

TOURISM, CULTURE AND BUSINESS

# ICELANDIC TIMES

ISSUE 9 • 2011



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# TOURISM, CULTURE AND BUSINESS ISSUE 9 • 2011 ICELANDIC TIMES

When summer comes, Iceland opens up just like the many different varieties of flowers that bloom across the land. Like those flowers, there is such a variety of activities to do, sights to see and things to experience.

In this, the largest issue to date, we present some of that wide range of facets that make a summer visit to Iceland so different from the more common holidays.

No magazine can do the country justice, however; every sense, every emotion and

every part of body and spirit is exercised to the maximum in this land of extremes.

It's easy to use superlatives, but this is one occasion where they are merited. How else can life-changing sights and experiences be described?

We invite you to investigate this Land of Fire and Ice yourself and see if you agree with all that has been written here. Yet, you will still only be scratching the surface! *-ASF*

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### Credit

**PUBLISHER**  
Interland ehf.  
Höfðatún 12 • 105 Reykjavík  
info@icelandictimes.com

**EDITOR AND GENERAL MANAGER**  
Einar Th. Thorsteinsson  
einar@icelandictimes.com

**SALES AND MARKETING**  
Anna Margrét Bjarnadóttir  
anna@icelandictimes.com

Björg Sigurðardóttir  
bjorg@icelandictimes.com

Elin Björg Ragnarsdóttir  
elin@icelandictimes.com

**PROOFREADING**  
Andrew Scott Fortune

**ARTICLES WRITTEN BY**  
Andrew Scott Fortune  
Anna Margrét Bjarnadóttir  
Hrafnhildur Þórhallsdóttir  
Kelly Baumann  
Laurence Koster  
Marie Valgardsson  
Róbert Róbertsson  
Stefán Helgi Valsson  
Unnur Hrefna Jóhannsdóttir  
Vignir Andri Guðmundsson

**LAYOUT**  
Interland Layout Team

**FRONT COVER PHOTO**  
Svartifoss, S. Iceland  
by Ragnar Th. Sigurðsson

### Cover

**Picture: Svartifoss**  
One of the most popular sights with its natural basalt columns, Svartifoss (Black Falls), has inspired architects, notably the design of Hallgrímskirkja, the church overlooking Reykjavík. Its sharp, hexagonal columns of dark lava give it its name. It is found in the Skaftafell National Park, South Iceland.

### Icelandic language

Icelandic is one of the European root languages, like Latin. There is no 'c' or 'z' in modern Icelandic, except in foreign words. However, it still contains some letters not found in most other languages. This basic list provides a general idea of their sounds, using familiar words rather than phonetics.

Character	Pronunciation
á	Like 'ow' in 'cow'
æ	Like the personal pronoun 'I'
ð	Like 'th' in 'that'
þ	Like 'th' in 'thing'

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**Icelandic Times**



Höfðatún 12 • 105 Reykjavík  
+354 534 1880  
info@icelandictimes.com  
www.icelandictimes.com

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# ICELAND BEST ENJOYED FROM A BIKE SADDLE

Reykjavik Bike Tours – Iceland's first specialised bicycle tour company



which museums are not to be missed, which restaurants have been getting great reviews, current special events and much, much more. Perhaps the most important aspect of this tour, apart from the exercise, of course, is the ample opportunity guests have to ask the local guide questions.

## Coast of Reykjavik – 2.5 hrs / 18 km

This tour's main attraction is Reykjavik's coastline and the often-beautiful evening light along the north, south and west coast of Reykjavik. Highlights include Öskjuhlíð forest, Reykjavik's geothermal beach, Reykjavik University, Grotta nature reserve and lighthouse.

## Golden Circle & Bike – 8 hrs / 25 km

This tour includes all the usual stops along the 240 km so-called Golden Circle route, Iceland's most famous tourist route. Highlights include Gullfoss waterfall, Geysir geothermal area, Þingvellir National Park (Parliament plains) and one or two more places. Participants bicycle about 25 km along some of the most beautiful parts of the Golden Circle, mostly in Þingvellir National Park – the most famous historical place in Iceland. Since 2004, it's been on the UNESCO's list of world heritage sites.

## Westman Isles & Bike – 9 hrs / 7 km

This tour includes a guided mini-bus transfer – a 30 minute mini-cruise with the local ferry and sightseeing by bicycle on Heimaey Island. This island is the largest and the only inhabited island in the Westman Isles archipelago (Vestmannaeyjar). Tour highlights include the 1973 lava field, botanical garden in the lava field, a puffin colony, Pompeii of the North, and much, much more. There are only few cars on Heimaey Island, and there are many places of interest within a short distance of each other – which makes it an ideal place to bicycle.

*Ursula and Stefán love what they do and receive every visitor with a friendly smile.*

German-born Ursula Spitzbart is the founder of Reykjavik Bike Tours. She first came to Iceland ten years ago, fell in love with an Icelander and his country, started a family and wrote a book in the German language about her experiences as a German living in Iceland.

Ursula worked at the Technical University of Munich in Germany for several years as a professor's academic assistant in food technology. She then worked for Rotel Tours for four years as a tour manager for German tourists visiting Scotland. Ursula's partner, Stefan Helgi Valsson, has been a full-time tourist guide since 1988, a tourist guide educator and trainer and a college and university lecturer in tourism subjects. Once a prize-winning bicycle racer, Stefan now enjoys admiring the sights and scenery and telling entertaining stories to visitors.

Reykjavik Bike Tours is the first company in Iceland to offer daily



scheduled bike tours of Reykjavik and day tours from the city. Tours are available all year – depending on the weather in winter, of course. This summer, the company offers

private bicycle tours for families and groups as well as four scheduled tours: Classic Reykjavik, Coast of Reykjavik, Golden Circle & Bike and Westman Isles & Bike.



## Classic Reykjavik – 2.5 hrs / 7 km

This tour is a perfect introduction to the capital city of Iceland. Participants can expect to see some of the city's hidden

secrets while learning about its history from a professional and enthusiastic local tourist guide. Participants get to know what the city is all about – in terms of its history,

Reykjavik Bike Tours

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↑ Egísgarður 7 • 101 Reykjavík  
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# KEEP YOUR MEMORIES ALIVE

*Viking Souvenir Stores Offer Something to Remember Your Stay By*

There are many ways to keep pleasant and joyful memories alive and in 'The Viking' you'll find a whole family lineage which has spent close to six decades finding the best for each visitor in Iceland. For some, it is something as little as a key ring, for others, something as practical as a wool sweater and for yet others, something



selection of products is larger and better than ever and that the quality of service is among the best in the business, as it should be, as we have the whole family working in the shops," says Sigurður.

After taking a look into one of their shops, you'll see that Sigurður's boast are not idle words – the stores are literally stuffed with souvenirs and goods. The selection is really too extensive to describe; it ranges from small memorabilia, novelty items, books and clothing, and everything in between.

There are two Viking shops in Reykjavik: at Laugarvegur 1 (look for the giant polar teddy-bears) and Hafnarstræti 1. There are also two shops in Akureyri: one on Hafnarstræti (look for the giant trolls outside) and down by the harbour, as well as a small shop in the old turf farm in Laufás just outside Akureyri. The Viking franchise has also recently expanded to Ísafjörður in the Westfjords of Iceland.

informative as a book on Iceland. Whatever is your favourite way to keeping your visit to Iceland alive, the family of 'The Viking' will help you find it.

Sigurður Guðmundsson, manager of 'The Viking', is particularly proud of his heritage. "It has been close to sixty years since my grandfather started the business, which he then handed down to my father and was passed down to me 12 years ago. I take it as a great responsibility to keep the family business up to the standards set by my predecessors. I can safely say that our



**The Viking** -VAG



Laugarvegur 1, 101 Reykjavik  
 +354 551 1250  
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# VIKINGWEAR, PAST AND PRESENT

*Enter the World of the Vikings at Viking loft*

Vikings were a tough race in the olden days; their clothing effective and well made for the environment they lived in.

Today, the only company that makes Viking clothing in Iceland has opened its doors in Reykjavik's downtown harbour area in the flourishing community built around the bright green old fishermen's huts right on the waterfront.



Not only will you find traditional Viking dress but the owner, Jenny, has taken the Viking style and brought it right up-to-date with a range of fashionable modern styles that are highly regarded in fashion circles.

Icelandic woollen sweaters, shawls, hats, vests are to be found alongside dresses and unique one-off creations. If you want to stand out at a party or in the workplace yet want to wear something both comfortable and warm, you will find a number of styles to choose from in Viking loft. Versions of the clothing can be made to order for children of all ages.

Icelandic wool keeps you comfortable at a constant temperature. The wool has two layers, one soft and so cosy and the other, rougher and practically waterproof. Together, they provide a material that breathes, yet insulates, totally naturally. The wool is woven by a weaver in the old town of Vík on the south coast.

The shawls complement the sweaters beautifully and are available in white, black or stunning purple. A pendant, made from Icelandic pearl - Djupalónsperlu - a unique accessory that completes the ensemble, hangs on a fine leather necklace, enclosed by a delicate fine silver wire cage.

While you are browsing the clothing, why not take time for a special reading from a Völva? Practising a craft handed down from the Viking times, where no-one would consider undertaking any new venture without consulting the seer, Hrafna the Völva has her runes and bones and uses her prophetic gift to help you know more about yourself and your future. A Völva possesses gifts of divination and prophecy and you may well find her gift life-changing.

-ASF

**The Viking Loft**



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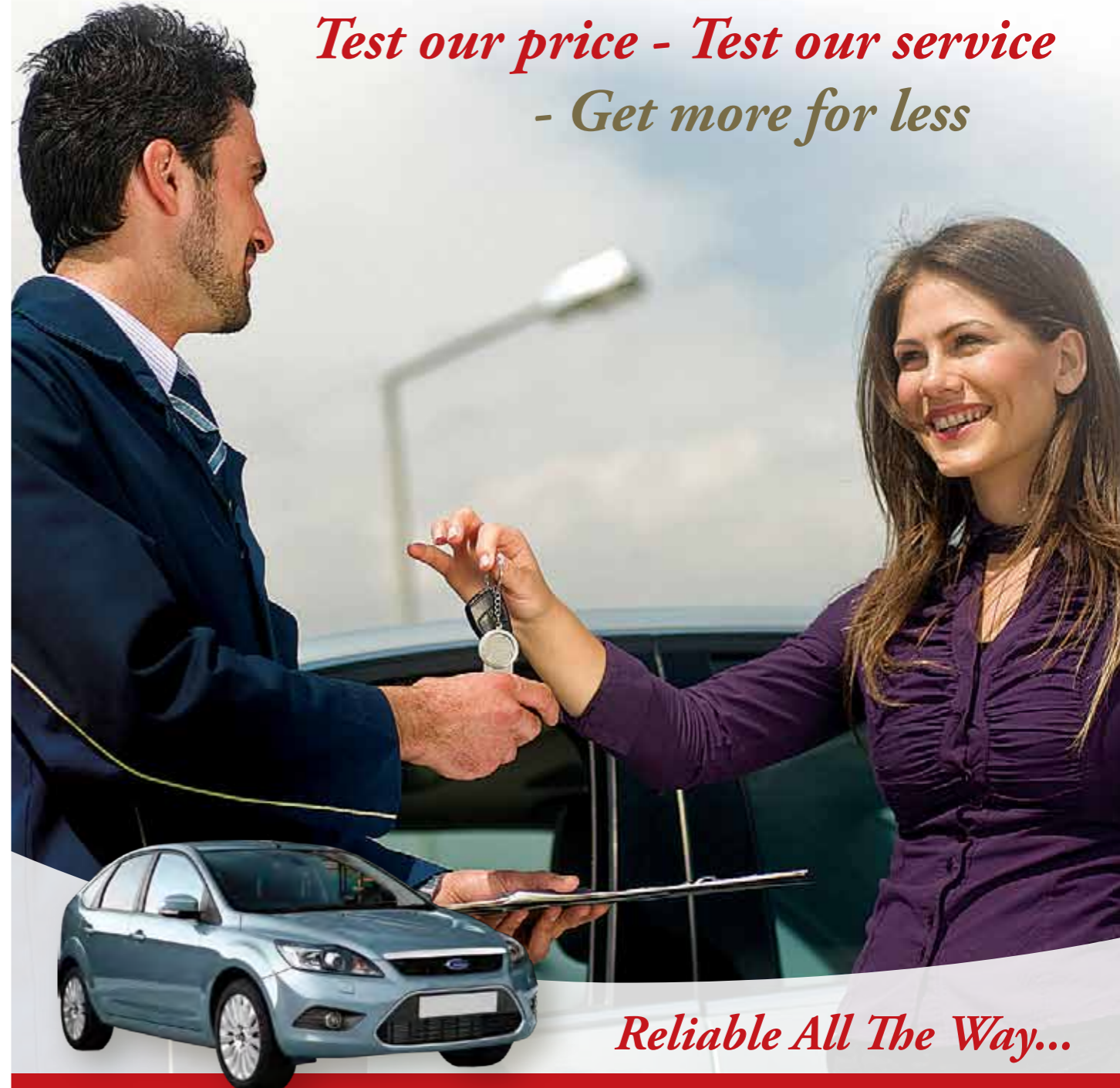
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# ON THE WATERFRONT

*Reykjavik Maritime Museum Explores the Roots of the Icelandic Culture*

Visiting Iceland without exploring its maritime history would be like going to Greece without learning about democracy or philosophy - and what better way to learn about fishing than visiting Víkin - the Reykjavik Maritime Museum down by the old docks amongst the boats and fishermen. Besides exhibiting Iceland's sailing and fishing history, the museum has a unique café on the waterfront, overlooking Reykjavik harbour, where you can enjoy genuine Icelandic pastries while watching the ships roll in - and then watch them sail away again.

Amazingly, Reykjavik's only maritime museum is not that old and has, in a span of a few years completely changed the appearance of the waterfront - from a dilapidated fish processing plant to preserving Iceland's most important history



depicts the lives of Icelandic fishermen. A popular attraction is the Coast Guard Vessel Óðinn, which is actually an exhibition itself, allowing you to walk onboard the vessel, see how the sailors lived and learn something about the Cod Wars.

Another treat in the museum is the Bryggjan Café, overlooking the entire harbour on a large pier. The café is run by a woman simply known as Sigga who has been bequeathed secret recipes from her grandmother and now makes Reykjavik's best pear cakes. "I just try to run the café as I would my own home. We bake everything



with class. Eiríkur P. Jörundsson, director of the museum, is particularly proud of the endeavour. "This is a unique place and an unforgettable experience. Here you can really get to the roots of our culture, where sailing and fishing was extremely important. There is nothing like coming here, where the first settlers of Iceland landed their ships, smelling the ocean, seeing numerous relics from the past and experience how this nation grew from poverty to abundance based on our rich fishing grounds," says Eiríkur.

There are three permanent exhibitions in the museum as well as temporary ones. 'The History of Sailing' exhibition recounts Iceland's maritime history and the growth of Reykjavik Harbour in a lively fashion. It recreates the appearance of the docks from the early 20th century with all the sights and sounds - it even has real seawater with fish, crabs and starfish crawling around at the bottom. The 'From Poverty to Abundance' exhibition portrays the Icelandic fisheries at the turn of the 20th century, and realistically

here on the spot. We even make our own butter," says Sigga. Bryggjan indeed has on offer dishes which most Icelanders are familiar with from their grandparents, such as the deep-fried kleinur and pancakes with sugar. The food is even served on antique dishes donated to the museum by fishermen's wives. But a café in a maritime museum would hardly be complete without any seafood, which Sigga delivers copiously with her unique and scrumptious fish soup.

But Bryggjan Café's 'ace in the hole' is surely the splendid view and bustling atmosphere. "We often get old fishermen stopping by for a cup of coffee and the old crews from Óðinn usually come by at least once a week before they head out to maintain and clean their old vessel, so in that way, it is kind of reminiscent of what the old harbour life was like," says Sigga.

-VAG



Grandagarður 8 • 101 Reykjavík  
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## A GOURMET EXPERIENCE TO REMEMBER

*Argentína Steakhouse*

Iceland is a land of secrets, waiting to be discovered. For those who love good food, wines and spirits, the only give-away is a flag hanging above two gates on a side-street just off Laugavegur's shopping street. Here, at the end of a dark hallway is a large wooden door with an ornate handle that opens into one of the most popular and respected restaurants in Iceland. Popular, that is, with people in the know! This hidden epicurean jewel has been sought out by visitors from all over the world for the past 22 years!



Argentína Steakhouse won the coveted 'Restaurant of the Year' award in 2000 with good reason. You are not just offered a meal, as this is not an 'eat-and-run restaurant' but an evening's gourmet experience. No matter what your choice from the menu, you are guaranteed a meal to remember for its presentation, flavour, texture and originality.

However, the meal is the culmination of that experience. Before anything touches your taste buds, your other senses are immersed in the rich leather and wood, the intimate lighting and atmosphere of the rustic, Argentinean-style decor, the music and the tantalising aromas. Enjoying a drink from the large selection of fine wines and spirits stocked at the bar in front of the fire crackling in the hearth, relaxing in the comfortable chairs of one of the lounges, provides the perfect ambiance to the start of your evening.

Steaks are the hallmark of Argentína's cuisine. Icelandic beef is untouched by drugs, additives or steroids. They have been genetically unaltered over the 1,000 years since the first settlers. Allowed to grow slowly, they have developed just the right amount of fat necessary for the meat to grill perfectly and the muscles are finer, so the steak is succulent and tender. Icelandic lamb is renowned for its unspoilt, natural growth as they roam unrestrained in the mountain wilderness pastures, also free from additives or hormones, colouring or enhancers – and that shows in its tenderness and taste! Also on the menu is a wide range of carefully selected fresh seafood, shellfish and lobster, to provide a choice for every palate.

Char grilled to perfection, the steaks are complemented by the red and white wine selection from all the major countries and regions, or Champagne and sparkling wines, all served by attentive waiters and waitresses. The desert menu complements the main meal with its range of both Icelandic and international choices.

There is no incentive to rush out once you have finished your meal. There are plenty of comfortable couches and chairs in which to relax and enjoy an after-dinner glass of quality cognac, whiskey, port or liqueurs. Argentína is also the most popular venue to buy cigars, though the restaurant is now a smoke-free area.

Although the restaurant can seat up to 120 guests, including two banquet rooms that seat up to 16 and 20 guests respectively, Fridays and Saturdays should be booked in advance. It is open Sunday-Thursday from 6 pm to midnight and on Friday-Saturday from 5:30 pm to 1 am. (The kitchen closes 90 mins. before closing time.)

-ASF

**Argentína**

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# A VIKING'S LIFE

*Vikingakráin - The Viking Tavern in the Centre of Reykjavik*

Vikings loved to eat - and eat well, and they have a reputation of eating and drinking to keep up.

Now, you can join them, right in the heart of Reykjavik, close to the harbour to enjoy the Viking lifestyle, food, drink, dress and skills. Vikingakráin takes you back 1,000 years, plunging you into a world of sheepskin and silversmiths, rough wood and candlelight, longships and Viking dress.

Here you can live and breathe Viking traditions, eat the same food cooked in the same way they are thought to have cooked and served by Vikings dressed in the same way their forebears were.

Drinking is a well-known Viking tradition. Upstairs, you can get your drinks straight from a Viking longship. At both bars your beer will be drawn from carved wooden high seat pillars, similar to those the first Viking to settle here, Ingólfur Arnarson, threw overboard as he was approaching the country to find where he should set up home. No polished hotel tables here, you sit on benches or logs at rough-hewn wooden tables. Smoke from the candles rises through the beams.

They were craftsmen, skilled in working with their hands. As you walk through the wooden gates, you find yourself in the midst of a Viking market where you can see artisans at work and purchase their original handiwork.

In the market area, for example, you can meet Ari and Ágústa from Níu Heimar (Nine Worlds). Ari is the blacksmith, but his talents go much further, as his skills with painting and crafts show. Together, they are fascinating to talk to, if you have an interest in the roots of the Viking world, as they take you into the mists of history and the spirit world. In their workshop just a couple of minutes away, you can find an amazing collection of everything from driftwood and glass, smoothed by the rough seas, shells, herbs, bones and even twigs that are transformed into works of art.

Did you ever wonder how the Vikings really dressed? Here is your chance, not only to find out, but to take some home with you. Craftsmen in the market have jewellery of all types, leather bags and many other skillfully-made items that make worthy gifts and treasured mementoes.

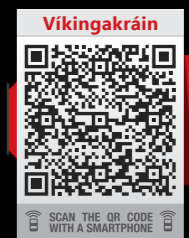


In her booth in the restaurant, you will find Hrafna the Völva - a Viking seer who can tell you a lot about yourself. The Vikings of the past would always consult a Völva before starting any undertaking.

Visiting musicians, actors and storytellers make regular appearances to enthrall and entertain you. Every day at 8 pm, the popular comedy show, 'Let's Talk Iceland', that tells you all you need to know about the history of Iceland and Icelanders from its settlement until present day is performed in the restaurant. It is a fun and vibrant play in English. You will meet Vikings or valkeries from the past and go on an unforgettable journey through the history of Iceland and discuss the strange people living there - the Icelanders.

The world of the Vikings is very much alive today and you will find them, eating, drinking, working and generally having fun in Vikingakráin in Reykjavik.

-ASF



**Vikingakráin**  
 Hafnarstræti 1 • 101 Reykjavík  
 +354 551 1717  
 vikingakrain@vikingakrain.is  
 www.vikingakrain.is



# A LEGEND DOWN BY THE DOCKS

*The Tale of the Sea Baron*

A true legend and a trailblazer in Reykjavik harbour is the Sea Baron, a retired fisherman and Coast Guard chef, who came up with the recipe for what has been called the “world’s greatest lobster soup.” You’ll find his restaurant, Sægreifinn, down by the old harbour in Reykjavik in a green-painted, old fisherman’s hut, where you can have your choice of fresh seafood barbecued on skewers or see if there is any truth to the bold statement about the lobster soup.

## Smoking Eel All Night Long

In his early days, the Sea Baron, who is better known as Kjartan Halldórsson, was a fisherman who sailed from Reykjavik’s harbour during the 1950’s. Kjartan then decided to take a week-long chefs’ course and hired himself as a chef for the Coast



Guard, where he would prepare meals during their often long tours. Then he pioneered marketing smoked eel to Icelanders and, to this day, he smokes his own eels down by the docks, the pungent smell forcing him to smoke them during the night. Later, Kjartan opened up a fish shop, selling all sorts fresh fish products directly from the dock.

Kjartan’s transition from fishmonger to restaurant owner was based more on coincidence than anything else. One day, standing by his boxes of fish packed in ice, a group of foreign visitors asked if it were possible for Kjartan to prepare the fish for them. Quick to spot an opportunity, Kjartan ran to the nearest shop, purchased a grill and cooked the fish right there, inviting the visitors to dine inside his fish shop – which is where the Sægreifinn restaurant stands today. Word spread and more people asked for his grilled seafood, so Kjartan got rid of the boxes and became a restaurant owner.



## The Best Possible Materials

Here you’ll always find a fresh assortment of the best seafood, the selection depending on the catch of the day. How does Kjartan make sure he has the best ingredients available? He owns the fish shop across from the restaurant, so it’s a problem solved. Shortly after opening the restaurant, Kjartan invented his lobster soup, which has now become world famous for its delicious flavour and taste. Kjartan sadly refuses to disclose the secret to his recipe!

## Aphrodisiac Soup

A true pioneer, Kjartan is always coming up new ideas. One is named Sea-agra Soup. Its key ingredient is the Sea Cucumber, which according to Chinese folklore, has an aphrodisiac effect on those who eat it. There is only one way to find out if that is true – drop down to the legendary Sægreifinn restaurant at the harbour and enjoy!

-VAG

**Sægreifinn**

Geirsgata 8 • 101 Reykjavík  
**+354 553 1500**  
 info@sægreifinn.is  
 www.sægreifinn.is

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# JEWELLERY FROM THE GODDESS OF THE SEA

*Sædis’ Silver and Stones Stream from the Waters*

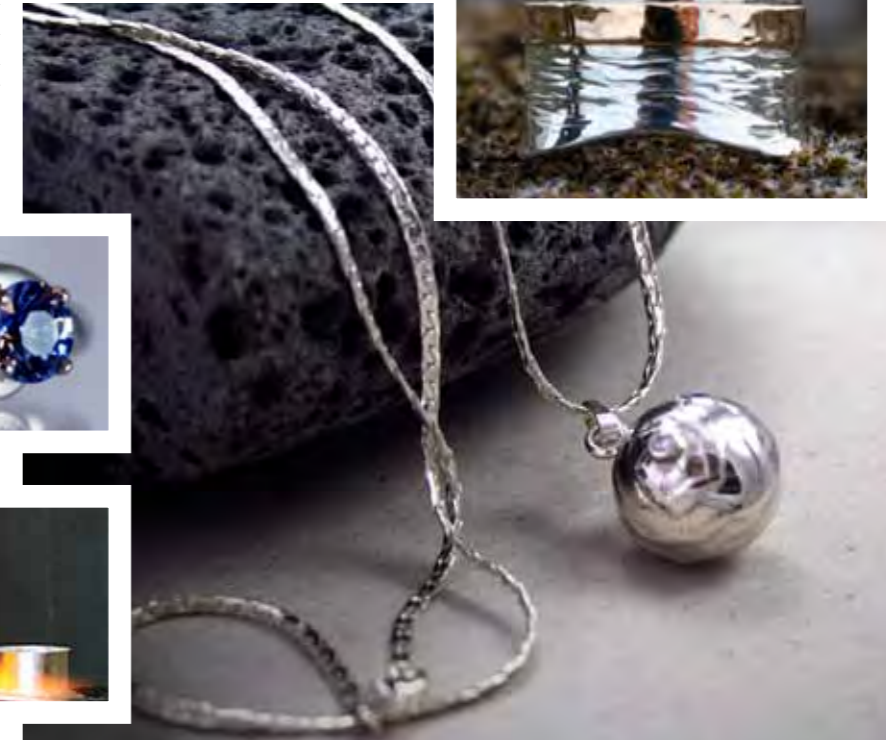
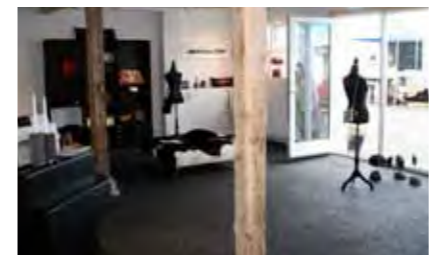
The old harbour of Reykjavik truly is one of the city’s most magical places. The area has, in the last few years, been completely revived and the old fishing huts which, not so long ago, faced being demolished now, thanks to a group of highly innovative and creative individuals, brim with life and activity, housing various restaurants and cafés as well as workshops and studios for artists and designers. Among those who have so vigorously renovated this charming little ‘village’ is a brilliant and immensely talented jewellery designer, Sædis Bauer Halldórsdóttir.

immediately evokes images of Iceland’s most distinct symbol, pure water. Whether it be the silky smoothness of Lake Þingvellir, crystal-clear mountain streams or the waves of the ocean, the texture and mobility of



Sædis, whose name translates ‘Goddess of the Sea’, indeed seems to have a special relationship with the earth’s blue gold. So special that, upon entering her gallery and workshop after strolling along the harbour, one is struck by the thought that somehow the ocean must have flooded into the store and magically taken the shape of beautiful pieces of jewellery.

Marvelling at the sleek beauty and mirror-like appearance of her design, which ranges from the most feminine to pieces that can easily be worn by both men and women,



water is ever present in Sædis’ creations. Her respect for nature and strong emphasis on quality is evident in all aspects of her work. Sædis uses green practices and each piece is elaborately handcrafted from recycled materials and fair trade stones making it as unique as a raindrop. Among her metals of choice is silver, which she uses along with blue and clear stones and Icelandic stones like the lava stone. Sædis will custom-make pieces to meet the wishes of clients using whatever precious metal they request. She also sells quality leather products and art pieces by significant Icelandic artists.

Sædis is among many designers and artists who sell their creations on etsy.com, making her design available worldwide at saedis.etsy.com but if you’re in Reykjavik, a visit to her open workshop and gallery truly is an experience you don’t want to miss.

-HP

**Sædis Goldsmith**

Geirsgata 5b • 101 Reykjavík  
**+354 555 6087**  
 saedis@saedis.is  
 www.saedisbauer.com

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# EXPERIENCE THE FORCE OF NATURE

*Volcano House Films Take You into the Fires of Hell*

Opening 7th May, 2011, The Volcano House will offer visitors a lively and entertaining look at the geology of Iceland.

Behind the concept are three brothers, Svavar, Þórir and Hörður - all of whom were looking for a change of direction in their careers. When the idea of opening The Volcano House presented itself, they leapt at the opportunity.

Located across from Reykjavik's old harbour, two excellent 40-minute films will be shown every hour, on the hour, in



the in-house cinema, which seats up to 50 guests. The films cover two of Iceland's 20th century eruptions - the 1973 eruption in the Westman Islands and the most recent 2010 eruption of Eyjafjallajökull.

A brief synopsis of Iceland's geological history and volcanic system in English, German and Icelandic will be displayed together with hands-on exhibits of lava rock and ash, making The Volcano House a kind of 'learning oasis' for those on a quest for knowledge.

"We hope to eventually include an earthquake simulator," says Þórir, "where guests will be able to experience the feeling of earthquakes of different magnitudes on the Richter scale, bringing home the reality and impact of any of the earthquakes that have rocked the world in recent months".

Superb volcano and related nature photographs by some of the best photographers in Iceland today will be exhibited. The gift shop will have a lovely selection of handcrafted items by top Icelandic designers and artists, whose work is related to Iceland's volcanoes and nature.



Digital prints of the exhibited photographs will also be available in the gift shop.

In The Volcano House café, guests can enjoy excellent coffee, light refreshments and a selection of wines and spirits.

*Welcome to the Volcano House!*

**Volcano House** -EMV

Tryggvagata 11 • 101 Reykjavík  
 +354 555 1900  
 info@volcanohouse.is  
 www.volcanohouse.is

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# SJÓHATTURINN SOUVENIRS

*The Little Shop with a Big Heart*

You will find the essence of Iceland in the Sjóhatturinn (The Sea-Hat) souvenir shop. This family-run business actively scours the country in search of innovative and interesting crafts and souvenirs straight from the source.

Husband and wife, Garðar and Brynja, opened the store just three years ago in the same old fisherman's hut where Garðar used to bait lines. The hut's original character and feel have been preserved and old fishermen who worked there frequently gather in the shop's lounge, overlooking the harbour to exchange tales from the sea.

## Unique Selection of Bird Memorabilia

Sjóhatturinn offers a wide selection of bird memorabilia – especially the colourful puffin. They have their own taxidermist who supplies them with stuffed puffins you can take home. Garðar and Brynja are more than happy to reserve one and send it to you. They also search for quality bird wood carvings and offer a selection that is hard to find elsewhere.



## Down to the Grassroots

Garðar and Brynja's ambition is to offer as wide a selection of interesting crafts and souvenirs as possible. "We leave no stone unturned in our search. We stop at every single farm and craft house to see what the people are doing. We talk to old fishermen and whalers, farmers, painters, potters, knitters - everyone who is creating something which captures the essence of Iceland. We get right down to the grassroots and thus our products are as authentic as possible. We want to be able to tell our customers where they come from, who made them and how," says Brynja.

All wool sweaters in Sjóhatturinn are knitted in Iceland and each comes with a special label identifying who knitted it, so you know you're buying an authentic Icelandic wool sweater. Sjóhatturinn also offers affordable, quality outdoor clothing from Icewear to keep you warm both here and at home.



Other items include yarn, which a mother from Northern Iceland makes from her own sheep's wool; ceramic bowls made by disabled craftspeople; hand-made Icelandic Santa Claus and trolls; jewellery made from lava rocks, fish skin products, books, Icelandic cosmetic and health products and, of course, sea hats. Animal collectors should enquire about the sperm whale teeth.

## Have it Sent Home

You don't have to carry your souvenirs. You can ask Brynja and Garðar to send them to your home. If you forgot something, just send an e-mail and they will ship it to you. "People have been extremely



grateful for our services and wide selection. In fact, many have expressed their regrets of not finding us until the end of their trip when their funds were depleted," says Brynja, so be sure to visit Sjóhatturinn early during your stay.

**Sjóhatturinn** -VAG

Geirsgata 3 • 101 Reykjavík  
 +354 552 7777  
 sjohatturinn@sjohatturinn.is  
 www.sjohatturinn.is

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# HARBOURSIDE SUSHI

*Sushimiðjan-Midori, a Top Class Restaurant at the Old Harbour*

In one of the bright green buildings down at the old harbour is Sushimiðjan, a bright and busy sushi restaurant.

Serving a range of tasty sushi dishes with sake, wine or beer, this is a very popular eating and meeting place.



Sitting on the patio on a warm summer day, enjoying a delicious sushi and the view over the harbour to Mount Esja across the bay, this is the life! For freshness, the harbour is the place to be. The combination of Icelandic fish and sushi cannot be beaten for quality and flavour - and its presentation is top class.

The menu offers Makis, Nigiris and Sashimis, along with a mixed vegetable sushi and different children's dishes. Japanese noodles with chicken, vegetables or Tiger prawns, fish or miso soup, seafood or beef salad round out the main courses. For desert, there is chocolate cake with cream, ice cream and fresh berry smoothies.

The restaurant is open from 11:30 am to 11 pm. Take-away meals can be ordered by phone or on the web. They cater for companies, parties and lunches, too.

**Sushimiðjan** -ASF

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# SHOP FROM YOUR HOTEL ROOM

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Did you just arrive home and realise you didn't get that special gift? A quick visit to the website and it's on its way and your embarrassment is saved.

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# SEE ICELAND WITH FRESH EYES

*Unique Visual Experiences of Iceland's Geological History*

Much has been written about Iceland's splendid landscapes in trying to capture the essence of the country, but fewer have tried to actually explain how Iceland came to be the way it is. Thus many visitors casually pass by Iceland's staple attractions without ever realising the complexity of their origin and being. In the rustic loft of a fisherman's hut down by Reykjavik's old harbour, you can now glimpse into the origin of Iceland at Cinema No. 2's unique movie theatre.

The company specialises in nature cinematography and offers a wide selection of films which focus more on the experience of the topic rather than simply showing it. The

Bryndís says that visitors, and even Icelanders themselves, often don't get the full Iceland experience simply because they don't know its history. "For example, some people don't realise that Iceland is positioned on the



filmmaker has been filming Icelandic nature since 1970's and has amassed enormous amounts of extraordinary footage.

One of their most popular films is called 'Eruption'. It focuses on the powerful Eyjafjallajökull eruption in 2010. Bryndís Kristjánsdóttir, manager at Cinema No. 2, says their guests are continually amazed by the force of the eruption as seen in the film and often want to know more about the volcanic activity in Iceland. As a result, Cinema No. 2 now presents their latest film, 'The Birth of an Island', which shows you exactly that - how Iceland came to be the way it is.



Mid-Atlantic Ridge, spanning the North-American and European tectonic plates, as well as being on top of a so-called 'hot spot', resulting in the extremely variable volcanic activity found in Iceland. But the volcanoes are not the only things which shape the country. The movie explores how climate changes, glaciers, rivers and the ocean slowly, slowly form the splendid landscapes we see here today. As with our other films, we wanted to focus on giving a visual experience and limit the amount of explanation as much as possible, focusing instead on atmosphere and visual presentation," says Bryndís.

Cinema No. 2 has a wide selection of film screenings from noon to the evening, ranging from just over twenty minutes up to two-hour showings. Bryndís says the schedule is designed to suit everyone, from people who want to take a breather from a busy day of excursions, whale-watchers looking for things to do, those wanting a lunch break, pre-dinner entertainment or a cosy way

to spend the evening. In fact, Cinema No.2 was recently selected as one of the top 10 places to go after hours in Reykjavik by the popular tourist website, [www.TripAdvisor.com](http://www.TripAdvisor.com). German speakers are advised to check out the daily screenings at 18:30 in German.

**Cinema No. 2** -VAG

Geirsgata 7b • 101 Reykjavík  
 +354 898 6628  
 cinemano2@lifsmynd.is  
 www.lifsmynd.is

# EFFECTIVE AND PURE

*Sif Cosmetics Serum Changes Skin Care Forever*

Based on the latest advances in molecular biology and medical research, the Icelandic biotechnology company Sif Cosmetics has recently launched a brand new product in skin care: EGF Serum, which is making waves in the world of cosmetics. With only 9 ingredients on its label, the serum works by stimulating the skin's own renewal process,

using something called EGF, or epidermal growth factors. EGF Serum is the first skincare product on the market to contain cellular activators produced in barley plants, grown in state-of-the-art geothermal greenhouse on the Reykjanes Peninsula, west of Reykjavik.

My own conclusion? Having used only a few drops of the product every night for two weeks, my complexion has evened out, is hydrated and smoother, as many other women have found to be true.

Amazingly, some have even cancelled their botox injections in favour of the serum, and THAT is very good news!



**Sif Cosmetics** -EMV

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# HOTEL SHOPPING STORE LOCATION IN THE CENTER



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Opening hours are every day from 09:00 - 19:00 until 7th of June and from 09:00 - 20:00 from 7th of June - 1st of September.



# WHALES, DOLPHINS, PUFFINS AND FISH

*Elding - Pioneers of Reykjavik's Whale Watching Phenomenon*

Elding Whale Watching, founded in 1998, pioneered whale watching trips from Reykjavik. Whale watching was uncharted territory but word of their success in consistently finding whales and dolphins got around, making the trips very popular. They have five boats, all of which are fully used, as the idea of whale watching has captured the hearts of people everywhere.

## Whales and Puffins

Elding offers all year round whale watching with numerous superb tours daily during the summer. Whale watching in the beautiful evening light, as the sun sets close to midnight, has become very popular.

