompasses Iceland's largest forest and rolling highlands inhabited by herds of wild reindeer, something quite unique to this corner of the country.

swans, waders and ever-popular eider ducks. Both the village of Djupivogur and the Uthérað Coast are excellent for birdwatching.

Extreme adventures

In the ice and snow in the nearby Vatnajökull during the winter and spring, you can visit the magnificent Icecaves of Eyjabakkajökull or enjoy the once-in-a-lifetime adventure of bathing in the warm waters of the Kverkfjöll ice caves. In the east you can also experience some of the best northern lights while enjoying a warm natural bath at the edge of Europe's largest glacier. Tours are available from Egilsstaðir that make this a breathtaking experience. Travelling towards the coast, the East Fjords reveal a magnificent landscape of long, narrow fjords,

steep mountains and jagged peaks. The area is brilliant for winter sports; snowmobile riders favour the highlands and skiers gather from around Iceland to enjoy the slopes at Oddskard in the Fjords.

Food for thought

East Iceland is renowned for its wonderful local food. Game such as Reindeer and ptarmigan are the local speciality which, along with delicious lamb and the freshest of fish, organic greens, wild berries and mushrooms make the heart of the region's prize-winning cuisine. Regardless of whether you want to go birdwatching or spot reindeer, maybe experience the extreme adventures of the arctic winter or simply enjoy a romantic get-away, East Iceland is a magical place to do it.





The puffin
The puffin is approx.
30 cm. tall
Its wingspan is 15-17 cm.
It weighs 300-450 gms.
It lives in the North Atlantic
Total population is approx.
14 million

It gets its directions from the moon, but it sometimes confuses city lights with the moon and ends up in the town. In the Westmann Islands, the children collect them all and bring them back to sea.

The puffin in Iceland

The biggest puffin colonies are in the Westmann Islands. Several million nest there annually. In recent years with fewer sand eels in the sea, possibly due to global warming, many pufflings have died as their parents cannot bring them enough food. Puffin hunting, which has been practised on the coasts of Iceland for many centuries, has been limited because of this. Other puffin colonies close to Reykjavik, are on the small islands of Lundy and Akurey right off the coast and in Andriðsey a bit further north. They are also found in Breiðafjörður fjord, on the island of Vigur in the West Fjords, Grimsey, the northernmost island of Iceland and Skrüður in the East. With over 10 million living around its coasts, Iceland is the ideal location to see the puffins and many travellers even visit especially to see this small, strange bird. The remainder are scattered around the coasts of Ireland, the Faroe Islands and Norway, in Europe and of Newfoundland and Maine, in America.

The Puffin

– The bird that has become synonymous with Iceland

Puffins are seabirds and they spend most of their time at sea. Only from the end of April can they be seen near their nesting locations on land, right before they begin to mate. Both male and female acquire their colourful beaks at this time.

At sea, they are silent but during breeding, the puffins are vocal, their sound being monotonous, long and creaking.

Compared to many other birds, the puffin's flight seems clumsy, but it can fly fast. The puffin's real talent is to dive. It can dive down to about 60 meters and stay underwater for almost 2 minutes. It makes great use of this talent to fish the sand eel for its pufflings.

The "Dean" or the "Clown of the Ocean"

The puffin has been called many names, as its appearance and special walk often resembles some human characteristics. It belongs to the auk family and its Latin name is *Fratercula artica*. *Fratercula* literally means "little brother", referring to the bird's resemblance to a monk or a

priest. In Icelandic, it has often been called "the Dean" or the "Priest". In other languages, it has been called the "clown of the air" or "sea parrot"—probably due to its colourful beak, one of its most remarkable characteristics. The beak has blue, yellow and red stripes, though only from nesting time in the spring until autumn, becoming dark brown after that.

The puffin islands and colonies

Unlike its cousins of the auk family, the puffin does not make its nest on the cliff face but in grassy hills above it. There, they make a hole in the ground in which they lay a

single egg. The hole itself is unique; the puffin digs it uphill to prevent it from getting wet during rainy days and puts some corners inside it to use as a toilet. Incubation takes 6 weeks though the puffin does not lie on the egg like most other birds but protects it with its wings. After birth, the puffling is fed well on sand eels as it needs up to one third of its weight in food every day. When not getting food for its puffling, the parents can be seen sitting comfortably in front of their holes, enjoying life. After feeding it for 40 days, the parents leave the puffling and fly to sea. Hunger causes the puffling to try to fly and it leaves the nest, too.

Places to see puffins

- Westmann Islands
- Lundy, Akurey and Andriðsey by Reykjavik
- Breiðafjörður fjörd
- Hafnarhólminn by Borgarfjörður eystri fjörd
- Skrúður by Fáskrúðsfjörður fjörd
- Vigur in Ísafjarðardjúp
- Ingólfshöfði and Reynisfjall by Vík í Mýrdal



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Olgeir Andr sson, photographer

Tales from a Northern Lights' Hunter

Can you tell us a little about yourself?

I was born in Iceland in the little fishing village of Sandger i on the Reykjanes Peninsula. As a boy, I spent many summers driving around the whole country with my grandparents. It was my grandmother who first taught me the basics of photography with the little camera that she always carried with her on these trips. I soon became the main photographer for the family because I seemed to have developed an eye for photos! Then

when I was 14 years old, I got my first camera, a Kodak Instamatic 100. A couple of years later, I switched to a Canon EOS 5d mark 2 and have used this same brand ever since.

What are your first memories of the Northern Lights?

When we were young, my friends and I used to lie in the snow, making snow angels and looking up at the Northern Lights. We lived far from any city centre and so going even just a hundred metres from the house gave

us optimal viewing. I was completely fascinated with the Northern Lights from an early age and to this day, the fascination has never left me. I started photographing them about 4 or 5 years ago on a full-time basis.

Do you only photograph the Northern Lights?

For the most part, yes, and for two reasons. One is that I love going out in our beautiful natural surroundings when it is cold and fresh to watch this stunning phenomena. It's an amazing thought that our ancestors were witnessing the same thing hundreds or thousands of years ago. Number two is because I love to share my talent with others. Just another reason to come to Iceland in the winter!

In recent years, there has been an explosion in the number of people who are eager to learn the technique of capturing the Northern Lights. Do you have any tips that you can share with us?

The advent of the digital camera has made it a lot easier nowadays, because you have more control over

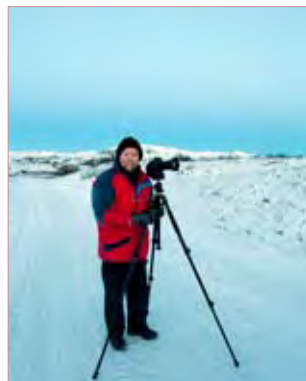
the exposure time and aperture and you can see right away what you have done and make the necessary changes. The second piece of equipment you need is a tripod. The smaller tour companies that do Northern Lights tours often offer tripods, but it is good to check this before you come. Also make sure you are warmly dressed, because you are sometimes spending up to 4 or 5 hours out there watching the lights. Get away from the city lights and check the websites listed below for the forecast before you go. From Reykjavik, you only need to go about 10 minutes outside the city to be able to see them without interference from city lights.

What have been the most unusual reactions you have had from people who see the Northern Lights for the first time?

One time, I had a small group with me and a woman in the group got so excited she was jumping up and down holding on to my arm, her nails digging into my skin. It was a phenomenal occasion and the forecast rating was a '10'. She was shouting, "Oh, my God! Is that real? Is this for real? I just can't believe this is real!!!" and she was going on like that.

Have you had any unusual experiences on your 'hunting' trips?

