

TOURISM, CULTURE AND BUSINESS

ICELANDIC TIMES

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TOURISM, CULTURE AND BUSINESS ISSUE 11 • 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!

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FRONT COVER PHOTO

Svartifoss, South. Iceland
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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.

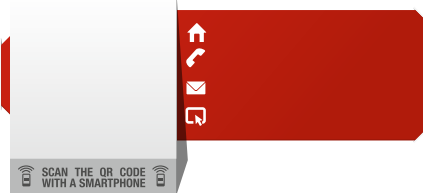
Character	Pronunciation
á	Like 'ow' in 'cow'
æ	Like the personal pronoun 'I'
ð	Like 'th' in 'that'
þ	Like 'th' in 'thing'

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Icelandic Times



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OPEN



A STAPLE OF CLASS AND QUALITY

Einar Ben Restaurant offers style, service and exquisite meals

In the highly competitive restaurant scene in Reykjavik, new, trendy places come and go on a monthly basis, whereas a select few have found their way into the Icelandic psyche and have been able to maintain the delicate mixture of class, comfort and top-class food that keeps customers coming back. Einar Ben is one of those select few.

Professional Yet Friendly

Upon entering the elegant hall on the second floor of a century-old gentry's townhouse, it is easy to see why Einar Ben has become a staple in Reykjavik's restaurant scene – it is completely free of pretense and excess whilst, of course, offering some of the best dishes in town.

The first thing you'll notice is the professional, yet friendly, staff who seem to take pride in catering to their visitors, as opposed to rushing as many paying customers as possible in and out in one night. The interior is elegantly decorated, honouring the building's rich history and when walking around the restaurant, you get the feeling you're entering different rooms of a home, instead of bare and minimalistic dining halls. In fact, the restaurant is located in the former home of one of Iceland's greatest heroes, after which it is named – Einar Ben, a poet and a pioneer, who personified the dreams and

ambitions Icelanders had at the beginning of the 20th century.

Classic Dishes With a Twist

All of this is, of course, a pleasant addition to what matters the most – the food. Jóhann Jakobsson, owner of Einar Ben, takes great pride in only using the freshest Icelandic materials, whenever possible and indeed when Icelandic Times dropped by Einar Ben's on a cosy Sunday evening, he received a call about a new delivery of game reindeer, which had just arrived in Reykjavik and needed to be picked up. "Our dishes are based on the classics – the fish and the lamb. We're proud of our menu and have no interest in following trends, which would ultimately compromise what Einar Ben stands for. The menu's subtitle of 'pure Icelandic' refers to the ingredients, whereas the dishes are also based on French and Danish traditions. We pride ourselves on healthy portions and hearty sauces," says Jóhann.

For starters, we were treated to a delicious langoustine & pumpkin soup, which set the mood for what was to come. The Arctic char served with a celeriac puree, mashed potatoes and spinach proved that Jóhann's claims of Einar Ben's seafood expertise were not exaggerated

– truly exquisite. The lamb loin served with crushed potatoes and parsnip puree was cooked to perfection and shows what Jóhann means when he talks about the Icelandic lamb being the best in the world when cooked correctly. The skyr and ice cream desserts are not to be missed: true delicacies made with unique Icelandic ingredients, including freshly picked blueberries and rhubarb.

Unwind at the Red Bar

The 'red bar' on the top floor is ideal for following a top class meal with a drink in a tranquil atmosphere. Those looking for a place to start a night of clubbing would be well advised to check out the red bar as well.

-VAG

Einar Ben



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THE SEAFOOD LOVERS' HAVEN

Vitinn - the Sandgerði Restaurant right at the Harbour

The Reykjanes peninsula is something almost every visitor visits - 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 fresh seafood straight to your palate. With the harbour just metres away, you can enjoy a meal that is full of freshness and flavour. You can find out yourself why Steinunn the Old, cousin of the first Viking settler, Ingólfur Arnason, chose this spot 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 nearby 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.

If you're looking for somewhere to celebrate an event, Vitinn will make 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.

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.

Vitinn is open for lunch year-round and, all day from May to September. 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 and, if you are flying home, a satisfying way to enjoy your trip.



Vitinn -ASF



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RECORDING A CHANGING WORLD

One Man's Vision Becomes Skógar Folk Museum

Byggðasafnið 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



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VIKING TOURS OF THE WESTMAN ISLANDS

Experience the Haunting Music of Bird, Man and Whale

Mountainous, mysterious, and a place on virtually every tourist's wish list. Seen from the mainland, the jagged archipelago rises dramatically from the sea, breaking the horizon of Iceland's south coast with a sort of 'come hither' look.

The Herólfur ferry, at its brand new port just outside Hvalsövellur, plies 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, 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 peek 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 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 in the Westman Islands!

-EMV

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WARM IN THE WORST WINTERS

Álafoss' natural Icelandic wool keeps you warm and dry

Just 20 minutes from the centre of Reykjavik lies the town of Mosfellsbær on the road to the north. There, after passing under the bridge you will find a roundabout. Most traffic continues straight, but if you take a right turn, you'll immediately see the red-roofed building of the old mill built next to the warm

álafoss or ála waterfall, from which the mill took its name. Built in 1896, the mill was used to knit woollens. It was here that the Icelandic woollen industry began and flourished.

The mill itself has closed but the building now houses the Álafoss store, where visitors find a very wide range of designs of

woollen clothing, the yarn and everything associated with making the clothing, along with art and craft supplies and souvenirs.

The clothing ranges from traditional to high fashion and the wide range of styles and colours gives plenty of choice for men, women and children alike.

The Icelandic wool is noted for its special qualities. The fibres are made up of two different types of wool: a virtually waterproof outer layer and a soft, warm inner layer. This makes clothing especially comfortable and suitable for all weathers. Sweaters made from this wool have been used for generations by farmers, fishermen, mountaineers - and the man or woman on the street, too. They are warm, shower-proof and comfortable.

Today, many young designers have taken the Icelandic wool to create a whole new range of designs and colours, whilst the store still carries a stock of the traditional designs that have become a fashion statement in themselves the world over.

Browsing clothing and knitting articles may not be to everyone's taste but there is a lot more of interest, as the store is also a virtual museum. There are pieces of machinery, vintage-style cash registers, original early phones and examples of equipment used to make the company the powerhouse that it was in Icelandic society for so many years.

The small café at the back overlooks the waterfall that started it all. It is the kind of store where you can relax and browse, enjoy the ambiance and find those special gifts and personal items that are so rarely found in Europe or the rest of the world.



Alafoss Wool Store

-ASF



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MUNAÐARNES RESTAURANT & COTTAGES

Fall in love with Iceland in this corner of paradise

Ninety-five kilometres north of Reykjavik, lies a 65 hectare tract of birch-covered land on the banks of the peaceful Norðurá river.

It's a place where Icelanders go to get away from the stress of city life, and is a favourite haunt of families, in particular.

Fifty-six rustic, self-contained cottages are scattered throughout the park-like grounds, some sleeping 6 to 8, while others are ideal for couples, but all come with the usual accoutrement of the summerhouse life-style, including an inviting hot tub and grill out on the deck.

All in all, Munaðarnes can accommodate up to 300 guests, year-round, making this an unparalleled place for family reunions, tour groups and conferences.

Making it relaxing and fun

The heart and soul of Munaðarnes lies at the spacious café-restaurant that seats over 100 guests and where managers

Stefanía and her husband Þór are busy making sure that visitors are well taken care of and even entertained throughout their stay. I met them on the terrace where we savoured an organic Sumatran coffee and enjoyed the warm September sun.

Thoroughly loving what they do, Stefania and Þór have no regrets about leaving Reykjavik and have no plans to resume their life there any time soon. It's not hard to see why.

The energetic couple put their all into making Munaðarnes a genuinely fun and friendly place to stay, with lots of activities for guests, such as bingo, karaoke, a Sunday afternoon cake buffet, guided nature walks, bouncy castles for the kids and even an Indian curry night.

On cool summer evenings, you can cosy up on the deck in colourful wraps, while the kids play in the playground or have a round of mini-golf just outside the door, all of which contribute to Munaðarnes'

popularity as the 'go-to' place for families with children of all ages.

An original menu with local ingredients

Munaðarnes Restaurant prides itself on several original dishes such as savoury crêpes filled with grilled chicken, smoked lamb or trout, with rice and fresh vegetables. The succulent Limousin-Galloway beef, which comes straight from a nearby farm, is used in all of Munaðarnes' home-style burgers and steaks.

A speciality of the house is the hearty Icelandic goat meat hamburger which is fast gaining favour and is a real must to try. Lastly, a variety of home-baked cakes and desserts served with excellent fair-trade coffee rounds off your meal.

Reading through the guest-book, I was impressed with the many positive comments from visitors. As one young person so aptly put it, "This is the place where I fell in love with Iceland"—a fitting sentiment that pretty much sums up the 'Munaðarnes experience'.



Munaðarnes -EMV



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DINE IN A CHRISTMAS CARD

Kaffi Klettur is the classic Christmas venue

On your way out to Geysir and Gulfoss on the Golden Circle Tour, you will come to the small community of Reykholt. In former times, it was thought that the steam pouring out from the hot springs came from some infernal source, so priests came to try to stop them - without success, fortunately, as Kaffi Klettur bakes its fresh bread there, giving it a delicious distinctive taste.

With snow blanketing the country, Iceland presents a truly traditional Christmas air and where better to dine than in the snug warmth of the restaurant that looks like it stepped right out of a Christmas card!

With special Christmas buffets and the famous 'skáta', the uniquely Icelandic stingray

fish dish, meals at this time of year in this beautiful wooden restaurant, are especially worth stopping for. You may be fortunate to arrive on one of the 'culture evenings', which add a fun element to the experience.

Almost all the ingredients of the meal are grown naturally in the area, caught from the Tungafloet or Hvitá rivers or come from nearby farms.

This is a country restaurant and, as if to emphasise that fact, the restaurant is decorated with historical items from the past, when life was a quite rigorous. For children, this is a fascinating place that will keep them captivated while the adults

chat. It's the kind of experience that you will remember as much for the ambience as well as the delicious meals.

The Tasty Pastry

Steinunn, the chef and proprietor, also bakes a special kleinur. Make sure you try this tasty pastry, too, freshly cooked and a delicious desert. You may have tried commercially-produced varieties before, but this is the real thing, hand-made, small and crisp. You will see why it is so popular that it is shipped all over the country.

A Place for Parties

If you are visiting Iceland with a company or a group of friends. Kaffi Klettur is a restaurant that you will all want to eat at to take back memories of a good time, with good food, good drinks from the well-stocked bar and a good experience that you will talk about for a long time to come.



Kaffi Klettur -ASF

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EAT AT THE SOURCE

Dine on Delicious Langoustines at Eyrarbakki's Rauða húsið

A visit to Iceland is not complete without a visit to the birthplace of the Icelandic lobster industry. Here, you can indulge in a feast of the finest Icelandic seafood at the Rauða húsið (Red House) restaurant, found in the picturesque seaside village of Eyrarbakki. In this beautiful red house, a short drive from Reykjavik, langoustines are served in a charming atmosphere amidst a rich and well-preserved history.

Now a tranquil village, Eyrarbakki was once an important trading centre in Iceland. Many of its houses were built in the early 1900's and the village maintains that turn-of-the-century charm and atmosphere.

Iceland was late to discover this seafood delicacy. Lobster fishing was born off the shores of Eyrarbakki in 1954. In fact, it was not till then that the Langoustine was discovered to be not only edible, but delicious, too!

Care is taken to maintain the sense of history within the restaurant. The red house boasts beautiful original wooden floorboards dating back to 1919. If you arrive by noon, a hearty bowl of langoustine soup or a light seafood salad sets you up for the day. Choose an evening of indulgence and you can savour the Catch of the Day, consisting of three different seafood dishes. 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, the restaurant's cuisine is a mix of international and Icelandic foods, all featuring local ingredients.