## Puffin Islands

During the summer months' breeding season, when thousands of puffins nest on Lundy or Akurey, two islands near Reykjavik, each whale watching trip visits one of them (which, depends on the tides). The boats get in very close without disturbing the birds, providing fantastic photo opportunities. Around these islands, other birds like eider ducks, black guillemots, gannets and cormorants can also regularly be seen.

## Puffin 'n Fishing

Daily, in summer, there are two additional hour-long trips just to see the puffins and one 3-hour trip which includes fishing. The fish you catch is barbecued on board. You can't get a fresher meal than that!

## The Key Differences

Elding is the only whale watching operator that offers tours all year round. Many take boats out into the Atlantic—but what makes

the experience memorable is the quality of service. Elding's boats are purpose-designed and the crews are both experienced and friendly. Having live commentary from naturalist guides, expertise and friendly explanations also gives the trip extra value.

## Sustainable Operation

Elding is the only whale watching operator in Reykjavik that contributes to and participates in marine research. This is seen as an important contribution to its sustainability policy and a good way to



understand the environment they are dependent on. Two research projects, cataloguing and behaviour-monitoring of the whales are run on the Elding boats. Since 2007, over 300 whales have been listed and photographed and important data on them gathered on their behaviour.

## Eco-friendly operation

From the outset, Elding set the bar high on standards of professionalism in each area. Every year since 2006, it has received the Green Globe/Earth Check certification, whose audit requires an annual improvement in their environmental impact.

## 'Dive' with the Whales

An older ship has been converted into a Whale Watching Centre, whose centrepiece is the skeleton of a minke whale. Downstairs is a walk-through presentation which should not be missed. Films shot underwater take you into the whales' world. With a shop and café to relax in and seating both up on deck, with a beautiful view of the harbour and inside, this is worth a visit in itself. It is open daily from 8 am to 5 pm.



*"Elding is far and away the best Whale-Watch operator in Reykjavik. Outstanding naturalist guides, very friendly and professional staff, comfortable and stable boats and Marine Biologists working on board... Brilliant!"*

—Mark Carwardine, BBC TV presenter and one of the world's foremost whale and dolphin experts.

**Elding** -ASF

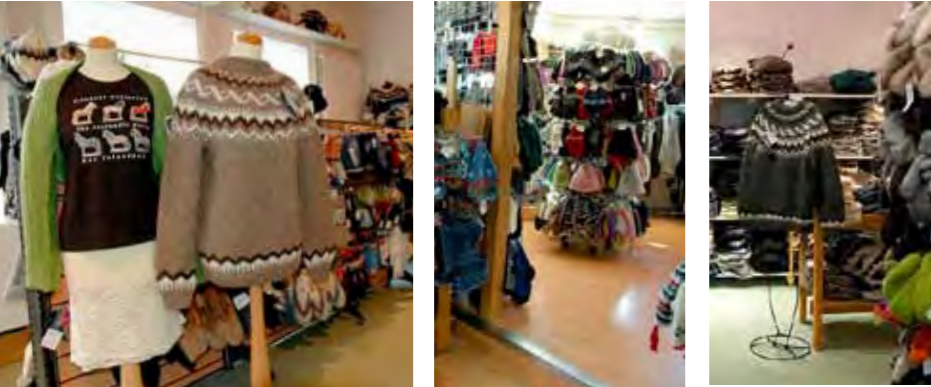
Ægisgarður 7 • 101 Reykjavík  
 +354 555 3565  
 elding@elding.is  
 www.elding.is

# CLOSE-KNIT

*The Handknitting Association's Yarn*

You line up with dozens of other women to stand before a fickle shop owner who will take only a minute to judge months of work. After hours of waiting, you finally stand before him and

Before 1977 this depressing scene was commonplace. Knitting orders were advertised on the only radio station in Iceland with little consideration for the people filling the order. From this



his shrewd eye skims over your sweaters. He shakes his head and your heart sinks. You hang your head in dejection and trudge home with your rejected sweaters in tow; months of work and part of your family income is lost in that moment.

chaos emerged Iceland's Handknitting Association, a small group of women who wanted to take charge of their own work rather than rely on the whim of shop owners. These women wanted to sell their handiwork on fair terms by coordinating

orders and members to create a harmonious cottage industry. This pioneering standardisation, quality inspection, and guidance for projects has grown the Handknitting Association from a small group to around 200 knitters.

Not just anyone can knit an Icelandic sweater, which takes a full two to three days to complete. The pattern itself is as complicated as the Icelandic name for it, lopapoyssa. Although most members of the Handknitting Association are older Icelandic women who want to occupy themselves well into retirement, the financial crisis has ushered in a younger generation of knitting professionals to carry on the tradition. The Handknitting Association coordinates old and new members to clothe clientele in apparel entirely made in Iceland by professional knitters whose work has standardized sizes and undergoes rigorous quality inspection.

-KB

Icelandic Handknitting Assn.



Skólavörðustígur 19 • 101 Reykjavík  
 +354 552 1890  
 handknit@handknit.is  
 www.handknit.is

# A NEW MEMORY EACH MONTH

*Snerra Publishing introduces the 2012 selection*

Once you've returned home from your trip to Iceland, you'll undoubtedly want to have something to remember it by. Having a new picture from Iceland on your wall every month is surely one of the better ways to do it. Snerra publishing company is now presenting a new selection of calendars for the year 2012 – a souvenir which is not only nice to look at but also practical and informative.

The 2012 selection is especially extensive, with 'The Icelandic Calendar', which includes pictures of the landscape, towns and people of Iceland in all four seasons; 'This is Iceland' offering glimpses of the Icelandic way of life; 'Experience Iceland' focussing on the powerful forces of nature at work in Iceland; 'The Panoramic Desk Calendar'; 'The Icelandic Horse Calendar' and the ever popular Puffin Calendar. The Nature Calendar is new this



year with drawings by award winning artist, Jón Baldur Hlíðberg.

You can keep up with what's going on in Iceland as the official Icelandic holidays are marked on the calendars - so you'll know when to celebrate Iceland's Independence Day and when to start eating putrefied shark and soured liver sausages.

-VAG

Snerra Publishing



Skútuvegur 10f • 104 Reykjavík  
 +354 567 3350  
 snerra@snerra.is  
 www.snerra.is



# NOODLE STATION REYKJAVIK

*Simple, fast and delicious Thai food at affordable prices*

Young Thai entrepreneur Charin Thaiprasert is the proud owner of the Noodle Station restaurant. Charin's recipe for his restaurant's success has been in his family for generations. There are



three different courses on the menu – noodle soup with beef, noodle soup with chicken and noodle soup with vegetables. The noodles are made with rice and no flour is used in the process. Customers can expect delicious food and fast service at an affordable price.



The Noodle Station is exceptionally easy to find. It is at Skólavörðustígur 21a – on the left-hand side of the street, about half way up. This is the street that leads from Reykjavik's city centre up to the 74.5 metre concrete, space-shuttle look-alike, Hallgrímskirkja memorial church on Skólavörðuholt hill.

-SV

Noodle Station



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# A PASSPORT AROUND ICELAND

*Sterna offers a liberating alternative in touring the country*

There are many ways to explore this island nation but many have yet to realize how convenient the public transport system is. Drengur Óla, Marketing Manager of Sterna Tour Company, says that there are many advantages to using public transportation in Iceland, including fair prices and the regularity of the trips.

“First and foremost, we offer public transportation, which means that our buses

show your passport and you’re on your way. “It has proven to be very liberating for our customers to have the freedom and flexibility to tour the country at their own discretion, whether we’re talking about families, groups or lone travellers. We’ve often seen a certain community among the travellers and some of our customers who step on the bus as individuals, leave with a group,” says Drengur.



always depart at given times and no matter how many or few passengers, you never have to worry about how or when you’re getting to your next destination. In fact, in all my years working for this company, we have never left a passenger behind, and we don’t intend to start now,” says Drengur.

Sterna has adjusted their route network to give easy access to all the locations of interest to a curious traveller. Increasingly popular are The Bus Passports, enabling you to jump on and off scheduled trips at your own convenience and to travel to specific areas of Iceland without ever having to worry about booking the bus. You just

There are six different passports available, including the full circle around Iceland on highway no. 1, a tour to the West Fjörds and the Golden Circle. An increasingly popular alternative to the circle around Iceland is the East Circle via Kjölur, taking you straight across the barren highlands of Iceland. “The Kjölur route also offers you a chance to experience the hidden oasis of

the Kerlingarfjöll area, which has been overlooked by many, but is a unique area. This summer, we are offering short tours in the mountainous area and the first ‘Day-Tour’ (as opposed to scheduled tours), which takes you to the volcanic islands of Vestmannaeyjar, including a pick up at your hotel. Another innovation is that the tours around the Snæfellsnes peninsula will have local guides, offering detailed and entertaining commentary of the area. The most popular routes around the South of Iceland also include stewardesses to help facilitate the whole experience.”

Drengur says that Sterna places special emphasis on safety and that all their buses come equipped with seatbelts and meet all the required standards and more. “Another plus of utilizing the public transport system is that you can be sure that the driver knows the route like the back of his hand and is experienced in dealing with the needs of the travellers, including accommodating families with children and those with special needs.”

-VAG

**Sterna**



BSÍ - Vatnsmýrarvegur 10 • 101 Reykjavík  
**+354 551 1166**  
 sterna@sterna.is  
 www.sterna.is

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# SKETCHING FOR SUPPER

*Dining with Kjarval at Gallery Restaurant*

Art is a lifestyle, not a profession. Jóhannes Kjarval was painfully aware of this fact for years while he struggled to obtain his basic needs by paying with paintings and sketches, scattering his life’s work throughout the city of Reykjavik. Tucked away on an unassuming side street, sheltered from the hectic downtown is Hotel Holt’s Gallery Restaurant, home to several works by Kjarval.



Heavy draperies and frosted glass shelter guests from prying eyes, while attentive wait staff assist travellers. The meal starts light with a small taste of soup to excite the palette and move on to a delicate appetiser like foie gras braised in tart fruit sauce. The entrée follows with a heavier dish, Icelandic lamb marinated with herbs and spices. A rich dessert polishes the meal off with chocolate cake or skyr and berry tarts.

Throughout dinner, guests can admire idyllic scenes of Icelandic landscapes and people livening up the dark wood panelling. Indulging in art and food was a passion



of Hotel Holt’s original owner Þorvaldur, who opened the hotel and restaurant in 1965. Þorvaldur even paid Kjarval for his work by providing him with food for sketches he drew. Kjarval often sketched at The Gallery restaurant which is dedicated to the works that he produced for his patron.



The Gallery Restaurant welcomes guests as it once welcomed Kjarval. Though a first class restaurant, it is not limited, with a three course lunch for 3,500 kr. and two-for-one drinks at Happy Hour or light fare such as mini burgers. Guests can try the three course dinner menu at 5,900 kr. Whether dining or simply stopping by for a drink, the staff encourages guests to walk through all the rooms of the restaurant and hotel to view their extensive collection of artwork.

For those with an interest in wine, the restaurant offers a cellar with 4,000 bottles and a waiter to act as a personal guide through the selection. There is a bottle of wine for every taste and price range. The Gallery Restaurant stays true to its original intent as a luxury dining experience, open to everyone, with its focus on the possibilities for guests in any price range.

-KB

**Gallery Restaurant**



Bergstaðastræti 37 • 101 Reykjavík  
**+354 552 5700**  
 gallery@holt.is  
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### Food for Thought

But Solla says that perhaps the greatest encouragement she's gotten came from a couple who had been having difficulties due to the husband's depression and general lack of health. "After only two months of eating raw food the wife came to me and told me they'd found happiness again and it was as if she'd gotten a new husband. That just goes to show that food doesn't just affect you physically, also mentally," says Solla.

Raw food cooking may sound rather limited to those who've never tried it, but Solla has found ways of making many of your favourite dishes without ever having to boil or cook out their nutrients. "To tell you the truth I am very fussy about what I eat and I didn't want to spend my life eating something I didn't like, just because it was good for me – I wanted it to taste good as well! And as there were really no outside options for this sort of food when I started I simply had to do it on my own," says Solla.

### Getting the Most from Your Food

Solla says raw food cooking is all about getting the most from the food you eat and using food which helps your body to stay healthy. "Some people may have some prejudice against raw foodism, but the fact of the matter is that it has been researched by scientists which show its effectiveness. Raw or living foods have natural enzymes, which are critical in building proteins and rebuilding the body, but by cooking the food excessively we lose these enzymes and the body has a harder time processing the food we eat.

But as with everything else in life there is a certain leeway to everything, which is why we offer both pasta and chicken dishes as well as raw food meals. Right now we're serving around 75% raw food dishes and the rest is of course extremely healthy as well," says Solla.

-VAG

## STAY HEALTHY IN ICELAND

*Solla, at Gló Restaurant, is one of the world's top raw food chefs*

Since The Settlement, Iceland's culinary traditions have mostly been characterised by the available methods of preservation rather than taste and nourishment – that is up until now. In recent years, vegetarian, raw and generally healthy food has been increasing in both popularity and quality in Iceland. A major catalyst in that process is a woman named Sólveig Eiríksdóttir, one of the world's top raw-food chefs and owner of the ever-popular Gló restaurant, opposite the Nordica Hotel.

Gló restaurant offers a wide selection of raw food dishes, as well as vegetarian and other healthy foods, all of which are renowned for both their taste and nutritional value. Come by at lunch hour any day of the week and you'll find the place packed with health fanatics & athletes; hippies & hipsters; politicians & programmers – all of which line up daily to try Gló's raw food pizza's, raw food lasagne, their unique salads and whatever dishes Gló offers each day.

### Decades of Experience

The restaurant's success is a result of its owner's tireless effort to introduce healthy eating to Iceland and its visitors. Sólveig, or Solla as she is most commonly known as, has been involved in the health food industry for close to thirty years and during that time has amassed copious amounts of knowledge and experience on the matter. She is a sought after lecturer on the topic and a continual presence on lists of the best raw food chefs in the world.

Solla had previously run extremely popular vegetarian restaurants in Reykjavík, but when Solla was introduced to the world of raw food in the mid 90's she hasn't looked back. "I'm extremely grateful for having gotten to know raw-food as soon as I did, as it is the best thing that has ever happened to me. It has helped my body to age gracefully, stay free of pests and illnesses, and given me the energy to match the energy of my employees, most of which are much younger than me," says Solla.



**Gló Restaurant**  
Engjateigur 19 - 105 Reykjavík  
+354 553 1111  
glo@glo.is  
www.glo.is

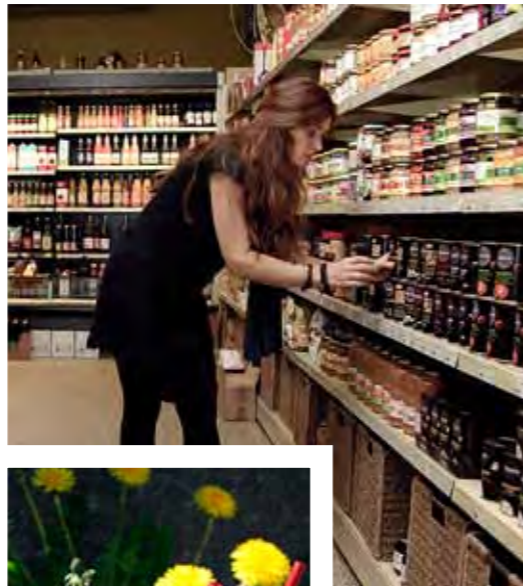
# CAREFREE SHOPPING AND DINING

*Maður Lifandi Makes Healthy Living Easier*

Changing to and maintaining a healthy lifestyle may appear a daunting task with some of the reasons being: not knowing how to eat healthy, not knowing where to find healthy food and thinking that healthy food is rather dull and flavourless. Maður Lifandi supermarket and restaurant chain makes it their goal to make that easy for you by providing a unique selection of organic and natural groceries, and gourmet meals

about chemical additives, fillers or other unwanted ingredients like white sugar and wheat. We've studied the list of ingredients for you and only sell products that meet our standards. Furthermore, our staff is highly informed in organic and health products, and should be able to provide you with the information and help you need," says Arndís. The product

providing affordable meals which are not cheap when it comes to taste. "A lot of people seem to think health food is flavourless and dull which could not be further from the truth in our case. We've got a team of chefs who are experts in using fresh natural and organic ingredients to make delicious and savoury meals," says Arndís. Each day, Maður Lifandi offers both



a vegetarian and non-vegetarian special, soup and bread, as well as the ever popular salad bar along with a selection of cold dishes, either to dine-in or as a take-away.

Arndís says that the smoothie and juice bar is constantly growing in popularity. There, customers can have their choice of healthy and nutritious drinks, the most popular one being "The Green Thunder".

Maður Lifandi has three locations in the Reykjavík area: one in Borgartún 24, one in Hæðarsmári 6 in Kópavogur, and one in Hafnarborg - The Hafnarfjörður Centre of Culture and Fine Art - which should make for a nice outing; enjoying delicious healthy food and admiring works of art by leading Icelandic and international artists.

-VAG

Maður lifandi



Borgartún 24 • 105 Reykjavík  
 +354 585 8700  
 madurlifandi@madurlifandi.is  
 www.madurlifandi.is

SCAN THE QR CODE WITH A SMARTPHONE



# OLDEST VEGETARIAN RESTAURANT

*Vegetarian Meals So Good Even Non-Vegetarians Love Them*

Due to an often-unforgiving climate, Iceland does not have a particularly long history of vegetarian and organic lifestyles. Cultivating vegetables and fruits in such unfavourable conditions is a challenge even the greenest fingers will have problems overcoming. But thanks to new technologies, a warmer climate, modern transportation and some hard work, Iceland has become a vegetarian and health food heaven, and a leading pioneer in that trend is Iceland's oldest vegetarian restaurant, Grænn Kostur.

restaurant scene as is made evident by the long queues that form every Thursday, with customers waiting for Grænn Kostur's famous spinach and vegetarian lasagne. "We're constantly disproving

Grænn Kostur's Course of the Day is a particularly popular choice. Along with the splendid course are various salads, breads, rice, and some juicy and flavourful sauces, which is more than enough to satisfy an empty stomach. Jóhanna says they're also quite proud of their cake and cookie selection which is, of course, also as organic and wholesome as possible, completely



the image many people seem to have of vegetarian eating; that it is a single leaf of cabbage with a glass of water. When you get a meal at Grænn Kostur, you really get a meal. It has therefore been a pleasant experience to see that a large proportion of our customers aren't even vegetarians; they simply like a tasty and healthy alternative," says Jóhanna.

void of white sugar and wheat, as well as some raw food cake alternatives that are a big hit.

"Our customers, who come from all walks of life, come again and again, whether they're looking for a quick bite to go, a lively lunch or just reading the paper over a cup of coffee and a wholesome cake," says Jóhanna.

-VAG

Jóhanna Jónasdóttir, service manager, says that Grænn Kostur (Green Choice) has accomplished a lot since its inception but their mission of 'better health through good food' is still going strong. "Our goal is simple: We want our food to be as natural and as full of life as possible - the closer to its origin the better.

That is why we make everything from scratch from as wholesome, natural and organic ingredients as possible. Our customers really seem to appreciate that," says Jóhanna.

Grænn Kostur has long since become a staple in Reykjavík's



Grænn kostur



Skólavörðustíg 8 • 101 Reykjavík  
 +354 552 2028  
 graennkostur@isl.is  
 www.graennkostur.is

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# SHOP AND ENJOY

Shopping and Entertainment Combined in Iceland's biggest shopping mall

**CLOTHING STORES INCLUDE**  
 Benetton, Zara, Debenhams, Herragarðurinn (Hugo Boss, Sand and more), Body Shop, Oasis, Karen Millen, Levi's, Topshop, Dorothy Perkins, Evans, Bianco, Vero Moda, Jack & Jones, Vila, Exit, Selected, Joe Boxer, Dressman and more.

**RESTAURANTS INCLUDE**  
 TGI Friday's, Pizza Hut, Café Energia, Café Adesso, Serrano, Subway, Hlíðlabátar among others.

**OTHER STORES INCLUDE**  
 Carat, Jón og Óskar, Meba and Leonard goldsmiths, Dogma, Drangey, Optical Studio, 66° North, Líf og list (Kop og kande), DÚKA, Eymundsson bookstore, Útilíf, Intersport and more.

Scan this QR code to get the Smáralind application. Available for Android phones and iPhones



Although Iceland's main attractions are its landscapes and scenery, the country is actually an excellent choice for some quality shopping as well. In the biggest shopping mall in Iceland, Smáralind, you'll find under one roof everything from high-end clothing to outdoor & sporting equipment; informative books and magazines in English and other languages to a movie theatre; and from a wide selection of quality restaurants to a complete family entertainment centre opening this autumn.

"Smáralind will be celebrating its 10th anniversary this year and is more vibrant than ever," says Guðrún Margrét Örnólfsdóttir, Marketing Manager at Smáralind. "Right now we're transforming our lovely hall, Vetrargarðurinn, into an

amusement park of sorts – a completely new family entertainment centre, where you'll find world class entertainment and activities for the entire family," says Guðrún. In addition, Smáralind offers strollers free-of-charge and quality child care while you do your shopping.

With over 80 shops and businesses on three floors, you'll surely be able to find something which suits your taste. "We pride ourselves with the wide range of stores and services we offer. Many of the stores here are exclusive to this mall in Iceland. Most of them are shops with Icelandic products as well as foreign; clothes stores, Icelandic art and design, bookstores that sell Icelandic literature in foreign languages and interesting books for travellers. You'll also find many cosmopolitan shops which

you can find in London, Paris and New York," says Guðrún.

She says that Smáralind strives to offer a comfortable, yet lively atmosphere, making shopping there an experience in itself. "It is a place where lively people and shoppers can easily spend the day with pauses at the many coffee places and restaurants in addition to one of the best movie theatres in Reykjavik. It is, in fact, the policy of Smáralind to combine shopping and entertainment," says Guðrún and notes that the list of events will be especially lively on this anniversary year, so keep posted.

On that note, Smáralind is now embracing new technologies and is introducing a new mobile application available for Android phones and iPhones

that enables you to get the information you need wherever you want, whenever you want. The application will make special offers available to you and you can even get better deals by sharing them with your friends. For the app, click the code above and for more information, visit the website shown below.

Smáralind is located in Kópavogur, only a 10 minute drive from downtown Reykjavik and easily accessible by public transportation as well.

**Smáralind** -VAG

Hagasmára 1 • 201 Kópavogur  
 +354 528 8000  
 smaralind@smaralind.is  
 www.smaralind.is

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# SELF-DRIVING MADE EASY

*Fosshótel: Connecting the Ring around Iceland*

The thought of booking accommodation for an entire road trip can be a daunting task, as the number of options and variables is sometimes seemingly endless. Fosshótel has come up with a convenient option for those driving around Iceland: the 'On the Road' package, which enables you to travel to all of Iceland's greatest attractions while always having a comfortable place to stay nearby.

Fosshótel handles all your hotel accommodation and provides you with a detailed travel itinerary to help you on your way. Their hotels are each located by the main road and close to many of Iceland's main attractions, eliminating long and tedious drives to your



night's lodging. Fosshótel has two conveniently located hotels in Reykjavik to start your trip. In Reykholt, in the west of Iceland, you'll find a culturally-themed hotel connecting you to the rich history of the area and the wonders of the Snæfellsnes peninsula. There are three hotels in the North of Iceland: Dalvík, Húsavík and



Laugar, giving you access to such diverse activities as whale watching, the geological phenomena of Ásbyrgi and the magnificent Dettifoss waterfall. Fosshótel, of course, provide accommodation close to Vatnajökull in the East of Iceland. Fosshótel Mosfell gives you easy access to many of Southern Iceland's greatest attractions, including a hike to Mt. Hekla and the secluded Þórsmörk area.

The hotels are not exclusive to those using the self-drive package and provide a cosy and friendly option for the weary traveller. Fosshotel's motto is 'Friendly

all around Iceland,' and their three main goals are to provide a good night's sleep, healthy breakfast and making their visitors comfortable, so you can be sure of a warm welcome. Most of their hotels have quality restaurants which emphasise the local cuisine and many of the staff are, in fact, locals who are more than happy to give you advice and information for your travels.

**Fosshótel** -VAG

Sigtún 38 · 105 Reykjavík  
**354 562 4000**  
 sales@fosshotel.is  
 www.fosshotel.is



# DINE WITH THE CHEF OF THE YEAR

*A Breath of Fresh Air at Sjávargrillið*

The Icelandic restaurant scene is quite the competitive business, so it may come as a surprise to some to hear about a chef in his 20's opening a new restaurant in downtown Reykjavik. Sjávargrillið, on Skólavörðustígur, is the brainchild of Gústav Axel Gunnlaugsson, who received the top honour of being named the Icelandic Chef of the Year in 2010, the youngest ever to do so, at the age of 23.

Despite his young age, Gústav, has cooked for many of the most esteemed seafood restaurants in Iceland and in London. In fact, when you read this, he will recently have competed for the honour of being the Nordic Chef of the Year in 2011.

Gústav has now decided to use his experience, education and his undisputed talent in his own brand new restaurant, named Sjávargrillið, or the Sea Grill.

When deciding on the new menu and theme for Sjávargrillið, Gústav scoured the country for inspiration, looking for the taste and essence of Iceland. As a



It should come as no surprise that Gústav is most comfortable working with fresh products from the sea, as he was born and raised in the small seaside town of Húsavík in the north of Iceland. "The brilliance of working with seafood here in Iceland is that we really have the best and freshest materials available. We literally get the fish directly from the fishermen themselves," he says.

result you'll see the cosy interiors made from driftwood collected from Icelandic shores and some innovative use of scrap iron from abandoned fish processing plants. For the menu, Gústav utilises as many of the Icelandic seasonal products as are available, including various wild and tasty plants which can survive the harsh arctic climate.

As the name implies, it is the grill that is Gústav's favourite method of cooking and it should come as no surprise that the Grill Feast Menus, with fish, meat or lobster, are already becoming the most popular dishes. The feasts are served on grills which Gústav had specially made for the restaurant



and offer a three-meal overview of Gústav's talents.

During lunch hour, Sjávargrillið offers the 'Fish of the Day' course, which is selected each day from the finest fish the day's catch can offer.

Sjávargrillið is located on the lively Skólavörðustígur, running down from the cathedral and on sunny days, it is the optimal location to enjoy a light seafood dish or coffee outside, while gazing at the bustling street life of Reykjavik.

**Sjávargrillið** -VAG

Skólavörðustígur 14 · 101 Reykjavík  
**+354 571 1100**  
 info@sjavargrillid.is  
 www.sjavargrillid.is

# THE SPIRIT OF ICELAND

*Íshestar's Horses will give You a Ride into Nature*

It can be said that the true spirit of a country is reflected in the nature of its native animals. The spirit of Iceland can therefore be found in its own cherished friend and companion, the Icelandic horse. Independent

The Icelandic horse was part and parcel of Iceland 1,000 years ago and continues to be an important part of Iceland today. So your trip to Iceland will hardly be complete without experiencing a riding



yet gentle, standing strong in the face of the conflicting winds of adversity, hard working and loyal, handsome and hardy. Can these words not describe both horse and man?

tour, whether it is an easygoing ride for beginners or a multi-day tour for the more experienced rider somewhere in the far reaches of the country.

# THE ART OF BACALAO

*Salthúsið Restaurant of Grindavík*

Call it bacalao, salted cod, morue - or saltfisk in Icelandic, the cod fish was once so important to Iceland's economy that it featured prominently on the Icelandic Coat of Arms. The Salthúsið

Benefiting from its proximity to the sea, Salthúsið's á la carte menu features beautifully presented seafood that couldn't be fresher: whether it's cod, haddock or catfish or even lobster – it all depends on



(Salt House) Restaurant of Grindavík is the first restaurant in Iceland specialising in the lowly codfish, bringing it up to new heights. Once the staple of the poor, bacalao has been a celebrated ingredient in Mediterranean, African, and Caribbean cuisine for many centuries.

the 'catch of the day'. Not a fish lover? The menu also features items such as marinated fillet of lamb, beef tenderloin and BBQ ribs amongst others.

Linger over a glass of wine from Salthúsið's extensive wine list while listening to the soft ambient music in front

As one of Iceland's oldest and leading tour companies, Íshestar puts great emphasis on its personal service, quality tours and safety, while providing a wide variety of year-round riding tours for all skill levels.

### Join one of Íshestar's most popular tours

The Lava Tour is an excellent ride for beginners wanting to get a feel for the Icelandic horse. This tour suits ages 8 to 99. You will take a 1½ - 2 hour ride through ancient lava fields surrounding Íshestar's Riding Centre.

Horse and Blue Lagoon Tour: After a ride of 1½ - 2 hours you will be driven to the fabulous Blue Lagoon, the perfect place for a soothing swim in the mineral rich waters, get a massage for those achy muscles or just relax and enjoy the facilities. (Blue Lagoon entrance fees are not included in the tour price.)

*For the authentic Icelandic experience this year, let Íshestar show you the way*

**Íshestar** -EMV

Sörlaskeið 26 • 220 Hafnarfjörður  
**+354 555 7000**  
 info@ishestar.is  
 www.ishestar.is

of the wood-burning stove in the dining room that serves to warm and brighten those rainy days that are sometimes a part of life in Grindavík. Aside from the á la carte evening menu, there is more casual fare for the lunch crowd, a café with free Internet access and a bar which is popular with the locals on weekends.

Salthúsið Restaurant, just 5 minutes drive from the internationally acclaimed Blue Lagoon, is housed in a warm and inviting log house, made of solid Estonian pine. The restaurant, spanning 2 floors, is an elegant venue for banquets, parties, conferences and reception dinners accommodating a total of 200 guests. The large premises can host conferences, workshops and meetings in 3 dining rooms, each with its own separate sound system, wireless Internet and an overhead projection system.

**Salthúsið** -EMV

Stamphólsvegur 2 • 240 Grindavík  
**+354 426 9700**  
 salthusid@salthusid.is  
 www.salthusid.is

# NATURE'S NUANCES

*Blue Lagoon Bliss*

Bodies lie weightlessly suspended, enveloped in mineral rich, milky blue waters. Faces, covered with white silica masks, wade slowly through shallow water. Pitted rocks, created by the slow cooling of the lava flow from volcanic eruptions thousands of years ago, give the illusion of a lunar landscape. Welcome to the otherworldly Blue Lagoon.

A path leading to the main entrance takes you into rooms accented with rich chestnut-brown wood, framed by natural rock. Beyond the doors of the changing rooms lies geothermal seawater enriched with silica and algae minerals to energize and nourish your skin. The brisk Icelandic weather rushes you into the pool and seconds later the warm embrace of that geothermal seawater enfolds you.

Trained masseuses can float you effortlessly through the water for submerged spa treatments while soothing any tensions from your trip. They gently place you on a raft as warm water lazily laps over your body. Stress melts away in the healing blue water, transforming concern into relaxed energy, which you can take home with help from an assortment of spa products available in the gift shop.



A swim-up bar delivers specialised skin masks, nourishing algae masks, exfoliating volcanic scrubs, or luscious cocktails for those who wish to imbibe. Guests who have the willpower to drag themselves from the deliciously warm water are richly rewarded for their effort in the Lava Restaurant & Bar. Built into a cliff, it gets its name from



the exposed lava rock wall integrated into its layout. A towering glass staircase brings guests to a second floor bar where you can indulge in a drink before dinner. Though the Lava Restaurant & Bar has won several architectural awards, its design does not outdo the restaurant's menu which runs the gamut from light dishes to gourmet meals.

An exclusive lounge is set aside for guests who want more privacy. The six rooms feature a changing area, vanity, and shower

which open into a hall that leads to a second floor balcony overlooking the main pool. Downstairs in a shared lounge amid subtly scattered curved grey chairs, fresh fruit, tea and coffee await, while a cheerful fire warms the room. A small indoor pool is reserved for guests of the lounge and provides access, through a private entrance, to the main pool. For those who want to treat themselves, full meals, small dishes, and cocktails can be ordered from the Lava Restaurant & Bar.

**Blue Lagoon** -KB

Grindavíkurvegur 5 • 240 Grindavík  
**+354 420 8800**  
 blueagoon@blueagoon.is  
 www.blueagoon.is

# THE PLACE TO STAY IN GRINDAVÍK

*Guesthouse Borg offers economical comfort in a friendly house*

In most countries, the opportunity to experience life in a fishing town has all but disappeared. Not so in Iceland, where Grindavík is one of the busiest. Situated a few kilometres from the world-famous Blue Lagoon, 20 minutes from Keflavik's International airport and 40 minutes from the capital, the town is packed with history going back as far as the first settlers. A geological hotspot, the area offers such a wide array of other tours, sights and experiences that one holiday is not enough.



Guesthouse Borg is an ideal place to stay, meet interesting people and enjoy the facilities and fun the town offers. It caters for individuals, couples, families and groups of up to 16 people in a clean, modestly-priced homestay accommodation. You'll find a full kitchen where you can cook your own meals, a laundry and a computer to go online. Breakfasts are provided on a self-service basis. Owners Björk and Magnús make this a comfortable home from which to launch out to explore the area.



**Guesthouse Borg** -ASF

Borgarhraun 2 • 240 Grindavík  
 +354 895 8686  
 bjorksv@hive.is  
 www.guesthouseborg.com

# BEAMS, BOTTLES, BARRELS & BEER

*Kanturinn Bar and Restaurant*

Vikings know how to enjoy themselves - the fishing community, especially. That makes Grindavík popular with tourists who want to experience the real culture of the country.

After an exciting day of tours around this rugged coast or over its rough lava fields, it's time to unwind and enjoy the company of the local folk in this fishing town. Filled with character - and people,



Grindavik's Kanturinn is all things to all men when it comes to refreshment. Here, you will find many nationalities enjoying themselves in the comfort of the bar and



restaurant, which serves both burgers and Asian food, with beer and soft drinks, making it also a fun place for families.

Whether sitting outside on the patio under the midnight sun or inside, surrounded by wood beams, this is the Icelandic pub at it's best. Nothing makes them happier than a satisfied customer.

**Kanturinn** -ASF

Hafnargata 6 • 240 Grindavík  
 +354 426 9999  
 ammacogan@gmail.com  
 none

# A TOUR TO RAVE ABOUT

*Salty Tours Take You on Trips that will Leave You Awed*

The first thing that came to mind was, "What is half a shipwreck doing so far inland?" Then, when I saw the other half a few hundred metres further up the road, I wondered, "What could possibly have split this steel ship in two and dumped the mangled halves so far apart?"

I was just getting a glimpse of some of the astonishing sights that Iceland offers. I realised there's a power here of tremendous proportions. Mind you, if I hadn't taken The Grand Volcano and Lava Circle Tour, I would probably never have seen this or the many other dramatic sights this day had presented me.

there seems little of apparent interest - but that is what makes Iceland special: you have to do a little searching to find the special experiences that will make your holiday memorable.



**Very Highly Recommended**

Salty Tours picks travellers up from hotels in Reykjavik and drives out for a day on the Reykjanes peninsula. Þorsteinn (Thorsteinn) knows this area like the back of his hand - its history, culture, people, land, animals and birds. He weaves them together into an experience that has resulted in rave reviews on *TripAdvisor.com*: "How amazing was this trip", "Very highly recommended indeed... This tour was fantastic..." Having just sampled a few minutes of the tour, I can unequivocally echo these reactions. This is a tour that will give you a new perspective on life in the North.

**Time to Reflect in the Blue Lagoon**

After a day filled with new activities every few minutes, your mind needs a break, so the tour ends at the world-renowned Blue Lagoon, where you can relax in its health-giving hot geothermal waters, laced with healing minerals, as you mull over all you

**Guided Tours Make All the Difference**

Savvy visitors to Iceland are becoming more aware of the value of guided tours as a way of not just seeing sights but of experiencing all the different facets of the country. Although it may seem more economical to just rent a car and drive around, there is so much more in a tour. You see places you would never have seen and enjoy the fascinating history you would never have heard - not to mention the anecdotes and pleasure.

Many tourists just drive straight from Keflavik airport to the capital, passing fields of lava. From the coach or car,



have encountered in just one day before taking the tour bus back to your hotel. You will probably feel you have just lived several lives all at once and will be left with the hunch that if this one peninsula has so much to offer, then the rest of your trip will provide a lifetime of memories.

**SaltyTours** -ASF

Borgarhrauni 1 • 240 Grindavík  
 +354 820 5750  
 tgk@saltytours.is  
 www.saltytours.is

# HIDDEN BEHIND THE LAVA

*Spectacular Secrets for Savvy Sightseers*

Grindavík is a town with a history going back to the early settlers of the 800's. Set on the wild coastline behind a field of lava, it is just out of sight of travellers going to and from the airport. Like much of Iceland, it

is filled with hidden secrets to be investigated. Only 3 km from the Blue Lagoon, Grindavík town offers an inspiring insight into a fishing community. The harbour is full of life, with ships of different sizes coming and going. It's hard to imagine that, until about 80 years ago, men braved the wild seas to go fishing in rowing boats. This history is vividly portrayed in the museum, located just behind the harbour. Grindavík is famous for both its stockfish and saltfish, a national dish in Mediterranean

countries. You can try some in the museum's café run by Mamma Mia restaurant. Above it is the dramatic Magma museum, giving a very clear picture of life under the earth here. The areas in Reykjanes where

over the lava or riding on horseback - or bicycle. There are miles of hiking trails with amazing panoramas and fascinating sights. It's a dream for ornithologists and geologists. For those with wide-ranging interests, this is an area that would take all your time and keep you coming back for more. Sports are popular in the town, which has a large swimming



fire and water mix in a cauldron that bursts out on the peninsula, are especially worth checking out - along with one of the very few places on Earth where you can stand on two different continents.

Grindavík has all kinds of bars and restaurants. Accommodation is available in Guesthouse Borg, Arctic B&B or at the new campsite, a virtual paradise for families which offers 2-for-1 passes to the Blue Lagoon.