In April of 2010, I was coming back from a night of photography in the highlands at about 2:30 in the morning. This was in the spring and the ground was just starting to thaw. On the way back to my car I stepped



Olgeir Andr sson, photographer

on an icy patch. My foot broke through the ice and I fell in up to my knees. As I fell, I let out a yelp and immediately an arctic fox somewhere in the distance answered my cry with another yelp! My foot was stuck, but I eventually dislodged it and had to use my tripod as a crutch to walk the remaining fifteen metres to my car. My leg is healed now but it was a good lesson in watching where you step in Iceland!

What about the colours?

The Northern Lights are most frequently a greenish colour but as they start moving faster, other colours appear - often pink, violet and sometimes red. Red is quite rare but I think in the next couple of years we will start seeing more of these totally red Northern Lights. If the activity is at a '10' they are so bright it is almost like daytime. This is very difficult to capture and this is where I have to put down my camera and just enjoy the moment.

Any awards or publications?

Kodak displayed one of my photos on the big screen in New York's Times Square in 2007 and I was chosen 'Photographer of the Year' in Denmark in 2008 by Zoom Magazine.

I won this competition with the same photo that was in Times Square. My work has also appeared in many different magazines, adverts and books around the world.

This summer my new book, "Northern Lights in Iceland" came out in English & German, showcasing the best of my last 3 years of work. Its available in bookstores throughout Iceland and you can also pick up a copy at the Keflavik Airport bookstore before you catch your flight home.

If you have questions about Northern Light photography, Olgeir would be happy to help. You can contact him at: olgeir56@simnet.is

Olgeir's portfolio can be viewed here: olgeir.zenfolio.com/

The following websites publish regular updates of auroral activity:

www.swpc.noaa.gov/pmap/pmapN.html
www.raunvis.hi.is/~halo/leirvogur.html
www.gedds.alaska.edu/AuroraForecast/ShortTerm.asp
www.gedds.alaska.edu/AuroraForecast/



Olgeir does all the preparations for his Northern Lights photos beforehand, and rarely relies on optimisation to perfect his work.





CenterHotels of Reykjavik

Affordable yet trendy



Happy hour at Center Hotel Thingholt is from 5pm to 9pm, every Friday and Saturday.



CenterHotel Thingholt

- CenterHotel's most celebrated and innovative boutique hotel

Decorated in a truly timeless Icelandic style, Hotel Thingholt was designed by award winning Icelandic architect Gulla Jónsdóttir. The floors are tiled in black leather and the lobby walls are covered in salmon-leather tiles. An impressive, long, black lava-textured wall covered in dark glass masks is meant to represent the hidden people of Iceland, while a small and refreshing waterfall trickles down over it.

Coolness factor rating: Off the charts!

Hótel Thingholt
Þingholtsstræti 3-5
101 Reykjavík
Email: thingholt@centerhotels.is

CenterHotel Arnarhvoll

This brand new hotel, right in the Reykjavik city centre, boasts modern Scandinavian design, providing guests with a sophisticated and stylish environment. Excellent location, personal service and breathtaking views overlooking the Reykjavik bay and the mountain ranges beyond are just a taste of what you can expect when staying in CenterHotel Arnarhvoll.

CenterHotel Thingholt was recently awarded a place on Expedia's "Insider's Exclusive List," - an annual selection of top hotels around the world.

Hótel Arnarhvoll
Ingólfsstræti 1
101 Reykjavík
Email: arnarhvoll@centerhotels.is

Location, location, location

CenterHotel's premises are located right in the centre of downtown Reykjavik and so exploring local cafes, shops, galleries, nightlife, and museums couldn't be easier.

The famous Laugavegur, probably the best-known street in Reykjavik, is just a two minute walk from both Hotel Thingholt and Hotel Arnarhvoll, putting you right in the centre of the action.

Stay connected via social media

Stay connected and get the latest about CenterHotels on Facebook, Twitter and TripAdvisor. Find out what's happening in Reykjavik via CenterHotel's Facebook page or try your luck playing our Give-Away game, also a frequent event on Facebook where we give one lucky fan a free night's stay, with breakfast included, at any one of our hotels; Thingholt, Arnarhvoll, Plaza, Klöpp or Skjaldbreid.

CenterHotels website is:
www.centerhotels.com/

Did you know?

...CenterHotel Arnarhvoll boasts a spa including Turkish bath and Finnish sauna.

VATNAJÖKULSPJÓÐGARÐUR

NATIONAL PARK

WELCOME!

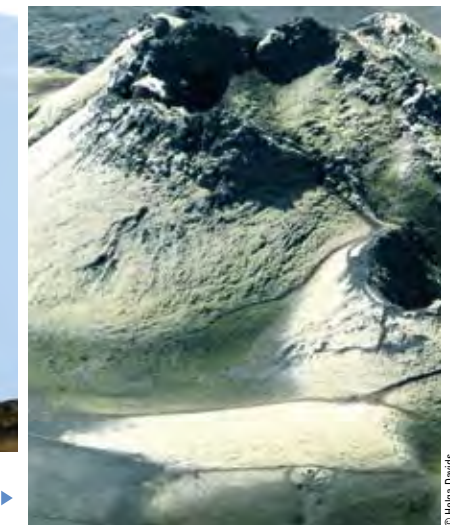
Vatnajökulspjóðgarður is Europe's largest national park. You are invited to see Iceland's highest mountain along with volcanoes, waterfalls, lava fields, sand deserts, and glaciers. Green oases, rich flora and birdlife.



◀ Climbers on Hvannadalshnúkur, Iceland's highest summit
Hafragilsfoss, 2 km downstream from Dettifoss ▶



▲ Reindeer in the northeastern highlands



Laki craters ▶

Visit our website www.vjp.is to find more information on Vatnajökull National Park.



A Quiet Icelandic Christmas

Leave the frenzy of holiday shopping and hectic preparations far behind. Treat yourself to a quiet little getaway this season in the countryside at Hotel Hamar in Borgarnes. Just one hour's drive from Reykjavik, the hotel beckons you with its lights twinkling in the brisk night air. A panorama of craggy snow capped mountains form a dramatic backdrop to set the holiday mood. Let the celebrations begin!

Choose a two- or four-night vacation package which gives you the opportunity to include trips to Iceland's famous Blue Lagoon and other attractions. A highlight is the traditional Icelandic Christmas Eve dinner with Hotel Hamar's owners and their family, followed by an optional visit to the local church for Christmas Eve mass, with plenty of time to relax and enjoy the hotel's beautiful surroundings and outdoor hot tubs.

A few package highlights include:

23rd December

— **St. Thorlakur's Mass**

Pick up your car at Keflavik airport. Drive to Hotel Hamar, with a soothing

stop at the Blue Lagoon on the way. Dinner at Hotel Hamar, followed by Icelandic stories read in English by candlelight. Just like Icelandic children, don't forget to leave your shoe out and one of the Icelandic Yuletide Lads may leave you a gift!

24th December — Christmas Eve

A lesson in how to make traditional Icelandic laufbraud ('leaf bread'), followed by an easy walk around the surrounding area. After lunch at the hotel, join Hotel Hamar's owners, Unnur and Hjörtur, in preparing the table for the Christmas feast, or relax in one of the hotel's outdoor hot tubs. Like everywhere else in the country,

Christmas dinner begins at six in the evening and is followed by a mass at the local church, for those who wish to attend.

25th December — Christmas Day

Relax over a leisurely breakfast; take a drive around the beautiful Borgarfjordur countryside, visiting hot springs, waterfalls and trolls. Dinner is at the hotel, followed by an optional walk through the local town of Borgarnes, to see all the traditional Christmas lights.