Enjoy a walk around the village either before or after a meal at the Rauða húsið. The walk could continue along the beautiful black beaches only a few minutes away from the village. A relaxing stroll by the water makes the visit complete.



Rauða Húsið

-ASF



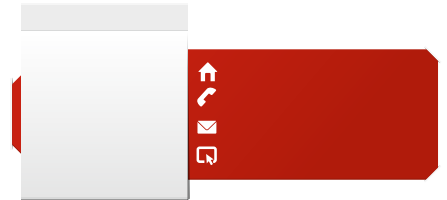
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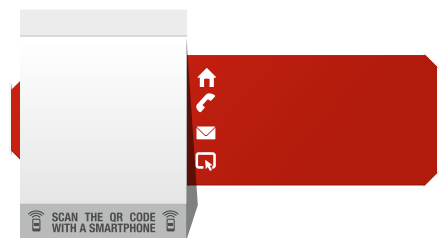


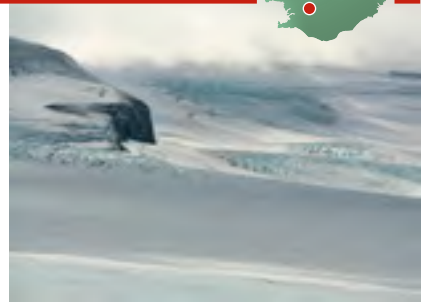


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SLEEP UNDER NORTHERN LIGHTS

In the depth of the countryside, Gamli bær Guesthouse in Húsafell

Only two hours' drive from Reykjavik, Húsafell is one of the best places in Iceland to see the Northern Lights. Surrounded by glaciers, lava fields, a beautiful river and waterfalls, it's a prime setting for

photographers. "After dark in winter, it is the best place to sit and watch the Northern Lights," says host, Steinunn Jóhannsdóttir.

Gamli bær Guesthouse was originally a farmhouse built in 1908 by a woman. "At the time it was very unusual for a woman to build a house", says Steinunn. "Many wondered why she needed such a large house but it turned out to be a good investment.

The guesthouse is heated by a local source of geothermal hot water, providing it with hot water for the hot tub as well.

Húsafell is surrounded by glaciers, with the beautiful Eiríksjökull being the most visible. Close by is an 1,100 year-old lava

field and the Hraunfossar and Barnafoss waterfalls are just a stone's throw away.

The farm church standing next to Gamli bær is used for christening, weddings and funerals. Next door, lives local artist Páll Guðmundsson, who made a stone-bar xylophone for the church as well as dozens of other sculptures.

In winter families and small groups can rent the 10-bed guesthouse in its entirety for a modest price and enjoy the free show in the sky on almost any clear night.



Gamli bærinn

-ASF



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ÁSÓLFSSKÁLI FARM HOLIDAYS

And the Winner is... 2011's Most Beautiful Farm in the Area

It's one of those places that is easy to miss if you are rushing along the ring road on Iceland's majestic south coast. Sharing the peaceful location just below Eyafjallajökull with a handful of

other farms, Asólfsskáli Farm seems to magically come into focus in a way that you might not expect.

It won the 2011 award for being the most beautiful farm in Rangárthing-eystra



county and the honour is wholly fitting for this neat and tidy dairy farm that opened its doors to travellers in 1991.

There are two self-contained cottages that can sleep up to 6 people each and come complete with jacuzzi and gas barbecue, making it an ideal retreat in a post-card perfect setting. Visitors are welcome to watch the milking of Asólfsskáli's 50 cows, hike the foothills along marked trails or visit the picturesque 19th century Asólfsskáli church that presides over the landscape.

Ásólfsskáli

-EMV



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THE OLD COWHOUSE RESTAURANT

Sitting Pretty on Iceland's South Coast

Location wise, The Old Cowhouse Restaurant couldn't be in a more perfect position for feasting your eyes upwards to the misty, craggy, moss-covered peaks of Eyafjallajökull. It's a welcome addition to Iceland's ever-growing list of new amenities that have been popping up all over the country.

The remodeled former barn easily seats 50 to 60 dinner guests while retaining its unpretentious character and sweet bovine simplicity, making this a thoroughly

enjoyable place to stop for lunch or dinner while travelling the south coast.

The menu boasts grass-fed beef, as is the norm in Iceland, coming straight from restaurant's own cattle herds. A hearty and warming meat soup called Volcano Soup, served with homemade bread, is a favourite.

Open year-round, the Old Cowhouse plans monthly events including an October evening of traditional food, a November evening of game (reindeer and geese), a December buffet of traditional Christmas

dishes, as well as musical evenings of Icelandic folk music at various times throughout the year.

For opening hours in Winter, please contact The Old Cowhouse Restaurant directly. Large and small groups welcome.

Old Cowhouse

-EMV



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© Nicolus Grabar

SKI FROM MOUNTAIN TO SEA

Oddsskarð's Advanced Ski runs are for those who love a challenge

What the East of Iceland lacks in people, it more than makes up for with warm communities who welcome visitors to some of the best hiking and scenic parts of the country. But what about in winter?

If you are a competent skier and love the sport, the snows here are great. They last all the way through the winter until May or even June, making it possible to try all the different courses in the area.

The smoother, shorter courses of 1.5 km are a good preparation for the more challenging slopes, where the difficulty level quickly rises. The different sides of the mountains present very different slopes, with some being both steep and extreme, bringing a thrill and a challenge to experienced skiers wanting to pit their skills against the mountain. With cliffs and gradients of over 18°, these slopes are not for the novice or faint-hearted but some of them provide the best racing in Iceland.

If you like a longer ski run, how about trying the routes from the mountaintop all the way down to the sea? There are two different routes that will take you between 3 and 5 km to traverse.

Peak Snow under Peak Lights

These are probably some of the best snows and skiing conditions you can find in the country, but they are all the more spectacular as the Northern Lights reach their climax for the next decade during these next two winters. Far from city lights, and with the backdrop of the mountains and the fjörd, this is an experience unmatched anywhere.

Stick around

You can come for the day but, once you see these slopes, you will doubtless want to stay longer to try them all. It's just a 50 min. flight from Reykjavik to Egilsstaðir - less than an average day's commute - but you'll find yourself in a very different world from

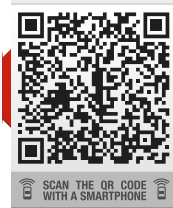
your workplace. You will need your camera, too, as the views are sublime. Stay in the Fjarðahótel or Hjá Marlín in the middle of Reyðafjörður or in one of the small cottages of Mjóeyri Guesthouse, perched on the edge of the fjörd at Eskifjörður and you will see why your camera is essential.

Food, Drink and Nightlife

It's one thing to ski, but you can build up quite an appetite. Fortunately, these communities are very lively and welcoming. For generations, they have welcomed the fishing fleets from France and Norway and now they are happy to share their lifestyle with visitors from many different countries. There's a lot of history, art and culture in this remote part of the country - but during the winter months, there's also a lot of snow - good skiing snow.

-ASF

East Iceland Marketing Office



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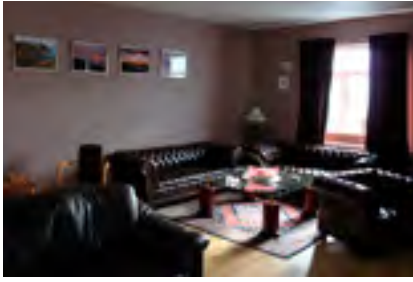
ON TOP OF THE WORLD

Experience Siglufjörður's beauty from Hvanneyri Guesthouse

Many visitors looking for the real essence of Iceland find it when visiting the northerly town of Siglufjörður, the former herring capital of Iceland.

The fishing boom eventually ended, but the people stayed, including the family in Hvanneyri Guesthouse. The family patriarch had, in fact, worked in Siglufjörður's fishing industry since he was six years old until the last fish processing plant closed this year.

The Guesthouse is located on the main street and is thus within arms' reach of the town's restaurants, shops and bakery, making it an ideal place to set up base during a stay in Tröllaskagi.



Accommodation ranges from dorms to lavish suites, something of which Katrín and her family are especially proud—offering each customer a room to fit their taste and budget.

Returning Friends

A family-run business, Guesthouse Hvanneyri puts special emphasis on friendly service. “We feel our customers appreciate this and many of them keep returning. In fact, I just received baby gifts for my newborn from one of our customers. I guess it doesn't get any more personal than that,” says Katrín.

A Trip into Icelandic Culture

The town has a lot to offer in itself. The people of Siglufjörður are particularly proud of their museums: The Herring Era Museum and the Folk Music Centre, where you can delve into Iceland's folk music heritage, thanks to Rev. Bjarni Þorsteinsson, a former resident of Siglufjörður, who diligently collected and documented hundreds of folk songs from the year 1880 onwards. That's not to mention the beauty of the Tröllaskagi area.



Hvanneyri

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OPÍÐ



FIRE, WATER, AIR AND

A Tour in Winter that Shows the Elements in Action with Iceland Excursions

There are not many tours in the world that will take in mountains and glaciers, volcanos and waterfalls, geothermal areas and strange beaches, countryside and communities all in the space of a single day.

South Coast and Waterfalls

The tour to the south coast encompasses all these elements and the winter months present visitors with an entirely different landscape, showing the sights with a very different perspective.

Leaving Reykjavik, the coach heads for the Hellisheiði mountain range. Even from a distance, the steam from the geothermal area can be seen billowing up into the early morning sky. Crossing the plateau, the plumes of steam turn first blood red then white as the sun rises over the countryside. You feel as though you are being transported through another world-and this is only the start of the tour.

A panorama is laid out before you as you come off the mountain. On the right, the

sea and on the left, the village of Hveragerði, with picturesque streams and hot springs sending up energetic clouds of steam.

Volcano country

By the time the coach reaches Hvolsvöllur, you will probably be thinking about some refreshments and this is where there is a stop for just that. You are now in volcano country, very close to the well-known Eyjafjallajökull and Fimmvöruhals volcanos that have hit the headlines - and the airlines - in the past few years. Not





EARTH

far away are the other big hitters: Hekla and Katla, both of which are still sleeping, though scientists say they are due to awake any time.

The landscape changes when you leave Hveragerði. On the right, the Westman Islands rise out of the sea and, before you know it, a mountain appears on the left with what look like strands of silver hair falling from it. This is the beautiful Seljalandsfoss, the waterfall that you can walk behind. In winter, it is all the more beautiful. If it is cold, some of the falls

may be frozen columns of ice. Continuing into the interior, you would come to the Þórsmörk National Park but, today, we are continuing under Eyjafjallajökull to Skógar. The waterfall here inspired the design of the cathedral that overlooks all Reykjavik. This is Skógarfoss, its black basalt columns creating a cathedral effect of their own.

This is also the land of the famous Njáls Saga. The tour that takes in the south coast and the dramatic waterfalls of Seljalandsfoss and Skógarfoss also takes

you over mountains, past volcanos and down to the beaches of Vík.

Iceland Excursions have a variety of unusual tours that make a visit to Iceland a very memorable experience. Whether it is enjoying the bonfire and fireworks on New Year's Eve or watching an ethereal light show as the Northern Lights sweep across the night sky in a silent dance of awesome proportions, these tours are different, filled with the best that makes Iceland the destination of choice for adventurous travellers.



Iceland Excursions



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THE HIKING PARADISE

Álfheimar's Comfort Hiking Package

Moving mountains may seem impossible, but thousands of years ago, when the landscape around Borgarfjörður eystri was still forming, colossal glaciers collided, raising massive mountains and leaving paths of flat valleys in their wake.

The Borgarfjörður eystri hiking area was named one of the 25 most beautiful treks in the world by National Geographic Adventure and last year's top choice for hiking in Iceland. Borgarfjörður eystri, a small community in the northeastern corner of the country, distinguishes itself from other hiking areas with its well-established infrastructure and clearly marked trails.