Travel options include guided tours of the peninsula with Salty Tours; driving an ATV

pool complex with hot pots (jacuzzis), slide, children's pool, tanning beds and sauna. An 18-hole golf course set in spectacular vistas is just 4 km from the Blue Lagoon.

There is also a Hiking festival over Verslunarmannahelgin - the last weekend in July.

For details of the coach connections with Reykjavik, go to [www.grindavik.is/bus](http://www.grindavik.is/bus)

It is little wonder that this seemingly-hidden area is so popular with Icelanders and a growing number of knowledgeable tourists alike. With so much to experience in such a small area, it's a place not to miss on your itinerary. Their website has a wealth of information that will pack your holiday with memorable experiences.

-ASF

**Grindavík**



Vikurbraut 62 • 240 Grindavík  
**+354 420 1100**  
[grindavik@grindavik.is](mailto:grindavik@grindavik.is)  
[www.visitgrindavik.is](http://www.visitgrindavik.is)

SCAN THE QR CODE WITH A SMARTPHONE

# MAMMA MIA

*Tantalise Your Taste Buds and Satisfy Your Stomach*

Grindavík's a great place to stay when exploring and touring the amazing sights of the Reykjanes peninsula - but, wherever you stay, there's always the question of where to eat! Just 200 metres from the campsite - and right opposite the newly-opened Magma museum, close to the harbour, is one of the hottest additions to the restaurant scene, Mamma Mia.

dishes. Grindavík is famous for its saltfish or bacalao, as the Spanish call it, that is so popular in Mediterranean countries. Alongside this delicious cod dish, you will also find the freshest plaice, straight from the harbour just metres away.

meal. With such a variety of meals available, you can visit often and try a new dish each time.

The restaurant serves drinks of all kinds, including beers, wine and spirits. It's a lovely place to dine outside in the warm summer evenings, sheltered from any wind. The fresh sea air is both stimulating and restful.

Mamma Mia has seating for 30 outside along with the 60 places inside. This makes



This comfortable restaurant is a pizzeria with a full complement of pizza sizes and types, all hand-made and stone-baked with a delicious crunchy crust. They produce their own 'Mamma Mia' pizza topped with tuna, shrimp and mussels - a real speciality.

No restaurant in a fishing town would be complete without a selection of seafood

Whether you are hankering for a hamburger or are looking for a traditional lamb or beef steak, you'll find them here, as this is a restaurant with a wide selection of dishes on its menu.

Mamma Mia offers a choice of sandwiches with different original fillings, if you're looking for a lighter

it a convenient stop for lunch or an evening meal for tour groups visiting the museum. They also run the coffee shop in the museum, to which they add life with portions of salt fish that you can snack on as you enjoy the exhibition, besides offering the usual drinks and snacks. Seated in the coffee shop, you have a view over the harbour and can watch the boats returning and unloading their catch.

Mamma Mia is open from 11:30 until 10 pm - or later and you can order their pizzas to be delivered to your hotel, guesthouse or the campsite - even the Blue Lagoon and Northern Light Inn.

-ASF



**Mamma Mia**



Hafnargata 7a • Grindavík  
**+354 426 9966**  
[mammamia@mammamia.is](mailto:mammamia@mammamia.is)  
[www.mammamia.is](http://www.mammamia.is)

SCAN THE QR CODE WITH A SMARTPHONE



At Vikingaheimar, you can see the replica Viking longship that sailed to the USA in 2000 to celebrate the millennial anniversary of Leif (The Lucky) Eriksson's trip to discover 'Vinland', as he called the New World - almost half a millennium before Columbus.

Practically every kind of accommodation from camping and hostels to guesthouses and hotels is available in Reykjavik - usually located close to key sites of interest. The former NATO base is now a centre for constructive innovation, with a university,



# ICELAND'S HUB

*Reykjavik: Some of Everything and Some Unique*

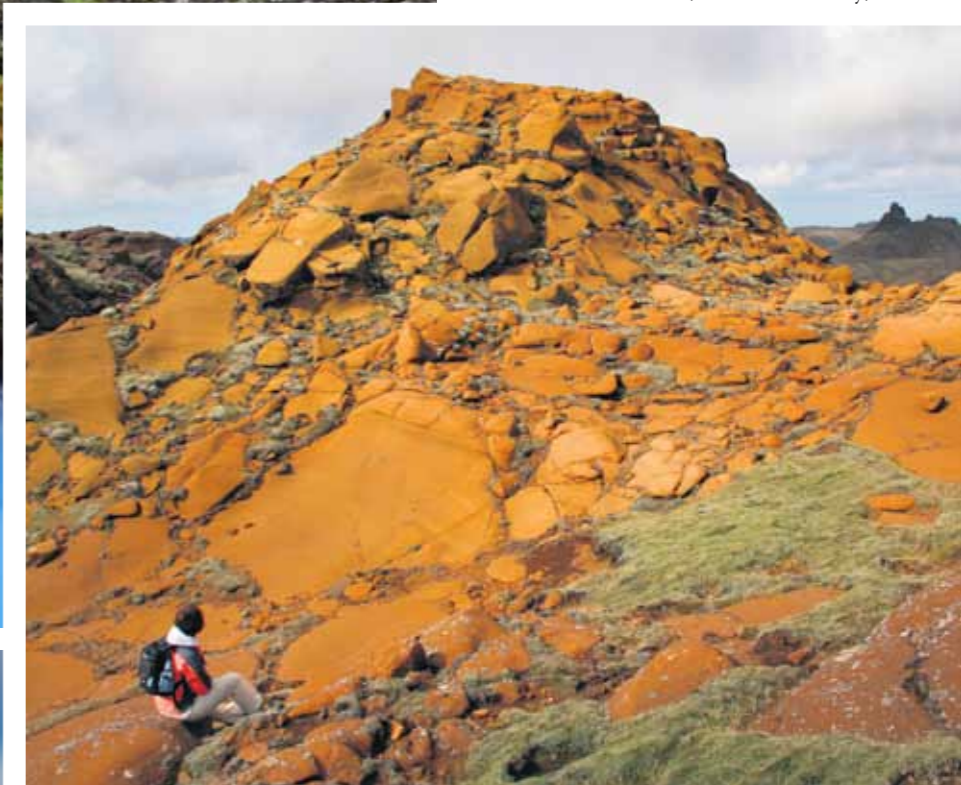
The Blue Lagoon is famous worldwide for its warm, healing waters. It's one of the 'must visits' on most tourists' lists. A brilliant blue amidst the grey lava, with steam rising from its waters, it is an astonishing sight. However, it is only just one facet of this amazing area of the country.

Reykjavik represents a microcosm of all Iceland offers. It would be a mistake to overlook it in your visit to the country as it has so many unique and fascinating features. If you are staying in Reykjavik, there are scheduled buses and tours that can open up its treasures to you. Did you want to see bird life, or whales or historical sites, or maybe cross the bridge between two continents? How about golf, hiking, horse, bike or ATV quad bike riding? Would you like to try shark meat, washed down with the local brew, Brennivín? Did you hear about the giantess in the cave near Gróf Marina or Gunna, the ghost at the boiling mud springs?

Some of these experiences are unique to Reykjavik. You won't find them anywhere else in the world. These are the experiences that make Iceland so highly recommended and that make your holiday so incomparable.

Keflavik Airport is the main hub for air traffic in and out of Iceland. Situated on the Reykjavik peninsula, it is surrounded by natural and geological phenomena, art and culture, entertainment and sport, myth and history. The Reykjavik coastline is notorious for its fierce weather and powerful seas, calm as a millpond one minute, churned into a deadly raging fury the next. It is an area that has tested the mettle of generations of brave Vikings who have wrestled a hard-won living from it.

From the airport, it is but a few minutes to the town of Keflavik, which is the hub for all connections around the peninsula. Alternatively, Sandgerði, with its Nature Centre or Garður, with its beautiful old church and Garðskagi's museum and lighthouses overlooking sea bird colonies, seals and whales are only minutes



away. Behind the lava fields which hide it from the main road, just over 3 km down the road from the Blue Lagoon, lies the fishing town of Grindavik, famous for its salt fish and the bacalao that is a national delicacy amongst Mediterranean countries. A museum has just opened there showing the history behind the fish and upstairs is a dramatic presentation of the geology of the peninsula at the Magma museum.

For those used to big city life, the tours of the peninsula reveal another world entirely. It's a land steeped in history as dramatic as 'Lord of the Rings' - but totally factual. It's a young land, geologically - and much of it is still hot. Whether hot mud springs or lava fields, volcanos or the fault lines of grinding tectonic plates - they are all here, showing off the powerful forces that created them.

many start-up companies covering an array of fields, a health spa and large guesthouse. Maps and information can be found in the Tourist Information Centre, located in Krossmói 4, as well as in the hotels and guesthouses and at the airport.

Iceland has been called, 'Europe's Best Kept Secret' and she doesn't give up those secrets easily. It takes time to experience all the hidden things Reykjavik holds - but it offers memories that you will treasure and an adventure that is rare in today's world.

-ASF

Reykjavik Marketing Office



Kjarrmóa 4 • 260 Reykjavík  
+354 893 4096  
kristjan@visitreykjavik.is  
www.visitreykjavik.is

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# MAN, THE SEA AND NATURE

*The charming town of Sandgerði within reach*

Sandgerði is a charming fishing town on the western side of the Reykjanes peninsula which has the Keflavik International Airport within its boundaries. Sandgerði is one of the country's major fishing communities, with a storied history and loads to see. Rich fishing-grounds are found just off the coast of Sandgerði and in recent years, good harbour facilities have been constructed in the town. In 1986, the community celebrated its 100th anniversary.



## Monument to Might

When entering the town, the art monument, Álög, stands dignified on the left side. The monument, made by sculptor Steinunn Þórarinsdóttir, is in honour of seamen and is to remind us of how small and insignificant human existence can be when dealing with the powerful ocean.

## Exploring Nature

There are many interesting things to do in Sandgerði and lots of places to visit. No one should miss visiting the Nature

Centre called Fraedasetrið, where visitors can learn more about the birds, beaches and sea life of the area in an unusual and exciting way. An exhibition on the life and work of the famous French polar explorer Dr. Jean-Baptiste Charcot is on display at the museum. He died when his vessel, 'Pourquoi pas?', sank in a violent storm in Faxaflói Bay, off Mýrar on 16th September 1936.

The lighthouse in Sandgerði is one of few of its kind in the country and is a great place to visit. In the northern part of town is Sandgerðstjörn pond, where hundreds of

migratory birds gather each spring. The town's oldest house, after which the town of Sandgerði was named, stands by the pond. The house was erected in 1883. A new road lies south from Sandgerði passing Hvalsnes and Stafnes on to Hafnir village. This offers the possibility of making a round trip of the northern part of the peninsula where there are many beautiful spots to visit, some of which have historical significance.



A great variety of Icelandic handmade souvenirs is on sale at Listatorg souvenir shop and the handcraft workshop Ný-Vidd at Vitatorg. Vitinn and Mamma-Mia restaurants are in walking distance from Vitatorg.

## Everyone needs Recreation

A new swimming pool has been opened in Sandgerði with hot tubs and slides for the kids. Then there is also a new and excellent 18-hole golf course, Kirkjubólsvöllur, with its elegant club house. An impressive camping site with a service building is situated in the town.

-RR

Sandgerði

Garðvegur 1 • 245 Sandgerði  
**+354 423 7551**  
 reynir@sandgerdi.is  
 www.sandgerdi.is

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# A MECCA FOR SEAFOOD LOVERS

*Vitinn - the Sandgerði Restaurant right at the Harbour*

Visiting the Reykjanes peninsula is something almost every visitor does - whether just flying in or out of the country or touring around it to enjoy its many sights and adventures.

Just minutes from the airport, in the town of Sandgerði, you will find a popular restaurant right by the harbour, known as the Lighthouse Restaurant or Vitinn that prepares a dish you won't find anywhere else.



This beautiful restaurant brings the freshest seafood straight to your palate. With the harbour a mere stone's throw away, you can enjoy a meal that is full of freshness and flavour. You will find out for yourself why this spot was chosen by Steinunn the Old, cousin of the first Viking settler, Ingólfur Arnason in the 800's.

Offering an excellent range of fish and seafood, Vitinn is a mecca for fish lovers. However, its speciality is the Rock Crab, a delicacy found only in this part of Iceland and on the US East coast. This is the only restaurant in Europe that offers this treat



fresh from the sea. Special tanks ensure their cleanliness in the University Research Centre, so you can be sure of the very best dining experience.

Owners, Stefán Sigurðsson, the restaurant's chef, and his wife Brynhildur Kristjánsdóttir have created a menu to show off Icelandic cuisine at its best. Besides seafood, there are the lamb and beef dishes along with an international range of meals.

On a sunny day, eating outside is a pleasure, with the view over the harbour. For those used to big city life, there's no smog or pollution here, so the fresh air and relaxed lifestyle of this little coastal town add to the enjoyment of the meal.

Inside, the wood-panelled restaurant provides a cosy atmosphere. Diners are surrounded by memorabilia from the area's fishing and agricultural heritage which adds to the distinctive ambiance. The restaurant has places for groups and individuals - but the service is equally personal for both. Icelandic hospitality is warm, friendly and unpretentious.

If you're looking for somewhere to celebrate an event, Vitinn makes it truly memorable, with their staff dressed in national costume. Children are very welcome and they have a special reward when they finish their scrumptious meal from the children's menu.



Vitinn is open for lunch year-round and, from May to September, is open all day, too. The coffee house has a range of snacks, cakes, waffles and specialities from its home-baked cuisine.

You can see the quality and standard of the food from the photos but visiting and enjoying a lunch or dinner is clearly the only way to experience it.

-ASF

Vitinn

Vitatorg 7 • 245 Sandgerði  
**+354 423 7755**  
 info@vitinn.is  
 www.vitinn.is

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# ADRENALIN PUMPING

*Moonscape Riding with ATV-Adventures in Grindavik*



Although exploring foreign landscapes through the window of a moving car and the occasional stop can be quite efficient and comfortable, there is really nothing which compares to scaling volcanic craters and speeding across sandy beaches on a quad-bike! ATV-Adventures in Grindavik offer you that unique chance through practical and thrilling tours on the volcanic landscapes of the Reykjanes peninsula.

Being the 'youngest' part of Iceland and the upper-most part of the North-Atlantic ridge, the Reykjanes peninsula is abundant with geological wonders and spectacular views, including immense lava fields, hot springs, multi coloured landscapes and, the most famous of all, the Blue Lagoon. You can explore in the wide array of tours ATV-Adventures has on offer.

**Make Your Last Day in Iceland Count**  
 The practical aspect of ATV-Adventures is the ability to combine excitement with the often tedious logistics of travelling. Instead of having to arrange different

modes of transport for each activity, ATV offers you a pick-up at your hotel in Reykjavik or Keflavik and several options for further activities the same day. A popular choice is to make the most of your last day in Iceland with a car waiting for you and your luggage at your hotel in the morning, then some adrenaline pumping quad-biking, then winding up in the Blue Lagoon while ATV safely stores your luggage before finally heading off to the airport in the afternoon.

### Alien and Foreign Landscapes

The tours include the compact Panorama Tour, which takes you up a hard mountain path for some splendid views and a ride along the coastline with stops at the various shipwrecks. The Lava Beach Tour goes further into the culture and history of the area in two hours and explores the lives of the local fishermen in the past.

The Trip to the Moon tour takes you for a three-hour ride on top of a relatively recent lava field, so recent that vegetation has yet to get a foothold on it and smoke actually steams up from underneath, an alien and foreign

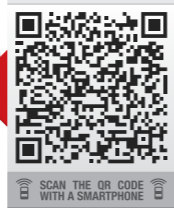
landscape for sure – hence the name. The tour also includes a stop at a hot spring which rumours say is haunted, an old lighthouse, a look into a volcanic crater and a chance to pick up a lava rock that feels actually still warm to the touch. The 6-7 hour Volcanic Safari offers you the chance to see all of Reykjanes' most dramatic locations in one exciting trip that includes the birdlife in the area, lunch down by the docks in the fishing town of Grindavik, the multi-coloured landscapes of Vigdisarvellir and all of the activities in the other tours.

### Safety First

ATV places special emphasis on safety and quality equipment in their tours. All of the tour guides are required to complete strenuous safety and first-aid courses and the company works closely with the local rescue team to map out all possible safety scenarios. All the quad-bikes are specially

-VAG

ATV-Adventures



Tangasund 1 • 240 Grindavik  
**+354 857 3001**  
 info@atv4x4.is  
 www.atv-adventures.com

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Taste the Saga



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# ROMANTIC AND DREAMY

*A Secluded Boutique Hotel with the Perfect Ambiance*

There is a magical quality to the light in Iceland throughout the year, no matter what the season. Hotel Glymur takes full advantage of its privileged position on a hillside overlooking the

tilled bathrooms come with plenty of fluffy towels and robes which you are encouraged to lounge about in.

There are three gorgeous suites, the 'Hallgrímsstofa Suite', named after the famous 17th century poet-priest and the 'Guðríðarstofa Suite' named after his wife. The stylish and spacious suites both look out on the fjord and the church, where Hallgrímur and his wife lived and worked. The smallest of the three suites is named after Hallgrímur and Guðríður's son Eyjólfur and is suitable for disabled people and the elderly.



fjord; the midday sun reflects off the deep blue waters in such a way that I am sure I have just been transported into a dreamy impressionist painting that I never want to leave.

The secluded boutique hotel is a popular destination for a romantic weekend getaway and has even been the venue for the occasional wedding. The sleek Italian leather sofas in the suites and villas, some in cool shades of lime green, orange or chartreuse, are at once restful and energising, giving each room a distinctive character. The 22 double rooms are called 'gallery mini-suites' and the ensuite floor-to-ceiling

Picture romantic gourmet dinners with views over the fjord as the sun begins to slowly wend its way to the northwestern horizon. Hotel Glymur's à la carte restaurant offers some tempting dishes such as roasted lamb fillet with blueberry sauce and an amazing pan-fried salt fish with strawberry and mint sauce. Very tempting indeed!



Six new self-catered villas, each with their own original theme are all fabulously appointed with modern furnishings in delightful combinations of vibrant colours which contrast with the tranquil panoramic views just outside the door. Watching the midnight sun set across the fjord, while enjoying a glass of champagne from your villa's private hot tub is highly recommended.

-EMV

**Hótel Glymur**

Hvalfirði • 301 Akranesi  
 +354 430 3100  
 info@hotelglymur.is  
 www.hotelglymur.is



# SETTLING FOR MORE

*A Condensed Version of History in The Settlement Centre, Borgarnes*

Icelandic history is not for the faint of heart. Defined by the exploits of adventurous Norwegian colonists and written during the Middle Ages, Iceland's bloody past is a challenge to understand unaided. Murderous family rivalries coupled with escalating strife between Iceland and Norway was recorded in several volumes of historical records and sagas. While these deeds have been translated into



several languages, the power of these narratives is often lost in a minefield of patronymic homage to ancestors who kept thorough records.

The need for a condensed version of Iceland's past led to the creation of the Settlement Centre, which brings Icelandic history to life. Two exhibits initiate visitors into Iceland's founding and vividly detail Egil's Saga, one of the main epics written in the 13th century, by adopting theatrical elements to imaginatively retell well-known tales. Interactive displays, including a Viking ship simulation of the first journey from Iceland to Norway and lively renderings of characters from Egil's Saga sculpted by different artists in unique media, do justice to detailed descriptions of Iceland's origins from the 13th century Book of Settlement and

Curiosity about Icelandic history is not the only hunger satisfied by the Settlement Centre, which features a bright and spacious restaurant on its second floor.



Prepared using five element principles which focus on balanced nutrition, the Settlement Centre's restaurant serves up a tasty array of choices. A local favourite is the lunch buffet of soup, salads, and homemade breads prepared



Snorri Sturluson's renowned depiction of Egill Skallagrímsson, Iceland's foremost warrior-poet. These images, paired with a multilingual iPod guide, are designed to leave an indelible impression on visitors. Run by husband and wife team Kjartan Ragnarsson and Sigríður Margrét Guðmundsdóttir, the Settlement Centre was founded with the desire to associate places with Sagas and stories from historical texts. Enriched with this background knowledge, visitors can then easily appreciate the connection between Iceland's past and present; its places and stories. One hour is all it takes to get the gist of Iceland's last thousand years, with the Settlement Centre handpicking choice morsels to whet visitors' appetites for Icelandic history and sagas.

fresh daily. In the evenings, a dinner menu caters meatier dishes of lamb, fish, and occasionally horse.

The Settlement Centre has expanded its current exhibitions with a third project, a GPS guided tour of its surroundings in Borgarnes. Since many scenes from Egil's Saga have unfolded close to the Settlement Museum, the GPS winds visitors through countryside where the sagas took place. Visitors can then listen on the spot to stories from the sagas, giving a sense of place to vast stretches of history.

-EMV

**The Settlement Centre**

13 -15 Brákarbraut • 310 Borgarnes  
 +354 437 1600  
 landnam@landnam.is  
 www.landnam.is

# WHO'S PULLING THE STRINGS

*Brúðuheimar's Puppetry Masters*

Dimmed lights slowly turn on as a skilled puppeteer picks up several small figures and a story unfolds. Background scenery, made of colourful felt, changes with the seasons of a play which tells the parable of a lazy woman who bargains with a troll to work for her for free. Textured with clever lighting and realistic sound effects produced by the puppeteer, Brúðuheimar's plays ignite the imaginations



of young and old. Parents sit hushed with entranced toddlers, who stay still for almost an hour mesmerised by the tiny figures. "We want to encourage play, not only in children but in adults who are normally discouraged from playing," explains Hildur, director of the museum, "Puppetry is another kind of storytelling that we are trying to revive at a time when speed often trumps artistry."

Though Brúðuheimar only opened last year, it has received much attention, mainly because of Bernd Ogrodnik's lifelong mission to reinvigorate puppetry. Bernd is a classical pianist who taught himself woodworking and began puppeteering over twenty years ago. His theatrical works have gained international recognition and redefined puppetry by pushing the limitations of the art form. Brúðuheimar



compiles all the passion and previous work of Bernd in houses formerly used as a trading post and almost turned into harbour-side apartments in 2003.

Slowing down is encouraged at Brúðuheimar, where children can retreat upstairs to dress up in costumes and act out their own play or build with wooden blocks made at Brúðuheimar's workshop. Parents and adults also have their chance to enjoy quiet moments in a vegetarian café, where the food is made from scratch and most ingredients are organic. Visitors of any age can exercise their imaginations with shadow puppetry and a play area demonstrating Bernd's methods for creating his characters on stage. Surprisingly, some of the most effective performances involve no more than hands and small accessories like shoes or goggly eyes that fit between fingers.



Brúðuheimar's staff can guide visitors through the exhibits to give a better idea of the work behind the scenes. "We want people to experience something closer to theatre. This is not something that you can read, but something you need to try for yourself," says Hildur, who has witnessed many adult visitors light up when they perform small shows with the puppets provided. Brúðuheimar is open from 10:00 am to 9:00 pm in the summer, but has more flexibility for groups. Plays are run on most Sundays at 2:00 pm and cost 2000 ISK.

-KB

**Brúðuheimar**

Skúlagata 17 • 310 Borgarnes  
 +354 530 5000  
 bruduheimar@bruduheimar.is  
 www.bruduheimar.is

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# STAY BY THE BAY

*Hótel Brú offers warmth and comfort*

Hótel Brú – The Bridge Hotel is situated close to the town of Borgarnes and the bridge crossing Borgarfjörður bay. Hótel Brú offers guests the homey feeling of warmth and comfort in a cosy atmosphere with a spectacular view over the bay, the beautiful countryside and, in the distance, Snæfellsjökull volcano and glacier.

Owner and chef Veigar Freyr Jökulsson has, in recent months, transformed an older hotel into a charming place where tourists can drop in for a meal at the restaurant or a few nights' stay in the hotel before continuing on their travels around the country.



"I have been very satisfied with the reception that Hótel Brú has received in recent months. It has also been pleasant how many guests from various countries have visited us and have been impressed with the stay and the food. That makes me feel its all worthwhile," says Jökulsson.



Visitors are offered a personal and relaxed way to stay. Hótel Brú provides 8 double rooms with made up beds and a bathroom. The rooms are charming and snug with comfy furniture. A hearty breakfast welcomes guests in the morning in the restaurant or out on the lovely balcony overlooking the bay on the one side and sheltered by the mountain range on the other.

Hótel Brú has an excellent restaurant, with its lavish decoration and agreeable atmosphere. The antique style furniture gives the place a nice and classy appearance. A selection of dictionaries decorate one of cabinets.



The food in the restaurant is delicious. The menu provides an Icelandic cuisine with local ingredients from the region. The selection of dishes includes fish, lamb and puffin. The prices are very reasonable. The casual friendliness of the staff, the laid-back atmosphere and the easygoing buzz among the diners gives the place a nice feel and offers guests an enjoyable stay.

At Hótel Brú, you feel unrushed and at ease - whether you want a good night's sleep or a delicious Icelandic meal. The atmosphere, the food and the location makes Hótel Brú a place that should not be missed.

**Hótel Brú**

Hafnarskógur • 311 Borgarbyggð  
 +354 437 2345  
 hotelbru@hotelbru.is  
 www.hotelbru.is

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# STAY IN STYLE

*Breathtaking Beauty in Borgarnes B & B*

**B**orgarnes is becoming known as a town for artists and designers but, long before they started to arrive, the most beautiful house in Borgarnes was built in 1947. Designed by Halldór Jónsson, it has many very unusual features. The house is bright and airy, with paintings on the walls and other beautiful works throughout, making it a very special place to stay.



Its owner, Inger, has now opened it up for visitors to stay and enjoy the beauty of the house and the area it overlooks. The house is ideal for groups wanting some time together. Either a single

floor or the whole house is available to rent. Its size and its calm style is just right for small retreats or conferences where a warm comfort is more important than an extravagant hotel's luxury.

After farming for over 30 years, Inger decided that she wanted to buy a house in Borgarnes. A friend told her of this house at 11 am and she had bought it by 3 o'clock the same afternoon! When you visit, you will understand why. An unusual feature of the house is the theme of cows that is found throughout. Children will love a hunt around the house to find all the cows and other animals in all their forms.

There are 7 rooms including a 4-bed family room. The house is very child- and baby-friendly. The garden has a play area with swings and a trampoline but, right next door is a famous play park that an older man crafted specially out of timber for the children in the neighbourhood to enjoy themselves in a beautiful location. Each room also has a TV and free wireless Internet access. Guests can use the very large, beautifully laid-out kitchen, to cook for themselves if they wish - but there is a delicious breakfast available every day.

Located at the tip of the peninsula, the lounge looks out over the rocks towards the sea. The view is stunning and the sun puts on a spectacular show every clear evening as it dips towards the horizon. The patio below the lounge provides a lovely sheltered spot to enjoy the warmth, the garden and the view.



Bird-watchers can enjoy the wide variety of birdlife, both in the tall fir trees and amongst the rocks in the sea. Birds like the eider are frequently seen.

**Borgarnes B&B** -ASF

Skúlagata 21 • 310 Borgarnes  
 +354 434 1566  
 borgarnesbb@internet.is  
 www.borgarnesbb.is

# THE ENGLISH HOUSES WITH HISTORY AND SOUL

*Cosy, traditional family home away from home*

**I**t's always nice to feel at home - even better, when you don't have to do the cooking but can eat a delicious, traditional cuisine. Better still, when that home is in the Icelandic countryside, right by the Sjárarfoss or 'sea waterfall', marking the point where the river's fresh water meets the sea's salt waters and where salmon leap on their way upstream.

To call Ensku húsin (The English Houses) a guesthouse is to do it disservice. It has been family-run for three generations, with a fascinating history.

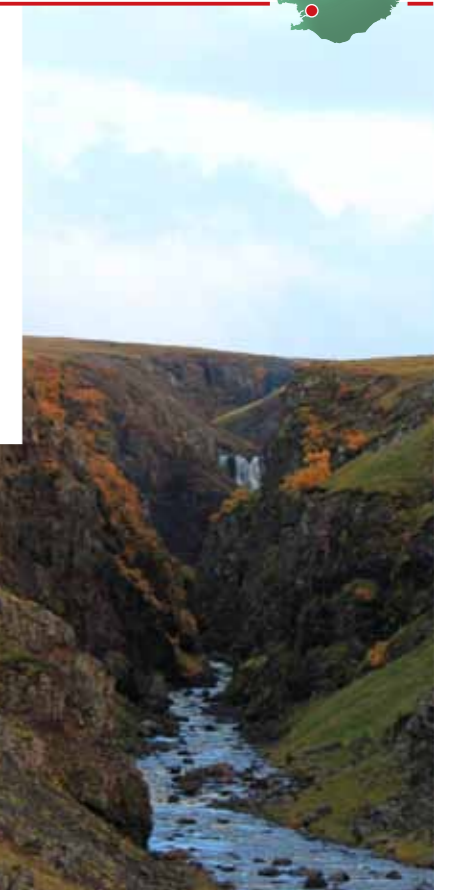
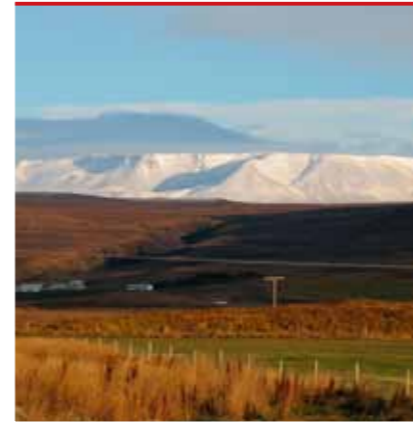
Built in 1884 by a carpenter for his family, it became a fishing lodge when he moved to America. After being owned by the priest at Borg, the farm that was home

to Egil Skalla-Grímsson, the warrior-poet who wrote his first poem whilst drunk at the age of 3, the Scottish Lord Oran Campell bought the house, river and fishing rights. On his death, an English lady, Mrs. Kennard, bought it, she and her fishing friends coming each summer. It was named, 'The English Houses' out of respect for her. She was forcibly shipped home by the British ambassador after the war broke out and never returned, selling it to Geir Zoega, who had cared for it. He, in turn, sold it to a young farmer, Jóhannes Guðmundsson, whose family rebuilt it, turning it into a very comfortable guesthouse.

Open all year round, it's an ideal place for individuals and families, celebrations or small conferences. In summer, it's a beautiful location to base from while exploring this rich and diverse area with its spectacular features and colourful history.

**Enskuhúsin** -ASF

Litla-Brekka • 311 Borgarbyggð  
 +354 437 1826  
 enskuhusin@simnet.is  
 www.enskuhusin.is



# RELAX IN REYKHOLT

*Steindórsstaðir's Superb View of the Beautiful Dale*

**L**ike all the world's cities, Reykjavík is a busy place, filled with all the traits of a modern city life. You have to get out of the city to enjoy the peace and beauty of the countryside.

Just an hour and a half away is the village of Reykholt. Every direction you look, there are beautiful rolling hills. Sheep and cows graze peacefully. Birds sing in the trees but, otherwise, it is peaceful. You think, "I could settle down here!"

At Steindórsstaðir, a sheep and milk farm set on the side of a hill, you can stay as long as you like! The house, originally built in 1938, has been beautifully restored and re-designed with everything you need for a comfortable break. Hot showers, underfloor heating, self-catering in a fully-equipped kitchen, cosy lounge and comfortable beds - they are all there.

After a day's hiking in the area, it is so nice to come back to a hot shower and

a relaxing soak in the hot pot, sheltered from any wind, overlooking the beautiful countryside, a drink in hand, enjoying the company of friends you've just made. Or you can sit on the patio, watching the sun going down at midnight, unwinding from the stress of daily life at home.

This is a family-run guesthouse where you can visit at any time of the year and enjoy each season's special characteristics in all their fullness. There are 7 rooms, single, double and a triple with space for 12 guests at a time at very economical rates. Families find this a wonderful place for a holiday, giving the children that special experience of being around the animals, developing a love and appreciation of nature. Jón Helgason, the poet, lived nearby, getting his inspiration from the hills, canyon and many waterfalls. Now, there are 25 hectares of trees growing in a reforestation project that makes a very enjoyable area to stroll in.



**Steindórsstaðir** -ASF

Reykholt • 320 Borgarfjörður  
 +354 435 1227  
 steindorsstadir@steindorsstadir.is  
 www.steindorsstadir.is

# SURROUNDED BY NATURE

*Character and Charm in Southern Snæfellsnes*

Langaholt Guest House looks out over Faxaflói bay on the southern side of the Snæfellsnes Peninsula. In summer, Arctic Terns preside over the landscape. To the west, Snæfellsjökull perches on the horizon, providing guests with quintessential post-card views of this mysterious glacier-topped mountain.

Owner/manager Þorkell, or Keli as he likes to be called, says that the guest house has been in his family since 1978. Today, most operations of Langaholt Guest house, camping site and 9-hole golf course are all overseen by members of Keli's extended family. And while certainly coming close to

hotel status with its spacious accommodation and á la carte restaurant, Keli prefers nevertheless to retain the true character of a country guesthouse with a warm and inviting atmosphere, where guests can feel at home.



The restaurant employs a couple of top notch chefs who specialise in a variety of fish & seafood dishes. They use the freshest possible trout and salmon from nearby rivers, while the cod, catfish, monk fish, halibut or plaice come straight from the fishermen on Breiðafjörður and Faxaflói Bays. "I never know exactly what is going to be on the day's menu - it really just depends on what the fishermen bring in that day," Keli explains. Fish stock, patés and several types of bread and cakes are all made here.

The restaurant is open daily from 8 am to 9 pm and travellers are welcome to stop in for a hearty breakfast or enjoy a delicious bowl of fresh seafood soup served with home-made bread for lunch. Relax with glass of wine or a cold Icelandic beer while perusing the á la carte menu in the evening, which offers starters, main courses and desserts.



Langaholt Guest House is centrally located on the south coast of Snæfellsnes Peninsula, 89 km from Borgarnes and 164 km from Reykjavik. Well situated for exploring the wonders of the area, activities such as horse riding, whale watching, bird life, hiking tours and fishing are just some of the possibilities.

**Langaholt** -EMV



Ytri-Garðar • 356 Snæfellsbær  
**+354 435 6789**  
 Langaholt@langaholt.is  
 www.langaholt.is

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# THE CALL OF THE COUNTRYSIDE

*Summering at Gamli Baer*

In the summertime, Reykjavik's residents flee the city for a much needed vacation. Many head to houses in Húsafell, a sprawling area of farms turned into summer cottages with restaurants and pools flanked by Eiríksjökull and Langjökull glaciers. Húsafell's allure lies somewhere between its snow-covered mountains and valleys sprinkled with farms, less than an hour from Thingvellir, the rift between North America and Eurasia.

Húsafell's charm was tempting enough for Steinunn and her husband Sæmundur to move across Borgarfjörður and take over Gamli Baer, an old farm turned guesthouse built in 1908. "The minute I walked in, I just knew that I was home," exclaimed Steinunn who prides herself in maintaining the farmhouse in its original condition, complete with a shared kitchen and dining room made for meeting fellow travellers.

At breakfast, the couple at Gamli Baer delight in getting visitors started on their way by directing them to local attractions. Húsafell's pool, which houses a bouncing castle, will expend children's energy so that they will sleep soundly if parents want to get in a late night round of golf under the endless summer sun. Glacier hiking and dog sledding guides are also on hand for travellers who want to see Eiríksjökull and Langjökull up close. On the weekend, bonfires light scarcely darkened Saturday nights as a few amateur troubadours serenade the crowd.



with the farmers, whose sheep they stole to survive, lie buried in the cave's recesses. Ghosts and other spirits may lurk in the depths of Surtshellir, but visitors who have ventured into the cave always triumphantly reappear hours later without having encountered any wandering phantoms.



## Chalk and Art

Chalky rocks found a short hike from Gamli Baer supply artists with the colours to capture Húsafell's legends. Artwork by Pall Gudmundsson is scattered around Gamli Baer, which lies close to his workspace. Pall's stone carvings are scattered around the area, which has inspired artists for centuries and is likely to continue for years to come.

**Gamli bærrinn Húsafelli** -KB



Húsafell • 311 Borgarbyggð  
**+354 895 1342**  
 sveitasetrid@simnet.is

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## Giants and Outlaws

Unlike its current residents, Húsafell has a checkered past, unintentionally playing host to several rambunctious outlaws who hid out in Surtshellir, Iceland's longest cave measuring 1,970 metres. This cave is named after the fire giant, Surtr, who is said to have hollowed out earth using his powerful flames to create a place to rest. Remnants of Surtr's existence and the outlaws final showdown



# TOURING ICELAND FROM ABOVE AND BELOW

*Iceland Excursions-Grayline Iceland*

If this is your first time in Iceland, whether just for a few days or for a few weeks, consider taking one of Iceland Excursion's exciting guided day tours - a fantastic way to get to know the country, especially if you're short on time.

Iceland will amaze you with the sheer number of things to do, places to see and adventures to partake of and Iceland Excursions goes to the limit, offering a wide variety of tours to make sure you get the most out of your stay. There are day tours to all the best-loved sights, activity tours, combination tours, city and country breaks, and the list goes on and on.

In this edition of Icelandic Times, the spotlight is on two very different tours, an activity tour and a cultural tour, giving you an insider's perspective of two wildly different day trips.

## **Iceland Excursions Goes Underground**

In a cave produced by free flowing lava about 1,000 years ago, we get ready to do some down-to-earth caving on this very exciting tour!

We head to Leiðarendi Lava Tube Cave, a 30-minute drive from Reykjavik. For me, this is definitely a first. The mini-bus with 6 other passengers, plus our driver/guide stops in the middle of a vast 1,000 year-old moss-covered barren plain. Sheer volcanic mountains rise straight up out of the plain and there is not a soul in sight, be it man, sheep or horse. We don bright orange overalls, with matching helmets and after a quick briefing, we're off.

It's a short walk to the cave entrance and there we clamber down the steep rocky incline and walk off into the darkness, headlamps beaming brightly.