26th December — Boxing Day

Enjoy a hearty buffet breakfast,

followed by a visit to the Settlement Centre in nearby Borgarnes. A guided tour through the saga trail is happily provided by Unnur. The rest of the day is free for you to do whatever you wish, followed by an evening trip to spot the elusive but stunning northern lights.

27th December

Leave for Keflavik airport or add a few days in Reykjavik

For more options, trip suggestions, details and booking, please see the hotel's website: www.icelandairhotels.com/offers/christmas-iceland-hotel-hamar-special-offer



The Lobster House

Made From the Finest Ingredients Available

The Icelandic Lobster is a delicacy you simply must try during your stay in Iceland and few are more experienced in preparing delicious lobster dishes than The Lobster House, situated in the heart of Reykjavik.

However, what most Icelanders call lobster is probably not what you think it is. The crustacean on offer in The Lobster House is actually a much smaller species called langoustine which is commonly found in the north-eastern Atlantic Ocean and North Sea. The langoustine is usually around 17 cm (6.7 inches) in length and weighs up to 400g, whereas the common lobster usually ranges from 20-40 cm (8-16 inches). The history of commercial langoustine fishing in Iceland only dates back around fifty years, but since its introduction to the Icelandic cuisine it has been considered one of the top gourmet foods available.

The langoustine's smaller size however does not mean less taste – on the contrary, the chefs at The Lobster House claim that it outshines the common lobster in most aspects. "Even though it is smaller than the lobster most people are used to, I have found that the

"Even though it is smaller than the lobster most people are used to, I have found that the giant lobster doesn't come anywhere near the langoustine when it comes to taste and texture. The langoustine is considerably softer and the taste is much more concentrated."



giant lobster doesn't come anywhere near the langoustine when it comes to taste and texture. The langoustine is considerably softer and the taste is much more concentrated. It is one of the bests possible materials a chef can work with, making my job that much easier," says one of the Lobster House's expert chefs, Ottó Magnússon.

But appearances can be deceiving and Ottó says that it is not uncommon to see a look of surprise on the faces of customers when they receive a plate of these relatively small crustaceans, thinking a mistake has been made. "They are often sceptical at first, but after the first bite, their doubts are removed instantly," says Ottó.

The most popular dish in The Lobster House is the grilled lobster with garlic, a dish most Icelanders savour on sunny summer evenings. But as the name implies, the chefs at The Lobster House are experts in coming up with innovative ideas on preparing this delicacy.

The Lobster House is located in one of Reykjavik's oldest houses on Amtmannsstigur 1, which was originally built in 1838. If you are walking north, away from the pond towards the sea on the right side of Lækjargata you should notice

a cluster of old houses behind a small peculiar garden with an oversized chess board. On the most prominent building you'll see a sign

with the langoustine on it and inside the feast awaits. Further information is available on www.humarhusid.is



Eyjafjallajökull - Fimmvörðuháls - Þórsmörk

From Dept. of Civil Protection and Emergency Management

The Civil Protection authorities prepare for natural hazards in Iceland. The countryside's beauty is legendary but it is also a volatile land.

The Fimmvörðuháls eruption attracted people from many nations. It started on March 20th 2010 and lasted three weeks in a mountain pass between two glaciers, Mýrdalsjökull and Eyjafjallajökull. Through this mountain pass is a popular hiking path 22 km. long and 988 meters high to the Þórsmörk nature reserve. Last summer, ash and tephra covered some of the path and made hiking difficult at times.

This hiking path is known for sudden and extreme weather changes. At times there were hundreds of people at the site during the volcanic eruption. This made the rescue, relief and security effort during the eruption more difficult, since some people did not wear proper clothing for the cold and high altitude.

Lava now covers parts of the old hiking path and a new path has been made in order to protect the newly formed craters that are still hot from the magma underneath. The two craters have been given names from the old Norse gods. The bigger crater was given the name Magni and the smaller is Móði, both names of sons of Thor, the god of Thunder.

Whilst the hiking trail is open, the track for 4WD vehicles up the pass that runs from Skógar to Fimmvörðuháls remains closed for any vehicles.

The Eyjafjallajökull glacier volcano erupted on 14th April. Glacial floods followed the eruption and ran into the Markarfljot and Svaðbælis rivers, damaging roads and protective floodwalls. Ash and tephra spread over vast areas. Eyjafjallajökull has been a restricted area since the beginning of the eruption, except for scientists.

Whilst there has been no volcanic activity in the Eyjafjallajökull volcano since June, scientists are closely monitoring it and the Civil Protection is still on alert since earlier eruptions in the glacier (1821-23 and 1612) started again after short breaks.



Þórsmörk is a nature reserve and a popular destination for hikers and campers, especially during the summer. The road to Þórsmörk was damaged by floods from the Eyjafjallajökull glacier that came down the Gigjökull glacier during the Eyjafjallajökull eruption. The Soil Conservation Service has made an effort to restore the ash-covered land and in late summer, green and lush vegetation emerged. The ash appears to be a good fertilizer.

Tourists also started to revisit the area again. The Road Administration repaired and reopened the road to Þórsmörk in early June, but it is only suitable for 4WD vehicles.

Enjoying your trip

Hiking this area can be a very rewarding experience and is enjoyed by thousands each year - especially for those who enjoy the rugged beauty and spectacular views. It is best visited from late

May to September. It is a challenging environment and visitors should enter it prepared with proper clothing, boots, food supplies and phones. Bear in mind that a hike that may start in calm, +20°C sunshine can face sudden weather changes that see the temperature fall dramatically, with rain and a strong, cold wind. Whilst such weather can be equally rewarding, it can be dangerous for anyone unprepared for it.



Should you face a situation where you need help, the Emergency number is **112**. We hope you never need it, but if you do, we are here to help.



A Man and His Horse on an Icelandic Midsummer's Day

- Kálfholt Riding Tours

Riding an Icelandic horse through the windswept countryside of South Iceland on a delightfully sunny summer's day is the dream of many a horse enthusiast. Freedom fills your senses in the wide open expanses, lifting the spirits of both man and horse. The power and majesty of these noble animals combine instantly with the power and majesty of the Icelandic landscape as it thunders out before you. This interplay between man, horse and nature is something that Eyrún and Steingrímur,

proprietors of Kálfholt Riding Tours have known for many years and now they offer their time and talent, expertise and services to travellers in Iceland.

Breeding for Excellence

Kálfholt is a well established breeding farm in southern Iceland that has produced some excellent horses for both breeding and competition. Amongst those are Röðull, which won the Class B at the National Icelandic Horse Show in 2008. Courses and private lessons taught



by professional riding instructors are offered for advanced riders using Kálfholt's well-trained horses. Located 70 kms from Reykjavik, between Selfoss and Hella, the farm is easily accessible from ring road #1 and is perfectly situated for day tours in the area.

Personalised attention is all yours

Kálfholt Riding Tours specialise in providing riding instruction and tours to individuals, couples and small groups of up to 12 participants. Eyrún and Steingrímur's patient and personal style is perfect for families

with small children, from age 2 onwards and for beginners of all ages. So, whether you are a beginner or a more experienced rider, Kálfholt has organised tours to suit every level.

Popular tours include :

Introduction to the Icelandic Horse - a gentle half hour ride for children 8 years and under.

Introduction to the Icelandic Horse - a one hour tour for beginners of any age.

90 minute, 2.5 hour and 5 hour tours in the countryside along the banks of the Þórsá (Thorsa) river and to Urrithafoss, for intermediate and advanced riders.

Immerse Yourself in a Week-Long Stay

Kálfholt offers an exciting week-long stay at the breeding farm which includes full board, accommodation, a 4-day riding tour, airport pick-up and drop-off and one day of

sight seeing at the Golden Circle (Geysir, Gullfoss and Thingvellir). Participants will receive basic riding instruction which is geared to your level of competence, allowing you to gradually progress in your riding skills. Evenings can be spent relaxing in the hot tub, enjoying traditional Icelandic songs, music and games.