For the past fifteen years, Arngrímur Viðar Ásgeirsson, owner of Álfheimar, has aided tourists in their search for natural beauty by offering a complete 3-7 day package to visitors so that they can simply relax and enjoy their time.

Often referred to as comfort hiking, Álfheimar offers a complete package and includes hotel accommodation and local restaurant dishes. Though days can be long and rigorous, Álfheimar provides its

guests with a comfortable place to rest after a day out in nature. The only thing that they need to bring is a good pair of hiking boots and warm clothes.

"We have spent time creating the different day tours from our hotel and have hosted every level from amateur to experienced hiker. Our local guides give our guests opportunity to see places that they might not find on their own and tell them about what they see and experience," says Arngrímur.

In the Footsteps of Elves

Álfheimar Guesthouse encourages its guests to slow down and take a closer look at their surroundings with its 'Hiking in the Elves' Mountain Programme'. Rather than rushing from place to place, guests are treated slow travel in the immediate surroundings where they can get a better idea of local life and nature. The community has its roots in ecotourism, placing a special emphasis on respect for nature through environmental stewardship. This has earned the community recognition from the EU's Blue Flag programme for its environmentally friendly harbour,

Hafnarhólmi. Birds, especially puffins, circle the harbour area, which provides an ideal lookout point for avid bird-watchers.

Three- to seven-day tours give travellers the chance to explore the area and break from their normal routine.

A hiking guide takes guests from the hotel to a new destination each day while explaining to them about the area. All hotel staff have lived in the area for several years and can often trace the story of a place that could cause questions to city people to a folk-tale or the local life of the village. Borgarfjörður eystri has a diverse collection of rare rocks and minerals especially rhyolite. At the rock museum of one family in the village you can see several unique types of stones found in the area. Unlike Landmanalaugar, one of the most difficult treks in the country, in Borgarfjörður eystri, rhyolite can be found close to the road and along relatively easy hiking trails.

A Quick Flight to Paradise

It is easy to get to Borgarfjörður. Air Iceland flies from Reykjavík to Egilsstaðir and then Álfheimar offers free collection to the accommodation in Borgarfjörður eystri. The flight, pick up from Egilsstaðir airport and accommodation in Borgarfjörður eystri are included in the tour. Guests will be taken to one of Álfheimar's thirty



double rooms, each with made up beds and a private bathroom.

Once at Álftheimar, guests have nothing to worry about as all transportation, museum admissions, and meals are included. Meals focus on local food and guests often have the chance to meet the farmers and fishermen who supplied their dinner. Guests are always encouraged to drop by the farms to get a better idea of daily life, and if they arrive in autumn or spring they get the added experience of participating in the autumn sheep round-up and spring's lambing season.

Programme for 2012

Arngrímur says that, in 2012, guests will arrive for the 7 days tour on a Saturday, so they are ready for the first hike Sunday morning. The season will start on the 2nd of June and there is a guaranteed departure every Saturday until 15th of September. If they have only one guest, it can be lovely but they take a maximum of 14 people per guide.

Because they spend 6 nights at the hotel, they can choose their 5 days of hiking when they see the weather report and the catch of the day is offered in Elves' Mountain. Hikes are from 12-18 km but, usually, they are about 5-8 hours in the countryside. Everyone likes to stop and experience the nature and the wilderness.

The Hiking Tour Plan

In the normal day-to-day programme, the second day begins with a hike to Storurð, or Boulder Hollow, chosen as the best hike in Iceland last year. Starting from Vatnskarð pass, an experienced guide will lead hikers across the Geldingafjall mountain. From there, you can see Njarðvík, Fljótsdalshérað valley, the black sandy beach of Héraðsflói bay and, if the day is particularly clear, Vatnajökull glacier and Mt. Snæfell in the distant east. From here it's not far to Stórirurð, an expanse of enormous rocks cut through by a small river with streaming pools of icy turquoise water. The road then forks into a more challenging, yet unforgettable, hike through Dyrfjöll, the Door Mountains, or an easier way down through the valley.

Following a day's rest and hearty meal of freshly-caught fish from local fishermen, a new day begins with a more relaxed hike of 11 kilometres, stretching from Selfjót river and along the seashore to Stapavík cove. From Stapavík, the hike goes along an old riding trail through Gönguskörð pass. Until 1955, this trail was the only way from Borgarfjörður to Fljótsdalshérað valley. Once through the valley, hikers will be picked up from Njarðavík and driven to Borgarfjörður.



The next day is dedicated to an easy hike of 15 kilometres to view Breiðavík. Hikers begin walking over moors and will notice light brown rhyolite that turns golden in the sunshine around Lake Urðarhólavatn. As Breiðavík inlet stretches before them, they will watch the majesty of rhyolite mountains' expand in an array of pastel colours. After a gentle walk along a sheep trail, it's time to enjoy the atmosphere, waterfalls and peace in Breiðuvík before heading up to Gagnheiði ridge which is the best viewpoint over about 500 metres, and then it's back to Bakkagerði.



The fifth day is a gentle one and includes a cultural tour around the immediate area of Borgarfjörður encompassing the Old turf house, concert hall, local fish factory, and a workshop that turns rock to art. The local museums of the artist Kjarval and the fairytale museum where you can learn a little more about the local elves are also on the route which, of course, includes the Elf rock and the local church. Following a delicious fish soup from the local Álfacafé, the guides lead hikers to Hvolsmælir peak which lies at the foot of the Door Mountains.



The hikes will continue the next day with Brúnavík Bay. It starts at Borgarfjörður's environmentally friendly harbour, Hafnarhólmi, with a visit to the puffins and other nesting birds such as the harlequin ducks. Moving up from the coast, the hike passes through vegetated mountain screes to Brúnavík pass, descending to Brúnavík inlet. Here lies a black sand beach littered with beautiful stones and a small stream that hikers can cross barefoot, staying that way until they reach Hofstrandarskarð pass. The final part of the walk flanks Helgárgil, a canyon where a myriad colours are reflected, and heads back towards Bakkagerði village.



A Time to Choose a New Direction

Guests have the option of continuing their stay in Borgarfjörður eystri or choosing to take a tour that includes travel to Mývatn and Akureyri. The difficult task of leaving Borgarfjörður is softened by the beauty of Mývatn, which hosts a variety of birdlife on its peaceful shores. Guests will visit Mývatn's famed natural geothermal bath and stay at a nearby farm holiday guesthouse. From there they will be driven to Akureyri, where they can spend the day before heading back to Reykjavík.

Preparing for the Hikes

Álfheimar Guesthouse's owner, Arngrímur Viðar Ásgeirsson, has taught sports at the local school for several years and recommends a few tips to prepare for the trip. "Though hikes are easy to moderate, I encourage people to walk for one to two hours, three to four times per week to get their bodies ready for hiking. We want to make sure that our guests get to see all the places and some require more effort to get to. Hikes can be challenging, but we make sure we find out each hiker's capability before we head off on the day's hike," advises Arngrímur, "and if someone decides to take a day off, we can help them to find short hikes or places to go in the little village of Bakkagerði".

A Visit To Fairy Tale Land

Guests can take a close look and learn information about the landscape's geology by going to the rock museum which then leads into every child's dream, 'Fairy Tale Land'. Adults and children alike can hear stories and kids can try on elf costumes as they visit a castle, the elves' mountain home, and dive under the sea to a mermaid's world.

The Art of Kjarval

An exhibition about Kjarval, one of Iceland's most famous painters, takes guests through his life and displays his sketches of local people. For guests looking for a cosy café, Elf Café offers a delicious fish soup, homemade cake and cookies, coffee, tea and espresso.

In the little fishing village of Bakkagerði and the nearby area, you can find about 140 people and a lot of elves. They offer a variety of 240 different types of beds from mountain huts to hotel style rooms. They like to have guests and are not involved in mass tourism, so will help you to find your right place to stay.

For more information, the local tourism website, www.borgarfjordureystri.is will give you a lot of material and www.puffins.is can update you about the birdlife.

Álfheimar



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DINE BY THE RIVERSIDE

Hotel Selfoss' Restaurant and Spa provide comfort and class



Just 45 min from the capital, the powerful Ölfusá river runs through the town of Selfoss. On its bank stands Hotel Selfoss, with 99 well-equipped rooms, its top-class Riverside restaurant providing diners a spectacular view of the foaming river, the bridge and the mountains beyond.

The restaurant itself has a spacious lounge area with comfortable couches. The warmth of the inviting open fire adds to the ambience of muted elegance where there is time to converse over drinks from the well-stocked bar.

The chef creates dishes from the finest local produce that are more reminiscent of works of art, making the dining experience exceptional.

The hotel has all the normal facilities expected of such a luxury hotel, including

meeting, conference and banquet facilities. However, there is much more, including a cinema and shops. In addition, the Riverside Spa and Wellness Centre is a wonderful place to relax and rejuvenate body and spirit alike, fully equipped with sauna, steam room, a hot pool and rainwater showers.

From the hotel, guests can branch out and explore the entire south of Iceland, knowing that, after a day in the wilds, they will be thoroughly taken care of on their return.

-ASF

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EAST ICELAND- A

Hikes and treks for everyone

East 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.

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 to safer hiking and optimal enjoyment.

A climb up Mt. Snæfell, the 1833 extinct volcano, presents a magnificent view from the top of Iceland's highest mountain outside the glacier massif of Vatnajökull. There are guided tours up and around the impressive volcano and the surroundings offer some great sights, such as lush green moss and sparkling springs in between black sands. Herds of wild reindeer and pink-footed geese roam the area. Nearby Brúarjökull offers probably one of the easiest accesses to explore the tremendous ice sheet.

For the avid hiker, the Snæfell-Lónsöræfi trail with stunning landscapes in the Vatnajökul National Park is a tempting and trying solitary route across the glacier Eyjabakkajökull before dropping down to the the stunning Lónsöræfi highlands, and the view of long green valleys with

countless waterfalls, such as Geithellnadalur, Hofsdalur or Viðidalur.

Likewise a tour to Kverkföll, 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 southing your soar feet in the warm juvenile volcanic waters flowing from the mouth of the great Kverkföll Ice cave. Although the white giant looks peaceful enough, never forget that there are many dangers hidden in the moving ice.

The 150 km marked paths of the Víknaslóðir (Desert Inlets) in Borgarfjörður eystri, enable you to have views of beautiful coastlines, mountain ridges, abandoned farmhouses, birdlife, arctic fauna and with





HIKING HAVEN

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 Stóruð, 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 day to enjoy the best of unspoilt breathtaking nature.

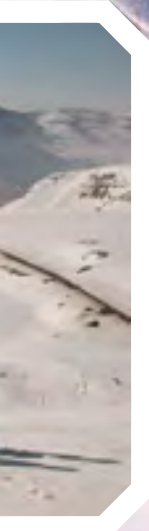
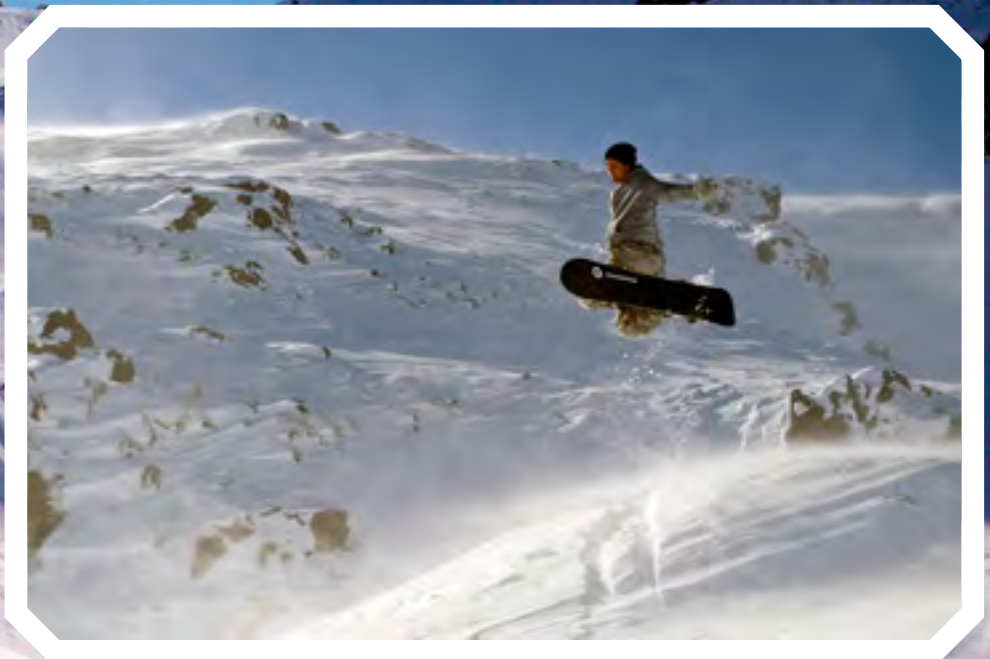
For those preferring a more maritime view to enjoy a unique opportunity to experience the beauty and the calm of Iceland's East are the Fjords. Visit the wonderful Nature heritage centre at Skálanes at the furthest

shore of beautiful Seyðisfjörður or enjoy the ride to one of Iceland's most celebrated fjords Mjóifjörður with the breathtaking Klifurbrekkufossar waterfalls.