Some places are flat and smooth, the ceiling high, where we can walk upright. Further on, we walk hunched over and still further, we have to crawl or do a crab walk as the ceiling lowers to about 3 to 4 feet (1 - 1.25 metres). It's an amazing experience and if you have ever wanted to try something challenging, going just a bit, but not too far beyond your normal comfort zone, then this is your chance.

## **Iceland Excursions Goes Above Ground**

A tour which gives insight into the above-ground habits of Icelanders, the 'Taste the Saga Tour' is a relaxing and fun way to learn about Iceland's past and present.

What better way to understand Iceland's colourful drinking culture than to visit it's oldest brewery, Ölgerðin, named after Iceland's most famous - and infamous - drunkard turned poet, Egill Skallagrímsson, who started both drinking and writing poetry at the tender age of 3.

Before touring the stylish headquarters, we of course get to taste various samples of beer, including an excellent modern-day version of mead, which is similar to the stuff that those Vikings used to drink, back in the day.

The tour concludes with a shot of Brennivín, with it's wonderful caraway seed flavour and let's just say, you will leave this tour 'happy'!

-EMV



**Iceland Excursions**  
 Hafnarstræti 20 • 101 Reykjavík  
 +354 540 1313  
 iceland@grayline.is  
 www.grayline.is

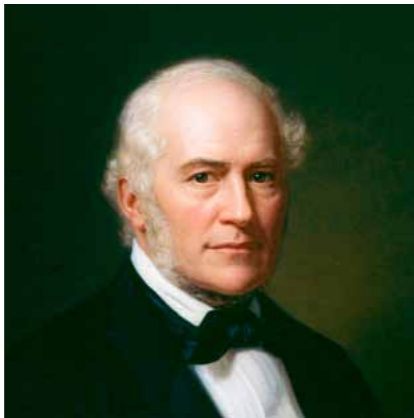
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# THE MAN CALLED 'PRESIDENT'

*The 200th anniversary of Jón Sigurðsson*

You might expect a boy, growing up in one of the most remote parts of Iceland's West Fjords, to become priest, like his father, a farmer or a fisherman. Such was not to be the case with Jón Sigurðsson. From this farm, he travelled to study and spend his life in Copenhagen, where he became the most ardent and strongest voice for the freedom of the Icelandic nation and its independence from Danish rule.

On the 17th June, the country celebrated the 200th birthday of this freedom fighter, who fought so eloquently with words and wisdom, in contrast to the violence in other countries. In 1851, he was elected president of



the Copenhagen branch of the Icelandic Literary Society, after which, he became known as President Jón, first among his friends and then more generally.

Even though he died in 1879, his efforts brought Icelandic independence on the same day in 1944, the date chosen to honour the man who had done so much for the nation.

### From Home to Vibrant Museum

Today, his birthplace in Hrafnseyri has become a museum with a new, state-of-the-art exhibition of his life and work. It also uses the building's own windows, integrating the views into the exhibit, at the same time, taking the visitor back to a Europe in the grip of revolutionary foment. A film in English, Danish & Icelandic is screened in the chapel.

Open 10 am to 8 pm daily until end of August. Entrance is free. Ranking at the top of such exhibits, it is well worth making the trip to experience it.

**Hrafnseyri** -ASF

Hrafnseyri • 471 Þingeyri  
 +354 456 8260  
 hrafnseyri@hrafnseyri.is  
 www.hrafnseyri.is

# UNIQUE ADVENTURE TOUR

*A Trip Into the Fantasy World of Breiðafjörður Bay*

You watch the net being hoisted aboard, laden with seafood. Open a scallop or urchin at the table and pop it into your mouth, wash it down with white wine and you have a unique, delicious experience! Undoubtedly the freshest sushi in the world! How often can you taste food that fresh at home?

The West coast town of Stykkishólmur is the base for Seatours, whose boats sail the mysterious Breiðarfjörður bay with its

innumerable islands. Here, you can see puffins, eider ducks, shags, kittiwakes and sometimes, the magnificent white-tailed eagle. The catamaran tour boat takes you almost within touching distance of the bird colonies on the towering cliffs. This is a big, comfortable boat, with an on-board restaurant, mind you!

It's a trip into a fantasy world of incredible basalt rock formations like 'God's Bookshelf' and the island of Eiriksey, where Eric the Red fled after being outlawed before sailing off to Greenland.

This tour earns its name and is highly recommended for those wanting something different!

Another tour you can try is Sea Angling in the rich fishing grounds of the bay. As the seagulls look on, you bring up your dinner from the ocean's depths. You can have it cooked for you in one of Stykkishólmur's restaurants after the tour! Cod, halibut, redfish and coalfish are the most common catch.

You can take your car across the bay, visiting the island of Flatey, where it seems time has stood still in the 19th century.

These are thrilling experiences for all



age groups and families, especially, will find it one of the best day's out with so much to see, do and experience. You'll want to remember it, too, so a visit to the largest souvenir shop in West Iceland in Stykkishólmur will give you a wide choice of memories.

**Seatours** -ASF

Smiðjustigur 3 • 340 Stykkishólmi  
 +354 438 1450  
 seatours@seatours.is  
 www.seaferdir.is



# EUROPE'S LAST FRONTIER

*Remote, Beautiful and Tranquil—The Westfjords*

Serenity, tranquillity and remoteness attract people to the Westfjords. It is a favourite place to enjoy the outdoors – go hiking, horse riding, kayaking, boating, bicycling and fishing. The arctic fox can often be seen there in its natural environment. Hornstrandir area, for example, has been uninhabited except for birds, seals and fox since 1950. It is one of the most remote areas in Europe and a favourite place in which to hike. Visitors can visit by boat for half a day or spend several days hiking.

### A Sidetrack to Nature's Treasures

The Westfjords of Iceland is Europe's last frontier. It is a geographical area in the north west of Iceland. Its remoteness, beauty and tranquillity is unsurpassed. Unfortunately, some foreign visitors bypass the area, as they are often in a hurry to complete the circular route around Iceland along the so-called Ring road. Travellers who venture off the Ring road and visit the Westfjords are in for a pleasant surprise.

Narrow fjords and valleys, steep and often high mountain slopes and a narrow strip of land along the sea characterise the Westfjords. Mountain tops seem to have been levelled with a knife, as many are remarkably flat. The highest mountain is nearly 1,000 metres high.

Some of the highlights on the west side of the Westfjords include Bjargtangar, generally regarded as the westernmost point in Europe; Dynjandi waterfall is 100 metres high with seven cascades; Látrarbjarg is a 14 km long

and 441 metre-high sea cliff, home to millions of nesting sea birds in summer including the puffin. Highlights on the east side include the Museum of Sorcery in Hólmavík and Reykjanes peninsula which has a 50 metre geothermal hot water swimming pool supplied with water from a local spring.



### Rural Atmosphere

The Westfjords has a population of 7,400 and covers 8,700 km<sup>2</sup>. This makes it one of the least populated parts of the world. There is less than one person per square kilometre. Compare that to 300 people per square kilometre in England and 18,534 in Macau. Visitors travelling by road can expect to drive on gravel some parts of the way, something which has become a rare experience in most countries in Europe.

### A Cosmopolitan Oasis in a Vast Area of Natural Beauty

Ísafjörður has 2,600 inhabitants and is, by far, the largest town in the Westfjords. Excellent restaurants capitalise on fresh fish caught every day. The Lonely Planet guide book describes the town as a "cosmopolitan oasis". It is the perfect place to prepare for a hiking adventure in Hornstrandir Nature Reserve established in 1975, or to enjoy some of the local gourmet cuisine which

**Westfjords Marketing Office** -SV

Aðalstræti 7 • 400 Ísafjörður  
 +354 450 4040  
 gustaf@westfjords.is  
 www.westfjords.is

## DINE AT THE DANISH HOUSE

*Café Riis takes you back in time to dine in style*

Old photographs pepper the walls of Café Riis invoking its past as a trading post and providing insight into Holmavík at the turn of the 20th century. One of Café Riis' owners was born in the

town and is intent on preserving the café's ties to the past. The large wooden house is still reminiscent of its life in the hands of Danish merchant Ricard Riis, the restaurant's namesake.



Café Riis' main ingredients are often supplied by its owner who brings daily catches that are so fresh they are still flopping around when the chef gets them.

Farmers from the surrounding area supply meat and a Saturday buffet satisfies even the heartiest appetites. A lower level bar caters to private parties or events year round. The café is open in the summer Sunday through Friday from 11:30 until 10:00 pm and stays open until 3 am on weekends.

**Café Riis** -KB

Hafnarbraut 39 • 510 Hólmavík  
 +354 451 3567  
 caferiis@caferiis.is  
 www.caferiis.is

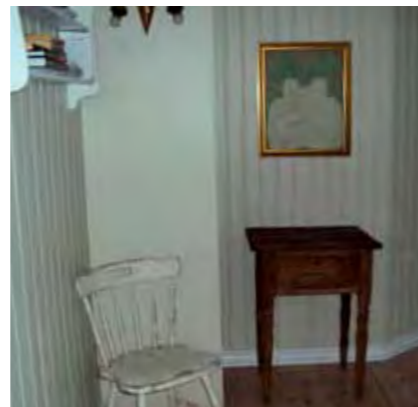
## HÓLMAVÍK'S HARBOUR HOUSE

*Steinhúsið - modern accommodation in a house from another era*

Two doors splashed with bright red paint announce the recent restoration of a home built in 1911,

reliving its former glory days in Hólmavík, the large town in the eastern part of the West Fjords. Steinhúsið is an outpost of comfort in what can be a desolate area, offering modern accommodation in the midst of a traditional fishing village. Its location near the harbour and across the street from Hólmavík's attractions, such as the Witchcraft and Sorcery Museum, Cafe Riis, and artist's workshop, make Steinhúsið an ideal place to rest before embarking further into the Westfjords.

The main house has five bedrooms on the second floor with two large living



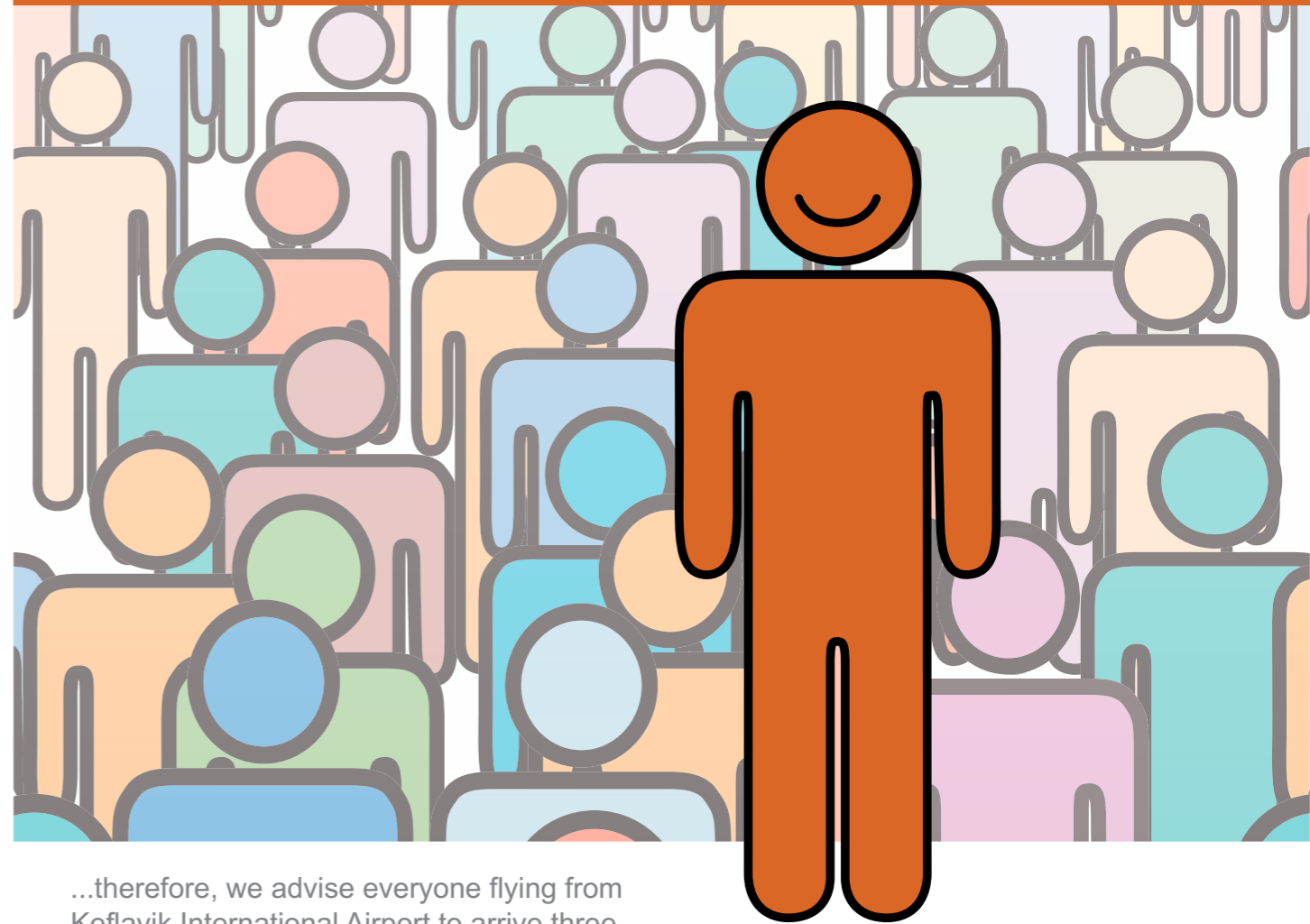
rooms and a separate fully-equipped kitchen on the bottom. An adjoining apartment with a separate entrance features a large bedroom, kitchen, and small living room. Tongue and groove painted wood walls meld with modern furnishings to invoke the past without forsaking contemporary comforts.

**Steinhúsið** -KB

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\*Check-in opens at 05:00 AM





## TROLLING THE WESTFJORDS

*Living Legends in Drangsnæs*

According to an old Icelandic folk tale, the Westfjords was nearly separated from Iceland by a relentless trio of trolls, furiously digging away at the narrow strip of soil fanning off to form the Westfjords.

One troll woman competing against her conspirators realised that her monumental task would not be accomplished and

called Drangsnæs at the far end of Steingrímsfjörður bears marks of the troll woman's handiwork. Her grim profile, transformed into stone by the first rays of sunlight, watches over Grimsey.

Happy accidents have helped Drangsnæs both in legend and reality. A source of geothermal water was discovered when someone forgot to shut off the water



slammed the spade of her shovel down in a rage, breaking off a chunk of land with her ox on it, thus forming Grimsey, the small island near Drangsnæs and home to the world's most concentrated puffin colony.

Though the trolls were unsuccessful in breaking off the Westfjords, the choppy coastline of a tiny fishing village

supply feeding into the fish factory. When the town furiously sought water by boring holes, they struck geothermal gold: a hotwater source that now heats the entire village and provides free hot tubs on the beach from where visitors watch birdlife, seals, and occasionally whales. Large stones sheltering them from strong

coastal winds have teardrops carved in them, created by artist Mireyja Samper.

An annual festival, held in the middle of July, celebrates Drangsnæs' livelihood by tickling the palette with tastes of minke whale, puffin, seal, and a wide variety of fish from the fjord. Kids and adults can try their hand at sea-angling, while braver visitors attempt to swim through strong currents to Grimsey. The festival has steadily expanded over sixteen years of celebration and has grown to host thousands of people. The festival is run entirely by volunteers who pour into Drangsnæs to help the 65 townspeople prepare to receive guests.

Drangsnæs has a long relationship with volunteers who have travelled to help not only with the festival, but with various projects such as building the community centre. "Cooperation is an important part of life here," says Jenny Jensdóttir, "without it we couldn't survive."

Too bad the legendary trolls were too busy to realize this. Perhaps if they had adopted the spirit of Drangsnæs' residents, they would be floating on an island called Westfjords rather than sitting in stony silence.

-KB

Kaldranæshreppur



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Holtagata • 520 Drangsnæs  
 +354 451 3277  
 drangsnæs@drangsnæs.is  
 www.drangsnæs.is



## FISHING WITH THE FISHERMAN

*Hotel Malarhorn is a Restaurant, Bar, Hotel, Tour Guide and...*

Under the watchful eye of Drangsnæs' troll woman and just a quick boat ride to Grimsey island, is Malarhorn: a restaurant, bar, hotel, and tour organiser rolled into one. The idea for Malarhorn sprang from local fisherman Ásbjörn Magnússon's desire to share the delights of Drangsnæs with visitors and find something to do for the six months of the year he's not fishing.

Malarhorn is a showcase of Drangsnæs' connection to the sea with accommodation nearby in the shadow of Grimsey and fresh fish served up daily at its restaurant which specialises in food from the area, like lumpfish served with seal fat. If seafood isn't to your liking, then Icelandic meat soup and lamb from nearby farms provide a tasty alternative. In good weather, the restaurant has a roomy balcony overlooking Steingrímsfjord, where your fish was caught.



Malarhorn has a four bedroom, two bathroom cottage for independent guests with a fully-equipped kitchen and outdoor grill for guests who want to do their own cooking or summer barbecuing. A ten bedroom house with separate entrances and bathrooms in each room and a new twelve room guesthouse, completed in June, offers hotel-styled rooms to Malarhorn's burgeoning selection of accommodation. Anywhere you choose to stay in Malarhorn is just a few minutes walk from Drangsnæs' pool.

Magnússon is also the only Drangsnæs resident who offers a tour of Grimsey, which has the largest concentration of puffins in the world with 300,000 individuals and 80,000 nesting pairs on a few kilometres of land. The tour takes three hours, dropping guests on the island for an hour's hike before picking them up to fish the fjord and catch



their lunch. This tour's flexibility allows guests to arrange for more time, as long as the group numbers three or more. Guests who want a private fishing lesson from Magnússon can arrange for the enthusiastic fisherman to instruct them using his decades of knowledge and experience.

Grimsey island used to be a haven for fishermen trawling the area. Now, its alluring animal life and role in Icelandic folk lore distinguishes it. Tours to Grimsey begin on June 20th and run until August 15th, possibly longer if the weather is favourable. Guests at Hotel Malarhorn receive a discount on tours around the island and can get more information about the folk tales from the family who run the hotel.

-KB

Malarhorn



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Malarhorn • 520 Drangsnæs  
 +354 451 3237  
 malarhorn@malarhorn.is  
 www.malarhorn.is



# WHO'S WATCHING WHOM?

*Seal watching from the sea*

A treat for children and adults alike, this summer it will be possible to take an unforgettable seal watching tour with Seal Watching ehf. From the decks of their most recent acquisition, the Brimill, you will get a chance to observe seals at one of the very best seal watching locations in Iceland, Miðfjörður fjord, along the Vatnsnes Peninsula.

Seals are one of the star attractions of aqua-parks and zoos around the world with their graceful swimming and cute antics. It's one thing, however, to see them in captivity and quite another to see them in their natural habitat. Playful

and curious by nature, the seals often swim quite close to the boat for a better look at you! Then it is a question of who is watching whom?

Seal watching tours are offered twice-daily from June through August at 10:00 and 13:00. Sightings ranging anywhere from 12 to 95 seals are possible and, as the boat approaches, the captain will turn off the engines, getting you within about 45 metres of the seals, much closer than is possible on land. Puffins, as well as other migratory birds, inhabit the area every summer and are also great to watch. Other tours on offer are a 3 hour

sea angling tour and a 2 hour 'midnight cruise' which starts at 23:00. (from 10th June to 20th July only)

### A few surprising facts...

With puffins and whales grabbing many headlines in recent years, it may come as rather a surprise to find that Icelandic coasts are home to about 12,000 Common seals and 4,000 Grey seals—the two native seal species that are thought to rarely leave the Icelandic shelf. The Common seal, being the more outgoing and curious of the two species, congregates in small groups on skerries and rocky beaches and is more easily spotted than the shy Grey seal. Solitary vagrants such as Harp seals, Ringed seals and Hooded seals are sometimes seen during the winter, while Bearded seals and Walruses are very rare.



*(Information courtesy of the Icelandic Ministry of Fisheries and Agriculture)*

Sealwatching ehf is located in the small village of Hvammstangi, on Miðfjörðurfjord, on the west side of Vatnsnes Peninsula. The village is easily accessible, just 7 km off the main ring road, about half way between Reykjavik and Akureyri.

**Selasigling** -EMV

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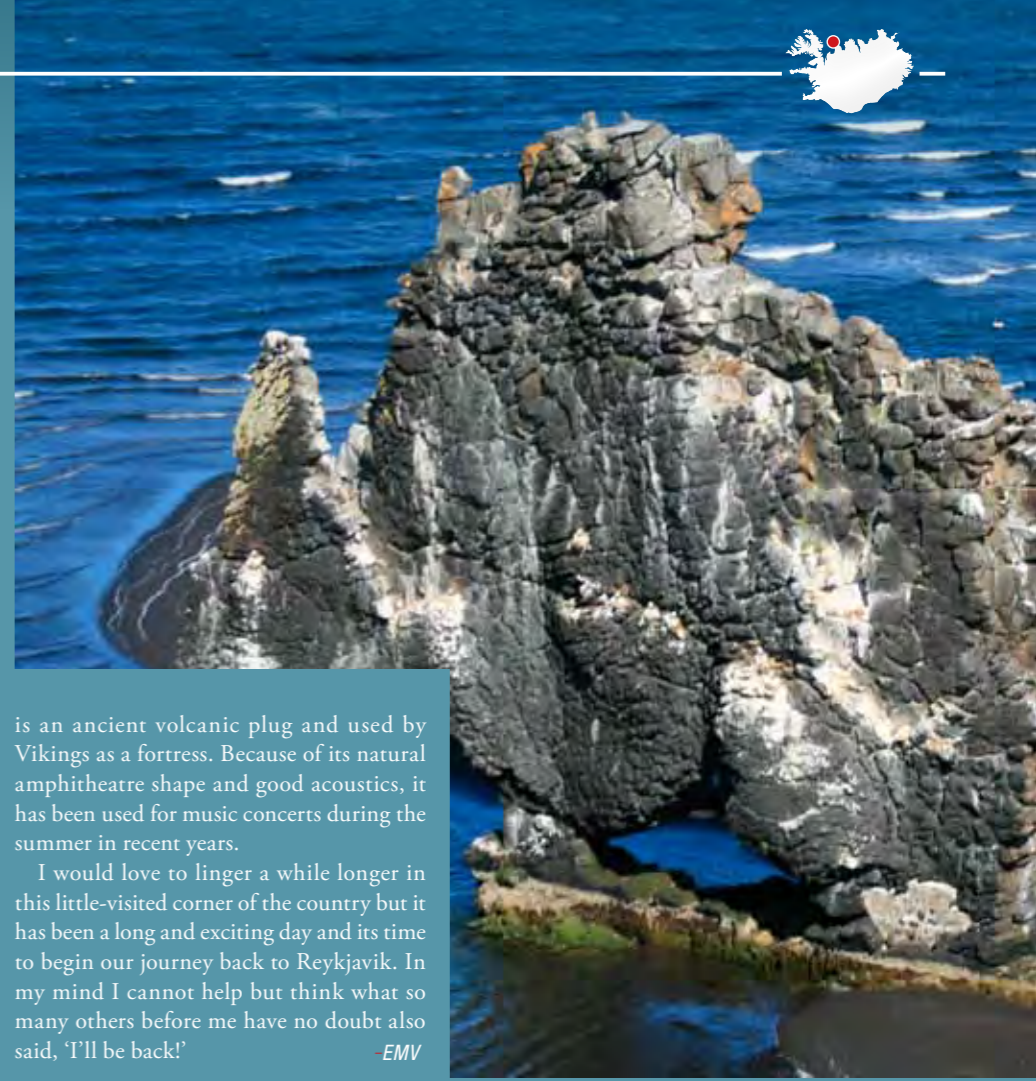


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# TAKING THE TIME TO EXPERIENCE ICELAND

*A Day Tour to the Seals and More - A Farm Lunch, Fresh from the Sea and Garden*

As is often the case, biggest does not necessarily mean best and this is also true when it comes to touring Iceland. Time Tours is a small and friendly family-run company that goes out of its way to help you get the most out of your stay in Iceland and delivers quality, informative tours at reasonable rates.

Time Tours offers all the major day tours from Reykjavik such as the Golden Circle, the South Coast and Jökulsárlón Glacial Lagoon, the Blue Lagoon and Snæfellsnes Tours. But this innovative company has recently added a new tour to its roster, known as 'The Seal Route' of the Vatnsnes Peninsula.

The fact that no other tour company in Iceland, that I know of at least, offers this tour was enough incentive for me, and exploring every nook and cranny of Iceland is something that I never tire of. So when I was offered the chance to go on the maiden voyage of Time Tours' Vatnsnes Peninsula Tour, I didn't hesitate.

**First things first...the weather report**  
The weather was typically Icelandic, exciting! We saw it all that day, sunshine and clouds, rain and wind, misty mountain tops and more wind. What Icelanders call the 'real Icelandic weather,' which is the most authentic way to see Iceland.

**Where's that?**  
If you have ever driven to Akureyri, you will have passed the turn-off to Vatnsnes without even realising it. At 190 km from Reykjavik, it lies about half way from Reykjavik to Akureyri, making it ideal for day tours.

First stop, the main service town in the area, Hvammstangi. Here we pop in for a visit to the Seal Centre (Selasetur). Via its various exhibits, cultural displays, documentaries and even seal folklore, the Seal Centre offers a non-partisan view of seals in Iceland, their role in Icelandic history and present-day sustainability issues surrounding this sometimes controversial

creature. A fascinating documentary (in English) about seals in Iceland plays in the basement and can fill you in on many cool details that you might otherwise have missed.

As we travel north along the west side of the peninsula, steep undulating grassy slopes lead down to the sea and we stop to inspect an empty 'réttir' or sheep round-up pen that lies just a few metres from the sea. Further along, with binoculars in hand, we keep a sharp look-out for seals lying along the shoreline. At Illugastaðir Farm we get out of the minibus and walk down to the water's edge where we have a great clear view of a large seal colony resting on the skerries and beaches just offshore. Known for their innate curiosity, seals will often swim quite close to shore so that they can get a good look at you.

We break for lunch at Geitafell Farm with its curious round tower which was used to store 'sour' hay in the old days. We are warmly greeted by hosts Róbert Jón Jack and

his lovely wife, Sigrún, who serve a superb seafood soup, a fresh salad from their own garden and a wonderfully not-too-sweet skyr cheese cake served with coffee.

After lunch we're off again, travelling around the tip of the peninsula to the eastern flank, where the views to the east-north-east are magnificent. Below us sits the 15 metre-high Hvítserkur rock, which sometimes looks very much like a dragon drinking peacefully from the sea. Our final stop is the Borgarvirki Crater which

is an ancient volcanic plug and used by Vikings as a fortress. Because of its natural amphitheatre shape and good acoustics, it has been used for music concerts during the summer in recent years.

I would love to linger a while longer in this little-visited corner of the country but it has been a long and exciting day and its time to begin our journey back to Reykjavik. In my mind I cannot help but think what so many others before me have no doubt also said, 'I'll be back!' *-EMV*



## STRING OF PEARLS

- 1 Hvammstangi / Town Seal Centre and old Church Kirkjuhvammskirkja
- 2 Hamarsrétt / Fold
- 3 Seal Colony
- 4 Illugastaðir / Seal Colony

## ★ GEITAFELL - Seafood Restaurant

- 6 Tjörn
- 7 Hvítserkur
- 8 Vesturhópshólar
- 9 Borgarvirki / Crater
- 10 Breiðabólstaður
- 11 Gauksmýrartjörn - Fuglasjóðun / Birdwatching
- 12 Víðidalstunga
- 13 Kolugljúfur Gorge of Kola the Troll

## Geitafell



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Here you can taste delicious soups and other seafood gourmets, served with locally grown salads and homemade bread. The fish is caught only from local waters and you can be sure of getting only the best possible quality.

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Time Tours offer a variety of ground services for individuals, couples, families or groups. A variety of day tours is offered for individuals and custom designed holidays for larger groups and families.



# EUROPE'S ONLY FISH TANNERY

*Five Years from Fish Soup to Soft Leather*

June 10th marked the official opening of Sútárin, the last remaining Icelandic tannery and now economuseum. The museum guides guests through the tanning process from stripping the fat off translucent fish skins to adding finishing details to dried skins. The idea to start a museum came when visitors to the town of Sauðárkrúkur got wind that Europe's only fish leather tannery was operating nearby. Last year, Sútárin received between four and five thousand visitors. It was then that they had to decide whether to open their doors completely or firmly shut the tannery to guests.



## A Crazy Invention

Aided by IMPRA, a branch of the Icelandic Innovation Centre committed to aiding companies starting new projects and work developed by entrepreneurs and inventors, Sútárin has grown from an experiment in the inventive search for new materials into a rapidly developing for-profit museum. While other tanneries struggled to compete with each other, Sútárin opted for a new approach and began working with fish skins in 1989.

"People thought that we were crazy in those early years," grins Gunnsteinn, owner of both companies working at Sútárin: Atlantic Leather and Loðskinn. "All we had at first was thousands of litres of fish soup."

Five years later, they had developed a process and created Atlantic Leather. By 2000, their fish leather had the same softness as leather from cows and no residual smell; the process was perfected and Sútárin remained the only tannery left in Iceland.

## A Rare View of Tanning

Sútárin's determination has made it what it is today and is part of the reason for the econo-museum, which gives visitors a rare view of tanning from start to finish. Sútárin combines their tannery tour with a historical overview of tanning in Iceland. Sútárin has tools used in tanning, early photographs, and clothes produced from old

tanneries that were donated by Glaumbaer, which collaborates in projects to preserve Skagafjörður's history.

Sútárin uses fish skin, which would otherwise be thrown away. Most of its fish skins come from a factory in Dalvík, a town an hour away. The majority of skins are exported, but some Icelandic designers have decided to work with the new material. A shop in Sútárin features products from Icelandic designers and fish skins themselves for purchase. Traditional double face sheepskins, calf skins, and ostrich skins are also processed at the tannery.



**Sútárin**  
 Borgarmýri 5 • 550 Sauðárkrúkur  
 +354 512 8025  
 gestastofa@sutarinn.is  
 www.sutarinn.is

-KB

# LEATHER FROM THE SEA

*Fabulous Fish Creations from Sútárin's Tannery*

Spotted leopard print leather in turquoise and chartreuse leaps from glossy magazine pages. But these daring spots come from wolf fish tanned at Sútárin, Iceland's only tannery. Shocking as it may seem, fish is the latest trend in leather and has begun to climb its way from the bottom of the sea to the top fashion world.

Though the idea for using fish leather is not novel, the process has been refined. Fish leather shoes were worn in Iceland hundreds of years ago, but their quality was questionable. A popular joke was to ask how many fish leather shoes it took to get from one place to another. This dilemma was solved by the inventive Atlantic Leather company, which takes fish skin by products from Dalvík, in North Iceland and turns them into skins that can be made into shoes, bags, clothes and furniture.



## From Waste to Haute Couture

Couture clothing designers like Alexander Wang, Sigerson & Morrison and Helmut Lang have all bought skins from Atlantic Leather. Fish leather trumps more mundane

cow or sheep leather with its variety of patterns, which change according to the species of fish. Wolf fish sports spots, perch has rough and raw scales, while salmon leather is thin and moulds to fit any contour. Though skins are dyed and treated

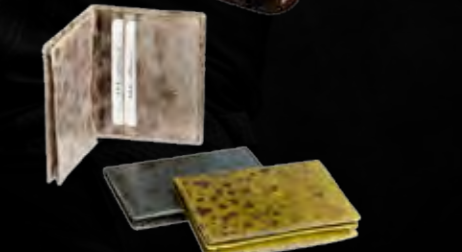


to enhance their pattern, they are simply a soft and scentless version of nature's original design. All chemicals used in the tanning and dyeing process are EU approved.

## Out of Weakness, Made Strong

The questions in everyone's minds revolve around the quality and durability of fish leather. Fish leather is surprisingly strong, even stronger than other kinds of leather because it has cross-hatched fibres rather than fibres that run in only one direction. Despite the normally pungent smell of fish, the treatment eliminates any smell so that few people can even recognise the difference between fish and other types of leather. Better yet, fish leather is a byproduct of food processing so it creates value from something otherwise thrown away.

Still a skeptic? Then come take a look at Sútárin, Atlantic Leather's economuseum in Sauðárkrúkur. Guests can take a tour to see the process firsthand and walk away with some of the latest fish leather fashions.



**Atlantic Leather**  
 Borgarmýri 5 • 550 Sauðárkrúkur  
 +354 453 59 10  
 atlanticleather@atlanticleather.is  
 www.atlanticleather.is

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# THE MOST VALUABLE SERVANT

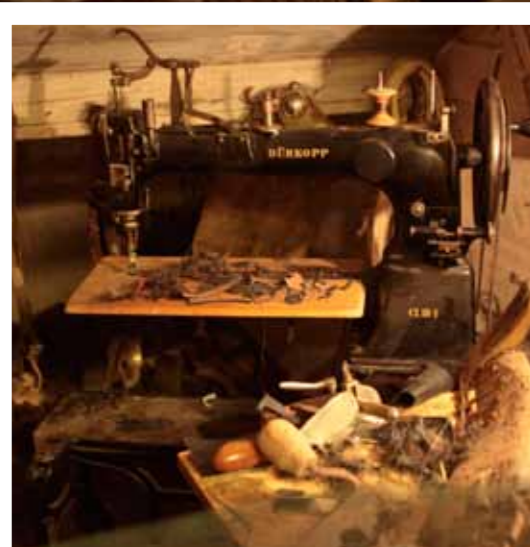
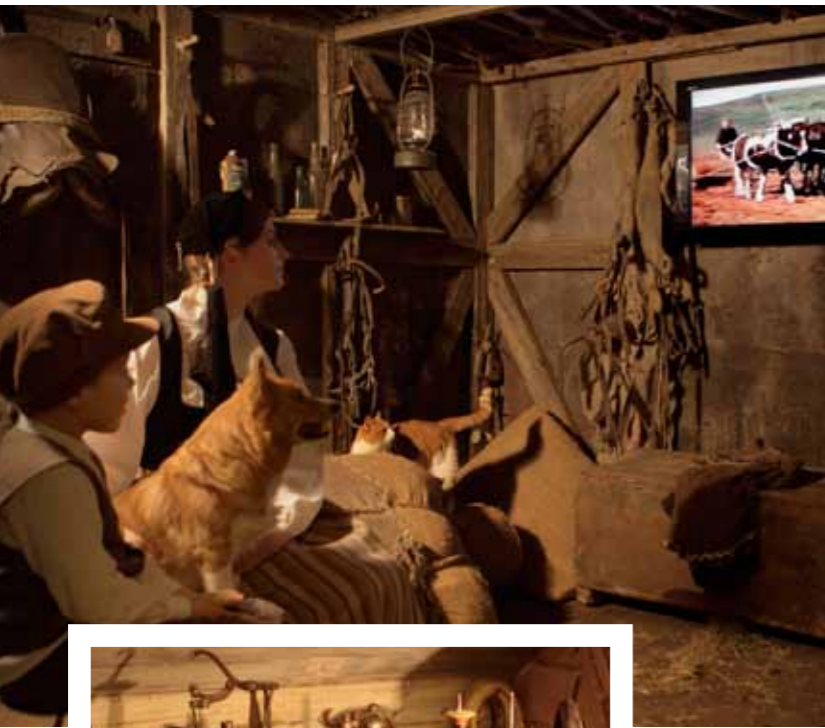
*A journey back in time – with a most treasured four-legged animal*

Known worldwide for its famous five gaits, remarkable strength—in spite of its relatively humble size—and mild temperament, the Icelandic horse is quickly becoming a significant export product and trademark for this little country. But long before it became sought-after outside the coasts of Iceland, the nationals recognised its wonderful characteristics and have commonly referred to it through the ages as ‘the farmer’s most valuable servant’. Considering the importance of the horse in the often harsh surroundings and difficult conditions Icelanders have had to survive in, it is not surprising to find an entire museum

dedicated to it. The Icelandic Horse History Centre at Hólur in Hjaltadalur is a captivating museum that both educates and entertains its visitors.

The museum, rightly situated in Skagafjörður, a region famous for its superb breeding farms that continuously produce horses of great excellence, focuses on communicating how closely intertwined the Icelandic horse is with the nation’s history. It gives an animated and interesting look not only into the past but also into the life of the

common workman and the livelihood of the people. In the spirit of traditional Icelandic hospitality, the museum places much emphasis on personal service. Visitors are guided through the exhibition and thereby given the opportunity to ask questions and chat. The exhibition is actually set in an old barn and guests are allowed to touch all the objects. In addition, there is



plenty of reading material, film footage and photographs to make the experience as vivid as possible. Guests also get to visit a nearby barn to meet the Icelandic horse ‘in person’ and can even mail a letter the way people did when horses were used by postmen. You write the letter with a feather pen and are taught to fold it in the custom of old. You then stamp it with the centre’s seal and send it off to your loved ones.

The centre is, at its core, an educational institution for research and communication of knowledge about the Icelandic horse and as such, accepts donations from those interested in supporting their work.

*The Icelandic Horse History Centre  
 Hólur í Hjaltadal Sauðárkrökur*



**Icelandic Horse History Centre**  
 Hólur í Hjaltadal • 551 Sauðárkröki  
 +354 455 6345  
 sogusetur@sogusetur.is  
 www.sogusetur.is

-KB



# LIVING INSIDE

*Glaumbaer's Living Museum*

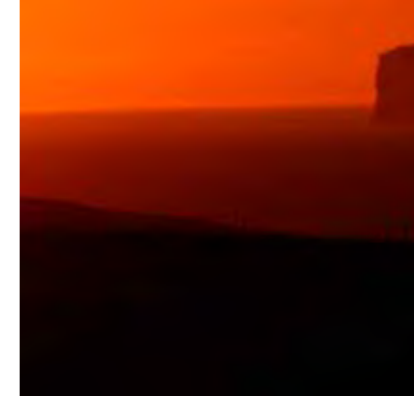
A remarkably well preserved turf house and farm called Glaumbaer still withstands Iceland’s harsh weather after three centuries of punishment. Glaumbaer, a fully intact eighteenth- and nineteenth-century farmhouse near Varmahlíð, just off the Ring Road, presents life in rural Iceland

a wealthy home, the people who lived at Glaumbaer still had to produce all of their own food and clothing by hand and unlike today, wealth did not imply ease in the remote countryside.