For further information go to: <http://www.kalfholt.is> or for direct bookings go to: kalfholt@kalfholt.is Phone: +354 487 5176





A Ride Off the Beaten Track

- Kerhestar's horses will take you to a hidden world

Less than an hour from Reykjavik, you could find yourself preparing for a trip unlike anything you are likely to have experienced before. Just 15 km. from Selfoss, Kerhestar has a stable of 100 horses. They can provide you with a thrilling and memorable adventure to tell your friends about!

Most tourists to Iceland will visit the spectacular sights like Geysir, Gullfoss or Þingvellir (Thingvellir) - sights that will stay in your memory. What Kerhestar offers is an opportunity to see these but, uniquely, also take a ride into a world most tourists will never see and take home an experience that you will never forget!

Where will you ride today?

At Kerhestar, you can ride for an hour or more - 2 hours, a day or go on longer trips of several days. A favourite day ride is down to the nearby Áltavátn, riding the horses through the waters of the lake, surrounded on all sides by the beautiful countryside.

A longer, 3-4 day ride for the adventurous can take you up into the mountainous area of Lyngdalsheiði,

overlooking the famous Þingvellir and Þingvallavatn (Thingvallavatn). You can stay in the mountain cabin used by the riders in autumn when they go to collect their sheep off the mountain plateaux for the winter. (This has been recently renovated and provides a place for a comfortable night's rest.)

Other rides or trips into the surrounding countryside can easily be arranged. Some rides, in particular the longer (3 - 4 day) trips, require some riding experience.



Photos: Björn A Einarsson

All necessary clothing and safety equipment is provided for everyone, no matter how long their ride will be. On the longer trips, food is also provided. Sleeping bags can also be provided for those who don't bring their own.

An ideal choice for children

The Icelandic horse is not as large as its European or American relatives but it has become renowned for its comfortable ride and good demeanour. Whether you ride for an hour or a day, these horses make it a time you will treasure!

The calm nature of the Icelandic horse makes it an ideal choice for children to start learning to ride. At Kerhestar's horse farm, children can enjoy not only being around the

horses but riding them, being led and supervised by an adult for their safety.

What else would you like to see?

For those who have enjoyed a ride and want to do more, Kerhestar also offers trips in coaches or minibuses, depending on the size of the group, to visit the surrounding tourist attractions - such as Geysir, Gullfoss or Þingvellir (Thingvellir) or a one-day tour up on the Langjökull glacier, if you want a rest from riding.

You can find out more by contacting Kerhestar:

Helga: +354 482 3666;
Sverrir: +354 662 4422
Email: kerhestar@kerhestar.is or
visit their website:
<http://www.kerhestar.is/>

Feel the Freedom of a Farm Holiday

- Is this how Santa Klaus lives?

Imagine walking outside from a cosy farmhouse, looking up to see the largest glacier in Europe seemingly within a stone's throw from where you're standing, stretching out its fingers towards you. Or walking over the crisp snow to view a herd of reindeer. Have you ever wondered which animals and birds share this island with you? Would you like to be able to tell your friends about a very unusual experience, of which few can boast?

Hólmur farm guesthouse, situated just 33 km. from Höfn, is much more than a guesthouse. Here you can stay during winter as well as summer and drink in the stillness, the fresh air, the awesome views - not only around the house but by taking trips to the nearby beach or Jökulsárlón, the Ice Lagoon or to the nearby glaciers.

In winter, all the animals are 'home' from their summer wanderings. Guests who stay overnight in winter have free access to the zoo and they can help care for the animals under the guidance of Magnús and Guðrún - Maggi and Gunna, who are both agriculturalists.

The reindeer tour is unique to the winter here and visitors are driven up close to where the herd is grazing. Powerful binoculars are provided and you can see them in their natural habitat and learn about their ways. The trip to the coast takes you back



in history to the time the British & US forces were stationed here in the Second World War. After that, it's time to taste the Icelandic shark meat and dried fish, washed down with brennivín or Egils malt.

Above all, this is a chance to experience the pristine beauty, calm and stillness of the countryside, unwind from the stress of modern life in a family-run farm guesthouse, styled in the manner of the last century. Despite being on the edge of

a wilderness, there are regular flights and coach connections from Reykjavík to nearby Höfn í Hornafirði, where a car from Hólmur can pick you up. Being fairly close to the Ring road, it is also easy to reach it by car.

Their website is packed with information: www.eldhorn.is/mg/gisting You can call +354 478 2063 or 1037 or +354 861 5959

The email address is: holmur@eldhorn.is

The reindeer tour is unique to the winter here and visitors are driven up close to where the herd is grazing.





You haven't seen Iceland till you've seen the Westman Islands

- Now closer than ever before

For many years, there were only three ways to get to the Westman Islands. The most common has

been to take a 6-hour round trip car ferry from Thorlakshöfn, on the south coast of South Iceland.

Then there is the option of an Eagle Air flight from Reykjavik or taking a 6-seater, single-engine plane from the tiny Bakki airport near Hvolsvöllur, options which, for those travelling by car, often force them to cross the Westman Islands off their wish-list of places to see in Iceland.

The shorter, cheaper option

In July 2010, a new harbour opened at Landeyjahöfn, near Hvolsvöllur - something which a few years ago seemed to be an impossible dream but has now made possible due to recent advances in technology. The ferry Hérólfur, which is operated by Eimskip, sails several times a day

year round, weather permitting. The trip takes around 30 minutes from Landeyjahöfn in good weather, considerably reducing the overall travel time and can carry up to 500 passengers and 60 vehicles.

An island in bloom

Because of all the increased traffic to and from the island, several new shops, restaurants, cafes and hotels have blossomed in the town of Vestmannaeyjar, making this destination more desirable than ever. It's a common mistake for tourists to visit the island for the day and then realise that they should have booked a room to spend the night. Fitting all there is to do and see into a day just doesn't

Another annual celebration takes place over the first weekend in August every year, attracting thousands of mainland visitors. This is "shopkeepers weekend" when almost everything in Iceland shuts down for this 3-4 day extravaganza.



work! A healthy hike to the slopes of the Eldfjall volcano is a good place to start, followed by a bus tour around the island to see where, amongst other things, the Algerian pirates came ashore in 1627 and kidnapped half the population of the island. Boat tours circle the island, providing opportunities for puffin viewing and a visit to the singing sea cave before your tour of the island is complete.

Celebrating Life, Westman Island Style

Although much has been written about the 1973 volcanic eruption which forced the evacuation of

the whole island for 5 months, you probably didn't know that the end of the eruption is commemorated every year on the first weekend in July. This is a weekend of music and song when establishments open their doors wide and life is fêted to the full.

Annual "Shopkeepers Weekend"

Another annual celebration takes place over the first weekend in August every year, attracting thousands of mainland visitors. This is "shopkeepers weekend" when almost everything in Iceland shuts down for this

3-4 day extravaganza. Music, entertainment, sing-a-longs (for several thousand people) and firework displays mark the occasion which is especially festive in the Westman Islands. Locals set up large white tents and actually move some of their furniture into them so they can camp out in comfort for the duration of the festival. Because of the popularity of this event, hotels and every other sort of accommodation are booked months in advance.

For further information go to : www.visitwestmanislands.com/english





Dogsledding Iceland

- In the golden silence of the highlands

Dogsledding Iceland is the only company in Iceland to offer this unique and fun way to sight-see, combining adventure and fun.