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 eiderducks, 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. And finish with a short hike to Helgustaðanáma, the old Iceland Spar mine in Eskifjörður.

For some shorter option, the Hiking Pearls of Fljótisdalshérað, the area around Egilsstaðir gives you some great ideas. Don't miss the 40 minutes climb to Iceland's 2nd highest waterfall, Hengifoss and the beautiful basalt pillars of Litlanesfoss in Fljótisdalur, or a stroll in the Hallormsstaður arctic birch forest are all truly something to write home about. The solitude of Hjálpleysa, the ½ day hike by Stóra-Sandfell through mindblowing monuments of the iceage. 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 evidence by the Bustarfell folk museum in Vopnafjörður. To name just a few of the wonderful options.

For further information www.east.is



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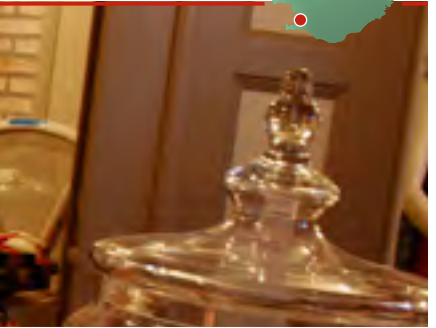


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DOWNTOWN CHOCOLATE FANTASIES

A Chocolatier opens in Reykjavik's oldest house

Almost anyone can tell you where Reykjavik's oldest house is-and now with more reason than ever. One word says it all: Chocolate!

Sure, you can buy chocolates in a supermarket but enter this house and you're entering a whole world where you taste buds will be tantalised with creations that will forever change the way you think about chocolate.

An eruption of taste

Hafliði sources his chocolate beans from all over the world. What he does with them, though, is unique. A range of volcanos, for example. They erupt in your mouth with a taste that sends streams of flavour flowing over your tongue and down your throat in an unforgettable torrent of taste. Drangar, Jökull, Stapi and Eldborg volcanos are immortalised in flavour. Packed in pyramid-shaped boxes, they are an original gift - if the giver doesn't get them first.

Skyr as you've never tasted it

Another feature Iceland is famous for is its skyr - a thick milk product slightly similar to thick yoghurt. Organically produced at the

Erpsstaðir farm in the west of the country, you will find it filling some very special chocolates here that are very popular with visitors.

A new round of golf

Perhaps you are a golfer - or know one. These golf balls you certainly won't want to send soaring down the fairway but rather sliding over your tongue. White chocolate on the outside, with a delicious filling, these golfball packs are a popular present - even to yourself!

Red Lovers' Hearts

Of course, chocolate, love and romance go together as one. Red heart chocolates are a sure success with that someone special. Coming in packets of 6, you may even get to try one.

Smartphone centre

Smartphones are now becoming ubiquitous. The smartphones you find here may not make any calls but coming in white or brown chocolate, you will certainly be called on a lot! They make an original, fun gift that will be as popular as the real thing.

Christmas Tea Delights

Filled with the special Christmas tea, these packs of chocolates are not to be found anywhere else, so not even Father Christmas can get ahold of them. If he did, he would never take to his sleigh.

Canned Kaviar

This fishing nation is known for its love of caviar but here are cans filled with delicious brown or white caviar that doesn't seem at all fishy. These specially-packed creations of crispy cover chocolate will be quite a talking point in a party.

The list of original creations goes on, so chocolate lovers had better bring big bags. From pralines to truffles, orange, ginger or lemon peel packs, a Sao Tomé special, passion fruit and rum and so many more, you'll be so thankful that you can choose beautifully-presented wooden cases filled with these specialities or a special 3-tier box whose design is a work of art itself.

With handmade creations like this, you'll never look at commercial chocolates in the same way again. Having tasted the real thing, who would want any other?



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ART IN FOMENT

From placid landscape beginnings to a dynamic diversity at Listasafn Íslands

In a country where culture plays a major role, art has been held in high regard. Nonetheless, it has had a tumultuous history, as aficionados and artists alike struggled to come to terms with a changing world and changing definitions of what is considered art.

Iceland was under Danish rule at the end of the 19th century, when revolutionary fervour was sweeping Europe and the desire for independence was expressed in bloody upheavals in many countries. Iceland's drive for freedom was led by the wise counsel and argument of Jón Sigurðsson in the courts of the Danish king while art was expressing an Icelandic identity to its people through its landscapes.

Founded in 1884, the National Gallery of Iceland exhibited works in Parliament House. Artists travelled the country,

painting its beauty for the public to see. For many, it was the first time to see the nation's natural treasures. Travel was difficult and few undertook the arduous treks, so this was an awakening for the nation. Ásgrímur Jónsson wrote in 1903 about the importance of a nation having its own artists, "if only to teach the public to appreciate the beauty of nature around us..."

However, only two years later, mirroring the spirit of independence in the country, the struggle to break free from a restrictive concept of art was already beginning, a struggle that was to continue to the present day, with young new artists continually seeking new expression, interpretation and forms for their art.

At the end of the 19th century and in the beginning of the 20th, most aspiring artists

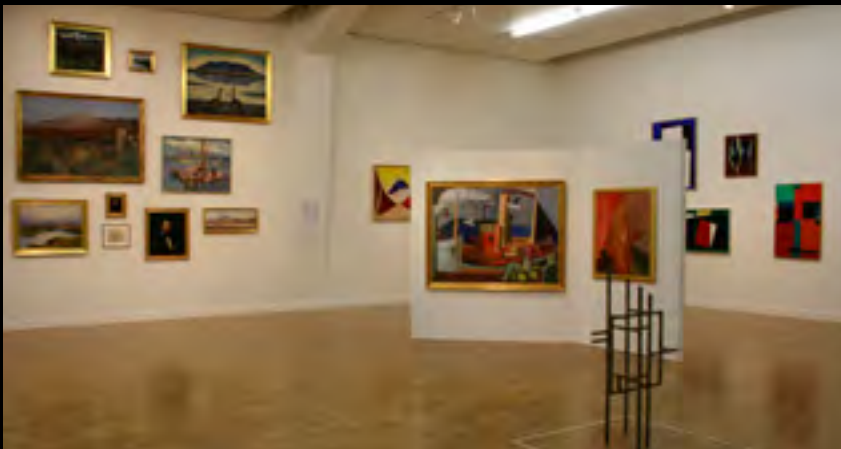
went to Copenhagen to further their studies. The vibrant art scene there was in the throes of a rebellion by young artists against traditional art styles. International exhibitions were held frequently, offering an opportunity for new inspiration and direction.

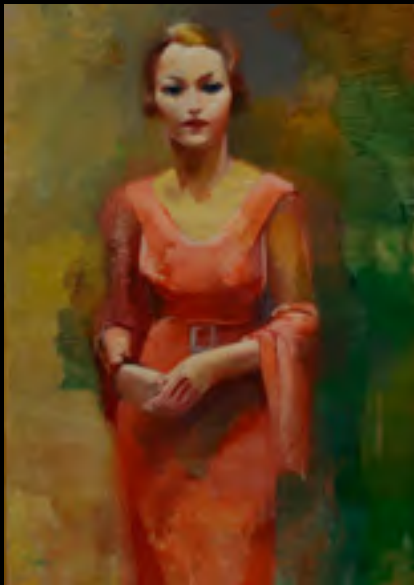
Returning to Iceland, many artists planted the seeds in others who were to take art in different directions. They faced strong opposition from several sections of society.

In 1925, Finnur Jónsson returned to Iceland, holding an exhibition in Café Rosenberg. This was the first major exhibit of avant-garde abstract art.

Around 1930, artists began investigating new themes and methods of modern art.

1940-41 were characterised by much debate about the character and substance of art that split the Icelandic art world for decades following. Some politicians





demanded art be easily understood and in close connection to nature, whilst numerous artists wanted to see modern art that emphasised the role of structure, form and colour find a place in Icelandic art, which resulted in a lot of experimentation.

The late 1950's saw two major artists bring dramatic new themes to the art world here: Erro introducing Pop art and Dieter Roth, the Fluxus movement.

In 1965, an exhibition was held under the name of SÚM, a movement that was soon to shake up the art scene in the sixties. Some of its members were invited to exhibit in the Pompidou in Paris at its opening in 1977.

In the 1990's, video art made its debut and visitors found a new expression through interactive participation in works of art. Nonetheless, the stormy debate over the years has barely abated, with every push in a new direction leading to debate and controversy, with each generation of artists pushing the envelope to discover new means of expression.

Iceland's short, but rich history is evident in the number of works the Gallery has - not to mention those hanging in official buildings and embassies worldwide. With over 10,000 works to choose from, a number that is growing with contributions from upcoming artists, the Gallery maintains a high level of interest from the public by having regularly changing exhibitions, educational dialogues and embracing latest technological developments by digitising its collection with a view to making it available on the Internet. Exhibitions and lecturers travel the country so everyone can benefit from them, no matter how remote they are from the capital. Schools pay regular visits and special attention is devoted to them, as it will be from them that the next generation of artists will arise.

"Then and Now" is an exhibition that gives an overview of the country's art history with samples from each time and genre. It demonstrates how much effort is put into every aspect of each exhibition.

The National Gallery has moved several times. From the Parliament, it moved to the top floor of a new building designed for it and for the National Museum next to the university until, in 1988, it found its home opposite the 'pond' next to Fríkirkjun - the church that borders the lake. It is housed in what used to be an frozen fish storage. A dramatic glass addition highlights its modern outlook.

It is open daily from 11 am to 5 pm, except Mondays and visitors will find it well worth taking some time there. There is a bookstore with many beautiful publications and a range of interesting articles and upstairs, a café serves delicious meals and snacks.

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ENJOY WINTER'S WONDERS

Reykjavik Excursions Take You to the Sights of the Season

Winter in Iceland is a time for enjoyment, excitement and thrills. Unlike the US, Canada or most of Europe, the winters are quite mild and, unlike the damp in Britain that seeps into the bones, Iceland's crisp, dry winters provide ideal conditions for enjoying the outdoors.

The Night Becomes Light

Everything changes in the autumn, opening up a completely different range of activities and challenges. This is the time when the nights are regularly swept with swirling and dancing Northern Lights. And there's a tour for that. These

heavenly lights seem to have a mind of their own, appearing for a moment or for hours, visiting different areas with their unique flowing forms. Leaving Reykjavik in the evening, the tours head out to different locations, wherever the Lights are expected to appear. Take your camera, but nothing can capture the experience of watching this dramatic scene unfold. Being a natural phenomenon, they do not appear on demand so, if you don't see them one night, you're welcomed back free for another tour. This winter, they are at the peak of their activity cycle, so chances are unusually good, given a clear night.