A dark and narrow corridor with side rooms for storage and food preparation

knit their winter clothes or sometimes to play games like chess or backgammon to pass the time. Bonds grew strong as families toughened up over several winters, labouring for their livelihoods.

At small country farms, connections to the outside world and supplies were relatively limited. People were forced to use anything that came their way to create the tools necessary for daily life. The results of this inventiveness are placed around



with everything left as though awaiting the return of the family that once lived there. Walking through restored rooms of this well-to-do farmhouse gives an insight into what life was like in this era. Though

winds up in the large room known as the baðstofa, centre of the household’s domestic life and bedroom for the entire family. Dark nights were spent shuttered away in this room where the family huddled together to

Glaumbaer in the context of their purpose. Jaw bones from sheep and horses were turned into tools found in the badstofa. Driftwood that washed ashore was carved into storage chests, bowls, and spoons. Even Glaumbaer’s turf construction was an ingenious way around using wood, which was precious and in short supply at the time the farm was built.

The museum at Glaumbaer was started at the request of residents around Skagafjörður to preserve part of their past. The farm shows how much people can do with limited resources and the creativity that emerges in tough circumstances. Glaumbaer stands as a reminder to Icelanders’ past and shows its visitors how well they survived and thrived in Iceland’s harsh environment.



**Glaumbaer**  
 Glaumbaer • 551 Sauðárkrökur  
 +354 453 6173  
 bst@skagafjordur.is  
 www.skagafjordur.is

-EMV/AMB



# MAKE FRIENDS IN HISTORY

*Iceland's Oldest Hotel Takes You to a Bygone Era*

Marlene Dietrich and Iceland's current president have something in common. Both have stayed at Hotel Tindastóll, Iceland's oldest hotel. Built in 1884 and restored in 2000, Hotel



Tindastóll has the look and feel of its past with much of the original wood still intact and the decor made to match.

### Sleep in an Icelander's Room

Ten rooms named after prominent Icelanders have double beds, wardrobes,

Tudor furniture, and a private bathroom. Deluxe rooms feature added comforts such as a DVD player and small sitting area. Two separate summer homes are available for families or friends to rent.

### Meet in a Relaxing Atmosphere

On Hotel Tindastóll's ground floor is an old fashioned tavern with ample room for guests to relax with a drink. A hot tub, made with stones found on the shores of Skagafjörður with water set at 39°C, can be accessed from either the tavern or dining room.

Hotel Tindastóll serves a buffet breakfast each day at a long dining room table, encouraging a friendly atmosphere where guests can get to know their host as well as their fellow guests.

**Hótel Tindastóll**

-KB



Lindargata 3 • 550 Sauðárkrúkur  
 +354 453 5002  
 sm@simnet.is  
 www.hotelvindastoll.com

# LIGHT IN THE NORTH

*Hólar Keeps History Alive*

Hólar's small population belies its importance in Icelandic history. With nine centuries of history, it would need days to delve into its past and its achievements. Not only was Iceland's first printing press brought to Hólar, but Christianity's early efforts at instilling a strong educational spirit persist in this small university of about 250 students and the bishop's seat of North Iceland.

Hólar church has featured prominently in its history and traces its ancestry to 1106. The current church, built in 1763, houses relics from its illustrious past.

Small, fully equipped cottages and rooms are available to rent year round and can house 100 people in the summer. A campsite is serenaded by a chorus of birdsong, sheltered by trees protecting guests from the chilly



winds that often blow in Iceland. Undir Byrdunni, a restaurant meaning 'Under the Mountain', caters a summer buffet at each meal and local specialties like Hólableikja, made from locally-caught arctic char.

A geothermal outdoor pool next to the restaurant provides a restful warm soak after dining.

**Hólar**

-KB/ASF



Hólar • 551 Sauðárkrúki  
 +354 455 6333  
 hildur@holar.is  
 www.holar.is



# SAUÐÁRKROKUR'S KITCHEN

*Ólafshús Restaurant Feeds the Town*

For over a decade, Ólafshús has filled an important niche in Sauðárkrúkur, a large town in northern Iceland with a population of 2,500. The restaurant has become known as 'the town kitchen' because of its central location, just five minutes walk from any accommodation. "We have a great cooperation with the hotels in town, and they choose to send their guests here," explains Kristín Magnúsdóttir, a part-owner in her family's business, "It seems a bit strange to people who visit, but we have had only good reviews from guests."

Once the workshop and home of saddle maker Ólafur Jónsson, the house has undergone several name changes in the past century. Once a pharmacy, then a bank, and finally a restaurant, Ólafshús has finally settled into its role as the town's kitchen. "I barely use my kitchen at home anymore because I have one here," remarked one enthusiastic guest.

Reasonable prices and a versatile menu keep customers coming back to Ólafshús, where you can get a full meal with ingredients from Skagafjörður's local food chest, sit down for a juicy burger, or get a pizza delivered, depending on your mood. Salad, topped with smoked puffin, followed by marinated lamb are some of the chef's signature dishes. Lighter appetites are appeased by the soup and salad bar offered until the evening.

**Kaffi Krókur—the Coffeehouse and Pub** Guests who prefer a casual café can cross the street to Kaffi Krókur which, much like Ólafshús, is a jack of all trades with an original intent far different from its current one. Kaffi Krókur is a coffeehouse and restaurant that turns into a lively pub that often features live music on the weekend. Kaffi Krókur was the sheriff's home until 1912, changing hands and names until it became a café and pub in 1994.

Both Ólafshús and Kaffi Krókur can cater larger events and recently hosted the afterparty for the opening of Sutarinn museum, a fish leather tannery in Sauðárkrúkur.

Ólafshús has seats for sixty guests in its main restaurant with a room for small meetings on the second floor and two banquet halls for larger events.

Kaffi Krókur is perfect for smaller meetings and its café atmosphere is well-suited for informal groups.

**Ólafshús**

-KB



Aðalgata 15 • 550 Sauðárkrúkur  
 +354 453 6454  
 olafshus@olafshus.is  
 www.olafshus.is

# FOR THE ADVENTUROUS

*Skagafjörður - a Mecca for Food, Horses and Recreation*

From the historical importance of Hólar to the isolated beauty of Reykir, the district of Skagafjörður, located in northern Iceland, offers a complete package of culture and natural beauty. Known as the epicentre of Icelandic horse breeding, this district has developed into a well-rounded destination for tourists and, like the horses found in this area, boasts an incomparable spirit not seen in any other part of Iceland.



well-marked, with many routes suitable for less experienced hikers. Avid bird watchers can get guided tours of the best places



to spot rare birds like the horned grebe, which sports a red head and builds floating nests near shorelines.



### The Food Chest for chefs and diners

Ingredients gathered from the area are incorporated into the local cuisine in the Skagafjörður Food Chest. The concept focuses on the abundance of game, meat, dairy, vegetables, and fruit found in the region and encourages chefs to experiment with recipes using these ingredients exclusively. Several gourmet restaurants in the area have dishes

Forested by birch and pine trees, the region hosts many different species of birds whose sweet summer songs are heard while hiking one of its many winding woodland paths. Skagafjörður's hiking trails are



bearing the Skagafjörður food chest label and the list of inventive menu items is always rowing.

### Recreation Mecca

Museums like Glaumbaer and Hofsó's Emigration Centre delve deeper into

Iceland's past as new traditions are forged by pioneering microbreweries and a tannery producing fish leather. Recreation has also expanded in recent years with new golf courses, swimming pools, and boat trips popping up everywhere. Horse shows, riding tours, and visits to breeding farms remain a backbone to the region, with thousands of horse lovers flocking in each year.

Skagafjörður entices more adventurous travellers with canyon rafting trips and excursions into the highlands. Boats explore islands in the fjord that remain relatively untouched by people. Mountains rise up to shelter towns built in their valleys and experienced hikers can try trekking up steep inclines. Whatever your desire its certain that Skagafjörður will fulfill it.

-KB

Varmahlíð Tourist information



560 Varmahlíð  
 +354 455 6161  
 info@skagafjordur.is  
 www.visitskagafjordur.is

SCAN THE QR CODE WITH A SMARTPHONE



# A DREAM COME TRUE

*Hotel Varmahlíð - from Dream to Reality*

Once there was a little girl who lived next to a big, beautiful hotel. She watched the people come and go from Hotel Varmahlíð in awe. One day, she sneaked over to the post office with some friends and pretended to mail a letter so that she could get a closer look. Peering through the window, she saw a huge dining room and people happily eating their meals and celebrating a special occasion. "Someday," she promised herself, "this place will be mine."

### Owning the Dream

The girl, Svanhildur Pálsdóttir, has now grown into the woman who owns and manages the hotel. "I always saw the potential for transformation," Svanhildur recalls, smiling at her good fortune. "I grew up just across the street and dreamt of making this hotel my own." Svanhildur has worked hard to transform Hotel Varmahlíð into her own, down to the minute details such as which colour of flower to place on the table.



### Filled from the Food Chest

The dining room that Svanhildur once peered into as a girl now serves dishes using game or livestock brought in by her husband and brother-in-law. Smoked goose carpaccio, wrapped around small scoops of date chutney arranged on a bed of lettuce grown at a nearby greenhouse, piques salty and sweet taste buds. Warm rhubarb cake with vanilla ice cream and mango rhubarb



chutney ends the meal with a melding of local and exotic. The menu belongs to Skagafjörður's food chest, an effort by restaurants to use food that is around them rather than looking far from home. Summer dishes will focus on shrimp, cod, local cheese and/or lamb.

### Three-Star Comfort

Each of the nineteen rooms at Hotel Varmahlíð has an en suite bathroom, television, alarm clock, and hair dryer. Its three-star rating ensures that nothing will be lacking and all overnight stays include

a breakfast buffet. Hotel Varmahlíð is ideal for conferences and special occasions with the restaurant catering to the unique needs of each group and the hotel comfortably sleeping almost forty people.



### An Enchanting Vision for All

Svanhildur's enthusiasm and knowledge of the area aids guests in discovering hiking paths that lie just up the sloping hills surrounding Hotel Varmahlíð. Tree-covered paths provide pleasant hiking on windy days, while short, yet rewarding walks are said to reveal nine churches standing tall on Skagafjörður's horizon on a clear day and will enchant visitors to Hotel Varmahlíð, just as it enchanted its owner years ago.

-KB

Hotel Varmahlíð



560 Varmahlíð  
 +354 453 8170  
 info@hotelvarmahlid.is  
 www.hotelvarmahlid.is

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# THE PEARL OF DRANGEY

*A Beach Guesthouse and a Birdwatcher's Paradise*

An inspiring twenty minute drive up a gravel road from Sauðárkrókur on Route 748, brings you to Reykir, an isolated guesthouse in a spectacularly beautiful spot. From here, there are many hiking possibilities, including a hike up Tindastóll, the mountain that towers over Reykir, to the magical stone in the lake.



Viggo and his son, Helgi Rafn, run the guesthouse together today. Viggo learned its secrets from his father, who is from Reykir and built up its travel services. His father used to take visitors out on his boat for a tour of Drangey, where puffins and many other birds

mingle amongst the craggy cliffs; a tradition that Viggo and Helgi Rafn continue with 3-hour, guided boat trips, an unmissable addition to your holiday.

### Drangey: The Food Chest

Drangey rises steeply out of the fjord 180 metres high. Its flat top is covered with grass and, with its steep nesting cliffs, is one of the most famous birdwatching sites in Iceland. In times past, when famine was over the country, Drangey was called 'Skagafjörður's Food Chest'. So many different varieties of birds are to be found there that today it is truly a birdwatcher's paradise.

### A Place of Evil Spirits and Outlaws

Locals used to believe that evil creatures lived on the island because many men plunged to their deaths trying to gather eggs and hunt the birds that lived there. According to legend, one of the bishops at Hólar, Guðmundur the Good, came to bless the island and encountered an evil spirit. When confronted, the spirit mournfully said that, "even evil needs a place to live". After pausing for a moment, the bishop agreed to leave one part of the island unblest so that evil spirits had somewhere to reside.

It was on the island that Grettir the Strong took sanctuary for 3 years in the 11<sup>th</sup> century after being made an outlaw, as described in Grettir's saga.

### Relax in the Pools and Guesthouse

Heading back to the guesthouse, visitors will find two natural hot pools called Grettislaug, named after Grettir. Fed from a hot spring, they are 38°C, so a dip in the pool can quickly take away chills from the wind or soothe tired feet after a day's hiking. Next to the hot pot is a small pond where horned grebes, small red-headed birds that build floating nests, usually swim. The horned grebe is relatively scarce worldwide, but is plentiful in northern Iceland. Following Viggo's directions, down the beach, past driftwood and over rocks, small, glittering pebbles can be found littering the beach under the cliffs where crashing waves have smoothed them. Looking up, the island of Drangey appears close enough to reach out and touch.

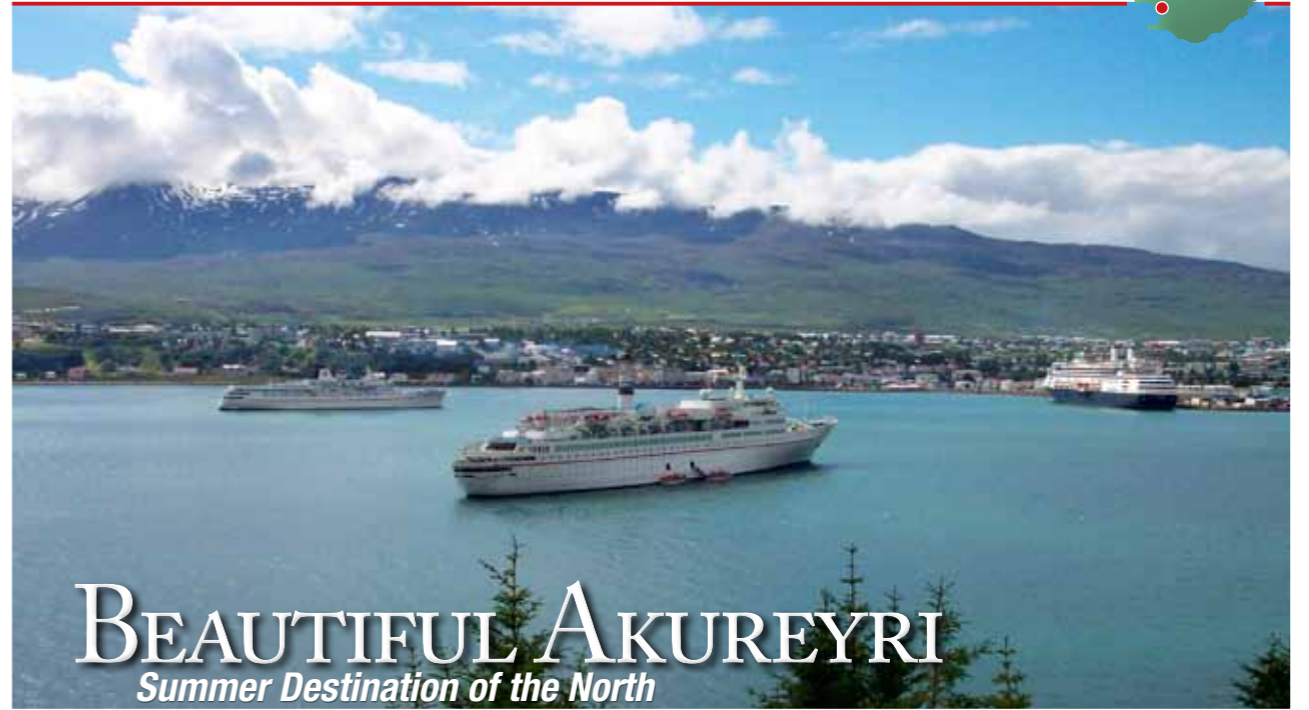


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**Drangeyjarferðir**

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Fellstúni 1 • 550 Sauðárkróki  
 +354 821 0090  
 drangey@fjolnet.is  
 www.drangeyjarferdir.is



# BEAUTIFUL AKUREYRI

*Summer Destination of the North*

One of the most idyllic towns in Iceland, Akureyri, is buzzing with excitement this summer, with happenings and lots of new additions to its growing list of amenities.

The newly-opened Icelandair Hotel with 63 rooms, is just a 2 minute walk from Akureyri's popular geothermally heated municipal swimming pool that features two large outdoor swimming pools with temperatures around 28°C along with geothermal hot pots and water slides in the children's area. The lovely Hotel KEA, right in the centre of town, has been recently renovated and enlarged.

### New Museums and Exhibitions

In the Old Town of Akureyri you will find a variety of interesting museums and exhibits. New this year, are the Motorcycle Museum of Iceland and an exhibition of old toys at Friðbjarnarhús in Aðalstræti, both located in this historic part of town.

### Culture, the Arts and Tourist Information

Opened in August 2010, the Hof Cultural and Conference Centre is the latest addition to Akureyri's growing cultural life, providing a state-of-the-art venue for concerts, the performing arts, conferences, exhibitions, special occasions and events. At the Hof, you will also find Akureyri's Tourist Information Centre, located just inside the front entrance.

### New Hiking and Bike Trails

The Kjarnaskógur Recreational Area, ideal for summer outings, with its many walking paths, playgrounds, picnic areas and barbecue facilities, has recently added several new hiking trails and boasts a new mountain bike trail, the longest in the country.

### Stroll through the Fauna and Flora

The Botanical Gardens of Akureyri contains a wide variety of both Icelandic and foreign flora, with new species being added to the collection on a regular basis. Popular with visitors a locals alike, the gardens provide a welcome respite where you can relax and enjoy our wonderful summers in north Iceland.

### Festivals and Events

The Summer Festival of the Arts opens with the Midsummer Night Festival on June 23 every year and continues for 10 weeks throughout the summer with concerts, exhibitions, dancing, theatre literature and more.

### New restaurants in Akureyri

Goya Tapas Bar, Kaupvangsstræti, 23  
 Kung Fu Sticks & Sushi, Brekkugata, 3  
 1862 Nordic Bistro, Hof Strandgata, 12  
 Örkin hans Nóa, Hafnarstræti, 22  
 Laxdalshús, Hafnarstræti, 11  
 Kaffi Költ, Geislagötu, 10

The Annual Hiking Week of Akureyri and surroundings will take place this year on 3-10 July. Guided walks, ranging from a few hours (easy) to strenuous, such as the '24 peaks in 24' hours will be offered.



### Medieval Days at Gásir

A medieval festival will be taking place at Gásir, 11 km from Akureyri, which was the main trading post in Northern Iceland during the Middle Ages. Held on 16.-19. July, Medieval Days is a reenactment of life as it was at Gásir, with medieval markets, food and handicrafts.

**Akureyrarstofa**

SCAN THE QR CODE WITH A SMARTPHONE

Strandgata 12 • 600 Akureyri  
 +354 450 1050  
 akureyrarstofa@akureyri.is  
 www.visitakureyri.is

# A COMFORTABLE PLACE TO BASE

*From Sunnuberg Guesthouse, the Town is Easily Accessible*

Arrive in Hofsvós, where fog has just descended, as Icelandic weather changes so quickly, shrouding the town with an aura of mystery. It can seem daunting. Sunnuberg

Guesthouse is a welcome sight. It has four double rooms and one single room, all with en suite bathrooms, a shared living room that has a small refrigerator to store snacks, and a microwave for a quick bite to eat.

A short walk from the guesthouse is the new pool designed by Sigríður Sigþórsdóttir, the same architect who designed the Blue Lagoon. It opened just over a year ago and attracts many visitors to the small town. The



pool is built into the land, with grass covering a roof that you can walk over and comfortably stand on to see the area around it.



After a wonderful night's sleep, a morning coffee and breakfast, the fog has lifted, the sun is out again and I'm off to discover the Icelandic Emigration Centre or take a dip in the pool overlooking the fjord. It's good to have the guesthouse as my base as I explore the town and its many interesting places.

**Sunnuberg** -KB

Suðurbraut 8 • 565 Hofsvós  
 +354 893 0220  
 hofsos@hofsos.is  
 www.hofsos.is

# A CAFÉ IN THE DANISH ERA

*Delicious Food, Delightful Views at Sólvík in Hofsvós*

In a beautifully restored 19th century wooden building, next door to the Icelandic Emigration Centre in Hofsvós, is the restaurant and café Sólvík.

**Renovated History**  
 Hofsvós is one of the oldest trading centres in Iceland. In the oldest part of the village surrounding the harbour, many of the houses have been recently renovated, giving the old village back the feel of the trading centre of bygone days. Sólvík used to be the home of the agent for the Danish monopoly and was standing previously in Grafarós, which was a trading centre from 1835-1915. It was moved in parts to Hofsvós and erected in it's current location in 1920.

**Fresh Food at its Best**  
 What a treat, to sit on its terrace, overlooking the charming harbour of Hofsvós, enjoying the wonderful cuisine of Dagmar Ásdís Þorvaldsdóttir; a freshly caught cod and trout, mountain lamb from Skagafjörður, chicken fillet, hamburger, lobster, soup and bread or even just a coffee and cake.

Dagmar, who has been running Sólvík for about 10 years, claims that the courses



she has selected on the menu are simply her clients' most popular courses for the past years. The restaurant is open every day, all day long, offering a full menu.

**Sólvík** -KB

Vesturfarasetrið • 565 Hofsvós  
 +354 453 7930  
 samstarf@visir.is  
 www.hofsos.is



# FAR FROM HOME

*The Icelandic Emigration Centre Links Past and Present*

Immigration is often viewed from an outside perspective, which follows immigrants' lives as they become established once arriving in a new country, rather than seeing the reasons for leaving their homeland. Pioneering Icelanders left for faraway lands in pursuit of prosperity or a new adventure. The Icelandic Emigration Centre in Hofsvós tells stories of emigration from Iceland during its height from 1870 until 1914.

## Poignant Mail

The voices invoked through records and letters mailed back home tell the perils of life in a new land. Most fared well with easily acquired land parcelled out to any newcomers, but some saw all of their children perish in lands where they lacked stronger links like those left behind in Iceland. Most of the immigrants settled in North America, setting up communities throughout parts of Canada and the United



States. It is estimated that the equivalent of another Iceland, 300,000 people with Icelandic heritage, live scattered across North America.



## Poverty and Class

Poverty prompted mass emigration from Iceland, with people often looking to escape conditions close to feudal servitude. Numerous people had no land and worked for large farms owned by the wealthier classes. The emigrants made up approximately one quarter of the entire population and their difficult lives made leaving an easier decision. Starting out fresh in countries where land was plentiful and class distinctions negligible allowed poor emigrants a chance to free themselves from the rigid social mores of Iceland's lower classes.

## Vagaries of Nature

The Icelandic Emigration Centre links harsh winters with heavy pack ice that ruined farms and diminished fish stocks to spikes in migration during the following years. Famine was always a threat, as the weather often caused living conditions to teeter on the brink of being uninhabitable. Natural

disasters, such as earthquakes and volcanic eruptions, led to entire villages fleeing the fallout and resettling in countries where nature's violent forces were less volatile.

## The Journey

Each room in the Emigration Centre tracks different stages of the emigrants'

journey from Iceland. Following the reasons for departure are rooms recreated to resemble the hold of a ship that took the Icelanders to their new homes. Initially, ships were packed with people, sleeping head to toe in cramped quarters that they frequently shared with animals. The final section of the museum displays photos and letters written by Icelanders detailing their lives in new countries.

## Finding Family

People of Icelandic descent can even trace their heritage by talking to museum staff who have access to many genealogical records from Iceland and settlement areas in North America.

**Emigration Centre** -KB

Vesturfarasetrið • 565 Hofsvós  
 +354 453 7935  
 hofsos@hofsos.is  
 www.hofsos.is



# GOURMET FLAIR

Lónkot's Masterful Menu



Small violets, dotting the path leading to Lónkot, a gourmet restaurant twelve kilometres from Hofsóss, later appear on your plate, blended into a menu that changes with the availability of ingredients. There is



no fixed menu at Lónkot, but an inventive mother and daughter prepare specialities, such as carrot ginger soup and puffin breast marinated in a tangy berry sauce, as the main dish of mountain lamb braised with herbs cooks slowly and a sorbet of skyr and berries freezes.

If the meal has slowed your desire to leave, you can retreat to the guesthouse and later try out nine holes of golf. If a breakfast of homemade muesli, toast with



homemade rhubarb jam, and freshly squeezed blueberry is enough to make you stay the night then you can bask in the warmth of an outdoor patio or seek out warmth in an indoor jacuzzi exclusively for overnight guests.

**Lónkot** -KB



Lónkoti • 566 Hofsóssi  
 +354 453 7432  
 lonkot@lonkot.com  
 www.lonkot.com



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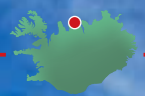
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*The Warmth of Iceland*

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# FJALLABYGGÐ

*A Tale of Two Villages*

It's a happy tale of how two villages, separated by huge mountain ranges were joined together. Miles and miles of intimidating and bold-faced mountain peaks, stretch out as far as the eye can see, standing between Siglufjörður and Ólafsfjörður, two small fishing villages on the very northern peninsula of Tröllaskagi, in North Iceland.

Although it is only 17 km as the crow flies between the villages, the geography of the area dictates a 62 km detour around the mountains in summer and a 260 km detour in winter! One can only imagine the challenges of transportation, communication, safety and a host of related issues that residents of these remote fjords have had to contend with all their lives.

But no longer! In 2003, after much back and forth discussion and negotiation, plans for a tunnel connecting the two villages were finalised, making it the most ambitious project ever undertaken by the Icelandic Road Administration. Then, in 2006 the

residents of the two communities voted to merge into one municipality, under the name of Fjallabyggð. The tunnel, or shall we say, tunnels, as there are two of them, are 11 km in combined length and already have had an huge impact on residents of the now-unified villages. The official opening of the tunnels took place in October 2010.

Héðinsfjörður is between the villages. It is a beautiful area for hiking groups. There are many hiking trails from Héðinsfjörður to Ólafsfjörður and Siglufjörður.

Life in Tröllaskagi has been forever transformed and the community has felt its effects already. According to Sigurður Valur Ásbjarnarsson, mayor of Fjallabyggð, the merging of the two municipalities would not have been possible without the tunnels. The residents of the two previously separated towns can now enjoy richer cultural, educational, and employment opportunities, and the tunnels will provide better and more varied services in tourism and business.

## The Rise and Fall of Iceland's Herring Boom

Possibly one of the best, if not the best museum of its kind in Iceland, Siglufjörður's Herring Era Museum has a creative and entertaining way of bringing the subject of herring to life. The museum was awarded the Micheletti Award for the best new industrial museum in Europe in 2004. Spread out over several buildings, the exhibits revisit Iceland's golden age of herring that lasted from 1867 to 1968 and had an enormous impact on Icelandic society and economy. Lively theatrical performances depicting life and times from the Herring Era of the 1950's are scheduled every Saturday in July. It is open from 10.00 to 22.00 between 12th June–18th August, and 13.00 to 17.00 in Spring and Autumn.

## Music in their Bones

Another gem in Fjallabyggð is the Folk Music Centre, which opened in 2006 in Siglufjörður. Music has always played an

important role in the everyday lives of Icelanders which continues to this day. The museum is located in one of the oldest houses in Siglufjörður, where the 19th century Rev. Bjarni Thorsteinsson lived from 1888-98. Bjarni was an avid collector of Icelandic folk music, a talented composer and is considered by many to be the 'father of Siglufjörður'. Since 2006, the Folk Music Centre in Siglufjörður has organised a Folk Music Academy to coincide with the Folk Music Festival held there in the beginning of July every year.

## The Red, the Yellow and the Blue

The unmistakable bright red, yellow and blue buildings on the Rauðka Marina serve as the main gathering place and landmarks in Siglufjörður. Named after a well-known local sailor, the Hannes Boy Café, with its cosy rustic ambiance is reminiscent of the glory days of the herring era. Opened in 2010, Hannes Boy Café is actually a brand new restaurant, serving quality food at

reasonable prices and using the best local ingredients, as much as possible. Right next door, the Red House Café & Bar has just opened and is the place to enjoy light lunches, a glass of wine, and live music. Finally, the Blue House, also on the marina, will serve as a gallery hosting the works of local artists. ([www.raudka.is](http://www.raudka.is))

## Poetry Centre

The Poetry Centre opens in Siglufjörður on 8th July this summer where you can read poems by major Icelandic poets and in the future, also poems by foreign poets.

## Whale Watching in Ólafsfjörður

Exciting new developments in whale watching are now on the horizon for North Sailing, one of the leading whale watching companies in North Iceland. In early June 2011, the well-known company began offering its tours from Ólafsfjörður, as well. Its traditional oak boats just add to the authenticity of your journey out on the open

waters of the Arctic Sea, where the chance to spot various whale species is optimal.

## Natural History Museum in Ólafsfjörður

A fascinating place for adults and children alike, birds are the primary focus in the museum. However, there are several other stuffed animals such as goat, polar bear, arctic foxes, along with fishes and crabs.

**Festivals to be held in 2011 include:**  
 Herring Festival in Siglufjörður 29 July – 1 August  
 Berry Days, Ólafsfjörður 12 – 14 August

Fjallabyggð -EMV



Gránagata 24 • 580 Siglufirði  
**+354 464 9100**  
 Form on website  
[www.fjallabyggð.is](http://www.fjallabyggð.is)

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## THE ULTIMATE MARITIME EXPERIENCE

*Niels Whale Watching combines Whale Watching and Sea Angling*

When looking for an authentic Icelandic maritime experience you can't go wrong by going whale watching and sea angling on a genuine Icelandic fishing vessel with veteran fishermen at the

experienced whale watching companies. The company is named after its vessel, Niels Jónsson EA 106, a virtually unmodified 30 ton fishing boat built of oak in Akureyri in 1973, which is used for commercial fishing

and has been dubbed 'The Pearl of Eyjafjörður'. The bay is full of life during the summertime with humpbacks, beaked whales, dolphins and sea hogs being the most commonly spotted in the bay, with a 95% chance of seeing at least one of them. The Niels crew has decades of experience in locating the bay's inhabitants and start each day by taking a drive along the shore to see where the whales are mainly located order to make the most of the day's trips.

### Fun Fishing with the Experts

After having gazed upon the great whales you'll have the chance of trying your luck at sea angling under the guidance of professional fishermen with decades of experience. The most commonly caught fish are cod, haddock, pollock and catfish and if you are lucky, you might even catch a giant halibut. The fishermen will even help you prepare your catch for cooking.

helm. Niels Whale Watching operates in the majestic beauty of Eyjafjörður Bay in the north of Iceland, using their decades of experience to give visitors a chance to come up close to some of the earth's biggest mammals as well as trying your luck at fishing – on the same tour.

during the wintertime. It is, of course, equipped to fit the needs of the modern man, with protective clothing, hot coffee and genuine Icelandic pastries available during your trip.

### A Bay Full of Life

Eyjafjörður Bay is known for its great beauty and towering mountain ranges surrounding it, including the Tröllaskagi peninsula and a multitude of small seaside towns. Another delight is sailing by Hrísey Island, which has

### Sail in a Traditional Oak Boat

Niels Whale Watching has been taking tourists out to Eyjafjörður Bay since 1989, making them one of Iceland's most

**Niels Whale Watching** -VAG

Hauganesi • 621 Dalvík  
**+354 867 0000**  
 niels@niels.is  
 www.niels.is

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## TO GRANDMOTHER'S HOUSE WE GO

*Cake and Coffee at Áskaffi in Glaumbær*

Steaming tea or coffee is an essential part of Icelandic culture. Before cafés, the strong aroma of coffee brewing and freshly baked cakes came from grandmothers' kitchens as they served guests who stopped by. A welcoming cup of coffee along with a slice of cake, filled with rhubarb jam, was given to every visitor who took the trouble of travelling the distance between farms to visit friends or relatives. Áskaffi continues this tradition by opening the doors to a world seen by few visitors, an Icelandic grandmother's cosy kitchen.



"The two women that opened this café didn't want the past to fade away, so they decided to share people's everyday lives. Otherwise these items would stay stuffed in trunks or banished to people's attics," explains Herdís. Rooms are packed with relics of domestic life from the nineteenth until the middle of the twentieth century, careworn heirlooms stored in chests carved from driftwood open to reveal prized possessions from another time: dolls, sewing kits, pipes, and countless photos housed in handmade frames.



Waitresses in period costumes bustle from a tea room with tables covered in floral patterns and checkered table clothes to fetch cakes made from recipes passed down for generations. "I have, at most, twelve recipes for cakes. It's a huge decision to add anything because we want to keep the food simple, like it was in the old days," says Herdís, manager and the woman behind the scrumptious cakes and coffee. Unlike other tearooms, this one picks nostalgia over propriety with sheepskin coverings, family photos, and life-size mannequins in the national costume.



The progression from open hearth to coal and finally electric stove marks Iceland's modernisation. By the 1950's, modernisation was nearly complete and Iceland had most of the conveniences enjoyed in other countries, a testament to its self determination following independence. No kitchen was complete without coffee, a precious commodity throughout several eras. Yet, because beans were in short supply, various additives, such as chicory, were used to stretch out the beans until a new shipment arrived. Fortunately today there is no shortage of coffee beans to limit the quality of Áskaffi's. "The one thing I've changed since the nineteenth century is the additives in the coffee, but I think that all Icelandic grandmothers would approve," chuckles Herdís.



**Áskaffi** -KB

Glaumbær • 551 Varmahlíð  
**+354 453 8855**  
 askaffi@askaffi.is  
 www.askaffi.is

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## A STAY BY THE PARK

*Árból Guesthouse is a beautiful place to stay in Húsavík*

On a residential side street of Húsavík, overlooking a gentle stream on the west end of the town park is Árból Guesthouse, a tranquil guesthouse just off the town's main street. Ten rooms prepared by owner and manager, Auður, await travellers who want to spend a few days whale watching or taking day trips to Mývatn or the National

attic recently added on as an expansion. Bedrooms have shared bathrooms with five bathrooms in total for the ten rooms in the hotel. Styled simply, with cushioned wicker chairs and comfortable double beds, the airy rooms are illuminated by sun streaming through large windows on summer days. The two bedrooms in the attic are styled

peek outside at the well-kept garden and on warmer days, sit out on the backyard patio and listen to the sound of the gently trickling stream. Guests who want to take a short walk can just follow the stream to enter Húsavík's park. A bit further is a lake with a lot of trout in it. It takes about an hour to walk around it. No fishing permit is required at the lake so visitors can just grab a fishing pole and see if anything is biting.

### A Governor to be thankful for

Árból Guesthouse's three floors were once trod by Húsavík's governor, who lived there until 1956, and the house acted as the city hall for the district. Known for his kindness and good nature, the former governor used to phone farmers brewing spirits during Icelandic prohibition days if he expected an official visit from his superior. Partiality to locals and exceptions to the rules were considered a norm in this small town's life. Even though the governor is long gone, he is still remembered in the stories and hearts of the townspeople and Árból remains known for its inner charms and outward grace.

-KB



Park which is only forty-five minutes away. Auður often remains at the guesthouse to give visitors tips or chat with them at breakfast, for a hands-on approach.

The three story guesthouse features four rooms per floor with a two bedroom

differently from the rest of the house, with wood stained dark honey and a skylight lighting up a shared living room lined with leather couches.

After a big buffet breakfast included in the price of the room, guests can take a



**Árból**

Ásgarðsvegur 2 - 640 Húsavík  
 +354 464 2220  
 guest.hus@simnet.is  
 www.arbol.is

# Kraum of the Crop



### Designer unite!

Kraum, the nation's first store dedicated entirely to Icelandic design, has breathed new life into Reykjavík's oldest house, just off Ingólfstorg square downtown. The store features work from over 70 designers including textile, jewelry, household items, and a variety of other utilitarian object, all selected by a professional committee to ensure a fair representation of Iceland's best. Kraum, meaning simmer, is appropriately named as the first and only forum for Iceland's auspicious design scene, which centers an organic elements like wool, lava and fur from the nation's unique nature. Because the space was conceived as a store and not a gallery, the offering focuses on production items instead of one-of-a-kind pieces, and prices reflect Kraum's sentiment of design's place in everyday life, and not just on the mantelpiece.



### Opening hours

Monday - Friday 9:00 - 20:00  
 Saturday 10:00 - 17:00  
 Sunday 12:00 - 17:00

Aðalstræti 10 101 Reykjavík www.kraum.is



## LIFE ON THE EDGE OF THE ARCTIC

*Húsavík - the Hub of the North-East*

Way up in the north east of the country lies Húsavík, the town known as 'The Whale-Watching Capital of Europe'. Like most Icelandic coastal towns, Húsavík started its life as a fishing village. With an abundance of whales and birdlife, it has quickly earned its reputation as the place to visit to see the awesome sights both these creatures provide along with the scenery on Skjálfandi Bay, a natural wonder.

to one of the largest colonies of this unusual bird in Iceland.

The harbour area has been transformed into a worthy attraction in itself. Visitors can enjoy delicious meals of freshly-caught seafood or shop in one of the converted former fisherman's homes, which still retain their character and charm.

Sea tours are not the only form of recreation, however, as hiking is a very popular pastime, too. The beautiful

waters travel over 200 km to the sea from Vatnajökull, Europe's largest glacier. Completing this tour is Ásbyrgi, one of



the most unusual natural wonders in the country. A horseshoe-shaped canyon, legend has it that the Norse god Óðin's horse briefly stepped here, leaving his footprint. This makes a good day trip and Húsavík is the best place to use as a base to explore the whole of this beautiful area, unlike any other.