Gaining in popularity in recent years with young people and families alike, Dogsledding Iceland offers sled tours in the highlands and “dog trolley” tours. Each tour lasts approximately 45 to 60 minutes and you will experience some of the most beautiful scenery in Iceland. Your tour will take you up over the magnificent Langjökull Glacier in West Iceland, where silence reigns and the only sounds are the hiss of the sled gliding across the snow and the occasional words of encouragement from the driver to the dogs.

Dog Trolley - Sledding without a sled!

In the autumn, when there isn't enough snow in the highlands and the glaciers are not safe for sledding, the company offers another kind of sledding experience. This is the “dog trolley” - a specially built trolley that the dogs pull like a

sled. On these tours, passengers are given the opportunity to have a break in the middle of the tour and there will be plenty of time for photography - and dog petting! On the way back you might even get to drive the dogs yourself!

Travel with film stars!

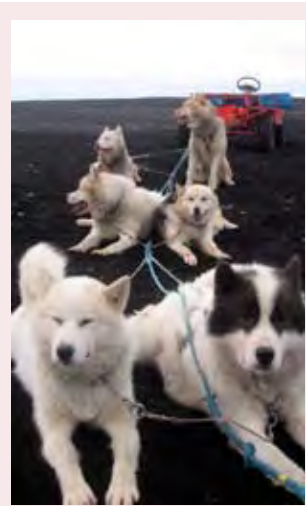
The dogs have starred in television commercials, movies and just recently, in a German historical documentary about the race between Roald Amundsen and Robert Scott to reach the South Pole in 1911. International companies like Hyundai, Landrover, Amundsen Vodka and Morrison's Supermarket chain in Britain have all produced successful television commercials and adverts using dogs from Dogsledding Iceland. The dogs have even been cast in movies such as Tomb Raider (1997) with Angelina Jolie.

Clips of some of these commercials are all available for viewing on YouTube here:

The Greenland Dog

Used in Greenland among the Inuit people for thousands of years, the Greenland dog or ‘Greenland Husky’ as they are sometimes called, are extremely strong working dogs who are happiest when they have a job to do. They are very much pack dogs, built to pull heavy loads in harsh winter weather conditions. Originally starting with 16 dogs, the Dogsledding Iceland pack has now grown to 26 dogs, with another 5 puppies awaiting training in the Spring of 2011.

www.youtube.com/watch?v=8nnjrfj1-tk
www.youtube.com/watch?v=T2DbXZIO2gY
www.youtube.com/watch?v=F2Cm_4573fs



Dogsledding, the ultimate in green technology

Visit the Setting for Iceland's Greatest Saga

-The Saga Centre in Hvalsövellur offers a unique chance to stand in the footprints of Iceland's greatest heroes

The most famous and acclaimed of all of the Icelandic Sagas is, without a doubt, Brennu Njáls Saga, or Njála as most Icelanders call it. It is an epic prose written in the thirteenth century by an unknown author which tells the story of blood-feud lasting fifty years.

Njála is a highly complex work, telling the lives of memorable characters such as the powerful, yet peaceful, warrior Gunnar Hámundarson from Hlíðarendi and his friend and title character, Njáll from Bergþórshvöll, who were continually sucked into power struggles and battles by both their enemies and their own families.

The Saga Centre in Hvalsövellur offers you a chance to actually visit the sites described in the story and learn more about its characters through the informative Njála exhibition. There, the story and principal characters are explained in great detail, richly illustrated with pictures and descriptions of their conflicts at fateful moments in the story.

Njála describes Icelandic society as it was approximately 1,000 years ago; it offers a magnificent characterization of the power struggles, torrid passions, strife, and skulduggery in a heathen society that was about to become Christianised.

Unforgettable Experience

The immediate surroundings of the Saga Centre are the actual historical setting of Njála itself. The key sites from the story are labeled with the Saga Centre logo and, in many places, there are information signs detailing how the site is related to the events and characters in Njála. All the sites are easily accessible to visitors. The Saga Centre can be of assistance in hiring expert tour guides for large and small groups alike, for an experience which will not easily be forgotten.

Imagine standing on top of the same rock as the seemingly invincible Gunnar Hámundarson did when he fought off an ambush at the river Rangá. Gunnar had previously killed Þorgeir Otkelsson and a nemesis of Gunnar had heard of



a prophecy saying Gunnar would meet his demise if he were to slay another member of Þorgeir's family. So it was no coincidence that among the attackers was Þorgeir's son, whom Gunnar, of course, killed.

Fair is the blooming meadow

A famous passage in the book is when Gunnar was being forced to exile from Iceland and took his last look over his homestead and spoke: “Fair is the

blooming meadow.” After viewing the meadow of Hlíðarendi Gunnar decided to stay in Iceland and thus live the remainder of his days as an outlaw. That same influential meadow is naturally still there today and you can decide for yourself if it is beautiful enough to spend your life as an outlaw for it. Bergþórshvöll was home to Njáll, as well as the setting for his death. After a series of misfortunes, mostly caused by his sons, Bergþórshvöll

was descended upon by an army of a hundred men who burned the home to the ground with Njáll and eleven others in it. This event spawned the name of the story, “The Story of the Burning of Njáll.”

Insight Into the World of Vikings

The Njála exhibition also offers a unique insight into the pre-Christian world of Vikings, including their noteworthy sailing techniques and miniature models of the Althing, or parliament. Another part of the exhibition explains the unique Icelandic tradition of safeguarding its storytelling wealth by writing it down on calf skin.

Then, if you really want to immerse yourself into the life of a Viking, you can attend events in the Saga Hall, which is a reproduction of a typical Viking Age chieftain's hall, complete with benches clad in horsehide.

History of Trade

The Saga Centre also hosts an exhibition of Icelandic co-operative society, where guests can learn about the history of trade, commerce and the co-operative movement. Take a glance back in time and explore the life and work of past generations. The exhibition is conceived as a journey through time and enables visitors to walk through the past 100 years of trade in Southern Iceland.



Let your dreams come true this year with Iceland Excursions-Gray Line Iceland

If one of your dreams in life is to see Iceland and the Northern Lights, then make this your year to do it! The 2010/2011 winter season has been one of the best in recent years for experiencing the Northern Lights and Iceland Excursion's Northern Lights Mystery Tour is the oldest running tour of its kind in Iceland. Experienced guides know where the best viewing spots are located - but if perchance you miss them, a second chance is yours, free of charge. Tours run from 15th September to 15th April.

On a clear day you can see for miles

Iceland Excursion's South Coast tour is packed with some of Iceland's most dazzling sights. Leaving Reykjavik, the tour proceeds over the Hellisheidi Plateau where, on a clear day, you can see over 100 km. to Eyafjallajökull with its fresh new snowcap and the mountainous Westman Islands just off the coast. The route passes Hveragerdi, the town known for its geothermally heated greenhouses, and then it's on to Hvolsvöllur for a short stop. For the next 80 km., between Hvolsvöllur and Vik, the dramatic coastline begins to emerge: the notorious Eyfjallajökull comes



Ribbons of light undulate across the sky, sometimes with seeming rhyme and reason and sometimes doing the most unexpected things!

into full and glorious view and you will visit some of the most famous waterfalls in Iceland - Seljalandsfoss and Skogarfoss, which cascade down from the glacier.

Skogar and Vik

At Skogar you will visit the Skogar Historical Museum where you get

a glimpse of South Iceland's past with its turf houses and indoor exhibits of life in 19th century Iceland. Then it's on to the beautiful seaside town of Vik, known for its black volcanic sand beaches and the Reynisdrangar Sea Stacks that rise curiously from the sea. Legend has it that three trolls were attempting to drag a three-masted ship to shore when daylight struck them and turned them to stone. The return journey stops at two other colourful south coast seaside towns, Stokkseyri and Eyrarbakki, the latter having been a major port for trade in the 18th and 19th centuries and where many of the oldest houses in Iceland still stand today.