The White Thrill on the Golden Circle

In winter, an additional thrill is added to the 'Golden Circle' tours that visit Þingvellir National Park, the site where the world's oldest functioning parliament came together and where the earth's plates are fighting to separate, the spectacular geothermal area of Geysir, where giant jets of boiling water blast skywards and Gullfoss, the majestic waterfall that has awed thousands.

Driving up to Langjökull, Iceland's second-largest glacier (or its vicinity, depending on the weather and snow conditions), an exhilarating hour-long





snowmobile ride over the vast expanse of snow awaits those who are looking for new challenges.*

A comment from a client sums it up: “We did this trip in early March and it was by far and away the best trip that we did in Iceland. Great for those who love adventure and sightseeing. Geysirs, waterfalls, continental plates and snowmobiling over a glacier. What more can you want? I’d say this is a must do.”

**Snowmobile drivers must present a valid driver’s licence. 2 people share a snowmobile.*

A Walk on the Ice Side

Eyjafjallajökull is best known for its volcanic eruption but the volcano is actually on a glacier, some two hours drive from Reykjavik through the beautiful countryside of South Iceland. The tour passes over the geothermal mountain plateau, with its plumes of steam rising high into the sky, past horse farms, and scenic churches, villages and rivers until it comes to Hvolsvöllur, where there’s a break for refreshments before heading to the Sólheimajökull glacier tongue, for the start of the walk up the ice, using the

supplied crampons. This is where your camera will come into play, giving you memories to take home and amaze your friends. Windproof warm clothing, rain gear and hiking boots are needed on this tour and good sunglasses are advisable. (Layers of clothing are best.)

On the way back, there are stops at the striking and beautiful waterfalls at Skógafoss and Seljalandsfoss. If you have ever seen them in summer, you will really enjoy their winter appearances. This tour is awesome and has received a lot of praise and rave reviews!



Reykjavik Excursions

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WINTER JEEP TOURS

Personal Trips in comfort with Salty Tours

When you travel to Iceland with a small group of friends, you may be tempted to simply rent a car and see the sights. To be frank, driving in Iceland in winter can be quite a challenge and by driving yourselves, you will miss a lot. I know. Been there, done that - and in winter, that can spoil the holiday very quickly, let alone worrying about the driving or where to stop and eat or missing any of the sights. .

Salty Tours has built up an impressive list of positive reviews on sites like TripAdvisor.com for the simple reason that the owner, Þorsteinn, knows what he's doing and he's a mine of knowledge and interesting stories. His winter Jeep Tours cover a huge area and he knows it like the back of his hand. You can travel in the comfort of a Jeep and have a really personalised tour, tailored to your own interests and needs and see things you

would not even know existed had you just driven around yourself.

These are all full-day tours from 8 to 14 hours and they cover quite a lot of territory, whilst ensuring that you get the very most out of the day. Travelling down the South Coast to the dreamlike landscape of Jökulsárlón, for instance, takes you over mountains, with spectacular views of steam towering up into the sky from the geothermal areas, down through the small towns of the south, under Eyjafjallajökull, whose eruption in 2010 is notorious, past waterfalls all the way to Europe's largest glacier, Vatnajökull. Continuing on, the tour takes you to the unearthly site of Jökulsárlón.

The slightly shorter South Shore Tour takes you on a similar trip, though not quite as far, and includes the magnificent basalt columns and black sand beaches of

Reynisfjara. Get up close and personal with both a volcano and a glacier.

The Golden Circle Tour takes you through Þingvellir, a UNESCO World Heritage site and the location of the world's first parliament where you can see the forces of nature tearing the earth apart as the tectonic plates of N. America and Europe are clearly visible here. Then on to Geysir, with its spectacular boiling water eruptions every few minutes and its beautiful hot pools. A few kilometres away is the powerful waterfall of Gullfoss, with its winter coat of ice lining the walls of the cliffs and spectacular rainbows.

Winter is also the time to see the awesome Northern Lights as they sweep across the skies at night. This can be a bit of a mystery tour as, depending on the weather, the trips can go to a variety of places.

Salty Tours takes you to numerous other locations and specialises in the unusual like Photography safaris, Snowmobiles, Quad bikes or Glacier walks to push the boundaries of your holiday experience.



Salty Tours

-ASF



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EUROPE'S ONLY FISH TANNERY

Five Years from Fish Soup to Soft Leather

June 10th marked the official opening of Sutarinn, 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, Sutarinn 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, Sutarinn 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, Sutarinn 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 Sutarinn: 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 Sutarinn remained the only tannery left in Iceland.

A Rare View of Tanning

Sutarinn'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. Sutarinn combines their tannery tour with a historical overview of tanning in Iceland. Sutarinn 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.

Sutarinn 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 Sutarinn 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.



-KB



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LEATHER FROM THE SEA

Fabulous Fish Creations from Sútarinn'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 Sútarinn, 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



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



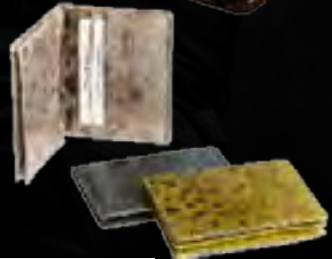
contour. Though skins are dyed and treated to enhance their pattern, they are simply a soft and scentless version of nature's original design. All chemicals used in the tanning and dyeing process are EU approved.

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 Sútarinn, Atlantic Leather's economuseum in Sauðarkrókur. Guests can take a tour to see the process firsthand and walk away with some of the latest fish leather fashions.



KB

Atlantic Leather

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CINEMA ON FIRE

Experience Volcanic Eruptions close up at Volcano House

Every hour, on the hour, take a trip back to 1973 and watch the awesome power of red-hot lava, seemingly irresistible as it moves in slow motion, swallowing and crushing everything in its path. Like a sci-fi monster, you see it start to engulf a thriving community and the impending disaster as it edges to the harbour to destroy the only safe haven for the fishing fleet. Every boat is pressed into service to ferry the inhabitants to safety as they watch more of their lives disappear.

The Fight Back

Many a community would quit under such seemingly-impossible conditions - but not the Westmen. Within days, the inspiring titanic struggle against overwhelming odds begins.

A Drama from Emmy-nominated Film-makers

Then, the 2010 eruption that everyone struggles to pronounce: Eyjafjallajökull

that covered farms and villages in a deep layer of ash and an almost impenetrable fog, threatening, once again, the livelihoods of hard-working communities. A massive flood sweeps down the mountain, putting bridges along the main road linking the southern towns and villages at risk. This one is too big to overcome - but not too big to fight.

These films bring the raw emotion and courage of these communities home, leaving you not only awed at the power of these elements from hell but at the spirit of the men, women and children living under their shadows.

Time for a Breather

It's time for some refreshments and rumination and Volcano House has meals and snacks with drinks of all kinds in a comfortable café where you can look over the harbour and think about what you have just seen. It's lunches include delicious homemade soups that people pop in off the street to enjoy. Take



a look at the floor: it's not smooth but made of small rocks, smoothed by the elements.

Free Geology Display

As you sip your latte or tea, look around at the display cases. A closer check reveals the beauty of the land - its rocks and crystals. After the eruptions, there's an endless supply of volcanic rock to take home with you and, among the videos of eruptions and Icelandic life, you'll find bottles of ash and even a volcano cake recipe that will be a real hit back home!

A visit to the Volcano House is perfect for when you have an hour or two on your hands and would like to do something different, with a dash of excitement added to it but don't want to travel. Situated right downtown by the old harbour, it's open from 9am to 11pm daily and, in early 2012, you will feel what it's like to be in an earthquake with a new simulator to shake you up!



Volcano House



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-ASF



From

LISTASAFN ÍSLAND

In a country where culture plays a major role, art has been held in high regard. Nonetheless, it has had a tumultuous history, as aficionados and artists alike struggled to come to terms with a changing world and changing definitions of what is considered art.

Iceland was under Danish rule at the end of the 19th century, when revolutionary fervour was sweeping Europe and the desire for independence was expressed in bloody upheavals in many countries. Iceland's drive for freedom was led by the wise counsel and argument of Jón Sigurðsson in the courts of the Danish king while art was expressing an Icelandic identity to its people through its landscapes.

Opened in 1884, the National Gallery of Iceland exhibited works in Parliament House. Artists travelled the country, painting its beauty for the public to see - for many, it was the first time to see the nation's

natural treasures. Travel was difficult and few undertook the arduous treks, so this was an awakening for the nation. Ásgrímur Jónsson wrote in 1903 about the importance of a nation having its own artists, "if only to teach the public to appreciate the beauty of nature around us..."

However, only two years later, mirroring the spirit of independence in the country, the struggle to break free from a restrictive concept of art was already beginning, a struggle that was to continue to the present day, with young new artists continually seeking new expression, interpretation and forms for their art.

At the end of the 19th century and in the beginning of the 20th, most aspiring artists went to Copenhagen to further their studies, often on government scholarships. The vibrant art scene there was in the throes of a rebellion by young artists against traditions. International exhibitions were

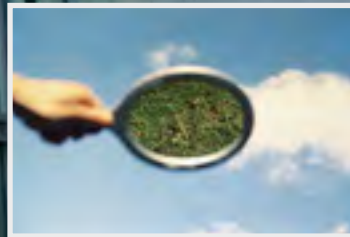
held frequently, offering an opportunity for new inspiration and direction.

Returning to Iceland, many artists found themselves as isolated as Icelandic society itself was at this time but they planted the seeds in others who were to take art in different directions. They faced strong opposition from many sections of society. In 1925, Finnur Jónsson returned to Iceland, holding an exhibition in Café Rosenberg. This was the first major exhibit of avant-garde abstract art and it split the Icelandic art world for decades following. Around 1930, artists began investigating new themes and methods of modern art. The 1930's and 40's were characterised by much debate about the character and substance of art. Most politicians demanded art be easily understood and in close connection to nature, whilst numerous artists wanted to see modern art that emphasised the role of structure, form and colour find a place



ART IN FOMENT

placid landscape beginnings to a dynamic diversity at Listasafn Íslands



in Icelandic art, which resulted in a lot of experimentation.

The late 1950's saw two major artists bring dramatic new themes to the art world here: Erro introducing Pop art and Dieter Roth, the Fluxus movement. In 1965, an exhibition was held under the name of SÚM, a movement that was soon to shake up the art scene in the sixties. Some of its members were invited to exhibit in the Pompidou in Paris at its opening in 1977.

In the 1990's, video art made its debut and visitors found a new expression through interactive participation in works of art. Nonetheless, the stormy debate over the years has barely abated, with every push in a new direction leading to debate and controversy, with each generation of artists pushing the envelope to discover new means of expression.

Iceland's short, but rich history is evident in the number of works the Gallery has

- not to mention those hanging in official buildings and embassies worldwide. With over 10,000 works to choose from, a number that is growing with contributions from upcoming artists, the Gallery maintains a high level of interest from the public by having regularly changing exhibitions, educational dialogues and embracing latest technological developments by digitising its collection with a view to making it available on the Internet. Exhibitions and lecturers travel the country so everyone can benefit from them, no matter how remote they are from the capital. Schools pay regular visits and special attention is devoted to them, as it will be from them that the next generation of artists will arise.

"Then and Now" is an exhibition that gives an overview of the country's art history with samples from each time and genre. It demonstrates how much effort is put into every aspect of each exhibition.