Other places of interest in the area are the many abandoned farms along the 40 km-long peninsula of Skálar at Langanes, now populated with a wide range of birdlife. Dimmuborgir (Dark Castles) are volcanic rock formations east of Lake Mývatn. A forty minute walk leads to a cave with a high dome-shaped roof that is open at both ends. This is the reputed home of Iceland's Yule Lads.

Húsavík is fast becoming the centre of tourism of many different types. Being so close to the Arctic circle, it offers an insight into life in the North. The town's culture makes it a popular place to stay and

-KB/ASF



Old schooners have been renovated, now providing a true sea-going experience in the style of days gone by, taking visitors out into the Arctic ocean under sail to enjoy the magnificent sight of whales in their natural habitat.

A new addition to the seagoing tours is an hour-long excursion to the island of Lundy, known as 'Puffin Island', home

countryside draws visitors from many countries. If something less strenuous is in order, a thirty-minute drive south will bring you to Goðafoss, one of the most spectacular waterfalls in Iceland.

Just twenty minutes drive further on is the mystical Lake Mývatn. East of Húsavík lies Vatnajökull National Park and Europe's most powerful waterfall, Dettifoss, whose

## THE CULTURE HOUSE

*Húsavík's Fascinating View of Its History*

There are two permanent exhibitions in The Culture House: 'Man and Nature – 100 years in Þingeyjarsýsla', a new exhibition opened in 2010 and 'The Maritime Exhibition'.

### 'Man and Nature—100 Years in Þingeyjarsýsla'

This aims to provide insight into man's relationship with nature in this region in the period 1850-1950, and the subsistence farming that was practised at that time when each farmstead was largely self-sufficient.

This interesting aspect of national culture is explored by juxtaposing objects from nature and man-made artefacts. The presentation includes a large number of interesting exhibits - some of natural origin, such as animals, plants and rocks, while others are home-made objects, for instance tools, needlework, works of art and crafts, etc.

### The Maritime Exhibition

Here you will find displays of a large number of boats, many of them built in Húsavík. It also includes a wide variety of fishing gear, equipment and tools which were used in the fisheries, seal-hunting and shark-fishing. Films can be viewed, and the exhibition offers an interesting interactive history database, where information on



such unusual matters as the location of fishing grounds, farms with driftwood rights, landing-places for boats, etc. is presented in map form.

### Research and Photography Exhibits

On both the ground floor and top floor of the Culture House various temporary exhibitions and events take place. This summer, there will be an exhibition on archeological research and findings in the

Images by © Christopher Lund



area, an exhibition on Iceland's role in the moon landing and a photography exhibition with photos from the Mývatn Area at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, taken by Bárður Sigurðsson.

At the Cultural house you can also find a children's room, museum shop and coffee.

The Culture House is open from the 1st of June - 31st of August every day from 10-18.

Adult admission is 600 ISK with children under 16 admitted free and includes all exhibits.

### Húsavík Phallogical Museum

One of the strangest museums in Iceland and likely the world, the phallogical museum is a serious museum with a sense of humour about its subject matter. This museum boasts a collection of carefully preserved penises from all land and sea animals found in Iceland. The collection has

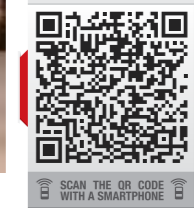
been recently completed as the museum now has a human specimen from a man willing to relinquish the rights to his most intimate parts after his death to forever go down in history. A fun museum to make curious comparisons.

Open everyday 12-18 from 20<sup>th</sup> May to 10<sup>th</sup> September. Admission is 800 ISK.

### Húsavík Whale Museum

Dedicated exclusively to whale biology, behaviour, and interaction with people, this museum is housed in the town's renovated slaughterhouse.

Húsavíkurstofa



-KB/ASF

Hafnarstétt 1 • 640 Húsavík  
 +354 464 4300  
 info@visithusavik.is  
 www.husmus.is



## WHALE WATCHING UNDER SAIL

*North Sailing's traditional oak schooners sail to the whales*

Sailing traditional Icelandic schooners used to be almost a memory of the past until brothers, Hörður and Árni Sigurbjarnarson painstakingly restored a 20-ton oak vessel to its former glory and started taking visitors whale and puffin watching from the northern town of Húsavík.

of northern Iceland. All the boats are outfitted to modern standards without losing the beauty and charm of the traditional oak wood finish.

### Challenges and memories

Sailing the arctic seas in a schooner being driven by the wind at up to 10 knots under full sail, following the world's largest creatures, is invigorating, to say the least! It's a thrill that few get to experience today - but a memory that lasts a lifetime! Is this environmentally friendly form of travel the way of the future?

### Twice the experience

Today, with a fleet of six vessels, in addition to Húsavík, North Sailing is expanding to offer new tours from Ólafsfjörður, just about an hour's drive up the fjord from Akureyri. This is a prime location for whale watching - literally just minutes from the feeding grounds of whales, dolphins and porpoises!

The opening of a new tunnel between Ólafsfjörður and Siglufjörður, famed for its herring and museum, means that it is quicker and safer to travel between the towns.

### Tours for all tastes

Regular tours last approx. 3 - 4 hours, starting 1st April and include hot chocolate and local snack refreshments.

Warm overalls, hats, gloves, blankets and raincoats are available in preparation

for any changes in weather. There are up to 10 tours daily during high season. The evening trips are special in summer, sailing under the midnight sun! There is the option to combine a trip with a 2-hour horse riding tour from Saltvík Horse Centre, south of Húsavík. For the more adventurous, there is a 2-day tour, 'NSE-1 Edge of the Arctic,' eating and sleeping on board, stopping off at Flatey and Grímsey islands. What food could be fresher than fish caught en route and grilled on board!

For the even more adventurous, there is an 8-day tour, flying from Reykjavik airport to Greenland, sailing on the schooner Hildur, with treks inland to breathtaking views and a BBQ on the beach, eating locally-prepared musk ox meat.

### Lunch or Dinner at the Harbour

The beautiful Gamli Baukur restaurant, with its large verandas overlooking Húsavík harbour, offers a great dining experience, surrounded by maritime memorabilia to complete your tour. With its fresh seafood, both local and international dishes, it is a hot venue for live music.

**North Sailing**

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-ASF

Hafnarstétt 9 • 640 Húsavík  
**+354 464 7272**  
 info@nordursigling.is  
 www.nordursigling.is



## MASSIVE MARINE MAMMALS

*Europe's Only Museum Dedicated Exclusively to Whales*

of whaling plays alongside a display of weaponry used for hunting. Icelanders have not had a long history with whaling, although other nations have come to exploit Icelandic waters for whales and other sea life. A complicated relationship exists between humans and whales which alternates between a desire to continue whaling traditions and a commitment to preserving species.

Whaling is not the only threat to whales' survival, which depends on plentiful fish stocks and clean water to survive. The effect of chemicals that run off into ocean water and certain fishing practices such as bottom trawling have decimated whale populations. The use of sonar equipment has caused whales to beach themselves by confusing their internal sonar and leading them into shallow waters from which they cannot escape. Húsavík's whale museum describes all the threats facing whales in the hope of educating the public about these problems.

### Understanding through Research

Iceland has a special relationship with whales. Twenty-three species frequent the waters around Húsavík spending the summer fattening up in Iceland's rich feeding grounds before migrating to give birth in the warm waters of the Caribbean. Húsavík's unique position as a summer



home for migrating whales makes it ideal for research and public education by providing people with greater understanding not only of whales but the problems facing the global environment.

**Húsavík Whale Museum**

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Hafnarstétt 1 • 640 Húsavík  
**+354 414 2800**  
 info@whalemuseum.is  
 www.whalemuseum.is

# TJÖRNESHREPPUR

North Iceland, population 56

It's a place where the sheep population vastly outnumbers human residents and the numbers of nesting birds among the cliffs reach dizzying heights in summer. The municipality of Tjörneshreppur, is a 200 square kilometre stretch of land just past Húsavík in the far reaches of North Iceland.

Going to the municipality's website I spied an article on their home page. The biggest news in January 2011 was that 2 freedom-loving sheep that had been lost in the highlands since September, had finally been rescued and brought home, much to their dismay!...Just to give you



an idea that this is really the ideal spot to spend an afternoon away from the crowds on Reykjavík's Laugavegur shopping street. The quiet calm, the serenity of the ocean's gaze...this is the beauty of Tjörneshreppur municipality.

Driving north from the town of Húsavík, the glittering expanse of the North Atlantic comes into view as you

drive along this section of what is called the 'diamond ring road'. This is where, come mid-summer, you can watch the midnight sun setting on the northern horizon... one of the most peaceful and idyllic sights that you could ever hope for. Although Tjörneshreppur is not the highest latitude in Iceland, you will nevertheless feel like you have reached



'land's end' when you arrive at the very tip of Voladalstorfa, a hook-shaped cliff that juts out into the bay, where you can take walks and observe the puffins that nest there.

Besides its magnificent ocean views, Tjörneshreppur municipality is also an area of interest for geology students from all over the world who come here to study rare fossils that 'shouldn't' normally be found at this latitude.



### Mánárþakki Museum and Turf Farm

A quaint and charming museum with exhibits of life in Iceland as it was around 100 years ago is found at the Turf Farm museum at Mánárþakki, which is open from 10<sup>th</sup> June to 31<sup>st</sup> August or by special appointment outside of those dates.

### Dive with Puffins!

The largest of the 3 islands off the coast of Tjörneshreppur, aptly named 'Puffin Island' has recently been discovered as a dive spot making it one of the newest snorkelling/diving sites in Iceland. For more information about this dive site go to: [www.divethenorth.is](http://www.divethenorth.is)

So, if you are making your way around Iceland this summer, or just happen to be visiting North Iceland, take some time to relax and enjoy the beautiful Tjörneshreppur Municipality.

**Tjörneshreppur**



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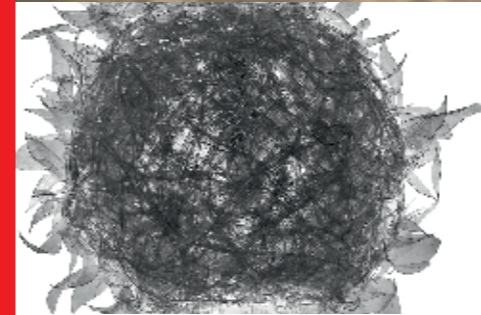
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Ytri-Tungu 1 • 641 Húsavík  
**+354 464 1970**  
 skrifstofa@tjorneshreppur.is  
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# EAST ICELAND

– a hiking haven

**E**ast Iceland is a magnificent wonderland where hikers, wanderers, bird-watchers, kayakers and nature lovers find everything their heart desires; Wilderness, solitude, challenge, other horizons—and some, even peace of mind. But more than anything, East Iceland is known for great outdoor activities, hiking, riding, fishing, exploring, and friendly fishing villages for après adventure.

### Hikes and treks for everyone

Hiking is by far the East Iceland traveller's best way to enjoy the refreshing wilderness. The region is renowned for interesting and diverse routes, ranging from day hikes to adventure-rich multiday treks. Good hiking maps of the whole region are available at Tourist Information Centres and a number of paths have been marked for safer hiking and optimum enjoyment.



### Mt. Snæfell—Lónsöræfi

Mt. Snæfell, the 1833 extinct volcano and Iceland's highest mountain outside the glacier massif of Vatnajökull, presents a magnificent view from the top.

There are guided tours up and around this impressive volcano and the surroundings offer some great sights, such as lush green moss and springs, sparkling in between black sands. Herds of wild reindeer and pink-footed geese roam around. Nearby Brúarjökull probably offers one of the easiest accesses to explore a tremendous ice sheet.

For the avid hiker, the Snæfell–Lónsöræfi trail, with stunning landscapes in the Vatnajökull National Park, is a tempting and trying solitary route across the Eyjabakkajökull glacier before dropping down to the the stunning Lónsöræfi highlands, and the view of expansive green valleys with countless waterfalls, such as Geithellnadalur, Hofsdalur or Viðidalur.



### Kverkfjöll

A tour to Kverkfjöll, experiencing the unique interplay of ice and fire in the imposing surroundings, is an experience. Climb to the hot spring valley for a magnificent view of boiling mudsprings melting a labyrinth of caves through the great Vatnajökull glacier. Try soaking your sore feet in the warm volcanic waters flowing from the mouth of the great Kverkfjöll ice cave. Although the white giant looks peaceful enough, never forget that there are many dangers hidden in the moving ice.

### Víknaflóðir

The 150 km marked paths of the Víknaflóðir (Desert Inlets) in Borgarfjörður eystri,



enable you to have views of beautiful coastlines, mountain ridges, abandoned farmhouses, birdlife, arctic fauna and, with a little luck, maybe even reindeer. The area is known for colourful mountains and semi precious stones, as well as one of the best places to watch puffins. Some of the best day hikes are without a doubt to be found here, including one of Iceland's best kept secrets—the monumental Stóruurð, a labyrinth of enormous rocks through which a little river winds its way and calm turquoise ponds of icy water lie hidden among the huge boulders, lined by flat banks of short, green grass. Just the perfect way to enjoy the best unspoilt, breathtaking nature.

### Skálanes

For those preferring to enjoy a maritime view, a unique opportunity to experience the beauty and calm of East Iceland are its fjords. Visit the wonderful Nature heritage centre at Skálanes at the furthest shore of beautiful Seyðisfjörður or enjoy the ride to Mjóifjörður, one of Iceland's most celebrated fjords, with the breathtaking Klifurbrekkufossar waterfalls.

### Eskifjörður - Norðfjörður

Different, but no less attractive, is the easternmost part, the Gerpissvæði between Eskifjörður and Norðfjörður, where skyscraping peaks join forces with the heavy waves of the Atlantic. The great variety in

coasts is phenomenal. Brightly coloured pebble beaches, black sand beaches of Vöðlavík, awesome sheer cliffs, pristine fjords lined with eider ducks, old ruins of ancient farmsteads and the occasional reindeer herd in deserted coves give you an out of this world feeling of freedom and eternity. Then, finish with a short hike to Helgustaðanáma, the old Iceland Spar mine in Eskifjörður.

### Around Egilsstaðir

For some shorter options, the Hiking Pearls of Fljótsdalshérað, the area around Egilsstaðir give you some great possibilities. Don't miss the 40-minute climb to Iceland's 2nd highest waterfall, Hengifoss, the beautiful basalt pillars of Litlanesfoss in Fljótsdalur, or a stroll in the Hallormsstaður arctic birch forest. They are all truly something to write home about, as are



the solitude of Hjálpleysa, the ½ day hike by Stóra-Sandfell, through mindblowing monuments of the Ice Age. Enjoy a stroll at Húsey or spend a day at Iceland's strangest beach, Þerribjörg, by the Hellisheiði pass to Vopnafjörður. Visit the Elf-lady trail and the Earth history landbridge by the Bustarfell folk museum in Vopnafjörður. This is to



Miðvangi 1-3 • 700 Egilsstaðir  
 +354 472 1750  
 astathor@east.is  
 www.east.is





## THE EDGE OF IMAGINATION

presented by The East Iceland Culture Council

**E**DGES is a co-operative effort combining cultural heritage and contemporary art with a view to strengthen local identity in three peripheral regions of the North Atlantic. Participating artists were challenged to find new ways of portraying the shared heritage of East Iceland, Northern Norway and Donegal, Ireland, while fostering a sense of community and cooperation between the coastal regions. The project partners are Vesterålen Regional Council (Norway), East Iceland Culture Council and Donegal County Council Cultural Services and local heritage museums of each country. The participating museum in Iceland is The East Iceland Heritage Museum.

### The Edge of the Pier, the Sea, the Imagination

At the core of the project are three museum-based artists' workshops, each exploring a similar Edge-related theme - The Edge of The Pier (Vesterålen), The Edge of the Sea (Donegal) focusing on sea journeys by Donegal hermit monks and The Edge of the Imagination (East Iceland) which focuses on mythical folklore and beliefs.

### The Hidden People

Four young artists, led by artist/actress Halldóra Malin Pétursdóttir, have collaborated on the Icelandic side of the project: Maria McKinney from Ireland, Anja Veronica Hansen, from Norway and Icelanders Hlín Davíðsdóttir and Páll Ivan. The four artists, armed with a large portion of artistic license, have taken the vantage point of the hidden people themselves, shedding light on many aspects of their little understood modus operandi and feelings about humans.

### Elves and Fairies

Elves, we learn, are extremely curious about humans, and their biggest fear is that we stop believing in them. In their obsession with the human race, they have been known to 'borrow' single socks in order, which they then use as telescopes in order to spy on the world of humans. Fairies in Ireland are into 'shape shifting' and frequently assume the body of birds. When a bird is stuffed by a taxidermist, fairies take it as a great compliment and as such are enormously pleased to have been honored in this way. Although elves are allergic to iron, and must wear protective gloves when handling anything made of it, they are fascinated by



aluminium, and at least in this exhibition, have papered their walls with the aluminium foil.

Fascinating stuff! But to truly grasp these fanciful revelations you might want to check out the exhibition yourself. The Edge of the Imagination, runs until the 31st of July at the Natural History Museum in Neskaupstaður (weekends only, admission free)

Well, now I know why I have so many socks missing from my sock drawer!

Meningarráð Austurlands -EMV

Skriduklaustri • 701 Egilstöðum  
 +354 471 3230  
 menning@skriduklaustur.is  
 www.skriduklaustur.is/mening

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Images by © Óskar Ragnarsson

## KAFFI STEINN & GUEST HOUSE

Stöðvarfjörður's newest addition

**K**affi Steinn & Guest House is just one more example of Icelandic ingenuity in re-using old buildings that have outgrown their original purpose. The building in question used to be a supermarket which fell into disuse 1995, sitting idle and empty until 2 families banded together to buy the property in 2010.

The café serves soup of the day, pizza, cakes, cappuccino and espresso coffee from its snazzy new Italian coffee maker. There are 9 new rooms all with en suite bath and there are plans in the works for an adjacent meeting/event room. The café is right across the street from the local handicraft market and looks out over the Stöðvarfjörður

fjord and the impressive Sulur Mountains, just a stone's throw from Petra's Stone and Mineral Collection.



Kaffi Steinn -EMV

Fjarðarbraut 41 • 755 Stöðvarfjörður  
 +354 511 3055  
 kaffisteinn@simnet.is



## Café Sumarlína

A cosy café with a French atmosphere – everything home baked  
 Sumarlína Restaurant-Café is a cosy restaurant, with seats for 50 people, situated in a beautifully restored wooden house on seaside in Fáskrúðsfjörður. The restaurant is open every day, 10 am-10 pm, offering a full menu. The emphasis is on local food, meat, fresh fish, crabs, shrimp, crêpes, hamburgers, sandwiches and a delicious selection of cakes. A buffet is available for groups upon request.

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## The French Museum

Pêcheurs Français en Islande

In memory of the French fishermen in Iceland. French fishermen fished in Icelandic waters for over three centuries. The French writer, Pierre Loti, enshrined their memories in his novel "Pêcheurs d'Islande". Fáskrúðsfjörður used to be the base of the French fishermen and they played an important role in the history of the area. A visit to the French Museum is an absolute must!

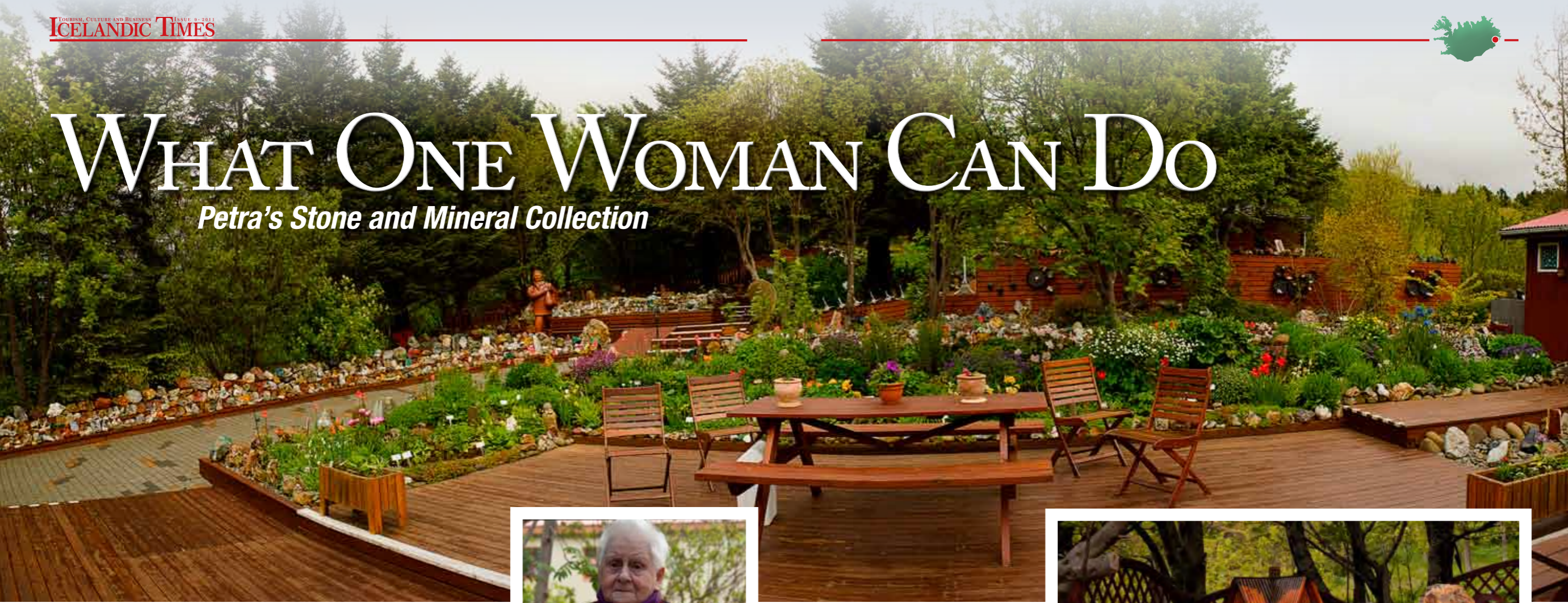
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# WHAT ONE WOMAN CAN DO

## Petra's Stone and Mineral Collection



**L**jósbjörg Petra María Sveinsdóttir was born on Christmas Eve, 1922 in a small traditional farmhouse on the northern shore of Stöðvarfjörður. Beautiful stones have always been a part of Petra's life and, as a child, she showed an uncanny knack for discovering rare semi-precious stones, finding her first geode at age 7. Interestingly, the name Petra, (Greek for 'stone') is not used commonly in Iceland, so it is rather curious that her parents chose this name for her.

### Riches in Remoteness

For the first two decades of her collecting work, Petra was restricted to searching the north slopes of the mountains in Stöðvarfjörðar. Prior to 1962, travel in Iceland was very difficult; the roads were primitive, and no bridge existed as yet over the Stöðvará River. The remoteness limited Petra's scope of search to her own 'back yard'. Nevertheless, it was simply a matter of walking out her front door and up into the mountains above her home to conduct her

searches, often with several of her children in tow. Her collection is therefore a remarkable testament to the vast variety of minerals & stones present in the geology of East Iceland.

### A Rare Method for Find Rare Shells

In addition to her mineral and stone collection, Petra also has a large collection of shells which she built up by using two distinct methods: either by taking long walks by the seaside or by taking a group of children to the local fishermen where they would gather fish guts which they then studied on her kitchen floor. Petra and her students found many rare species of shells by using this unpleasant and smelly research technique.

### Drawn by the Beauty of Geology

When questioned, Petra says that she has a limited interest in geology and other natural sciences. She claims that her interest is solely connected to the beauty of nature, not the science behind it. However, there is evidence to the contrary, as noted by



her correspondence over the years, with geologists, marine biologists and botanists. The letters are both answers to her questions about matters connected with geology and natural science and renderings of thanks for specimens that she has contributed to scientific research. One of these specimens, was a shell that a local boy found near his home. The shell proved to be unique, existing nowhere else in the world and was given the name Stöðvarkóningur, after the place where it was found.

In the past 30 years, hundreds of thousands of visitors of all nationalities

have visited Petra's collection, which is on display in her own home at Sunnuhlíð in Stöðvarfjörður. Visitor numbers reached a zenith in 2003 with 20,000 people passing through the exhibition. During July and August, it is not uncommon for more than 100 visitors to be viewing the collection at the same time and has proven to be the most popular tourist attraction of East Iceland.

### The Rewards of a Lifetime of Searching

In spite of all the interest and even notoriety that Petra's collections have garnered, Petra is not completely at ease with all the attention that her life's work has brought upon her. In 1995, the then president of Iceland, Vigdís Finnbogadóttir invited Petra to a special dinner at the presidential residence at Bessastaðir, where Petra was to be decorated with the prestigious Order of the Falcon award. Petra initially declined the invitation saying, "This award is for the stones and not for myself and it is the stones that should be getting the award, not me!"



After some persuasion from her family and friends, she finally decided to go and had a lovely time. Petra remarks, "I remember feeling so frustrated at not being able to write a song or a poem about all the beauty of God's creation that I have been blessed to see, there is just so, so much variety, it is truly astounding."

### A Dream Realised

But if the entries in her guest book are anything to go by, then it is clear that Petra has indeed succeeded in realising her dream of being able to express her love of nature.

We are indebted to Petra, now with the help of her children and grandchildren, who have opened their hearts, their lives and their home, to share with us one woman's passion for the beauty to be found in the geology of East Iceland.

-EMV



Petra's Stone Museum

Fjarðarbraut • 755 Stöðvarfjörður  
 +354 475 8834  
 petrasveins@simnet.is  
 www.steinapetra.is

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# EMBRACED BY NATURE IN EAST ICELAND

Fishing, Hiking and Hunting in the Tranquility of Breiðdalur Valley with the Elves and Trolls



There are still many areas of Iceland that have, for whatever reason, not yet attracted too much in the way of mass-tourism. Breiðdalur Valley in East Iceland is just one of those places. As remote as it is beautiful, the valley has only a few farms scattered here and there and you can easily have the entire valley pretty much to yourself. There is a good variety of marked trails which are excellent for day hikes and you will also find three of Iceland's most beautiful fishing rivers, Breiðdalsá and its attractive waterfall Beljandi, the Tinnudalsá River and Norðurdalsá River. Autumn is an ideal time for hunting geese, ptarmigan and even reindeer - while fishing for brown trout is possible throughout the year.

So where to stay while surrounded by so much natural beauty? Hotel Staðarborg, of course! So deep is the peace and quiet that guests often wake up to see a herd of reindeer grazing right outside their window. In the small stand of trees behind the hotel, small birds flit from branch to branch, singing and chattering.

Owner/manager Arnar Stefansson tells me that many tourists ask him if this is the right place to see elves and trolls. "I always tell them, yes, this is exactly the right place!"

Hotel Staðarborg is formerly the schoolhouse in Breiðdalur which has now been thoroughly renovated and can accommodate 54 people in 30 spacious rooms complete with private facilities and television. Sleeping bag accommodation and a camping site is also available.

The hotel's restaurant serves à la carte meals and refreshments are available throughout the day. Facilities at Hotel Staðarborg include a jacuzzi and a grassy sports field.

The hotel is located on Highway #1, about 7 km from the village of Breiðdalsvík. It is 625 km from Reykjavík and 75 km from Egilsstaðir. The hotel is also an ideal stop for those who are travelling by the Norraena ferry, as it is only about 100 km from Seyðisfjörður.

So will you finally get a glimpse of one of those elusive elves or trolls here in the natural paradise that is Breiðdalur Valley? You'll have to find the answer to that one yourself!

-EMV



Hótel Staðarborg



Staðarborg • 760 Breiðdalsvík  
 +354 475 6760  
 stadarborg@simnet.is  
 www.stadarborg.is

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# HOME COOKING, GERMAN-STYLE

German Cooking, Icelandic Ingredients - Hotel-Restaurant Margrét



The antique wooden clock strikes nine in the evening and we are just finishing up an enjoyable meal with Irish coffee and a delectable cheesecake from the kitchen of Margret Bekemeier, chef and owner of Hotel-Restaurant Margrét.

Reminiscent of a Swiss chalet, the hotel is made from Finnish pine inside and out and is entirely furnished with antiques brought over from Germany.

This exceptional small hotel has absolutely everything going for it - the view, the food, the décor, the architecture, a kitchen garden and even its own clutch of egg-laying hens. Spectacularly situated in the foothills of the mountain ridge that separates Breiðdalsvík and Stöðvarfjörður, the hotel overlooks the Bay of Breiðdal (Breiðdalsvík). It's hard to imagine a more picturesque and cosy location for a holiday in Iceland. Although there are only 4 rooms, all with private bath, the hotel can sleep up to 11 guests comfortably, making this undoubtedly the smallest hotel in Iceland.

Images © by Tim Vame

Margret, who is an accomplished professional chef from Germany, also grows her own herbs and lettuce and raises her own chickens on the property. The extensive lunch and dinner menu offers traditional German home cooking using the freshest of Icelandic ingredients, and you can be absolutely sure of an excellent and copious meal.

Looking out at the scenery, I am already dreaming about returning again soon, but next time, I'm definitely bringing my husband.



-EMV

Café Margrét



Pverhamri • 760 Breiðdalsvík  
 +354 475 6625  
 cafemargret@simnet.is

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Images by © Tim Vollmer

## JUST BEGGING TO BE EXPLORED

*Breiðdalur Valley of East Iceland*

The East of Iceland is renowned for its unique geological formations and for its magnificent variety of semi-precious stones and minerals due, in part, to natural erosion by the elements. Breiðdalur Valley shares in this rich heritage that is often overlooked by mainstream tourists and as one of Iceland's hidden treasures, the wide and verdant valley is just begging to be explored.

There are many old hiking trails that crisscross the Breiðdalur district which have been used for centuries as postal routes and walking

paths that once connected the isolated villages. In an effort to open the district to more tourism, a local hiking group has started an ongoing project of mapping and marking the ancient paths, making them more accessible and safe for hikers with the use of a GPS system.

Uncountable waterfalls descend from Breiðdalur's many peaks, and just about every farm in the valley is backed by its very own 'private' waterfall.

There are wonderful picnic spots around the valley as well as opportunities for horse

riding and salmon fishing and you can camp just about anywhere that is not farm land.

The Gamla Kaupfélag which dates from 1906, is Breiðdalsvík's oldest building and was recently renovated to house the district's Heritage and Geology Museum. The museum showcases the lives and works of two of Breiðdalur's most famous scholars-Professor Stefan Einarsson, and Dr. George P. Walker.

Stefan Einarsson was a prolific writer, linguist and grammarian who taught for many years at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore and received Iceland's highest honour, the Order of the Falcon in 1939.

An 'adopted son' of Breiðdalur, the world-renowned British vulcanologist, Dr. George P. Walker, spent many years doing research in East Iceland, particularly in the Breiðdalur Valley. He was one of a few foreigners to receive the Icelandic Order of the Falcon (the equivalent of a knighthood), conferred upon him by the President of Iceland in 1977.

Both men contributed much to their respective fields of research and the unique exhibitions are full of fascinating details and artifacts from their life and work.

-EMV

**Breiðdalshreppur**



Ásvegur 32 • 760 Breiðdalsvík  
 +354 470 5560  
 hreppur@breiddalur.is  
 www.breiddalur.is

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## RURAL ROMANTIC PARADISE

*Hótel Bláfell offers a Vintage Escape in Heavenly Surroundings*



### A New Look to the Hotel

The hotel has recently been renovated and is partly constructed from natural wood, which gives it a warm log cabin feel. The rich geological history of the area is shown in parts of the interiors that are made from stones found nearby. The lava in the east fjords is part of the oldest landmass in Iceland, making it rich in semi-precious minerals and stones.

Hotel Bláfell has both standard and deluxe rooms with a bathroom, TV and telephone. Downstairs there is a

In one of Iceland's numerous fjords on the east coast, a wonderful little oasis lies in wait, ready to embrace travellers with an all-Icelandic cosiness and country romance. This is Hotel Bláfell, a family-owned hotel and restaurant, situated in Breiðdalsvík, a rural paradise cloaked by beautiful mountains and peaceful scenery.

Hotel Bláfell is run by couple Friðrik Árnason and Hrafnhildur Hafsteinsdóttir who have been welcoming guests for years, making it their goal to create a homely atmosphere for people to relax in.

### A New Look to the Traditional Village Shoppe

This summer, they have extended their business by converting the village's old general store into a charming little café,

Kaupfjlagið, complete with a souvenir shop, an arts and crafts market selling wool products and various handmade objects by local people, a Tourist Information Centre and wireless Internet. When designing the place, the couple decided to decorate with recycled and vintage finds from the local area representing the history of the house and connecting it to the history of the village, which gives Kaupfjlagið an old fashioned and cosy look. The café menu has light dishes ranging from sandwiches to salads as well as bread and pastry. Everything is homemade, something that has been a trademark of the restaurant at Hotel Bláfell, which prides itself on traditional homemade cooking, using local food from the farmers in the valley and fishermen in the village.

comfortable sitting room with an open fireplace and a wireless Internet free of charge. Also the friendly staff will gladly assist you to make the most of your visit.

Whether you are looking for an invigorating holiday resort in which to unwind in the serenity of nature, or simply longing for a hearty meal as you pass by on your way to many of Breiðdalur's natural gems in the vicinity of Breiðdalsvík, Hotel Bláfell is sure to leave nothing to be desired.

-HH

**Hótel Bláfell**



Sólvöllum 14 • 760 Breiðdalsvík  
 +354 475 6770  
 info@hotelblafell.is  
 www.hotelblafell.is

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# HOTEL FRAMTÍÐ OF DJÚPIVOGUR

Accommodation for every budget



often visible resting on the skerries and tours to the island include a guided hike and visit to Iceland's oldest and smallest 18th century wooden church.

Just a few minutes drive from the harbour is a lovely area for walking and an excellent location to view many interesting species of birds, such as the Red-Throated Diver and the Slavonian Grebe. Special bird-watching huts or 'hides' have been set up to facilitate bird watching which are often used by the many bird-watching enthusiasts who frequent Djúpvogur in summer.

A hike to the top of Búlandstindur is a wonderful way to get in some exercise and the view from the top is breathtaking. On a sunny day, the air is so clear and unpolluted that you can easily see for at least 100 km

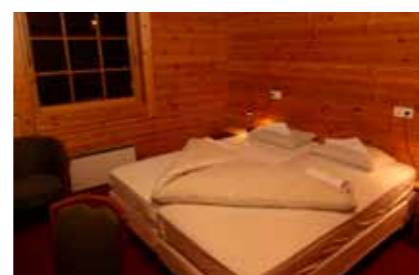


It's rather rare in Iceland to find so many types of accommodation owned by just one company, but Hotel Framtíð has got it all covered; a kind of 'one stop shop' for all your accommodation needs, right in the centre of town.

Facilities are centrally located within the vicinity of the main building at the Djúpvogur harbour: there is a camp site, a separate building for sleeping bag accommodation, 3 self-contained apartments which are great for families and small groups and 4 brand-new self contained cottages that sleep 2-3 persons each. The century-old main house boasts

a new wing with 18 double rooms and en suite bathrooms, a large breakfast/meeting room, the restaurant and 8 cosy bedrooms with shared and private facilities on the upper floor.

The post-card setting for Hotel Framtíð couldn't be more delightful. The restaurant overlooks a small harbour with colourful fishing boats and even the passing sailing yacht. We joke that the fish in the harbour are so close that they simply jump out of the water and land directly on our plates. Owner Thorir explains, "Well, its not too far from the truth, as the fishermen are only going



maybe one kilometre from the harbour to fish".

A favourite of tour guides in Iceland, the popular daily special at Hotel Framtíð is always the catch of the day, whether it be cod, trout, halibut, haddock, redfish or plaice. Other excellent menu items include starters such as mussels (local of course), cooked in white wine, an almost addictive goose breast carpaccio and main dishes such as the heavenly roast lamb fillet or grilled langoustine with garlic butter.

Now that you are comfortably settled into your lodging, you will want to spend a day or two exploring Djúpvogur and surroundings. The Island of Papey, believed to be the home of Irish monks and hermits before the Settlement makes for an interesting day trip. The 2 km-square island was inhabited until 1966 and is now home to many thousands of pairs of Puffins. Only reachable by boat, tours to the island leave the harbour daily at 13:00, returning at 17:00. Seals are

in all directions, making this an experience that you will not soon forget.

## The Eggs of Merry Bay

A lovely walk along the water's edge brings you to an outdoor sculpture, 'The Eggs of Merry Bay' which runs along the west side of Gleðivík (Merry Bay) about 900 metres from the main harbour. Created by the Icelandic artist Sigurður Guðmundsson, the exhibition contains 34 huge granite eggs, one for each of the species of local birds. The largest egg belongs to the colourful Red-Throated Diver, which was chosen as the official bird of Djúpvogur.



**Hótel Framtíð**

Vogalandi 4 • 765 Djúpvogi  
**+354 478 8887**  
 framtid@simnet.is  
 www.simnet.is/framtid

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# THE GATEWAY TO EAST ICELAND

*Forget Reykjavik! Djúpvogur is the Real Iceland*

For the last 20 years or so, the population of many small towns and villages across Iceland has been declining drastically. Recently, however, many talented young people have returned to raise their families in Djúpvogur. Evidence of this trend is readily visible at the town's kindergarten where 36 children between the ages of 1 and 5 are enrolled. Compare this with the grade school where the total population of kids ages 6 through 15 is 55 and you get the idea. The innumerable benefits of living so close to nature in one of Iceland's many enchanting small villages is gradually gaining new ground.

### Explore Nature and History

Djúpvogur is a compact little village with a population of only about 460 inhabitants,



© Tim Vollmer



set at the mouth of both Berufjörður and Hamarsfjörður fjords. One of the area's distinguishing landmarks is Búlandstindur, which presides over the town with its perfect pyramid-shaped peak.

The heart of Djúpvogur is its harbour and the point from which many an interesting day of exploration begins.