The South Coast tour is available in English, French, German and Scandinavian languages. For further information and booking go to: [www.grayline.is/tour/Day_Tours_and_Sightseeing/AH34_South_Coast_\(AND\)_Waterfalls/Iceland.is](http://www.grayline.is/tour/Day_Tours_and_Sightseeing/AH34_South_Coast_(AND)_Waterfalls/Iceland.is)



Seljalandsfoss



Did you know? Iceland Excursions-Gray Line Iceland is a family-run company, founded in the early 1980s by two boyhood friends from a small village in the West Fjords. It is known for its exceptionally friendly and knowledgeable staff, constant innovation and adding new tours to its itinerary



Glacier Jeeps

Unforgettable Glacier Jeeps

With a stellar safety record and over 20 year's experience on the largest glacier in Europe, Glacier Jeeps operates from South East Iceland and offers spectacular tours to Vatnajökull Glacier. The freshness and purity of the glacial air will energise and mesmerise you, leaving you with a special feeling that you will not soon forget.

A Mountaintop Restaurant

Jöklašel Restaurant, at an altitude of 840 m., is the highest restaurant in Iceland and the base of Glacier Jeep activities. It offers a soup and salad buffet lunch as well as a variety of cakes and coffee, comfortably seating 80 to 90 people. A seafood buffet for groups and freshly caught arctic char and salmon are available by special arrangement. Incentive groups can enjoy a buffet lunch right on the glacier while enjoying breathtaking



views of both the glacier and the Atlantic Ocean.

Glacier Jeeps most popular tour, the Jeep Tour takes you to Jökulsel with the option of going further over

the glacier by Ski-doo. Along the way, there is a magnificent view of deep valleys like Kálfafellsdalur, tall mountains such as Þverártindsegg and Öraefajökull, and of course the great Vatnajökull itself. The company

Glacier Jeeps most popular tour, the Jeep Tour takes you to Jökulsel with the option of going further over the glacier by Ski-doo.

also offers hiking tours to many other destinations on the glacier and must be booked one day in advance.

Glacier Jeep tours depart daily from the junction with road no. F985 (the road to Jöklašel) at 9:30 and 14:00, but other timetables can be arranged to suit. For further info visit: www.glacierjeeps.is



Útivist

The Outdoor Touring Association of Iceland

There's something for everyone!

The Útivist Touring Association began life in 1975 as a hiking club at a time when interest in the outdoors was just beginning to gather momentum in Iceland. Membership in the club rose from a few hundred in its first decade to around 1,400 at present and is still growing, drawing members from all over the world. But you don't have to become a member to join in on the many varied hiking tours, bicycle tours and even the new self-drive jeep tours that Útivist now offers around Iceland.

Breaking New Ground

While the heady days of South Iceland's recent volcanic activity may be behind us, the memory of those tumultuous weeks is as much etched in our minds as it is in the landscape itself. The area around Eyafjallajökull and Fimmvörduháls

is called Thórsörk, (Thor's Woods) and is one of the most beautiful areas of South Iceland.

Located just 50 km. from the town of Hvalsöllur, the area is popular with Icelanders and tourists alike

but is reachable only by specially-equipped 4x4s or by tour buses with experienced drivers.



The 3-day midsummer trek over the 1,100 m. high Fimmvörduháls hiking trail starts out at Skógar, taking you past the Fimmvörduháls eruption site where you will witness first-hand fresh lava, new craters, sulphur deposits and the earth still warm.



A 24 km. hike from Skógar to Thórsörk

Útivist offers guided excursions to Thórsörk every weekend in summer, from late June to late August. One of the more popular weekend tours takes place every year around Jónsmessa or St. John's Eve, (June 24th). The 3-day midsummer trek over the 1,100 m. high Fimmvörduháls hiking trail starts out at Skógar, taking you past the Fimmvörduháls eruption site where you will witness first-hand fresh lava, new craters, sulphur deposits and the earth still warm.

The tour culminates at Básar in Thórsörk with music and singing around a bonfire after an enjoyable summer evening meal. This hike is not for beginners! Being in shape and possessing some hiking experience is required.

The heart of Útivist beats at Básar

Some of the most enchanting scenery in Thórsörk is found at Básar, and it is here that Útivist volunteers built their first hut. Over the years improvements have been made and now there is a well-

equipped lodge for up to 80 guests, several more huts and a popular camp ground. From Básar, Útivist also organises a 6-7 hour round-trip hike up to the Fimmvörduháls crater where you can get a good look at how this most recent volcano has forever changed and re-shaped the landscape.

Útivist welcomes volunteers to assist in the marking of trails, building mountain huts and in nature conservation. For more information please go to: www.utivist.is





Photos: Ingolfur Juliusson

Hvolsvöllur

— From obscurity to fame virtually overnight

Unless you have been living under a rock for most of 2010, you are sure to have heard of a certain volcano with a ridiculously difficult-to-pronounce name that wrought havoc with air travel around most of Europe and even affected many flights to the States. Indeed, Icelanders got a good chuckle listening to us foreigners trying to pronounce Eyafjallajökull and stumbling all over their language!

We would love to send someone up to the summit or a few 'somebodies,' along with several geologists and reporters, with camera crew trailing behind for an in-depth interview with the now famous volcano. Perched on the edge of the crater, they are there to ask the question that is on mind of many: "So, what are your plans for 2011 and beyond? Will we be seeing more of you in the near future, or will you be going back into hibernation for a few more hundred years?" With no such eventuality in sight any time in the near future we have to look to scientists and the Civil Protection Dept. to give us their best estimates.

The Civil Protection Dept. has got you covered....

The region around the volcano, including the Fimmvörduháls hiking trail and the Thórsörk Mountain Reserve, is now open to visitors. That said, the Dept. of Civil Protection of Iceland keeps a watchful eye

out should any changes take place at Eyafjallajökull and has a well-developed plan of action in the event of any emergency arising. (see article from the Dept. of Civil Protection)

-An exciting array of possibilities just on our doorstep

Hvolsvöllur is an excellent location from which to base to explore South Iceland. Its central location makes it ideal for day trips in the region and then back for a good night's sleep in one of the area's many types of accommodation. There are

campgrounds, youth hostels, guest houses and hotels ranging from 1 to 4 stars. Ferry trips to the Westman Islands are now possible from the new harbour, Landeyahöfn, that opened in July, 2010 and is just 20 minutes from Hvolsvöllur.

The Geo-Vision of the Future

There are some new exciting developments on the horizon for South Central Iceland, in particular the huge area covered by the municipalities of Rangarthing-eystra (Hvolsvöllur area), Myrdalshreppur (Vik area) and

Skaftárhreppur (in which large area of the Vatnajökull National Park and Vatnajökull Glacier are located). The region has a unique geodiversity with geological features found nowhere else on Earth. Therefore, the goal is to become full fledged members of the European Geoparks Network and the UNESCO Global Geoparks Network in 2011 or 2012.

For more information about the area please go to:
www.rangarthingeystra.is
www.europeangeoparks.org/isite/home/1,1,0.asp



Hestheimar

Remote Beauty Near Reykjavik

The Icelandic landscape can be challenging for creatures who are not fleet-footed, but a farm holiday at a charming family-owned horse farm called Hestheimar offers guests the chance to experience Iceland on the backs of horses bred to lead riders through the countryside. Hestheimar lies in the south of Iceland close to the Hekla volcano and has a view of three nearby glaciers. Located between the towns Selfoss and Hella, less than 100 kilometers from Reykjavik, the accommodation is cozy, featuring double rooms with private bathrooms and an outdoor hot tub. Guests are treated to home-cooked meals as well as home-baked breads and pastries, with a traditionally Icelandic flavour. Hospitality is a top priority for the farm, which has received a customer service award for the past two years running and remains a popular destination for visitors all the year.