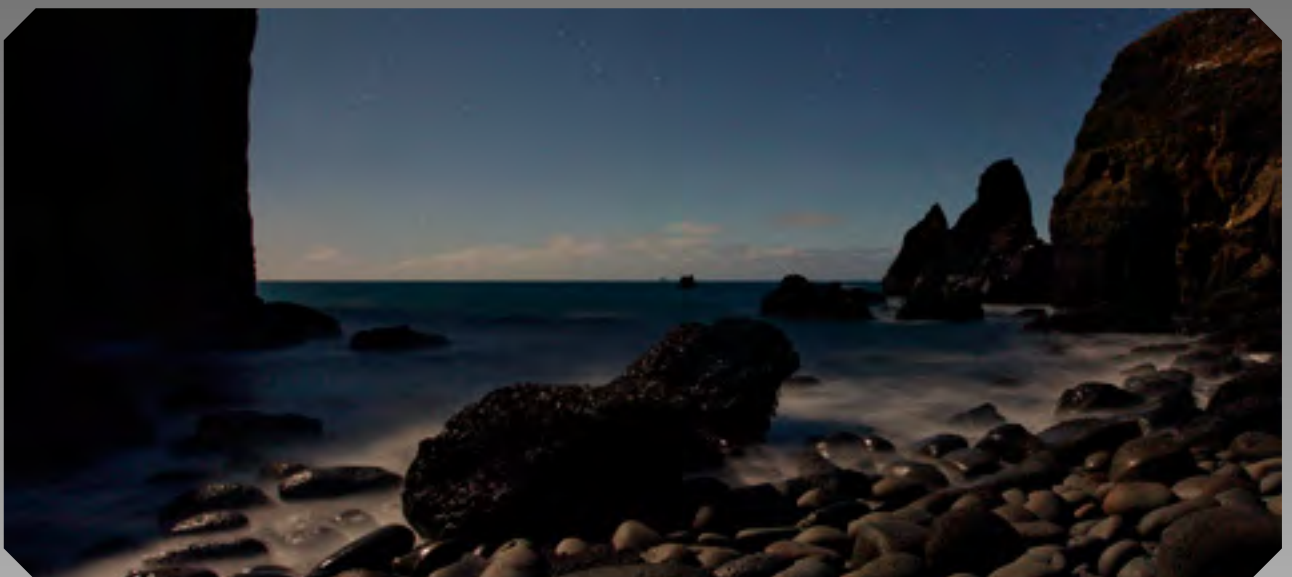
The National Gallery has moved several times, from the Parliament to the top floor of the National Museum by the university until, in 1988, it found its home opposite the 'pond' next to Frikirkjun - the church that borders the lake. It is housed in what used to be an ice storage. A dramatic glass addition highlights its modern outlook. It is open daily from 11 am to 5 pm, except Mondays and visitors will find it well worth taking some time there. There is a bookstore with many beautiful publications and a range of interesting articles and upstairs, a café serves delicious meals and snacks.

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OLGEIR ANDRÉSSON

Lighting the Night

The spectacular Northern Lights captured for all to enjoy

There is never one night the same as another. They appear, dance across the sky in a ballet of light, only to disappear as abruptly as they came.

This winter and next, the Northern Lights are at the peak of their cycle. This will be the best time to view them and the time when the chance of viewing them is higher than it will be for years to come.

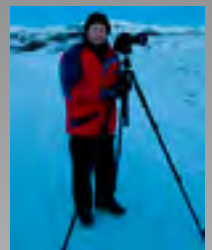
Experiencing the Northern Lights is to experience an ethereal sight. The nights generally need to be chilly and clear. From around 9 pm onwards, the Lights appear, starting as a glow and frequently becoming so bright that everything around is clearly visible.

Their shape and patterns change by the moment and they really do appear to be dancing as they sweep across the sky. Whilst they can be seen in Reykjavik, the city lights don't allow their full beauty to be seen and so it has become popular to take a tour out into the countryside to enjoy them.

Just as they are never the same any given night, so they appear differently according to where you are viewing them in the country. Photos you see are a moment, frozen in time of an event that will be very different just a minute later. Thus, this is a performance that can be enjoyed every night they appear, for hours at a time.

Capturing the beauty of the Northern Lights has been a life-long project for Olgeir Andrésson.

He travels for hours to find the spots he feels they will be at their best and then spends hours filming them, sacrificing sleep and comfort to get the best shots.. Over the years, he has developed numerous techniques to portray both them and his surroundings at their best. Using a good camera with long shutter openings, he has produced some stunning displays of this phenomenon that most would never get the opportunity to see in their lifetime. He has become a master in his craft and his masterpieces could adorn any art gallery, company or home.





Askja caldera and the Víti explosion crater Víti (Hell) was formed in an eruption in 1875.

THE HIGHLANDS IN NORTH EAST ICELAND

During the past few decades, highland excursions have become increasingly popular. Walking enthusiasts quaff the fresh mountain air, while others prefer drives along unmade trails in jeeps and other rough terrain vehicles. A third group likes to combine highland jeep tours with hiking.

The highland scenery in Þingeyjarsýsla district is stark and diverse and offers visitors countless options.

Near and far highlands

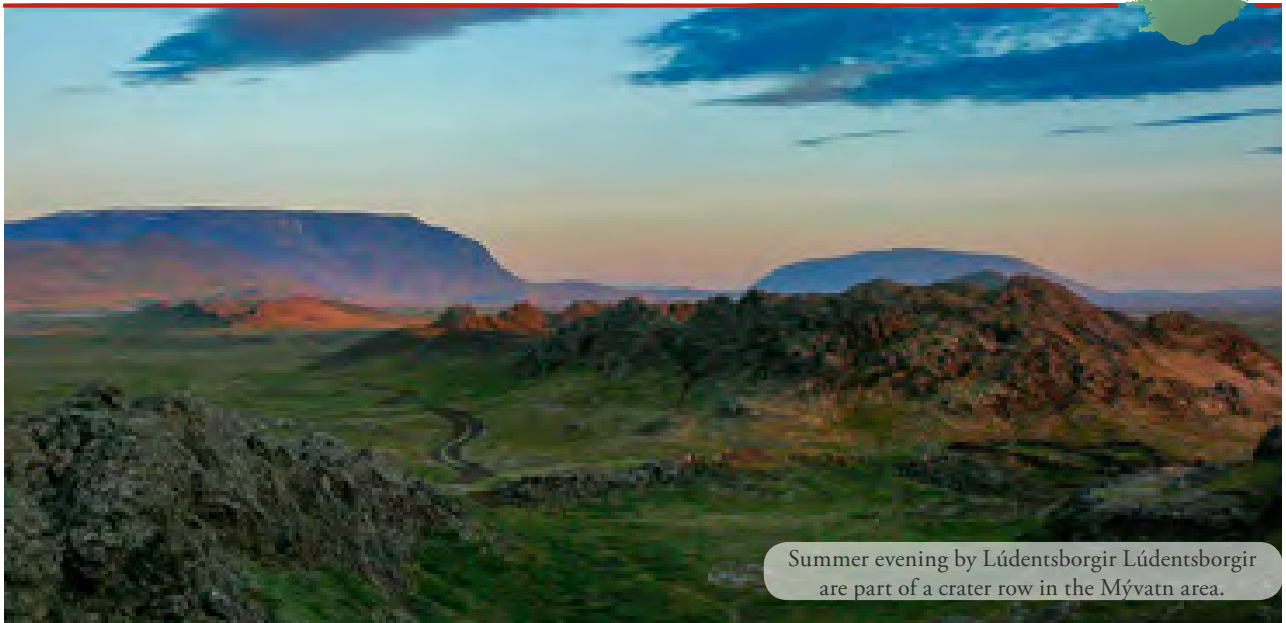
The highlands may in fact be separated into two categories: the near highlands and the far highlands. The former term refers to the highland areas closest to populated districts. In this category, we find a large number of mountains that offer interesting trekking challenges. This applies, for example, to the highland terrain west of Skjálfandi bay, jeep excursions to Flateyjar dalur valley and walking tours from there into the Fjörður area, hiking terrain in Kinnarfjöll mountains, the Þeistareykir area, the mountains in the Mývatn area and the highland tract

in the eastern part of Langanes point. All these areas offer diverse landscapes and panoramic views of the surrounding scenery, an invigorating experience that inspires the traveller with ‘joie de vivre’. The far-highlands

signify the highland terrain north of Vatnajökull glacier. Some would call this “the real Icelandic highlands” containing a large number of locations that enthrall those who love the wilderness and its adventures.



Herðubreið mountain Herðubreið has been called the queen of Icelandic mountains.



Summer evening by Lúdentborgir Lúdentborgir are part of a crater row in the Mývatn area.

The Highlands, in their stark beauty

These barren expanses offer countless routes of adventure. Some of these possibilities are described in more detail below.

Gæsavötn are two shallow lakes to the east of Tungnafellsjökull glacier. There is some vegetative cover around the lakes. The ruins of a stone and turf hut were found here in 1932; perhaps a testimony to outlaws or an archaic shelter for mountain travellers.

In ancient times, a common route between north and south Iceland lay across

the rocky desert of Sprengisandur where Kiðagil was a popular place of rest, a kind of mountain oasis. The memory of this resting place has been rendered immortal by the following lines from a well-known Icelandic ballad by poet Grímur Thomsen: “If Kiðagil I could descend / I’d give my best steed to that end.”

Dyngjufjöll mountains are located to the north of the Dyngjujökull glacier, which extends north from Vatnajökull. This is a barren mountain cluster encircling the 50 km² Askja caldera. Subsidence in Askja’s

south-east corner has formed a smaller caldera now filled by Öskjuvatn, Iceland’s deepest lake, with a maximum depth of 220 metres. The Víti crater next to Öskjuvatn was formed in a huge explosive volcanic eruption in 1875. The warm water in the crater is suitable for bathing and is popular with visitors.

Ódáðahraun is Iceland’s most extensive lava field, a practically continuous desert from Vatnajökull glacier northwards to the mountains in the Mývatn region. The most renowned of those is Herðubreið, a table mountain 1682 metres in height, long referred to as “the queen of Icelandic mountains” and recently elected Iceland’s National Mountain by popular vote.

Approximately 5 km north of the mountain are Herðubreiðarlindir springs, a green oasis in stark contrast to the bleak surrounding desert. Conspicuous among the lush Herðubreiðarlindir flora are clusters of garden angelica, several willow varieties and colourful aggregations of arctic river beauty. Herðubreið and its surrounding area was declared a nature reserve in 1974.

Kverkfjöll mountains are a huge mountain range at the northern extremity of Vatnajökull glacier. The region is characterised by alternations of ice sheets and clusters of natural hot springs, with the most prominent, Hveradalur, being the among the greatest high temperature geothermal areas in Iceland. In summer regular tours are operated to the Kverkfjöll region from Akureyri, Húsavík and the Mývatn District.



Kverkfjöl area – The opposing forces of fire and ice are very evident in the Kverkfjöll area.

CONTEMPORARY ART IN ICELAND

Reykjavík Art Gallery is Iceland's largest art gallery. The gallery exhibits and sells artwork by about 20 active artists at any given time. The many different artists all offer their unique version of contemporary Icelandic art. Please come by and enjoy contemporary Icelandic art.



Árni Bartels



Hrefna Víglundsdóttir





The gallery welcomes the Swedish artist Helena Morland, who works with Icelandic landscapes, to its ranks. Reykjavík Art Gallery is open every day from 12 to 18. Reykjavík Art Gallery – Skúlagata 30, 101 Reykjavík – Email: thsteinn@simnet.is – Tel: 893 6653 – www.reykjavikart.is



Helena Morland



Helena Morland



Reykjavík Art



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BIRDLIFE IN REYKJANES

Icelandic birds

On the Krýsuvíkurborg and Hafnaberg cliffs, thousands of seabirds nest each summer. The most common are guillemot, razorbill, Brünnich's guillemot, kittiwake, puffin, black guillemot, fulmar and cormorant.