Just by the docks you will find the oldest house, Langabúð, which dates back to 1790. The deep red and black timber house serves as a cultural centre and heritage museum dedicated to the sculptor Ríkarður Jónsson and politician Eysteinn Jónsson, who was instrumental in transforming Iceland into a prosperous, independent republic. Coffee, tea and homemade cakes are served in the centre's coffee shop, which is open daily in summer.



### A Home to Talent

Elsewhere in this issue of Icelandic Times, you will find articles about a few of those talented people who call Djúpvogur home, such as clothing and accessory designer, Águsta Arnardóttir, semi-precious stone collector, Auðunn Baldursson and an overview of Djúpvogur's specialists in accommodation, Hotel Framtíð.

In summing up life in Djúpvogur, one poignant phrase written by an enthusiastic blogger comes to mind: 'Forget Reykjavik, this is the Real Iceland'. I couldn't agree more.

### Djúpvogshreppur



Bakka 1 • 765 Djúpavogi  
**+354 478 8288**  
 djupvogur@djupvogur.is  
 www.djupvogur.is

-EMV



# EYJÓLFSTADIR GUEST HOUSE

*Cheerful and Spotlessly Clean*

Nestled down between the undulating folds of Fossardalur Valley in the East Fjords, with its 30-some waterfalls, lies Eyolfstaður Guest House. Cheerful and spotlessly clean, the sleeping-bag-only guest house is popular with hikers and walking tour groups and is one of the most inexpensive lodgings in the area. We met up with 19 year-old Johann, who showed us around. "This house is where

my grandparents lived until 1977 and it has been run as a guest house since 1983,"



Johann tells us. Many of his grandparent's original furnishings have been used in the decorating, giving the cute guest house a homey 50's or 60's charm that makes it so remarkable. Six comfortable bedrooms sleep a total of 22 people and

there is large, fully-equipped kitchen where guests can do their own cooking.

### Eyjólfstaðir

-EMV



Eyjólfstöðum • 765 Djúpvogur  
**+354 478 8971**  
 foss@heima.is  
 www.djupvogur.is/eyjolfstadir

# YOU CAN'T JUDGE A ROCK BY ITS COVER

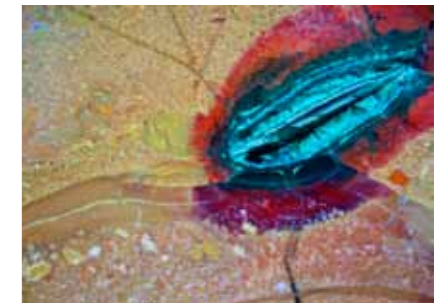
*Auðun's Stone & Mineral Collection*

Rocks, for me, have always been pretty much, well...just rocks. Then I went to East Iceland and got a whole new perspective on the hidden dimension of rock insides that I barely knew existed.

Auðunn Baldursson of Djúpvogur has been collecting stones for the past 21 years but four years ago decided to bring his hobby to new levels, by investing in a stone cutter and polishing equipment. Auðun obviously enjoys the look of delight and surprise on the faces of his visitors as he turns each rock around, exposing their impressive colours and patterns.

The pride and joy of his private collection is the 460 kg monster of a rock containing agate, quartz crystal and zeolyte which is the largest of its type ever found in Iceland.

The small entrance fee of 500kr per person will help Auðun realise his dream of moving the collection out from above his mechanic's shop and into a more suitable location.



### Auðun's Stone Collection



Mörk 8b • 765 Djúpvogur  
**+354 861 0570**  
 audunn@steinasafn.is  
 www.steinasafn.is

Images by © Tim Vollmer



## FASHION DESIGN GOES ALL-NATURAL

Arfleifð - Icelandic Heritage Ecomuseum

With so much emphasis placed on using only local ingredients these days, it should come as no surprise that one fashion designer has come up with the brilliant idea of putting to good use the by-products created by the food industry.

are so changeable that I am always learning something new and I get the inspiration to create based on this experience, much in the same way that an artist is inspired by various mediums", explains Ágústa.

The list of materials used in Ágústa's creations reads like a dinner menu: cod, perch, spotted wolffish, salmon, catfish and lamb. Using skins that would have normally been discarded and which have then been tanned at Atlantic Leather in north Iceland, the fish leather is strong yet soft and can be dyed to the designer's specifications. Ágústa takes things one step further with the inclusion of reindeer skin, seal skin and fur and even using strands of horse tail, bones and horns for decorative elements in her creations.

To celebrate Arfleifð's first anniversary in March of 2011, a new collection was premiered at Reykjavik's Grand Hotel, with a fashion show entitled 'Fashion with Flavour'. The dinner menu, featuring dishes of fish, lamb and reindeer was served by models dressed in Arfleifð designed clothes and it has been non-stop for Ágústa ever since.

The Arfleifð Artisan Workshop, Ágústa's home and atelier in Djúpivogur, is open to the public seven days a week. Visitors can learn about the craft, its history and development, chat directly with Ágústa



and watch the making of the items available in Arfleifð's boutique.

Arfleifð is a member of the Ecomuseum Artisan Network of Northern Europe, and the first Icelandic artisan to gain this distinction.

### Definition: Ecomuseum

An Ecomuseum is a new concept dedicated to the preservation of authentic techniques or know-how used in the production of traditional craft or foods and is an important part of cultural tourism.



**Arfleifð** -EMV  
 Hammersmíni 16 • 765 Djúpavogi  
 +354 863 1475  
 agusta@arfleifd.is  
 www.arfleifd.is

Ágústa Margrét Arnardóttir, who has been developing her techniques over the last 8 years, was one of the first few designers in Iceland, if not the world, to see the tremendous potential in working with fish leather, which is ideally suited for clothing and accessories. "Each type of skin has its own character and personality which I try to bring out in my designs. The materials

# ICELAND HISTORY & HERITAGE MAPS

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## THE ICONIC JÖKULSÁRLÓN

*A Fantasy World of Rock and Ice*

The Jökulsárlón Glacial Lagoon is, without a doubt, at the very top of my list of places to see in Iceland. Not only is it one of my favourite places, it is one that most definitely deserves all the superlatives of the English language—unbelievable, stunning, magnificent are three that instantly spring to mind. It's the place, given only three or four days in the country, that I would go to first—and for two reasons:

First, just because of the unparalleled destination in itself.

The second reason is that the drive from Reykjavik to Jökulsárlón takes you along the whole southern coast, which is so varied and dramatic that it makes the drive totally

worth it. You could easily spend your entire vacation exploring the south coast and not run out of things to see and do.

### So accessible

There are not many glacial lagoons existing in the world today and certainly none that are this accessible. Located just a stone's throw from the main ring road, the lagoon is actually much bigger and deeper than it appears. With an area measuring 23 square km (36.8 square miles) in size, you could easily fit the island of Heimaey (in the Westman Islands) into it with room to spare. It's 250 metres (825 feet) depth would fit five Leaning Towers of Pisa, stacked one on top of another!

### Scenic boat tours

Upon arrival at the lagoon, you will find a small café where you can enjoy coffee, hot chocolate, waffles, or soup and sandwiches. Jökulsárlón ehf offers guided boat tours using specially-equipped amphibious boats which take you further into the lagoon, sailing among the icebergs.

Across the road, where the lagoon flows into the sea, you can walk down to the water's edge to witness the baby 'bergs' that dot the shoreline- a truly amazing sight!



Images by © Emily Burdjevski

### Boat tours are available daily

July and August - 9.00 to 19.00  
 15th Sept. - 30th Sept. - 10.00 to 17.00

Jökulsárlón

-EMV



Kirkjubraut 7 • 780 Hornafirði  
 +354 478 2122  
 jokulsarlon@jokulsarlon.is  
 www.jokulsarlon.is

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## EUROPE'S LARGEST GLACIER

*Vatnajökull National Park, South Iceland*

One of the greatest nature preservation projects in Iceland is Vatnajökull National Park – the home to Europe's largest glacier. The glacier and its active volcanoes are, however, far from being the park's only attraction. You can also find powerful waterfalls, colourful geothermal areas, vast barren landscapes, mysterious canyons and historical sites where Iceland's most famous outlaw resided in exile – to name but a few.

The Vatnajökull National Park was formally established in 2008, when several smaller parks were merged into one. It covers 13% of Iceland, or around 13.000 km<sup>2</sup> with the glacier and its many rivers and streams that flow from it towards the sea. The largest river is Jökulsá á Fjöllum, which runs over 200 km north, over Europe's most powerful waterfall, Dettifoss and the adjacent geological mystery and natural beauty spot, Ásbyrgi, to the Arctic Sea.

"The park's uniqueness is that no two areas are the same. Each has its own charm and beauty and is definitely worth a visit. You can actually visit the park year after year and never set your foot in the same place twice." Other locations include a "hellish" volcanic crater, ice caves, mysterious canyons and oases in the desert of the Icelandic highlands.

been established as actual roads and driving on them was, for all intents and purposes, considered off-road driving. But now the formal road system has been increased from around 250 km to about 700 km of roads, ensuring travellers can access all the boundaries of the park without disturbing its environment," says Þórður.

### Safety First

Although elaborate safety measures have been taken throughout the park, risks associated with glaciers and glacial rivers



should never be taken lightly. Not all the river crossings in the park have been bridged and some require special vehicles to cross and the glacier itself should not be traversed without proper equipment and information.

You'll find information centres in Kirkjubæjarklaustur, Höfn, Ásbyrgi, Skaftafell and Skriðuklaustur and during the summer, the number of park rangers is increased substantially to make sure your visit to the park is an enjoyable one.

### Always Something New

The amazing sights within the park are too numerous to mention and all of them differ wildly from each other. Among the most popular are the beautiful Skaftafell area and Ásbyrgi, but Þórður H. Ólafsson, Manager of the Park Office, encourages visitors to explore its other, less visited locations.

### Renewed Road System

Since the park's establishment, several changes have been made to preserve the delicate ecosystem and increase the accessibility and service to its visitors. One has been the total overhaul of the park's road system. "Before, it mostly consisted of tracks and trails which had been used for years without having ever

Vatnajökulsþjóðgarður

-VAG



Skaftafelli • 781 Óræfi  
 +354 470 8300  
 info@vjp.is  
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# HUMARHÖFNIN OF HÖFN

*Langoustine finds its niche in the New Icelandic Cuisine*

Iceland is known for some of the finest fresh fish in the world and a large share of the country's catch is landed at Höfn í Hornafirði, on the south-east coast. Höfn (which sounds like 'Hup' to our ears and means harbour) is also known as the langoustine capital of Iceland, with a several thousand visitors in town over the first weekend in July for the annual Humarhátíð (Langoustine) Festival.

So what's the langoustine capital of Iceland doing without a fine-dining restaurant that can do justice to the lovely little crustacean? This is the idea behind the sea-food restaurant

DuPont and many of his dishes, such as the beautifully presented 'Mix of Whole Langoustine and Tails', the famous 'Black Magic Sauce' and Duck Confit have

been renovated and taken over by the restaurant. There is an exhibit of the history of the house, located on the 2nd floor.



Humarhöfnin which has been a big success since it was opened 5 years ago by Anna Þorsteinsdóttir, her brother Ari Þorsteinsson and their spouses.

Popular with tourists from the Mediterranean countries, Humarhöfnin is the only restaurant in Iceland that serves whole langoustine. (The concept is so new in Iceland, that each diner who orders langoustine receives illustrated instructions on the finer points of using the lobster cracker and fork that come with the dish.) The menu was developed and created by the French chef Jacques

been very successful. Paired with one of Humarhöfnin's specially selected wines, you are in line for an absolute feast. The crème brûlée, made from local eggs and imported Madagascar vanilla will have you swooning and you might want or need to order a double portion.

The casual, bright and lively decor fits Humarhöfnin's harbour location and the friendly wait staff will be happy to point out the very boat that brought in the day's catch, moored at the docks just a few hundred metres away. The building was formerly the town co-op which has

## Comfit

Confit is one of the oldest methods used to preserve food and is a specialty of south western France

-EMV

**Humarhöfnin**



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Hafnarbraut 4 • 780 Höfn  
 +354 478 1200  
 info@humarhofnin.is  
 www.humarhofnin.is



# OASIS UNDER THE GLACIER

*Freysnes Restaurant, Supermarket & Petrol Station*

Opened in 1995 by Anna Maria Ragnarsdóttir and her husband Jón Benediktsson, Freysnes Restaurant & Supermarket is often a welcome stop to break the long stretches between Kirkjubæjarklaustur and Höfn. Popular with tourist guides and truckers who circle the country, you will find hearty home cooking, a salad bar and hot meals that make up the lunch or dinner menu. If you left your tube of toothpaste down the road

150 km ago, then the mini-supermarket is a convenient place to restock.

## 1,300 Years of Family History

In conversation with Anna Maria, who divides her time between the restaurant and the Skaftafell Visitors' Centre just 5 km away, I am amazed to learn that her family has been living in the area since about the year 1300. It's a wonder that genealogists the world over are not flocking at her door for an interview.

## A Father's Vision Fulfilled

The story of Anna Maria's ancestors is well documented outside the Skaftafell Visitors' Centre. Her father, Ragnar Stefánsson, who was way ahead of his time, was one of the few of his generation who had a vision of preserving the area for use as a national park. In his day, this was definitely a 'foreign' concept that was not at all welcome among many of his compatriots. "I think my father would be very pleased, if he were alive today, to see that his dream of preserving the land is finally coming to fruition", says Anna Maria.

Images © by Tim Vollmer



## Vatnajökull - Record of Extremes

In June 2008, Skaftafell National Park became a part of Vatnajökull National Park which covers an area of some 12,000 km<sup>2</sup> or at most 12% of the area of Iceland and is one of the most popular tourist destinations in the country. Vatnajökull National Park holds the record for having both the warmest and coldest recorded temperatures, for being the wettest and driest location and containing the highest and lowest elevations in Iceland.

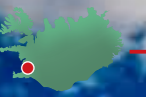
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**Freysnes Restaurant & Shop**



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Freysnesi • 785 Óraefum  
 +354 478 2242  
 freysnes@gmail.com



# HERE TODAY, CHANGED TOMORROW

*Reykjavik Excursions takes you to a Highland Paradise*

The process of creation continues unabated in Iceland and what you see today, may be very different tomorrow. Those familiar with the Þórsmörk (Thorsmörk) nature reserve prior to the notorious eruptions would see a totally different landscape today. By next year, things will probably be different again in this constant war of creation and destruction, in which creation always wins out in the end.

In almost any country, I could buzz around in my little VW Golf. Even here in Iceland, I can drive over most of the country. But I'm told I can't take it to Þórsmörk - and I decided to find out why.

Driving down to the beautiful Seljalandsfoss waterfall would be no problem, but I took the Reykjavik Excursions tour bus there so I could

enjoy the view. I got a lot more than I bargained for, as I was regaled with history, stories and anecdotes the whole way that made the countryside come alive as never before.

Then, from a distance, a clear white line down a high escarpment showed we were almost at the waterfall. This is the one you can walk behind and it's worth the spray, believe me. It's not the only waterfall here, though. There are a whole line of falls which make this a beautiful place to stop and even camp. But I was on a mission.

This year, a new monster bus has joined the RE fleet. I saw it at the bus station, fresh out of Customs, still with plastic on the seats. At first glance, it looked like a NATO rocket launcher with windows. Surely, this

is overkill? The huge windows give a panoramic view and it's so high off the ground, you feel as if you're flying up to Þórsmörk. There are only two in the world - and both are in the south of Iceland! Its tyres alone would dwarf my car. It can pass through waters 2 m high that even jeeps cannot get through. I'd need diving gear in my car. A Super jeep would be taking me today, though. We drove in a convoy of 4 cars, carefully picking our way through the rocks.

The first thing you see is desolation as you drive up the valley. The rugged beauty of the mountains; the multitude of rivers rushing to join the larger Markarfljót river, crossing the rock-strewn valley floor. Just the first river answered my question as we plunged down its steep bank and its waters

splashed over the top of the jeep. I would be a drowned rat! - And this was only the first of many. No, you can't take your car on this route. I'm convinced.

At one point, the river current even started to sweep the heavy jeep ahead of us downstream as it crossed. We were up against powerful forces here. Now I see the need for the new monster bus.

The mountains are covered with snow - but this year, the snow is covered with dark stains of ash. This is a rare sight, indeed. Then the GPS shows that we are in the middle of a lake! All I see is rough ground. There's a small pond barely big enough to float a child's boat in it. Our driver tells us that the ground here rose by 50 metres during the eruption - that's the height of a 16-storey apartment block-with the

roof! This year, the Ljónið lake is but a memory - but next year, who knows?

Just as I am beginning to wonder why people come here, the vista opens up into the most beautiful, verdant scene at Valaknúkur. This area has its own amazing micro-climate. Woods and fields, caves and mountains. This is hiking territory at its best! From here on, there are paths of different difficulties, surrounded by greenery that is bursting through the ash. The trees and undergrowth thrive in this highland Shangri-La.

There is a small resort at nearby Húsadalur, with sleeping accommodation of all kinds, for those who can stay longer, and a log-style restaurant, whose staff work tirelessly to provide the kind of delicious meals hikers and visitors need.

This food is good! A hot pot and showers top off this highland resort.

The tour is a 12 hour trip, with pick-ups from Reykjavik hotels around 7:30 am. GPS-guided commentary is provided en route and then you transfer to the new bus at Seljalandsfoss for the trip into the interior. This popular tour is worth every minute and will leave you with an amazing photo album and memories. Once you've been on one of these tours, all the others suddenly look very inviting!

-ASF



Photo © www.olihar.com

Reykjavik Excursions

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BSI Bus Terminal • 110 Reykjavik  
 +354 580 5400  
 main@re.is  
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## NOTHING IN SIGHT BUT NATURE

*Kirkjubæjarklaustur, Skaftárhreppur District*

If you travel south on Road No. 1, take a look at the pearls of nature which are as unique as their history when you enter Skaftárhreppur.

The Skaftárhreppur district derives its name from Skaftá river, which is 115 km long, rising beneath the Skaftárjökull glacier and flowing to the sea. Skaftárhreppur covers a very large territory, fully 7% of Iceland's total land area. It is part of the Katla Geopark Project, founded in November 2010 (see [www.katlageopark.is](http://www.katlageopark.is)). With a population of only 447 inhabitants, there are about 15.5 km<sup>2</sup> per person. There is peace and quiet here, making the perfect place to relax and unwind.

been especially noteworthy. In 2010, there was an eruption in Eyjafjallajökull and in 2011 in Grímsvötn. A lot of ash fell on Skaftárhreppur but the inhabitants united to clean it up so you can enjoy the peaceful surroundings and nature. The land is constantly changing, though, from the glaciers to the vast black sand beaches.

### Hiking in History

There are numerous other natural wonders in Skaftárhreppur. Systrastapi (Sister's Rock) is one of them, a steep-sided rocky hill west of Klaustur. Folklore says that two nuns were buried up on the rock after being burnt at the stake for breaking their vows



Images © by Ingibjörg Einiksdóttir

the unique geology in the area is constantly evolving. It's opening has been delayed due to the recent eruption. However, Klaustur is the ideal spot from which to take day trips into the southern highlands.

### A Touch of the Irish

Kirkjubæjarklaustur, with around 120 inhabitants is growing, and is the centre of commerce, service, tourism and industry. The town's name, which is often shortened to Klaustur, refers to long and interesting story of Irish hermits who are believed to have lived at Kirkjubær before the Norse settlement of Iceland. Tradition says that it has always been inhabited by Christians and the pagans were not welcome.

### Soothe the Stress Away

There is nothing to beat a refreshing swim and relaxing dip in a hot pot - especially after a day's hiking, regardless of weather. The outdoor swimming pool at Klaustur has recently been rebuilt into a high-quality pool.

-EMV

#### Skaftárhreppur



Klausturv. 15 • 880 Kirkjubæjarklaustri  
**+354 487 4840**  
 sveitarstjori@klaustur.is  
[www.klaustur.is](http://www.klaustur.is)

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The cornerstone of the local economy is the agriculture and animal husbandry, while tourism is a growing sector.

### On Fire in the Basement

The geology of Skaftárhreppur has been evolving over centuries, creating marvellous pearls of nature caused mainly by volcanic eruptions and the sudden floods that come from the glaciers. The last two years have

over 1,000 years ago. Systrafoss (Sister Falls) are beautiful twin waterfalls, surrounded by towering 65 year old pines and is located in Klaustur. Then there is Eldgjá (Fire Canyon), a spectacular volcanic canyon 270 metres deep, 600 metres wide and over 70 km long. The newest attraction will be Geo Hikes, consisting of a brand new 20 km marked hiking trail that circles Klaustur, with informative signs giving insights as how

## UNDER THE GLACIER

*A Breathtaking, Quiet Summer at Hotel Laki*

There is a saying in Iceland that is thoroughly fitting for Hotel Laki: 'Who needs pictures on the walls when you have such breathtaking views?' Designed in 2003 by the Icelandic architectural firm Yrki, the hotel was created to make the most of the abundant summer light. Huge vertical and panoramic windows flood the spacious dining and recreation areas with natural light and on the far horizon, the gargantuan Vatnajökull Glacier presides over the landscape.

### Volcanic Benefits

In May 2011, the Grímsvötn Volcano, situated in the Vatnajökull Glacier, woke up briefly to spew a few thousand tons of ash around the area. As abruptly as it began, the volcano petered out a few days later and nary a peep has been heard from it since.

Hotel Laki had to deal with a few centimeters of ash but that was quickly swept away and now its back to business



as usual. On the plus side, volcanic ash has been found to be beneficial to plants in Iceland and therefore is good for the farmers in the area.

### Life Under the Glacier

The clean, modern Scandinavian style hotel comprises 64 double rooms with private

bath and 15 self-contained guest cottages, a challenging golf course. It also offers ATV trips in and around Vatnajökull Glacier. There is a gift shop which carries woollen goods, landscape paintings by local artists as well as jewellery and other hand-made items.

The extensive lunch and dinner buffet menu includes many dishes. A partial list includes: Soup of the day with homemade bread, smoked duck, minke whale and salmon, smoked and marinated goose, homemade patés. Hot courses change from day to day but can include vegetarian as well



as meat dishes. There is also a wide selection of desserts such as tiramisu, freshly baked cakes and hot berry sauces.

Plans for a spa have been on the drawing board for a while now, so this is something that guests can look forward to, possibly by summer 2013.

#### Hótel Laki



Efri-Vík • 880 Kirkjubæjarklaustri  
**+354 487 4694**  
 efrivik@simnet.is  
[www.hotellaki.is](http://www.hotellaki.is)

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-EMV

# KNIT-WITS

*Vik-wool Unravelled by Víkurprjón*

The early settlers of Iceland set the tone of the country by dotting its empty hills with sheep. These sheep were one of the few things that the first settlers brought with them on their journey to Iceland and became an important source of food, clothing, and even wealth. Perhaps this explains why the population of sheep is twice the human population and why much of the human population is occupied in knitting.

continued knitting in the original patterns brought by the first Icelandic settlers, who knew just how to deal with the damp and chill.

### Imagination and Tradition

Just a quick Icelandic lesson: Víkurprjón means Vík-wool (Vík knitting) and for the past thirty years they have turned wool into everything from traditional hats, scarves,

and sweaters in natural colours to striking,



You also might have realised that, with the unpredictability of Icelandic weather comes the need for warm, waterproof clothes. This is why the people at Víkurprjón have



contemporary patterns dreamt up by imaginative designers. As one of the best-known and oldest producers of Icelandic wool products, they have turned a time-honoured tradition into a thriving business

and paved the way for an entire industry.

The wool, processing, design, and production are Icelandic and Víkurprjón has maintained a staff dedicated to creating clothing distinguished by its quality and attention to detail. Most of the work is done on the premises of the two-storey building where visitors can take a peek at the people behind the scenes. Visitors can climb to the second floor of the shop to look down onto the bustling workshop and see how their clothes are made before purchasing them.

### Sounds of the Past, Books of Today

Wool is not the only focus in the store, which treats travellers to Icelandic folk music as they browse. The music plays softly in the background of the shop so that visitors can hear the voice of a bygone era as they stroll around. Víkurprjón's selection of books contain anything and everything visitors want to know about Iceland, from the contemporary nightlife in Reykjavik



and recent volcanic eruptions to Old Norse myths and well-known Icelandic sagas. Best of all, visitors are just a few minutes from Vík's shore with its black sand beaches and rugged coastline. This store on the southern tip of Iceland gives travellers the chance to

Víkurprjón hf

-KB



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# RECORDING A CHANGING WORLD

*One Man's Vision Becomes Skógar Folk Museum*

**B**yggðasafnið á Skógum, better known to English speakers as Skógar Folk Museum, is a unique place. It was founded on 1st December 1949 in a small basement room of the Skógar school by Þórður Tómasson, who always had great interest in preserving the original Icelandic folk culture.

## A Pivotal Moment in History

The establishment of the museum took place at a turning point in Icelandic history, when a new culture was taking over from the old: the old agricultural society was disappearing. Farmers were giving up both on agriculture and rowing out to sea in their open boats, and more and more were moving from the rural areas or fishing villages to Reykjavík.

Over time, the museum has expanded greatly; the collection of items which began in 1945 is still growing today, and the museum is now divided into three parts, the Folk Museum, Open Air Museum and



Museum of Transportation. Documents and handcrafted objects are on show connected with fishing, agriculture and farm life and, in the most recent building, transportation and telecommunication.

## The South Coast on Show

Besides the various exhibits in the main building, there is a lot to view outside as well. All the buildings outside were in use on the South Coast of Iceland at some time. They were deconstructed piece by piece by the curator, to be rebuilt and shown in the open-air museum. You



should take your time going through them, because it is a unique experience! One of the farmhouses is built as a 'fjósbaðsstofa': the living quarters that were traditionally built above the cowshed, using the cows as the main heating source. And no one should miss a visit to the old turf farmhouses Icelanders used to live in; the oldest is from 1838!

Skógakirkja, the church of Skógar, which was consecrated in 1998, has elements dating back to 1600. Holt was the first house built of timber in Vestur-Skaftafellssýsla, in 1878. The children's school from Litli-Hvammur in Mýrdal was originally built in 1901. In the newly built area, you can see how fast Iceland has changed since the mid-20th century.

In the Museum of Transportation, you can find a cafeteria where you can get traditional Icelandic food or some light refreshments during your visit, and the museum's shop where you can buy handcrafted pieces to remember a beautiful day. The fascinating Folk Museum of Skógar will surely show you that time moves fast here.

**Skógar Folk Museum** -EMV

Skógum • 861 Hvolsvelli  
 +354 487 8845  
 skogasafn@skogasafn.is  
 www.skogasafn.is

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# HOTEL SKÓGAR

*Where good things come in small packages*



**A**ny journey around Iceland's south coast inevitably brings you to the peaceful village of Skógar and its famous waterfall. The tiny village is really just a collection of houses, a camping site, a folk and transportation museum, and a great small hotel, Hotel Skógar.

On the upper floor, you will find four spacious and beautifully appointed deluxe rooms, while eight double rooms, all with en-suite bathrooms are found on the ground-floor. A welcoming wood-burning fireplace in the dining room sets the tone for romantic dinners and the hotel's top-class chef will not fail to impress with her succulent dishes of Icelandic lamb or fresh fish.

Hotel Skógar is ideally situated for visitors wishing to hike over the Fimmvörðuháls route and onwards to Landmannalaugar and Thorsmörk. Outings in the area include the magnificent Dyrhólaey cliffs, teeming with birds in summer and a visit to the Skógar Folk Museum with its original turf houses and turn of the century buildings. 10 km to the west of Skógar brings you to Thorvaldseyri Farm's new visitor centre, which chronicles the eruption of Eyafjallajökull in 2010.

After a day of exploring the area, be sure to make use of Hotel Skógar's relaxing hot tub and sauna or enjoy a glass of wine out on the deck, creating an altogether wonderful stay at Hotel Skógar - a must while travelling in Iceland this summer.



**Hótel Skógar** -EMV

Skógum • 861 Hvolsvelli  
 +354 487 4880  
 hotelskogar@hotelskogar.is  
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# A MEANINGFUL SLICE OF LIFE

*Thorvaldseyri Visitor Centre, South Iceland*

In case you missed the 2010 'event of the year' here in Iceland, better known as the Eyafjallajökull eruption, you can now get a chance to experience at least some of the excitement at the newly opened Thorvaldseyri Visitor Centre.

Featuring a powerful 20 minute documentary punctuated with gripping footage of ground and aerial views of the eruption, the tiny yet impressive visitor centre sits right at the foot of the volcano itself. The film is narrated in a compelling first person perspective by farm owners Ólafur Eggertsson and his wife Guðný Valberg, allowing us a fascinating glimpse into their lives during that uncertain spring of 2010.



The geothermally-heated visitor centre has already received over 1600 visitors since opening on 14th April, 2011 and also contains a gift shop and photo gallery. A definite must this summer and worth every kronur of the 800 kr entrance fee.

**Porvaldseyri** -EMV



Porvaldseyri • 861 Hvolsvelli  
 +354 487 5757  
 oll@thorvaldseyri.is  
 www.thorvaldseyri.is

# ICE & ADVENTURE TOURS

*Glacier Jeeps*

Located not far from Jökulsárlón in East Iceland, Glacier Jeeps Ice and Adventure tours offers exhilarating guided glacier adventures that might be the one stop in Iceland that changes your life. Exhilarating is the only word that adequately describes the view from Europe's largest glacier, the mighty Vatnajökull.

Glacier Jeeps offers year-round adventure jeep tours using specially fitted 4WD

vehicles, snowmobile tours and hiking tours. All equipment - helmets, snowsuits, snow boots, and snow climbing or hiking gear is included in the price.

Tours depart twice daily at 9:30 or 14:00 from road F985, where you will begin the 16 km drive up to Jöklašel Restaurant, which also serves as a base. This is where guests get their gear for their respective tours and then, you're off! Each tour is approximately

3 to 3½ hours in length and there will be plenty of time for photo breaks and enjoying the view. It is possible to stop at Jöklašel for refreshments after the tour.

## A Mountaintop Restaurant

Jöklašel Restaurant, at an altitude of 840m, is the highest restaurant in Iceland and serves as a base for most Glacier Jeep activities. The restaurant, which comfortably seats 80 to 90 guests, offers a soup and salad buffet lunch, a variety of cakes and coffee, teas and soft drinks. A seafood buffet for groups, freshly caught arctic char (trout) and salmon are available by special arrangement. Incentive groups can enjoy a delicious buffet lunch right on the glacier while enjoying breathtaking views of both the glacier and the Atlantic Ocean.

*Tours need to be booked one day in advance.*

**Glacier Jeeps** -ASF



Silfurbraut 15 • 780 Hornafjörður  
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 www.glacierjeeps.is



# PERFECT PLACE TO STAY IN ICELAND

*Viator summer cottage rental agency – a perfect option for families and small groups*

Summer cottages offer more convenience, more flexibility and more independence to holidaymakers than any other kind of accommodation – especially for small groups and families with children.

The popularity of summer cottages in Iceland continues to increase both among the local population as well as tourists from abroad. Their popularity is hardly surprising because of the many benefits they afford to users.

Viator summer cottage rental agency provides an exclusive booking service on behalf of the owners of privately-owned summer cottages in all parts of Iceland. This means that visitors in Iceland are certain to find one which exactly matches their

needs in terms of size, price, location and additional features.

Each cottage bears witness to the taste of its owner. The surroundings range from

coastal scenery, farm meadows to volcanic landscape – even volcanoes. Cool days are never a problem when staying in a summer cottage in Iceland because they're equipped with heating systems.

Most of the 14,000 summer cottages in Iceland are privately owned. Some of Viator's cottages are equipped with a hot tub, either indoors or outdoors. A hot tub is the perfect place to wind down after a busy day, or to enjoy the northern lights from mid-September to mid-April.

Summer cottage stays offer small groups and families the exclusive use of a cottage. Holidaymakers can come and go as they please without consulting with a front-desk, or be disturbed by other people. And finally, the cottages are often located closer to major attractions in the countryside than more conventional kinds of accommodation.



**Viator ehf**



Ármla 24 • 108 Reykjavík  
 +354 544 8990  
 petur@viator.is  
 www.viator.is



## ÞJÓÐVELDISBÆRINN

*The Farm That Opens the Door to the Past*

**B**elow the mountain of Sámstaðamúli in Þjórsárdalur (Thjórsárdalur) in Southern Iceland lies the medieval farm, Þjóðveldisbærinn (Thjóthveldisbærinn). It is a reconstruction of the houses at the nearby 12th century farm of Stöng. The farm was constructed as a replica of Stöng farm as a part

deserted is something of a mystery. The Hekla volcano violently erupted in the year 1104, spewing ash and lava and it is thought that, at this time, Þjórsárdalur, with its 20 farms was evacuated. However, some doubt has recently been cast on this chronology, with new evidence coming to light that seems to point to the Stöng farm and others continuing to be in operation after this event. Therefore it cannot be excluded that Hekla's next eruptions in 1158 or even in 1300, may have led to Þjórsárdalur being abandoned.

### Celebrating the 1100th Year Anniversary of Icelandic Settlement

During the preparations for the anniversary of 1100 years of the settlement of Iceland, well-known architect Hördur Ágústsson, the foremost expert on pre-modern housing in Iceland, was commissioned to reconstruct a full-scale replica of the Stöng farm. Ágústsson agreed and construction began during the year of celebrations, 1974 and was completed in 1977. Þjóðveldisbærinn was built to demonstrate that the medieval settlers in Iceland did not inhabit dirty hovels but lived in carefully built and stately buildings. The project was sponsored in part by the Prime Minister's office, the state power company and by the local municipality, Gnúpverjahreppur.



of the celebrations for the 1100th anniversary of the settlement of Iceland, celebrated in 1974. Þjóðveldisbærinn is a historical venue exhibiting examples of medieval Icelandic handicrafts and technology. It is open to visitors throughout the summer from June to September.

### Rising Out of Volcanic Ash

Stöng farm was excavated in 1939 by a team of Nordic archeologists. The farm revealed much about the construction of the structures and buildings on medieval farms in Iceland. However, just when and why the farm became

### Skeljastaðir - Another Medieval Farm

Þjóðveldisbærinn is close to another long-abandoned medieval farm, Skeljastaðir (Skeljastathir). Skeljastaðir presents a classic example of medieval Icelandic architecture. The main building has six rooms: the

entrance; a sleeping and working room, called the skáli; the living room; the storage room, likely used as a pantry; a small chamber (probably sleeping room for the master and mistress of the farm) and a toilet room. Two of these rooms form the hub of activity on the farm, the skali and the living room. Although it was also used as sleeping quarters, the skáli was important, as all manner of tasks were conducted there. The living room was also a multi-purpose space, where the women wove, cared for the children and served the meals.



### The Turf Church

Visitors to Þjóðveldisbærinn can also visit the turf church, the most recently reconstructed building on the farm. It was erected to celebrate the 1,000-year anniversary of Christianity in Iceland. The design of the church was based on a church which was found during archeological research in Stöng in 1986-1998. Remains of several other medieval churches were also used to design the replica. It was ordained in the year 2000.

-AJ

### Sögualdarbærinn



Háleitibraut 68 • 103 Selfoss  
**+354 488 7713**  
 einarmat@lv.is  
 www.thjodveldisbaer.is



## ELDSTÓ ART CAFÉ & RESTAURANT

*A South Coast Oasis for Food and Art in Hvalsövellur*

**T**hey say that Iceland has the highest number of writers, artists and musicians per-capita of any country on earth. Many of them congregate in the more well-known towns like Hveragerði,

### The Potter's House

Occupying the old post office, right on the main road though town, Eldstö Art Café & Restaurant is also known as 'The Potter's House'. It is here that Thor Sveinsson and his wife G. Helga Ingadóttir run a unique combination of café and gallery where you can buy exquisite hand-turned pieces by the master potter, Thor, and enjoy a properly brewed espresso or cappuccino, tea or hot chocolate, light lunches and dinners.

Helga is also a very talented jewellery designer and is the creator of the glazes used on all the pottery at Eldstö Café. She is quite the accomplished country, folk and jazz singer herself.

Eldstö Café offers fresh soups and salads, home-made bread and pastries. Everything is served in Thor and Helga's ceramic creations which you can purchase in the in-house gallery. The deep, rich colours of the ceramic glazes used on the pottery are made from Icelandic ash, (especially from Hekla Volcano) rendering the pottery very resilient as well as dishwasher and oven proof.

New on the menu this summer are authentic Chilean empanadas, served with an excellent home-made hot sauce made with an intricate mix of aromatic fresh ingredients. Once you have tasted this you may well be spoiled for life and the store-bought variety will never taste the same again. Consider yourself sufficiently warned.

Wonderful, on a sunny summer evening, are Eldstö Café's grilled marinated lamb or veal kebabs, with a fresh vegetable salad



which may be enjoyed either inside or out when the weather permits. Wine and beer are also available.



Mentioned in various guides to Iceland such as Frommer's and Lonely Planet, Eldstö Art Café & Restaurant is well worth a visit as you travel Iceland's south coast this summer.

-EMV



**Eldstö**  
 Austurvegi 2 • 860 Hvalsövellur  
**+354 482 1011**  
 eldsto@eldsto.is  
 www.eldsto.is



# THE PORTAL TO EXHILARATION

## *Hvalsövellur Opens the Door to Thrills to Remember*

While the numbers of tourists in Iceland grows with every passing year, it's not like it gets extremely crowded, even in the middle of July. Once outside of Reykjavik, the numbers thin out considerably and if solitude and wide open spaces are what you are looking for, you don't have to drive very far to find them.

Drive 106 km out of Reykjavik along the south coast and there lies the town of Hvalsövellur. Peaceful farmlands suddenly and dramatically give way to almost vertical slopes that reach down to the main road. Kilometre after kilometre of endless black sand beaches hug the shoreline; deserted except for the occasional surfers who come to do battle with the waves.