Year-round Hestheimar Delights

As winter draws on, Iceland becomes less crowded and provides a haven for visitors looking for an escape. Winter visitors are able to enjoy lower prices on a variety of activities and it provides guests with the best offers of the year. With mild winter temperatures peaking at 7 degrees Celsius, Iceland can provide either a much-needed break from the brutal cold of other Northern climates or winter snows can blanket the land with quiet beauty. Whether mild or



snowy, Hestheimar provides guests with a superb array of services ranging from snowmobiling and quad bike tours to guided hikes and horse tours, all which are arranged to suit the needs of its guests.

Adventure with Comfort Close at Hand

The farm has ample room for larger groups, even featuring a horse show for groups of 20 or more. Customised riding lessons give visitors an opportunity to brush up their riding skills with expert trainers. Weekend riding courses for groups and longer summer tours are offered. Day tours allow guests to witness Iceland's winter sights,

such as the Northern Lights, away from the bright lights of Reykjavik. Winter's numerous pleasures lend Iceland a different kind of charm not seen in summer, inviting visitors to experience adventure while keeping

all the comforts of home.

For more information about Hestheimar visit www.hestheimar.is.





Feeling Adventurous?

- South Iceland Adventure, edgy and just a little bit daring

Many people are surprised when they arrive in Iceland to discover just how much there is to do beyond the usual touring! There are glacier hikes, volcano tours, geo-tours, cave exploring, hot-spring bathing, ice climbing, Super Jeep ice safaris, diving and the list goes on and on. South Iceland Adventure is for those who want just a tad more excitement and edge to their Icelandic vacation in a way that challenges you to go right to the

limit of - but not beyond - your personal comfort zone.

The South Iceland Adventure Advantage

SIA guides have lived most of their lives in the area around Eyjafjallajökull. With years of mountaineering experience behind them, they combine their knowledge, talent and passion for the Icelandic Highlands with safety and skill. Like their Viking forefathers before them, they

possess an understanding of the challenges that are to be found, and are adept at finding the hidden gems that can really make your holiday special.

No Guts, no Glory - Snowkiting in the Highlands

SIA offers the challenge of a lifetime - especially geared for those who want to test their limits to the max. Enter (drumroll please): Snowkiting in the Icelandic Highlands! Jerome

Jossarand, considered to be one of the most daring snow kites in the world today, has teamed up with SIA exclusively to offer

SIA's winter activities include: Super Jeep tours, diving and snorkeling adventures, Northern Light tours, highland hiking, ice climbing, ice walking, caving, snowmobiling, and, of course, snow kiting.

instruction and guidance in this extreme sport. In February 2011 they will be introducing Iceland as one of the best locations on earth for snowkiting enthusiasts. An experience you won't want to miss.

Inspirational Iceland: New Lava, New Land

You've seen the photos, the TV reports and heard all the rumours. Now you can discover for yourself how this eruption has changed the face of the land in a dramatic statement that can only be appreciated first hand. The SIA Super Jeep Tour, which operates out of Hvolsvöllur to the Eyjafjallajökull area, can pick you up from Hótel Rangá, Hótel Hvolsvöllur or from Hótel Fljótshlíð for a very inspirational look at Iceland's most recent geological happening.

Feel it! Get inspired! Go for it! Let South Iceland Adventure take you to the edge!

For information and bookings go to: www.icelandadventure.is or write to: info@siadv.is or call +354 770 2030



Feel it! Get inspired! Go for it! Let South Iceland Adventure take you to the edge!



Reykjavik Excursions Enjoying Iceland in comfort and security

Reykjavik Excursions is one of the oldest touring companies in Iceland. Founded in 1968, it offers professionally guided tours around Iceland, in English, German, French and the Scandinavian languages.

Here are just a few highlights of what Reykjavik Excursions offer:

South Shore Adventure Tour

In this 10-hour day tour of the south coast, you will take in some of the most impressive scenery in Iceland. Stopping at Seljalandsfoss, you will get a chance to walk behind this 60 metre "bridal veil" waterfall - beautiful in any season! The dramatic cliffs almost touch the shore, and glimpses of Myrdalsjökull Glacier peek out from above the craggy mountain

tops. There's a stop at Skogar with its broad curtain waterfall and history waiting for you to discover at Skogar Museum. The approach to the village of Vik with steep slopes rising on one side and the view down to the ocean

beyond the village is priceless.

Thorsmörk (Þórsörk)

Visiting Thorsmörk is high on a many traveller's list of things to do in Iceland. But the tricky part is

actually getting there! It's a rocky road and one that is interlaced with glacial rivers and rivulets and not necessarily something you would want to try to drive yourself. So what to do? Problem solved! Reykjavik Excursion's specially-equipped buses and their experienced drivers will put you at ease, so you can relax and enjoy the scenery in comfort and security. This tour runs from 15th June to 11th Sept.

Super Jeep Tour – Aftermath of a Volcanic Eruption

Witness with your own eyes how the recent eruption of Eyafjallajökull changed the landscape for miles around. You will travel to Gigjökull glacial lagoon, going deeper into Thorsmörk where tour buses cannot manoeuvre, giving you a chance



Blue Lagoon



to see for yourself Eyafjallajökull's enormous impact on the area. 'Super Jeeps' are specially modified jeeps that are able to handle rocky terrain and easily ford the ever-changing Markaflljót glacial river. This tour is available year-round.

Northern Lights Tour

Your chances of seeing the Northern Lights this year are, in a word, excellent! Just one more reason to visit Iceland in winter! Let Reykjavik Excursions show you the sights and the lights, but don't forget your camera and tripod. The tour runs daily from 15th Sept. to 15th April. Take a Walk on the Ice Side Easily one of the most popular tours on offer, 'Take A Walk on the Ice Side' takes place on the Solheimajökull glacial tongue at Myrdalsjökull, South Iceland. Just a 2.5 hour drive from Reykjavik, you will be taught the basics in using ice equipment and walking on crampons. A safe and easy walk on the glacier, this tour gives you a chance to explore the ridges, ice sculptures and

crevasses under the watchful eye of experienced mountain guides. This tour is offered daily, year-round.

Gullfoss-Geysir Direct

If you want to maximise your sight-seeing into a short space of time, the Golden Circle Tour is no doubt one of the best of the best. The big 3 sights are:

- Gullfoss - one of the most beautiful waterfalls in Europe, guaranteed to inspire you!
- Geysir Geothermal Area - The famous Geysir has gone quiet these days but its 'little' brother Strokkur is the more active of the two geysirs now, erupting regularly every 10 minutes or so.
- Thingvellir - besides its historical significance, this is where you can straddle the two mid-Atlantic tectonic plates simultaneously. Thingvellir has been recognised by UNESCO as a cultural site connected to Viking culture and is the only place in the world bearing this distinction.



Relax at the Blue Lagoon Tour

Finish off your trip to Iceland with a dip in the Blue Lagoon. After all, a trip to Iceland without going to the Blue Lagoon would be like going to Paris and not seeing the Eiffel Tower! A great way to end your journey, bathing in the relaxing milky waters of this exquisite example of Iceland's unique use of geothermal energy. Afterwards, Reykjavik Excursions can either drop you at Keflavik Airport, in time to

catch your flight home or can get you back to Reykjavik, either way.