Krýsuvíkurborg is 50 metres high, and about 57.000 pairs of seabirds nest on these cliffs. The highest point of Hafnaberg is 43 metres,

and its estimated population of seabirds is 6.000 pairs. Fourteen kilometres off the southwest of the peninsula is Eldey island, home to one of the largest gannet colonies in the world. The gannet is the largest seabird in the North Atlantic Ocean, and about 16.000 pairs nest each year on the island, which is only 0.03 km²

in area, and up to 77 metres high. Often seen between the mainland and the island are dolphins or whales. The great skua and arctic skua are common in summer, scavengers snatching their food from other seabirds. By nature the skua is not able to dive for food like other seabirds. Other common birds on the coast are gulls, such as the great and lesser blackbacked, glaucous and herring gulls. The arctic tern is among the most common birds in the peninsula, mostly found in colonies on the tip of Reykjanes, east of Grindavík and between Garður and Sandgerði. Whimbrels which breed in the Suðurnes area spend the winter in Africa, and arctic terns migrate to the Antarctic. The golden plover, oystercatcher and snipe are migratory birds which are common in the area, while the purple sandpiper is one of the few Icelandic waders which does not migrate. Among passerines, the redwing and snow bunting are common, and the starling remains in Iceland all year round. The largest passerine is the raven. The eider is by far the most common species of duck in Iceland.

In the Suðurnes area, the eider is economically important, as farmers harvest the valuable down from eider nests. The greylag goose nests in the lowlands, and the whooper swan is the only species of swan which breeds in Iceland.





The Icelandic Yule Lads Dimmuborgir is home to the Icelandic Yule Lads and in December they have their annual bath in the Mývatn Nature Baths.

that the people of Þingeyjarsýsla have on offer a variety of adventurous recreations to brighten up the toil of everyday life. Everyone can find something to suit their interests.

In the Mývatn region you can rent cross country skis or purchase access to the Winter Garden which offers go-carts, ice bowling, ice golf and even ice cricket! Snowmobile trips are also popular and by Krafla is a small tow lift. The Mývatn Nature Baths are open year round. There you can relax after an eventful day under a starry sky or even in a snowdrift.

Anything can happen in the depths of an Icelandic winter. The view from the mountains is an impressive one and the Northern Lights can often

be seen high in the sky on a clear, frosty winter's night. It is a wonderful opportunity to spend the Christmas holidays in the embrace of these high, snowy mountains - a really good way to recharge one's batteries!

WINTER

In Iceland

The Northeast has long been called the land of winter adventure. When

the earth is covered with a blanket of white and its flora has prepared itself for the long winter sleep, the Yule Lads who live in Dimmuborgir begin to stir once again, bringing life, excitement and a sense of wonder to the season. At this time

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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 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 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.

The Viking -VAG



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Hljóðaklettur by Vesturdalur: You can spend several days exploring all the different hiking routes along Jökulsárgljúfur in Vatnajökull National Park

JÖKULSÁRGLJÚFUR – VATNAJÖKULL NATIONAL PARK

Shaping the landscape from glacier to sea

For thousands of years, Jökulsá á Fjöllum, one of Iceland's largest rivers, has continued to flow from under the Vatnajökull glacier and wind its way through a landscape of diverse aspects for a distance of about 200 km until merging

with the sea in Öxarfjörður bay. On its long journey, the river has carved numerous channels into the highland bedrock and, to the west of Hólsfjöll, it cascades from a tall rocky ledge, forming the huge Dettifoss waterfall, plunging into magnificent canyons which extend all the way down to the bridge over the river on highway 85. The canyons (Icelandic: gljúfur), which take their name from the river, Jökulsárgljúfur, are approximately 25 km long, half a kilometre wide and in several locations, they extend to a depth of over 100 metres.

Awesome beauty

While Icelanders based their living almost exclusively on agriculture, their primary criterion of natural beauty was the suitability of the land for farming. With the growing diversification of employment and industry, improved education and prosperity, people began, to an increasing extent, to find beauty in the wilderness with its highlands and mountains, despite their barren and rugged appearance. Eventually, areas which were thought to surpass others in their unique natural characteristics came to be protected.



Jökulsárgljúfur: The canyon extends to a depth of over 100 metres and the surrounding landscape is magnificent



Jökulsárgljúfur: The river Jökulsá has carved a 25 km long canyon and shaped the landscape from the glacier down to sea in Öxarfjörður bay.

Vatnajökull National Park

A National Park was established in Jökulsárgljúfur canyons and the surrounding area in 1973 and expanded to include Ásbyrgi in 1978. When Vatnajökull National Park was established in 2008, Jökulsárgljúfur became a part of it. The park includes all the canyons to the west of Jökulsá. In 1996, the area around Dettifoss, Selfoss and Hafragilsfoss to the east of Jökulsá was declared a national monument.

Among renowned pearls of the park, in addition to above-mentioned waterfalls are Vesturdalur, Hljóðaklettur, Hólmatungur and Ásbyrgi. All those

natural phenomena—canyons, gullies, and rock formations of diverse shapes and sizes are primarily formed by volcanic activity and huge glacial melt water floods in Jökulsá.

The Park offers numerous other points of interest, such as the huge rock pillars Karl and Kerling (Old Man and Old Woman) and the Selfoss and Réttarfoss waterfalls in Jökulsá. Hólmatungur area is rich in diverse vegetation. Everywhere stark contrasts meet the eye.

Great hiking trails

The National Park is ideal for walks and outdoor recreation, especially for those who

are not in a hurry, since a number of days are needed to learn to enjoy the richness and diverse character of the area. There is a marked footpath through the park, between Dettifoss and Ásbyrgi which takes nearly two days to traverse. However, many shorter routes can be selected, radiating out from the park's main destinations.

In summer, the local rangers offer a programme of events where visitors can choose between various walking tour options. A number of brochures have been published describing walking routes and those who take an interest in geology and botany can benefit variously from the study of those.



THE WONDER OF WHALES

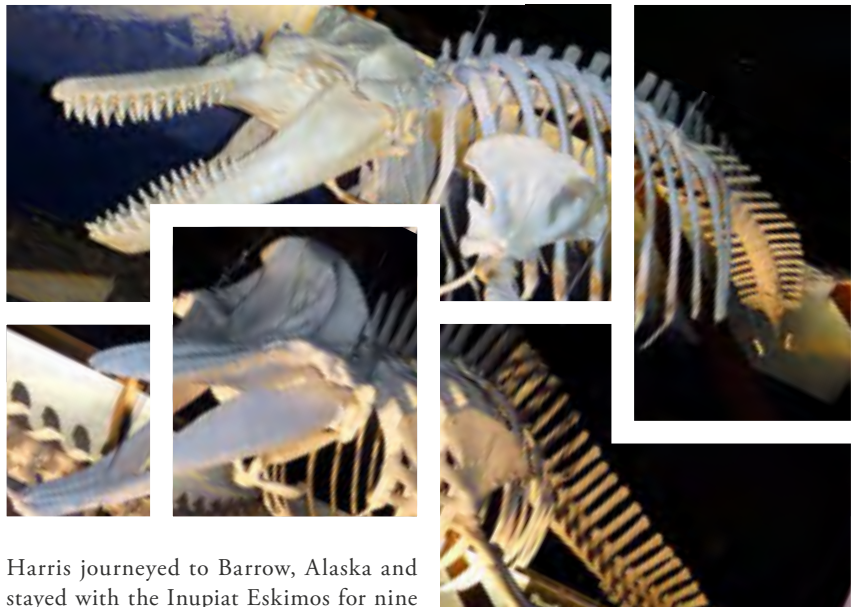
Europe's only Whale Museum in Húsavík offers an impartial presentation

Today most people think of whales as majestic creatures gliding effortlessly and unseen through depths of the oceans. However, during the Settlement Period, Icelanders' view of whales was limited to survival, seeing stranded whales as an easy source of food to sustain a community through unforgiving winters. Seventeen sagas mention the relationship between humans and whales in Iceland's Settlement Era, with disputes over stranded whales often mentioned as sparking animosity between communities and sometimes even resulting in deadly duels. Finding a stranded whale was a rare and lucky find and the Icelandic word 'hvalreki', or whale stranding, has come to mean 'jackpot' or 'good fortune'.

The Húsavík Whale Museum features permanent exhibitions that explore whales in the context of various cultures. Although Iceland had traditionally abstained from commercial whale-hunting until the turn of the 20th century, it has been involved with whaling since the thirteenth century due to its status as a Norwegian colony. A Norwegian treatise written during this period called 'The Speculum Regale', or 'King's Mirror', describes the character of whales found in Iceland and warns men about the dangers of the hunt. "There are certain varieties that are fierce and savage toward men and are constantly seeking to destroy them at every chance. They roam about in all the seas looking for ships, and when they find one they leap up, for in that way they are able to sink and destroy it the more quickly." Though mixed with bits of folklore, The Speculum Regale gives valuable insight into the historical relationship between man and whale.

The Whale Hunt, a new temporary exhibit at the Húsavík Whale Museum, expands on the museum's permanent exhibits by exploring the relationship between indigenous whaling cultures and whales with the help of artist Jonathan Harris.

about whales and the debate surrounding them grows. Iceland stands at the forefront of this debate as opinions have swung from adhering to limitations given by the International Whaling Commission in 1986 to the current position of whaling quotas

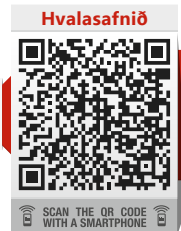


Harris journeyed to Barrow, Alaska and stayed with the Inupiat Eskimos for nine days to document their indigenous whale hunting. The Whale Hunt allows visitors to come to their own conclusions by following the heartbeat of the hunt through a series of photographs, extending from the preparation before the hunt to the distribution of meat afterwards. Harris' goal was to witness an event without letting modern notions and judgements get in the way of traditions that have existed for thousands of years.

Húsavík's Whale Museum remains the only museum in Europe dedicated exclusively to whales. The museum seeks to expand its collection as information

of certain species until 2013 in the hopes of creating a sustainable industry. These continued connections allow Húsavík's Whale Museum to evolve its exhibits to reflect man's varied relationship with whales, while maintaining a neutral perspective.

-KB



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COMFORT CLOSE TO KEFLAVIK

Peace, quiet, rest and relaxation in Hotel Berg's beautiful surroundings

Hotel Berg is a new small and homely hotel in Keflavik run by Ólöf and Arnar who really do care for their guests. As TripAdvisor.com confirms, they take great pride in exceeding their guests' expectations in order to make each person's stay as comfortable and convenient as possible.

Hotel Berg's eleven double rooms are spacious, warm and pleasant. Each room has an en-suite bathroom with a washbasin, shower and toilet. Rooms are equipped with a TV and DVD player, with movies on request, wireless Internet, high-quality bedding, a fridge, a hair-dryer and other conveniences. Buffet breakfast is served between 7 and 10 am.

The hotel stands on a black basalt rock overlooking the local small boat harbour in Keflavik. The rock face provides the small boat harbour with shelter on its western side and, in winter, is lit with electric lights which can look very dramatic during mid-winter blizzards.


A fire burns in the sitting room hearth, casting a warm glow over some typical Icelandic furniture dating from the middle of last century. Outside, there is a hot tub where guests enjoy the Northern Lights, when conditions allow.

Some of Keflavik's best walks and restaurants are close to Hotel Berg. A 7 minute drive from the International airport makes it a favourite choice with travellers who arrive in the county at night or depart early. However, many a visitor has commented that they wished they could stay longer, as they had enjoyed it so much and wanted to see more.

-SV



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FORGED IN FIRE

Original Jewellery inspired by Icelandic nature by a modern Viking craftsman

The skills of the Viking craftsmen are legendary - as are their love for nature and life itself. Bring that Viking spirit down through the ages, through the different art periods, such as Baroque and Rococo and combine it with 21st century technology and you have Sign.

Looking as though he has stepped straight out of a Viking hall or longship, Ingi's love for nature has inspired his creations - the creations of a goldsmith craftsman. His workshop, situated on Hafnarfjörður's harbour quayside, shows his love for the art of the ages. The display cases from past and present are filled with his creations in silver, gold, white gold and palladium, lit by crystal chandeliers from the Golden Age.

Typical of Viking craftsmen, his workshop is a simple, massive table. What makes it different from his forbears are the modern tools used to form his creations. Every piece is carefully designed and beautifully formed.