**A look at two local adventure companies who are based in Hvalsövellur.**

The advantage is immediately obvious. These are guides who didn't get their knowledge of the area from a book. Having lived most of their lives around Eyjafjallajökull Volcano they impress with their insight and first-hand accounts that only locals would know. With years of experience behind them, each company is able to combine their talent and passion with safety and skill. Like their Viking forefathers before them, they possess a deeper understanding of the challenges that are to be found and are adept at finding the hidden gems that can really make your holiday outstanding.



### South Coast Adventure

Family-run South Coast Adventure is based out of the beautiful Hamragarður Camping Site next to Seljalandsfoss, perfectly situated for tours into the Thorsmörk Nature Reserve and trips to the top of Eyjafjallajökull. This is one place where its good to heed the advice of the experts and not try to make it on your own. The Super Jeeps are not given that name for nothing. They are specially outfitted to ford glacial rivers and get you over some of the roughest terrain.



Skálakot • 861 Hvalsövellur  
**+354 867 3535**  
 info@southadventure.is  
 www.southadventure.is

### Thorsmörk by Superjeep

The Thorsmörk Nature Reserve is a unique area that is sheltered on three sides by the glaciers Mýrdalsjökull, Eyjafjallajökull and Tindfjallajökull, with its own micro-climate, no less. Getting there in a Superjeep is half the fun, of course. The tour stops at Gigjökull glacial tongue, where much of the action of the 2010 volcano eruption took place. It was here that massive chunks of ice the size of houses and tons and tons of water roared down the side of the mountain, overwhelming the small but deep glacial lagoon that was once there. After a lunch or dinner stop at Húsadalur, the tour continues all the way into the valley, passing the Elf Cathedral and other curious rock formations.

### Eyjafjallajökull by Superjeep

For an extraordinary view of the of the whole volcanic system for miles around, the trip to the top of Eyjafjallajökull by Superjeep is a must-do. You will get a chance to peer into the still-warm crater at the summit, and check out the mind-boggling collision course of fire and ice from the 2010 eruption of this now famous volcano.

### South Iceland Adventure Edgy and just a little bit daring

South Iceland Adventure is for those of you who want just a tad more excitement and edge to your Icelandic vacation in a way that



challenges you to go right to the limit of - but not beyond - your personal comfort zone.

### Walk new ground

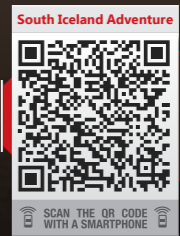
One of the most popular walking routes in Iceland, the Fimmvörðuháls Hiking Trail comes alive on this tour called 'Meet Eyjafjallajökull'. Explore the volcanic fissure and walk across freshly minted lava that exploded from the earth preceding the 2010 eruption on Eyjafjallajökull.

### Canyoning in Fljótshlíð

South Iceland Adventure has created a short activity that's easy to fit into your schedule—Canyoning! Feel of the force in the river, explore the inside of the canyon

and challenge yourself with an extreme day tour. South Iceland Adventure has the excitement you are looking for.

*Iceland's southern portal, Hvalsövellur - where the landscape is alive with change and where the volcanoes follow the whims of the unwritten rules of nature.*



Öldugerði 17 • 860 Hvalsövellur  
**+354 770 2030**  
 info@siadv.is  
 www.icelandadventure.is







# A WEEKEND IN THE WESTMAN ISLANDS

*Experience Adventure, Birdlife and Volcanic Fallout*

If the Westman Islands is not on your itinerary this summer, it really should be. The once difficult to reach archipelago is now easily accessible via the new ferry route that leaves from Landeyjarhöfn, transporting you and your car to the island in just about 30 minutes. Or, if you prefer, there is a small airport just minutes from the port which can fly you over in about 6 minutes on a little 6-seater plane. Whichever mode of transportation you prefer, getting there is all part of the fun.



**Home to Man and Birds-Lots of Them**  
 Heimaey, literally 'Home Island', is the biggest and only inhabited land in this chain of 14 islands including the more recent Surtsey, which erupted up from the sea bed between 1963 and 1966. Now a protected nature reserve, it is possible to circle the island by boat but going onto the island itself is off-limits.

In spite of Heimaey's small size, there is plenty to see and do, so staying overnight in one of the island's hotels, guest houses, self-contained cottages or camp sites would not be out of order to give you a real feel for this very special corner of Iceland. There are several restaurants and cafés in town serving lunch and dinner, such as Café Maria, Café Kro, and Café Vulcano. Höllinn is the main venue for events of all sizes in the Westman Islands and can

provide lunch or dinner for groups, large or small. The sheer vertical walls that are characteristic of many of the islands within the archipelago are home to thousands of kittiwakes, fulmars and gannets. Viking Tours offers 90-minute boat trips around the island, enabling you to sail right up close to the cliffs. From that vantage point, they resemble noisy high-rise apartment buildings with the occupants out on their

balconies having fun chatting, swooping from perch to roost and of course taking turns with their obligatory nest-sitting duties. The waters that surround the island are outstanding shades of a deep turquoise colour that you would never expect to find in the ocean at this latitude, giving the impression of an island dipped in crystal-turquoise ink and making for a truly memorable experience.

**Action on Land and Sea**  
 Looking for some action? Get your ya-ya's out with a high-paced adventure tour in and around the archipelago by joining a 90-minute rib-safari (RIB is the acronym for rigid inflatable boats which are used increasingly for tourism in Iceland), exploring caves and maybe even heading out to see that famous newcomer island, Surtsey. Or perhaps you'd like to tour the island on one of those curious vehicles

called a Segway Personal Transporter that are new to the Westman Islands and an ideal and fun way of getting around.

**Killer Whales and the Priest of the Sea**  
 In the summer months, the Westman Islands are home to pods of killer whales and, of course, the illustrious puffins which can be seen out on the sea during the day or hanging out near their burrows in the evening. While there have been fewer puffins arriving in the island in recent years, their numbers are still in the thousands, so your chances of catching sight of one of these darling birds is very high.



**Pompeii of the North**  
 Round out your tour of the Westman Islands with a walk around town to see where the lava flow stopped in 1973. Partially engulfed buildings can still be seen and there is even an ongoing

archaeological dig that visitors welcome to help out with. Over 400 homes and buildings were destroyed by the 1973 eruption and the aim of the project called 'Pompeii of the North' is to excavate at least 7 to 10 houses, giving us a glimpse into the lives of those affected by this largest natural disaster in Iceland in recent memory.

-EMV

**Vestmannaeyjabær**

Ráðhúsinu • 900 Vestmannaeyjum  
 +354 488 2000  
 postur@vestmannaeyjar.is  
 www.vestmannaeyjar.is

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# VIKING TOURS OF THE WESTMAN ISLANDS

*Experience the Haunting Music of Bird, Man and Whale*

**M**ountainous, mysterious, and one of those places on virtually every tourist's wish list. Seen from the mainland, the jagged archipelago rises dramatically from the horizon, breaking the horizon of Iceland's south coast with a sort of 'come hither' look that you cannot evade.

The Herólfur ferry, at its brand new port just outside of the town of Hvolsvöllur, plies the waters that separate the islands from the mainland, making the easy 25–30 minute crossing several times a day. Now you have no excuse not to see the Westman Islands!

### The Circle Tour

A fun and refreshing way to sight-see in the Westman Islands, Viking Tours' specially designed tour boat takes you around the main island of Heimaey, 2 or 3 times a day in summer.

The 90-minute tour gives you a chance to peak into caves, observe puffins and concludes with the haunting saxophone music which fills the singing cave of Klettshellur, renowned for its superb acoustics and performed beautifully by Sigurmundur Einarsson, director of Viking Tours.

### The Coach Tour

Another delightful way to explore the island is by Viking Tours' coach which departs from the main harbour every day, year round. The guided tour takes you to the still-warm Eldfell crater which erupted over the whole island in 1973, the effects of which are easily observable throughout Heimaey. You will also get a chance to observe puffins at Stórhöfði.



### 10 million puffins can't be wrong

In staggering numbers, these adorable birds flock to the archipelago year after year, the first arriving on schedule around the 12th–14th of April. "The best time of day to see them is in the late afternoon and early evening when the puffin parents return to their burrows after spending the day fishing on the sea", says Sigurmundur.

### Whale watching in the Westman Islands

With whole families of Killer Whales and dolphins arriving in July, the Westman Islands is a great place for whale watching, boasting the largest population of these sea mammals in Iceland. Viking Tours can organise a whale watching tour for you on request.

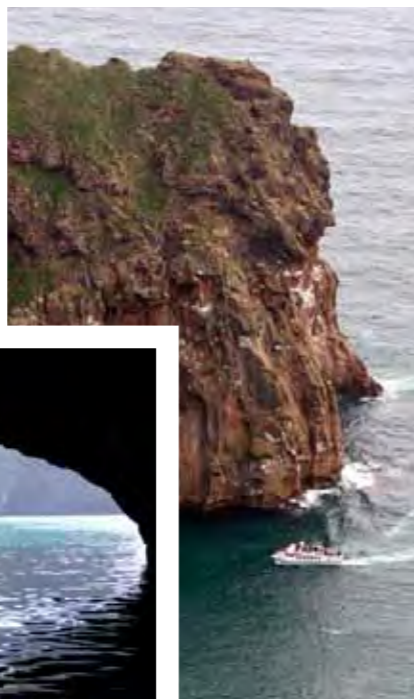
All Viking Tours trips begin and end at the cosy Café Kró down at the main harbour, where you can take in the 55 minute film about the 1973 eruption and learn how this singular event changed the face of the Westman Islands forever.

*See you this summer  
 in the Westman Islands!*

**Viking Tours** -EMV

Tangagötu 7 • 900 Vestmannaeyjum  
 +354 488 4884  
 viking@vikingtours.is  
 www.vikingtours.is

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# ELEGANT EATING

*Delicious dishes in the old town of Eyrabakki at Rauða Húsið*

**W**hat is better than a succulent lunch or a seafood dinner on your travels in the southern part of Iceland? The Rauða Húsið restaurant is renowned for its delicious seafood dishes, not least the fresh lobster. You could even take a special day-trip from Reykjavik to Eyrabakki.

Danish Merchant in 1765, now houses the Árnes Folk Museum.

Rauða húsið, The Red House, is one of the most beautiful houses in the village, standing by the coastline. Guests will appreciate the sense of history within the restaurant and its ambiance, with its windows and lovely wooden floor. The house is quite spacious and has about 200 seats but is not crowded, making dining both comfortable and suitable for groups. It used to belong to Guðmunda Nielsen. She built its oldest part in 1919, after returning home from Copenhagen where she studied



### Old World Village Charm

Eyrabakki was once one of the most important trading centres in Iceland but has evolved into a charming and tranquil village of less than 600 inhabitants. Many of its houses were built in the early 1900's and the village has maintained a turn-of-the-century, freewheeling charm and atmosphere. Eyrabakki boasts many beautifully restored fine timber buildings. The oldest of them, The House, built by a



business management. She was considered to be an exceptional lady and opened her retail shop right after building the house.

### Langoustines from the Birthplace of Lobster Fishing in Iceland

Lobster fishing in Iceland was born off the shores of Eyrabakki in 1954. Icelanders were late to discover the various seafood delicacies. In fact it was not till the mid-20th century that the locals discovered that not only was the small Langoustine lobster edible, it was delicious!

### Menu Suggestions

One of the most popular dishes besides the lobster which the restaurant is famous for is the Catch of the Day, which consists of three different seafood dishes prepared from

the freshest ingredients available: Lobster soup, with a hint of Cognac topped with coriander cream; Oven baked bacalao in olive and tomatconcasse; Seafood trio with mixed vegetables and potato puree. Or you might even like to taste oven-roasted cod with slowly roasted



tomatoes and hollandaise sauce. Pair a bottle of fine wine with any of the menu's offerings and cap it off with one of the Rauða húsið's



signature desserts. Serving a variety of delicious fish and meat dishes, guests will find the restaurant's cuisine is a nice mixture of both international and Icelandic, but local ingredients figure prominently.

### Return to Reykjavik with a Full Stomach

Rauða Húsið is a popular spot for travellers returning to Reykjavik or wanting a pleasant evening trip, as it is just 50 km from the capital, with an easy and beautiful drive.

**Rauða Húsið** -AMB

Búðarstíg 4 • 820 Eyrabakka  
 +354 483 3333  
 raudahusid@raudahusid.is  
 www.raudahusid.is

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## THE CHOCOLATE INNOVATOR

*Be warned! Café Mika is a Chocolate Lover's Paradise*

**A** chef and chocolatier, Mika finds ways to put this delicacy into unexpected forms, creating whole new taste experiences.

Mika offers a special thick drinking chocolate. Each week, he selects one of a range of chocolates from many different parts of the world, each with a different flavour.

### Lobster Hot Dogs

Mika's latest creation is a delicious hot dog, made from healthy bread rolls, the popular langoustine lobster, tomatoes and onions, covered with tangy chilli and a white chocolate sauce that leaves the taste buds tingling with its flavour.

Open for lunch and dinner, the menu changes with the season, to take advantage of the freshest local vegetables, Icelandic cheeses, arctic char, langoustines and meats, blended into mouth-watering meals for individuals or groups. A selection of drinks is also available to round of your meal, which you can also eat

outside in the sunshine, enjoying Reykholt's beautiful nature.

### Unique Ice Cream Flavour Blends

Naturally, you'll find ice cream here, too. The difference is that Mika mixes flavours, blending them with chocolate, nuts, fruits and more so that each level has a different taste. The clever blend makes for an ice cream unlike any you have tried before. If you're like me, you'll want to come back for more!

### Pralines with a Difference

Whilst ice cream isn't something you can easily take with you, Mika's pralines are a delicacy you will want to stock up on. You can take them in presentation boxes or eat some with your meals. You'll need a cast iron will to get these home

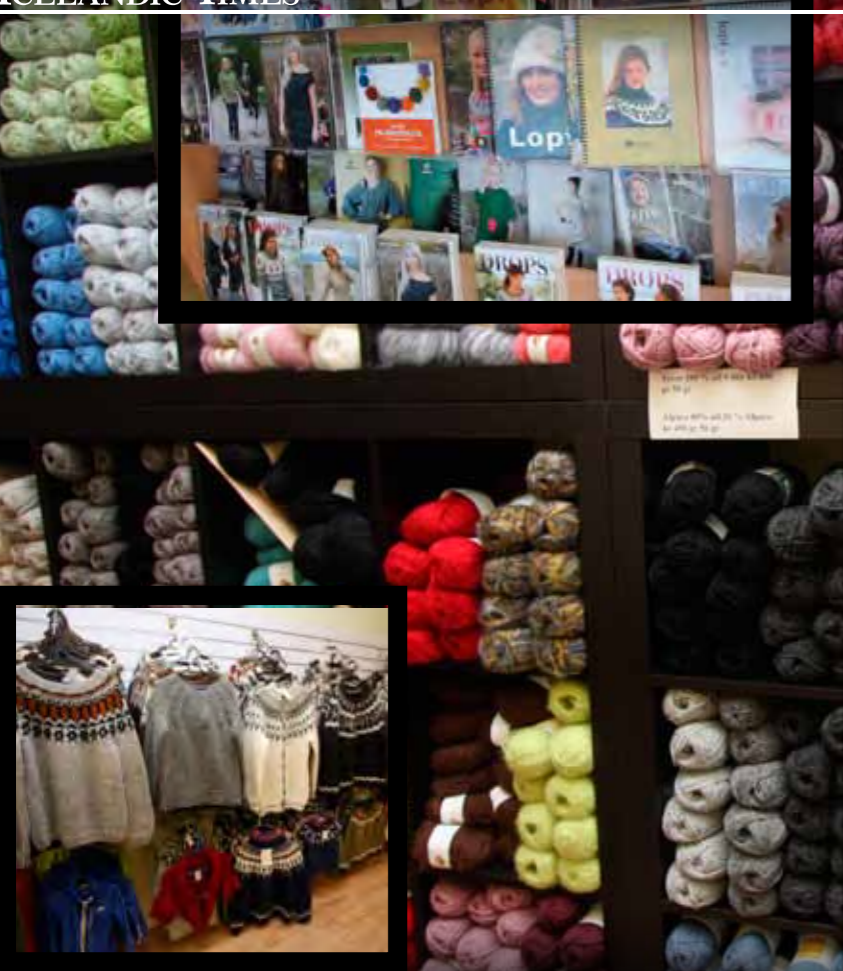
Café Mika

Skólabraut 4 • 801 Reykholt

**+354 896 6450**

mikaehf@simnet.is

on Facebook



## A KNITTING MECCA

*Bjarkarhóll has Everything Needed to Knit*

**T**hey're warm. They're chic. They repel rain and they remind you of your Icelandic experience. What makes them special is that you can also make them yourself. The Icelandic sweater.

Bjarkarhóll in Reykholt on the way to Geysir and Gullfoss has ready-made sweaters in many different styles. If you enjoy knitting and creating something special, they also have kits to take home with you. These are complete with all you need to make a genuine Icelandic wool sweater. The patterns come in a range of styles for men, women and children.

This is a one-stop shop for everything associated with knitting - a knitting mecca. Whether you try a pre-packed kit or use one of the multitude of patterns available in the shop, you'll find all you need to create your own wool sweater here.

Wools from different countries sit alongside the classic Icelandic wool. All the

accessories and accoutrements are available, including a Fair Trade product: a special range of buttons created in Nepal. These add a unique feature to your creation.

Woollen gloves are common but how about a glove to hold a cold beer can? Certainly a conversation piece! For those with poor circulation, the fingerless gloves are a boon.

Handmade jewellery and natural cosmetics make this a gift shop with a wide range of specialities to choose from. You can also order from them online - so once others start asking about your creation, you have a ready source of supply.

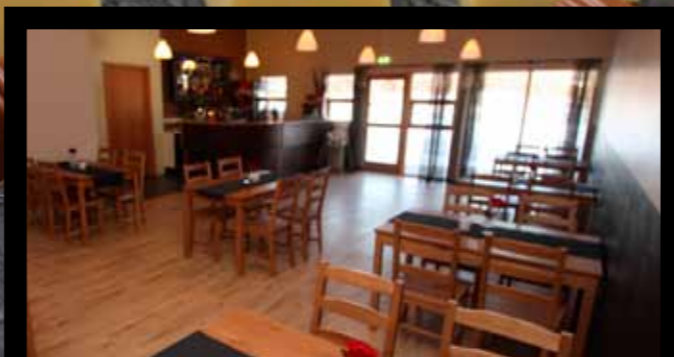
Bjarkarhóll

Skólabraut 4 • 801 Reykholt

**+354 587 6655**

garn@garn.is

www.garn.is



## SIGHTSEEING THE VIKING WAY

*Iceland Riverjet Brings Thrills and Fun to the River*

**T**he Vikings first travelled up rivers with their wooden boats over 1,000 years ago but their spirit is still here!

The boats are better; oars have been replaced with an engine and these Vikings are a whole lot nicer. Now you can go 'sightseeing the Viking way' with Iceland Riverjet.

Jet boating up the Hvítá River below the Gullfoss waterfall is extreme in excitement and thrills! Having no physical requirements, this adventure is for everybody over 10 years old!

The boats are custom-built from thick aluminium and powered by specially adapted V8-400 hp engines. With a water jet instead of a propeller, they can travel in depths as shallow as 10 cm at speeds up to 75 km/hr! They are highly manoeuvrable and can safely jump waves, go through rapids and do 360 degree spins on a coin.

The riverjet tour lasts half a day with a pick-up at your hotel in Reykjavik to the new Bjarkarhóll in Reykholt. There are two

tours: standard and extreme, varying only in length and degree of thrills. The 45 minute ride in the 11-seat boat takes you through spectacular lava canyons, beautiful scenery and white water rapids. The extreme tour takes about 2 hours, with bigger waves and stronger rapids, kicking the sightseeing up a notch! Trips run from April to October every day and every hour.

Iceland Riverjet is the first commercial jet boat company in Europe, founded in 2010 by the Norwegian, Cato Bergnord. He has over 17 years of white water experience and is a licensed jet boat pilot from New

Iceland Riverjet

Skólabraut 4 • 801 Reykholt

**+354 863 4506**

contact@icelandriverjet.is

www.icelandriverjet.is

# REYKHOLT'S HOTSPOT

*The Gorgeous South – Green Energy and Gourmet Meals*

The south of Iceland is absolutely one of the island's most beautiful regions. With its wide plains and magnificent scenery, it is a real feast for the eyes as well as possessing many of those majestic Icelandic landmarks: waterfalls, volcanoes and hot springs. Oh yes, and greenhouses. A lot of greenhouses.

### Where does it come from?

Reykholt in Biskupstungur is a beautiful little town on the Golden Circle that has plenty to offer to those who visit it. It is a convenient stop on your travels around the south region, with a guesthouse and a camping site, a swimming pool and facilities for plenty of outdoor activity.



Reykholt is rich in geothermal energy and the first greenhouse in the region heated in this way was built there in the thirties. The hot spring of Reykholt is very old and there are stories of how people would come from the nearby church at Skálholt to block it, partly because occasionally animals would fall into it, but also out of a superstition since, naturally, boiling hot water coming out of the ground could only have its origin in one place!

Eventually though, despite all superstition, the area became inhabited early in the 20th century precisely because of its geothermal energy. Even though it has actually been capped today, the old hot spring still erupts every 10 minutes and the water is utilized to heat both residents' homes and the

greenhouses in the area. Hot springs apparently do come in handy, after all: you can even bake the traditional rye bread in them, as Steinunn at Kaffi Klettur does!

### And speaking of bread...

Whatever your interest in geothermal energy, Reykholt has a hot spot that you do not want to miss. Kaffi Klettur, the local bar and restaurant with its mouth-watering menu is more than enough reason to stop by.



Known for top-notch cooking and romantic surroundings, the restaurant works in the spirit of the Slow Food philosophy, honouring fair business trades and using fresh, organic locally-produced ingredients. The result is an utterly delicious cuisine with dishes that range from traditional Icelandic food like freshly-caught trout with locally-grown vegetables to more international dishes like



the homemade lasagna. Everything is home-baked and make sure you don't leave without tasting their cakes and desserts, rumour has it they're sublime! Steinunn's kleinur are so popular, she ships them all over the country.

**Kaffi Klettur** -HP



Reykholti • 801 Selfossi  
**+354 486 1310**  
 husid@best.is  
 kaffiklettur.is

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## Guided tours in Harpa

Every day at 11.00 and 15.30

Price: ISK 1500 (10 Euros)

The tour lasts 45 minutes and is in English. It takes you on an interesting walk around the many facilities of Harpa, through the main halls and spaces and gives you an opportunity to take a look at its unique architectural features.

**Book special tours** at [tours@harpa.is](mailto:tours@harpa.is) or [kristin@harpa.is](mailto:kristin@harpa.is) or tel. +354 528 5009. Discounts for large groups.

### VIDEO

A new documentary featuring Icelandic bands by Árni Sveinsson - shows weekdays at 19.00 in Kaldalón.  
 Price: ISK 1500 (10 Euros)

### AMAZING ICELAND

A documentary on Iceland's nature and wildlife - shows weekdays at 13.00 in Kaldalón.  
 Price: ISK 1500 (10 Euros)



# Harpa Welcomes You

MUSIC - CULTURE - GUIDED TOURS

## Concerts in Kaldalón all summer

Harpa presents concerts in Kaldalón at 17.00 by the Classical Concert Company of Reykjavík - a journey through traditional Icelandic music.

Tickets on sale at [www.harpa.is](http://www.harpa.is) and at the box office in Harpa.

## Excellent restaurants and shops

Enjoy dining at the outstanding „à la carte“ restaurant and bar **Kolbrautin** on the fourth floor. And for a cup of coffee or quick snack visit **Munnharpan** on the ground floor. Also on the ground level you'll find **12 Tónar**, a music shop with an extensive selection of music, and **Epal**, a **Nordic design** shop that also offers souvenirs from Harpa.

## SUMMER FESTIVAL IN HARPA

Series of classical concerts in Harpa, July 8-10

**Three concerts in Eldborg featuring great musicians:**

**July 8th**

**Maria João Pires, Maxim Vengerov and St. Christopher orchestra**

**July 9th**

**The St. Christopher Orchestra**  
 Conductor: **Donatas Katkus**

**July 10th**

**Maria João Pires and the Art Vivo string quartet**

The **Classical Passport** is available now at the Harpa Box Office at a **special price**.

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We look forward to seeing you in Harpa

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# THE OLDEST ECO-VILLAGE

## Sólheimar: Where Culture, Organics and People Thrive



Sólheimar is hardly the kind of place in which you arrive by accident. But take a twenty minute detour en route to Gullfoss or Geysir, or an afternoon trip from Reykjavík, and you will be very glad you did. Nestled in a small valley, the village remains tucked away until – at the very last bend – the turf roofs of the houses begin to appear as if from nowhere.



With a population of around 100, Sólheimar holds many surprises. Over 30,000 visitors a year have already discovered this special place, many returning time and again. Being one of Iceland's largest organic vegetable producers would be reason enough to drop by and stock up on tomatoes, peppers and chutney, to name but a few ingredients. This was the first place in the Nordic countries to cultivate produce organically. But the village shop is much more than a general store and an organic greengrocer for residents and visitors. Here you can find candles, weaving, handmade soap, art and ceramics, as well as toys and gifts carefully crafted from wood. Sólheimar has its own bakery too, which makes the delicious bread and cakes that can be found in the shop and the café. The shop is the perfect place to find a unique present or keepsake.

A cosy place then think again – Sólheimar's café is geothermally heated and the greenhouse is as warm as the welcome you will receive there. The name of the café, which translates as 'green coffee pot', is a reminder of its green credentials, because from the coffee and cake to the beer and wine, almost everything is organic. The Green Coffee Pot is a meeting place for residents and visitors all year round, but visit on a weekend afternoon in summer and you will find yourself in the midst of a lively entertainment programme that comprises everything from well-known pop and rock musicians to classical concerts, and choirs.

The social hub of Sólheimar is its café, which happens to be in a large greenhouse. If a café in a greenhouse does not sound like

reflection. Wander amongst the sculptures in the village centre, and then set out on a circular walk which takes you up to the hilltops for stunning views and down across the wetlands bird sanctuary on a boardwalk before emerging through shaded woodland, a rarity in the Icelandic countryside. You can walk through a living exhibition of different tree species cultivated at Iceland's only organic nursery and arboretum, and perhaps choose one or two for your garden. Two guesthouses provide comfortable accommodation for those staying longer. There are rooms with or without en suite, as well as self-contained mini-apartments with their own kitchenette. For groups, full board accommodation is available, while individuals can opt for breakfast on request. For other meals, guests can use the

self-catering kitchen or the barbecue on the veranda. A geothermally-heated pool and hot tub are nearby and open to guesthouse visitors.

Sesseljuhús, an educational and exhibition centre in the village, is a distinctive building which can also be rented out for conferences and corporate events. The building showcases sustainable architecture and is open to visitors on weekdays. Sheep wool was used for insulation and the exterior cladding is driftwood. It is powered by a combination of renewable energy sources, including an innovative generator that produces electricity from the temperature difference between hot and cold water. Another noteworthy building, and one of the newest in the village, is the church, which was completed and consecrated in

2005 and holds weekly Sunday services throughout the year. It regularly welcomes visiting choirs, and there are Saturday concerts from June to August.

There is always plenty going on at Sólheimar and a diverse lecture programme includes upcoming lectures on Icelandic water, the revival of the birch tree in Iceland, and fish and fishing in the south of Iceland. There is also a workshop on nature photography, an educational walk on fungi, a jazz concert and a violin concert, all in July and August. There will be two fascinating exhibitions in Sólheimar throughout the summer. In the sports hall cum theatre, there will be an exhibition connected to the 80th birthday of the Sólheimar theatre, which is the oldest and biggest amateur theatre in Iceland. Then there will be an



hosts. Many have special talents in art and in other areas. You'll meet Sólheimar people in the café and around the village, and they'll brighten up your day. You can find their work in the shop and take home something to remember your time in Sólheimar.

exhibition in the Ingustofa art gallery, with an Icelandic folklore and fairy tale theme.

Sólheimar was founded in 1930 by Sesselja Hreindís Sigmundsdóttir and today is home to people with special needs and others. The villagers with special needs will always be at the heart of Sólheimar, and they are great



www.icelandictimes.com

**Sólheimar**

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Sólheimar • 801 Selfoss  
 +354 480 4400  
 solheimar@solheimar.is  
 www.solheimar.is



# SLAKKI ZOO AND PLAY CENTRE

*Where Children and Animals Get to Know One Another*

Summer is here. The newborn lambs are skipping and jumping in the fields. The flowers are blooming in all their glory and Iceland has turned green once again. The volcanic eruptions have only served to fertilise the grass and the blue skies are encouraging everyone to get out into the countryside once again.

Of course, the countryside is synonymous with animals. In Laugarás, close to Skálholt cathedral is the Slakki Zoo and Play Centre, which is one of the most popular animal centres. It would be a mistake to think this was just for children, however. It has activities for all the family, adults included and it makes a great day out in a place where the simple joys of life can be indulged in by everyone.

For the children to be able to experience animals close up, to be able to touch and hold many of them, is such a treat nowadays. They love the opportunity to play with

animals of all kinds and to look at the birds and fish in their own environments.

### A Safe and Fun Activity Day

There are animals of all sizes from horses to mice, pigs to ponies and everything in between. Some are inside and others can be enjoyed in the gardens. The kittens, for example, are a favourite inside their own little house, where children can hold and pet them for as long as they wish - and that can be a long time.

This is a safe environment where parents can relax, knowing their children will be enjoying themselves without harm. Families often make a day of it, as there is plenty to do. Besides the animals, there is a large aquarium and many different species of birds to enjoy. Even farmers come with their families - often wondering why their children love it so much when they have animals at home!



It's not just the animals, though. There are other games to play which unite the family in a fun entertainment such as the putting green and crazy golf.

### Relax with Restaurant Refreshments

Naturally, when you're staying all day in a centre such as Slakki, refreshments are very important and here you will find a restaurant and café filled with home-made snacks, including delicious hamburgers with salad and apple cakes with cream.

The café is in a small turf house, with plenty of seating outside where you can enjoy the sun and the yummy, locally-made Kjörís icecream.

Stuffed animals may be fine at home, but nothing can replace the experience of holding or playing with live animals. No computer or TV can take their place, either, so it's no surprise that many families return again and again.

Slakki's indoor zoo is open every day throughout the summer months until the end of August. It is one of Iceland's secrets that is being revealed on the Internet, with pictures and videos being posted by satisfied customers and their happy children. If you're driving the Golden Circle trip, see for yourself. It's only a few minutes off the main road to Geysir.



-ASF

**Slakki**



Launrétt I • 801 Selfossi  
**+354 486 8783**  
 helgi@slakki.is  
[www.slakki.is](http://www.slakki.is)

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## GEOTHERMAL CYCLING

*Whatever Your Pace, Iceland Activities Has a Ride for You*

Iceland Activities may well be the only tour company in Iceland that specialises in tours and activities exclusively in the Hengill Geothermal Area, famous for its natural hot springs. It's also a company that truly is 'family-run' in every sense of the word. "We are a sports-minded family who have been exploring the Hengill area together for the last 25 years. When our kids were small we took them with us on

to all our favourite places that we have grown up with," says Ulfar Andrésson, 23, who along with his sister, Sólveig and their mom Steinunn are an integral part of the family business.

### Your Pace is our Pace

Iceland Activities' guided biking, hiking and walking tours in and around Hveragerði and the Hengill Geothermal

a dip in a geothermally-heated river. Whatever your pace and level of fitness, Iceland Activities will meet you there.

### Iceland on your own

Cycling around Iceland is a healthy and enjoyable way to explore the country on your own. You can rent your own quality bike for anywhere from 4 hours to 3 days or longer and it comes complete with bicycle helmet and a suggested itinerary.

### 'Hotsprings around Hveragerði' Guided Bike Tour

Iceland Activities offers an exclusive guided bike tour in and around Hveragerði and then takes you to observe the new geothermal park that was created by an earthquake in 2008. Have fun boiling eggs in one of the many hot springs and end the day relaxing at the Hveragerði swimming pool. Got kids? Iceland Activities has child-sized bikes, activities and tours to suit the youngest members of your group.

### Gearing it up a notch

If you yearn for still more, Iceland Activities also offers surfing on south Iceland's famous black sand beaches or group activities especially geared to young people. Have fun this summer with Iceland Activities!

### Iceland Activities

-EMV



Mánamörk 3-5 • 810 Hveragerði  
 +354 777 6263  
 icelandactivities@icelandactivities.is  
 www.icelandactivities.is

every trip, every summer - biking, hiking, fishing, camping - we have done it all," says Andrés Ulfarsson, who founded the company in 2010. "It was only natural for us to launch this business, taking visitors

area are rated from easy to strenuous and suitable for all ages. Travel over 1,100 year-old sheep paths high up in the mountains that criss-cross this magnificent volcanic area and then take

## HOFLANDSETRÍÐ RESTAURANT

*A Fine Example of Icelandic Home Cooking at its Best*

The 'flower town' of Hveragerði is home to Hoflandsetrið Restaurant, with its warm and inviting interior, imaginative pizzas and traditional Icelandic home cooking.

give Hoflandsetrið's pizzas a surprisingly creative twist. The 'Heilsuveisla' pizza, with a healthy crust made with five whole grains and a hint of cummin and sesame seeds, endows this pizza with a wonderful flavour that you won't find anywhere else.



### Pizzas with Pizazz

The clever use of bananas and pineapple in the 'Janis Joplin' or the 'Brjálaður Banana' (crazy banana) with pepperoni and bananas

### Specialities and Banquets

A selection of warming Icelandic specialities makes up the lunch buffet and varies from day to day (week-days only) and is popular amongst locals. A banquet room comfortably seats groups of up to 60 guests.



Three generations of the Hofland family work side-by-side to make this one of the most successful restaurants in South Iceland.

### Hoflandsetrið

-EMV



Breiðumörk 2 • 810 Hveragerði  
 +354 483 4467  
 info@hoflandsetrid.is  
 www.hoflandsetrid.is

## RIVERSIDE RESTAURANT & SPA

*Elegant accommodation and dining on Iceland's South Coast*

In case you were not expecting to eat well outside of Reykjavik, a fabulous dining experience awaits you at the Riverside Restaurant at Hotel Selfoss. A top chef preparing elegantly prepared meals, an attentive staff, crisp

white linen table cloths and relaxing atmosphere overlooking the Ölfusá River, all combine to make this one of the outstanding establishments in South Iceland, on par with any of the best restaurants in Reykjavik.



The four star Hotel Selfoss offers 99 spacious double rooms, 4 conference rooms, in-house cinema and stage as well as facilities for the handicapped. The wonderfully relaxing Riverside Spa caters to all your indulgences with its sauna and steam room, hot pools, rainwater showers and a relaxing room with bar.

### Hótel Selfoss

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Eyravegi 2 • 800 Selfossi  
 +354 480 2500  
 info@hotelfselfoss.is  
 www.hotelfselfoss.is



## FINDING THE ESSENCE OF ICELAND

*Icelandic Mountain Guides*

Standing on top of a glacier is a goal you'd imagine only experienced mountain climbers are able to achieve, but it is actually simpler than you'd think – it is even achievable in a day's trip from Reykjavik. But one cannot, of course, simply walk to the top of a treacherous glacier without the help of experienced guides who've mapped out every crack in the ice and know the

glacier and Mýrdalsjökull glacier, as well as several day tours from Skaftafell National Park which connects you to Europe's largest glacier, Vatnajökull. But why would anyone want to visit such a foreign and unforgiving landscape? For Leifur Örn Svavarsson, guide and co-founder of IMG, who has scaled the glaciers hundreds of times and never gets tired of it, the answer is simple: "It is like

### If You Can Walk Up Stairs, You Can Join a Glacier Walk

Before taking inexperienced mountaineers up to these treasures of Iceland, IMG had to make sure that all possible safety measures were taken, which is why they've implemented a strenuous training programme for all their guides. The educational programme entails 27 days of direct training and exams, followed by over 100 days under direct and indirect supervision, as well as first-aid courses. These steps have paid off, as is made evident by IMG's accident free history and the awards they've won for education and safety.

The range of tours is designed to fit the different needs of Iceland's visitors. "If you can walk up stairs, you can reach a part of a glacier with us. While scaling the tallest peak of Iceland, which has a quite rapid ascent and a 12-14 hour hike, requires some physical fitness and hiking experience, we try to have alternatives which suit all our customers' wishes, ranging from a few hours light hike up to quite challenging, but equally rewarding hikes," says Leifur.

In addition IMG offer combination tours which take you horseback riding, hot-spring bathing and sight-seeing, as well as glacial adventure tours on 4x4.

-VAG

Mountain Guides



Bankastræti 2 • 101 Reykjavík  
 +354 587 9999  
 mountainguides@mountainguides.is  
 www.mountainguides.is

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difference a single misstep can make. For over seventeen years Icelandic Mountain Guides have been finding ways to make these imposing phenomena reachable to all those who wish to explore them.

### Step Into a Different World

Icelandic Mountain Guides (IMG) offer day tours from Reykjavik to Sólheimajökull

stepping into a different world. Standing on top of pure ice, hearing the creaks and flow of water underneath, seeing the caves and crevasses gets you as close to the essence of Iceland as possible. We had been doing it since we were young and simply felt as if you can never really experience Iceland without trying it, which is why we established Icelandic Mountain Guides," says Leifur.



Watchmaker Frank Michelsen, founder of Michelsen Watchmakers, at his desk in Sauðárkrúkur, N-Iceland, in 1920.



Reykjavík 64°N/22°W.  
 Lava-grey dial  
 Icelandic Wolffish strap  
 Price 157.000 ISK.



## Watchmakers since 1909

Four generations of Michelsen watchmakers have provided Icelanders with the skill and expertise that comes from experience and which has been passed on in the family, from one generation to another. On the occasion of the centenary of Michelsen watchmakers in 2009, the Michelsen watches were reintroduced after a 70-year break.

Now we proudly present a new Michelsen watch  
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