Prefer to tour Iceland on your own? Discover Reykjavik Excursion's 'Iceland on Your Own' and be the master of your own vacation. Go to: www.re.is/IcelandOnYourOwn/ for further information. Enjoy your holiday in Iceland and let Reykjavik Excursions take you there! For tours and bookings go to: www.re.is/



Thorsmörk (Þórsörk)



“Skaftárhreppur district is the perfect place to relax and unwind. You have practically the whole place to yourself! Fresh mountain air, fresh glacial water and with more sheep than people, you will truly be ‘at ease with the elements.’

Fjaðrárgljúfur.
Photos: Ingibjörg Eiríksdóttir

Kirkjubæjarklaustur, Skaftárhreppur District

Home to one of the youngest and greatest shows on Earth

Slow down: you’ll see more! While on the road travelling east, you might well stop at Kirkjubæjarklaustur to fill your car with petrol, and

looking around, immediately dismiss it as not worth bothering with and drive onwards. You would be very mistaken! There are a thousand years

of history waiting to be discovered in these parts. There are pearls and gems of beautiful waterfalls to behold. Walk along black sand beaches that

give way to the pounding surf of the Atlantic Ocean to the south while the Vatnajökull Glacier dominates the eastern horizon.

The Gift of Silence

With only 0.065 inhabitants per square km Skaftárhreppur district is the perfect place to relax and unwind, you’ll practically have the whole place to yourself! Fresh mountain air, pure glacial water, safe and secure, with more sheep than people, you are truly “at ease with the elements.”

For more information go to: www.klaustur.is

An ecclesiastical history

With a population of only 150, Kirkjubæjarklaustur is a peaceful village on the south central coast of Iceland. Affectionately referred to as “Klaustur” for short, the town is the service area for the whole district of Skaftárhreppur and is easily accessible from ring road #1. In 1186, a Benedictine convent was founded at Kirkjubær which was active until it disbanded during the Reformation in 1550. Many local place names and folk tales reflect the presence of the nuns and the ecclesiastical history down the centuries. Because of its relatively ‘southern’ location,

the region enjoys mild winters and often rather warm and sunny summers comprising one of the most geologically young and exciting volcanic areas on Earth!

Geo-Tourism at its best: Stay and explore!

· Kirkjugölf or ‘Church Floor’ is an 80m² protected natural monument, just east of Klaustur, made of columnar basalt formations that curiously resemble laid hexagonal shaped tiles, and hence the name.

· Systrastapi - a steep rocky hill where legend has it that a couple of nuns got into trouble about 1,000 years ago...

· Systrafoss - ‘Sisters Falls.’ Beautiful twin waterfalls surrounded by towering 65 year-old pines. Located right in the town of Klaustur. The picnic area is frequented by young and old alike in this romantic and scenic part of Klaustur.

· Eldgjá or ‘fire canyon’ - This is a spectacular volcanic canyon 270m deep, 600m wide and over 70 kms



Systrastapi. Photo: Þórir N. Kjartansson



Feeling free on the black sand beach.

long - accessible in summer and autumn only.

· Fjaðrárgljúfur - a dramatic canyon with unusual and extravagant rock formations and beautiful views - accessible all year round.

· Geo Hikes - a brand new 20 km marked hiking trail circles Klaustur with informative signs giving insight as to how the unique geology in the area is constantly evolving - starts in Spring 2011.

This is life in Klaustur, Skaftárhreppur District.



A waterfall in Rauðá, near Systrastapi.



Laufskálavarða on the Myrdalssandur.



photo: Ragnar Th. Sigurdsson

Hekla

The Gateway to Hell

- Hekla's fearsome reputation through the Ages

Hekla is one of the best known volcanoes in Iceland and has a history going back to the Middle Ages. It has erupted almost 30 times that are known, the first one recorded being in 1104.

Situated in the south of the country, it rises up majestically from the plains and is visible for many miles. Travelling from Reykjavik, it is possible to see it on a clear day, it's snow-capped

peak glistening in the sunlight as the traveller descends from the Hellisheidi plateau that separates the capital from the rest of the south.

Whilst other volcanos on this fiery island have captured the headlines in recent months, Hekla is never quiet for long. It has erupted more often than any other volcano on in Iceland since its settlement. The last eruption

was quite minor in February, 2000 but there were fears that it might erupt again in early 2010 following reports that there were spots near the summit not covered with snow.

Fire, Smoke, Death and Destruction

Hekla's fearsome reputation is not without reason. In 1300, for example, a major eruption split the mountain. The noise was heard all the way in the north parts of the country where the ashes and smoke plume created such darkness that no-one would risk putting out to sea to go fishing. Earthquakes followed, farms collapsed and many people died in the ensuing famine. This was not an isolated occurrence, as the volcano has caused much damage, famines and loss of life down through the years. Bishops and priests across Europe branded it the 'Gateway to Hell' during the Dark Ages. Perhaps that was not such an inappropriate description, even if not entirely accurate! Some went so far as to say it was the home of Satan himself and that witches gathered there to meet him. The unsaved dead were said to be carried by birds to its craters. Such was the superstition and fear created by such stories that no-one dared climb Hekla's slopes for centuries.

Breaking the Taboo

Finally, in 1750, two naturalists, Eggert Ólafsson and Bjarni Pálsson broke the taboo by climbing the mountain during a dormant period. Besides the gaping craters, no witches were to be found. Satan might have been entertaining some kilometres below, but if he was, they didn't receive an invitation!

A Hike Around 'Hell'

Today, it is a popular climb and hike. Being the highest point for many miles around, the views are worth the effort and the photo opportunities are many. In spring, when still covered with snow, climbing Hekla and skiing around the craters is a popular pastime. However, due to Iceland's temperamental weather that can change in a matter of minutes, it is wise to carry good clothing when hiking there - and a check on earthquake activity would not be unwise!

Hekla is about 4,890 ft. (1,491 m.) high and sits on a mountain ridge some 25 miles (40 km.) long. The volcanic fissure which splits the ridge is almost 3.5 miles (5.5 km.) long. During the 1693 eruption, 14 craters along its length were active simultaneously and in 1766, 18 craters were spewing smoke, ash and tephra. Some eruptions have been so violent that the ash has risen to the stratosphere and reached as far as Russia.

At one time, Hekla's slopes were green and verdant with forests. Later eruptions destroyed that with lava and tephra, some rocks being so large that they have killed people as far away as 28 kms!

Like all volcanos in Iceland, Hekla is constantly monitored for any activity. An eruption is expected at any time but, at the time of writing (Dec. 2010), there are no signs of volcanic activity. For a (hopefully)

reassuring update on its condition, the Weather Bureau provides the latest information on their website: <http://en.vedur.is/earthquakes-and-volcanism/earthquakes/>

A Fiery Future

The rise in volcanic and earthquake activity worldwide over the past few years would seem to indicate that it won't be long before we see Hekla justifying its formidable reputation with another eruption. Whether it will be massive or just a plume of smoke is one of its hidden secrets!

If past experience is anything to go by, an eruption of Hekla will be quite a sight to behold - from a distance! The earth will be split by those fires from the pits of hell along its length, smoke and steam will billow up towards the stratosphere, blazing lava will flow down the mountain like a massive torch-carrying army, accompanied by thunder, lightning and earth tremors or larger quakes.



Katla is a volcano. The last major eruption occurred in 1918



Hekla's eruptions in 1913. Pictures from old postcard

We live in exciting times and it's more than likely that Hekla will be the centre of attention once again in the near future. How long it will erupt is open to question - but it has been known to continue for several years!



The lavafield around Hekla is called Dómadalshraun - Judgement Day!

photo: Ragnar Th. Sigurdsson



By the sea and a delicious lobster



At the Restaurant Fjöruborðið in Stokkseyri



Fjöruborðið

and the sea said ok...



< Only 45 minutes drive from Reykjavik

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