Glaciers and ice caves, hot, flowing lava and cold, hard rock forms that

you can see in the designs of his rings, Viking arm bands with wrought lattice work from the Baroque period, ornate jewellery from the Viking period that has been enhanced by Rococo styles, yet with a distinct 21st century feel to them, these are totally original concepts whose unique blending of natural form and dramatic style in the hands of a craftsman result in creations that enhance the beauty of man and woman alike. His range of crosses span the generations of styles to meet the needs of any occasion. Many of his necklaces are inspired by the volcanos that have made Iceland famous, such as Katla, Krafla and Hekla.

From the delicate tiara, to the necklace styles, armbands, bracelets and the ranges of rings, you feel you are wearing the essence of Iceland and the spirit of the Vikings. Styles range from the ornate to classically simple, yet all are original. Some have precious stones inset in the silver or gold whilst others are a blend of the precious metals themselves.

Ingi also does custom work for clients that results in a gift that is absolutely unique. Without doubt, each one will be a talking point that cannot fail to attract attention. Already sought after today, they will be even more treasured in future years.

Sign was founded in 2004 as a way for Ingi, who graduated in 1993, to express his art and share it with the world. His workshop is open to visitors and his creations are also found in a number of Iceland's shops.

-ASF



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TREASURES AND RICHES



The National Museum Holds the Wealth of the Nation

It is always a special experience to visit a new country and to see its sights and enjoy all that makes it different from one's own. Its culture, its people, the beauty of its landscape and its man-made creations.

However, its true wealth lies in what has made it what it is today as each generation has added their own contribution to the country's heritage. What you see in today's society is the result of all its previous generations and is what makes it truly unique.

The National Museum of Iceland is located next to the University of Iceland and holds a sample of the lives previous generations have left. Here is where you will gain so much greater insight of what makes Iceland today and the value attached to each individual's life.

A Young Nation with a Mature History
'The Making of a Nation' is the museum's permanent exhibition, displaying the heritage and history of the Icelandic people and country, from the early days of the Settlement right through to modern times. It offers a fascinating perspective on many aspects of life and society throughout Iceland's short history.

Being the last European country to be populated, Iceland doesn't have the relics of the Romans, the architecture of the Greeks or the dynasties of China. What it possesses is a unique mingling of two very diverse cultures, living under incredibly difficult conditions and the powerful story of their struggles and overcoming great adversity to become the independent nation Iceland is today, with its rich culture. Many

people find its cultural diversity absolutely incredible for a population so small.

Travel Through Time

The exhibition is conceived as a journey through time, beginning with an example of one of the ships in which early settlers crossed the unpredictable ocean with the most rudimentary of instrumentation from their Viking homeland to the high-tech airport of today, handling many thousands of travellers. Using about 2,000 objects and 1,000 photographs, this is the next best thing to personal time travel.

When visiting the museum, you can opt to take one of four themed routes through the exhibition: Work and the Way of Life; Homes and Settlement Patterns; Arts and Crafts; Social Culture and Language.



To enrich your experience, there are multimedia presentations that allow you to gain greater insight and active involvement in a more immersive experience. Likewise, there are two rooms that are especially popular with families on the second floor which are dedicated to hands-on experiences. Dress like a Viking; have a mock sword fight; try out some of the puzzles and games—and come away with a new perspective on the country through the best medium: fun!

Craftsmen Before the Age of Plastics

Between the two cultures, the Celts, with their writing and the Vikings with their craftsmanship, a rich tapestry of life has been handed down to us today.

Temporary exhibitions add an additional perspective on Iceland's heritage, with thousands of photographs showing life over the last century. For example, there is an exhibit containing a range of ornamentally-carved drinking horns.

Your imagination can take you back to see the care and skill of the craftsman at work, transforming these bovine horns into objects of art—practical drinking goblets that have disappeared from modern mass-produced plastic society.

History is for Children

Museums can make a very special contribution to a child's development. Recognising that, museum educators make presentations for schoolchildren from a young age all the way up to university students, with each presentation being both geared to their age and maturity level and the national curriculum.

Children visiting with their parents can enjoy the quizzes and hand-outs the teachers have made—as well as having fun dressing up and re-enacting lives of the past.

This is the way to learn history—hands on and seeing it first hand. The multimedia presentations build on the displays to provide adults and children alike with a fascinating,

engaging experience that educates without you even knowing it!

Stay for a Day in Time

You can choose how long and how much you want to get into the details of the exhibition but even a cursory look will take some time. For those wanting an in-depth view, you will undoubtedly want to stay longer.

The museum offers refreshments and a shop so you can continue your time travelling. Iceland values its historical narrative highly and the National Museum is but the first step in a journey that will take you around the country. It provides a foundation that puts everything else in context.

Þjóðminjasafn Íslands

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-ASF

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ON TOP OF THE WORLD

Glacier Jeeps takes you up Europe's Largest Glacier

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 May-Oct from road F985 (GPS: N 0,64°1344,7 W 0,15°4159,3), 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.

October–May: Please call for the departure time. The trip then starts from Hostel Vagnsstaðir (GPS: N 0,64° 1344,7, W 0,15° 4153,3)

Tours need to be booked one day in advance.

Glacier Jeeps



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-ASF





Snartarstaðir by Kópasker The District folk museum at Snartarstaðir has a particular focus on various textiles.



Farm Þverá in Laxárdalur valley The site where the first Icelandic cooperative was founded in 1882.

Maritime Museum in Húsavík Two boats in the collection of the Maritime Museum in Húsavík. sw

LOCAL HISTORY AND MUSEUMS

Settlement and adoption of Christianity

The Swedish explorer Garðar Svavarsson was the first man to discover that Iceland is an island. He wintered in Húsavík four years before the settlement of Ingólfur Arnarson. Left behind upon Garðar's departure was Náttfari whom many consider the first permanent settler of Iceland. This region fully satisfied the demands made by the settlers with regard to the quality of land and potential for sustenance. The lay of the land made it better suited for average size family farms than for large manors, which were fewer here than elsewhere in North Iceland. A large number of settlers are identified in Landnáma, the book of settlements and many burial mounds of the first settlers have been found in southern Þingeyjarsýsla.

About the year 963, descendants of the settlers decided to convene their district assembly (Icel: þing) at Þingey island in Skjálfandafljót. This assembly is referred to several times in written sources during the period of approx. 950 - 1250. Such sources are often sagas relating to local heroes, such as Þorgeir chieftain of Ljósavatn who became renowned for his decisive role in the conversion to Christianity in 1000. He is also said to have thrown his images

of the old heathen gods into a waterfall in Skjálfandafljót which henceforth was named Goðafoss (Waterfall of the Gods).

Leading the Icelandic renaissance

An Askja eruption in the late 19th century, years of springtime sea-ice clinging to the north coast and other difficulties placed a severe burden on the people of Þingeyjarsýsla as on other inhabitants of Iceland. A large number of people emigrated to America and many lost faith in their native country. Yet, in Þingeyjarsýsla, the spiritual culture and resistance of the population showed no weakening and thus it fell to them to assume a leading role in the renaissance that took place in Iceland in the 19th century. This reawakening comprised, among other things, demands for freedom of trade, improved educational opportunities and increased technical efficiency. As testimony to those new times, the first Icelandic cooperative society was established at the farm Þverá in Laxárdalur valley in 1882, which became a model for other cooperative societies all over the country. Trade was transferred to the people themselves and independence was on the horizon.

Museums and exhibitions

History holds importance for people here and numerous museums provide the present generation with information relating to centuries gone by and the ancestors' struggle for survival. The Þingeyjarsýsla District Museum has exhibitions in three locations; The Museum House in Húsavík, Grenjaðarstaður in Aðaldalur valley and Snartarstaðir by Kópasker. Folk Museums can also be found at Mánárþakki on Tjörnes point and at Sauðaneshús on Langanes peninsula.

Among specialized museums in the region are the Transportation Museum at Ystafell, Sigurgeir's Bird Collection by Mývatn, the Whale Museum in Húsavík, District Archives, Natural History Collection, Maritime Museum and Photograph and Film archives in the Museum House in Húsavík and the Phallological Museum in Húsavík. In addition there are several interesting exhibitions, as in Gljúfrastofa by Ásbyrgi, summer exhibition inn Gallerý Yst Bragginn nearby Kópasker, Laxárstöð in Aðaldalur, Kiðagil in Bárðardalur and the Earthquake Center in Kópasker.



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



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.

If You Can Walk Up Stairs, You Can Join a Glacier Walk

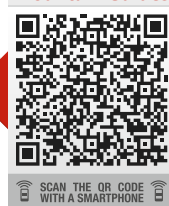
Before taking inexperienced mountaineers up to these treasures of Iceland, IMG had to make sure that all possible safety measures were taken, which is why they've implemented a strenuous training programme for all their guides. The educational programme entails 27 days of direct training and exams, followed 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



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TOTALLY THAI

Authentic Thai meals with a special touch at Ban Thai restaurant

For the last 22 years, people from many parts of the world have converged on a small, unpretentious restaurant, close to the Hlemmur bus station at the end of the Laugavegur shopping street in downtown Reykjavik.

In Iceland, the competition amongst restaurants is fierce and many an eating place has opened, only to close a few months later, when the novelty had worn off. Those with staying power are those whose food is exceptional and whose ambience is both comfortable and attractive to diners.

Thai food is known the world over for its flavour and use of different spices to produce mouth-watering meals that have become so popular in recent years. Having lived in Thailand with my family for many years, authentic Thai food was something I looked for on my return to Europe. Thus, finding a restaurant that offers a full menu of these delicious delicacies is an inspiration to me. Others appear to agree with me as, even on a Monday night, usually one of the quietest nights for restaurants, there was a constant flow of diners to this little restaurant.

Actually, calling it 'little' is somewhat of a misnomer. Downstairs is very cosy, surrounded by pictures and different items from Thailand's rich culture. Upstairs are three rooms ideally suited to larger groups, so a lot of people can actually eat in the restaurant without it seeming to be crowded.

Meals are served by a waitress dressed in traditional Thai costume and, as she delivers the dishes to the tables, it is easy to see why this restaurant appears at the top of the favourite lists so often. These are the real thing! Served the traditional Thai way with spoon and fork, they are supplemented by beers, wines and spirits to complete the experience. Genuine Thai beer is specially imported by the proprietor to add the final touch.

If you have never been to Thailand and want to know what it's like to eat out there, Ban Thai is probably the closest you will find to that experience in Iceland. The food is prepared by an experienced Thai chef and it really shows in the presentation of the meals.

If you are an aficionado of Thai cuisine, you will know of the different



spices and that it is can be very spicy. Ban Thai accommodates every taste with its range from mild to very spicy indicated on its menu by little red chillis. The menu also has details of the health benefits of the different ingredients that makes very interesting reading.

Ban Thai is open in the evenings from 6pm. A Take-Away service is also provided, which is very popular, with phone-in ordering keeping waiting to a minimum.

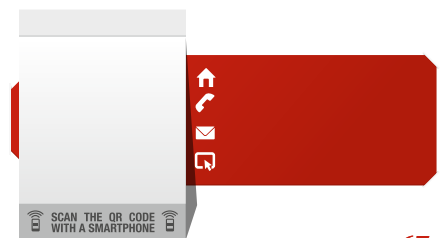


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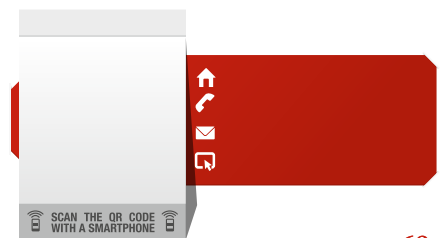
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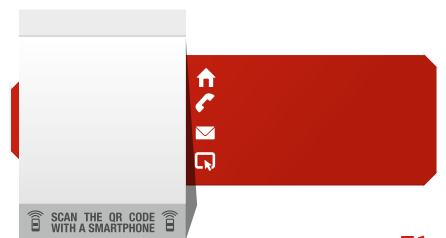






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